

MONITORING OF THE MEDIA SCENE IN SERBIA

FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER 2024

INTRODUCTION

Monitoring of the media scene is carried out with the aim of continuous monitoring of events and processes affecting the state of media freedom in the Republic of Serbia. The authors of the monitoring deal with: freedom of expression; monitoring the implementation of existing regulations; adopting of new regulations, also by amending and supplementing the current ones - from the field of media as well as from other areas directly or indirectly affecting the freedom of the media; and also by analyzing SLAPP lawsuits (strategic lawsuits against public participation) directed against journalists and media.

Publicly available data, data obtained from journalists, editors and other media workers, journalist associations and media associations, as well as state and non-state bodies are used for monitoring.

I FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Support for students fighting for democratic values in Serbia

Journalists and media associations gathered in the Coalition for Media Freedom and ANEM called on their colleagues to support the students who are protesting and fighting for democracy, justice and freedom of speech in Serbia.¹ The Coalition for Media Freedom has sent an invitation to the European media to inform their citizens about the fight for freedom that is being waged in Serbia.²

The Ministry of Information and Telecommunications condemned the statement of the Coalition for Media Freedom and stated that in this way the Coalition stepped out of the professional and ethical framework of the journalistic profession and openly got involved in political life in our country.³

The Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV) and the Nezavisnost association, as a sign of full support for the demands of students, pupils and citizens, have suspended all contacts with the current regime. Those associations, until the student demands are met, will not participate in meetings, discussions, negotiations and agreements with representatives of the regime. Due to the "unprecedented attack on the Coalition for Media Freedom", the dismissal of the Minister of Information and Telecommunications, Dejan Ristić, was also requested.⁴

In mid-December, the international organization [Amnesty International](#) published the report '[Digital Prison' — Surveillance and Repression of Civil Society in Serbia](#). It is said that this is a case study that aims to shed light on the way in which the Serbian authorities, using surveillance technology and digital repression tactics, exercise control and demonstrate force over civil society. The report presents exact evidence that members of the police and the state Security Intelligence Agency (BIA) created spyware (called NoviSpy in the report) that was installed on the smartphones of at least four activists, journalists and members of civil society. The hardware-software solution Cellebrite UFED (a highly sophisticated tool for digital forensics, developed by the Israeli company [Cellebrite](#)) was used

¹ [Novinarska i medijska udruženja: Studenti nam sada čast iz osnovnih postulata novinarstva](#), article published on December 17, 2024 at Cenolovka portal.

² [Koalicija za slobodu medija: Poziv evropskim medijima da izveštavaju o borbi za slobodu građana Srbije](#), announcement published on the Coalition portal.

³ [Ministarstvo osuđuje političko delovanje Koalicije za slobodu medija](#), announcement published on December 19, 2024 at the Ministry of information and telecommunication portal.

⁴ [NDNV i Nezavisnost: Solidarišemo se sa studentima i obustavljamo sve kontakte sa režimom, zahtevamo ostavku ministra informisanja](#), announcement published on December 21, 2024 at NDNV portal.

to (maliciously) access protected computer systems. Members of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and BIA used to access mobile devices while members of civil society, journalists and activists stayed in their premises (as detained or invited for an informative interview). At the time of access to secure computer systems, telephone devices were out of reach of the person who owned them. The phones would first be forcefully unlocked using the Cellebrite UFED tool, then their data would be downloaded, and finally NoviSpy spyware would be installed on them. According to Amnesty International, NoviSpy has the ability to take screenshots and send them directly to the BIA server. Apart from taking screenshots, NoviSpy can provide access to location, microphone and camera.

Amnesty International's report states:

The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which donated the Cellebrite UFED technology, and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), which managed procurement for the Norwegian government's grant to Serbia's Ministry of Interior, failed to conduct an adequate due diligence process to assess and mitigate for the potential risks of this technology to human rights or provide safeguards against its abuse. Given the weak regulatory environment for digital surveillance in Serbia, concerns about the independence of the judiciary, and persistent reports of threats to civil society and independent journalists, the Norwegian government and UNOPS had a responsibility to exercise oversight and due diligence when procuring highly invasive technology and handing it over to Serbian institutions. By failing to do so, they enabled and contributed to Serbia's violations of people's rights to privacy, freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly through unlawful digital surveillance. In a response to the details of the findings, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the Ministry finds it "alarming that digital forensic tools, purchased through a project funded by Norway, may have been misused top target members of civil society in Serbia," and added that, "if correct, [this] would be in clear violation of core principles of Norwegian development assistance, and the agreed purpose of the support to Serbian authorities at the time." The Ministry added that UNOPS, which was responsible for all project activities, is expected to conduct a thorough investigation of the alleged misuse.

Amnesty International provides exact evidence that the journalist of the FAR portal from Dimitrovgrad, Slaviša Milanov (more about this case in the [Monitoring of the media scene for March 2024](#)), during his stay in the premises of the Ministry of Interior, had the spy software Novi Spy installed to his phone without his knowledge. Slaviša Milanov's phone was intercepted without the legally prescribed procedure. Milanov was not informed of the intention to search his device, he was not given the legal basis for the search, he was not asked for the device's code (nor did he provide it intentionally or unintentionally).⁵

Although Slaviša Milanov submitted a criminal complaint to the competent prosecutor's office and a complaint to the Department of Internal Control of the Ministry of Internal Affairs regarding the said event, there was no reaction from the competent institutions. The Prosecutor's Office has not (yet) contacted the journalist, and the internal control procedure has not even been initiated.⁶ In a letter from the Pirot Police Department, Milanov was informed that the police department had checked his allegations and found that it was not proven that the police officers, by taking official measures and actions, threatened his human rights and freedoms, but acted in accordance with the law and the Rulebook on Police authorizations.

The Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia (NUNS) appealed to the prosecutor's office to determine responsibility for the misuse of digital forensic tools and monitoring of journalists and activists. In addition to the case of Slaviša Milanov, NUNS has focused its attention on the case of Ljubomir Stefanović, the author of the YouTube channel Slavija Info, about which case you can find more information in the [Monitoring of the media scene for October 2024](#). According to the information available to NUNS, Ljubomir Stefanović used the Cellebrite tool, which is used to unlock the phone and download data from it, which opens up the possibility of installing NoviSpy software.⁷

The BIA also spoke out about Amnesty International's report, claiming that the agency worked exclusively in accordance with the laws of the Republic of Serbia, and that they are not able to "even" comment on the "meaningless statements from their text". The BIA statement further states:

Regarding the "report" of Amnesty International, published on 16/12/2024, the

⁵ [A Digital Prison: Surveillance and the suppression of civil society in Serbia: Executive Summary - Amnesty International](#)

⁶ [Državni nadzor: Novinaru tajno instaliran špijunski softver u telefon tokom ispitivanja u policijskoj stanici](#), author: Vesna Radojević, article published on December 16, 2024 at Raskrikavanje portal.

⁷ [Pozivamo tužilaštvo da utvrdi ko je odgovoran za zloupotrebu digitalnih forenzičkih alata i praćenje novinara i aktivista](#), announcement published on December 17, 2024 at NUNS portal.

Security Information Agency can only state that the trivial sensationalism of its content indicates the purpose of Amnesty International, which is reflected in the work for the interests of certain agencies and pressure groups.⁸

The Ministry of Internal Affairs responded with a short statement:

In connection with Amnesty International's report on the use of forensic tools, the Ministry of Internal Affairs informs the public that within the National Center for Criminal Forensics, Directorate of Technology, Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, forensic tools are used exclusively in accordance with the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Republic of Serbia.

We also note that the forensic tool is used in the same way in other police forces around the world, and that the statements in the Amnesty International report are absolutely incorrect.⁹

The Ministry of information believes that it is not competent to examine the allegations from the Amnesty International report. Despite the published data on the installation of spyware, Minister Dejan Ristić rated 2024 as the "most successful" and "record year". Asked to evaluate the report, the minister said:

The Ministry of Information and Telecommunications is not the Ministry of Internal Affairs and is not the prosecutor's office. In this sense, we cannot conduct investigations and determine whether some claims are based on facts or not. As in any democratic country, we leave that to the authorities that are responsible for it.¹⁰

Numerous domestic and international organizations stood up in defense of basic civil liberties. The Belgrade Center for Security Policy has asked the Serbian authorities to immediately stop illegal digital surveillance and investigate all cases of abuse, including the responsibility of individuals in state institutions. They asked the European Commission to seriously consider how the abuse of digital surveillance in Serbia affects the process of European integration. It was requested that the

⁸ [Saopštenje BIA 16.12.2024. godine | Bezbednosno-informativna agencija](#)

⁹ [MUP: Navodi Amnestijevog izveštaja su netačni, forenzički alat koristimo u skladu sa zakonom](#), author: Milica Ljubičić, article published on December 16, 2024 at Raskrikavanje portal.

¹⁰ [U izveštaju Ministarstva informisanja ni reči o špijuniranju novinara: Za ministra 2024. "apsolutno najuspešnija" godina](#), author: Tamara Stojanović, article published on December 27, 2024 at N1 portal.

international community increase its support to civil society organizations, activists and journalists so that they can carry out their work without fear of surveillance and repression. Cellebrite, as well as other companies that produce digital surveillance tools, are required to cease cooperation with the Serbian authorities until a legal and transparent framework for the use of their products is established.¹¹

Eight days after the publication of the report, ten civil society organizations submitted a joint criminal complaint to the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime against Unknown persons from the police and the BIA, due to the existence of grounds for suspicion that the activists' and journalists' phones were forcibly unlocked and then "infected with espionage software",¹² committing criminal acts: Unauthorized collection of personal data,¹³ Creation and introduction of computer viruses,¹⁴ Unauthorized access to a protected computer, computer network and electronic data processing.¹⁵ SafeJournalists and MFRR demand a quick and thorough investigation into the use of spyware and the introduction of stricter regulations to regulate its use in Serbia.¹⁶

A group of EU Parliament MEPs sent a letter to the authorities in Serbia urging them to stop using spyware:

We, the undersigned members of the European Parliament, are extremely concerned and appalled by the findings of the Amnesty International report, which shows that Serbian security institutions systematically misused spying tools like NoviSpy and Pegasus, as well as forensic tools like Cellebrite, to illegally collect data from journalists' devices, activists and citizens who peacefully express their disagreement with the authorities. These practices are a direct attack on fundamental freedoms, including the right to peaceful assembly, freedom of expression and the right to association.

In a situation where mass protests and civil unrest are taking place across Serbia

¹¹ [BCBP upozorava: Građani su žrtve nezakonitog prisluškivanja od strane države - Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku](#), announcement published on December 16, 2024 at BCBP portal.

¹² [Civilni sektor podneo krivičnu prijavu protiv N.N. lica u BIA i policiji zbog špijuniranja aktivista i novinara](#), article published on December 24, 2024 at NUNS portal, sources: N1, Beta.

¹³ Article 146 paragraph 2 of the Criminal Code

¹⁴ Article 300 paragraph 1 and paragraph 2 of the Criminal Code

¹⁵ Article 302 paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code

¹⁶ [SafeJournalists i MFRR: Hitna potreba za brzim i temeljnom istragom o upotrebi špijunskog softvera i strožim propisima u Srbiji](#), announcement published on December 18, 2024 at SafeJournalists portal.

following the tragedy in Novi Sad, it is crucial to ensure that digital repression and illegal surveillance cease immediately.

Citizens of Serbia deserve to live in a country that respects and protects basic rights and freedoms, and not to be exposed to illegal and arbitrary actions by their own police and security services.

As a candidate for EU membership, Serbia is absolutely expected to immediately stop using all spying tools and abusing foreign financial aid for these purposes.

Therefore, we strongly condemn this illegal surveillance and demand an urgent, transparent and independent investigation of these serious allegations, as well as the prosecution of the responsible persons within the Government of Serbia, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Security and Information Agency.

Finally, we call on all companies that provide digital surveillance tools to suspend cooperation with Serbia until a transparent and accountable policy is established.¹⁷

The members of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists (PWG) paid special attention to the report of the Amnesty International organization, and announced that due to the seriousness of the allegations of unauthorized wiretapping, surveillance and monitoring of individual journalists, they will closely monitor everything and take additional measures with the aim of determining whether some of the criminal acts were committed to the detriment of journalists and whether the legally prescribed procedures were followed.¹⁸

At the press conference held in December, the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications announced that, compared to last year, during 2024 there was a decrease in the number of attacks and pressures on journalists. Data from NUNS show that the number of physical attacks on journalists has increased, and that more physical attacks were recorded in the last two months than in the first 10 months of the current year. And the number of threats on social networks has also increased.¹⁹

¹⁷ [Grupa evroposlanika uputila pismo vlastima u Srbiji: Prestanite sa upotrebom špijunskih softvera](#), author: Nikola Radišić, article published on December 18, 2024 at N1 portal.

¹⁸ [Stalna radne grupa za bezbednost novinara održala poslednji redovan sastanak ove godine na kome je razmatrana bezbednost medijskih radnika](#), announcement published on December 20, 2024 at NUNS portal.

¹⁹ [U izveštaju Ministarstva informisanja ni reči o špijuniranju novinara: Za ministra 2024. "apsolutno najuspešnija" godina](#), author:

MPs from the Movement of Socialists, Bojan Torbica and Đorđe Komlenski, submitted to the National Assembly the [Proposal for the Law on a Special Register of Agents of Foreign Influence](#). As proposed, the idea is to establish a special Register of non-profit organizations established in the Republic of Serbia. As the draft law foresees, organizations that are mainly financed by foreign entities or are assisted by foreign entities in some other way, due to their political influence, action and performance of other political activities — can be designated (in compliance with the provisions of the law) as "agents of foreign influence".

In the explanation of the proposal, it is stated that the law will enable the citizens of Serbia to clearly "notice and find out", who is from abroad and how much is paid by "various associations, i.e. non-profit organizations". The goal is to provide insight into "according to whose programs and directives" non-profit organizations "work and what is most important, to which foreign governments and organizations they are accountable." The proponents explicitly state that "betrayal of one's own country and people cannot be a highly profitable activity, from which a part of Serbian citizens earns extremely high financial income."

The domestic professional public reminds that this is not the first time that the mentioned initiative has been launched. They evaluate the bill as pressure on people who criticize the actions of the government, with the desire to divert the attention of civil society from hot topics.²⁰

The European Economic and Social Committee expressed deep concern about the proposed law:

*This draft law represents a serious and direct threat to civil society organizations, jeopardizing their role in preserving democratic values, human rights and European integration. We call on Serbian legislators to consider the implications of the proposed draft law and avoid actions that could harm civil society and hinder Serbia's progress on the European path.*²¹

In the response that the spokesperson of the State Department sent to Radio Free Europe (RSE) regarding the said proposal, it is stated that the United States is deeply concerned about the

Tamara Stojanović, article published on December 27, 2024 at N1 portal.

²⁰ [Predlog Zakona o registru agenata stranog uticaja: Represija protiv nevladinog sektora ili skretanje pažnje javnosti?](#), author: Ivana Nikoletić, article published on December 6, 2024 at Cenzolovka portal.

²¹ [Serbia: Draft law on foreign agents risks democratic and EU integration goals | EESC](#)

implications that the proposed law could have on democracy, human rights and basic freedoms:²²

*Such a law could narrow the space for civil society action, stigmatize civil society organizations that work to improve the lives of Serbian citizens, and hinder the work of independent media that provide accurate information to the public.*²³

The European Commission told RSE:

*We remind you that any law of a candidate country for EU membership must be in line with the basic democratic values of the EU, including freedom of speech and expression.*²⁴

Before the holding of the EU - Western Balkans Summit in Brussels (it is the first high-level meeting between the members of the new European Commission and the heads of state of the Balkans), the international organization Reporters Without Borders (RSF) pointed to the summit as an important opportunity to create new political momentum and set ambitious goals for media freedom. RSF called on the European Union and member states to require candidate countries to commit to improving their laws in order to foster a free, independent and pluralistic media landscape in the Western Balkans region. According to RSF's World Media Freedom Index for 2024, media freedom has worsened in all six countries of the Western Balkans, while Serbia and Albania in the EU-Balkan zone have the worst results. Regardless of the fact that they are ranked better, in other countries of the region, media freedom is still fragile.²⁵

²² [Nekada strani plaćenici, sada strani agenti – Vulin predlaže zakon](#), author: Ljudmila Cvetković, article published on December 4, 2024 at RSE portal.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ [EU-Western Balkans summit: the advancement of trusted, independent journalism must be prioritised in EU accession talks | RSF](#)

Pressures and attacks

The case of burning the house of Milan Jovanović

Although six years have passed since the burning of Milan Jovanović's house, the procedure for compensation for the material damage suffered by Milan Jovanović and his wife has not progressed far. Three years ago, the Second Basic Court in Belgrade declared itself incompetent to act because it turned out that the amount of the claimed damages exceeds the limit in which the basic court acts.²⁶ The defendants filed an appeal against the court's decision. The court has not yet made a decision on that issue. In the procedure for non-material damage compensation, the first hearing was held on December 27, 2024.²⁷

Dragoljub Simonović and Igor Novaković are currently serving their prison sentences. An international warrant has been issued for Aleksandar Marinković, who set fire to the house of Milan Jovanović. For now, he is not located.²⁸ Vladimir Mihailović is waiting for the decision of the High Court regarding the appeal he filed against the decision denying him a suspension of his prison sentence.²⁹

More about the final verdict in that case in the [Monitoring of the media scene in Serbia for April 2024](#).

The case of deprivation of liberty of Dušan Milanović, owner of the publisher of the Kosovo online portal

Dušan Milanović, who was detained by the police for 48 hours at the end of November, was released to defend himself.³⁰ Milanović is charged with the crime of terrorism for allegedly managing the Telegram group "Corridor".

²⁶ [UNS: Osnovni sud nenadležan po tužbi novinara Žig info zbog naknade štete za paljenje kuće](#), article published on January 19, 2022 at Danas portal.

²⁷ [Šest godina od spaljivanja kuće novinara: Proces za naknadu materijalne štete nije ni pokrenut](#), author: Perica Gunjić, article published on December 11, 2024 at Cenzolovka portal.

²⁸ Isto.

²⁹ [Novinar Jovanović: Odlazak bivšeg predsednika Opštine Grocka u zatvor za mene Pirova pobeda \(VIDEO\)](#), article published on October 15, 2024 at Insajder portal.

³⁰ [Oluja propagande, progonstvo istine](#), author: Tatjana Lazarević, article published on December 9, 2024 at Bezbedni novinari portal.

Threats addressed to the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation

At the beginning of December, a threatening message was sent to the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation from the Facebook account of a person signed as Dušan Milisavljević: "AND WHY ARE YOU FROM ĆURUVIJA WORRIED, WATCH OUT, THERE WILL BE MORE EASTER, THEY WILL TURN TO GOLD" (translation note: journalist Slavko Ćuruvija was assassinated on Easter 1999). The Foundation submitted a report to the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime.

Domestic journalistic associations reacted – the Coalition for Media Freedom³¹ and the Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS)³² demanded the immediate identification and prosecution of the person who sent the threat. The appeal was also sent by the international organizations Committee for the Protection of Journalists for Europe and Central Asia,³³ the OSCE Office in Serbia,³⁴ the Council of Europe Office for Media Freedom³⁵ and the Media Organization of Southeast Europe.³⁶

Although the competent prosecutor's office was provided with information about the profile from which the threatening message was sent, the person whose profile published the threat was not heard because, according to the information received from the police, they are waiting for identity confirmation from Facebook.

The case of the attack on Radar journalist Vuk Cvijić - still no progress

Not even six months after Vuk Cvijić reported that one of the co-owners of the publishers of the pro-government tabloids Srpski telegraf and Republika.rs Milan Lađević physically attacked him in the center of Belgrade - the prosecution did not receive footage from the video surveillance cameras from the police. The Insider editorial team sent questions related to the case to the prosecutor's office. The prosecutor's office directed the journalists to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which has not responded to this day.³⁷

³¹ [Koalicija za slobodu medija: Pretnje smrću Slavko Ćuruvija fondaciji ne smeju proći nekažnjeno](#), announcement published on December 4, 2024 at NUNS portal.

³² [UNS: Hitno pronaći i kazniti odgovornog za pretnju Slavko Ćuruvija Fondaciji](#), announcement published on December 4, 2024 at UNS portal.

³³ https://x.com/CPJ_Eurasia/status/1864686412487909731

³⁴ https://x.com/OSCE_Serbia/status/1864651018635543009

³⁵ <https://fom.coe.int/en/alerte/detail/107641873>

³⁶ <https://seemo.org/ressources/09-12-2024-death-threat-against-slavko-curuvija-foundation/>

³⁷ [Tužilaštvo za Insajder o "slučaju Vuka Cvijića": MUP ni posle više od šest meseci ne dostavlja snimke video - nadzora](#), article

Attacks on journalists and correspondents of Television N1

In the NUNS database of attacks on journalists, a case of physical attack on journalist Dušan Mladenović was recorded. According to reports, the same person previously "severely harassed" and "physically attacked" Mladenović and his family, which the journalist reported to the competent authorities. With the support of ANEM and NUNS, Mladenović reported the specific case first by phone, and then in person, by going to the Vračar police station in Belgrade.³⁸

In the first half of December, correspondent from Novi Sad Lea Apro's mobile phone was stolen while reporting from the blockade of the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad. According to the information published by TV N1, the students in the blockade drew the attention of the female journalists to the young man who was filming them, who, according to them, does not support the blockades. The journalist asked the young man why he was filming her. He covered his face and shortly after snatched her phone. According to reports, he gave the phone to another young man, then there was a short push, after which the phone was returned to the journalist.³⁹ NUNS,⁴⁰ NDNV⁴¹ and UNS⁴² in their statements condemned the attack on the journalist and demanded immediate prosecution of those responsible in that case.

Sanja Kosović, a correspondent from Novi Sad, was also attacked. At the protest in front of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina, an unknown man twice hit the microphone that the journalist was holding in her hands.⁴³

Threatening comments addressed to the editorial staff of the media Radar, TV N1 and the Regional Information Agency JUGpress

In mid-December, the editorial staff of the weekly Radar reported to the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime disturbing messages sent to them in the form of comments: "ashes soon", "see

published on December 17, 2024 at Insajder portal.

³⁸ <https://bazenuns.rs/srpski/detalji-napada-na-novinara/1627>

³⁹ [Novinarki N1 otet telefon na FTN u Novom Sadu, među studentima i oni koji se protive blokadi](#), article published on December 9, 2024 at N1 portal.

⁴⁰ [Najoštrije osuđujemo napad na novinarku N1 Lea Apro](#), announcement published on December 9, 2024 at NUNS portal.

⁴¹ [U Novom Sadu napadnuta novinarka Lea Apro, nadležni da kazne odgovorne](#), announcement published on December 9, 2024 at NDNV portal.

⁴² [Kazniti odgovornog za otimanje telefona novinarki N1 Lei Apro](#), announcement published on December 9, 2024 at UNS portal.

⁴³ [Ispred Skupštine Vojvodine napadnuta novinarka N1](#), article published on December 17, 2024 at N1 portal.

you".

According to the journalists, this is not the first time they have received comments of similar content from the same sender. Earlier, the following words came to their address: "vultures are on their way to eternal hunting grounds", "soon there will be no more vermin and vultures", "de.th to vultures... See you...", then again "see you", "ashes left behind all of you SOON". Some of those comments were reported to the competent authorities.

At the end of December, a threatening message was left on the Facebook page of the TV N1 newsroom: "I can't wait to fuck your Western fascist mother." The comment was reported to the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime.⁴⁴

The editorial staff of JugPress reported to the authorities the threatening messages that were left in the comments on the their Facebook account, under the post about Leskovac high school students paying tribute to the victims of the fall of the canopy in Novi Sad.⁴⁵ After the report was submitted, the disputed comment was removed. Based on the photos and messages he uploads on his Facebook profile, it can be concluded that the person who sent the threatening message is a sympathizer of the ruling party.

Threats addressed to TV Nova S journalist Isidora Kovačević

In the NUNS database of attacks on journalists, a threat addressed to the journalist Isidora Kovačević was recorded.⁴⁶ Through the Facebook social network, a message was sent to her: "...and you are all traitors to the wonderful country of Serbia." You are all Turks, and can you trust a Turk? You can only trust a dead Turk to some extent...". The threat was reported to the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime.

In December 2021, due to the coverage of the protest organized as a sign of opposition to the announced mining of lithium by the company Rio Tinto, "[wanted cards](#)" with the image of the journalist Isidora Kovačević were pasted in Šabac. More about this in the [Monitoring of the media](#)

⁴⁴ [Pretnje smrću i fizičkoj sigurnosti novinara, N1, Beograd, 27.12.2024. - SafeJournalists](#)

⁴⁵ [Aktivista SNS-a vulgarno vređa srednjoškolce i preti linčom novinarima JUGpress-a zbog pisanja o njihovom protestu](#), article published on December 26, 2024 at JugPress portal.

⁴⁶ <https://bazenuns.rs/srpski/detalji-napada-na-novinaru/1631>

[scene in Serbia for October 2024.](#)

The media are unable to follow the session of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina

In the second half of December, the UNS issued a statement in which it protested the impossibility of journalists, videographers and photojournalists to cover the session of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina. The journalist of the Radio 021 portal from Novi Sad, Dragana Prica Kovačević, said in a statement for UNS that the media was allowed to record only the first 15 minutes of the session, even though important decisions were made during it, such as the decision on the adoption of the budget. As the journalist said, only videographers and photojournalists were allowed to enter. She managed to get in, because she records and takes photos for the Radio 021 portal. After 15 minutes from the start of the session, the photojournalists and videographers were ordered to leave the hall. After they objected, they were physically pushed out. For some time they could not leave the Assembly building because the door was locked.⁴⁷

The inappropriate words keep coming

The mayor of Bor, Aleksandar Milikić, addressed Miljko Stojanović, correspondent of the daily newspaper Danas from Zaječar, with inappropriate words ("You are nothing but a barking pacer who thinks he will gain popularity with stupid texts"). According to this media, the mayor's inappropriate words were a reaction to the text "Zaječar's opposition 'hijacked' the forum of progressives in a village near Zaječar" and to a journalist's question: Why does the mayor of Bor visit the villages that belong to the municipality of Zaječar and hold forums with the residents of those villages?⁴⁸

TV N1 journalist Žaklina Tatalović on social network X published a message sent to her by the president of the Youth Philharmonic in Niš: "Zaklina, you are one of the worst traitorous pieces of shit, Fu*k your mother traitor, You should have done this to Kim Jong Un, so that you can see how you would have a good time, You traitorous scum and mercenary scum, You will answer sooner or

⁴⁷ [Skupština Vojvodine da novinarima omogući izveštavanje sa sednica](#), announcement published on December 17, 2024 at UNS portal.

⁴⁸ ["Vi niste ništa drugo do lajavi pacer": Umesto odgovara na postavljeno pitanje, gradonačelnik Bora izveđao dopisnika Danasa iz Zaječara](#), article published on December 30, 2024 at Danas portal.

later".⁴⁹ After publishing the message, the journalist received a public apology in which the sender of the message referred to the fact that his profile had been hacked.⁵⁰

In the NUNS database of cases of attacks on journalists,⁵¹ a message addressed to Željko Bodrožić, the president of the NUNS, was recorded. The message reached him through the NUNS Facebook account. The message reads: "When will the quasi-independent Association of Journalists of Serbia distance itself from the public appearances of an ape-like individual who presents himself as well as responds to Zeljko Bodrožić?" As was the impression in the Impression of the Week. The previous black-and-white rat in the position of KNUNS leader went to God for confession and I couldn't help but cry when I heard...". NUNS, as stated in the database of the SafeJournalists network,⁵² will report that case to the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime as hate speech.

In December, NUNS issued a statement in support of journalist Nikola Stamenić and the editorial staff of Sportklub and condemned the behavior of the general manager of Red Star Football Club Zvezdan Terzić, who allegedly insulted and belittled Stamenić and other journalists and media (Sportklub, Nova S, Danasa, Radar and the Direktno portal).⁵³

UNS with its branch in Kosovo condemned the threats addressed to the director of the Pristina portal Periscope Iljir Mirena. According to UNS, a comment was published on the Facebook account of the Nacional portal: "This man deserves a bullet." The comment was sent from Visar Kabashi's account, and it referred to Iljir Mireni.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ [Reporterka N1 Žaklina Tatalović dobila pretnje na društvenim mrežama](#), article published on December 30, 2024 at N1 portal.

⁵⁰ [Javno izvinjenje zbog pretnji Žaklini Tatalović: Hakovan mi je profil, to nije moj vokabular](#), article published on December 30, 2024 at N1 portal.

⁵¹ <https://bazenuns.rs/srpski/detalji-napada-na-novinara/1630>

⁵² <https://safejournalists.net/sr/incident/ostale-pretnje-novinarima-zeljko-bodrozic-beograd-29-12-2024/>

⁵³ [Direktor Crvene zvezde mora prestati da diskriminiše i targetira novinare](#), announcement published on December 28, 2024 at NUNS portal.

⁵⁴ [Da odgovaraju osobe koje su pretile smrću Iljiru Mireni](#), announcement published on December 19, 2024 at UNS portal.

II MONITORING OF THE PROCESS OF ADOPTION OF NEW LAWS

Law on Public Media Services

In the first half of December, the Coalition for Media Freedom published a statement in which it pointed out that, two months after writing the Draft Law on Public Media Services, "the Government once again made nonsense of the process of amending media laws." The coalition announced that Minister Dejan Ristić "imposed" the draft law, so that the work on the drafting of the Draft law was, to the surprise of the members of the Working Group, interrupted before it was actually finished. The coalition underlined the fact that the draft goes beyond the scope of what the Working Group was working on and as such is in conflict with the Media Strategy.⁵⁵

The key objections to the draft of the law are the following - first, although it is a basic guideline of the Media Strategy and a key item for achieving the independence of public media services, the draft law does not foresee any changes in the way of their financing.⁵⁶ The working group proposed several models, all of which were rejected. Second, in the draft of the law, RTS and RTV remain institutions with state capital, which renders the institutional autonomy of public media services meaningless. Thirdly, the role of the Commissioner for the Protection of the Rights of Listeners, Viewers and Readers (the introduction of that institution is foreseen in the Media Strategy), due to the way in which he is elected and dismissed (by the General Director), has been reduced to an administrative worker, without essential independence in its work.⁵⁷

Law on Public Information and Media and Law on Electronic Media

At the beginning of December, the first meetings of the Working Group for drafting the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on Public Information and Media, as well as the Working Group for drafting the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on Electronic Media, were held.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ [Koalicija za slobodu medija: Ministar Dejan Ristić oktroisao izmene Zakona o javnim medijskim servisima](#), article published on December 10, 2024 at Cenazolovka portal.

⁵⁶ The Strategy foresees the necessity of stable financing, which will be achieved primarily through taxes.

⁵⁷ [Koalicija za slobodu medija: Ministar Dejan Ristić oktroisao izmene Zakona o javnim medijskim servisima](#), article published on December 10, 2024 at Cenazolovka portal.

⁵⁸ [ODRŽANI PRVI SASTANCI RADNIH GRUPE ZA IZRADU NACRTA ZAKONA O IZMENAMA I DOPUNAMA ZAKONA O JAVNOM INFORMISANJU I MEDIJIMA I NACRTA ZAKONA O IZMENAMA I DOPUNAMA ZAKONA O ELEKTRONSKIM MEDIJIMA](#), announcement published on December 5, 2024 at the Ministry of information and telecommunication portal.

The working groups were supposed to prepare working versions of the Draft Law on Amendments and Amendments to both laws, and to submit them to the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications no later than the end of 2024. After that, the relevant ministry should call for a public debate.⁵⁹

Two days before the first meeting of the working groups for the drafting of these laws, UNS, reacting to the official notification that there are no representatives of the NUNS, NDNV and ANEM in the Working Group for the Drafting of the Public Information Law, and that representatives of the Association of Journalists of Vojvodina (DNV) and the Professional Association of Journalists of Serbia (PROUNS), which are not recognized in the media community as organizations that advocate for the protection of journalists and freedom of speech and information, will work in it, requested from the Minister to change the decision on the composition of working groups.⁶⁰

Reacting to this, the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications decided to amend the Decision on the formation of the Working Group for the drafting of the Draft Law on Amendments and Supplements to the law. NUNS is also included in the Working Group. UNS welcomed the decision, stating that the Ministry should have ensured that ANEM, Media Association and NDNV participate in the Working Group, since those organizations participated in writing the Media Strategy, the Action Plan for its implementation and the latest version of media laws.⁶¹

Both the Coalition for Media Freedom and ANEM asked the Minister why there was no place in the Working Group for the Drafting of the Public Information Law Draft for organizations that participated in the drafting of media laws and other documents. The response of the Ministry was that they decided to "extend the responsibility for the work on the drafting of amendments and additions to the legal regulations to other associations that have not participated in it so far", bearing in mind that in Serbia, in the field of public information, has 76 professional associations. The Coalition for Media Freedom pointed out that "the number of registered associations is not and can never be an indicator of their pluralism, activity or expertise", and reminded that the previous practice was for all member organizations of the Coalition for Media Freedom to delegate their members to all working groups that refer to the drafting of media legislation, the Public Information

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ [MIT da još jednom razmotri sastav Radne grupe za Zakon o javnom informisanju](#), announcement published on December 4, 2024 at UNS portal.

Strategy and the accompanying Action Plan. This practice is not without basis, given that all organizations have so far proven that they are credible partners who contribute significantly to the process of adopting key regulations in the field of public information.⁶²

Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance

During the public debate on the Draft Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance, the National Convention on the European Union warned that the proposed changes reduce the achieved level of rights and open space for additional abuses.

Although the changes to the law were approached with the aim of solving the problems of mass abuse of rights by malicious information seekers and lawyers, civil society organizations gathered in the Coalition for Freedom of Access to Information and the National Convention on the European Union believe that the proposals from the Draft of this law reduce the achieved level of public rights to be informed, thus leaving room for authorities to excessively restrict rights. A group of civil society organizations, including Transparency Serbia, Partners Serbia, Committee of Lawyers for Human Rights (YUKOM), Civic Initiatives, CRTA and the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia, has developed a [set of alternative proposals](#)⁶³ that can contribute to the solution of the problems caused by the abuse of the right to access to information of public importance.

The new Code of Journalists of Serbia

At the end of December, the new [Code of Journalists of Serbia](#) entered into force. According to the new Code, the Complaints Commission of the Press Council will act starting from January 2025.

Key changes relate to: respect for dignity, artificial intelligence and social networks, independence of journalists, privacy and personal data, introduction of gender-sensitive language and digital challenges.⁶⁴

⁶² [Koalicija za slobodu medija i ANEM: Ministarstvo informisanja i telekomunikacija prekinulo dobru praksu](#), announcement published on December 4, 2024 at Coalition portal.

⁶³ [NKEU: Predložene izmene Zakona o slobodnom pristupu informacijama od javnog značaja umanjuju dostignuti nivo prava i otvaraju prostor za dodatne zloupotrebe](#), article published on December 7, 2024 at NUNS portal.

⁶⁴ [Stupio na snagu novi Kodeks novinara i novinarki Srbije](#), announcement published on the Serbian Press Council portal.

A new chapter "Respect for dignity" was introduced into the Code. Also included are provisions governing the right to be forgotten, the use of artificial intelligence and the use of content from social networks, as well as provisions providing for editorial control (therefore responsibility) for content created using AI. It is the media's duty to label content created using said tools. In the chapter dealing with the issue of independence of journalists, independence from corporate interests is highlighted. The chapter on respect for privacy has been significantly improved. When it comes to comments, the novelty of mandatory notification of whether pre-moderation or post-moderation is used has been introduced. Also, provisions on gender-sensitive language have their place in the code.⁶⁵

III IMPLEMENTATION OF EXISTING LAWS

The deadline for applying to the Public Call for Nominating Candidates for the Election of Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM) Council Members expired on December 16, 2024.

At the meeting held on December 20, the Parliamentary Committee for Culture and Information adopted the list of candidates and proposers for the election of the REM Council. Candidates whose documents were found to have deficiencies were given a deadline of December 27 to eliminate the deficiencies.

ANEM sent an objection to the list of candidates and proposers on 27th December, 2024 and requested that the entire documentation submitted by the proposers and candidates for the REM Council be published on the Parliamentary website.⁶⁶

The final list of candidates was determined by the Parliamentary committee on December 30, 2024.

Project co-financing

The Ministry of Information and Telecommunications drafted amendments to the [Rulebook on co-financing of projects for the realization of public interest in the field of public information](#), with

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ [Prigovor na listu kandidata i predlagača za izbor Saveta Regulatornog tela za elektronske medije](#), author: Veran Matić, article published on December 28, 2024 at Javni servis portal.

associated forms. Pointing to certain illogicalities contained in the published documents (which concern, among other things, the formation of the candidate base, as well as lack of information regarding access to the Unified Information System), ANEM sent a letter to the line Minister asking him to clarify the observed illogicalities.

IV SLAPP LAWSUITS DIRECTED AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND THE MEDIA

The Coalition Against SLAPP in Europe (CASE) and the Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation released a [report](#) that showed 166 SLAPP lawsuits were filed in 2023. Serbia is one of the countries where a significant number of such procedures have been initiated.⁶⁷

Predrag Koluviija filed a third lawsuit against the journalist of the research portal KRIK. The lawsuit was filed against the editor, the journalist and the association that is the founder of the KRIK portal, and with it - due to the alleged violation of the dignity of the person by publishing the text "Operation 'Zepelin': Koluviija was suspected of producing marijuana even before 'Jovanjica'" – compensation for non-material damages is requested in the amount of 100,000.00 rsd.

One of the lawsuits filed by Predrag Koluviija against the editor-in-chief and publisher of the KRIK portal was assessed by the Platform of the Council of Europe for promoting the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists as "an act that has a terrifying effect on media freedom."⁶⁸ More about the previous procedures in the [Monitoring of the media scene in Serbia for June 2024](#).

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⁶⁷ [Srbija među zemljama u kojima je pokrenut značajan broj SLAPP tužbi](#), article published on December 9, 2024 at UNS portal.

⁶⁸ <https://fom.coe.int/en/alerte/detail/107636917;globalSearch=true>