

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

## **FOR THE MONTH OF JUNE 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

It has been 23 years since the murder of journalist Milan Pantić. After marking the commemoration, the representatives of the Commission for Investigating Murders of Journalists, Veran Matić and Živojin Rakočević, met with the competent Senior Public Prosecutor in Jagodina.

Rakočević expressed the view that the Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime, based on the evidence collected by the police, must urgently file an indictment. Veran Matić, on the other hand, recalled the fact that there were several attempts for the Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime, which is the only one with the capacity to conduct an effective investigation, to take over the case of the murder of Milan Pantić, however, the case was returned to the Prosecutor's Office in Jagodina.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the statement of Živojin Rakočević that the case was solved by the police, the Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime announced:

*After a comprehensive analysis of the files of the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Jagodina, formed against the unknown perpetrator in connection with the murder of journalist Milan Pantić, it was determined that in this particular case there is not only evidence, but also no data on the basis of which it could be concluded that a criminal offense was committed by an organized criminal group, that is, on the criminal offense of organized crime, which is the basis for establishing the jurisdiction of the Public Prosecutor's Office for organized crime. The material collected during the entire procedure, and in particular the data stated in the reports of the Working Group of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, UKP 03/2 SP number: 168/13-78 dated 05/05/2020 and 03/2 SP number: 168/13-753 from 18/02/2020, they are based, as stated in them, on criminal intelligence and operational knowledge and are nowhere near sufficient to draw any conclusion on the circumstances of the murder, because no fact can be established from them that would, at least approximately reliably indicate the motives and identity of the principal, organizer and perpetrator of the murder. The aforementioned reports are based solely on assumptions and in them, as well as in the entire files, there is no evidence, nor any indication that would indicate that this is a*

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<sup>1</sup> [U Jagodini obeležena 23. godišnjica ubistva novinara Milana Pantića](#), article published on June 11, 2024 at Beta News Agency portal.

*criminal offense under the jurisdiction of JTOK.*<sup>2</sup>

In an interview with NIN, Veran Matić assessed the return of the case to Jagodina as a "symbolic farewell" to the possibility of the case being resolved. In addition to the conversation with the competent prosecutor in Jagodina, Matić announced a conversation with the top of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Speaking about the potential perpetrators of the murder, Matić pointed out the necessity of determining the motive for its execution.<sup>3</sup>

To mark the commemoration, a meeting of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists (PWG) was held in Jagodina. The participants were journalists from the Pomoravski district, prosecutors and representatives of the police.<sup>4</sup>

### **Regular meeting of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists**

At the beginning of June, a [regular session](#) of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists was held. The meeting discussed current cases of attacks on journalists and cases of threats to their safety. Information about the case of a physical attack on journalist Vuk Cvijić was particularly insisted on, given that the members of the PWG were informed that Milan Lađević, after the disputed event, reported the case to the police, presenting his "version" of the event. You can read more about the physical attack on journalist Vuk Cvijić in [Monitoring of the media scene in Serbia for the month of May 2024](#).

At the meeting, representatives of the prosecution informed those present that on June 3 they received a report from the police, based on which the case was formed. The case includes the statements of Vuk Cvijić, Milan Lađević and two witnesses. Video recordings from the premises where the attack took place, as well as recordings of the surrounding buildings, were not submitted to the prosecution.

Representatives of journalist associations and media associations pointed out that the fact that the prosecution did not invite the victim to provide additional information about the attack he

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<sup>2</sup> [Oglasilo se Tužilaštvo o ubistvu novinara Milana Pantića nakon tvrdnji predsednika UNS da je taj slučaj rešen](#), article published on June 11, 2024 at Nova.rs portal.

<sup>3</sup> [Veran Matić za NIN o preprekama u istrazi ubistva Milana Pantića: Tužilaštvo beži od predmeta](#), author Vuk Jeremić, interview published on June 13, 2024 at NIN portal.

<sup>4</sup> [Sastanak Radne grupe za bezbednost novinara u Jagodini](#), article published on June 12, 2024 at Javni servis portal.

experienced, even seven days after Vuk Cvijić reported the disputed event, is unacceptable. It is emphasized that the [General Mandatory Instruction](#) issued by the Republic Public Prosecutor's Office at the end of December 2020 instructed public prosecutors to act urgently on criminal charges in cases of attacks on journalists, and the prosecutor's office to summon the injured party within 48 hours of taking over the case. In case of non-compliance with the provisions of the mandatory instruction, the competent public prosecutor is obliged to examine the grounds for initiating disciplinary proceedings.

In connection with the cases of endangering the security of Ana Lalić Hegediš, members of the PWG were informed that in two of the four reported cases, persons were identified against whom indictments were later filed. In one of those two cases, the main hearing was scheduled for July 3, and the decision of the High Court in Belgrade extended the ban on the accused from leaving the apartment. In other cases, the police did not submit a report on the collected information to the prosecutor's office. It is emphasized that, in accordance with the Code of Criminal Procedure, all authorities participating in the pre-investigation procedure are obliged to inform the competent public prosecutor about any action undertaken with the aim of detecting a criminal offense or finding a suspect. The police and other state authorities responsible for detecting criminal offenses - are obliged to act on every request of the competent public prosecutor. In the event that the police or another state body does not act on the public prosecutor's request, the public prosecutor will immediately notify the head of the body, and if necessary, may also notify the competent minister, the Government or the competent working body of the National Assembly. If, within 24 hours from when the notification was received, the police and other state bodies do not act on the public prosecutor's request, the public prosecutor can request the initiation of disciplinary proceedings against the person s/he considers responsible for not acting on her/his request.<sup>5</sup>

When it comes to threats addressed to Dinko Gruhonjić, there are four reported cases of threats to security in the records. In two cases, the threats were sent via the Internet, the third case refers to writing graffiti in the entrance where Gruhonjić lives, and the fourth concerns threats that were made to him on the street. In cases of threats sent via the Internet - in one of those two cases, the identity of the owner of the user account from which the threatening message was sent was established, and

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<sup>5</sup> [Član 44 Zakonika o krivičnom postupku \("Sl. glasnik RS", br. 72/2011, 101/2011, 121/2012, 32/2013, 45/2013, 55/2014, 35/2019, 27/2021 - odluka US i 62/2021 - odluka US\)](#)

a search was launched for that person; in the second case, an interview was conducted with the injured party and a request was sent to the police to collect the necessary information. In the case of writing threatening graffiti, the police report stated that the camera on the building did not record the movement of the perpetrator. The police claims that the cameras on the surrounding buildings in the area were also checked, but that they did not record anything either. On May 16, the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office again sent a request to the Novi Sad Police Department, but the report was not submitted.

The meeting also discussed cases of threats received by journalist Gordana Momčilović Ilić in Stara Pazova. Representatives of the prosecutor's office informed those present that the prosecutor's office rejected the criminal complaint, with the explanation that there are no grounds for suspicion that a criminal offense was committed, for which the prosecution is undertaken ex officio. The journalist has the right to file an objection against such a decision of the prosecutor's office, which must be submitted immediately to the higher public prosecutor's office. In the case of Verica Marinčić, the police collected the necessary information, while it remains for the journalist of Television N1, who was present and recorded the event, to be called to provide information about the event.

About the cases of attacks on journalists Ana Lalić Hegediš and Dinko Gruhonjić, about the pressure Gordana Ilić Momčilović was exposed to and the physical pushing of Verica Marinčić from the Inđija Municipality building from where she was reporting - more in [the Monitoring of the media scene in Serbia for the month of March 2024](#).

When it comes to the journalist of the "Podrinjske Novosti" Isidora Kovačević, the police have not yet provided the information requested by the prosecution. The journalists were threatened in mid-December 2023.

In the case of a physical attack (during the election day) on Uglješa Bokić, the correspondent of Danas and Cenzolovka who filmed the attack - the prosecution ordered that all relevant recordings from social networks be collected, an interviews be conducted with the suspect and any potential witnesses.

Those present noted that there are a large number of cases in which additional information and reports are waited too long, despite the fact that emergency procedures for handling have been

established. The representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs were asked to inform the authorities about this. One of the conclusions was that the implementation of investigative actions must be made more efficient. It was noticed that during the implementation of investigative actions, the evidentiary material relies too much on surveillance camera recordings, although there is a whole series of actions and measures that can be used to determine the factual situation, which are not used enough.

The PWG took the position that it is necessary to continue with the practice of holding meetings throughout Serbia, in cities where meetings of representatives of local prosecutor's offices, the police and local media will continue to be organized.

### Threats and pressures

In this month's monitoring, for the sake of transparency, threats and pressures directed at journalists will be discussed within two groups into which the threats and pressures will be classified, taking into account the persons to whom the threats and pressures were directed, but also the situation in which they found themselves and because of which they suffered threats and pressures.<sup>6</sup> The case of Belarusian journalist Andrey Gnyot was cited as an individual case, not included in the two groups mentioned.

The part of Novi Sad where **Dinko Gruhonjić**, NDNV program director and Beta News Agency journalist, lives, was plastered with posters with hate speech messages.

The editorial office of the **Lozničke novosti** media received two threats via the Facebook.

**Nenad Kulačin**, a columnist for the daily newspaper Danas and co-author of the podcast "Good, Bad, Evil", was threatened with death on two occasions via the Instagram. The threats were reported to the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime.

The editor-in-chief of the IN Media portal, **Verica Marinčić**, was sent threats and messages characterized by hate speech via the same network.

The Facebook served as a channel through which the editors and journalists of the KoSSev portal,

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<sup>6</sup> Data in this chapter are available at NUNS's [Data base of attacks on journalists](#).

**Tatjana Lazarević**, were threatened. The threats were reported to the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime.

The editorial staff of **N1 Television** also received a comment full of threats. The threats were reported to the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime.

During the elections on June 2, a large number of journalists were exposed to threats and pressure. While filming and trying to conduct a survey with young people who ran out of the Master Congress Center at the Novi Sad Fair, **Uglješa Bokić**, a journalist from the daily newspaper Danas, was hit by a man who grabbed his phone. A review of the video of the attack revealed that the man who attacked him was a former police officer. Bokić submitted the report to the competent police station.

**Marko Miletić**, co-editor of the Mašina portal, was attacked at the polling station in Zemun Polje. While he was trying to record actions that seemed suspicious to him, several people physically prevented him from doing so, although he said, as can be seen in the video he posted on the Instagram page of the Mašina portal, that he was a journalist.

Journalist **Dušan Čavić** was "warned" not to film the actions of the ruling party activists. The police were called to "help", and instead of checking the possible irregularities that Čavić pointed out, they told the journalist that he should not bother the activists engaged in the improvised call center.

The Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina (NDNV) [wrote](#) about physical attacks to which journalists were exposed in Novi Sad during election day. SNS activists threw tear gas at those who were reporting near the Novi Sad Fair.

According to NDNV, Radio 021 media journalist **Žarko Bogosavljević** was targeted by tabloids as a thief of voting materials from a polling station. Allegedly, before Serbian Prime Minister Miloš Vučević appeared at the polling station with his family, he attacked members of the polling committee. The text refers to the "attack" as planned, organized, because the journalists were, the tabloids claim, informed about when the prime minister will vote.

### **The case of Belarusian journalist Andrey Gnyot**

In mid-June, Belarusian journalist Andrey Gnyot was informed of the decision to extradite him to the Belarusian authorities for tax evasion. This criminal offense in Belarus is punishable by imprisonment

for up to seven years. Gnyot denied the accusations, while his defense claims that the persecution was politically motivated. The decision on extradition was made by the High Court in Belgrade on May 31, 2024.

Gnyot was arrested at Nikola Tesla Airport in Belgrade, on October 30, 2023 while he was in transit. A warrant was issued for him by the Belarusian Interpol Bureau. At the beginning of June, he was transferred to house arrest. In an interview with the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Gnyot said that both he and his lawyer filed a complaint against him.

As Gnyot is one of the founders of the independent association "Free Association of Athletes of Belarus" - the association that influenced the cancellation of the World Ice Hockey Championship in Belarus in 2021, and was later qualified by the Belarusian authorities as an "extremist" group - Gnyot could also face accusations of founding or participating in an extremist group. The penalty for that criminal offense is up to 10 years in prison.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the above, Gnyot also actively participated in the protests of 2020, which demanded the resignation of President Alexander Lukashenka.<sup>8</sup>

Domestic and international professional public reacted regarding the decision on Gnyot's extradition to Belarus. The European Committee asked Serbia to abandon that decision.<sup>9</sup> The Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia (NUNS) requested the Appellate Court to annul the decision of the High Court and release Andrey Gnyot. Expressing doubts about the charges against Gnyot, NUNS stated that there are reasons to believe that Gnyot could be subjected to inhumane treatment and torture in a prison in Belarus.<sup>10</sup>

Andrey Gnyot was visited by ANEM president Veran Matić, who said that he hoped that the Court of Appeal in Belgrade would carefully review all the evidence collected by Gnyot's legal team, thus correcting the omission of the High Court. The decision of the Appellate Court, according to Matić, should be the annulment of the decision on Gnyot's extradition.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> [Sud u Srbiji doneo odluku o izručenju novinara Andreja Gnjota Belorusiji](#), article published on June 19, 2024 at Javni servis portal.

<sup>8</sup> [Evropski komitet poziva Srbiju da ne izruči Andreja Gnjota Belorusiji](#), article published on June 28, 2024 at NUNS portal.

<sup>9</sup> Isto.

<sup>10</sup> [NUNS: Zahtevamo od vlasti da ne izručuje Andreja Gnjota Belorusiji](#), article published on June 14, 2024 at NUNS portal.

<sup>11</sup> [Veran Matić - Sloboda za Andreja Gnjota](#), author Veran Matić, article published on June 21, 2024 at Javni servis portal.



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

There was no news in the field of adopting new laws or amending existing ones.

During June, the discussion on whether changes to the Criminal Code would improve the safety of media workers in Serbia continued. At a panel organized by the NDNV, held in the second half of the month, Rade Đurić and Veran Matić, representatives of NUNS and ANEM, and lawyer Slobodan Beljanski discussed possible directions amendments to the law, emphasizing its implementation.<sup>12</sup>

## III IMPLEMENTATION OF EXISTING LAWS

### Project co-financing

At the beginning of June, the Coalition for Freedom of the Media announced the decision on the appointment of commission members for competitions announced in the field of public information. The announcement requested the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications to urgently cancel the decisions and remove the deficiencies in the selection process of commission members. The coalition pointed to the results of the analysis, which showed that the majority of experts, whether they applied independently or at the suggestion of professional associations, sent their resumes to several invitations, which, due to the unclear criteria of the Ministry, led to some of the candidates with higher number of points to be left without a place in the commission. In the statement of the Coalition, the suspicion was expressed that "combinatorics" was deliberately done in order to delegate exactly certain candidates to the commissions. On that occasion, the Ministry did not issue any statement.

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<sup>12</sup> [Beljanski: Izmeniti Krivični zakonik, sankcionisati i posredne pretnje novinarima, ne samo direktne](#), article published on June 18, 2024 at NDNV portal.

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

##### Legal proceedings against Verica Marinčić, IN Media portal editor-in-chief

At the end of January, the IN Media portal reported to the public that jars of "Fruškogorski Skočko - joy in the house" honey were distributed as part of the package handed over to young karate athletes at a reception by the President of the Municipality of Inđija. It is honey that is also advertised as an aphrodisiac. A photo from the reception was published within the article at IN Media portal. According to the editor-in-chief of the portal, Verica Marinčić, the photo was taken from the website of the Municipality of Inđija. Photos from the event are still available at official site. Before publishing the text, Verica Marinčić, as she said, contacted the municipality in order to get answers to the questions of who is responsible for the omission, who packs the gifts and why the municipality purchased honey for potency. However, she did not receive any answers.<sup>13</sup>

The president of the municipality characterized the article as a malicious campaign, and for the "gift" that the young athletes received, he said that the honey is intended for immunity, although the declaration submitted to the media by president himself states that honey is "excellent as an aphrodisiac."<sup>14</sup>

After the article was published, the publisher and editor of the IN Media portal received seven lawsuits. Even though it is about the same article, even though the founder of the IN Media portal and the editor-in-chief are included in each lawsuit, even though the same court (the High Court in Belgrade) has jurisdiction, a large number of proceedings have been initiated. Lawsuits were filed on behalf of eight minors, in the period from February to June 2024. Each lawsuit defines the claim in the same amount – 200,000.00 dinars was requested as compensation for non-material damage due to the violation of honor, reputation and the right to privacy.

For the [Raskrikavanje](#) portal, Verica Marinčić said that she received the information about the disputed gift from athletes' parents, who sent her a photo of a jar with the words "Skočko (Jumper) – Joy in the house" written on it. Marinčić sees the filing of lawsuits as a means of exposing the source of information, and chain lawsuits as pressure on the editorial office. The plaintiff's attorney sees the

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<sup>13</sup> [Predsednik opštine podelio deci med za potenciju, a roditelji ljuti na medij koji je to objavio](#), author Marija Vučić, article published on July 12, 2024 at Raskrikavanje portal.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

reason for filing a larger number of lawsuits in the need to respect the "uniqueness" of each plaintiff.

**Lawsuits by Milan Radonjić, former head of the Belgrade Center of the State Security Department, and Miroslav Kurak, a former member of the DB, against the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation**

Milan Radonjić and Miroslav Kurak sued the Slavko Ćuruvija foundation.<sup>15</sup> They filed a claim for compensation for non-material damage due to injury to honor and reputation due to [a statement](#) in which the Foundation disagreed with the decision of the Court of Appeal in Belgrade, which acquitted the prosecutors of murdering journalist Slavko Ćuruvija. Although it is the same announcement, all plaintiffs have initiated separate proceedings. The compensation they claim is in the amount of RSD 500,000.00 each.

Commenting on the lawsuits, the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation announced:

*This lawsuit is a consequence of the atmosphere in society created by the government. The captured state does not solve or punish the crimes committed on its account and in its name. Violence and crime are glorified and encouraged, and criminals are celebrated as heroes. Any kind of criticism of the government's current and past sins is most brutally suppressed.*

*This is the continuation of the persecution of Slavko Ćuruvija, 25 years after he was killed.*

*The Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation will continue to cherish the memory of the journalist whose name it bears, but will also insist on punishing all attacks on journalists. First with the acquittal and now with the intimidation of lawsuits, such attacks are encouraged. We do not agree to that.*

According to published information, the lawsuits in question are not the only ones filed by Radonjić and Kurak against the media and other persons who commented on the decision of the Court of Appeal.<sup>16</sup>

Regarding the lawsuits filed against the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, the professional public reacted.

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<sup>15</sup> At the time of writing this report, the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation received a lawsuit from a former member of the Secret Service, Ratko Romić. This lawsuit, as well as the lawsuit filed by Miroslav Kurak against the NIN, will be discussed in the next report.

<sup>16</sup> [Olenik: Cilj tužbi protiv mene - da se ne pominje uticaj BIA na sudove, ukazivanje na veze vlasti i kriminala stvara nervozu](#), author Una Sabljaković, article published on July 25, 2024 at N1 portal.

In a joint statement, the Coalition for Media Freedom and the SafeJournalists network [condemned](#) the "pressure on freedom of speech and the attempt to silence criticism". The Association of Serbian Journalists (UNS) said that all participants in the proceedings must be aware that the journalist and media community has the right to be [dissatisfied](#) with the judgment of the Appellate Court, and that they can exercise that right by expressing disagreement with the actions of the state and the court.

More details about the judgment of the Court of Appeal in the case of the murder of journalist Slavko Ćuruvija can be read in [the Monitoring of the media scene in Serbia for the month of February 2024](#).

**A legally binding verdict in the civil proceedings that the commander of the Unit for the Protection of Participants in Criminal Proceedings of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and two of his associates conducted against the journalist, editor-in-chief and founder of the KRIK editorial office**

In Belgrade, the Court of Appeal confirmed the judgment of the High Court in the part in which the editor-in-chief of the KRIK portal, Stevan Dojčinović, and the association that is the founder of that media are obliged to pay the commander of the Unit for the Protection of Participants in Criminal Proceedings of the Ministry of Internal Affairs<sup>17</sup> and two of his associates, for breach of honor and reputation, compensation for non-material damage in the amount of RSD 50,000.00 each.

In the [article](#) for which the lawsuit was filed, the defendants informed the public that a large number of lawsuits had been filed against the journalists of the editorial office of the KRIK portal and its editor-in-chief. Among the lawsuits was the one filed by the commander of the Unit for the Protection of Participants in Criminal Proceedings of the Ministry of Internal Affairs<sup>18</sup> and two of his associates. In the text, the editor's position on the proceedings initiated against them is presented, as well as a short statement from the editor of KRIK, in which the submitted lawsuits are evaluated as a form of SLAPP pressure on their editorial office. Under the title of the text, "KRIK buried by lawsuits from people close to the regime", as an illustration of what was said, photos of people who filed lawsuits and are known as businessmen close to people from the government or as people from the government were published. There are no photographs of the plaintiffs among them.

The first-instance verdict, which was later partially confirmed by the verdict of the Appellate Court in Belgrade, is discussed in the [Report](#) of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe,

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.mup.gov.rs/wps/portal/sr/direkcija-policije/ojdpp/Jedinica+za+zastitu>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

Dunja Mijatović, which was prepared after her visit to Serbia, which took place from May 13 to 17, 2023. The report expresses concern that the ruling was made in connection with an article reporting on pending SLAPP proceedings against the KRIK newsroom.

The judgment of the Court of Appeal states:

*The first-instance court correctly assessed that in the disputed text the plaintiffs were presented in a false light - as persons close to the regime who, together with other persons, filed lawsuits against the defendants in order to prevent the work of the media and stifle media freedoms, given that they were mentioned in the text about the chain filing of lawsuits by people close to the regime with the aim of exerting pressure, financial and other ways of exhausting the media [...] The value judgment of the defendants about the fact that the plaintiffs, as persons close to the regime, filed lawsuits against the defendants together with other persons, with the aim of common pressure in order to silence and shut down KRIK, and which portrays the plaintiffs as persons who, by order of the regime, file lawsuits aimed at stifling media freedom, and as the first instance court correctly concluded, does not have an adequate factual basis, considering that there is no evidence of the connection of the plaintiffs with officials and public authorities, nor about filing lawsuits with the aim of silencing the media, whereby the plaintiffs filed two lawsuits against the defendants for violation of personal rights, which, according to the plaintiffs, was done by publishing inadmissible information. The right of plaintiffs to file lawsuits in the court cannot be contested in the event that they believe that their rights, which are guaranteed by the Constitution, have been violated, while there is no evidence of abuse of procedural rights in those proceedings by plaintiffs (it cannot be considered abuse of procedural rights to file a lawsuit after legal deadline, nor filing a lawsuit with an unfounded claim).*

Reacting to the second-instance verdict, the editors of the KRIK portal announced that the journalists did not write in the text what the court claims was written. KRIK states that they did not write about the plaintiffs that "they file lawsuits by order of the regime", nor that they are people of the regime. They point out that in the introductory part of the text they even mentioned that lawsuits against the editorial office were filed "in most cases by people from the government or businessmen close to

them." The editor-in-chief of KRIK said:

*"Practically, we are no longer allowed to publicly complain about being sued, because then they sue us and we lose in court because of that. The scariest thing is that we were convicted for something we never published, for sentences that were not in the text and that the judges made up, and for our opinion that these were SLAPP lawsuits. This ruling means that any investigative media can always be condemned, regardless of what it published, so that the judges will not deal with the facts, but will interpret the journalistic text in a free way and add sentences to it."*

Before filing the lawsuit in question - the commander of the Unit for the Protection of Participants in Criminal Proceedings of the Ministry of Internal Affairs<sup>19</sup> and two of his associates - they had already sued KRIK editor-in-chief Stevan Dojčinović, journalist Bojana Jovanović and the founder of the KRIK portal. The texts for which the lawsuit was filed talked about problems within the Police Unit for the Protection of Participants in Criminal Proceedings. The proceedings ended with the court completely rejecting the claim as groundless, taking the position that the KRIK portal's editorial staff reported on a topic about which the public has a legitimate interest in being informed and that the published information was verified in accordance with due journalistic care. You can read more about that verdict in [the Monitoring of the media scene in Serbia for the month of January 2023](#).

Against the judgment of the Appellate Court in Belgrade, the editors of the KRIK portal filed a constitutional appeal and revision.

### **Legally binding judgment in civil proceedings following the lawsuit of Predrag Koluvija against KRIK and its editor-in-chief Stevan Dojčinović**

The Court of Appeal in Belgrade rejected the appeal of the editors of the KRIK portal and confirmed the first-instance verdict in the dispute brought before the High Court in Belgrade by Predrag Koluvija against the founder of KRIK and its editor-in-chief Stevan Dojčinović. Koluvija was awarded damages in the amount of 30,000.00 dinars.

In the first-instance proceedings, the court took the position that the defendants violated the presumption of innocence of the plaintiff by calling him an "accused drug lord" in the text "[Scheduled](#)

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.mup.gov.rs/wps/portal/sr/direkcija-policije/oidpp/Jedinica+za+zastitu>

[start of trial for Jovanjica 2](#)". You can read more about the first-instance verdict in [the Monitoring of the media scene in Serbia for the month of August 2023](#).

The second-instance court did not accept the argument of the defendants that the text represents a report from the ongoing trial (the proceedings are being conducted against Predrag Koluviija, for the criminal offense of Unauthorized production and placing on the market of narcotic drugs), that the text quoted information obtained from the spokeswoman of the High Court and data from the indictment, with a clear indication given right at the beginning of the text, that the trial has just begun. Also, the court did not consider it relevant that the defendants used the terms "accused", "accusations" in the text, making it clear that it was the evidence of the prosecution, as well as the fact that they stated in the text that all the accused, including Koluviija himself, denied guilt. The arguments that the expressions "marijuana plantation" and "drug lord", which are used in the text, are common, slang expressions, which, as part of the journalistic lexicon, serve the purpose of easier representation of what the indictment puts on the accused, were not accepted either. The argument that the readers could not have been misled by the fact that the term "accused" was used before the term "drug lord" was also rejected, implying that he was not convicted. Even the fact that it was explicitly stated at the beginning of the text that the start of the trial had just been scheduled - the court did not take it as relevant information for making a different decision.

The second case initiated by Koluviija against the editors of the KRIK portal is still ongoing. With that lawsuit, Koluviija demands that 2.8 million dinars be paid to him in the name of compensation for non-material damages due to the mental pain he suffered due to the seven KRIK news stories.

Against the judgment of the Appellate Court in Belgrade, the editors of the KRIK portal filed a constitutional appeal and revision.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> [KRIK pravosnažno osuđen po Koluviijinoj tužbi](#), article published on June 7, 2024 at KRIK portal.