

MONITORING OF THE MEDIA SCENE IN SERBIA

FOR THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER 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

On the International Day Against Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, November 2, 2023, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) called on states to take concrete measures to end impunity for these crimes.

EFJ currently counts 48 unpunished crimes in 13 countries. Six cases of impunity have been added to the European list, and two unsolved cases come from Serbia - the case of Slavko Ćuruvija, the owner of Dnevni telegraf and Evropljanin magazine, who was killed on April 11, 1999 in front of the building where he lived in Belgrade by two armed assailants who shot him several bullets in the back and head. 24 years have passed since the assassination, and the final verdict has not yet been passed. In April 2023, two Serbian State Security officers who are on trial for participating in the murder of Slavko Ćuruvija were released from house arrest after six years. The second case is the case of Milan Pantić, a correspondent for the daily newspaper Večernje novosti, who was killed by unknown assailants after they hit him in the head with a blunt object in front of his house in the town of Jagodina in central Serbia on June 11, 2001. It has been 22 years since the murder and no one was ever prosecuted and convicted.

"The EFJ reminds the Council of Europe member states of their determination to establish special judicial or extrajudicial investigations in specific cases or independent specialized bodies that will conduct such investigations on a permanent basis," stated the president of the EFJ, Maja Sever. "We are asking for this procedure to be established for each of the 48 cases of impunity identified in Europe." Inaction by the public authorities would be tantamount to complicity with murderers".¹

Alexandra Karppi from Freedom House was in Serbia in November to present to the students of the Faculty of Political Sciences a new report entitled "Nations in Transit" which she co-authored. The report deals with the state of democracy in 29 countries from Central Europe to Central Asia, including the countries of the Western Balkans, and seven indicators are taken into account during its preparation - democratic governance at the national level, electoral process, civil society, media independence, democratic governance at the national and local level, judicial framework and independence of the judiciary and corruption.

¹ [Nekažnjivost za ubistva novinara je u porastu u Evropi: vlade moraju preduzeti akciju](#), article published on November 2, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

According to the report, in 2022, Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia made some progress, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina saw a decline in the level of democracy, while Serbia's position remained unchanged compared to the previous reporting period.²

"In Serbia, we have new media laws that will affect the consolidation of the media market and contribute to one narrative being dominant," Karppi said in a statement to journalists after the presentation of the non-governmental organization's report on the state of democracy at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade.

The case of Srđan Nonić, Niš Initiative portal editor

A worker at the "Pčelica" children's institution in Niš physically and verbally attacked Srđan Nonić, the editor of the Niš initiative portal, and his co-worker, when Nonić tried to photograph the administrative building of this public preschool institution.

The attack was recorded on a video where it is clearly visible that the employee of "Pčelica" pushes Nonić and his co-worker from the public area, while insulting and shouting at them. Since the recording is interrupted for a moment, it can be concluded that the worker forcefully took Nonić's phone, since after that his co-worker continued to record instead of him and recorded the moment when Nonić snatched his phone from the hand of the worker. In the video, you can also see and hear that the preschool worker orders Nonić and his associates to "not film", to "get away from here" and to "not come here anymore", calling them "non-humans" and "non-workers", and Nonić as a "provocateur", a "parasite", a "slimy slime" and an "uncouth garbage". She told Nonić that he should be "ashamed" because he "compromises" and "creates a problem" for an institution that "seriously does its job" and "spits on the work of the workers". Although everything happened in the public space and outside the building, the security guard did not react.³

Nonić informed the police about the incident, the deputy prosecutor of the Appellate Public Prosecutor's Office in Niš, who is the contact point for the safety of journalists, the Permanent

² [Freedom House: 'Medijske slobode na Zapadnom Balkanu zabrinjavajuće'](#), article published on November 15, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

³ [Napad na novinare Niške inicijative od strane radnice Pčelice](#), author Đorđe Jokić, article published on November 3, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

Working Group for the Safety of Journalists, journalistic organizations, as well as emergency services, since his co-worker was not feeling well.

The Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Niš decided that there is no place to initiate criminal proceedings against any person regarding the event in question, because "there are no grounds for doubting that the actions of any person contain the elements of any criminal offense for which they are prosecuted ex officio". The prosecutor's office suggested that a misdemeanor proceeding be initiated against the employee of the "Pčelica" preschool for disturbing public order and peace, but according to the latest information, the Police Department did not submit a Request for the initiation of misdemeanor proceedings until the conclusion of this Monitoring Report. However, if misdemeanor proceedings are initiated and if it is proven that the worker violated Article 9 of the Law on Public Order and Peace, which regulates "insulting, violence, threats and fighting", she could be fined or imprisoned.⁴

The case of the Danas editorial office

Reacting to the statement of Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić that "Musliu is not his father", Danas wrote an article entitled "Albanian in Belgrade: Who is Fahri Musliu, whom Vučić says is not his father?" introducing readers to the character and work of this Albanian journalist. The reason for the text was President Vučić's guest appearance on television, who, responding to criticism from the opposition, said: "They attack me for having ugly lips, I didn't do anything to my lips, it's my mother's fault who gave birth to me like that. It's a matter of genetics. They accuse me that Fahrudin Musliu is my father. On this occasion, I tell them that my father's name is Anđelko Vučić, not Fahri Musliu".

Immediately after the publication of the text, there were attacks from the top of the state, and the editorial office of Danas was accused of "attacking the family of the president of Serbia", "targeting Danilo", "lying about Andrej Vučić". Journalists and editors of Danas were called "scum", they were told that they would fail in the elections on December 17, and the Minister of Foreign and Internal Trade, Tomislav Momirović, went the furthest in his threats, sending a direct threat to Danas via Instagram: "The greatest garbage! What an unsung scum! You will pay for this and you will also be

⁴ „Došao je nenajavljen i uperio telefon“: Kakav će biti epilog incidenta ispred dečije ustanove „Pčelica“ od 1. novembra? author Zorica Miladinović, article published on November 28, 2023 at Danas portal.

cleaned in these elections, the Dirtiest Jobs Branch of Dragan Đilas”.

The seriousness of this threat was pointed out by prominent media expert and member of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists, Veran Matić, who stated the following:

*"It seems that the Minister in the Technical Government, Tomislav Momirović, overslept yesterday, when we marked the International Day of Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, and sent an unacceptable threatening message to the newsroom, which last year received a terrorist threat that they would have the destiny of journalists of Charlie Hebdo, when ten members of that newsroom and two police officers were killed, while 11 were wounded. Connoisseurs of Tomislav Momirović's character and work know that even before entering the Government, he was prone to bombastic attitudes and intemperate statements on social networks that attracted attention and to a significant extent recommended him for a ministerial position. If Momirović intended to attract attention again, he undeniably succeeded with this kind of vocabulary unworthy of a member of the ruling cabinet. If this endangering the safety of journalists and the media is a prerequisite for career advancement, then an environment will be created in which the cleaning will actually take place."*⁵

The attack on Danas was not the only one, since due to the publication of the documentary "I, Aleksandar - State Gambit" produced by "JSP" journalist Jovana Polić, pressure and accusations were also brought against N1 television. The Minister of Finance, Siniša Mali, stated after the broadcast of the documentary that, "in every pre-election campaign, television N1 has an already established practice of preparing a series of the most disgusting propaganda films, as a rule full of hatred and criticism towards the President of the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić". In addition to the above, the editorial office also received a message with threatening content: "Fuck your Nazi mother, you stinky stink, GOD will judge you, if not you then your closest ones, you will die in the greatest pain because you are evildoers, you are falling apart from malice, lies, wickedness". The case was reported to the Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime.⁶

⁵ „Platićete za ovo“: Sagovornici Danasa o brutalnim pretnjama Danasu i N1 iz vrha države, author K. Živanović, article published on November 6, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

⁶ <https://www.bazenuns.rs/srpski/detalji-napada-na-novinara/1432>

The case of Danijel Radić, the KTV television owner

Danijel Radić, the owner of the local TV station KTV from Zrenjanin, which often broadcasts debate shows in which opposition politicians are guests, had their front and rear wheels unscrewed a day after reporting on the forum of the "ProGlas" initiative, which calls on citizens to vote in the December elections.

"While I was driving the car, the on-board sensor showed me that something was wrong with the tires. I thought maybe my tires were blown and stopped by the tire-repair shop. Then the repair man established that the screws on my front and rear wheels were unscrewed, which cannot be a coincidence," said Radić. As he further states, he asked the repair man to write a statement on the work order so that he could hand it to the police during the report, but he did not receive it because, as they told him in the tire-repair shop, they would have problems because of the statement.⁷

On this topic, Radić additionally stated that this is not the only pressure he has been suffering lately, since he has been faced with several unpleasant situations in the last few weeks. One of them is the stopping and detention by the intervention police, where, as he states, the police officers did not even know the reason for the stop, but received a directive to stop his vehicle. After the negative results of the alcohol test and the test for psychoactive substances, Radić stated that one of the policemen present told him that he was not stopped by accident, that he was a target, that they had received a directive to stop him and asked him in confidence to be careful.

The Association of Serbian Journalists (UNS) issued a statement calling on the Ministry of Internal Affairs to find the perpetrators of these events, stressing that any threat to the safety of journalists and media professionals is unacceptable and that those responsible for threats and physical attacks must be punished.⁸

The case of Nenad Živadinović, the Rhythm City portal journalist

Nenad Živadinović, a journalist from the Kragujevac-based Rhythm City portal, had his car windshield smashed by an unknown perpetrator. Other vehicles in the area have no damage, which is why it is

⁷ [Vlasnik KTV sumnja na režim: Nakon izveštavanja o „ProGlasu“ odvrnuti mu šrafovi na točkovima](#), article published on November 16, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

⁸ [UNS: Policija da istraži ko zastrašuje vlasnika KTV Danijela Radića](#) press release published on November 15, 2023 at UNS portal.

suspected that the attack has something to do with the journalistic work he is doing.⁹

Živadinović reported the case to an inspector from the Kragujevac police, who as a contact point is responsible for the safety of journalists, the police did their part professionally and carried out an investigation, and the portal Rhythm of the City stated that they "want to believe that this is not a warning for a media that writes independently, especially since the election campaign is in progress, but that this is an individual incident and that the car of our journalist was chosen by accident."

UNS emphasized that any threat to the safety of journalists and media professionals is unacceptable and that those responsible for threats and physical attacks must be punished.¹⁰

Cases of media discrimination and restriction of freedom of public information

The media N1, Nova S and RDP 021 from Novi Sad were forbidden to attend the negotiations between representatives of the Government and the association of farmers who protested because of the problems they face in performing their activities.

According to information available in the media, at the suggestion of the Government, the majority of farmers' representatives decided that the journalists of N1, Nova S and RDP 021 would not attend the negotiations. The meeting was held in Kisač, while in the Viber group, through which farmers previously informed the media about the road blocks and their demands, an invitation was first published to all media to the meeting in Kisač, but that invitation was later withdrawn for the aforementioned media.

The government justified the decision with the argument, "that these are media that have political broadcasts, not agrarian ones, and that they have no place at the negotiations in Kisač", and the representatives of the farmers agreed with this decision, because, as they explained, "they don't want negotiations with the Government about their position to be jeopardized because of this situation."¹¹

The Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina (NDNV) strongly condemned the violation

⁹ [Kragujevac: Novinaru Nenadu Živadinoviću razbijena šoferšajbna automobila](#), article published on November 21, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

¹⁰ [UNS: Policija da pronađe ko je oštetió automobil novinara Živadinovića](#), press release published on November 22, 2023 at UNS portal.

¹¹ [Novinari Nove, N1 i portala 021 „nepoželjni“ na sastanku premijerke i paora u Kisaču](#), article published on November 27, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

of the Law on Public Information and Media by the Government of Serbia and agricultural associations due to this behavior. NDNV pointed out that neither state institutions, nor any associations or individuals can in any way decide when and which media can or are allowed to report, and that those who take such "freedom" into their own hands are actually acting against the public interests and the right to public information.¹²

The Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS) reminded that the Law on Public Information and Media prohibits direct and indirect discrimination of media editors and journalists, especially according to their political orientation and beliefs or other personal characteristics. In addition, they pointed out that the farmers' counter demand that Pink, Happy and Informer television stations should not be accompanied by the Prime Minister was also unacceptable.¹³

Prime Minister Ana Brnabić, when asked who gave her the mandate to determine which journalists can attend the meeting and which cannot, stated that no one gave her the capacity and that "no one asked her anything about that".

"As far as I am concerned, the meetings are either closed to the public and we have statements for the media afterwards, or we have press releases or statements for the media, or they are open to the public and then all the media are invited without exception," Ana Brnabić said at the conference for journalists. Commenting on the fact that the farmers told the N1 newsroom that the Government proposed and most of the farmers decided not to have United Media journalists at the meeting, she pointed out that "it has nothing to do with United Media. "We said either all the media or no one, we didn't want to make a reality show out of the meeting, we wanted to talk. If they wanted it to be open to the media in terms of transparency, I said then it can be done for everyone".¹⁴

The second case of restriction of freedom of public information and discrimination was aimed at media expert and member of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists, Veran Matić, who was removed from the trial of Dejan Nikolić Kantar, who is charged with the crime of Endangering Security of the head of the Vranje Police Department Igor Živković. Although he properly

¹² [NDNV: Niko ne može zabraniti medijima da izveštavaju sa događaja koji su u javnom interesu](#), press release published on November 25, 2023 at NDNV portal.

¹³ [UNS: Neprihvatljiva selekcija medija za izveštavanje o pregovorima Vlade i poljoprivrednika](#), press release published on November 26, 2023 at UNS portal.

¹⁴ [Premijerka demantuje paore: Oni su predložili pet medija, mi smo rekli – „ili svi ili niko”](#), article published on November 27, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

accredited himself and entered the courtroom, shortly after the start of the trial and the appearance of the accused in the courtroom, Matić had to leave the courtroom.

Matić expressed his concern about preventing the public from being informed about court proceedings from which the public is not excluded and pointed out that there is no legal basis for his removal from the trial. He also pointed out that he felt humiliated, because after 40 years of journalistic work, he was removed from the place of reporting for the first time, this time from the courtroom, at the request of the accused and a person with multiple criminal convictions. He also pointed out that the defendant, Nikolić, has already been convicted for the threats he made to the owners and directors of OK Radio in the courtroom, thanks to the quick and efficient procedure that took place with the presence of media representatives and organizations that protect the safety of journalists.

"I can understand the judge's assessment that thanks to my removal from the courtroom, he will be able to hold the main hearing, hear the accused and then pass the verdict, but the events after my exit show that it was still an obstruction, because the accused in the end did not testify. Such decisions can teach those who want to exclude the public from the process. Does this mean that in the future every accused will be able to demand that a journalist who is not to the accused's liking for some reason be excluded from monitoring the court process? Today, I was not presented with the grounds for removal" - said Matić.¹⁵

A similar scenario happened only a month earlier in the Second Basic Court in Belgrade, only with a different explanation - that it was a mistake and an omission.

Namely, Matić and his colleague from the Insider TV media were not allowed to attend the main trial, which was open to the public, even though they sent accreditations for monitoring the trial in a timely manner to Second Basic Court spokesperson. It is about the same defendant - Dejan Nikolić Kantar. In that procedure, Kantar is accused of committing the criminal offense of Endangering security to the detriment of an officer of the Directorate for the Execution of Prison Sanctions of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Serbia in Belgrade. The indictment was filed due to the well-founded suspicion that on August 17, 2022 year, the day after the main hearing at the trial in Vranje for threats

¹⁵ [Veran Matić udaljen sa suđenja Dejanu Nikoliću Kantaru](#), article published on November 24, 2023 at Javni servis portal.

to employees of OK Radio (for which he was sentenced to 14 months in prison), where he repeated those threats (for which he was sentenced to 18 months in prison), in the premises of the District prison in Belgrade, in a sane state, aware of his act and aware that his act is prohibited, by threatening to attack the life and body of the victim, threatened the safety of the victim P.M. and thus caused the agitation of the citizens S.P., L.M. and Z.K., in such a way that on the said day in the canteen of the District Prison in Belgrade, after a verbal discussion with the victim, he addressed the same words: "I will kill your children, what can I give for you and yours 30,000 euros to the family if you are not there". He repeated that several times. Those words caused a feeling of fear to the injured party, for his own life and the safety of his family.

Upon arriving at the trial in the Second Basic Court, the guard first told Matić and his colleague that the courtroom was full and that they could not attend for that reason, and then he emphasized that the main trial had already started and that is why they could not enter. Nevertheless, the trial was attended by friends of the accused Nikolić, and after it ended, the judge answered Matić's question why the public was excluded even though the trial was not closed to the public, that he did not even know they were there, and that Matić and his colleague should have come in. After they asked for the minutes of the trial, they were directed to the spokesperson of the court, to whom they sent credentials for monitoring the trial. They were told their exclusion from the proceeding was a mistake.¹⁶

¹⁶ [Veran Matić – Izveštaj sa suđenja kojem nisam prisustvovao](#), article published on November 26, 2023 at Javni servis portal.

II MONITORING OF THE PROCESS OF ADOPTION OF NEW LAWS

November is the first month that began with the adoption of new media laws in force, which were still discussed while opinions were actively exchanged on whether the new legal solutions truly contribute to the improvement of the previously existing system.

The current topic are still controversial articles that were removed from the controversial media laws after pressure from the domestic and international public. With the publication of the Report on the Public Debate on the Draft Law on Electronic Media, which was published on the website of the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, it was revealed that the company "Telekom" was behind the proposed controversial provisions.¹⁷ The contentious proposal, which was eventually abandoned, was to amend Article 122 paragraph 1 of the Draft Law, in such a way that "the Regulator establishes a list of television and radio media services whose program contents are important for the realization of public interest in the field of electronic media and public information in the appropriate geographical areas for which the providers of those media services have been granted a license and whose unavailability to a significant number of citizens in that area would lead to the disruption of the achievement of goals of public interest or media pluralism".

It is natural that after the adoption of amendments and additions or new laws, and especially immediately after the start of their application, the professional public monitors with increased attention to what extent the legal solutions are really respected and what results they produce. The most important topic and the most disputed change in the law by the state concerns the Council of the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM), i.e. the issue of electing new members of the Council. Although the official "reset" of the REM Council is still expected in the end, it will probably be with a year of delayed effect, which again leads to the question of the effectiveness of the new legal solutions and compliance with the Media Strategy. The issue of REM's actions under the new law is also opened, which included a large number of proposals from the media community concerning the work of REM, especially because the impression remains that the new law is being violated by televisions as soon as it was adopted, which is why the first reports to REM have already

¹⁷ [Poznato ko je predložio sporne stavove u nacrtu zakona o elektronskim medijima](#), article published on November 6, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

arrived, but there is still no reaction from that institution.¹⁸

When it comes to international partners, the annual report of the European Commission for Serbia states that the new media laws are a step forward towards greater realization of the rights of persons with disabilities, while the UNS compared the old and new media laws and determined what changes have been really made in the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities. A positive change is visible in that the law does not only prescribe that the broadcaster should only adapt the content to people with hearing or vision impairment, but it is specified that it should do so by constantly including sign language, audio description, as well as open and closed subtitles in the program.

Unlike the old one, the new Law on Electronic Media obliges broadcasters to provide people with disabilities with urgent information important to life and health. Also, when determining the amount of compensation for exercising the right to provide a media service, the share of program content adapted to persons with disabilities, especially persons with visual and hearing impairments, will be taken into account.¹⁹

¹⁸ [Šta nam vrede bolji medijski zakoni: Televizije ga odmah prekršile, REM se i dalje pravi mrtav](#), author: Ivana Predić, article published on November 15, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

¹⁹ [Da li je medijskim zakonima poboljšan položaj osoba sa invaliditetom – Od prilagođavanja sadržaja do mera za zapošljavanje](#), author: Kristina Kovač Nastasić, article published on November 20, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

III IMPLEMENTATION OF EXISTING LAWS

Although the Commission for the Evaluation of Media Projects in Inđija made a decision in mid-July that 20 media projects will be supported by the amount of 25.8 million dinars from the municipal budget, which was discussed more in the [Monitoring Report for the month of July](#), the local government in the municipality of Inđija decided in November to rebalance the budget to increase the amount intended for the realization and improvement of public interest in the field of public information by 6 million dinars.

The head of the Social Activities Department, Ivana Babin, explained that the money will be determined by the decision of the mayor of Inđija, Vladimir Gak, because there is no time for the competition. Within the budget rebalancing draft, additional 6 million dinars were not explained.²⁰

The Law on Public Information and Media prescribes grants for the media through a public tender and through individual grants, which is the only way to distribute money without a tender. The conditions for the allocation of funds in the name of individual grants are stated in [the Rulebook on the co-financing of projects for the realization of public interest in the field of public information](#), and according to that document, individual grants "can only be awarded for projects that could not be planned at the time of the call for tenders (extraordinary circumstances, urgency of implementation, etc.)".

Also, [the Draft Decision on Amendments to the Decision on the Budget of the Municipality of Inđija for 2023](#) stipulates that 31 million dinars are expected to be spent on realizing and improving the public interest in the field of public information. Since the municipality of Inđija has already distributed 25.8 million dinars to the media through a public competition, 5.2 million can be distributed without a competition. However, Article 32, paragraph 1 of the Rulebook on co-financing of projects for the realization of public interest in the field of public information prescribes differently, and it is stated that "a maximum of 5% of the funds, out of the total allocated funds for the realization of public interest through a public competition, can be selected for individual grants" which in this particular case would be about 1.3 million dinars.

On this occasion, Rade Đurić, lawyer and researcher of the Independent Journalists Association of

²⁰ [Za konkurs nema vremena, 6 dodatnih miliona za medije u Inđiji diskreciono će podeliti Gak](#), author Verica Marinčić, article published on November 8, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

Serbia (NUNS), pointed out the obligation of municipalities to justify and explain their decisions and the ways in which they distribute funds, regardless of how they intend to allocate funds.

"The municipality could certainly and should supplement the original competition, and distribute the rest of the planned funds after the rebalancing in the prescribed manner. Otherwise, any allocation of taxpayers' funds contrary to the Law and Rulebook is subject to the supervision of competent institutions, such as the budget inspection or the inspection of the departmental ministry for local self-government." - pointed out Rade Đurić.²¹

The request for free access to information of public importance relating to whom and for what reason the additional funds are intended, as well as by what key they will be distributed, was sent to the head of finance, Branka Naić, from the legal service of the Independent Journalists Association of Serbia (NUNS) and IN Media. According to the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance, the Mayor was obliged to respond to the inquiry within 15 days, and since there was no response within the prescribed period, the Mayor of Indija Municipality in charge of finances violated the law.

"If the authority does not respond to the request, the applicant appeals to the Commissioner, who, if he determines that the appeal is founded, orders the authority to act on the request. Those decisions of the Commissioner are final and binding, and the Commissioner can forcibly execute them in such a way that the authority will pay a fine if it does not act according to the decision of the Commissioner. If the authority still does not provide information, the Commissioner is assisted by the government in implementing the decision. The problem with the law is that every law can be circumvented, and in our country there is no legal culture of respect for independent institutions such as the institution of the Commissioner" - stated Veljko Milić, lawyer and director of legal affairs of the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV).²²

The committee for evaluating projects at the media co-financing competition in Zrenjanin has published a proposal to distribute a total of seven million dinars, according to which, as in previous years, RTV Santos would receive as much as half of the funds intended for that purpose - 3.5 million dinars for two projects. RTV Santos is 51% owned by Sports and Health Television SOS Kanal Plus

²¹ [Indija: Novac za medije diskreiono bez konkursa uz kršenje propisa?](#) author Ivana Kragulj, article published on November 24, 2023 at NUNS portal.

²² [Načelnica finansija Branka Naić prekršila Zakon a da ništa nije rekla,](#) article published on November 22, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

d.o.o. Belgrade - Savski venac, owned by Kruševac businessman Radoica Milosavljević, close to the ruling party.

In the distribution proposal, it is stated that "Novi Sad Television" will receive 930,000 dinars, the portal "Vojvođanski" 810,000 dinars, the newspaper "Zrenjanin" 560,000 dinars, the portal "ZRKlik" 400,000 dinars, while "Radio 105" received 250,000 dinars, the same amount as the newspaper "Večernje Novosti". The commission proposed that 100,000 dinars be allocated to the site "Romanenemivat" from Belgrade, as well as to the portal "Web solution media" and "Media sport plus" from Zrenjanin. In February, this year's first competition for 20 million dinars was announced, and the most in that competition went to "RTV Santos", which was awarded a total of 10.4 million dinars for three projects.²³

This year's tender and distribution of funds for financing media content in Subotica is characterized, apart from the already established allocation of funds to media close to the government, by fragmentation. For certain media or people associated with them, funds were approved through several individual projects, and funds were also approved for individual media workers from those or other media, who applied for them through their citizen associations or entrepreneurial activities. Also this year, Subotica decided to co-finance the media content of media from other cities, among which are the media that are leading in the violation of the Code of Journalists of Serbia, such as the daily newspaper "Alo" or at first glance have absolutely nothing to do with this city, as in the case of "Purity media" from Borča.

Vladan Stefanović, who is better known to the general public for the controversial privatizations of local media in Vojvodina and his closeness to the ruling party, is also known for his participation in controversial commissions for media projects whose media have received the most money at the local media competition in Subotica for years. The media that belong to the Association of Electronic Media of Serbia ComNet, of which he is the nominal director-owner or are located at the same address owned by members of his immediate family, received 12.1 million dinars at this year's competition - "VTV doo Subotica" 4.5 million dinars, "Magazin Dani" 3.6 million dinars, and "V production doo Subotica" and "Radio Subotica" 2 million dinars each.

²³ [Komisija u Zrenjaninu predložila da RTV Santos dobije polovinu novca za sufinansiranje medija](#), article published on November 13, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

In addition to the above, two decisions were made on individual benefits in the amount of 2.2 million dinars, which was intended by the budget. Thus, on November 13, two decisions were made on the allocation of money to "Radio Subotica doo", in the amount of 1.9 million dinars, for the "Learn - don't risk" project, which, as stated in the documentation, "could not be planned at the time of the call for tenders", and for the Pannonia Foundation, in the amount of 250,000 dinars, for the project called "Reader's Diary" with the same explanation that the project could not be planned at the time of the call for tenders.

Media whose headquarters are outside Subotica received a total of 9.1 million dinars. Among them was Tijana Vlahović with the project "Subotica in the heart". It is interesting that on December 16, 2022, she founded the entrepreneurial shop "PR Production of cinematographic works, audio-visual products and television program PURITY MEDIA Borča", so less than two months before the announcement of the competition. At that time, she was allocated half a million dinars for the implementation of the project, and the commission assessed that this project "identified and clearly defined the needs of the target groups and that the project is aligned with the real problems, needs and priorities of the target groups". Tijana Vlahović submitted an application for a similar project to a competition in the Municipality of Odžaci, asking for the same amount of funds, but, unlike the commission in Subotica, the commission in this city assessed that the application was not "aligned with the real problems, needs and priorities of the target groups".²⁴

²⁴ [Osnuješ medij u Borči neposredno pred konkurs – dobiješ novac u Subotici](#), author Natalija Jakovljević, article published on November 21, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

IV SLAPP LAWSUITS DIRECTED AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND THE MEDIA

At the end of November, the publication "SLAPP lawsuits - a mechanism for silencing the public" was published, which was created as part of the project "Increasing public awareness of SLAPP lawsuits in Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina" implemented by the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV) in cooperation with partner organizations the Helsinki Citizens' Parliament of Banja Luka (hCa) and the Media Institute of Montenegro (MMI).

Analysis of the processes initiated by such lawsuits, some of which are described through analytical articles and interviews published as part of the above-mentioned project, show that the plaintiff's goal is not to obtain compensation and justice in court, but to intimidate the defendant and expose him/her to costs until he/she gives up further writing and reporting - which is why human rights defenders warn that such processes abuse democratic institutions and seriously threaten the achieved standards of protection of human rights and freedoms.

The goal of this analysis, which relies on a series of media articles and expert analyses, as well as the project as a whole, is to raise public awareness of SLAPP lawsuits in Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also to create a network of journalists and analysts interested in reporting and analysis of the SLAPP lawsuits, encouraging public debate on the mechanisms of combating SLAPP lawsuits and the legal regulation of this issue. Also, this project seeks to highlight the negative impact of SLAPP lawsuits on free speech and media freedom.²⁵

This publication is produced with the assistance of the European Union and the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications of Serbia. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Association of the Independent Electronic Media and may in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union and the Ministry of Information and Telecommunication.

²⁵ [PUBLIKACIJA: SLAPP TUŽBE – mehanizam za učtkivanje javnosti](#), article published on November 27, 2023 at NDNV portal.