

# MONITORING OF THE MEDIA SCENE IN SERBIA

## FOR THE MONTH OF JANUARY 2024

### 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 maintained by the Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS), a total of 131 cases of threats to journalists were recorded in 2023, which is nine fewer than in 2022, when 140 were recorded. The negative trend has not stopped since the number of pressures in 2023 has doubled compared to 2022 - 52 cases.

The UNS database also recorded 32 threats, 25 cases of preventing work, 16 physical attacks, 5 attacks on property and one case of breach of privacy. As stated, it is particularly worrying that as many as three physical attacks and two attacks on property took place in December, during the protests held in Belgrade. Two out of three physical attacks were done by police officers.<sup>1</sup>

The US organization Human rights watch has published its annual report on human rights. In the part of the report related to media freedom in Serbia, it was stated that the Permanent Group for the Safety of Journalists registered 42 cases of threats to journalists in the first half of the year, and that the Independent Journalists' Association (NUNS) recorded three attacks by the end of March. Also, the report specifically pointed out that even in 2023, pro-government media continued with campaigns to slander independent journalists who report on the government work, that independent journalists were the target of threats and intimidation, as well as they were under attack of so-called strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP). Special attention was drawn to the retrial of those accused of murdering journalist Slavko Ćuruvija in 1999.<sup>2</sup>

### The case of Ivana Milosavljević, CINS journalist

The journalist of the Center for Investigative Journalism of Serbia (CINS), Ivana Milosavljević infiltrated the call center of the Serbian Progressive Party before the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Serbia in order to work on an investigative story. After the story was published, there were seven attempts in one day to download her personal Instagram profile. Due to the suspicion that this was done because of published investigative story, the Independent Association of

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<sup>1</sup> [UNS-ova baza: U 2023. godini dvostruko više pritisaka i gotovo dvostruko više fizičkih napada nego u 2022. godini, broj pretnji smanjen](#) author A. Ničić, article published on January 3, 2024 at UNS portal

<sup>2</sup> [HRW o Srbiji: Zastrășivanje novinara, napadi na LGBT, spori procesi ratnih zločina](#), article published on January 12, 2024 at Cenolovka portal

Journalists of Serbia (NUNS) submitted a criminal complaint to the Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime, which states:

"For now, we believe that these attacks are the result of Ivana's journalistic work and an attempt to directly harm her, and that there is a completely justified danger that her social media accounts will be taken over," the report states.

While working on the story, the journalist discovered that in the disputed call center, more than 100 people called citizens every day asking if they would vote for the Serbian Progressive Party. The conclusion of the story was the exposure of a well-organized group whose activities refer to the "accumulation" of votes from the so-called "black funds".

### **Cases of threats to the N1 newsroom**

N1 journalists were the target of threats sent via e-mail. A certain Milan M. sent a message to the N1 web editorial office in which, among other things, he said that the day will come when they (journalists) will have bloody heads. In addition to threats, curse words were directed at the journalists, they were labeled as Nazis and Serb haters.

The Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia (NUNS) reported the case to the competent prosecutor's office, warned of the frequency of threats and attacks against N1 journalists and appealed to the competent institutions to urgently react and resolve this case, as well as all previously sent threats. In 2023, 6 cases were filed in prosecutor's offices in which journalists of the N1 media were harmed, of which one criminal complaint was dismissed, and the others are still under investigation.

In addition to NUNS, the SafeJournalists network called on the competent institutions to solve this case as soon as possible and thus send a message that they stand in the protection of journalists. They also said that they will carefully monitor the development of events related to this case and inform all relevant national authorities and international stakeholders.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to threats, the N1 team was also the target of ostracism in January. The first situation

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<sup>3</sup> [SafeJournalists: Hitno pronaći i procesuirati odgovornog za pretnje novinarima N1 u Srbiji](#), article published on January 13, 2024 at NUNS portal

occurred in Kraljevo, when journalists were not allowed to film in the hall where the constituent session of the Kraljevo City Assembly was held, although the accreditation for this event was properly sent. Tamara Filipović Stevanović, NUNS General Secretary, emphasized the following on that occasion:

*"It is discrimination by the media. It is illegal to deny access to some and allow others to enter the session of the Assembly, even the constitutive ones. We will record this in our database as media discrimination. As far as I was informed, only access to TV N1 and Nova S was banned. They told them that they didn't send the accreditation on time, and I saw that the accreditation was sent the day before, which means that there was really no basis to ban the journalists."<sup>4</sup>*

The second situation in which N1 journalists were ostracized came from Aleksandar Šapić, the president of the temporary authority of Belgrade. Šapić did not want to answer the questions of the N1 journalist, but told her that "seven days before the election, he stopped communication" with N1 television.

Journalists' associations have strongly reacted to this kind of behavior. Tamara Filipović Stevanović pointed out that Šapić's decision to end cooperation with N1 is not in accordance with the laws of Serbia.

"An elected, appointed, or appointed holder of public and political office is obliged to tolerate the expression of critical opinions, which relate to the results of their work, i.e. the policy they implement, and is related to the performance of their office, regardless of whether they feel personally violated by expressing those opinions" is stated in the Law on Public Information and Media.

"Aleksandar Šapić's statement that he has cut off communication with TV N1 and has no intention of continuing it is just another step back in the government's attitude towards journalists and the media, and I really can't imagine how Šapić came up with such an idea," said Maja Sever, president of the European Federation of Journalists.

The Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS) pointed out that the Law on Public Information and Media prohibits direct and indirect discrimination against media editors, journalists and other

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<sup>4</sup> [Ekipi N1 zabranjeno da izveštava sa sednice Skupštine u Kraljevu, iako je akreditacija poslata](#), article published on January 24, 2024 at Cenzolovka portal

persons in the field of public information, and that the freedom of public information must not be violated by abuse of official positions and public powers.<sup>5</sup>

### **The case of Vanja Đurić and Željko Veljković, N1 and Nova S journalists, respectively**

N1 journalist Vanja Đurić and Nova S journalist Željko Veljković were exposed to verbal attacks on the social network X after they left comments under the video of a girl from Kosovo, in which she sings the song "Christ God".

Vanja Đurić wrote: "How small she is, but she sounds like an old lady from the Kosovo cycle", while Željko Veljković wrote: "General return to the Middle Ages".

The most serious threat to journalists was made on the Instagram network, when Veljković was received a direct message stating: "What if I fuck your dead family, I'll kill you if I fuck your Ustasha mother."

After Đurić deleted her social network accounts, her phone number was published without authorization on the X social network.

NUNS, Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, SafeJournalists network and other organizations condemned these threats and the publication of the phone number. The case was reported to the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime.<sup>6</sup>

### **The case of journalists Nenad Kulačin and Marko Vidojković, authors and hosts of the "Good, Bad, Evil" podcast**

Journalists Nenad Kulačin and Marko Vidojković, authors and presenters of the "Good, Bad, Evil" podcast received threats on Facebook, within comments on the published post of the show that the journalists realized with the guest Biljana Stepanović, the editor of the "New Economy" magazine.

The comment stated: "I hope that the grinding machine used by Veljko remains", alluding to meat

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<sup>5</sup> [UNS: Šapić da poštuje Zakon o javnom informisanju i odgovara na pitanja novinara](#), article published on January 31, 2024 at Cenzolovka portal

<sup>6</sup> [SafeJournalists: Nadležni organi u Srbiji hitno da zaustave linč novinara](#), statement published on January 18, 2024 at NUNS portal

grinding machine allegedly used on murder victims by now prosecuted Veljko Belivuk.

The threat was reported to the Special Public Prosecutor's Office for the High-Tech crime in Belgrade.<sup>7</sup>

In January, Kulačin was one of the speakers in Šabac at an open meeting attended by representatives of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists, the Prosecutor's Office, the police, journalists and media workers from Šabac, Valjevo and Loznica. Given that Kulačin has been exposed to a large number of threats for a long period of time, his testimony was an introduction to the debate concerning the improvement of journalists' safety.

Nenad Kulačin expressed deep concern about the lack of progress in solving numerous case reports. He also complained about the lack of feedback on the status of the mentioned cases. He pointed out that "it is very important that we have convictions and constant public condemnations since we are constantly exposed to such threats and comments. My children and mother see threats. My mother lives in the town of Bor and is eighty years old. She received threats of rape. Threats are a red line that must not be crossed". Kulačin emphasized that, in addition to verbal threats, he was also exposed to SLAPP lawsuits – as such he market three that were filed by Aleksandar Šapić, with a total compensation claim in the amount of two million dinars.

At the meeting, Kulačin also complained about the lack of solidarity among journalists, but at the same time thanked ANEM, NUNS and Veran Matić, member of the Permanent Working Group for Safety of Journalists and ANEM Board President, for their support in improving the safety of his family.<sup>8</sup>

### **The case of Nebojša Todorović, Nova S journalist**

Nova S journalists Nebojša Todorović was kicked out from the Štark Arena press entrance by the security guard before the start of the Red Star - Baskonia basketball match.

As it was said in the media, a member of security told him that Nova S journalists were prohibited from entering the game by the club.

During the conversation with the security guard, journalist turned on the camera on his mobile

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<sup>7</sup> [Pretnje smrću i fizičkoj bezbednosti novinara, Nenad Kulačin, Šabac](#), article published on January 18, 2024 at SafeJournalists portal

<sup>8</sup> [Novinarska bezbednost u Šapcu](#) article published on January 25, 2024 at Bezbedni novinari portal

phone, pointing it at the floor. As he did not want to turn off the camera, an incident occurred.

A security guard grabbed his hand and took his phone away from him, and immediately afterwards he was roughly pushed from behind and kicked out of the press entrance. The phone was then returned at a personal request, but after everything recorded up to the previous evening was deleted from the phone's memory.

Nebojša Todorović, as he stated, has a valid seasonal accreditation issued by Red Star Basketball Club.<sup>9</sup>

There was no official explanation from Red Star Basketball Club, and media representatives of the Euroleague said that attendance at Euroleague matches cannot be prohibited for media representatives with valid accreditation for the current season.<sup>10</sup>

### **The case of Ivana Jovanović, Bujanovačke journalist**

Ivana Jovanović, a journalist from Bujanovac, was reported to the police by the principal of the "Branko Radičević" elementary school from Bujanovac for allegedly entering the school without authorization.

According to the information that Bujanovačke obtained, the application stated that the text about the renovation of the school and the photo showing that the ceiling in the school toilet had fallen - upset the parents of the children who attend that school.

The members of the Bujanovac police station interviewed the journalist in the premises of the Bujanovačke newsroom. She stated that she did not enter the school without authorization, but as a journalist, and introduced herself to the workers present, none of whom told her that entering the school and taking photos were prohibited. Also, according to her words, after returning from school, she called the principal, and he did not tell her that she had entered the school without permission, but pointed out to her that the fallen ceiling was not the only defect that was noticed during the reconstruction of the building.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.bazenuns.rs/srpski/detalji-napada-na-novinara/1470>

<sup>10</sup> [Novinar Nova.rs fizički napadnut u Areni: Oteli mu telefon, izbacili ga iz hale po nalogu Zvezde, Evroliga ćuti](#), author Nebojša Todorović, article published on January 18, 2024 at Cenzolovka portal

NUNS condemned the school principal's move and pointed out that it is a serious pressure on the media. They also appealed to the director of the school to withdraw the criminal complaint and allow journalists to carry out their work unhindered in the interest of the public.<sup>11</sup>

### **The case of Srđan Nonić, Niška inicijativa portal editor-in-chief**

Nikola Panić, an employee of the Niš city administration and the editor of "City Portal 018", was convicted in the first instance for endangering the safety of Srđan Nonić, editor-in-chief of the Niška initiative portal. The verdict gave him a suspended sentence - a prison sentence of six months, which will not be carried out unless he commits a new criminal offense during the two-year probation period. Panić was given the sentence requested by the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Nis. Since it is a first-instance verdict, Panić's defense attorney said that he will file an appeal against the verdict. The final decision in this procedure will be made by the court of second instance.<sup>12</sup>

More was said about this case in the Monitoring of the media scene for the month of January 2023.

### **The case of OK Radio**

In the Basic Court in Vranje, the trial of the casino "Colosseum gest" director Stefan Ilić was again postponed due to the fact that the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office initiated proceedings on the conclusion of an agreement on the recognition of both criminal offenses that are pending against Ilić due to illegal construction which bricked up windows of the OK Radio newsroom.

Since Ilić re-hired the lawyer who previously canceled his power of attorney and did not inform the court about it, Ilić also received an ex officio lawyer at this hearing, with an order to submit a power of attorney for the chosen counsel so that the one assigned ex officio could be dismissed.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> [NUNS: Pozivamo direktora škole iz Bujanovca da povuče prijavu protiv novinarki Bujanovačkih](#), article published on January 19, 2024 at NUNS portal

<sup>12</sup> [Osuđen „kazino naprednjak“ iz Niša: Novinar ga snimao u kockarnici, pa se od njega spasio begom u policijsku stanicu](#), author Miljana Isailović, article published on January 26, 2024 at Cenzolovka portal

<sup>13</sup> [Zaziđavanje OK radija: Ponovo odloženo suđenje, Ilić traži spajanje predmeta](#), article published on January 31, 2024 at Bezbedni novinari portal



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

The month of January, as the beginning of 2024, brought a good overview of important media moments from the previous year. The adoption of the new Law on Public Information and Media and the Law on Electronic Media, which began to be implemented on November 4, 2023, after they were adopted by the National Assembly a week earlier, is certainly singled out as the most important.

Criticisms during the public hearings mainly related to the distribution of public money for project co-financing, especially to the media that have been violating professional standards for years, and it was disputed whether media that violate the code and do not recognize the competence of the Press Council can receive funds. The Council proposed that the law stipulate that only media that do not violate professional standards receive money from the budget, but the Draft that was put to the public hearing contained a clause that states that the rule applies only to media that recognize the jurisdiction of the Press Council, which would mean that unethical media that have been violating the code for years and otherwise do not accept the Council's authority could once again apply for funds without any obstacles. Eventually, this article of the Law was amended and it was determined that it applies to both media that do not accept and those that do accept the Council's jurisdiction.

The three points that are disputed and that attracted the most attention certainly concerned the permission of the state Telekom Serbia to establish and buy media, REM's lack of obligation to act on citizens' complaints, and insufficient resolution of the problem of abuse of state institutions in election campaigns. Despite the agreements reached on the removal of some controversial provisions from the draft of the new media laws, the provision that allows the state telecommunications company Telekom Srbija to establish and own media was preserved.

Amendments to the Law on Public Media Services are also planned for next year, which is expected after the formation of the new Government.<sup>14</sup>

In 2019, the National Organization of Persons with Disabilities recommended that amendments to the Law on Electronic Media expand the jurisdiction of the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM) so that commercial media service providers are also obliged to make their content and programs accessible to people with disabilities. However, the new law retains the provision that "the

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<sup>14</sup> [Važni medijski trenuci 2023. iz perspektive Raskrikavanja](#), author Stefan Kosanović, article published on January 5, 2024 at Cenzolovka portal

media service provider is obliged, in accordance with its financial and technical capabilities, to make its program and content accessible to hearing and visually impaired people".

The Head of REM's Service for Supervision and Analysis, Stevica Smederevac, pointed out that when the regulations and the law are set in such a way that "can and must not", then the possibility is left for the broadcasters to justify themselves claiming that they do not have technical, personnel or financial capabilities.

Media service providers, according to the new Law on Electronic Media, are obliged to report to REM no later than September 1 whether and to what extent they broadcast a program accessible to people with hearing and vision impairments and whether translations into Serbian sign language, open and closed subtitles and sound descriptions are available.

So far, the regulator has published two reports on this topic - in 2013 and 2019, which showed that the share of programs intended for people with disabilities in public services is, as they say in REM, "at the level of statistical error".

By the end of the current year, REM should also publish a report on the availability of program contents for people with disabilities, and Stevica Smederevac said that only then will it be visible whether there has been an improvement in the past five years, since the previous report.

According to what can be seen from the annual reports, "there is not much progress in the share of the program adapted to persons with disabilities in the overall program", pointed out Sanja Remić, project analyst of REM.<sup>15</sup>

Although the President of the REM Council, Olivera Zekić, stated at the end of December that the report on the monitoring of the election campaign on the most watched national televisions is expected around January 10, since there was "no time for them in the first round", it was not published.

According to the information obtained by the Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS), REM has had this data for a month because the expert service of the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media completed this work for all television stations on December 20. The Center for Investigative

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<sup>15</sup> [Na javnim servisima program prilagođen osobama sa invaliditetom na nivou statističke greške, na komercijalnim televizijama ni toliko](#), author Slađana Dimitrijević, article published on January 16, 2024 at UNS portal

Journalism of Serbia (CINS) published these data in its research, and the president of the REM Council stated that the results were not true.<sup>16</sup>

"None of everything that CINS published, and others rushed to convey, is neither correct, nor is it in our report, because it is simply not finished. The data is still being processed, the report is still being made, and any attempt to get something out of it is nothing but a lie and manipulation," said Zekić.

As she further states, the research published by CINS is "another in a series of miserable attempts to discredit the institution, the Council and professional services".

"The final report will be published soon and only then will it be possible to analyze and comment on it," Zekić pointed out.<sup>17</sup>

Only some of the data published by CINS show that over 18 hours of election programming was devoted to the list of *Aleksandar Vučić - Serbia must not stop* on Pink TV, while all the other participants together had about 5 hours, Happy TV devoted about 20 hours of the election program to the list of the ruling party, while other election participants got about 11 hours of space. However, not only was the difference in the amount of airtime large, but all these televisions reported largely negatively about the opposition, while the government itself was talked about positively.

At the end of January, a meeting was held between the Minister of Information and Telecommunications in the Government of the Republic of Serbia, Mihailo Jovanović, and members of the Working Group for the development of an Action Plan for the implementation of the Media Strategy.

The topic of the meeting was the continuation of work on the development of the Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2020 to 2025, in the period from 2024 to 2025, as well as agreement on further steps aimed at full implementation of Media strategy. At the meeting, Minister Jovanović noted that with the adoption of new media laws, one of the primary goals of the Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2020 to 2025 has been achieved, as well as that a big step has been taken towards the further improvement

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<sup>16</sup> [UNS saznaje: REM ima, a mesec dana ne objavljuje podatke o praćenju izborne kampanje na komercijalnim televizijama](#), authors A. Ničić, K. Kovač Nastasić, article published on January 19, 2024 at UNS portal

<sup>17</sup> [Olivera Zekić demantuje podatke koje je otkrio CINS, a koje REM krije: Još pravimo izveštaj](#), article published on January 26, 2024 at Cenzolovka portal

of the media scene in Serbia. In addition, he pointed out that in the further implementation of the Media Strategy, the adoption of the Action Plan for the period 2024-2025 is important, and that he expects the implementation of the provisions of the Law on Public Information concerning project co-financing, as well as work on the Law on Public Media Services to be one of the main activities in the new Action Plan. In addition, Jovanović pointed out that in the previous year, the Ministry programmed a three-year IPA project worth 1.5 million euros, whose implementer is the OSCE, which ensured the financing of activities from the Media Strategy Action Plan. The project will start operating in the second quarter of 2024.

Regarding the new legal solutions concerning project co-financing procedures, Jovanović pointed out that during the month of February, the Ministry will conduct training for persons employed in local self-government units, media publishers, as well as for persons who will apply to be members of commissions.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> [Ministar Jovanović na sastanku sa članovima Radne grupe za izradu Akcionog plana za sprovođenje medijske strategije](#), statement published on January 23, 2024 at the Ministry of information and telecommunication web site

### III IMPLEMENTATION OF EXISTING LAWS

#### Project co-financing

In January, the new Rulebook on co-financing of projects for the realization of public interest in the field of public information entered into force, which prescribes a number of novelties, of which only a few are - scoring of proposed members during the selection of the committee, scoring of projects according to the criteria specified in this Rulebook, as well as Mandatory announcement of the competition by March 1 of the current year.

The new Rulebook provided, for the first time, the obligation of the professional service of the body that announced the competition to obtain data from the state authorities, the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media and the Press Council on the measures imposed on the media for violating professional and ethical standards. For failure to comply with these provisions, that is, failure to obtain this data, the Law on Public Information and Media foresees misdemeanor fines for the responsible person, in the amount of 50,000 to 150,000 dinars.

Another novelty in the Rulebook is that publishers of media in which the basic information about the media has not been published, i.e. the imprint, do not have the right to participate in the competition. The new Rulebook, among other things, specifies in more detail that the authorities that announce the competition (Ministry, autonomous province and local self-governments) can announce either a single competition or several individual competitions in one calendar year, according to the target group, thematic area or the type of media for which the competition is intended, but in such a way that all types of media are included. If all the money provided for project co-financing is not distributed at the competition, the Rulebook foresees the possibility of announcing another competition during the same calendar year.

For the first time, the Rulebook foresees the existence of score lists, both for the selection of committee members and for the evaluation of proposed projects. The biographies of the proposed committee members are scored based on the score list that is part of the application form. Most of the members of the commission, as before, are appointed on the proposal of journalistic and media associations, and if such a proposal does not exist, "from the ranks of theoreticians, analysts and practitioners in the field of media", it is stated in the new Rulebook.

The new Rulebook also specifies the conditions under which the head of the body can make a decision

on the distribution of funds that differs from the commission's proposal.<sup>19</sup>

Two cities - Leskovac and Sremska Mitrovica - announced the call for co-financing of media projects for 2024. The city of Leskovac allocated RSD 50 million for media projects, and the application deadline is February 19. The lowest amount allocated per project is 250 thousand dinars, and the highest is 15 million dinars.<sup>20</sup>

Sremska Mitrovica allocated 28 million dinars for media projects, the application deadline is February 13. The smallest amount of funds that can be approved per project is 50 thousand dinars, and the largest is 7.5 million dinars.<sup>21</sup>

The broadcasters whose license was valid until December 17, 2023, have still not received a Decision on the granting of a broadcasting license from REM, although the competition was announced on June 2, 2023, and discussions with those who meet the conditions of the competition, i.e. whose applications are complete and submitted within the stipulated period, were completed in December.

According to a source who wished to remain anonymous, the procedure was completed, discussions were held in December at REM, which, in accordance with the law, is the last part of the competition, and since then no one from REM has responded nor have broadcasters received a decision, which would mean that from December 17, when the license expired, they broadcast the program practically illegally. All of the above creates major problems for the media when participating in tenders or media competitions, which, according to the new Law on Public Information and Media, must be announced by March 1.

REM Council member Višnja Arandžević, when asked by the UNS what is happening with the competition, why it was not fully implemented and on time, and when we can expect REM's decision, answered only that she "expects that the vote will take place as soon as possible." REM President Olivera Zekić and REM Council member Milorad Vukašinović did not answer UNS questions.

Also, more than 40 regional television stations have broadcast licenses that expire on March 7 this year, and given that the competition for these licenses has not yet been announced, it is certain that

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<sup>19</sup> [Šta donosi novi Pravilnik o sufinansiranju medijskih projekata – bodovanje projekata i predloženih članova komisije, konkursi do 1. marta, obaveza impresuma](#), author K. Kovač Nastasić, article published on January 29, 2024 at UNS portal

<sup>20</sup> [Leskovac raspisao konkurs za sufinansiranje medijskih projekata](#), author A. Momčilović, article published on January 29, 2024 at UNS portal

<sup>21</sup> [Sremska Mitrovica raspisala konkurs za medijske projekte](#), article published on January 30, 2024 at UNS portal

they too will be without a license at some point and, among other things, opportunities to apply for media projects.

When asked if and when a competition will be announced for regional media whose license expires on March 7, there was no response from REM.<sup>22</sup>

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

The European CASE coalition (Coalition against SLAPPs in Europe) she set out to find the SLAPP politicians and SLAPP states who have filed the most lawsuits against the media. Among the proposed ones was Dijana Hrkaločić, former high official of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Serbia.

As stated on the social network X Dijana Hrkaločić filed 11 lawsuits against journalists of various media, as well as against the editor of the investigative portal KRIK.<sup>23</sup>

In the first-instance proceedings based on a private criminal lawsuit - which, according to the editors of the investigative portal KRIK has a SLAPP character, and was filed by Nikola Petrović, close friend of Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and former director of "Elektromreža Srbije", KRIK journalists Vesna Radojević and Dragana Pećo were acquitted of the unauthorized collection of his personal data".

The lawsuit refers to KRIK's investigative story "President's godfather Nikola Petrović bought an airline company from Stanko Subotic". During this procedure, the representatives of the Reporters without Borders organization provided support to the journalists. They called on Serbia to implement measures against SLAPP procedures recommended by the European Union.<sup>24</sup>

In their defense, the journalists explained that they did not present data from the plaintiff's private life, but from his business life, that they dealt with a topic about which the public has a legitimate interest in being informed, that they did so with due journalistic attention, publishing only data from

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<sup>22</sup> [REM kasni sa sprovođenjem konkursa, televizije i radio stanice emituju program bez dozvole](#), author K. Kovač Nastasić, article published on January 31, 2024 at Cenzolovka portal

<sup>23</sup> [Nominovani evropski rekorderi po SLAPP tužbama, među njima i Dijana Hrkaločić](#), article published on January 19, 2024 at Danas portal

<sup>24</sup> [Nikola Petrović ponovo 'izbegao' suđenje u postupku protiv novinarkе Dragane Pećo](#), article published on October 28, 2022 at NUNS portal

official documents and registers.

When pronouncing the verdict, the judge of the First Basic Court in Belgrade emphasized the following: "There were several legal issues in this case, but the main thing is whether the personal data was published, and the court determined that they were not, so the defendants are acquitted."<sup>25</sup>

This is not the first time that Petrović has filed lawsuits against journalists from the KRIK newsroom for allegedly committing the crime of Unauthorized collection of personal data. Journalist Dragana Pećo has already been legally acquitted of the charge that she collected Petrović's personal data without authorization while working on the investigative story "[Nikola Petrović and his wife are the owners of two new villas worth four million](#)". Litigation is ongoing against the journalist and editor-in-chief of the KRIK portal, based on the lawsuit filed by Nikola Petrović regarding the article "[The president's best man had a business with Markos - a criminal involved in international cocaine smuggling](#)".<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> [Novinarke KRIK-a oslobođene po tužbi Nikole Petrovića](#), article published on January 24, 2024 at KRIK portal

<sup>26</sup> [Dvanaesta tužba protiv KRIK-a: Stigla od Vučićevog kuma](#), author Bojana Pavlović, article published on May 10, 2023 at KRIK portal