

# MONITORING OF THE MEDIA SCENE IN SERBIA FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST 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

At the end of August, [the Final report of the ODIHR Election Observation Mission](#) was published. The report includes 29 recommendations for improving the electoral process. Key recommendations include one regarding journalists, which addresses the condemnation of attacks against them, as well as recommendations for implementing measures to protect their safety and conducting timely and independent investigations to put an end to the impunity for attacks on journalists.<sup>1</sup>

### Threats and pressures

**Due to the case of Tamara Skrozza, the deputy editor-in-chief of the FoNet news agency, the replacement of Dejan Ristić, Minister of Information and Telecommunications, was requested**

The tabloid campaign directed at Tamara Skrozza continued during August. The journalist found herself on the front page of the daily newspaper Informer, along with Rade Veljanovski, a professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences, who previously supported her. The wrongly and tendentiously interpreted words of Professor Veljanovski should have summed up what the two of them never said: "She is absolutely right, we should have killed you on October 5."<sup>2</sup>

Reacting to the announcement of the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, the representatives of the Coalition for Media Freedom handed the text of his own resignation to the Minister of Information and Telecommunications and left the scheduled meeting. The Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia announced the termination of communication with the minister.<sup>3</sup>

At the end of August, the President of the Republic of Serbia stated in the central news program on Pink Television that Skrozza did not say that he should have been killed, but that "it is quite clear what she wanted to say and everything that everyone said after her", and added:

*It is of crucial importance that we point out to people what is the truth. When I saw that representatives of the European Union came to defend Tamara Skrozza from being endangered... You ask yourself, who are they lying to, deceiving more... Everything is turned*

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/serbia/575485>

<sup>2</sup> [Veljanovski: To što je Tamara Skrozza poručila da je 5. oktobra trebalo ubiti Vučića je sasvim normalno i to mislimo mnogi mi iz opozicije!](#), article published on July 31, 2024 at Informer portal.

<sup>3</sup> [Slučaj Skrozza od tabloida do ministarstva: Novinari ministru predali nacrt njegove ostavke](#), author: Nenad Nešić, article published on August 2, 2024 at N1 portal.

*upside down, as is the story of who is endangered and who is not.”<sup>4</sup>*

### **The case of Uglješa Bokić, journalist of the daily newspaper Danas**

The case of a physical attack on the journalist Uglješa Bokić was discussed in [the Monitoring of the Serbian media scene for June 2024](#). Two months after the event, of which there is a video, the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad rejected the criminal complaint, with the explanation that there are no elements of a criminal offense for which prosecution is undertaken ex officio and that no offense was committed.<sup>5</sup> The case was concluded with an official note — an act that the injured party cannot dispute. The reason why the criminal complaint was dismissed, as stated by the daily newspaper Danas, lies in the expert's assessment that the injury suffered by Bokić was not a minor physical injury. It is noted that Bokić was diagnosed with a bruised sternum in the Emergency Center, which he visited after the attack.<sup>6</sup>

What is controversial in this case is that the prosecution exclusively focused on the type of physical injury, ignoring the fact that there are acts that can be prosecuted even if there was no physical injury (criminal acts of Abuse and Torture<sup>7</sup> or Violent Behavior<sup>8</sup>). Also, the decision not to initiate misdemeanor proceedings remained unexplained. Milena Božović, the prosecutor of the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade, informed the readers of the daily newspaper Danas that the legislator did not foresee that the finding and opinion of the court expert be delivered to the injured party, and thus Bokić was left without the opportunity to express objections to the finding and opinion, that is, to request new expertise.

*There we see the impotence of the injured party to challenge the finding in the specific case. Also, we have no information about whether the prosecution analyzed why the actions of the reported person did not have the essential features of the criminal offense of abuse and torture or Violent behavior, because we saw that everything happened in the presence of a large number of people, and the prosecution had to explain why the reasons were guided when it was found that the actions of the reported did not acquire the elements of these criminal acts*

<sup>4</sup> [Jasno šta je htela da kaže](#), author: Sofija Vukajlović, article published on August 26, 2024 at FoNet portal.

<sup>5</sup> ["Bilo bi čudno da se moj slučaj završio presudom": Zbog čega napadač na novinara Danasa Uglješu Bokića neće biti krivično gonjen?](#), author: Nađa Vukajlović, article published on August 5, 2024 at Danas portal.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Article 137 of the Criminal Code („RS Official Gazette”, no. 85/2005, 88/2005 - corr., 107/2005 - corr. 72/2009, 111/2009, 121/2012, 104/2013, 108/2014, 94/2016 & 35/2019)

<sup>8</sup> Article 344 of the Criminal Code

*either. The justification should also include the reasons why the prosecution did not submit a request to initiate misdemeanor proceedings, prosecutor Božović added.<sup>9</sup>*

The professional public considered the decision shameful. On this occasion, the vice-president of the Association of Journalists of Serbia and member of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists, Olivera Milošević, said:

*Bruising of the sternum which was noted by the doctor, for the expert and not even for the OJT in Novi Sad, is not a physical injury in the forensic-medical sense, so there is no criminal offense! Do we need to break our bones for that to be enough for the prosecutor? Is that the message - beat journalists freely, but carefully. What is the goal here except intimidation, clearing every obstacle on the way to realizing political or personal interests<sup>10</sup>*

### **The case of Andrei Gnyot, Belarusian journalist, film director and political activist**

In the first half of August, Belarusian journalist Andrei Gnyot, who was under house arrest with electronic monitoring device awaiting the final decision on his extradition to Belarus, told Radio Free Europe (RFE) that Interpol had removed him from the wanted list. According to Gnyot, the General Office of Interpol informed the representatives of the European Union in Serbia at the end of June that the warrant was no longer valid.<sup>11</sup>

At the end of August, Gnyot was heard before the panel of the Appellate Court in Belgrade, which should decide on the appeals filed by Gnyot and his lawyer against the decision of the High Court in Belgrade to extradite Gnyot to the Belarusian authorities. A gathering of support for the journalist was organized in front of the Court of Appeal.

In his defense, Gnyot said, among other things:

*The High Court of Serbia twice decided to extradite me, that is, to send me back to the dictatorship, to inevitable torture and death. For the first time, the High Court did not listen to me or the lawyers. The second time he ignored more than 78 pieces of direct evidence I presented showing that torture and death awaited me in Belarus. Before you stands an*

<sup>9</sup> ["Bilo bi čudno da se moj slučaj završio presudom": Zbog čega napadač na novinara Danasa Uglješiu Bokića neće biti krivično gonjen?](#), author: Nađa Vukajlović, article published on August 5, 2024 at Danas portal.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> ["Beloruski novinar koji u Srbiji čeka odluku o izručenju kaže da je skinut sa poternice Interpola"](#), article published on August 10, 2024 at Radio Free Europe portal.

*ordinary man who simply loves his country. A man who fights against election theft. I fight against violence, against the violation of the laws and constitution of my country. These are the reasons why Lukashenko sends people to prisons, and his dictatorial system tortures and kills them. Everyone knows it, and it's proven!*<sup>12</sup>

You can read more about the case of Andrei Gnyot in [the Monitoring of the Serbian media scene for June 2024](#) and [the Monitoring of the Serbian media scene for July 2024](#).

### **The case of OK Radio: the missing case files have not yet been found**

In the High Court in Vranje, in mid-July 2023, the files of the case in which Dejan Nikolić Kantar was first-instance sentenced to one year and six months in prison due to threats made during the trial to Olivera Vladković, the owner of OK Radio, and Svetlana Ivanov, an employee in that radio, have disappeared. The case file disappeared immediately before the panel of the Appellate Court in Vranje decided on the appeal against the verdict. The files were soon reconstructed, and the first-instance verdict was confirmed. You can read more about this case in [the Monitoring of the Serbian media scene of Serbia for July 2023](#).

Since there was no progress in determining responsibility for the disappearance of files in the past year, in mid-August Veran Matić, a member of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists, addressed a letter to the Minister of Justice, Maja Popović, demanding that responsibility for the demonstrated inefficiency be determined. Due to the lack of results in the investigation, presenting a complaint about the work of the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office, he addressed the Chief Public Prosecutor in the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Vranje.

### **The case of Anđelka Ćup, Euronews journalist**

Euronews journalist Anđelka Ćup was physically prevented from attending the press conference organized by Srpska lista in Kosovska Mitrovica. For a long period of time, that political organization drastically selects the media it invites to press conferences. Most often, two newsrooms receive an invitation. In a very dramatic day, in which the premises of several institutions in Kosovska Mitrovica were occupied by the police, Srpska lista did not give up on media selection. At the press conference called for only two media, journalists of other media who wanted to follow the events of exceptional

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<sup>12</sup> [Suđenje Andreju Gnjotu: torbica tužiteljke](#), author: Piotr Nikitin, article published on August 28, 2024 at Peščanik portal.

importance for the public also appeared. Those journalists were prevented from entering the premises. As she did not give up trying to attend the conference, physical force was used against Euronews journalist Anđelka Ćup. Journalists Ivana Vanovac, editor of Radio Mitrovica Sever and president of the Association of Serbian Journalists in Kosovo, and Maja Fićović, journalist and director of Radio Mitrovica Sever, as well as journalists from Television Prva and Media Alternativa, also experienced inconvenience.<sup>13</sup>

In its protest statement, the Association of Journalists of Serbia assessed that such an attitude towards the media is unacceptable and demanded from Srpska lista an equal attitude towards all media, regardless of their editorial orientation.<sup>14</sup>

### **Denial of the right to information and the right to use of language**

Serbian media in the north of Kosovo and Metohija do not receive information about visits by representatives of Prishtina. Only newsrooms reporting in the Albanian language were informed about these visits. Sometimes members of those newsrooms come with representatives of Prishtina to visit the municipalities in the north of Kosovo and Metohija.

Although their visits are significant for the Serbs living there, Serbs are denied the right to be informed about them. When Serbian journalists do reach out to politicians, the politicians ignore them, refuse to answer their questions, and do not provide them with the legally guaranteed translation. Such was the August visit of Kosovo's Minister Xhelal Sveçla, who refused to talk to the KoSsev journalist with the phrase "if a distance is possible".<sup>15</sup>

The journalist insisted on asking a question, and Sveçla directed her to the Minister of Justice Albulena Haxhiu, who was present. A person from Haxhiu's asked the journalist in Serbian language if she knew Albanian. When the journalist said that she didn't know, Haxhiu answered "sorry" and continued. The journalist asked to ask a question in English, but she was not allowed to do that either.

During August, several media outlets wrote to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, headed by Xhelal Sveçla, with a request to be informed about the visits, as well as to provide a translation into the

<sup>13</sup> [Srpska lista sazvala konferenciju za novinare na koju nije pustila - novinare](#), author: Budimir Ničić, article published on August 30, 2024 at Voice of America portal.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> [Od škole za romsku decu do sigurne kuće preko opštine Severna Mitrovica i tri ministarstva](#), article published on August 20, 2024 at KoSsev portal.

Serbian language. No one answered that letter.

### **The security of the KoSsev newsroom is threatened by fabricated news and photomontages distributed on social networks**

Fabricated news, disturbing content, including threats, even murder - were published with a fake logo of the Serbian media from northern Mitrovica, and especially with the logo of the KoSsev portal. This not only endangers the safety of journalists who have appeared as the target of fabricated news, but also endangers the newsroom whose logos have been misused. The Association of Kosovo Journalists asked the Kosovo Police and the Cybercrime Unit to urgently investigate the origin of those posts and prevent their further distribution.<sup>16</sup>

### **Foreign mercenaries in the action of overthrowing the regime - accusations of the Informer TV media**

The editor-in-chief and owner of the founder of the Informer TV media, in a show that is broadcast on that television, made unfounded accusations against a number of non-governmental organizations, which, as it is claimed, received money from the West (79 million euros) in order to finance the protests and in that way overthrow the government in Serbia. Among those organizations, in addition to the Trag Foundation, the Belgrade Open School, Civic Initiatives, the Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA), the Belgrade Center for Security Policy, the Bureau of Social Research (BIRODI), Ne davimo Beograd, Kreni Promeni, are the founders of the KRIK and BIRN media. In the case of the Civic Initiatives Association, details related to their operations were also presented, such as the list of employees, their monthly incomes and other individual transactions.<sup>17</sup>

### **Request to declare the Law on the Independent Media Commission unconstitutional**

The adoption of the Law on the Independent Media Commission caused numerous negative reactions both in the media community and international organizations, which can be read more in [the Monitoring of the Serbian media scene for July 2024](#). The Association of Journalists of Kosovo submitted comments on the law to the Constitutional Court, considering it unconstitutional and

<sup>16</sup> [Opasna kampanja lažnim vestima](#), author: Jelena L. Petković, article published on August 16, 2024 at Radio Goraždevac portal.

<sup>17</sup> [Informer o donacijama nevladinog sektora: Novac Zapada za izazivanje haosa u Srbiji](#), author: Milica Ljubičić, article published on August 22, 2024 at Raskrikavanje portal.

violating the right to freedom of the media. The comments specifically pointed out the unconstitutionality of the law-making procedure, the members who regulate the composition and work of the Commission, as well as the definitions of online media and the appeals panel.<sup>18</sup>

### **The formation of teams for monitoring news about Serbia in foreign media was announced**

Director of the Office for Public and Cultural Diplomacy, Arno Gujon, announced the training of teams that will monitor and respond to news about Serbia in foreign media.<sup>19</sup> Commenting on that decision, Rade Veljanovski, retired professor of the Faculty of Political Sciences, reminded the public that such teams already exist because if they didn't exist, "we wouldn't have so many daily reactions with various spins and abuses of what was said about Serbia." Veljanovski is of the opinion that the goal of the establishment of the teams announced by Gujon "is for them to be legitimized now and to be able to speak publicly, because the state has entered into a conflict with the civil sector, which speaks critically of the Government of Serbia and President Aleksandar Vučić. Now they obviously want to legitimize their counter-offensive, and this may serve the government's propaganda purposes, but it cannot bring about any democratization of the public dialogue".

Đorđe Pavićević, a professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences, evaluated the formation of the teams with the following words: "Since, unlike domestic ones, this government cannot control the media abroad, it decided to open an office that would deal with spreading the truth about itself, its achievements and its role in world politics," says Pavićević.<sup>20</sup>

### **Anniversaries of the disappearance of Serbian journalists from Kosovo**

August marked the 26th anniversary of the kidnapping of Đur Slavuj and Ranko Perenić, journalists of Radio Prishtina.<sup>21</sup> In 2017, EULEX confirmed that Perenić and Slavuja were abducted by members of the KLA in the vicinity of Orahovac and taken in an unknown direction. To this day, the facts about the kidnapping have not been revealed, nor is the fate of the two journalists known.

Ranko Perenić was a driver, who lived in Kosovo Polje. Đuro Slavuj was a journalist, who lived in

<sup>18</sup> [Udruženje novinara: Ustavni sud da progłasi neustavnim Zakon o Nezavisnoj komisiji za medije](#), article published on August 20, 2024 at Kosovo Online portal.

<sup>19</sup> [Gujon: Do kraja godine timovi zaduženi da demantuju lažne vesti o Srbiji na stranim jezicima](#), article published on August 22, 2024 at Beta news agency portal.

<sup>20</sup> [Vlada formira timove za praćenje stranih medija: Propaganda ili zaštita imidža Srbije?](#), author: Ž. Bošnjaković, article published on August 22, 2024 at Danas portal.

<sup>21</sup> [Navršava se 26 godina od otmice Đura Slavuja i Ranka Perenića](#), announcement published on August 21, 2024 at UNS portal.



Prishtina, in the "Božur" hotel, where refugees from Croatia were accommodated after Operation "Storm". On August 21, 1998, the two went to Zočište, to the Sveti Vrači monastery, in order to make a story about the return of monks kidnapped by the KLA.<sup>22</sup> On the road between Velika Hoča and Zočište, they were stopped by members of the KLA. From that moment, all traces of them are lost. Information about what happened - is still unknown today.

The fate or circumstances of the murder of the journalist and translator Aleksandar Simović, who disappeared in Prishtina on August 21, 1999, is not known either. Part of the remains was found in the village of Obrinje near Glogovac.<sup>23</sup> The head of EULEX at the time, Alexandra Papadopoulou, said in 2017 that it was "a war crime through and through."<sup>24</sup>

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

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

## III IMPLEMENTATION OF EXISTING LAWS

### Project co-financing

Tenders for project co-financing at the local level were announced in the municipalities of Temerin, Smederevska Palanka, Subotica, Irig, Bački Petrovac and Bačka Palanka.<sup>25</sup>

The Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS) announced that 45 out of a total of 167 local governments did not announce tenders for project co-financing of media content production projects in the field of public information for this year. The legal deadline for announcing the competition was March 1.<sup>26</sup>

When it comes to misuse of project co-financing, this phenomenon was also observed this month.

<sup>22</sup> [Novinari Ranko Perenić i Đuro Slavuj: Nestali na radnom zadatku pre 25 godina](#), author: Jelena L. Peković, source: International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), article published on August 22, 2023 at Javni servis portal.

<sup>23</sup> [Ubistvo Aleksandra Simovića Sime: Svedoka otmice ima, kidnaperi i ubice na slobodi](#), author: Jelena L. Petković, article published on December 27, 2018 at UNS portal.

<sup>24</sup> [Nesavesne istrage i ćutanje o zločinima nad novinarima u međunarodnim i kosovskim institucijama](#), article published on November 9, 2017 at UNS portal.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.uns.org.rs/desk/akcija.html?position=1>

<sup>26</sup> [Četvrtina lokalnih samouprava nije raspisala medijske konkurse; MIT: Pokrenućemo prekršajne postupke](#), author: K. Kovač Nastasić, article published on August 1, 2024 at UNS portal.

The practice of supporting projects that were not supported by the committee on allocation of funds continued. Although the Law on Public Information and Media stipulates that individual grants in the field of project co-financing cannot exceed 5% of the total funds allocated for the realization of the public interest, the Minister of Information and Telecommunications favored the decision to subsequently support projects that were not supported by the Commission through individual (discretionary) grants.

The former rulebook provided that individual benefits are given for projects that could not be planned at the time of the call for tenders (extraordinary circumstances, urgency of implementation, etc.). Unfortunately, such a provision no longer exists in that form and it is now clear that it is being misused in this way by the fact that unsupported media can apply for a competition with the same project.

### **The Committee of the National Assembly responsible for information ignored the Law on Electronic Media**

At the emergency session of the Council of the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM), held on June 3, 2024, a decision was made to submit an initiative to the Constitutional Court for the evaluation of the constitutionality of the provision of Article 126, paragraph 1 of the Law on Electronic Media, which stipulates that "Council members elected in accordance with the Law on electronic media continue to perform that function until the expiration of one year from the date of entry into force of this law".

Bearing in mind that the Law on Electronic Media entered into force at the beginning of November 2023, it is clear at the end of August 2024 that after one year from the date of entry into force of the law, it will not be possible to replace the existing members or appoint new members of the REM Council, which represents non-compliance with the Law on Electronic Media.

Responsibility for non-compliance with the said legal provision lies with the Committee of the National Assembly responsible for information. That Committee ignored the Law on Electronic Media, according to which it was required to publish a public call for nominations of candidates for Council members at the earliest six months, and at the latest three months before the end of the mandate, which means at the beginning of August 2024.

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

In the middle of August, the Civic Initiatives Association published a [report](#) in which it answers the following questions: Does the legislation in Serbia recognize the so-called SLAPP lawsuits? What consequences do activists and media suffer from SLAPP lawsuits? What should be done to protect those affected from the SLAPP phenomenon?

The report was prepared as part of the analysis ["From Silencing to Empowerment: The Regional Response to SLAPP Lawsuits in the Western Balkans"](#), conducted by the Balkan Civil Society Development Network. The Report includes an analysis of legal regulations and regulations in the Republic of Serbia and an assessment of the impact of SLAPP lawsuits on activists and the media. The report also contains several case studies on the basis of which the readers can familiarize themselves with the tactics and strategies used by both plaintiffs and defendants, as well as with recommendations for dealing with the challenges brought by the SLAPP phenomenon.

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