

**UPGRADING OF THE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE SYSTEM
AND MECHANISMS IN CASES OF THREATS TO THE SAFETY
AND LIFE OF FEMALE AND MALE JOURNALISTS IN SERBIA**

Report on Serbian-Language Media in Kosovo

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**ANEM and the Center for
the Development of Local Media**

Authors:

Jana Jacić

Jelena Milenković

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Introduction

According to the 2024 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders, Kosovo dropped as many as nineteen places and is now ranked 75th, placing it in the third group. As noted in the Reporters Without Borders report, media freedom in Kosovo is threatened by politicized regulation, strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), limited access to information, and a rise in physical attacks.

To preserve the integrity of the profession, it is essential that journalists work in a free and safe environment. Any threats to their safety must be addressed by the relevant institutions without discrimination, so that journalists who report incidents can feel confident they will be protected. This enables journalists to do their job without fear, to resist political pressure and self-censorship, and ultimately, to remain committed to their profession.

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Another important issue is media financing. Economically independent media outlets are better positioned to resist pressures from various sources.

Timely and objective reporting also requires cooperation with institutions. It is not enough for information to be accessible—it must also be understandable, which is a particular challenge in an ethnically divided environment such as Kosovo.

In this report, we analyze how editors and media directors of Serbian-language outlets operating in Kosovo perceive the environment in which journalists work—how safe they feel, whether they face political pressure, and how their cooperation with institutions functions. The second part of the report looks at how these media outlets are financed, as well as the staffing challenges they face.

The data was collected through interviews with Darko Dimitrijević, Editor-in-Chief of Radio Goraždevac; Mirjana Milutinović, Director of Radio Kontakt Plus; Maja Fićović, Director of Radio Mitrovica Sever (part of the public company Mreža Most); Zorica Vorgučić, Editor of Radio Kim; and Tatjana Lazarević, Editor-in-Chief of KoSSev.

Endangering the Safety of Journalists

The Association of Journalists of Serbia in Kosovo recorded 22 cases of threats to journalists' safety in the past year—one physical attack, six cases of pressure, two threats, and 13 instances of obstruction. Meanwhile, the Association of Journalists of Kosovo documented a total of 42 cases of attacks or obstruction of the work of journalists and media professionals during 2024. The most serious incident this year was a death threat sent via email to the office of a Serbian media outlet.

The average safety rating given by our interviewees for journalists working in Kosovo was 3 out of a maximum of 5.

Based on the interviews, it is clear that journalists in Kosovo face pressures and threats. Experiences vary. While several respondents noted that the situation has improved in recent years, another interviewee stated that pressures have been particularly present over the past two to three years.

"We still don't have the economic security necessary for journalists to be independent and not dependent on various media owners, whose narratives and political agendas often shape editorial policies. Journalists are frequently under pressure from editors. Secondly, media workers have no trust in the police and prosecutorial system in Kosovo. Thirdly, there's self-censorship. Journalists are aware of the limits—what they can say and how far they can go in their reports or commentary in order to protect themselves. I believe they often mentally calculate and try to strike a balance. On the other hand, journalists are freer now than they were in past years, when there were barricades, protests, and various gatherings here, and when they were seriously endangered—physically, verbally, and through social media attacks."

"The pressure is no longer what it was ten years ago, or even five or six years ago—it's dramatically lower, almost incomparable. But now we're facing a somewhat different situation. Pressure is starting to grow again, but this time from another direction—namely, from Kosovo institutions and the public opinion of the majority community, which has become quite radicalized, especially under Albin Kurti's government and its approach to the North, the Serbian population, and Serbia itself."

Our interviewees described a range of situations in which their safety was jeopardized, from verbal threats and police raids on newsrooms to demands that certain photographs from events be deleted etc.

Verbal attacks are the most common form of assault experienced by journalists from both Serbian and Albanian newsrooms. These often come from citizens themselves during coverage of public events.

During the May 2023 unrest, when Albanian mayors entered municipal buildings in the North—specifically in Zvečan—there was considerable pressure from the protesting community. Female journalists, in particular, faced hostility from local women, who told them not to take photos and accused them of “putting on an act,” among other things.

This was most evident during May in northern Kosovo, when a major protest took place in front of the municipal building in Zvečan, and journalists from Albanian newsrooms were attacked. While they were the primary targets, there were also incidents of harassment, heckling, and threats directed at us—journalists reporting in Serbian. For instance, during that time in Zvečan, when members of the opposition arrived, I was verbally attacked by a woman who was protesting there. She tried to prevent me from filming—I was recording with my phone because everything was happening quickly, and we were using both the camera and the phone. She insulted me, saying I was there to stir up tensions and so on. I didn’t report the incident to the authorities, but it was published as news, and the Association of Journalists of Serbia reacted. However, our Albanian colleagues fared much worse during that time.

The year 2023, when the crisis in northern Kosovo erupted due to the forceful entry of ethnic Albanian mayors into municipal buildings in Serb-majority areas, was the year with the highest number of recorded attacks on media crews, according to data from the Journalists’ Association of Serbia in Kosovo (UNS Kosovo). In 2023, there were a total of 32 documented attacks on media professionals, including cases of pressure, threats, physical assaults, and obstruction of journalistic work.

Journalists are often heckled by citizens and asked who they work for, or whether they work for “Šiptar media”—a derogatory term for Albanians.

One of our interviewees also mentioned that she became disliked because she was a correspondent for a Western European media outlet, which was labeled as “traitorous,” making her a more frequent target.

During fieldwork, journalists also face insults and threats due to their ethnic background.

*“On election day, we were conducting a public opinion survey with citizens. One of the respondents shared his view, and as he walked away—about ten meters later—he turned back and said, ‘Always for us, never for those *****.’ That was a slur referring to our Albanian colleagues. At the same time, my colleague—a cameraman of Albanian ethnicity—was standing there with the camera in hand. These are extremely unpleasant moments when I feel genuinely unsafe. I also fear for my colleague working in the north—worried that something might happen to him.”*

While traveling to Gračanica, on the main Mitrovica–Priština road, a snowball hit the car hard on my side. The impact was intense, it was frightening. We saw that children had thrown it, clearly because the car had Kraljevo license plates.

There are also provocations during live broadcasts.

I experienced an unpleasant incident during a live broadcast while covering the elections. A man—an Albanian—walked into the shot. He appeared to be drunk. Right in front of me, he flipped the middle finger and began shouting and cursing at Vučić, among other things. I reacted calmly so that it wouldn't be too noticeable on screen. By the time I finished the segment, he had already walked away. I don't even know where he went afterward.

Several years ago, there was also a recorded case of a physical attack on a journalist who was filming the removal of illegal constructions in northern Kosovo.

One such incident occurred while covering a Kosovo police operation.

"We were reporting on their action of shutting down the temporary Serbian administrative body and the municipal building in Peć that functions within the Serbian system. Suddenly, the police charged toward us. They entered our premises without authorization, kicking doors, without any explanation or basic decency—completely arrogantly. They then attempted to confiscate our vehicle, which was scheduled to head to another event. Of course, they searched the vehicle and so on."

According to our interviewee, the situation didn't escalate further only because he contacted representatives of the international community.

In 2022, threatening messages were left on the official vehicle of a Serbian media outlet's editor-in-chief, as well as on the doors of the outlet's building in Kosovo. The case was reported to the police. At the time, there were still Serbian representatives in the institutions. An inspector came to the scene, and the Association of Journalists of Serbia responded, repeatedly contacting the police to find out how far the investigation had progressed.

In 2015, gunshots were fired at the newsroom of one of the media outlets analyzed in this report. This was the most brutal attack the newsroom had experienced. A few months later, the outlet's director's car was set on fire.

"Even now, ten years later, I still reflect on how the first attack was the most brutal, and then they became milder. We are best known as an all-female newsroom. I feel like, at the time of the shooting, they didn't want any casualties—the shots were fired at night. Maybe they thought that firing a single round would be enough to scare us into quitting because we're women. That's my impression. It didn't work—so they set the car on fire a few months later."

After these attacks, individual newsroom members faced threats directed not only at them but at their families as well. One journalist was physically assaulted, which was followed by a smear campaign targeting both the outlet and the journalist. These events were later followed by cyberattacks. Last year, the newsroom's car was damaged.

This media outlet continues to be targeted through various campaigns, including instances

where their logo is publicly linked with certain individuals who are framed negatively in the media narrative.

“When we see those campaigns that are not organic, that are negative, and we assess that they are deliberately launched to stigmatize the media or target individuals, we try to stop them by immediately reporting them to the High-Tech Crime Department in Belgrade, which has not solved a single case.”

Based on the interviews, it is evident that journalists do not report every instance in which they feel endangered. More serious cases are reported, but incidents involving verbal attacks usually end in discussions with colleagues in the newsroom. In two interviews, the reason given was a heavy workload, which leads to these cases not receiving much attention.

Additionally, as one of the interviewees pointed out, journalists in Kosovo have become so accustomed to the situation there and to constant pressure that they are sometimes not even aware that the working environment they are in should not be like that.

Selective Justice

According to one of our interviewees, the judiciary in Kosovo applies justice selectively when it comes to journalists, using ethnic criteria as a basis.

The first case was recorded and documented with photos of the car belonging to the person who threatened us. The case was reported to the police. The public prosecutor did not deem it necessary to prosecute the perpetrator. No criminal charges were filed, even though the police assured us there were criminal elements involved. At the police station in Peć, they refused to tell us who the person was—someone they had quickly identified based on the license plates we photographed—but through our own investigation, we found out that it was a veteran of the Kosovo Liberation Army.

This previously described case occurred during fieldwork, while reporting on air pollution.

Another incident followed just a month later, after the publication of a local investigative story. This time, the threat came from an activist of the Srpska Lista (Serb List) political party.

The second threat was literally at the door of our newsroom. A man came and threatened my colleague, saying his teeth would be knocked out unless the article was immediately removed from the website. Of course, we didn't remove the text. Fortunately, nothing worse happened to my colleague, but there was physical contact and serious threats that endangered the journalist's safety. The case was reported to the police.

The outcome of this case was different. It was prosecuted, and the perpetrator received a suspended sentence.

When the final verdict was due, we held a meeting in the newsroom. The colleague

who had reported the young man said that while the incident deserved punishment, we should request a public apology from him—and if he apologized, he would drop the lawsuit. Not because we believed the man hadn't done something wrong, but because we believed the court should treat both cases equally. Had the first case been prosecuted and punished, we certainly wouldn't have withdrawn this second one.

Ethnic division is one of the reasons why journalists avoid reporting attacks.

There is currently a strong polarization in the north between the majority community, the Serbs, and the police as the main instrument of the Kosovo state or administration, which is perceived as playing a negative role. And that is very problematic now. I know that the moment I would go to the Kosovo police and report any kind of threat, they would be overjoyed to immediately find some Serb suspect. So, in the past year and a half, we did not report anything to the Kosovo police.

One of the analyzed media outlets had a negative experience when reporting a case to the police and therefore sent them a letter.

We sent a letter to the police as a written record, in which we expressed doubts about how they were conducting the investigation, including our suspicion that evidence was being removed. We kept the issue in focus as much as we could, even though they showed no interest. Everything we are now experiencing with the Albanian police, we already went through with the same Kosovo police when it was made up of Serbs. We have several examples showing that they were covering up evidence. We even have open suspicion that they were involved in actions against us. That happened again recently, even though they deny it. We can see how they conducted forensics, how they removed the evidence. The case ends with inspectors coming here to tell us that it was just ordinary chalk, calcium carbonate, that was thrown on the car, that it could be wiped off, and as far as they're concerned – the case is closed.

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The lack of trust that media professionals have in the work, efficiency, and effectiveness of security institutions in Kosovo is also noted by the Association of Journalists of Serbia in Kosovo. The Association has recorded multiple (four) cases of threats to journalists' safety or inappropriate conduct by police officers toward journalists in the field, but in all documented cases, the affected media workers did not want the Association to react publicly to those incidents. According to the Association's observations in Kosovo, in some cases journalists feared that a public reaction would only provoke more hostility and further endanger their own safety and that of their newsrooms.

Media Outlets Mostly Lack Journalist Safety Strategies

Only one media representative told us that their newsroom has a journalist safety strategy in place, but that this strategy exists only on paper.

It's hard to apply that strategy because everything happens here in a split second, when journalists, if something occurs, rush out onto the street. We have protective helmets; we have bulletproof vests that we received through some USAID program. Our newsroom is mostly made up of women. Imagine a female journalist getting ready to go out in the field after a bomb attack or after hearing that the Kosovo police have entered and are closing down the offices of a temporary municipal authority, putting on a vest that weighs 3 kg. I will take this as our responsibility too – that we quite irresponsibly go out onto the street and enter dangerous situations unprepared, carrying only our journalist ID cards.

One form of prevention practiced by a newsroom is assessing the situation during editorial meetings. This situational assessment is applied when working on topics related to the closure of institutions or covering a crisis. Journalists with the most experience and those trained in crisis reporting are sent to locations deemed potentially risky. Since there are few such journalists in the newsroom, in the event of a crisis, one of them will go out in the field even on their day off.

In several media outlets, editors themselves take on the responsibility of covering sensitive topics.

We don't have the capacity, we don't have any legal or institutional protection, nor are we as a newsroom able to provide such protection, for me to ask a journalist to go out and film in a crisis situation. I just can't do that. So many times, I've told them they're not safe and shouldn't go, even if something is 'on fire'.

Another form of prevention involves gathering information from colleagues at other media outlets. For instance, if an event takes place within the Albanian community, the newsroom will try to get in touch with an Albanian colleague to obtain information and avoid exposing their own journalists to risk.

However, ethnic division among journalists remains a problem. As one interviewee explained, just like in the wider Kosovar society, mistrust also exists among media workers.

A clear example is the north of Kosovo. Very rarely have colleagues from Pristina reached out to independent media in the north to get first-hand information. It's often the same among Serbs – sometimes they don't trust their Albanian colleagues, and sometimes they simply don't get feedback, there's no response."

In one media outlet, journalist safety is addressed through the organization of workshops.

With the help of the Media Institute in Stockholm, we had the opportunity – with financial support – to conduct a training session for journalists that included physical safety. But we do not overlook journalists' mental health, because that is just as important as physical safety. We are all under threat, we are all strained, and we have so many mental health issues that I can't even begin to explain."

Insufficient Training for Reporting in Crisis Situations and Journalist Safety

All media representatives expressed the need for journalist training on reporting in crisis situations, as well as safety training for journalists.

While such training courses were offered in the past and some senior journalists have participated in them, their younger colleagues remain unprepared.

Even journalists who haven't received training have had to report from crisis situations.

Although I've been in journalism for so many years, I wasn't even aware that we have the right to request training. I always thought I had to do my job, even in terrible circumstances where my life could be at risk. I never knew how to say no or express that I didn't feel safe. I always went, even when under pressure from all sides. My colleague is Albanian, and you're working with Serbs. You're afraid of what might happen. On the other hand, you fear the event itself, because sometimes those gatherings can suddenly become violent. You don't have anything except a vest—if you remembered to take it, since often you just rush to the scene. Then you're left with just your phone and personal belongings.

Safety trainings are, according to one interviewee, especially important when reporting on corruption or writing about radical Islam.

One female interviewee mentioned that trainings are offered through various NGO projects. However, these are insufficient—they last only 2–3 hours, involve no practical work, and only cover the basics. They are not tailored to journalists who have found themselves in truly dangerous situations.

As project funding is the primary source of income for many media outlets, smaller newsrooms cannot afford to organize such training.

Our newsroom is very small and financially struggling because we rely on project-based funding, so unfortunately there is no money for this kind of training. We're barely surviving as it is, let alone affording that. But if some organization could offer it, it would definitely be welcome.

In addition to a lack of training, there is also a lack of equipment for reporting in crisis situations.

We know what kind of gear is used when entering a crisis zone—helmets, bulletproof

vests, etc. What we have are jackets and a few vests we received from OSCE, labeled 'PRESS'. And that's it. We have our accreditations to show we're journalists and those vests, but really, there's nothing else.

Cooperation with Journalists' Associations and Organizations

Media outlets cooperate with both Serbian and Kosovar journalists' associations, including NUNS (IJAS), UNS (JAS) and its branch in Kosovo, as well as the Association of Journalists of Kosovo. They also have access to the SafeJournalists Network platform.

Journalists from Serbian newsrooms are mostly members of the Association of Journalists of Serbia in Kosovo.

One of the analyzed media outlets is a member of the Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM).

Another outlet is a member of the Association of Independent Electronic Media of Kosovo (AMPEK), as well as the Kosovo Press Council. Membership in such organizations offers various opportunities and hope that the associations will react and stand in defense of their members in times of trouble.

I don't think there can ever be enough. You always need to speak. You always need to be present everywhere. No matter what you're a member of, the more places you're part of, the more people will have the chance to hear about your problems.

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Experiences with the Association of Journalists of Kosovo vary. One interviewee stated that the Association did respond to threats made against journalists from Serbian newsrooms, while another said that broader cooperation with the organization does not exist.

When there's a conference or when they organize something, they sometimes invite journalists from Serbian-language newsrooms to participate, or when it's a meeting of some kind. But broader cooperation really doesn't exist.

Although journalists can reach out to these associations, interviews show that they rarely do—instead, they usually discuss problems internally within their newsrooms and then continue with their regular activities, lacking awareness of the importance of journalist protection. Part of the reason lies in the fact that responses from journalists' associations typically end with public statements.

Usually, when journalists receive threats, it all ends with a statement. Both Serbian and Albanian associations react, there are condemnations. Let's take the simplest example - when journalists are not invited to a press conference, which is also a big issue. There are condemnations of the selective invitations, and that's it. Next time, we're still not invited. So I guess people lose the will to even try.

Interviews also revealed a general lack of awareness about the availability of SOS hotlines for journalists, provided by various journalists' associations and organizations.

Cooperation with Institutions and Access to Information

A lack of transparency from institutions is evident—whether referring to Kosovar institutions or those of the Republic of Serbia. Most institutions are not open to communication with the media outlets we spoke to and do not respond to emails of any kind. Speaking about the Office for Kosovo and Metohija, one interviewee noted that they will provide an answer only if the question aligns with their political interests. However, if a question is raised about corruption or similar issues, their “response” tends to come in the form of pressure on journalists.

There is no communication with representatives of the Serb List, except now during the election campaign when they held rallies and so on, and invited us to cover the events. Even then, during press conferences, they often refuse to answer questions—instead, they give a short speech, address the media, and that's it. The lack of cooperation is very pronounced, and since they essentially run all ten Serb-majority municipalities, this means there is no collaboration at the level of local self-governments either.

When we do receive a response from them, everyone checks to see if everything is okay. It really takes an exceptionally unusual situation for any of them to answer us. Over these past ten years, we've had occasional instances where the Serb List would communicate with us, but it would happen in such a way that one of them, for example, would speak to someone and then tell us to 'play nice' so we can 'get along'.

This lack of transparency extends even to so-called *service information*.

We have a huge problem with both communication and access to information that is locally important and that we consider service-related. Here, everything is so politicized that even such information cannot be shared without a decision or without going through some institutional hierarchy. For instance, we had a situation where the emergency medical service gave us tips on how people should behave during a 42-degree heatwave. We got that information from a doctor we know: carry a water bottle, some chocolate, something cold, wear a hat and light clothing, etc. I hadn't even reached the newsroom—which is just minutes from the health center—when the phone rang asking us not to publish the information before the department head or director of the Clinical Center approved it.

One interviewee believes self-censorship is also at play.

I think with this new, polished image of the Serb List, and within institutions like the hospital, schools, or the post office, there is a kind of self-censorship at work. They simply don't respond.

And if they slip up and actually do answer the phone, they hang up the second they realize who's calling.

In addition to not answering calls or responding to questions, this media outlet does not receive any information from those institutions about anything concerning the public interest—not even about kindergarten events.

When organizing press conferences and various events, a practice of selectively inviting media outlets is observed. Only politically suitable media are invited. According to what we learned from interviews, this practice is implemented by representatives of the Serb List.

Speaking about cooperation with Kosovo institutions, one of our interviewees pointed out that Kurti completed a four-year term without giving a single interview to a media outlet reporting in the Serbian language.

Local municipal structures are under the administration of Vetëvendosje. One media outlet encountered problems while reporting from a local government session.

We have serious problems when we try to report objectively from the sessions. We've faced extreme situations where we were removed from a local government session. We even received a formal invitation, but once an issue was raised that didn't suit them, they simply kicked the media out of the room. And there are no consequences for that. Hiring media lawyers and fighting those battles—we really don't have time for that.

One of our interviewees highlighted the Kosovo Agency for Information of Public Importance as a positive example, saying that the agency does its job. However, not all experiences are positive. Another interviewee emphasized that accessing information of public importance is not easy. It often takes several days to receive replies to emails, and sometimes journalists don't receive any response at all.

As an example of good communication, one of the interviewees mentioned the spokesperson for the Kosovo Police in the northern Kosovo region, Veton Elshani.

Interestingly, this good cooperation with the police is developing precisely at a time when everything seems directed against the Kosovo Police, which is paradoxical. When the Kosovo Police entered northern Mitrovica in December 2022, as a kind of protective presence for the mixed communities of Serbs, Bosnians, and Albanians, the situation was exaggerated in the Serbian media to the point that it seemed like Kosovska Mitrovica had been occupied. At that time, we reported that this was not the case. Yes, they did enter, and indeed, there was no need for such heavy weaponry, but it was not a special police unit. It was regular police with heavier arms. But you had to investigate and understand that in detail because you're communicating with a spokesperson who is Albanian and speaks Serbian well—but not well enough.

Disregard for Language Rights

The disregard for language rights is precisely the problem faced by journalists working in Serbian-language newsrooms. Most Albanian-led institutions do not send press releases or any written information in Serbian, despite the constitutional obligation to do so. The bilingual language standard has been violated for over a decade, creating a significant burden for journalists.

It's true—we now have various tools and artificial intelligence, but for journalists, this can be very uncomfortable because it can completely change the context of what someone wrote or the information provided.

Experiences with politicians and institutional representatives vary. One of our interviewees noted that when it comes to politicians, there are some willing to give statements in Serbian, but that is not the case with institutions such as the police, the prosecution, the judiciary, or the ministries.

There are interpreters in the Government and the Presidency of Kosovo, and there are no issues in that regard. In the Kosovo Assembly, there have been problems in previous years. If the representatives or MPs of the Serb List do not participate in parliamentary debates, then there is no interpretation provided for media reporting in Serbian—and not only Serbian, but also Bosnian and Montenegrin. At press conferences held by certain institutions, such as the prosecution, interpretation is sometimes not provided. This occasionally happens even with international agencies and organizations, which is a failing on their part as well, though this issue mostly concerns Kosovo institutions.

As one of the interviewees put it, attending local government sessions is frustrating because the entire session is conducted in Albanian, while the interpreter is only there to fulfill a formality—translating three out of seventy words.

When the interviewee speaks Serbian but not well enough—as is the case with the spokesperson for the Kosovo Police in the northern region—just one misinterpreted term is enough for a journalist to publish disinformation.

Officials in Priština did not inform Serbian-language newsrooms about their increasingly frequent visits to the north. Moreover, they did not give statements in Serbian.

Their visits were never announced. We would just find out that Minister of Police, Sveçla was there, and journalists would chase him down. We've developed a sort of communication through group chats where we alert each other and rush out. At one point, I said we've started to resemble paparazzi journalists. We go out, stand next to a café, and wait. He drinks his coffee, and we wait for him to get up and maybe decide to speak. Of course, he usually just walks by, maybe smiles, maybe not—and responds in Albanian.

During one visit, when a journalist approached Kosovo's Minister Albulena Haxhiu to ask about the reason for her visit, the minister's advisor asked if she spoke Albanian. When the journalist replied that she did not, the minister refused to speak with her.

Following that incident, a letter was sent to Kosovo officials by Tatjana Lazarević, editor of KOSSEV, Mirjana Milutinović, director of Radio Kontakt Plus, and Maja Fićović, director of Radio Mitrovica Sever. In the letter, they pointed out the challenges they face and requested that visits by Albanian officials be announced in advance and that interpreters accompany them. A response to the letter has still not been received.

When it comes to cooperation with colleagues, one interviewee said that communication with Albanian journalists is generally quite good. Many of them, especially older ones, speak Serbian.

Political Pressure

Based on the interviews, it can be concluded that recently the media have generally not faced significant issues with either the Kosovo or Serbian authorities due to their reporting.

However, one media outlet has received warnings in recent months for allegedly violating the programming schedule. It was also warned about its use of terminology—specifically, journalists were advised not to use the word "Metohija." The outlet was also visited by a labor inspection team.

They monitored us, for example, on August 6th, right in the middle of our summer programming schedule. We didn't have some of the content we had registered back in 2015. They returned our reports several times, even though they were very accurate and precise—because their standards are extremely high. In Kosovo, you have to submit absolutely precise financial reports, detailed narrative reports, and clearly show growth, progress, or decline in percentages.

One of the interviewees noted a very restrictive attitude of the new Kosovo government toward the media in general.

Something is happening now that hasn't happened in years on the Kosovo media scene. For the first time, we are seeing almost daily reactions from the Association of Journalists of Kosovo, which only brings together Albanian-language outlets. There are chilling examples of targeting. When the Kosovo Prime Minister and other institutions directly target media, they target Albanian-language media as collaborators with Serbia. In Kosovo, there is no worse label or stronger social stigma than being branded a collaborator with Serbia. Now imagine the situation we, as Serbian-language outlets, are in. I can feel that looming threat.

In previous years, the situation with representatives of the Serbian authorities was different, and journalists experienced pressure.

Back then, we may have had problems. The year 2000, in particular, was more turbulent and dangerous for us. However, recently we haven't had any problems. I don't attribute that to us being "soft" in our reporting. On the contrary, I believe we're very professional. We're neither biased nor sensationalist. I think we've come to be accepted within the community. And when I say community, I also mean the local politicians who are part of it. Over time, I believe we've proven ourselves to be fair, balanced, and not the type to blame one side no matter what.

One of our interviewees described the period from 2014 onward, for the next eight years, as a time full of pressure—starting with political representatives trying to control their Facebook page and remove comments, all the way to determining which media outlets could be included in a project.

Another interviewee noted that in the past, both Kosovo institutions and members of the Serbian community reacted to news reports with press releases and attempts to discredit the media. There were also efforts to influence reporting. At times, an editor would receive a call asking about what had been published. However, that hasn't happened recently.

One newsroom was even visited by someone who conveyed a message that their reporting was poor, that the Serb List was becoming nervous, and that a solution should be found. The person suggested they should publish something positive, and when he failed to reach a "deal," he told the newsroom it would become difficult for them to continue working.

The pattern of political pressure from both the Kosovo authorities and Serbian representatives is the same. These pressures intensify whenever a major issue is raised. From the Kosovo side, the narrative is that the journalists are *Vučić's propaganda*; from the Serbian side, the narrative is that they are *foreign agents, traitors, Kurti's Serbs*, and so on.

Another form of pressure is not inviting media to events or failing to respond to emails, calls, or messages.

Still, one interviewee emphasized that, compared to the pressures they experienced many years ago, today's pressures are minor.

As one interviewee explained, the pressure intensifies when Serbian politicians suspect or believe that journalists are doing something that could jeopardize their positions. These pressures come from both the Serb List and the Office for Kosovo and Metohija.

As a Serbian-language media outlet, we mainly report on the lives of Serbs living here. A recurring topic in our reporting is how Serbia supports these Serbs—or, more precisely, how it claims to help, while most of that help ends up in Belgrade. Whenever we cover such topics, the pressure increases significantly.

These pressures usually don't come directly. Instead, they're conveyed through acquaintances.

When they do come directly, it's usually not in the form of threats—it's more like "advice." But when it comes indirectly, through so-called acquaintances or "friends," then you hear things like: "Are you crazy for doing this? They'll set your car on fire. They'll throw a bomb. Something will happen. They'll wait for you somewhere on the road."

These are the kinds of threats we face, as well as those like: someone from your close family might lose their job, lose a contract, lose this or that.

In previous years, there were also attempts to politically influence editorial policy. Both representatives of the Kosovo authorities and the Office for Kosovo and Metohija have in the past offered this media outlet financial support "for the media." The outlet interpreted this as pressure and rejected the money, as it was not part of any formal grant process.

A few years ago, people from Belgrade, from state institutions, came and offered us a large sum of money, supposedly to help us. When we asked if it was part of a public call, how the funds were allocated, and what their purpose was, they said it was just money they had left over. We simply don't accept any kind of donation—whether from local Kosovo institutions, institutions of the Republic of Serbia, or international organizations—unless it's clearly marked, specifically allocated, and part of a transparent grant process.

There's a noticeable difference in how Serbian and Albanian journalists are treated by Kosovo institutions. One example is that transport is not provided for journalists.

Although the Reporters Without Borders report identifies SLAPP lawsuits as a threat to media freedom in Kosovo, none of the analyzed media outlets have faced such lawsuits.

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Media Financing and Operations

For all the analyzed media outlets, project-based funding is the main source of income. The focus is on large projects funded by the international community. A major blow to the operations of the media we spoke with was the suspension of project funding by USAID.

According to one of the interviewees, grants awarded to media outlets are lower than those awarded to NGOs.

I think they've underestimated the work of the media. NGOs that hold one or two events a month receive much larger sums, and they're far less controlled or monitored. Meanwhile, we cover all those events for free and publish them. And they never budget anything for the media. They expect us to engage in activities that aren't really part of our core mission, for example, I've organized workshops. That's not what the media should be doing because it pulls us away from our real work. But we do it because we must secure some funding. We've been undervalued in the sense that no one wants to finance media content—news, informative programming—which is extremely important."

In Kosovo, funding for media is allocated by the Office for Communities within the Prime Minister's Cabinet.

Representatives of two media outlets stated that they rarely apply to these calls for proposals anymore—calls they used to apply to in previous years—saying they have stopped applying altogether. The reason is discrimination, non-transparent allocation of funds, and a mismatch between the funds awarded and the scope of work.

In the most recent call, some media outlets from the Serbian and other non-Albanian communities applied to produce content in their respective languages. It was a call for both NGOs and media outlets. However, mostly Albanian media and Albanian NGOs received the funding—funds that were specifically earmarked for the Serbian and other communities. This fund has existed for years within the Government of Kosovo.

We received a grant only once, and that was three years ago. It was a small grant, about 1,400 to 1,500 euros. I was then informed that I was banned from applying for two years because, allegedly, I hadn't spent the funds in accordance with the budget. But I had tracked every cent in my budget! I sent them between five and ten emails. They never replied. I asked for a meeting to clarify what I had done wrong. They never responded. Since then, we've never applied to their calls again.

The grants usually go to media outlets you've never heard of before. These are media that you hear of for the first time, and you can't even tell what they actually do. The amounts are also quite small, so in essence it doesn't really matter—we're not missing much by not applying.

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The average rating interviewees gave for the transparency of such calls was 1 (on a scale from 1 to 5). One of the respondents noted that there is absolutely no transparency when it comes to project co-funding through these calls. They also stated that the situation is no better with the Office for Kosovo and Metohija.

Most of the media outlets participate in the call organized by the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications of the Republic of Serbia, which is aimed at media based in Kosovo and Metohija.

Although the application process for the Serbian Ministry's call is generally viewed as transparent, interviewees expressed concerns about who is actually awarded the funds. Specifically, some of the media outlets that receive funding do not exist on the grounds they have no imprint, no visible output, no broadcasting.

There's only one such call per year, and it's intended for media that, as they say, produce content in Serbian in the territory of Kosovo. Their criteria are very strict, but they are not applied equally to everyone.

One of the media outlets has not applied to the Serbian Ministry of Information's calls for a

long time.

They allocate very little funding for the media, the paperwork is overwhelming, and it's just not worth it—so we stopped applying.”

One of the interviewees pointed out that their media outlet has never applied to calls for proposals from either Serbian or Kosovar institutions. The reason is to prevent any attempt at labeling or stigmatization from either side.

Advertising revenues do not make up a significant portion of the budget necessary for media operations.

The ethnic divisions that exist in society also pose a challenge for advertising. Large Albanian companies, despite having economic or other interests, refuse to pay for advertising in any Serbian media outlet.

International sources are important for advertising. These are not classic commercials but rather announcements, calls for applications, or promotional clips meant to inform the public about the work of certain institutions.

For one of the media outlets, marketing represented a significant part of funding in previous years, but this has declined since the shutdown of businesses and institutions in northern Kosovo. As a result, certain shops and clinics that previously advertised have closed.

A business partnership contract with the Most network, a public enterprise, is also an important source of funding for one of the analyzed media outlets.

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Journalists' income depends on projects.

One month, a salary could be €1,500, but the next month—if two projects have ended—it could be €500.

Earning a decent living requires a lot of work, so journalists often don't have time to devote themselves or their families.

In the analyzed newsrooms, the percentage of women is higher than that of men.

The biggest challenge when it comes to hiring new staff is finding young people who want to pursue journalism.

Some media outlets, even though they don't have many resources, still set aside a portion of the budget for journalist training.

The issue isn't just finding new people—newsrooms are also facing the departure of experienced journalists, either because they can no longer cope with the overall situation, or because they're moving into PR roles.

For years, the number of our staff has been declining, as new media outlets appear here that are close to the current government in Serbia. They simply take our trained people.

CONCLUSION

Although most of our interviewees assess that pressures and threats are less pronounced than in previous years, journalists in Kosovo still face them. Verbal attacks remain the most frequent, and a major issue is the selective invitations from the Serbian List, as well as the complete exclusion of journalists during visits by Kosovar officials to the north of Kosovo. The level of institutional opacity is also evident in the long delays in responding to inquiries regarding the most basic public service information. In addition to the overall atmosphere in which journalists operate, the withdrawal of USAID funding has had a particularly strong impact on the operations of Serbian-language media analyzed in this report. Since project-based funding is the primary source of income for these outlets, and they are unable to earn revenue through traditional advertising for various external reasons, this has placed additional strain on their sustainability. The entire situation also contributes to the difficulty in finding new staff, as well as the departure of experienced journalists from the profession.

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