

# **MONITORING OF THE MEDIA SCENE IN SERBIA**

## **FOR THE MONTH OF JUNE 2023**

### **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

### **The case of Boško Savković, journalist**

Journalist Boško Savković was detained in June on suspicion of having committed the criminal act of calling for the violent overthrow of the constitutional order and security, when he carried a banner at the "Serbia against violence" protest with a doll representing the hanged President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić. Due to the possibility of influencing witnesses and repeating the criminal act, Savković was ordered to be detained for 30 days.<sup>1</sup>

Savković stated that someone later, without his knowledge, hung a doll on the banner he was carrying with about fifteen other people, on which were written "Pink - stink" and "Hyenas and vultures walk together for a safe Serbia". When he noticed it, he took it off the banner and threw it into a nearby planter.

Savković's arrest was condemned by the domestic and international professional public, considering that dolls with the face of statesmen are normally used in civil protests.<sup>2 3</sup>

Despite the claims that he did not commit the criminal offense he is accused of, Savković concluded a plea agreement with the High Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade, according to which he was sentenced to six months in prison, which will not be served unless he does not repeat the crime within two years. After the conclusion of the agreement, he was released. He told the media that he considers the confession of the crime the best solution for his family, friends and colleagues.<sup>4</sup>

### **The case of Brankica Stanković, editor-in-chief of the Insajder media**

Brankica Stanković, editor-in-chief of the Insider media, was the target of Partizan fans chanting at the semi-final basketball match between Partizan and Cedevita Olimpija, which was played in the Arena hall. The most brutal threats were sent to Brankica Stanković, the same as 14 years ago, when

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<sup>1</sup> [Priveden novinar Boško Savković zbog obešene lutke Vučića](#) announcement published on June 5, 2023 at NUNS portal.

<sup>2</sup> [Statement by the European Economic and Social Committee on the arrest of Mr Boško Savković in Serbia](#) statement published on June 5, 2023 at the European Economic and Social Committee portal.

<sup>3</sup> [NVO: Hapšenje Savkovića predstavlja organizovano zastrašivanje građana](#) article published on June 6, 2023 at Insajder porta.

<sup>4</sup> [Boško Savković koji je nosio lutku „obešenog Aleksandra Vučića” priznao krivično delo i pušten na slobodu](#) article published on June 7, 2023 at Danas portal.

she was assigned twenty-four-hour police protection due to threats, under which she remained for a full seven years.<sup>5</sup>

In 2009, Stanković exposed the connection between soccer and basketball fans and criminal groups, as well as the "support" of the state, which did not process the criminals or has delayed the process, in the series "The Weakness of the State", broadcast on B92 TV. This was the first time that photos of the sports fan leaders were also published, which is why she was the target of hooligans from the stands. After the broadcast of the series, in addition to numerous sexist insults, a performance with a doll that the fans symbolically stepped on, kicked, threw and tried to impale on the bars of the stadium fence in the live television broadcast, the most direct threat of death stood out from the stands: "You are poisonous like a snake.", you will go down like Ćuruvija" - who was shot 17 times in 1999.

On the occasion of this event, numerous court proceedings were conducted, which were monitored in monitoring reports in the period from 2010 to 2013.<sup>6</sup> The Court of Appeal in Belgrade sentenced some of the fans of the football club "Partizan" to several months of suspended prison sentences for the criminal offense of endangering the safety of a journalist, while some were acquitted due to a lack of evidence. Miloš Radisavljević Kimi, the leader of the Alcatraz fans group at the time who led the cheering at the controversial match and whose criminal proceedings were initially separated from the other fans, was sentenced to 16 months in prison for endangering the safety of a journalist which, although he was on the run, he finally endured.<sup>7 8</sup>

At the aforementioned match, which took place in the Arena in June, the fans shouted the same insulting messages that caused Brankica Stanković to live under police protection for years. The fact that sentencing fans who were convicted for the same behavior to prison terms apparently did not have a deterrent effect, and the lack of socio-political condemnation and readiness on the part of the state leadership to really stop such attacks leaves room for repeated attacks and threats. If almost 15 years later we witness the same scenario, the question arises whether the granting of police protection is of any significance.

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<sup>5</sup> [Veran Matić – Zaštićena vrsta](#) article published on June 7, 2023 at Javni Servis portal, author Veran Matić.

<sup>6</sup> [Anem monitoring za mesec avgust 2010. godine](#) published on the ANEM portal.

<sup>7</sup> [Anem monitoring za mesec jun 2012. godine](#) published on the ANEM portal.

<sup>8</sup> [Anem monitoring za mesec oktobar 2013. godine](#) published on the ANEM portal.

Journalists' associations - the Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS) and the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia (NUNS) strongly condemned such threats and demanded that the competent Prosecutor's Office initiate an investigation and prosecute the fans who this time, as in previous years, threatened and chanted. They also pointed out that such behavior of the audience must be condemned by the clubs and organizers of the competition, and that the leaders of the biggest clubs who insist on stopping the game when members of their families are insulted, should do the same in the case of Brankica Stanković. It is said in the statement of UNS that "the institutions must not underestimate these threats, especially considering that the murders of Slavko Ćuruvija, Milan Pantić and Dada Vujasinović have not yet received a final judicial epilogue".<sup>9</sup>

Due to the mentioned events, the Ministry of Internal Affairs started the procedure of re-evaluating Stanković's personal vulnerability, and the (in)action of state authorities in the coming period will show us their readiness for systemic changes.

### **The case of Info-Vranjske**

The City Committee of the Serbian Progressive Party in Vranje issued a statement on its official Facebook page, in which the Info-Vranjske portal is labeled as terrorist and traitorous. The announcement is filled with religious, national and racial hatred, and the Info-Vranjske portal is accused that it has "become the mouthpiece of Schiptar terrorists who arrest Serbs in the north of Kosovo and Metohija", "an accomplice of a terrorist organization", and that "they can appoint (Kosovo PM) Albin Kurti as editor of their portal in the absence of real journalists".

Journalists' associations spoke out about this kind of treatment - the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS) strongly condemned the ruling party's rhetoric and pointed out that it considers the language of the announcement unacceptable and that this kind of verbal attack on a media portal directly threatens the safety of journalists and makes them targets of further attacks, because the hostile atmosphere towards journalists and the media is also transmitted to citizens.<sup>10</sup>

The association called on the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) to condemn the announcement of the

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<sup>9</sup> [NUNS i UNS osuđuju pretnje upućene Brankici Stanković i traže reakciju](#) article published on June 7, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

<sup>10</sup> [NUNS: Institucije da hitno reaguju na govor mržnje uperen protiv portala Info-Vranjske](#) announcement published on June 15, 2023 at NUNS portal.

Vranje committee and to disassociate itself from such communication. The Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS) reminded that in the joint statement of the Serbian members of the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), supported at the annual assembly of the EFJ in May, representatives of the executive power, members of the National Assembly and other state and local officials were called to stop targeting journalists and using an offensive narrative.<sup>11</sup>

### **The case of JuGmedia portal**

Threats were sent to the editors of the JuGmedia portal via the social network "Facebook" after news about the screening of the film "We are all different and beautiful" was published in Serbian and Albanian. This film was created as part of the project "Cultural orientation and exchange in southern Serbia" as a result of the joint work of students of the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš, young people from Preševo, as well as young members of the refugee community from this city, on the occasion of World Refugee Day.

In order to bring this news and film closer to young Albanians in Serbia, the JuGmedia editor-in-chief, Milica Ivanović, decided to publish the text in the Albanian language, especially considering that this portal, based in Leskovac, reports on the entire south of Serbia.

Nevertheless, such a decision resulted in comments such as "wretched traitors, I would slaughter you all", "damn your money and kill your children with it", "you have become KLA", which were published on the account of this media by both the main and responsible editor below the publication of the text on the social network "Facebook". The aforementioned threat of slaughter particularly upset the newsroom, while there was also a demand to collect signatures for the abolition of this media through a petition.<sup>12</sup>

In an interview for UNS, the editor pointed out the following:

*"We are constantly living in a crisis, and young people made a film about peace, understanding and coexistence in Kosovo and Metohija. I think it was the right thing*

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<sup>11</sup> [UNS: Neprihvatljive uvrede koje je GO SNS-a u Vranju uputio redakciji Infovranjskih](#) announcement published on June 15, 2023 at UNS portal.

<sup>12</sup> [Redakciji Jugmedie prete i klanjem zbog saopštenja na albanskom o filmu mladih](#), tekst objavljen dana 16. 6. 2023. godine na portalu Jugmedia

*to do. I think that as a media that is registered in the south, we should write in Bulgarian and Albanian. It is necessary to get closer to the Albanian youth. That text was the most read for two days."*

The aforementioned threat was reported to the competent authorities, while the UNS condemned such actions and comments, stressing that *the use of the language of national minorities in Serbian-language media must not have the effect of jeopardizing the safety of journalists working in those media.*<sup>13</sup>

### **The case of Ivan Ivanović, presenter of the show on Nova S TV**

Ivan Ivanović, presenter and author of the show "Four and a Half Men with Ivan Ivanović", which is broadcast on Nova S television, was once again the victim of threats sent to him by Simo Spasić, the president of the Association of Families of Kidnapped, Murdered and Missing Persons of Kosovo and Metohija.

In April of this year, after being mentioned on Ivanović's show, Spasić sent threatening messages to Ivanović that he would "break his spine" along with numerous other vulgar threats aimed at his daughters and wife. Criminal proceedings were initiated against him for the criminal offense of Endangering security, in which he was allowed to defend himself from liberty. Since Spasić repeated this criminal offense in June, he was deprived of his liberty and detained for 48 hours by order of the prosecutor of the First Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade. After he presented his defense before the prosecutor, he was ordered to be detained on suspicion of repeating the criminal act, that is, committing the act he threatens.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to Ivanović, journalist Olja Bečković also received threats several times from Spasić, while in February of this year he was sentenced to six months in prison at first instance for the criminal offense of Stalking, which was committed against Aleksandar Stankov, a journalist of the Južne vesti portal, to whom he sent insulting and threatening messages for a year and a half. In addition to the

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<sup>13</sup> [UNS: Tužilaštvo za VTK da pronade ko je pretio novinarima „Jugmedije“](#), saopštenje objavljeno 19. 6. 2023. godine na sajtu UNS

<sup>14</sup> [Uhapšen Simo Spasić zbog ugrožavanja sigurnosti Ivana Ivanovića](#) article published on June 20, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

above and other numerous threats and criminal proceedings against him, Spasić is known for the fact that he was sentenced to four and a half years in prison for the rape of his ex-wife.<sup>15</sup>

Although a person like Spasić should not be free, let alone present in the media space, it seems that he has been successfully carrying out the task given by the public authorities for years - to stifle and make senseless (with threats and insults) every public event and attempt by political dissidents and activists for their voices to be heard.

### **The case of Olivera Vladković, owner of the OK radio, and Svetlana Ivanov, radio employee**

Dejan Nikolić Kantar was sentenced to one year and six months in prison due to threats made towards the owner of OK Radio, Olivera Vlatković, and the employee of this radio, Svetlana Ivanov during the trial, which gave this event an epilogue in the form of a first instance court decision.

Namely, in August 2022, a hearing was held for the main trial in the proceedings against Kantar, as well as the defendants Bojan Tanasković and Slaviša Kocić for the criminal offense of Violent Behavior, which had its epilogue the previous month.<sup>16</sup> In that procedure, the injured party, Olivera Vladković, as well as Svetlana Ivanov, were heard as witnesses, and while giving statements about the event in question, they indicated that they did not feel safe and that they still had police protection.

Despite the mentioned words of the witness, as well as the fact that the hearing for the main trial was being held due to previously sent threats, Kantar was repeatedly warned by the judge for disturbing the order in the courtroom. Once he realized that he would not be released from custody, he also uttered following threats - *those who are afraid should be afraid; I will break Vranje and Belgrade; it won't end here, that used to be done in Jasenovac, tack - tack - tack.*

In connection with the above, the court found that the actions of the defendant Kantar have all the essential features of the criminal offense of Endangering security<sup>17</sup>, and therefore, in an efficient court procedure, found him guilty and sentenced him to a prison sentence specially measured taking into account his previous convictions, as well as the fact that the act in question was committed in

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<sup>15</sup> „Hodajući Informer“: [Ko je Simo Spasić, aktivista koji novinarima šalje preteće poruke?](#), autor V. Jeremić, tekst objavljen 11. 4. 2023. god. na portalu Danas.

<sup>16</sup> [ANEM Monitoring za mesec maj](#) published at Bezbedni novinari portal.

<sup>17</sup> Article 138 paragraph 2 of the Criminal Code („Sl. glasnik RS“, br. 85/2005, 88/2005 - ispr., 107/2005 - ispr., 72/2009, 111/2009, 121/2012, 104/2013, 108/2014, 94/2016 i 35/2019).

the courtroom of the Basic Court in Vranje and it was against persons who had the status of injured persons in that criminal proceeding.

Member of the Permanent Working Group for Security and ANEM President Veran Matić pointed out that:

*"At the same time, the threats uttered have their unlimited duration, which does not end only with the length of the prison sentence, so we have an unlimited effect of threats and intimidation, a permanent sense of threatened security not only of those who were threatened by the accused, but also of all those who opposed criminal activities, from police representatives to persons who were at some point close to Nikolić.*

*ANEM and the Permanent Working Group have shown how important solidarity with endangered media is, not only at the level of announcements, but also through concrete engagement in highlighting events that lead to violence and direct opposition on the ground, as well as through the expression of concrete solidarity and presence in places where violence occurs, following the final outcome and court proceedings."<sup>18</sup>*

As the aforementioned decision is of the first instance, the defendant has the possibility of filing an appeal against it, and the final epilogue is expected only after the deadline for filing a legal remedy and the decision on the same has passed.

### **The case of Vojin Radovanović, journalist of *Danas* newsroom**

Vojin Radovanović, a journalist of the daily newspaper *Danas*, was the target of an attack in the Belgrade bar "Šlep" when an unknown person approached him, got in his face and pushed him after repeatedly saying the words "Vojine, *Danas* is a mercenary media, you work in a mercenary media".<sup>19</sup>

In his statements to the media, Radovanović added that he had seen the same person ten minutes before the incident pointing his finger at him and saying something to the person he was with. Although the person the attacker was with tried to prevent the attack from happening, the attacker

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<sup>18</sup> [Vranje: Još jedna presuda Kantaru](#), article published on June 27, 2023 at Bezbedni novinari portal.

<sup>19</sup> [„Radiš u plaćeničkom mediju”: Novinar Danasa Vojin Radovanović napadnut u lokalu, podneta krivična prijava protiv N.N. lica](#), article published on June 28, 2023 at *Danas* portal.



reacted by pushing him away and coming to the journalist, after which the incident ensued.

Since such an attack endangered the safety of journalist, a criminal complaint was filed with the competent authority against unknown person whose identity has not yet been revealed, and Radovanović is expecting a call from the police to give a statement.

In addition, on the occasion of this incident, journalists' associations also spoke out, and thus the UNS reminded that any threat to the safety of journalists is unacceptable, and that the perpetrators of physical attacks must be punished most severely.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> [UNS: Policija da pronađe osobu koja je fizički nasrnula na novinara „Danasa” Vojina Radovanovića](#), announcement published on June 28, 2023 at UNS portal.

## II IMPLEMENTATION OF EXISTING LAWS

### Project co-financing

In 2023, 71 applications were submitted to the Competition for co-financing of projects for the realization of public interest in the field of public information in the territory of the city of Niš, and the project evaluation commission proposed to co-finance 31 projects with funds in the total amount of 69.5 million dinars (almost 600.000 EUR).<sup>21</sup>

The majority of the allocated funds (21.7 million dinars/183.898 EUR) went to the local "Radio television Belle Amie doo Niš" for projects that will be implemented by "TV Belle Amie" (20 million dinars) and "Radio Belle Amie" (1.7 million dinars). "Vidosav Radomirović PR Agency for the publishing activity of Narodne novine Plus Niš" will also be supported with millions for the project that will be implemented by "Narodne novine Plus" (12 million dinars/101.694 EUR), and each of the mentioned media is owned by the Radomirović family from Niš, close to the local government, who will receive jointly more than 285.000 EUR.

The project, which will be carried out by "Zona Plus doo Niš" on "Zona Plus TV", which is officially owned by the son of the ruling party member and Minister of Internal Affairs Bratislav Gašić, will be financed with 15 million dinars (more than 127.000 EUR). The "Society for radio and television activities Kopernikus cable network company with limited liability, Niš" with the project on "TV K::CN 1" will receive 4.92 million dinars from the budget.

Among the others who received millions in the competition are "Jelena Lješnjak PR Agency for the production of cinematographic works of audiovisual products and television programs Niš" - 2.5 million dinars, "Igor Spasić PR Agency for the production of cinematographic works of audiovisual products and television program Balance Media Niš" - 2.4 million dinars, "Radio and television production Multimedia design studio Miroslav Mitić entrepreneur, Niš" - 1.2 million dinars, "Nastasija Nikolić PR Office - administrative services Nancy com Niš" - 1.2 million dinars, "Association of Serbian-Czech Friendship - Beseda Niš" - 1.3 million dinars, "Manuela Radojković PR Production of cinematographic works, audio-visual products and television program Helloanimation Niš" - 1.72 million dinars. High amounts were also received by the association "Forum artisticum" - 556,000

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<sup>21</sup> [Na niškom konkursu 70 odsto sredstava za provladine medije: Novac i za one koji se bave kancelarijskim uslugama ili „prijateljstvima”](#), article published on June 1, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal, author Z. Miladinović.

dinars, "Trivera d.o.o. Niš - Medijana" - 900,000 dinars, "Nenad Petrović PR video production and post-production agency Visiongate studio Niš" - 500,000 dinars, "Internet Group doo, Belgrade (New Belgrade)" - 800,000 dinars.

[Other media](#) and production groups received amounts from 100,000 to 400,000 dinars.

In June, the mayor of the city of Pančevo, Aleksandar Stevanović, signed the Decision on the distribution of funds for co-financing projects in the field of public information, and the city of Pančevo allocated an amount of 42 million dinars for that purpose (355.000 EUR).<sup>22</sup>

The largest amount (14.5 million dinars/122.880 EUR) was granted to the production "SCTV production doo Pančevo", which will realize its project on "TV Pančevo". Money from the budget was also received by: "VAT production doo Beograd-Palilula" with a project that will be implemented by "Radio Pančevo" - 5 million dinars, "Open View DOO Vršac" for a project that will be implemented by "Informative Internet portal EPancevo.rs" - 3.55 million dinars, "Pančevo Limited Liability Company Pančevo" for the project in the weekly newspaper "Pančevac" - 3.4 million dinars, "Sommelier 2020 Novi Sad" for the project which will be implemented by Novi Sad's "Dnevnik" - 2 million dinars, "Pancevac-net Pančevo Limited Liability Company" for the project which will be implemented by "Pančevac-net" - 1.1 million dinars, "Stella production doo" Belgrade - Palilula" for the project to be realized by "TV Studio B" - 1.4 million dinars, "Limited Liability Company for Publishing and Trade Activity Start Press, Pančevo" for the project to be realized by "013INFO" - 2.2 million dinars, "Newspaper publishing company Novosti AD Belgrade (Stari Grad)" - 800,000 dinars.

Funds was also given to the media which often violate the Code of Journalists of Serbia and which should not receive support from the budget. Questionable are Belgrade-based "Alo media system doo Belgrade" for the project in the daily newspaper "ALO!" - 900,000 dinars, "Insajder team doo Belgrade - Stari grad" for the project that will be implemented by the "Internet portal Informer" - 300,000 dinars and "Media network limited liability company Belgrade - Stari grad" for the project that will be implemented by the internet portal "Republika.rs" - 700,000 dinars.

[Other media](#) whose projects were supported received amounts from 100,000 to 900,000 dinars.

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<sup>22</sup> [Milioni građana Pančeva dodeljeni beogradskim prorežimskim tabloidima, šampionima kršenja i ljudske i novinarske etike](#), article published on June 13, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal, author Ivana Predić.

### III MONITORING OF THE PROCESS OF ADOPTION OF NEW LAWS

#### Law on Advertising

In mid-May, the Ministry of Internal and Foreign Trade established a working group for amendments to the Law on Advertising. Although within the Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025, i.e. the Media Strategy, four activities relate to the field of advertising, it was noted that the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, which is responsible for its implementation, was not informed about the establishment of the working group.

On this occasion, the Coalition for Media Freedom, consisting of the Association of Media, the Association of Online Media (AOM), the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV), the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia (NUNS), the Association of Local and Independent Media "Local Press" and the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, issued a statement in which it pointed out this failure of the Government of the Republic of Serbia in the implementation of the Media Strategy and additionally emphasized the following:

"Regulating the advertising field is key to establishing a fair and transparent media market and is a basic prerequisite for the sustainability of private media in particular. On this occasion, we remind that the state failed to prepare a comprehensive analysis of the relevant media market at the very beginning of the implementation of the Media Strategy, which should have included the advertising market and give a clear picture of the problems in this area, which affect the pluralism of media content. Special attention in the Strategy is devoted to the so-called state advertising (advertising by public authorities and companies that are partially or fully state-owned) which especially affects the disruption of the media market by favoring certain media companies."

It was particularly pointed out that in this way the Ministry of Internal and Foreign Trade failed to include representatives of the media community in the working group, in addition to the fact that the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Prime Minister had previously promised several times that coordination would be established between the various working groups that established to amend media and other relevant laws determined within the Media Strategy.

In this regard, the Coalition for Media Freedom called on the Ministry of Internal and Foreign Trade to reconsider its decision on the formation of a working group and include representatives of relevant

media associations in it.<sup>23</sup>

#### IV SLAPP LAWSUITS DIRECTED AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND THE MEDIA

After three lawsuits were filed this year against the research portal BIRN (two by the mayor of Belgrade, Aleksandar Šapić, and one by Predrag Koluvića, the owner of the company Jovanjica, who was accused of organizing a criminal group that grew tons of marijuana), a new SLAPP lawsuit was filed by Nenad Milanović, the chief of staff of the mayor of Belgrade.

Milanović filed a lawsuit against BIRN and its editor-in-chief Milorad Ivanović because, as he claims, his honor and reputation were harmed by the publication of the text about the agreements with the Turkish company Kentkart, which is why he demands that the defendants undertake to pay 200,000 dinars for mental pain he suffered.<sup>24</sup>

The lawsuit states that the text entitled "[The recordings reveal that Šapić's chief of staff offered to rig the tender to Kentkart](#)" is *full of absolute falsehoods*, but no further clarifications are provided as to which of the above-mentioned falsehoods is true, for which the editor-in-chief, commenting on the filed lawsuit, stated that *this is another SLAPP lawsuit* and that these lawsuits are *not being filed to satisfy any justice, but to exhaust journalists and editorial staff*.

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<sup>23</sup> [Koalicija za slobodu medija: Radna grupa za izmene i dopune Zakona o oglašavanju bez učešća novinarskih i medijskih udruženja](#), article published on June 8, 2023 at NUNS portal.

<sup>24</sup> [Šapićev šef kabineta tuži BIRN za povredu ugleda i časti](#), article published on June 12, 2023 at BIRN portal, author Gordana Andrić.