

MONITORING OF THE MEDIA SCENE IN SERBIA

FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER 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

According to the database of pressures and attacks on journalists led by the Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS), in the first eleven months of 2023, a total of 111 cases of threats to the rights of journalists were recorded, one less than in the same period last year.

According to the UNS database, the most common type of threat to journalists' freedoms was pressure, of which there were 42, almost twice as many as last year, and they mostly came from public officials and representatives of political parties, who insulted journalists or “explained” to them “how to do their job”. Such data indicate that the culture of public speaking has declined compared to last year.

Although there were more pressures, the number of recorded threats in the UNS database is significantly lower than last year, thus 29 threats against journalists were recorded by December, while 43 threats were recorded in the same period last year. Although the decrease in threats should be encouraging data, the fact that certain journalists received threats from the same person or group of people more than once shows that the negative trend has not stopped, and this is confirmed by the information that there were three more physical attacks than last year with a total of 13. As the database shows, journalists from the media houses N1 and Danas faced the most threats and pressures, followed immediately by journalists from RTS and KRIK. Journalists also received threats of burning down the newsrooms, as well as a series of reports about planted bombs.

However, according to data from the database, in the first 11 months, there were six cases less than last year of preventing journalists from working, that is, a total of 23 cases.¹

A member of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists, Veran Matić, stated at the press conference that from the beginning of the year to the end of November, the State Prosecutor's Office filed 73 cases related to attacks on journalists and threats to their safety, 23 of which were resolved. According to that report, in 9 cases a guilty verdict was passed, in 6 cases decisions were made to dismiss the criminal charges, in 5 cases the proceedings before the court according to the prosecutor's indictment are ongoing, in 2 cases the implementation of evidentiary actions is underway, in 37 cases of the cases a request was submitted to collect the necessary information,

¹ [UNS-ova baza pritisaka i napada na novinare: U 2023. godini isti broj zabeleženih slučajeva kao lane, manje pretnji ali dvostruko više pritisaka](#), author A. Ničić, article published December 7, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

while in 6 cases, even after measures were taken, the perpetrator was not identified. He also pointed out that the first-instance and final decision was made in 23 cases, which, as he stated, is 31.5% of the total number of cases.

“It is an indicator of the trend of more guilty verdicts than in the previous period, when there were usually around 25 percent of court-solved cases”, Matić said.²

The case of Dušan Čavić, activist and Marka Žvaka TV series author

The mayor of Belgrade, Aleksandar Šapić, got into a verbal confrontation and insulted Dušan Čavić, an activist of the initiative “For our quay” and one of the authors of the show “Marka Žvaka”, after Čavić asked him at a media conference held in New Belgrade “Where are you in front of Ribnikar (primary school) to pay respect to the shadows of dead children?”

Explaining that he was there, but that he did not take a photo, Šapić, outraged by the question, repeatedly said to Čavić that he is a “scum”, “scumass” and “jackass”.

“Listen to me now scumass ... I entered every school, I just didn't take a picture of myself, scum... Well, I didn't take a picture, you ill-mannered jackass”, Šapić shouted.

As a reminder, Aleksandar Šapić laid wreaths for the victims after the murder of pupils and security workers at the elementary school "Vladislav Ribnikar" on May 3 this year, and the murder of young people a day later in the villages of Dubona and Malo Orašje near Belgrade. However, the wreaths were not laid at the places where they were killed but in front of the Belgrade City Assembly, which was accompanied by cameras. As an excuse for not immediately visiting the school and places near Mladenovac where children and youth were murdered in two separate massacres, he said that he was not in Serbia on the days of the murders.

Not long after the incident, a video was published on the “Did you know” page on Facebook under the title: "Who is Dušan Čavić (MARKA ŽVAKA), who is attacking Aleksandar Šapić?" targeting Čavić. The video contains untruths and serious accusations, most likely in an attempt to discredit Čavić,

² [Veran Matić: Od početka godine 73 predmeta u vezi s napadima na novinare](#) article published on December 21, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

which in practice often results in further threats and attacks on journalists.³

The case of Isidora Kovačević, Podrinske media editor-in-chief

Podrinske media editor-in-chief Isidora Kovačević received an insulting and threatening message from the sabacizbori2023 Instagram profile, that because of the statements she made about police chief Aleksandar Vilotijević, she should peel potatoes in Bogosavac (prison in Šabac) and that, together with Nebojša Zelenović (former president of Šabac municipality), should move out of the town after the election.

Threats of expulsion from Šabac came a day after Kovačević commented for the daily newspaper Danas that the head of the Šabac Police Department, Aleksandar Vilotijević, attended the final pre-election convention of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party in this city, while one of the leaders of the hooligan group that attacked protest participants in Šabac in 2021 sat behind him. Kovačević reported on that attack in Podrinske and published photos of those who participated in breaking the road blockade, and after the reporting, she appeared on the wanted list plastered around the city.

Regarding the new threat, Kovačević said that after seeing the photo from the SNS rally with the Šabac police chief, she feels even less safe since the case of pasting warrants with her image in 2021 has not yet been solved, nor have the perpetrators and inspirers been found. She also pointed out that the appearance of the head of the Šabac Police Department in the front row at the meeting of the ruling party is a form of intimidation of everyone in Šabac who is being pursued and targeted by unknown perpetrators, while the police do not react.⁴

"It is clear that the chief of police is not ashamed to appear at such a pre-election event, even though the case of the "warrant" has not been solved for two years, nor have the principals, coordinators, distributors been found, and it is not known which printing house printed the posters. It is also clear that he is not ashamed that the police have been looking for the only suspect in the case for seven months at his home address, while he is in prison. And it is clear that the police and the prosecutor's office do not want to do their job, and we can only guess the reason given that he is sitting in the

³ <https://www.bazenuns.rs/srpski/detalji-napada-na-novinaru/1449>

⁴ [Novinarki Isidori Kovačević prete proterivanjem iz Šapca zbog komentara o načelniku policije koji sedi u prvom redu na mitingu SNS-a](#), author Uglješa Bokić, article published on December 20, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

front row at the meeting of the ruling party”, stated Isidora Kovačević.

The case was reported to the competent police station in Šabac, and the Association of Journalists of Serbia strongly condemned the threats and requested that the Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime (VTK) initiate proceedings and vigorously approach this case, taking into account the unresolved threats that this journalist received years ago.⁵

The case of Žaklina Tatalović, TV N1 journalist

After reporting from the protest that took place after the parliamentary elections in front of the Republic Election Commission (RIK) in Belgrade, an unknown person on a motorcycle followed the official, marked car of the TV N1 team, which drove journalist Žaklina Tatalović home.

When the N1 team drove the journalist to the street where she lives, the motorcyclist made a circle around the N1 vehicle with his motorcycle, and then drove away in the opposite direction of the one-way street. After the journalist ran out of the car with her colleague, the motorcyclist returned and made another circle around the vehicle. The press team then moved away from the street, but returned to see if the motorcyclist was still there, after which he got off the bike and walked around the entrance. The TV N1 crew waited in the car to see what was happening, and the motorcyclist then got on the motorcycle and started again towards the N1 vehicle in the opposite direction. With a few glances, when he made sure that the journalist was no longer in the vehicle, he drove away from the scene.

The incident was immediately reported to the police, and members of the Ministry of Internal Affairs identified and interviewed the suspect. The man stated that he had delivered food that evening in Lamartinova Street in Vračar and provided the record of orders from that address for inspection. He also added that “while driving, he did not endanger anyone in traffic, that he did not have a conflict with anyone and that he was just doing his job”.

The police, they add, informed the public prosecutor of the First Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade about everything, which is the contact point for the safety of journalists, and submitted the

⁵ [UNS: Tužilaštvo za VTK da pokrene postupak zbog pretnji urednici „Podrinskih“ Isidori Kovačević](#) article published on December 21, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

complete case files to him for further processing.⁶

The case of Vojin Radovanović, Danas daily newspaper journalist

The case of Vojin Radovanović, who was threatened with death by an unknown person via Instagram profile Selidbeiprevoz, and which was portrayed more in the [Monitoring report for the month of August](#), has received its epilogue.

The prosecution concluded a plea agreement with the defendant for endangering the safety of journalists, the High Court in Belgrade accepted the agreement and the verdict became final. The spokeswoman of the High Court in Belgrade, Milica Veličković, stated for the Association of Journalists of Serbia that L.B. was sentenced conditionally to one year in prison, that he was banned from approaching and communicating with the journalist, with the condition that the prison sentence will not be carried out if the convicted person does not commit a new criminal offense in the next three years.

At the end of September of this year, the defendant was heard before the prosecutor of the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime when he admitted to the crime of Endangering Security under Article 138 of the Criminal Code, and during the hearing he stated that he sent the threatening message to Radovanović out of revolt because of his previous posts on Instagram.⁷

The case of Mladen Savatović, TV N1 journalist

Journalist of the N1 television, Mladen Savatović, was attacked in the middle of his live reporting during the protests that took place in Belgrade after the parliamentary elections end of December.

“That was in the middle of the live. He came and stopped there. He shouted something like "fox, fox" and then slowly approached. When I realized that he was going to try to jump in front of the camera or attack me in the middle of the live, then I asked him “what exactly are you waiting for”, after which he was rude and got in my face. At that time, I reacted with emotion, I told him that the police would find him, thinking that he would run away. However, he was even more aggressive and that's when

⁶ „Samo radio svoj posao“: Šta je rekao policiji vozač motora za koji je novinarka Žaklina Tatalović prijavila da je pratio ekipu N1? Article published on December 22, 2023 at Danas portal.

⁷ [Osuđena osoba koja je na Instagramu pretila smrću novinaru Vojinu Radovanoviću](#), author Dragana Bjelica, article published on December 25, 2023 at UNS portal.

the citizens who were there ran to help”, Savatović described the attack.

He also added that plainclothes police officers were present at the scene, but that they did not react and take actions to secure the place and investigate the case, but the police appeared only ten minutes after the incident and the call, which allowed the attacker to run away. The police then made a note and instructed the journalist to go to the police station the next day and report the attack.

The Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia (NUNS) strongly condemned this attack as well as the lack of response from the police and pointed out that the policemen who were on the scene had to protect the journalist and detain the assailant until the arrival of the patrol that would further act on the attack. They also called on the competent authorities to fulfill the duties they have accepted and to react as quickly as possible in cases of attacks on journalists.⁸

The President of the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, also spoke about the attack, saying: “Just think about it - a man was unpleasant to a journalist from N1 and told him "boo". And imagine if someone did that, as they do, I heard that they did it to Informer journalists and I don't know who, and it's much harder than that. No one reacted, everyone is silent. This journalist rightly says - call the police and the police will respond. And they know that they have to rely on the police for justice and on their country, even though they have to spit on that country all day long. In the end, everyone knows that the country is good for them and that they can only expect good things from the country”. The president's reaction and minimization of the attack was met with condemnation.

In a [special announcement](#), the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation pointed out that it is unacceptable and shocking that the president of a country which is at the bottom of the media freedom ladder, and in which the safety of journalists is recognized as one of the biggest obstacles to informing citizens in the public interest, publicly downplays the importance of attacks on journalists. The reaction was also followed by Maja Sever, the president of the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), who pointed out following: “Exactly the comment of Aleksandar Vučić shows how much there is no political will to ensure the safe work of journalists in Serbia. On the contrary, Aleksandar Vučić makes fun of an attack on a man who is on a work assignment, downplays the problem and with such irresponsible behavior endangers the safety of our colleagues. This is a very dangerous message, with which the President

⁸ [NUNS: Policija da hitno istraži i reši slučaj napada na Mladena Savatovića](#), article published on December 26, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

of Serbia makes it known that attacks on journalists are acceptable behavior, thereby almost encouraging the attackers and creating an atmosphere in which journalists cannot do their journalistic work in safe conditions”.⁹

The police arrested the suspected man after the attack, and the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade opened a case due to the existence of grounds for suspicion that the criminal offense of Violent behavior at a sports event or public gathering was committed. The attacker was detained.¹⁰

Apart from Savatović, other journalists suffered attacks during the protest, so the journalist of the Nova.rs portal, Andrija Lazarević, was hit with a baton by members of the Gendarmerie while he was on journalistic assignment. As Lazarević states, he was then in a group of citizens retreating in front of the cordon. He says that the citizens were calm and that there was no reason for the Gendarmerie to use force at that moment.¹¹ The crew of Al Jazeera television was also attacked, and its journalist Jelena Glušac says that a policeman grabbed the cameraman by the neck and took him away so that he would not film the arrest of the demonstrators.

The Coalition for Media Freedom and the SafeJournalists network, in a separate statement, condemned the attacks and the use of excessive force by the police during the protests due to election irregularities, and appealed to the organizers of the protests, participants and the police to enable journalists and media workers to work smoothly and safely, so that they could credibly convey the events of the protest to the public.¹²

The aforementioned negative events and dangerous situations at the protests in which journalists found themselves were the reason for organizing a meeting between representatives of the police and representatives of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists. Although, after the meeting, the Ministry of Internal Affairs issued a statement stating the good cooperation between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and journalists' associations, with the emphasis that the police act with special care on every report by journalists that their safety is threatened and take all measures within their competence in order to identify perpetrators, NUNS in a separate

⁹ [Sever: Vučićeva poruka novinarima je veoma opasna, ismejavanjem pokazuje da su napadi na njih prihvatljivi](#), author Jelena Petković, article published on December 27, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

¹⁰ [Viši sud u Beogradu: Pritvor okrivljenom za napad na novinara televizije N1](#), article published on December 29, 2023 at Danas portal.

¹¹ [Novinar portala Nova: Morali smo da se evakuišemo, Žandarmerija udarala bez razloga](#), article published on December 25, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

¹² [Koalicija za slobodu medija i Safejournalists mreža: Policija da ne napada novinare, već da im omogući bezbedan rad](#), press release published on December 25, 2023 at Coalition for Media Freedom portal.

announcement explained in more detail the reasons for holding the meeting, the content of the meeting itself, what was stated and what was agreed upon.¹³

At the meeting, the representatives of the associations presented the details of all recorded attacks and incidents, while the police representatives did not agree with the fact that the incidents were committed by their officers, with the statement repeated several times that the police officers on the ground provide protection to all participants of the event, including journalists. At the insistence of the representatives of the associations that the events be checked and acted upon, a promise was obtained from the representatives of the police that all the mentioned events will be carefully investigated.

In order to prevent future incidents towards journalists, it was proposed to create some kind of protocol - instructions for unit representatives on behavior towards journalists, as well as to organize joint educational workshops and trainings on that topic.

At the meeting, the need for mutual coordination during similar events was also pointed out due to the severity of the incidents that are constantly repeated, and in this sense, the need to have concrete police contact points on the ground that journalists could turn to if they needed protection or to report specific events.

In the end, it was concluded that, although the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists proved to be a good model of cooperation and communication, there are many reasons why cooperation with the MUP cannot be called good. Nevertheless, the intention to continue to communicate correctly remains unchanged since there is still a significant number of professional members of the police who are serious and reliable partners in protecting the safety of all journalists in Serbia.¹⁴

The case of Uglješa Bokić, Cenzolovka journalist

At the end of December, a threat was sent via Facebook to Uglješa Bokić, a journalist from Cenzolovka portal. Due to the way the threat was written, it could refer to the entire editorial office of

¹³ [Dobra saradnja između Ministarstva unutrašnjih poslova i novinarskih udruženja](#) public release published on December 27, 2023 at Ministry of Interior web site.

¹⁴ [NUNS: Ispravka i pojašnjenje povodom saopštenja MUP-a](#) public release published on December 28, 2023 at NUNS portal.

Cenzolovka.

It is about the threat of a certain M.S. from Novi Sad, who on the Cenzolovka Facebook page, under the post referring to the text by Uglješa Bokić entitled “A small guide for reporters from the protest: How to protect sensitive data from your phone if the police arrest you”, said the following: “They should take you to the basement and kill the God in you” and then “all of you should be killed”.

On the statement of another commentator that he does not understand who he would kill, M.S. answered “Journalists who support the destruction of state property and all leftists in Serbia by summary procedure”.

According to the available information, the threat was reported to the competent Special Public Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime, which took the case into operation.¹⁵

The Case of Dušan Mladenović, TV N1 journalist

Journalist Dušan Mladenović and his family were threatened on December 31 by a neighbor from the same building where Mladenović lives.

The attacker shouted insults and threats at Mladenović for an hour, mentioning Mladenović work for TV N1. This is not the first time that the same person has attacked Mladenović and his family, since in March 2023 he broke into his apartment during renovations and shouted that he was going to make life hell for him and his family. The president of the house council then called the police, who refused to come, saying that they had no solution for him. After that, in May, he physically attacked Mladenović's children (ages 2 and 6), when he poured a bucket of water on them and again threatened to make their lives hell. That's why the police reacted, the case was taken over ex officio, and a private lawsuit was filed. Both processes are still ongoing.

The latest threats were immediately reported, the police came to the scene, after which the person was taken into custody, and the event was added to the existing criminal report.¹⁶

¹⁵ [Pretnje smrću i fizičkoj bezbednosti novinara, Uglješa Bokić, Beograd, 28.12.2023.](#) article published on December 28, 2023 at SafeJournalists portal.

¹⁶ <https://www.bazenuns.rs/srpski/detalji-napada-na-novinaru/1463>

II MONITORING OF THE PROCESS OF ADOPTION OF NEW LAWS

Given that the media laws were recently adopted, the process of monitoring their application in practice is still ongoing, and the first impressions are that media laws are not being implemented, but rather being ignored. The publication of an explicit video of opposition politician Đorđe Miketić is cited as the most egregious case of violation of privacy protection provisions of all applicable laws. Although the publication of such content would require a strict sanction such as the revocation of the license, the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media reacted inappropriately and on the basis of previous experiences, it is clear that the broadcaster will not suffer serious consequences.

Although Article 62 of the Law on Electronic Media prohibits official campaigns thirty days before the election, in December the image of the President of the Republic of Serbia was constantly seen on the screen, portals and printed editions of the media. This is an abuse of a loophole in the law, which prohibits campaigning for officials who are candidates in the elections, and the presidential elections have not yet been announced.

The most controversial issue remained that the state did not give up on Telekom as the founder of the media, and this became a legal provision that caused a stormy reaction from the critical public. The state, following this trend, will be able to have a large number of media, including informative ones, in its (indirect) ownership. Also, the state will be an unfair competitor to the independent cable media, which are already endangered in many ways, and there is no provision of any law that could prevent it from doing so, at least on paper. The problem with this solution is that the state will be able to finance "its" media through Telekom in a completely non-transparent way, and not only those that this company is the founder of.¹⁷

Acting according to the new Law on Electronic Media, from December 21, the SBB company formed a new basic list of TV channels. In position 0 is the SBB service channel, and in positions 1 and 2 the TV channels of the Public Media Service RTS 1 and RTS 2. Behind them are positioned the channels N1 and Nova with the numbering 5 and 6, except in the territory of Vojvodina where, according to the new law, the position 3 and 4 are occupied by RTV 1 and RTV 2. The national TV channels Pink, B92, Happy and Prva are in positions 7, 8, 9 and 10. SBB left the users of the EON platform the

¹⁷ [Novi medijski zakoni Srbije u praksi: Gore nego što se moglo zamisliti](#), author Nedim Sejdinović, article published on December 6, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

possibility to replace the basic list of channels themselves with the operator list of TV channels, where the list selected by the users themselves will always be active.¹⁸

The month of December was also marked by the session of the REM, where Rajka Galin Čertić was unanimously appointed as the director of this body, the only one who applied for the competition for this position, and who had been the executive director until now.¹⁹

When it comes to REM, it was announced that at the session held on December 26, 2023, the REM Council [adopted the Program Monitoring Report during the election campaign](#) for public services and cable media service providers.²⁰ Although according to the new law, REM is obliged to publish periodic reports during the campaign, the first report on the monitoring of the election campaign was published by REM only after more than 10 days after the election. In addition to being published late, this report is also incomplete - it contains only the monitoring of public services and cable television, while the most watched national televisions are not included in it.

Ivana Stefanović from the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation spoke out regarding this issue, pointing out that “we know that they (REM) have been doing nothing for years, and of course this happened again during this election campaign. What is particularly dangerous - I think it is completely clear that they are not working not because they cannot or do not know how, but because they are in the corps of one party and one group of television stations who live very nicely at the expense of this party and at the expense of all of us”. The President of the REM Council, Olivera Zekić, said that the report on the monitoring of the election campaign on these four televisions is expected around January 10, noting that there was no time for these reports in the first round, and that the REM Council did not have time to prepare for the deadlines which the new law foresees, for the reason that it entered into force when the campaign had already started.²¹

¹⁸ [Izmena pozicija kanala u skladu sa Zakonom o elektronskim medijima](#), article published on December 20, 2023 at SBB web site.

¹⁹ [Imenovan director REM-a](#), article published on December 25, 2023 at N1 portal.

²⁰ [Usvojen izveštaj o nadzoru programa tokom izborne kampanje](#), information from REM web site.

²¹ [Zekić: Biće izveštaj i o kampanji na nacionalnim televizijama, nismo imali vremena](#), author Aleksandra Kuzmanović, article published on December 29, 2023 at N1 portal.

III IMPLEMENTATION OF EXISTING LAWS

The new Law on Public Information and Media, which entered into force on November 4, 2023, prescribes new obligations in connection with the announcement of tenders for project co-financing of the production of media content. Thus, the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, the Provincial Secretariat for Culture, Information and Relations with Religious Communities, as well as local self-governments are obliged to announce tenders by the first of March of the current year.

Apart from the fact that this is the first time that the deadlines for announcing tenders are defined by law, for the first time the penalties for those who do not comply with the legal provisions have also been defined. Thus, if the competent authorities do not announce tenders in the first two months of the current year, or cancel them and do not announce new ones within 30 days, they will commit a misdemeanor for which the legislator has provided a penalty for the responsible person in the range of 50,000 to 150,000 dinars.

When evaluating media projects, data will also be taken into account whether in the year preceding the year of application, a measure was issued by the regulatory body in the case of electronic media (REM), or an act of the self-regulatory body of the Press Council was adopted - for printed and online media, which determined that the media applying violated legal provisions and/or ethical standards.

If some of these measures are imposed on the project applicant, the seriousness of the injury and the number of imposed measures will be taken into account when evaluating the projects, as well as the behavior after the imposed measure, which is also proven based on the data of the competent regulatory or self-regulatory body. Also, for non-observance of these provisions, i.e. failure to obtain this data, the law foresees misdemeanor fines for the responsible person in the amount of 50,000 to 150,000 dinars.²²

²² [Kazne ukoliko se medijski konkursi ne raspišu do 1. marta, za ocenu projekata obavezno pribavljanje informacija o kršenju Kodeksa](#) article published on December 12, 2023 at Cenzolovka portal.

IV SLAPP LAWSUITS DIRECTED AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND THE MEDIA

The first-instance verdict of the High Court in Belgrade rejected the claim of Serbian businessman Bogoljub Karić, who filed a lawsuit against KRIK journalists for publishing information regarding the plaintiff (Karić), his business in Belarus and ties with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenka. In particular, Karić filed the lawsuit in November 2021, claiming that the statements from KRIK's article were untrue and that he suffered mental pain because of it. He also pointed out that because of this article, which was published not only on KRIK's website, but also on the website of the international journalist network OCCRP, his son and the companies associated with their family were placed under sanctions by the European Union and the United States of America. With the lawsuit, he demanded 600,000 dinars, but also that the article be removed from the site.

According to the court's opinion, KRIK journalists performed their journalistic work with due care and did not harm the Serbian businessman as he claimed in the lawsuit, but the article presented “true facts that were not disputed during the proceedings”. Also, the court’s opinion is that this is a topic that is undeniably of interest to the public, that the journalists did not make inadequate claims in the report, and the judgment further points out that the journalists do not even have the obligation to establish that the information they publish is absolutely true, but that it is sufficient to check them appropriately according to possibilities and circumstances.

As Karić's attorney filed an appeal against the verdict, the final decision will be made by the Court of Appeal in Belgrade.²³

At the end of December, the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation published a guide called [“SLAPP Lawsuits in Brief”](#) which explains the phenomenon of unfounded accusations through SLAPP lawsuits and which contains the most important information about the legal and other characteristics of this mechanism of intimidation of the media, individuals and organizations because of their work in the public interest.

As stated in the guide, the main characteristics of these procedures are legally unfounded and groundless requests and content elements that indicate abuse of rights or procedural rules. These are lawsuits that use court proceedings for other purposes and not for actual assessment, proving or

²³ [KRIK oslobođen po Karićevoj tužbi: Reč je o istraživačkom novinarstvu i temi od javnog interesa](#), author Milica Vojinović, article published on December 5, 2023 at KRIK portal.

exercising the plaintiff's rights, and the name of the plaintiff is not to have his claim accepted, but to limit, silence and prevent any criticism directed against him, to intimidate the defendant, but and all others who could publicly oppose him, which results in censorship and self-censorship.

The author of the guide is Ana Zdravković, and the guide aims to point out the basic characteristics of SLAPP, how to recognize it and what to do in case you find yourself as a defendant in a proceeding of this type.²⁴

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²⁴ [Vodič kroz SLAPP tužbe](#) Guide published on December 18, 2023. at Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation portal.