



How to Suppress The Opposition in The Parliament - Lessons From Maja Gojković

The last session of the parliament, the National Assembly of Republic of Serbia, has set new standards for what is considered shameful and disreputable behavior by those in power, headlined by the actions of the incumbent President of the Assembly, Maja Gojkovic. The key issue here is that the President of the parliament is applying double standards when it comes to respecting the rules of procedure, always at the expense of the opposition, which creates chaos and disruption of the parliamentary work and the democratic process itself.

To start off, the session itself was actually a merger of two separate discussions on two law proposals on the topic of education, one dealing with elementary and middle school education, and the other with higher education. The two very different issues were merged into one session not to facilitate discussion but to suppress it, along with any voice of dissent that might affect the supremacy of the ruling majority in the parliament. They use the 'urgent procedure' to hasten the law making process, stifling the spirit of debate and discussion out of the legislative process.

For a while now, the President of the Serbian Parliament has nourished the culture of aggressive behavior and has been creating an atmosphere of violence and fear. On a regular basis, she allows the MPs from the ruling coalition to break the Rules of Procedure and mobs MPs and parliament officials. Most worrisome, however, is that she suspends and punishes MPs from the opposition almost on a daily basis.

One way that she uses her power to maintain absolute control in the parliament is through creating a chaotic atmosphere on the floor by allowing members from her own parliamentary group (SNS) to break the rules of procedure. Furthermore, she uses her position of power to intervene in the plenary session and speak from the MP's podium, constantly asking for permission to speak. The vice presidents of the parliament are complicit in this, granting her the opportunity to maneuver and disrupt any meaningful discussion. You need look no further than the statistics - she was the MP with greatest number of complaints about rules of procedure being broken in the month of September - a chaotic situation created and exacerbated by her.

She often takes the floor, addressing the room using defamatory language and attacking the opposition in an *ad hominem* fashion, using tabloid "truths" as evidence in an attempt to provoke the opposition into reacting and breaking the rules of procedure. She constructs

strawman arguments - creating imaginary opponents she demolishes with her 'arguments', actively trying to tarnish the reputation of opposition MPs, especially first-timers in the parliament.

However, the latest of her antics breached all standards of decency and felt like a slap in the face of dignity of the National Assembly. During the speech of one of the opposition MPs, the only person with disabilities and wheelchair-bound MP, the President of the parliament approached the active camera and [blocked it with a sheet of paper](#), in order to prevent the live audience from seeing the speaker. Earlier, she stopped the same MP from speaking on several occasions, and these kind of situations keep repeating.

As unbelievable as it might appear, during the very same session she also managed to issue three warnings and suspend an opposition MP by literally saying "First warning! Second warning! Third warning! You are suspended!". Sadly, [this is not a joke](#), this is how the parliamentary majority and their rabid dictatorial Queen Mother behave - the absolutist allegory is not lost here, the majority does behave like the parliament is their private property and as if the opposition isn't even supposed to be there.

The most flagrant example in which the ruling majority, via the office of the President of the Parliament, is suppressing the opposition also happened during this session. During the speech of the Chief of one of the opposition parliamentary groups, who was presenting his amendment to one of the proposed bills, he was interrupted for no apparent reason and [suspended for twenty days](#). No explanation, no reasons given. The only thing he was "guilty" of was voicing his strong opposition that the ruling majority couldn't handle. This marked the precedent - the violation of procedure by the ruling majority was now open and shameless.

If by now, dear reader, you cannot stop and think this could get any worse - think again. It can. The President of the Parliament also managed to steal - for the lack of a better word - the time allotted for discussing the amendments. Since the ruling majority had spent all the discussion time allotted to their Parliamentary group and didn't have any amendments of their own, the opposition was left with four additional hours for discussion of their own amendments. The obvious solution to the Madam President of the Parliament was to simply suspend the session and declare there is no more time left for the discussion. That the members of opposition were pointing out that the electronic system of support is showing that four more hours are at their disposal for discussion did not help one bit - the evidence was ignored.

It's important to emphasize that the electronic system that measures debate time has been working perfectly since day one, and from my experience as an MP for over a year, the e-parliament system never made a mistake, especially of such caliber. After the opposition MPs loudly voiced their resignation against such a decision and kept showing the data she [lashed](#)

[out at the General Secretary of the parliament](#), screaming at her during the live broadcast on national TV to get out of the room, claiming she had made a mistake and gave her the wrong data. This was the icing on the cake, a colorful end of the session marked by abuse, intimidation and the breach of every rule.

The behavior of the President of the Serbian Parliament during the last session is a continuation of the ruling majority strategy to limit the freedom of speech and create an atmosphere of fear, thus disregarding to the rules of procedure and abusing people who work in the parliament. The outrageous tactics of stealing discussion time from the opposition, suspending of most outspoken MPs and lying to the members of the parliament is an insult to the already feeble state of democracy in our country. While she claims to be a person of sophisticated manners and enviable upbringing, her actions speak louder than words.

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