



Participants of the press conference in Kosovo Mitrovica
(photo: Zoran Savić)

BEZBEDNI NOVINARI

MEDIA MONITORING IN SERBIA
FOR FEBRUARY 2025

INTRODUCTION

The monitoring of the media scene is conducted to continuously track events and processes affecting media freedom in the Republic of Serbia. This monitoring focuses on freedom of expression; monitoring the implementation of existing regulations; the adoption of new regulations, as well as amendments to current ones, both in the media field and other areas that directly or indirectly impact media freedom; and the analysis of lawsuits considered by experts to be SLAPP suits (strategic lawsuits against public participation) targeting journalists and media outlets.

Publicly available data, information obtained from journalists, editors, and other media professionals, journalistic associations, and media organizations, as well as from governmental and non-governmental bodies, are used for monitoring.

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I. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In the Freedom House annual report [The Uphill Battle to Safeguard Rights](#), Serbia continues its downward trend on the list of countries where rights and freedoms have been most endangered over the past decade. The report states:

Serbia under the leadership of President Aleksandar Vučić and his Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) provides an informative example of the ways in which elected leaders have undermined the media. The country declined from Free to Partly Free in the 2019 edition of Freedom in the World and has lost a further 11 points since then, as rights and liberties have steadily deteriorated. Attacks on journalists and tightening control of the media environment have been among the most prominent features of this erosion.

The report notes smear campaigns targeting investigative media, tax inspections aimed at them, threats from top government officials, and arrests. It also points out that, in order to support pro-government media, the authorities abused regulatory control and licensing processes. Pro-government media have benefited from opaque ownership structures, indirect state subsidies, and a politicized distribution of advertising revenue. On the other hand, independent media and journalists have been intimidated by strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP). All of this has created an environment in which positive reporting on the President of Serbia and his SNS party dominates, especially in the lead-up to elections, while critical voices are silenced.

The deterioration of media freedom in Serbia is also recorded in the [Monitoring Report](#) prepared for the [Media Freedom Rapid Response \(MFRR\)](#) network by experts from the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), and the International Press Institute (IPI)¹. According to the report, 83 alerts were recorded in Serbia, concerning 117 individuals or entities associated with the media (compared to 49 documented cases in 2023).²

According to the MFRR report, verbal attacks are predominant in Serbia (71.1% with 14 cases of death threats). There were also 14 recorded physical attacks.

The report also discusses cases of death threats against the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, hostility toward media outlets (especially television channel Nova S), and threats made to journalists Ana Lalić Hegediš and Dinko Gruhonjić.

Eleven instances of verbal pressure by public officials were recorded. Particular emphasis was placed on an incident in the Belgrade City Assembly, where Slobodan Šolević, a member of the city council, insulted Danas daily journalist Vojin Radovanović, demanding that he delete footage in which Šolević appeared. The report highlights President Aleksandar Vučić's harsh criticism of the media outlets N1, Nova S, and Slobodna Bosna over their coverage of protests against lithium mining by the company Rio Tinto. It also covers a smear campaign targeting journalist [Tamara Skrozza](#) (pro-government tabloids manipulated her statement about the protests that led to the fall of Slobodan Milošević's regime). In connection to this, Minister of Information and Telecommunications Dejan Ristić accused Skrozza of spreading hate speech.

Among physical assaults, in addition to those occurring during protests, the report includes cases where perpetrators were members of the police and security services. The most alarming case involved journalist [Ljubomir Stefanović](#), who stated that the Security Information Agency (BIA) abducted and interrogated him for hours because of his public criticism of the Serbian President. During the incident, his mobile phone was hacked. Another notable case was that of [Slaviše Milanova](#), who had spyware NoviSpy installed on his device during questioning at a police station in Pirot in February of the previous year. Referring to findings by Amnesty International, MFRR and the SafeJournalists network called on Serbian authorities to respond to these cases of unauthorized state surveillance in line with the newly adopted European Media Freedom Act (EMFA).

In the area of legal proceedings, the report notes that three out of eight recorded cases were initiated by members of the judiciary. The investigative portal KRIK was described as "a constant target of harassment through lawsuits used as a tool of intimidation."

Reporters Without Borders published a Media Freedom Status Analysis, "[Analysis of the State of Media Freedom](#)" covering eight EU member states and Serbia as a candidate country. The organization harshly criticized the European Commission and EU member states for their inaction while media freedom continues to erode. Reporters Without Borders called on the Commission to assume responsibility for enforcing its own rules and to do everything in its power to halt the deterioration of media freedoms in Europe. Regarding [Serbia](#), which ranks 98th on the World Press Freedom Index, it was stated that the

country's Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) only formally adheres to the standards of EU independence, while in practice it operates under political control.³

On the [Council of Europe's Platform for the Protection of Journalism and the Safety of Journalists](#) which tracks threats against journalists in member countries and issues alerts and calls to authorities, a response was recorded from the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office with the information about attacks on N1 and Euronews crews during protests in early November in Novi Sad, and about insults and targeting of N1 journalist Miodrag Sovilj by Belgrade Mayor Aleksandar Šapić. The [response](#) noted that the latter case could only potentially be prosecuted through a private lawsuit, as the prosecution lacks a legal basis to initiate criminal proceedings.

The International PEN Center issued a [statement](#) noting that independent journalists in Serbia have become targets of the Serbian government, pro-government media, and online trolls. The statement emphasizes that the Serbian authorities must respect the right to peaceful protest and ensure a safe environment for journalists. It further notes that pro-government media report on protests in a negative tone and have published personal data of some demonstrators, raising serious safety concerns. The statement also cites President Vučić's claim that student protesters are funded from abroad and that the media are spreading false information about the demonstrations.

The statement also referred to a [manipulated video](#) circulated on social media that portrayed actors Marko Janketić and Mirjana Karanović, journalists Zoran Kesić and Jelena Obućina, writer Marko Vidojković, playwright Biljana Srbljanović, and historian Milan St. Protić as traitors and supporters of Kosovo's independence. Some of those featured in the video reportedly received death threats after its publication.⁴

PEN International called on Serbian authorities to respect their national and international obligations regarding the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Authorities were urged to ensure that journalists, writers, and activists are able to speak out and inform the public without fear of retaliation.

The [manipulated video](#) was also documented within the [Mapping Media Freedom](#) project, which tracks and reports violations of press and media freedom across Europe.

Unlawful Access to Mobile Data and Installation of Spyware

With the assistance of the Digital Security Lab of Amnesty International, yet another case of Cellebrite tool misuse was uncovered in Serbia.⁵ A 23-year-old activist attempted to attend a Serbian Progressive Party event at the Sava Center in late 2024 but was denied entry. He was taken into police custody and, according to Amnesty's findings, his phone was forcibly unlocked, data was extracted, and an attempt was made to install some form of spyware.⁶

Following Amnesty International's report published in December 2024, the Cellebrite company issued a response (for more information, see the [Monitoring Report on the Media Scene for December 2024](#)). After investigating the allegations of possible technology misuse, Cellebrite decided to suspend further use of its products by the relevant Serbian authorities.⁷

The Swiss daily newspaper Blick reported that Switzerland had sold Serbia surveillance technology worth nearly two million Swiss francs. This included IMSI-catchers, which enable the location tracking, eavesdropping, and monitoring of mobile phones. The Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) confirmed the transaction. A spokesperson stated that the equipment was delivered to Serbian state authorities but did not specify which institutions were involved. It is assumed that the Ministry of the Interior (MUP) or the Security Information Agency (BIA) are the likely recipients. The article emphasized that the sale of surveillance technology to Serbia is controversial, given that the Swiss export regulation on internet and mobile surveillance equipment prohibits such transfers if there is a well-founded suspicion that the technology will be used for repression.⁸



Illustration: Jose Aragonés on Unsplash

Threats and Pressure

In early February, more than 25 civil society organizations,⁹ as well as several journalistic and media associations, announced that they were ending cooperation with the legislative and executive branches of government in Serbia. As a result, they withdrew their formal and informal participation in working groups of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and its ministries, including permanent and ad hoc working groups, councils, and similar bodies in which they had previously been involved.¹⁰

In the joint statement issued by the organizations and associations, it is stated:

In practice, the protection of human rights and freedoms has been in constant decline for a long time, which has become increasingly evident today as the authorities attempt in every way to suppress student protests and avoid meeting demands that should not be controversial to anyone who has an interest in Serbia as a state governed by the rule of law. [...] In recent days, we have witnessed harassment, arrests, and expulsions of foreign nationals, the targeting of citizens with dual nationality, the sharing of personal data, and the endangerment of students' safety.

Civil society organizations have long been exposed to pressure, threats, and hate campaigns. We have seen how security structures are misused for the illegal surveillance and intimidation of activists, journalists, and other critics of the government.¹¹

The Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM) joined other journalists' and media associations in suspending cooperation with the legislative and executive authorities in Serbia, including the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists (PWG).¹²

The justification for this decision is reinforced by the data on recorded attacks against journalists. In the first two months of 2025, the Office of the Republic Public Prosecutor initiated 11 cases based on criminal complaints (4 in January and 7 in February), affecting 12 individuals – 7 men and 5 women. The Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime opened 6 cases affecting 7 individuals – 2 men and 5 women.¹³ The Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS), through its Database of Attacks on Journalists, recorded 5 physical assaults, 2 attacks on property, 17 verbal threats, and 26 instances of pressure.¹⁴ The large discrepancy between documented cases is yet another indicator of growing distrust in institutions, which contributed to the decision to suspend PWG membership.

Entering with Ulterior Motives

At the end of February, a large number of armed criminal police officers entered the premises of several civil society organizations (CRTA,¹⁵ Civic Initiatives¹⁶, the Center for Practical Politics¹⁷, and the Trag Foundation¹⁸), demanding access to and copies of their financial documentation. The operation was conducted on the orders of Higher Public Prosecutor Nenad Stefanović. In his public statement, the prosecutor explained that the Special Department for Combating Corruption was collecting necessary information, citing statements made by U.S. officials regarding the misuse of funds, potential money laundering, and the improper use of American taxpayer money in Serbia. According to the prosecutor, these statements mentioned NGOs in Serbia.¹⁹ However, the action initiated under his order was not based on a formal request – it was self-initiated.²⁰

The actions of the prosecution – announced in advance by pro-government tabloids and the highest state officials, including the President of the Republic of Serbia²¹ – have been harshly condemned by both domestic and international experts.

Pavol Szalai, Head of the EU and Balkans Desk at Reporters Without Borders (RSF), stated in an interview for the portal Cenzolovka that “[...] this police raid

resembles intimidation and smear tactics used against journalists and media during the time of Yugoslav dictator Slobodan Milošević.”

Esther Major, Deputy Director of the Europe Research Division at Amnesty International, told Voice of America that she was concerned by “repeated threats from some political parties in Serbia to adopt a law on foreign agents,” under which “receiving money from abroad” could be grounds for designating someone as a “foreign agent.” She added that “arbitrary investigations into organizations critical of the government threaten freedoms of expression and association and must be stopped.”²²

Legal expert Sofija Mandić also sharply criticized prosecutor Stefanović’s actions, stating:

The reader will already notice that prosecutor Stefanović is not the competent authority to investigate the misuse of funds. Let us point out that Stefanović is a prosecutor, not a Misdemeanor Court.

Citizen Stefanović, if he was so concerned and lacking better things to do, could have filed a request to initiate misdemeanor proceedings against the five organizations, and the Misdemeanor Court in Belgrade could conduct the proceedings. Could conduct - because in such a request, citizen Stefanović, in accordance with the law, would have to specify a factual description of the act constituting the misdemeanor, the time and place it occurred, and other relevant circumstances. In the evident absence of concrete information, he could write: I heard it from Marco Rubio. Or: I saw it on television. Even the Misdemeanor Court – which, by its very nature, has seen and heard it all – would find that laughable.²³

Threats directed at N1 journalist Ksenija Pavkov

During the coverage of the Serbian Progressive Party gathering in Sremska Mitrovica on February 15th, organized on the occasion of Statehood Day, N1 journalist Ksenija Pavkov was repeatedly threatened and subjected to insults and other disturbing messages.²⁴ In order to continue her reporting, the news team had to remove N1 television emblems. Journalistic associations responded to the attack on Ksenija Pavkov.²⁵



The attacker of IN Media portal journalists (photo: screenshot N1)

Physical attack on IN Media journalists Verica Marinčić and Miodrag Blečić

During the protests of students and pupils in Indija, an unknown older man, who referred to the protesters as “Ustaše”, attacked IN Media journalists Verica Marinčić and Miodrag Blečić, directing the same insults at them. The attacker hit Verica Marinčić to knock the mobile phone out of her hand, which she was using to film the event. The attack was stopped by a uniformed police officer, who detained the attacker.²⁶

Journalistic associations responded to the attack.²⁷

The attack on Verica Marinčić was not the only pressure incident that occurred in February. At a press conference, the mayor of Indija, Marko Gašić, insulted the journalist.²⁸

Brutal interference with journalists covering public events

Shortly before the session of the City Assembly of Novi Sad on February 24 – during which a new mayor was elected – members of the City Assembly’s security detail and private security personnel conducted thorough searches of journalists and held them isolated and locked in a room for a period of time.²⁹

At the session of the City Assembly of Novi Sad, Vuk Raonić was seated in the front row. He is the individual who attacked the Euronews journalistic crew

during a protest in front of the SNS offices in Novi Sad in November of last year³⁰ (for more details on this incident, see the [Media Monitoring Report for November 2024](#)). In response to questions from journalists after the session, he stated that he had not been informed that the prosecution had summoned him, nor was he aware of the event for which he is being charged.³¹

Threats to the editorial staff of the Zrenjanin newspaper

Through the social media platform Facebook, the editorial office of the newspaper Zrenjanin received insults and a death threats,³² which the editor links to their reporting on the student protest march from Zrenjanin to Vršac. The response from the prosecution and police following the report of the threat was swift and included periodic patrols near the newsroom. The perpetrator has not yet been identified or prosecuted. The Journalists' Association of Serbia (UNS) issued a statement in response to the incident.³³

Threats to the editorial staff of Nova ekonomija

A voice message was sent to the editorial staff of the magazine and portal Nova ekonomija via an Instagram account (@kosta.car), in which, along with the mention of their location and obscenities, they were threatened with death. The threat was reported to the relevant prosecutor's office, but the perpetrator has not yet been identified, and thus not prosecuted.

Threats and insults to Nenad Kulačin, co-author of the podcast Dobar, loš, zao (The Good, the Bad, the Ugly)

After an incident that nearly resulted in a physical attack, Nenad Kulačin reported the attacker, who was quickly identified and taken into police custody. The Public Prosecutor's Office is gathering the necessary data for prosecuting the perpetrator.³⁴

Threats to Ana Lalić Hegediš and Dinko Gruhonjić and break-in at the premises of the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV)

In February, new threats were made against Dinko Gruhonjić and his family. These threats were sent via social media and reported to the Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime. Journalist associations and media organizations responded to this.³⁵

During February, a violent nighttime break-in occurred at the NDNV premises. The police conducted an investigation, but the perpetrators were not found.³⁶

A few days later, threats were sent to Ana Lalić Hegediš, the president of NDNV, via Facebook, and these threats were reported to the Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime. Journalist associations responded to this as well.³⁷

REM's response to threats made against journalist Tamara Skrozza

REM (the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media) responded only in February of this year to a complaint submitted by the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS) six months earlier against TV Pink, concerning the way it reported on a statement made by Tamara Skrozza. The controversial segment aired in August 2024, as part of the news program National Daily. In the segment, Skrozza's response to a question posed by Rada Đurić, host of the show "If I Were Someone", was completely taken out of context and misrepresented in a highly inaccurate and tendentious manner. The news anchor introduced the segment by saying: "Opposition journalist Tamara Skrozza stated that Vučić should have been killed between October 5 and 6, 2000."

Following this introduction, the editor-in-chief of the pro-government media outlet Informer gave his opinion on Skrozza's statement, describing it as "monstrous, horrifying, terrifying," and characterizing it as a "call for execution," a "call for revolutionary justice." (For more on the targeting of journalist Tamara Skrozza and the campaign conducted against her, see the Media Monitoring Report for [July](#) and [August](#) 2024).

In its response, REM stated that at a Council meeting held on November 1, 2024, it was decided that "there were no grounds for initiating proceedings ex officio against the media service provider Pink Media Group."³⁸ However, at the most recent regular Council session, a total of 270 items were discussed – none of which related to the NUNS complaint. NUNS raised a question that remains unanswered: How did the REM Council reach a decision on a matter that was not on the agenda during the decision-making process?³⁹



Representatives of journalistic and media associations in conversation with colleagues from Kosovo (photo: Zoran Savić)

The situation in the media reporting in Serbian language in Kosovo

In February, a meeting on the safety of journalists was held in Kosovska Mitrovica, organized by the Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM). The meeting was attended by representatives of journalistic and media associations that are members of the Permanent Working Group for Journalist Safety (NUNS, UNS, NDNV, Media Association, and ANEM), as well as journalists from editorial offices reporting in Serbian from Kosovo.⁴⁰ The statement from the meeting stated:

The professional solidarity gathering was notable for the fact that, for the first time, representatives from almost all relevant journalist associations and media associations visited their colleagues in Kosovo to discuss the various problems they face. At the same time, for the first time, journalists reporting in Serbian from Kosovo, as well as correspondents from Belgrade and international media, gathered in one place. Members of the editorial teams of KoSSev, Radio Kontakt Plus, Radio Kosovska Mitrovica, Jedinstvo, KIM Radio, Radio Goraždevac, as well as correspondents from Prva, Gračanica Online, Euronews, RTS, Radio Belgrade, RTV Vojvodina, and Voice of America were present. [...] The meeting discussed topics related to the safety of journalists in Kosovo, where journalists face constant threats and attacks, discrimination, and intimidation. Specific cases faced by journalists in their work over the past years were also highlighted.⁴¹

The president of UNS in Kosovo, Ivana Vanovac, presented data on the number of attacks on journalists in Kosovo:

The year 2023 was a record year for the number of recorded attacks, with a total of 32 physical attacks, pressures, threats, and cases of hindering journalists in their work. In 2024, 22 attacks were recorded, including one physical attack, six pressures, two threats, and 13 cases of interference with work. Among other incidents were the mistreatment of the Radio Goraždevac team by the Kosovo police, the theft and damage to a building owned by KIM Radio in Čaglavica, and a physical attack on journalists from Politika and Jedinstvo on the main bridge in North Mitrovica, when our colleague Biljana Radomirović sustained minor bodily injuries, and there was an attempt to destroy the car of colleague Nevenka Medić from the KoSSev portal.⁴²

Due to the constant impunity of those who threaten journalists' safety, there is a lack of trust in institutions, both those in Pristina and those in Belgrade. Threats and other unpleasant actions by the Kosovo police further prevent journalists from seeking justice. Journalists, especially women, are often targeted. Discrimination against them is often carried out by members of the Serbian List. Journalists reporting in Serbian are also discriminated against by representatives of the government in Pristina.⁴³

The meeting discussed journalistic solidarity, preventing attacks, responding to threats, prosecuting perpetrators, and other challenges journalists in Kosovo face daily. Representatives of international organizations in Kosovo were criticized for their inactivity when it comes to protecting journalists' safety.

Representatives of the Kosovo and Metohija Journalists' Association and ANEM emphasized the importance of resolving the cases of 17 kidnapped and murdered journalists between 1998 and 2005. They called for the establishment of an international commission to investigate these cases and eliminate obstructions to justice. It was agreed that communication concerning issues that require support, solidarity, and advocacy from the relevant authorities should be ongoing.

II MONITORING THE PROCESS OF ADOPTING NEW LAWS

Law on Public Media Services

In early February, the results of the public discussion on the Draft Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Public Media Services were published. The Coalition for Media Freedom and ANEM reacted to the fact that the expert proposals submitted by the media community were not accepted. In a statement, they stated that the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications has once again proven that it has no intention of implementing substantive reforms envisioned by the Media Strategy.⁴⁴

We particularly emphasize that this Draft Law does not address the issue of financing public services - on the contrary, it cements their financial dependence on the budgetary decisions of the authorities. Although the Media Strategy clearly foresees stable financing through a fee as the primary source of income, the Ministry rejected all proposals that would ensure the financial and editorial independence of public services. The argument that "lack of funds will be compensated from the budget" is directly contrary to the goal of ensuring the independence of public services and opens space for political pressures and manipulation.

III IMPLEMENTATION OF EXISTING REGULATIONS

Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media

The portal Cenzolovka published journalists findings obtained from an analysis of the process for selecting members of the REM Council, an analysis that the President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, Ana Brnabić, sent to the ambassadors of the Quint countries (USA, UK, France, Italy, and Germany). The journalist asked Ana Brnabić to respond to the question of why she informed the Quint ambassadors about the electoral process for which she is not competent. No response was received. As the article assumes, the reason could be that the election of the new REM Council is an important condition for implementing the Reform Agenda and opening the Third Cluster for EU membership, which leads to “attractive accession funds.”⁴⁵

Representatives of certain proposers and candidates who withdrew their nominations believe that continuing the election and voting for the candidates for the REM Council would be irregular, which is why the process of selecting members should be repeated.⁴⁶

When it comes to REM’s handling of requests for access to information of public importance, the institution’s official stance is that it cannot respond to such requests due to the expiration of the REM Council’s mandate. However, according to a report by Cenzolovka, the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance, in a response to the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, stated that REM’s reasoning is unfounded.

⁴⁷Although the report on the course of the election campaign was supposed to be published after the 2023 elections,⁴⁸ REM significantly delayed the “after.” The report – titled [Elections 2023, Final Report: Monitoring and Analysis of Media Service Providers’ Programming During the Election Campaign for National, Provincial, and Local Elections](#) – was published a full year and two months later, having been adopted in May 2024. When asked by the Journalists’ Association of Serbia (UNS) why the report was released only now, the former president of the REM Council and current PR officer for the institution, Olivera Zekić, replied that it was released now “because she said so, and that there were no ulterior or prior motives.”⁴⁹

Project Co-Financing

On February 1, 2025, the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications announced all nine calls for proposals in the field of public information for the current year. A total of 427,500,000 RSD was allocated for the implementation of these calls, compared to 337,000,000 RSD allocated the previous year.⁵⁰

The Provincial Secretariat for Culture, Public Information, and Relations with Religious Communities announced two calls, allocating 130,000,000 RSD; last year, 90,000,000 RSD had been earmarked for this purpose.⁵¹

Regarding local governments, out of a total of 167 municipalities and cities, 122 local self-governments announced media calls for proposals within the legally prescribed deadline.⁵²

In early February, a call for applications for members of project evaluation commissions was opened.⁵³

Pointing out that many users encountered issues with the use of the Unified Information Platform (JIS), through which applications are submitted, ANEM (Association of Independent Electronic Media) called on the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications at the end of February to extend the deadline for project submissions. It was emphasized that nearly 84 million dinars (about 715,000 euros) from the budget had been allocated for the platform's development. The statement reads:

Almost two months after the start of applications for commission members via the platform, the identities of the candidates and the scores awarded to them by the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications based on their submitted CVs are still unknown. This already affects the transparency of certain local competitions whose deadlines for commission member applications have already expired. The implementation of a controversial scoring policy in evaluating the submitted biographies, as well as changes to the criteria during the application process, are not encouraging signs and are inconsistent with the optimistic statements and lack of self-criticism from the leadership of the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications.

The same demand was echoed by the Media Freedom Coalition and UNS. In an open letter addressed to Dejan Ristić, Minister of Information and Telecommunications, the Media Freedom Coalition highlighted 15 key issues raised by dissatisfied journalists. Users faced difficulties ranging from media and organization registration, to commission member applications, to submitting project proposals.⁵⁴

The Ministry of Information and Telecommunications extended the project submission deadline to March 17, and the deadline for commission member applications to March 3 of this year.⁵⁵

IV SLAPP LAWSUITS TARGETING JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA

The Court of Appeals in Belgrade has upheld the ruling of the Higher Court, by which the editor-in-chief of the investigative portal KRIK, Stevan Dojčinović, KRIK journalist Milica Vojinović, and the publisher of KRIK have been ordered to pay Bratislav Gašić, the Minister of Defense in the technical Government of the Republic of Serbia (who, at the time the article was published, served as the Director of the Security Information Agency - BIA), the amount of 70,000 dinars as compensation for non-material damage due to defamation and injury to reputation.

The lawsuit was filed over a KRIK article reporting on the trial of the accused Zoran Jotić Jotka and the so-called “Jotka Group.” During the trial, secretly recorded wiretapped conversations between two individuals were played as prosecution evidence. In one of these conversations, one person says to the other that Jotka does not need to fear enemies because he is connected to powerful people: “Who would kill him? Well, Bratislav Gašić is feeding at his table. There’s no one who could kill him.” The journalist explained the well-known Serbian phrase “feeding at someone’s table” as meaning that someone receives money or financial support from another. Although neither the court nor the prosecutor offered an “exact” interpretation of the expression, the court took the position that the journalists did not act in accordance with the required level of journalistic diligence.

The Court of Appeals stated that “the only permissible and lawful reporting is that which exclusively cites the statements of trial participants” and concluded that journalists must exercise greater caution when reporting on public officials. The ruling also states that the position held by the plaintiff “amplifies the negative impression that the average reader forms when reading the article,” because the public expects him to display “exceptional moral and professional competence.”

KRIK journalists have filed a constitutional complaint and a request for review against the Court of Appeals ruling. In doing so, they pointed to relevant decisions of the Supreme Court of Cassation in Belgrade and the European Court of Human Rights, which interpret the standard of due journalistic diligence in the context of public interest – something that must not be limited.



The ruling of the Supreme Court of Cassation reads:

Therefore, in the conflict between two interests – the personal interest of the plaintiff in protecting his reputation and honor, and the public interest in learning the information stated in the article – the public interest prevails, as correctly concluded by the court of second instance. [...] The plaintiff claims that the article in question violated his constitutional right to dignity. However, the plaintiff holds a public office, which requires him to tolerate criticism, regardless of whether he feels personally hurt by the expression of critical opinion (Article 8 of the Law on Public Information and Media). [...] The obligation of journalistic diligence is prescribed by law in order to enable public information, not to restrict it. Imposing an obligation on journalists to refrain from making statements that involve criticism of politicians would inevitably have a chilling effect, discouraging them from fulfilling their primary role as information gatherers and guardians of public interest. [...] In situations where freedom of expression is used to expose potential official misconduct, as is the case here, the public interest in accessing such information undoubtedly outweighs the plaintiff's interest in protecting his honor and reputation [...].⁵⁶

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Endnotes

- 1 Report follows the state of freedom of the press in 35 European countries (27 member states and 9 states candidates for membership)
- 2 [MFRR: U Srbiji zabeleženo 83 slučaja kršenja slobode medija u 2024. godini](#), published on February 12, 2025 at NUNS portal.
- 3 [Reporteri bez granica: Evropska komisija mora prestati da gura glavu u pesak dok se medijske slobode urušavaju](#), published on February 6, 2025 at Cenzolovka portal.
- 4 [Serbia: Protect journalists amidst nationwide protests](#), published on February 7, 2025 at Pen International portal.
- 5 [Student priveden, telefon hakovan špijunskim softverom](#), author: Aleksa Tešić, published on February 28, 2025 at BIRN portal.
- 6 [Cellebrite zero-day exploit used to target phone of Serbian student activist - Amnesty International Security Lab](#), published on February 28, 2025 at Amnesty International portal.
- 7 [Cellebrite Statement About Amnesty International Report](#), published on February 28, 2025 at Cellebrite portal.
- 8 [Švajcarska prodala Srbiji špijunsku opremu vrednu dva miliona franaka](#), published on February 3, 2025 at N1 portal, source: FoNet.
- 9 Organizations that signed the statement: A11 – Initiative for Economic and Social Rights, Alternative Center for Girls, ASTRA – Anti-Trafficking Action, Association of Media, Association of Online Media, Autonomous Women's Center, Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, Center for Contemporary Politics, CRTA, European Movement in Serbia, FemPlatz, Civic Initiatives, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, Initiative for the Rights of Persons with Mental Disabilities MDRI-S, Ministry of Space Collective, Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights – YUCOM, International Aid Network – IAN, National Coalition for Decentralization, Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina, Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia, Partners for Democratic Change Serbia, PIN – Psychosocial Innovation Network, Polekol – Organization for Political Ecology, Regulatory Institute for Renewable Energy and Environment – RERI, SHARE Foundation, Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation
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