

MONITORING OF THE MEDIA SCENE IN SERBIA FOR THE MONTH OF OCTOBER 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

Dragoljub Simonović began serving his prison sentence for setting fire to the house of Milan Jovanović, the Žig Info portal journalist

At the beginning of October, the former president of the City Municipality of Grocka Dragoljub Simonović began serving the four-year prison sentence for instigating the burning of the house of Žig Info portal journalist Milan Jovanović.¹ More about the final verdict in that case in [the Monitoring of the Media Scene of Serbia for April 2024](#).

The director of the KoSSev media agency portal, Nevenka Medić, had her car damaged

On the night between October 12 and 13, in the center of Kosovska Mitrovica, in front of the building where she lives, the director of the portal and media agency KoSSev Nevenka Medić's car was damaged. KoSSev said that the damage was most likely caused by a flammable liquid. The case was reported to the Kosovo police, who took a statement from Medić, conducted an investigation and performed a forensic examination.² After the inspection and forensic processing of the damage, one of the three spots on the car was erased without Medić's knowledge and consent, according to her. The police did not answer the journalist's question as to why this was done.

The KoSSev portal reminded that this is not the first time that the KoSSev director's car has been damaged. Her private car, which was also used for news room purposes, was set on fire in the same street. That case remained without an epilogue.³

Professional associations have expressed concern for the safety of Nevenka Medić.⁴ They demand from the competent institutions that the case be clarified and the perpetrators punished as soon as possible.⁵

According to the data of the Association of Journalists of Serbia, 20 cases of endangerment of

¹ [Simonović u Zabeli zbog paljenja kuće novinara Milana Jovanovića: Zašto su morale da prođu godine od dela do izdržavanje kazne?](#), article published on October 15, 2024 at Nova.rs portal

² [Direktori KoSSeva oštećen automobil](#), article published on October 13, 2024 at KoSSev portal

³ Isto.

⁴ [Reporteri bez granica: Zabrinuti zbog verovatnog pokušaja zastrašivanja direktorice KoSSev portala](#), article published on October 14, 2024 at KoSSev portal

⁵ [SafeJournalists: Odmah istražiti namerno uništavanje automobila direktorke portala KoSSev](#), article published on October 14, 2024 at KoSSev portal

journalists have been recorded in Kosovo since the beginning of the year. In the first half of the year, journalists were mostly prevented from working (they had problems with translation, discrimination...). In the second half of the year, in Kosovska Mitrovica, Jedinstvo journalist Zoran Vlašković and Politika journalist Biljana Radomirović were physically attacked,⁶ and the journalists of Jedinstvo were thrown out of the premises they had been using for more than 20 years.

Since the beginning of the year, the Association of Journalists of Kosovo recorded 42 cases of attacks and pressure on journalists.

A first-instance verdict was handed down for pasting a "wanted warrant" against journalist Isidora Kovačević, Podrinjske media editor-in-chief

After more than a year of trial, the Basic Court in Šabac issued a (first-instance) verdict for endangering the safety of journalist Isidora Kovačević and two other persons. Milan Filipović from Šabac was sentenced to a total prison sentence of two years, after he was declared responsible for pasting "wanted warrants" with a photo of Kovačević. The event took place in 2021. In addition to the Kovačević's photo, the warrants also included photos of the lawyer Aleksandar Mijailović and Veljko Anđelić, who was a minor at the time. Underneath the picture of Isidora Kovačević was written "Media patron of the batterers", under the photo of Aleksandar Mijailović "Counselor of the batterers", and under the photo of Veljko Anđelić "Criminal".⁷

The verdict also determined the security measure of banning access and communication with the injured party, which will be applied after serving the prison sentence. The arrest warrants were posted after hooded persons, armed with sticks and hammers, beat the citizens who participated in the protest against the Rio Tinto company on the Šabac bridge. Isidora Kovačević reported from the bridge, giving the names and functions of members of the ruling party who beat the protesters. One of the attackers even ran an excavator at the gathered citizens.⁸

In her statement to Danas, Kovačević pointed out that, after the procedure was carried out, nothing is still known about the other participants in the intimidation, and that it is clear that the act of

⁶ [Monitoring of the media scene in Serbia for July 2024](#)

⁷ [Muškarac koji je lepio "poternice" za novinarkom iz Šapca Isidorom Kovačević osuđen na dve godine zatvora](#), author: Uglješa Bokić, article published on October 2, 2024 at Danas portal

⁸ Ibid.

intimidation could not have been carried out by only one person:

The Šabac police department, for reasons known to it, did not complete its work. We still don't know anything about the printing press, principals, coordinators and other 'distributors'. I want to believe that this verdict is just the beginning of this story and that the other participants will also be prosecuted.⁹

The case of Ljubomir Stefanović, author of the YouTube channel Slavija Info

Ljubomir Stefanović informed the public, professional associations and competent institutions that on October 11, 2024, he was unjustifiably taken to the premises of the Serbian Security Intelligence Agency (BIA). As he stated for the Danas portal, there was no hint that he would be taken for an interview that day.¹⁰

According to his testimony, he was traveling by car in Milovan Šaranović St. in Belgrade. When he was level with number 5, an unmarked car blocked his way. A light blue van stopped behind his car, from which "at least six" men - members of the BIA - got out. They forced him into a van and took him to the premises of the Vožovac Police Station. He spent a total of four hours there. During that time, his phone and car keys were temporarily confiscated. He was not allowed to call a lawyer or anyone else. Two members of the BIA spoke to him, who refused to introduce themselves to him. The topic of conversation was the reasons why Stefanović criticizes the President of the Republic of Serbia in his broadcasts. Stefanović was asked to change his editorial policy, which he refused. Because of that refusal, according to Stefanović, their threats followed: that, as they said, they would "fix" him with a five-year prison sentence and that they would bring to Pink TV a person who would accuse him of having violent sexual relations with her.

Stefanović emphasizes that no official statement was taken from him, which is why there are no minutes, that the conversation was not preceded by an invitation, and therefore there is no written record of the said event.¹¹

That is not the only pressure that Stefanović was exposed to. Twelve hours before the disputed event,

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ [Urednik portala "Slavija info": BIA me je kidnapovala](#), author: Uglješa Bokić, article published on October 21, 2024 at Danas portal

¹¹ Ibid.

five different inspections carried out surveillance in the premises where he was employed. While the conversation was going on in BIA, in the studio where Stefanović records shows, the electricity was turned off. According to Stefanović, during the last five years of work, he spent more than 197 hours in detention at the RS border crossings. He was stopped and searched almost 90 times. Stefanović particularly points out that his minor son also witnessed those stops and searches. Children's belongings, prepared for the summer or winter vacation, were also searched.

On October 28, 2024 Ljubomir Stefanović filed a criminal complaint against the director of the BIA and against 11 unknown persons, members of the BIA, due to the existence of grounds for suspicion that they committed the criminal offense of Abuse of official position under Article 359 of the CC, Unconscionable work in the service under Article 361 paragraph 1 of the CC and Unlawful deprivation of liberty from Article 132 paragraph 2 of the CC.

The said event was recorded on the platform The Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR), which is a mechanism for monitoring and responding to violations of media freedom in the member states of the European Union and in the candidate countries.¹²

Threats addressed to Nenad Kulačin, "The Good, the Bad, the Evil" TV show co-author on Nova S

Journalist Nenad Kulačin, after the broadcast of the show, was sent a direct message on the Instagram with the following content: "This needs to be done in short order. All three of them. I come forward voluntarily." The threats were reported to the Special Department for High-Tech Crime of the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade.

Threats to Jelena S. Spasić, Kurir media journalist

At the end of September, due to articles in which she dealt with the work of the Rajić brothers association "Diabetes revolution", journalist Jelena S. Spasić started receiving threatening messages. On that occasion, two persons, Dušan Rajić and Saša Mirović, were deprived of their liberty and detained for 48 hours. After being detained, Dušan Rajić was released, while Saša Mirović was placed

¹² [Journalist Ljubomir Stefanović allegedly abducted by Serbian security intelligence agency for criticising Serbian President \(2024-10-11\)](#)

under house arrest. It was announced that the prosecutor's office will file an indictment against Mitrović, which will charge him with the crime of endangering security. You can read more about the threats addressed to journalist Jelena S. Spasić in [the Monitoring the media scene in Serbia for September 2024](#).

Female journalists are more exposed to threats than male journalists

On October 15, a meeting of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists (PWG) was held in Prijepolje. At the meeting, it was noted that in the first nine months of 2024, according to the records of the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, 44 cases were filed in connection with threats and attacks on 38 individual persons - journalists. Of these, 17 are male (44.59%) and 22 are female journalists (56.41%). Journalists are particularly vulnerable to threats via the Internet (70% of the total number of cases). The threats directed at female journalists are more brutal, they abound with explicit threats of sexual violence and threats to the family. They are characterized by dehumanizing language, they are very disturbing, and in addition to the fear they produce, they also pose a serious challenge to the mental health of those to whom they are addressed.¹³

Frequent impunity in cases of threats directed at journalists results in distrust in institutions and refusal to report, as well as self-censorship, due to the assessment that dealing with a certain topic endangers one's own safety and the safety of the family.¹⁴

Due to the increase in the number of threats directed at journalists, the PWG undertook to initiate discussions and activities in order to develop new mechanisms for their protection.¹⁵

According to the records of the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office for October, the number of cases increased by three compared to September, and there are currently 47 in total. During October, one female journalist was threatened, so the new statistics are as follows: the number of injured male persons remained the same (17, i.e. 42.50%), while the number of female journalists who were attacked increased to 23 (57.50%).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ [Novinarke više izložene pretnjama od novinara](#), article published on October 16, 2024 at Bezbedni novinari portal

Anniversaries of the murders of journalists from Kosovo

Bekim Kastrati, a journalist of the Bota Sot newspaper, was shot and killed on October 19, 2001, in the village of Lauš, northwest of Pristina. According to Reporters Without Borders, Kastrati was traveling in a car with two men when they were overtaken by a jeep from which they were shot. One of the men Kastrati was traveling with was also killed, while the third was wounded.¹⁶ The case was never solved.

The Washington-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) announced it was conducting an investigation to determine whether the killing could be linked to Kastrati's press call.¹⁷ The OSCE report from June 2002 stated that "the murder of two Kosovo journalists - Šefki Popova and Bekim Kastrati, as well as cases of threats against other journalists who investigated corruption, crime or drug trafficking, warn of the power of the underground in Kosovo."¹⁸

II MONITORING OF THE PROCESS OF ADOPTION OF NEW LAWS

The public debate on the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on Advertising ended on October 20. When it comes to regulating the field of advertising, media associations continued to point out key issues that should be regulated by the Law on Advertising, which was not done by the existing draft.

State advertising has been one of the key obstacles for the free operation of the media for years, since it enables the control of the media by the politicians in power. With the draft law on amendments to the Law on Advertising, state advertising has not been placed in the legal framework. Media associations demanded that state bodies and companies be required to make public information on how much money they give for advertising and to whom they allocate those funds. According to BIRN's research, local public and utility companies in the previous period most often allocated funds by "[direct contracting with eligible media](#)", which means that the procedure of public [procurement of media services](#) was avoided.¹⁹

¹⁶ [Reporters Without Borders Annual Report 2002 - F.R. Yugoslavia | Refworld](#)

¹⁷ [Journalist murdered in drive-by shooting](#)

¹⁸ [Kosovo journalists under threat | OSCE](#)

¹⁹ [Novi Zakon o oglašavanju ne rešava državno oglašavanje](#), authors: Radmilo Marković & Gordana Andrić, article published on October 19, 2024 at BIRN portal

In their comments on the draft law, eight media and civic associations and organizations - CRTA, Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS), Media Association, Online Media Association, Branch Union of Culture, Arts and Media "Nezavisnost", Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV), The Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation and the Business Association of the Association of Local Independent Media Local Press - demanded that the concept of state advertising be precisely defined and the criteria based on which advertising funds will be awarded; ban state advertising in the media that violates laws and standards of professional ethics and that, respecting the European Law on Media Freedom, rules on audience measurement be prescribed.²⁰

It is recalled that the working group for drafting the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on Advertising was formed in May of the previous year without representatives of media associations. The meeting organized by the OSCE, held before the formation of the working group, was attended by the head of the OSCE mission, Jan Braathu, the head of the EU delegation, Emanuel Giaufret, the ambassador of the Kingdom of Norway, Kristin Melsom, representatives of the media community, the then prime minister, Ana Brnabić, and the then minister of information and telecommunications Mihailo Jovanovic. At the meeting, it was agreed that representatives of media and journalist associations should be members of the Working Group. That agreement was not respected.²¹

III IMPLEMENTATION OF EXISTING LAWS

Project co-financing

The Association of Journalists of Serbia published the results of a research that showed that this year, almost 600 million dinars less than the previous year, was allocated for the co-financing of media content production projects in the field of public information. Since the introduction of project co-financing, this is the most drastic reduction in the amount allocated to media projects.²²

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ [U dvoboju sa državom](#), author: Izabela Branković, article published on November 20, 2024 at NUNS portal

²² [Najdrastičniji pad od 2015. godine: Za medije ove godine skoro 600 miliona dinara manje nego prethodne](#), author: K. Kovač Nastasić, article published on October 29, 2024 at UNS portal

IV SLAPP LAWSUITS DIRECTED AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND THE MEDIA

The MFRR organization expressed serious concern about the legal pressures faced by journalists of the KRIK portal. The MFRR particularly points to the problematic nature of the criminal proceedings against Stevan Dojčinović and Bojana Pavlović, following a lawsuit filed by judge Dušanka Đorđević and her lawyer husband, in which a prison sentence and a ban on journalism are demanded for the journalists. The statement signed by the International Press Institute (IPI), Free Press Unlimited (FPU) and OBC Transeuropa (OBCT) expressed the belief that the said case is part of a wider campaign aimed at silencing KRIK, due to its investigative journalism. The announcement states:

The outcome [of the case] will be a test for the independence of the Serbian judiciary and commitment to the rule of law. It will also be a test of the judiciary's ability to ensure a fair trial and to ensure that presiding judges are not unduly influenced in their sentencing [...] A conviction would have a chilling effect on the media and potentially spell the end of investigative journalism in the public interest in the country.

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