

MONITORING OF THE MEDIA SCENE IN SERBIA

FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH 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

The partner organizations of the [Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists](#) of the Council of Europe produced an annual publication on the assessment of threats to which the media are exposed and on the state of security of journalists for the year 2023. In the publication ["Press Freedom in Europe: Time to Turn the Tide"](#), Serbia was listed among the five countries where the highest number of attacks on the safety and integrity of journalists took place.

The cases recorded by said Platform for the past year refer to death threats addressed to [Stevan Dojčinović](#), editor-in-chief of the investigative portal KRIK, an attack on [Marko Dragoslavić](#), a FoNet photojournalist, as well as threats to [Vojin Radovanović](#), daily newspaper Danas journalist. More about these cases can be read in the [Monitoring of the media scene for March 2023](#), the [Monitoring of the media scene for August 2023](#) and the [Monitoring of the media scene for September](#) of the same year. At the time of the current monitoring (for the month of March 2024), two cases of these were resolved – the one about the attack on Marko Dragoslavić (the attacker was sentenced to a suspended prison sentence of 8 months, with a probationary period of three years), as well as the case of threats addressed to Vojin Radovanović (a plea agreement was concluded with the person who threatened the journalist of the criminal offense on the basis of which a conviction was rendered, which sentenced the perpetrator to one year of imprisonment with a three-year probationary period).

In the category in which warnings for harassment and intimidation of journalists are recorded, a case of threats addressed to journalist [Nikola Krstić](#) was recorded.

In the section that refers to cases of impunity for murders of journalists, in addition to the name of journalist Dada Vujasinović, the name of journalist Milan Pantić is also included among the journalists whose murder has not been solved. The Platform's website also recorded the (legally binding) [acquittal](#) of those accused of the murder of journalist Slavko Ćuruvija, with a note that it is necessary to pay full attention to the investigation of his murder and the prosecution of the perpetrators. It was also noted that the state's response is expected by May 6, 2024.

In the part related to legal activities aimed at journalists and SLAPP lawsuits, one of the two lawsuits that [Aleksandar Šapić](#), former mayor of the City of Belgrade, filed against journalists, editors and publishers of the research portal BIRN was recorded. He filed the lawsuit because of the information

presented in [the article](#) about his villa in Trieste. More information about that case can be read in the [Monitoring of the media scene for March](#) last year.

Another case of (legal) harassment and intimidation of journalists recorded on the Platform's website is the lawsuit filed by [Vladimir Đukanović](#), a high-ranking official of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), against the defendant Vuk Cvijić, then a journalist of weekly NIN. Đukanović filed a lawsuit against Cvijić because of the article that published the contents of the official note of police inspector Slobodan Milenković, who participated with his team in the investigation of the case colloquially known as [Jovanjica](#). More about that case can be read in the [Monitoring of the media scene for October 2023](#). In the note related to the expectations of the next steps, the rejection of the lawsuit and changes in the regulations to provide journalists with protection from SLAPP proceedings are mentioned. It said a response is expected by March 29, 2024. In the dispute, [the first hearing](#) for the main discussion was held for now. The next hearing, at which the plaintiff and the defendant will testify, is scheduled for September 13, 2024.

Defamation campaigns and political pressures against the [United Group](#) media were reported on the Platform's website. It is emphasized that these campaigns have recently dangerously escalated in the attacks of numerous public officials and pro-government media who accuse these media, calling them "fascist", for spreading disinformation, organizing anti-government actions and rallies. It was recorded that SNS MPs appeared behind the parliamentary lectern and accused the media of the United Group, especially television N1 and Nova S, of being responsible for the "sick atmosphere in society that favours tragedies". It was specified that SNS MP Nebojša Bakarec was referring to the mass murders that took place in the "Vladislav Ribnikar" elementary school and in the villages of Malo Orašje and Dubona. At the same session, Prime Minister Ana Brnabić also spoke, accusing the "tycoon media" of "poisoning the nation, sowing hatred minute by minute, hour by hour." Also, it was recorded that a group of protesters broke into the premises of the N1 television, disrupted the work and demanded that the staff leave the building in order to "face the anger of the people".

The adoption of the ["controversial media legislation"](#) was recorded, and as a key (controversial and criticized) clause was detected the one that allows public companies, such as Telekom Srbija, to establish and take over the media. The adoption was [strongly opposed](#) by media freedom organizations and journalists' unions.

Among the reported cases were also those who recorded pressure on several [media outlets from the north of Kosovo](#) that publish programs in Serbian - "Kosovo online", "Radio Kontakt plus", "Radio Kosovska Mitrovica", "TV Most" and the "KoSSev" portal. On the "Zečevi KiM" Telegram channel, those media outlets were described in anonymous posts and videos as "enemies of the Serbian people and Serbia who are under the influence of NATO and the West."

At the beginning of March, the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists (PWG) published its annual work report for the year 2023. It was established that during the last year, a total of 75 cases were filed in the prosecutor's offices in Serbia, in which journalists appear as the injured parties.

During 2023, as stated in the report, a total of 23 cases were resolved, which represents 31.51% of the total number of cases. As before, during the previous year in the largest number of cases the reported threats were those from Article 138 of the Criminal Code (criminal act of Endangering security). The threats were mostly sent via the Internet. In addition to the criminal offense of Endangering security, the following criminal offenses were recorded among the reported criminal offenses: Insult, Slight physical injury, Criminal behaviour, Abuse and torture, Persecution and Coercion.

The report presents statistics according to which, from 2016, when the prosecution's database was started, until the end of December 2023, a total of 522 charges were filed based on reports of crimes committed against journalists. There are 308 resolved cases (59%), while 214 of them (41%) are still active. When it comes to identifying the perpetrators of attacks on journalists, the percentage of unidentified perpetrators is still high (it amounts to 43% of the total number of pending cases). This data is related to previous years, since the number of unidentified perpetrators dropped from 94% of 17 pending cases (in 2016) to 9.6% (5 unidentified perpetrators in 52 active cases) last year.

The report also provides the following data: 81 cases (2016 - 2023) were resolved by a court decision, of that number in 63 cases a guilty verdict was reached, in 12 acquittals, in 6 cases the prosecution's indictment was dismissed or rejected. In the same period, 223 cases were resolved by the prosecutor's decision (in 106 cases, a decision was made to dismiss the criminal complaint, while in 97 cases an official note was made that there is no place to initiate criminal proceedings, i.e. that there are no elements of the criminal offense for which prosecution is undertaken by official duty).

The non-governmental organizations that make up the [Media Freedom Rapid Response](#) group have compiled an [Analysis of cases of endangerment of female journalists](#), which states that in 2023, female journalists were exposed to direct verbal and online threats much more often than their colleagues. The threats came from unknown addresses. When it comes to [Serbia](#), special emphasis was put on the case of the [interception of Bojana Pavlović](#), a journalist from the investigative portal KRIK, while her mobile phone was confiscated as she was performing her journalistic duties.

The case of Verica Marinčić, editor-in-chief of the "Indija independent media" portal ("IN medija")

The editor-in-chief of IN Media, Verica Marinčić, was physically pushed out of the premises of the Municipality of Indija, while she was reporting on the protest organized by the residents of Čortanovac due to the abolition of the railway station. According to the journalist, she entered the Municipality building to report on the meeting between the President of the Municipality of Indija and representatives of the councils of the local communities of Čortanovci and Beška. After she saw the journalists entering the building, as she said, she followed them. However, the door was locked. She rang the bell, and a security guard opened the door for her. He asked her to introduce herself, which she did, and after that she was allowed to enter. In the corridor, she met the President of the Municipality Cabinet Secretary, who told her that she was not allowed to film because she did not have accreditation, to which she replied that accreditation was not required for this type of event, and that her other colleagues entered unannounced.

"I took my phone to record what he was saying to me and he grabbed my left upper arm because I had a phone in that hand and squeezed me so the phone would fall out of my hand. Because I didn't want to let go, he took my phone from me. When he saw that the N1 journalist was filming all of this, he withdrew. After that, a security man came out and started pushing me to go outside," said Verica Marinčić.¹ The security worker, it was recorded on the video, while pushing the journalist towards the exit, said that she was *not on the list*.

Speaking about the accreditation procedure, Verica Marinčić explained that such a procedure is not practiced in Indija. She drew attention to the fact that the internet portal IN Media is not even on the mailing list or in the Viber group, which includes the media to which the local government sends

¹ [NUNS traži od nosilaca vlasti da prestanu sa diskriminacijom novinara i medija](#), article published on March 4, 2024 at N1 portal

invitations for events. Hundreds of times, according to her, she requested that IN Media be included in that list and in that group as a registered media, but her request was always ignored. She also addressed the relevant ministry, whose response was that they can only make a recommendation, since inviting the media to events is not an obligation of the local self-government.² After the incident, Verica Marinčić saw a doctor and reported the case to the police.

Both domestic and international professional public reacted to the event.

The [SafeJournalists network](#) and the [Media Freedom Rapid Response](#) platform strongly condemned the behaviour of the local authorities in Inđija. Journalist Verica Marinčić was prevented from doing her job by forcibly removing her from the municipality building.³

The Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM) [reminded](#) that this is not the first time that security of this journalist was endangered. The act of violence recorded on camera, they said, apparently has support at the very top of the municipality of Inđija:

Today's incident represents the continuation of many years of jeopardizing the safety of our colleague Marinčić in Inđija. Over the years, she has been subjected to various attacks. Since 2018, she has been exposed to threats on the street, cars following her, violent motorcycle driving, name-calling by MP Marijan Rističević, hacker attacks on the portal she reports for, and offensive comments via social networks. [...] Today's act of security worker cannot be justified by their ignorance or the absence of clear guidelines on how media workers can and must be treated. This unadulterated gesture of violence in front of the cameras clearly has the support of the very top of the municipality of Inđija, which proves that it is no coincidence that the journalist Verica Marinčić has been facing problems stemming from threats to her basic security for years.

In its statement, NUNS strongly condemned the attack on Verica Marinčić and recalled other recent cases of media discrimination.

The Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia strongly condemns the behaviour

² [Da li je došao trenutak kada će nas tući zbog pitanja? - Žaklina Tatalović, Maja Sever](#), source: YouTube channel Nova S

³ [SafeJournalists i MFRR: Fizičko obračunavanje sa novinarima u Srbiji je neprihvatljivo i mora se sankcionisati](#), announcement published on March 6, 2024 at NUNS portal

of the local authorities in Inđija and Loznica, who prohibit journalists from attending events of the public interest, as well as the behaviour of high officials of the Serbian Progressive Party, Aleksandar Šapić and Ana Brnabić, who refuse to answer journalists' questions. We remind the government representatives that discrimination against journalists and the media is prohibited by law and that they should provide conditions for their unhindered work. [...] The same thing happens to the journalists of the Pakt info portal from Loznica. Namely, since the constitution of the new convocation of the Loznica Municipal Assembly, they have been forbidden to attend sessions even though the work of the Assembly is public, and they have been accredited since 2012 and regularly receive material for monitoring the Assembly. The journalist of this portal, Miroslav Mijatović, says that on January 28, they received an invitation to attend the constitution of the new convocation of the assembly, but that they were not allowed to enter.⁴

The group [Female journalists against violence against women](#) reminded that the position of female journalists in the local media, especially in small communities, is significantly less favourable than the position of female journalists in the national media, and that they are therefore at greater risk of verbal and physical attacks, as well as pressure from local public.⁵

The Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina (NDNV)⁶ and the Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS)⁷ also condemned the attack on the editor-in-chief and journalist of the IN Media portal. NDNV underlined that the reports of their local commissioners from several cities and municipalities in Vojvodina record numerous cases of discrimination against journalists by local authorities. "We warn the public that discrimination and attacks on local journalists represent a direct attack on the public interest of local communities and on the basic rights of the citizens who live in them," says the NDNV press release.

⁴ [NUNS: Nosiocci vlasti da prestanu da diskriminišu medije i novinare](#), announcement published on March 4, 2024 at NUNS portal

⁵ [Novinarke protiv nasilja pozivaju institucije da zaštite Vericu Marinčić](#), announcement published on March 5, 2024 at NUNS portal

⁶ [NDNV: Napadi na lokalne novinare predstavljaju direktan atak na javni interes građana](#), announcement published on March 5, 2024 at NDNV portal

⁷ [UNS: Da odgovara napadač na novinarku IN medije Vericu Marinčić](#), announcement published on March 4, 2024 at UNS portal

The case of Ana Lalić Hegediš, journalist of the Nova.rs portal and executive director of the Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina (NDNV)

Ana Lalić Hegediš, journalist of the Nova.rs portal and executive director of NDNV, received a series of brutal threats, insults and calls for lynching,⁸ sent via social networks to her private and official phone, after publicly expressing her repeated opinion in connection with the construction of the church on Liman and after she spoke at the forum "In the Jaws of Nationalism", held as part of the "Rebedu" Festival in Dubrovnik. Death threats were directed at both her and her family. Speaking at the Dubrovnik festival on nationalism in Serbia, Lalić Hegediš said that Vojvodina is a constant target of Serbian nationalism, from whose "gallop" the citizens of Vojvodina are trying to defend themselves. She also said that Vojvodina experiences "Serbization" almost every day, that erases the anti-fascist past, and that in Novi Sad there is a trend of "churches springing up like tobacconists in every neighbourhood", which is not motivated by religious reasons, but by political revenge against citizens who are judged not to be "big enough Serbs". The threats that the journalist received were reported to the Special prosecutor's office for high-tech crime.⁹ Because of her views, Ana Lalić Hegediš found herself also a target of pro-regime tabloids.¹⁰

Like Verica Marinčić, Ana Lalić Hegediš has already experienced pressures in her work. During the corona virus pandemic, Ana Lalić was charged with causing panic by reporting on the lack of protective equipment at the Clinical Center of Vojvodina in Novi Sad. At the beginning of April 2020, Lalić was detained, with her laptop and two phones seized by the police. The criminal complaint was dismissed in the second half of April.¹¹

The latest threats have met with strong condemnation from the domestic and international public. The Southeast European Media Organization (SEEMO) condemned the death threats directed at Lalić and called on the authorities to find and sanction the perpetrators.¹² The SafeJournalists network and the Coalition for Media Freedom reacted,¹³ as well as UNS.¹⁴ Due to concerns for the safety of Ana

⁸ [Ana Lalić za Danas: Prete mi da ću biti zaklana, silovana i proterana](#), article published on March 11, 2024 at Danas portal

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ [NDNV: Ani Lalić prete da će biti zaklana u centru Novog Sada](#), announcement published on March 10, 2024 at Autonomija portal

¹¹ [Tužilaštvo odbacilo krivičnu prijavu protiv novinarkе Ane Lalić](#), article published on April 27, 2020 at Radio Free Europe portal

¹² [SEEMO osudio pretnje smrću upućene predsednici NDNV-a Ani Lalić](#), article published on March 13, 2024 at NUNS portal

¹³ [SafeJournalists mreža i Koalicija za slobodu medija: Zahtevamo hitno rešavanje svih slučajeva učestalih pretnji novinarima](#). Members of the Coalition for Media Freedom are: Media Association, Online Media Association (AOM), Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina (NDNV), Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia (NUNS), Business Association of local and independent media „Lokal Pres“, Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation and GS KUM Nezavisnost.

¹⁴ [Da odgovaraju osobe koje su Ani Lalić pretile smrću](#), announcement published on March 11, 2024 at UNS portal

Lalić Hegediš, NUNS reported the entire case to the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Reacting to the threats that the journalist receives, NDNV said in a statement that there is a deliberate provoking of tensions before the holding of local elections in Novi Sad:

We warn the public that there is ongoing deliberate tension provoking in Novi Sad, which was initiated by the city government, before the local elections in Novi Sad, where the construction of a church on Liman is used as an excuse, in order to present citizens who are against the construction as opponents of religion, Serbia and Orthodoxy. We believe that the threats directed at Ana Lalić are precisely the result of this dangerous narrative that comes from the very top of the local government and the Serbian Orthodox Church.¹⁵

As of the writing of this Monitoring, two people have been detained on the suspicion that they committed the criminal offense of Endangering security to the detriment of journalist Ana Lalić Hegediš. During the search, a device with a Facebook account from which threatening messages were sent was found in the apartment of one person. That person was detained for 48 hours.¹⁶ After the search, the second suspect was identified upon entering Serbia. After a 48-hour police detention, the person was interrogated at the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime. The court rejected the Prosecution's proposal to keep the person in custody, ordering him to be banned from leaving the apartment with electronic surveillance. During the search, evidence was found that the same person sent threats to Dinko Gruhonjić as well. According to information available in the media, four threats against Ana Lalić Hegediš were reported to the competent prosecutor's office.¹⁷

The case of Dinko Gruhonjić, editor-in-chief of the Vojvodina Research and Analytical Center (VOICE) internet portal and associate professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad

Dinko Gruhonjić was once again the target of harassment, attacks and death threats. Eleven months after he spoke with several other journalists from Serbia at the "Rebedu" festival in Dubrovnik, a video from the discussion appeared on social networks, which the journalists of the Raskrikavanje

¹⁵ [NDNV: Ani Lalić prete da će biti zaklana u centru Novog Sada](#), announcement published on March 10, 2024 at NDNV portal

¹⁶ [Uhapšen osumnjičeni zbog pretnji novinarki Ani Lalić, slao poruke preko Fejsbuka](#), article published on March 29, 2024 at N1 portal

¹⁷ [Uhapšeno još jedno lice optuženo za pretnje Ani Lalić Hegediš i Dinku Gruhonjiću](#), article published on April 1, 2024 at Javni servis portal

newsroom said was "deceptively edited".¹⁸ That video was the trigger for a wave of insults and death threats.¹⁹

In the video, Gruhonjić mentions Dinko Šakić, the commander of the concentration camp from the Second World War. According to Gruhonjić, it is not clear to him why political dissidents are naming him Sabahudin, when they can freely, as he said, because of the same name, maliciously associate him with Dinko Šakić. "They're climbing my family tree, so they can't figure out who I'm from, so they even made up the name Sabahudin for me, even though I have a nice name, Dinko, like Dinko Šakić," Gruhonjić said at the time.

In a recent statement to the media, Gruhonjić clarified that the essence of his presentation is precisely in the last sentence, which was omitted from the disputed edited video. He explained that his intention was to point out that he could have been discriminated against because of his name, so there was no need to give him the name Sabahudin.²⁰ Dinko Gruhonjić has publicly stated that he justifiably believes that the harassment and death threats come directly from the top of the government.²¹

Certain domestic tabloids published untrue information that Gruhonjić stated that he was proud to be named after Dinko Šakić, the Ustasha criminal and commander of the Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška camps, where hundreds of thousands of Serbs, Jews, Roma and other members of minorities perished.²²

At the entrance of the building where Gruhonjić lives, a graffiti appeared: "Dinko - Šakić, you are ready for a forever home. Serbian Vojvodina". As in the case of Ana Lalić Hegediš, the case was reported to the competent prosecutor's office, and international organizations were also informed. NUNS also reported the case of threats against Dinko Gruhonjić to the UN Human Rights Council. NDNV, colleagues and friends of Dinko Gruhonjić organized the removal of the graffiti, however, shortly after it was painted over, a new message appeared in the same place: "You painted for

¹⁸ [Obmanjujuće isečen video kao dokaz da jedan Dinko veliča drugog](#), author Stefan Kosanović, article published on March 20, 2024 at Raskrikavanje portal

¹⁹ [Novinar Dinko Gruhonjić o pretnjama smrću: Napadi dolaze iz vrha države](#), article published on March 22, 2024 at Insajder portal

²⁰ [Slučaj Dinko Gruhonjić: Kako je montirani video doveo profesora pred etičku komisiju](#), article published on March 22, 2024 at EuroNews Serbia portal

²¹ [Dinko Gruhonjić povodom pretnji smrću: Opravdano sumnjam da iza hajke stoji sam vrh vlasti](#), author Željko Bošnjaković, article published on March 21, 2024 at Danas portal

²² [Ujedinili su se! Studenti traže sankcionisanje Dinka Gruhonjića zbog govora mržnje](#), article published on March 19, 2024 at Informer portal

nothing! Liman".²³

A group of students from the Student Parliament of the University of Novi Sad, as well as the Vice-Dean of Students, spoke about the said case. They demanded that the alleged hate speech of Dinko Gruhonjić be condemned and that, as they said, he be fired. Otherwise, they announced that they would block the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Novi Sad, which they did on March 28, 2024. At the call of the Student Parliament, the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Novi Sad was blocked.²⁴ Three days later it was unblocked, as they said, temporarily.²⁵

On the other hand, support for Gruhonjić was provided by more than 80 students, who did not support the position of the Student Parliament and insisted that the names of the students demanding the sanctioning of Gruhonjić be made public.²⁶ According to information available in the media, threats were made to students because of this support.²⁷

Due to the alleged hate speech, a criminal complaint was also filed against Gruhonjić, and several politicians gave a statement regarding that case, among them the former director of the Security Intelligence Agency, Aleksandar Vulin, who stated: "If I were in the security system of Serbia, the namesake and like-minded person of Dinko Šakić would, strictly respecting the law, spent a lot of time in the premises of the competent services explaining what he meant when he talked about Serbs as criminals."²⁸

The position of NUNS is that the case of Dinko Gruhonjić represents a big test for the state. Freedom of thought and speech must be provided to Gruhonjić. The competent authorities have an obligation to stop the violent people, because, according to NUNS, they are well organized and coordinated, and if they are not stopped in their actions, they could lead to tragic consequences. NUNS demands that the representatives of the government behave responsibly, call for a reduction in tensions and urgently condemn all events that threaten the safety of citizens who dare to think and speak

²³ [Ponovo ispisan grafit na ulazu u Gruhonjićevu zgradu](#), article published on March 23, 2024 at Danas portal

²⁴ [Grupa mladih blokirala Filozofski fakultet: Nameštaj, lanci, policija](#), article published on March 28, 2024 at O21 portal

²⁵ [Prekinuta blokada Filozofskog fakulteta u Novom Sadu, rektor posetio studente koji traže ostavku profesora Gruhonjića](#), article published on March 31, 2024 at EuroNews Serbia portal

²⁶ [Obmanjujuće isečen video kao dokaz da jedan Dinko veliča drugog](#), author Stefan Kosanović, article published on March 20, 2024 at Raskrikavanje portal

²⁷ [Studentima stižu pretnje zbog podrške Dinku Gruhonjiću](#), article published on March 21, 2024 at Danas portal

²⁸ [Vulin reagovao na gnusne uvrede koje je Dinko Gruhonjić uputio Srbima: Ološ koji živi od mržnje prema Srbiji](#), article published on March 15, 2024 at Novosti onlajn portal.

critically.²⁹

Until the writing of this Monitoring, two threats against Dinko Gruhonjić were reported to the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime. This was discussed in the section related to the case of Ana Lalić Hegediš. At this point, it should be noted that one person was taken into custody and, after being questioned, he was ordered a measure forbidding leaving the apartment with electronic surveillance.

Dinko Gruhonjić has been a victim of harassment, attacks and threats for years, and his family was not spared from those attacks and threats either. In November 2020, graffiti containing messages of hatred and national intolerance was already written once in the entrance of Gruhonjić's building.³⁰ It is not known who did it. You can read more about earlier cases of threats directed at Dinko Gruhonjić in the [Monitoring of the Media Scene for March 2023](#).

Cases of threats to Ana Lalić Hegediš and Dinko Gruhonjić were one of the topics of the first regular meeting of the PWG in 2024. The meeting was held at the end of March, and in addition to members of the PWG and the head of the OSCE Mission in Serbia, Jan Braatu, the meeting was attended by Dinko Gruhonjić via video link.³¹

Threats addressed to journalists at a protest in front of the Welfare Centre in Novi Sad

At the beginning of March 2024, journalists from Tanjug, Kurir Television and Radio 021 were verbally attacked while reporting on protest held in support of the mother Ana Mihaljica, whose three children were allegedly temporarily taken away by the Novi Sad Welfare Centre. During the live broadcast, Tanjug reporter Saška Drobnyak was interrupted by a woman who introduced herself as Mihaljica's lawyer and stated that "journalists who lie will see their own". Tanjug photographer, Kurir correspondent and Radio 021 reporter Žarko Bogosavljević were also verbally abused. UNS informed the public that the police present at the protest did not intervene to prevent harassment of journalists in the performance of their journalistic duties. Because of her reporting, N1 correspondent

²⁹ [SafeJournalists: Kampanja protiv novinara u Srbiji mora da se zaustavi](#), announcement published on March 22, 2024 at NUNS portal

³⁰ [Tužilaštvo za RSE: Formiran predmet u slučaju napada na novinara Dinka Gruhonjića](#), article published on November 26, 2020 at Radio Free Europe portal

³¹ [Štalna radna grupa za bezbednost novinara održala redovan sastanak na kome su razmatrane i pretnje Ani Lalić Hegediš i Dinku Gruhonjiću](#), article published on March 26, 2024 at Javni servis portal

Ksenija Pavkov received numerous insults on the internet, as well as several threats of physical violence. Cases of threats addressed to N1 journalists on the Telegram channel have been reported to the competent authorities.³²

Domestic professional associations and international organizations reacted to the aforementioned attacks.³³

Attacks on journalists Nikola Stamenić, Nikola Janković, Branko Spasojević, Milivoj Pantović and Slaviša Milanov

In mid-March, the SafeJournalists network and the Coalition for Media Freedom responded with a joint statement regarding cases of frequent attacks on journalists. In the statement, in addition to the reaction to the threats addressed to Verica Marinčić, Ana Lalić Hegediš, Ksenija Pavkov and the journalists who were reporting in front of the Novi Sad Welfare Centre, they specifically referred to the threats and insults received by Sport club journalists **Nikola Stamenić, Nikola Janković** and **Branko Spasojević**, due to their coverage of sports events.

The announcement also pointed to the situation in which independent investigative journalist **Milivoje Pantović** found himself, whose laptop was damaged by unknown burglars. It was suspected that this was done in order to hinder his research work. The conclusion is based on the fact that Pantović was, for a long period of time, exposed to pressures that significantly affected his work.

There was also talk about the case of **Slaviša Milanov**, a journalist from the FAR portal from Dimitrovgrad. Milanov was detained by the police in Pirot. According to the information provided in the announcement, the car he was driving was stopped. Although the alcohol and drug tests to which Milanov was subjected turned out to be negative, the police still detained him for questioning, under the pretext that they suspected that he had transported wanted persons across the border between Serbia and Bulgaria. Milanov denied that indication.³⁴ Due to the existence of grounds for suspicion that police officers, during his stay at the Pirot Police Department, had unauthorized access to his

³² [Gnusne uvrede i pretnje reporterki N1 nakon izveštavanja sa protesta u Novom Sadu](#), article published on March 11, 2024 at N1 portal

³³ [Srbija: Eskalacija pretnji i napada na novinare u Novom Sadu](#), announcement published on March 21, 2024 at NUNS portal

³⁴ [SafeJournalists mreža i Koalicija za slobodu medija: Zahtevamo hitno rešavanje svih slučajeva učestalih pretnji novinarima](#), announcement published on March 13, 2024 at Coalition for Media Freedom portal

mobile phone - in the second half of March, NUNS filed a criminal complaint against the police officers, as well as a complaint to the Internal Control Sector.

The SafeJournalists network and the Coalition for Media Freedom demanded immediate action in these cases.³⁵

The case of threatening messages sent to the daily newspaper Danas newsroom

In the second half of March, NUNS reported to the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime threatening messages sent by musician Vlado Georgijev through the X social network, expressing his dissatisfaction with the manner of reporting by the daily newspaper Danas newsroom. According to the article published on the Danas internet portal, Georgijev left a comment under one of the texts: "God, may cancer eat you. Shame on you, you should be set on fire like today". The article adds that after that he added another comment: "Whoever buys Danas, his hands fall off, shame on you for the rest of the world and forever. Shame on you anti-Serbian animals. Gorillas in their own fire. Ordinary Ustashas, that's what you are, ordinary cowards and pu**ies. Sold-out miseries".³⁶

The case of threats to journalist Gordana Momčilović Ilić

Towards the end of March, journalist Gordana Momčilović Ilić reported the death threats she received because she was investigating the circumstances under which a 150 square meter prefabricated container was placed on a green area in a public park in the town of Stara Pazova. The journalist dealt with that topic for almost two months. In her statement to UNS, Gordana Momčilović Ilić described the event that took place on March 27. While she was standing on the street, next to her bicycle, a car approached her, which was then parked in a space reserved for people with disabilities. A woman got out of the car and told her that she would kill her if she mentioned her brother again. The journalist did not answer her, but she managed to take a photo of the car and its license plate. Gordana Momčilović Ilić notes that in the two months she has been dealing with the topic, she has not named anyone. She reported the case to the police and gave a statement at the

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ [Vlado Georgijev pretio redakciji Danasa: Treba vas zapaliti, da bog da vas rak pojeo](#), author D.D, article published on March 23, 2024 at Danas portal

prosecutor's office. In a press release, UNS expressed the expectation that the prosecution will initiate criminal prosecution due to the death threats the journalist received while doing investigative work.³⁷

A case of verbal pressure on N1 from high government officials

The president of the temporary authority of the City of Belgrade, Aleksandar Šapić, continued the practice of refusing to answer questions posed to him by journalists from N1 television. You can read more about the previous cases in which Šapić excommunicated journalists from the editorial office of media N1 in the [Monitoring of the media scene for January 2024](#).

The last of those events took place during an address to the media after the postponement of the constituent session of the City of Belgrade. N1 journalist Nenad Nešić asked Šapić if he could ask him a question, to which Šapić answered in the affirmative. After the journalist asked the question, Aleksandar Šapić, the president of the temporary body of the City of Belgrade, announced that he stands by his decision not to answer the questions of the N1 television journalists.

After this incident, UNS issued a statement strongly condemning Šapić's behavior and calling on him to respect the Law on Public Information and Media. The association insisted that Šapić stop discriminating against the journalists of the N1 media company, and reminded him that the job of the media is to ask questions of interest to the public, and that it is the duty of officials to answer those questions.

The next day, Aleksandar Šapić - as a basis for his "right" to refuse to answer the question - stated that the journalists of the media company N1 were "editing the footage and lying" and again refused to answer the question. At the press conference, in addition to Aleksandar Šapić, Ana Brnabić, the Prime Minister in a technical mandate and SNS commissioner for Belgrade, and Vladimi Orlić, the President of the Assembly in the previous convocation, were also present. In this decision, Šapić was supported by Ana Brnabić – she also refused to answer the question of the N1 television journalist.³⁸

Speaking about the treatment that N1 television journalists suffer from officials, we note that being

³⁷ [UNS: Tužilaštvo da pokrene postupak zbog pretnji novinarki Gordani Momčilović Ilić iz Stare Pazove](#), announcement published on March 29, 2024 at UNS portal

³⁸ ["Napredna" pravila za medije: Vi ste na našoj konferenciji](#), author Mladen Savatović, article published on March 2, 2024 at N1 portal

ignored is not the only pressure they are exposed to. In February, in the comments below the article published on the N1 portal "Marijuana cultivation laboratory found in Leposavić", the following was addressed to them: "We know where you live and what cars you drive" and "soon we will kill you all". The program director of N1 television, Igor Božić, told the UNS portal that it is not the first time that journalists of that media company have received threatening comments, but that the said comments are specific because the person who made the threat, as he noted, knows where the journalists live.³⁹

Meetings of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists

In the second half of March, PWG organized an open meeting in Novi Sad in order to provide support to threatened journalists and to discuss the escalation of threats and violence, which they have been particularly exposed to recently. The conversation was attended by PWG representatives Dragana Bjelica and Veran Matić, journalists Ana Lalić Hegediš, Ksenija Pavkov, Vesna Marinčić, Žarko Bogosavljević and other interested journalists.⁴⁰

Towards the end of March, the first quarterly PWG meeting was held. Branko Stamenković, representative of the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, informed present PWG members that during January and February 2024, five cases were filed in connection with endangering the safety of journalists (four cases were filed in January, one in February). In one case, a female journalist appeared as the injured party. One case was resolved with an official note from the prosecution stating that there is no place to initiate criminal proceedings. The remaining four are still under investigation. Stamenković also presented the information that from the beginning of 2016 until February 2024, 527 cases of attacks on journalists were registered, of which 316 were prosecuted (59.96%), while the remaining cases were dismissed. In 213 cases, i.e. 36.35% of the total number, the victims were female journalists - it was stated in the PWG announcement.⁴¹

³⁹ [UNS: Tužilaštvo za VTK da pokrene postupak protiv osoba koje su pretile smrću novinarima N1](#), announcement published on February 27, 2024 at UNS portal

⁴⁰ [Novinarke i novinari u Novom Sadu: pod pretnjama, napadima i uz ometanje u radu](#), author Veran Matić, article published on March 18, 2024 at Bezbedni novinari portal

⁴¹ [Stalna radna grupa za bezbednost novinara održala redovan sastanak na kome su razmatrane i pretnje Ani Lalić Hegediš i Dinku Gruhonjiću](#), article published on March 26, 2024 at Javni servis portal

II MONITORING OF THE PROCESS OF ADOPTION OF NEW LAWS

During March 2024, there were no significant news in the segment covered by this chapter of the Monitoring.

III IMPLEMENTATION OF EXISTING LAWS

During the observed period, two key problems were observed:

1. Non-announcement of the competition within the period provided for by law, and
2. Reduction of the amount of the budget allocated to the co-financing of projects for the realization of public interest in the field of public information and redirecting those funds to other means of financing (direct grants or public and other procurements).

According to the data published by UNS, 61 local self-government units announced a tender for co-financing until March 1, 2024, while 106 units failed to do so.⁴²

Due to the observed drastic decrease in the budget for co-financing of media projects compared to previous years, the UNS made a public announcement and requested that those tenders be cancelled. The association asked the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications to respond to the inadmissible circumvention of the obligations stipulated in the Law on Public Information and Media.

UNS points out that this year numerous local governments have reduced the amounts for co-financing of media projects by up to ten times, and diverted the money that was earmarked for this in previous years' budgets to contract services or other purposes that have nothing to do with the realization of public interest in the area of public information.

UNS has recorded this practice in a large number of municipalities and cities, among which so far the most drastic reductions are in Sombor, Apatin, Vršac, Požega, Bajina Bašta, Bečej, Bačka Topola, Šid, Pančevo, but also Smederevo, which adopted the budget on March 15, 2024 – it is stated in the UNS

⁴² [Više od polovine lokalnih samouprava prekoračilo rok za raspisivanje medijskih konkursa](#), author: A. N., article published on March 6, 2024 at UNS portal

announcement.⁴³

IV SLAPP LAWSUITS DIRECTED AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND THE MEDIA

After the European Parliament, the European Council adopted the Directive on the Protection of Persons Participating in Public Advocacy from Clearly Unfounded Procedures and Procedures Abusing Procedural Powers (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation). The Directive shall enter into force on the twentieth day following its publication in the Official Journal of the European Union. Member States have two years after that to incorporate the Directive into their national legislation.

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⁴³ [UNS: Ministarstvo informisanja da reaguje na drastično umanjivanje sredstava za medijske projekte u lokalnim samoupravama](#), announcement published on March 19, 2024 at UNS portal