

REPORT ON THE PROTECTION OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM OF SERBIA

ABUSE, IMPUNITY,
INADEQUATE INSTITUTIONAL
RESPONSE

FOURTH REPORT

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– an Analysis of Civil Court Proceedings in Media Disputes

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Criminal Law Protection of Journalists in Serbia in 2024 and 2025:

Media Freedom Trapped in a Downward Spiral

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SUMMARY

THE RISING ABUSE OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND THE ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS REMAIN WITHOUT AN ADEQUATE INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE.

The Fourth Report of the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation on the protection of freedom of expression in the judicial system of Serbia records a continuous increase in the abuse of freedom of expression, a failure to comply with the obligation of journalistic diligence, and increasingly frequent hate speech in pro-government media, which are included in this analysis precisely due to their frequent violations of professional standards. The analysed **media disputes** demonstrate that sensationalism, violation of honour and reputation, and violations of the presumption of innocence and the right to privacy are on the rise.

The analysis of the practice of civil courts in media disputes covers the period from July 2024 to the end of 2025. It encompasses proceedings against media outlets for which the monitoring of the Press Council showed that they most frequently violate the Journalists' Code of Ethics of Serbia, namely: *Alo*, *Informer*, *Kurir*, *Srpski telegraf*, *Republika.rs* (the portal of *Srpski telegraf*), and *Večernje novosti*. In addition, the analysis covers the daily newspaper *Danas* and the newspaper *Nova*, which the Press Council determined had the fewest violations of the Code, as well as the investigative portal *KRIK*.

It is visible that the number of media disputes is on the rise each year. In the observed period (a year and a half), a total of **2,480** cases were registered in the "P3" registry kept for this type of disputes, of which 396 were resolved by the end of 2025.

The analysis of finally adjudicated proceedings shows significant differences in the success rates of plaintiffs depending on the media outlet against which the proceedings were conducted; i.e., differences can be observed between the media for which the Press Council establishes that they most frequently violate the Journalists' Code of Ethics and those that have the fewest violations of the Code.

In the analysed proceedings against *Informer*, *Kurir*, *Alo*, *Novosti*, *Srpski telegraf*, and *Republika*, the claim was granted in its entirety or partially in 93.70% of the analysed cases concluded by a final judgment. In contrast, in

cases against the media outlets *Danas*, *Nova*, and *KRIK*, a significantly lower success rate of plaintiffs was recorded. Against *Danas* and *KRIK*, a small number of cases were finally adjudicated in the observed period and, in general, fewer proceedings were initiated compared to the other observed media outlets. In the cases against *Nova*, the claim was partially granted in 29.16% of the analysed proceedings (or in 41.17% of the final and binding ones). In proceedings against the newspaper *Danas*, the claim was dismissed in its entirety in 57.14% of the proceedings (four out of seven). In three cases (42.85%), the claim was partially granted. In proceedings against *KRIK*, the claim was partially granted in 50% of the final and binding proceedings (or in two out of four proceedings).

The amount of requested damages was also analysed, as excessively high claims can indicate SLAPP lawsuits. It was observed that high compensation claims (over one million dinars) are more frequent against media outlets that rarely violate the Code and that report critically about the authorities. Bearing in mind the total number of proceedings conducted against them, the submitted claims amounting to more than one million dinars are significantly more prevalent against the media outlets *Nova* and *KRIK*.

One of the observed problems is the persistent repetition of the same violations by the same media outlets, infringing upon the rights of the same plaintiffs, most frequently opposition politicians. The analysed court cases clearly indicate that certain opposition politicians have been exposed to continuous negative campaigns in pro-government media for years. Articles of identical or similar content are published about the same individual without verifying the truthfulness of the allegations. This problem is further deepened by the low amounts of awarded damages, which are obviously not adapted to the frequency and severity of the violations so as to have a deterrent effect.

In proceedings against print media and portals, the average compensation awarded by the first-instance court amounts to 97,515 dinars. When it comes to final and binding proceedings, the awarded amount of compensation averages 95,405 dinars. In many cases, amounts of 40,000 or 30,000 dinars were awarded, and in one case, a record-low amount of 20,000 dinars was recorded. The proceedings take a long time, even though they are considered urgent. The average duration of media disputes in the period covered is about two years. Long-lasting proceedings result in compensation that is insufficient to prevent future abuses, raising the question of the extent to which such low amounts provide adequate satisfaction for the violation of rights.

During the observed period, cases were also recorded in which the plaintiffs were minors. Since previous reports did not identify such cases, this indicates a further collapse of professional standards of journalism. Judicial protection is neither sufficient nor effective enough to curb violations of the rights protected in media disputes and to improve the manner of media reporting. Instead, the already poor situation is deteriorating.

Regarding protection against **SLAPP lawsuits**, bearing in mind that the European Union and the Council of Europe have adopted important standards to combat SLAPPs over the past three years, the main conclusion of the analysis is that their practical application is still delayed, and that most states have not yet aligned their legislation with the new regulations. Furthermore, Serbia still lacks an effective response to the problem of SLAPP lawsuits, despite direct warnings from the European Commission and the rising number of cases that seriously threaten the work of investigative media, journalists, and civil society organisations. Finally, although numerous international standards exist and training for judicial office-holders is occasionally implemented, the analysis highlights that without clear legal solutions and genuine political and institutional will, the protection of freedom of expression from the abuse of court proceedings remains limited and insufficiently effective.

The analysis of the **criminal law protection of journalists** covers the years 2024 and 2025, as well as the first three months of 2026. In 2025, a record-high number of reported criminal offences against journalists was recorded (134), while a very small number of convictions were rendered – only three in cases established in 2025. In addition, a very small number of cases from 2025 reached the court at all – only four at the moment of the conclusion of this report.

The report shows that certain newsrooms are frequently the targets of violence, threats, intimidation, and interference with their work, and that criminal complaints filed because of this are not considered with special caution; instead, they happen to be lightly and routinely dismissed.

The safety of journalists is further jeopardised by daily verbal attacks on critical media outlets launched by ruling party politicians and high-ranking state officials, thereby signalling that the targeting of journalists is socially acceptable. The atmosphere of lynch campaigns, created by the highest representatives of the authorities, on the one hand, incites the commission of violence against journalists, and on the other hand, discourages institutions from providing journalists with the necessary protection.

Criminal offences committed against journalists are frequently treated without taking into account freedom of expression and the connection between the committed act and the journalistic work. In this manner, the practice also deviates from the guidelines for prosecutors drafted by UNESCO and the International Association of Prosecutors, which, *inter alia*, provide for conducting a contextual analysis of the link between the alleged crime and the media activities of the victim, both past and present. Taking into account the media environment when making decisions in proceedings concerning criminal offences against journalists can lead to an improvement of the media environment and the degree of safety of journalists, through a more effective institutional response to cases of violence and threats to which journalists are exposed.

In addition to the general obligations that states have regarding the protection of freedom of expression, it follows, *inter alia*, from the practice of international courts and human rights bodies that journalists reporting from protests that may become violent must be protected by police forces. This is yet another “test” where the protection of the safety of journalists in Serbia, especially in the last year and a half, has remained far below the level required by international human rights standards in the field of freedom of expression. Since the end of 2024, violence against journalists has intensified precisely in the context of reporting from the protests that followed the collapse of the canopy at the recently renovated Novi Sad railway station. Police officers not only fail to provide journalists with adequate protection from violence while reporting at protests, but frequently attack journalists themselves or stand by as passive observers of the attacks.

Inadequate processing of attacks by the police undermines the safety of journalists in multiple ways, because apart from sending a discouraging message to journalists, it simultaneously signals to police officers that unlawful conduct by the police is not accompanied by corresponding consequences. Both the actions and omissions of the police further contribute to protests becoming a dangerous place for performing journalistic work, and to journalism in Serbia becoming a risky profession.

At the beginning of January 2026, a judgment of the Supreme Court of Serbia was published, which, in proceedings following a request for the protection of legality, determined that the acquittal in the case of the murder of journalist Slavko Ćuruvija was rendered with substantial breaches of the rules of procedure in favour of the defendants who are former members of state security. However, due to procedural limitations under the Criminal Proce-

dure Code, the Supreme Court could only establish substantive violations of criminal procedure, without affecting the final and binding nature of the acquittal. The Ćuruvija case was the only case of a journalist's murder that reached a court and that could have broken a decades-long chain of impunity. However, instead of access to justice, the conclusion of the nine-year proceedings led only to a legalistic end to a state crime. Such an outcome represents a clear and worrying indicator of the state of criminal law protection of freedom of expression in Serbia, which continues to collapse in the shadow of impunity.

The scale of violence against journalists has become worrying, especially over the past year and a half and in the context of protests. The absence of an adequate response from institutions can have a stimulating effect on potential attackers of journalists and lead to a further deterioration of the level of media freedom. Looking at the criminal law protection of journalists over the past two years, it cannot be concluded that the competent institutions have sent a clear message that violence against journalists is unacceptable and will be appropriately sanctioned.

The collapse of the level of media freedom culminated on the day of the local elections, 29 March 2026, when journalists were beaten, attacked with an axe, insulted, and obstructed in their work, while their equipment was destroyed and seized. The violence experienced by journalists on that day represents a serious warning that the institutional response must be far more efficient in order to prevent a further escalation of violence and impunity for violence against journalists.

CIVIL LAW PROTECTION OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION – an analysis of civil court proceedings in media disputes

INTRODUCTION

The fourth analysis by the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation on the protection of freedom of expression before the courts covers the period from mid-2024 to the end of 2025. It records a continuous rise in the abuse of freedom of expression, a failure to adhere to the duty of journalistic due diligence, and an increasingly frequent occurrence of hate speech within pro-government media outlets. These outlets have been included in this analysis precisely because of their persistent violations of professional standards. Sensationalism, infringements on honour and reputation, and disregard for the presumption of innocence, as well as breaches of the right to privacy, are all on the rise.

Simultaneously, media outlets independent of government control are facing mounting pressure, which significantly hampers their operations and restricts the space for expressing diverse opinions.

Critical reporting on the authorities is labelled by high-ranking state officials as an ‘attack on the state’ or the ‘undermining of Serbia’. Simultaneously, critical media outlets are being discredited and branded as ‘tycoon media’, ‘foreign mercenaries’, ‘terrorist organisation headquarters’, ‘fake journalists’, ‘media poisoning the minds of citizens’, ‘evil factories’, and similar derogatory terms.¹ When it comes to media outlets that, flouting journalistic standards, actively employ this rhetoric to discredit critical journalists and stifle any criticism of the authorities, no adequate response is yet in sight.

The analysed court cases clearly demonstrate that certain opposition politicians have for years been subjected to a media lynch campaign by pro-government outlets, a practice that is both recurring and intensifying. These media outlets continuously publish articles of identical or similar content concerning the same individual, without verifying the veracity of the allegations. Court decisions are ignored and have virtually no impact on altering practices, reporting methods, or compliance with legal norms.

1 · For more details, see Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, *Targeted by Power – Monthly overview of incidents in which officials in Serbia, from positions of power, intimidate and target critical journalists and media outlets*, available at <https://www.slavkocuruvijafondacija.rs/en/targeted-by-power/>.

Even in cases where the abuse of freedom of expression is condemned and judicial protection is granted, such protection can neither be considered effective nor capable of producing a deterrent effect.

During the period covered by this analysis, there were also several cases involving minor plaintiffs. In one instance, parents filed a lawsuit for the violation of their right to reverence following the publication of their child's name and photos from the child's funeral, despite their explicit objections. Given that the previous analysis did not identify any cases initiated on behalf of minors, **it is evident that a further degradation of professional journalistic standards has occurred in articles concerning minors in the meantime.** While inadequate and sensationalist reporting on the mass shooting at the "Vladislav Ribnikar" Elementary School undoubtedly contributed to this trend, not all cases involving violations of minors' rights were related to that specific event.

SCOPE OF ANALYSIS AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The analysis of civil court jurisprudence in the so-called media disputes covers the period from 1 July 2024 to the end of December 2025. The analysis focuses on disputes involving defendant media outlets that—according to Press Council monitoring—most frequently violate the Journalists' Code of Ethics, namely: *Alo*, *Informer*, *Kurir*, *Srpski telegraf*, *Republika.rs* (the online portal of *Srpski telegraf*), and *Večernje novosti*.² In addition, the analysis covers the daily newspaper *Danas* and the *Nova* newspaper, which the Press Council identified as having the fewest deviations from the Code, as well as the investigative portal *KRIK*.³ Cases against *KRIK* were analysed separately due to the specific nature of this outlet's operations, and because its journalists engage exclusively in investigative journalism and reporting on criminal trials in particularly sensitive cases of high public interest. Furthermore, this outlet is frequently highlighted as a target of SLAPP lawsuits, making it crucial to examine court conduct in the specific cases brought against *KRIK*.

2 · See Press Council, *Results of monitoring the compliance with the Code of Journalists of Serbia in daily newspapers in the period from 1 July to 31 December 2025*, available at

<https://savetzastampu.rs/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Monitoring-verzija-3.pdf>

3 · Proceedings against *KRIK* were analysed, *inter alia*, because international media organisations and investigative initiatives such as Global Freedom of Expression (Columbia University) point out that *KRIK* is often a victim of SLAPP lawsuits. See, for example, Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Trans-europa, Massimo Moratti, *Self-defence against SLAPPs in Serbia*, 11 December 2024, available at https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/en/cp_article/self-defence-against-slapps-in-serbia/.

It is evident that **the number of media disputes is on the rise each year**. There is also an increase in the number of proceedings initiated by the same plaintiffs against specific pro-government media outlets.

According to data obtained through requests for access to information of public importance from the Higher Court in Belgrade,⁴ the sole court competent for media disputes in Serbia – a total of **2,480** cases were registered in the ‘P3’ registry (designated for this type of dispute) during the observed period, of which 396 were resolved. A total of 148 decisions became final and binding. In the same period, 976 cases were initiated in the ‘Gž3’ registry of the Court of Appeal following appeals against first-instance decisions. The court does not possess data on the number of cases involving appeals against judgments versus those involving appeals against decisions.⁵ The Supreme Court sent a notification⁶ that a total of 24 cases had been received concerning appeals on points of law (revision) during the designated period, and four cases had been resolved.

A unique analysis was conducted for each media outlet, separately examining data for different plaintiffs and defendants to determine whether there is disparate court treatment based on the status and activity of the plaintiffs or the frequency of Code of Ethics violations by the defendants.

The analysis was based on data from obtained judgments, court websites, the automated case management system (Libra), and information provided by the competent courts. Necessary elements were identified to analyse the length of proceedings at all three instances and compliance with statutory deadlines. The analysis of the judgments established the amounts of requested and awarded damages, as well as whether the courts relied on international instruments and standards in their decisions. Particular consideration was given to cases where the same plaintiff initiates proceedings against media outlets that repeatedly violate the plaintiff’s rights. Furthermore, it was analysed whether the court took into account the journalists’ right to freedom of expression and whether there was an abuse of this right against the plaintiffs’ rights. Finally, the analysis examined how the court, in specific situations, ensures the protection of the rights of both parties to the proceedings.

4 · Letter from the Higher Court in Belgrade Su II-17a No. 212/25 of 15 January 2026.

5 · Letter from the Court of Appeal in Belgrade Su II 17a 105/25 of 13 January 2026.

6 · Letter from the Supreme Court Su II 17A 62/25 of 22 December 2025.

It was established that courts continue to maintain electronic records of defendants based solely on the designated first defendant. Consequently, it is not possible to obtain all data from the court, as a requester cannot know who was designated as the first defendant in each specific lawsuit.

The primary source of law for this analysis is the Law on Public Information and Media (LPIM)⁷, which regulates the substance of the freedom of public information, reporting on matters of public interest, the protection of media pluralism, and the prohibition of monopolies in this field. It also covers the transparency of media ownership data, enabling the public to form their own opinions on the credibility and reliability of information, ideas, and opinions published in the media, to assess the possible influence of the media on public opinion, and to protect media pluralism.⁸ The Law further specifies the status of elected, appointed, or nominated public and political officials, who are duty-bound to tolerate the expression of critical opinions regarding the results of their work or the policies they implement, in connection with the performance of their duties.⁹ Furthermore, the Law defines the obligation of due journalistic diligence, the public interest in the field of public information, and the duties of editors and journalists.¹⁰ Specific rights and obligations in public information are regulated, concerning the presumption of innocence, the publication of information related to criminal proceedings, the prohibition of hate speech, exemptions from liability, the protection of minors, and the prohibition of the public display of pornography.¹¹ The Law also contains provisions regulating personal data.¹² It prescribes the required content of a lawsuit¹³, active and passive legal standing (*locus standi*), the temporary prohibition of the re-publication of information, and judicial penalties.¹⁴

It is provided that a plaintiff may request the court to issue an interim measure prohibiting an editor-in-chief from re-publishing the same information

7 · LPIM, "Official Gazette of RS", No. 92/23 and 51/25.

8 · *Ibid*, Art. 5-7.

9 · *Ibid*, Art. 8.

10 · *Ibid*, Art. 9 and 15.

11 · *Ibid*, Art. 84 and Art. 86-89.

12 · *Ibid*, Chapter XII. The Law establishes the right to dignity (honour and reputation, or reverence) and the right to authenticity (Art. 90), private life and personal records (Art. 91). It regulates the consent of other persons (Art. 92) and cases where consent for publication is not required (Art. 93). The Law also prescribes other forms of judicial protection. *Ibid*, Chapter XIV.

13 · *Ibid*, Art. 112.

14 · *Ibid*, Art. 113-115.

or recording, if such publication would violate the rights or interests of the person, lasting at most until the final conclusion of the proceedings. The plaintiff must demonstrate a probable specific danger that the information will be re-published and that this would violate their rights or interests. A decision on the motion must be rendered within 48 hours, and an objection may be filed within the same time limit.¹⁵

Given the issues regarding reporting on criminal proceedings, the Law devotes particular attention to this matter, regulating the right to publish information, the deadline for requests, the content of the information and the timeframe for its publication, as well as the grounds for non-publication.¹⁶

During the period covered by the analysis, the court also ruled on the merits of claims under the provisions of the previous Law on Public Information and Media (LPIM)¹⁷, in a smaller number of cases where the lawsuit had been filed during its validity, but remained pending on the date the new Law entered into force. The new LPIM¹⁸ entered into force on 4 November 2023 and applies to cases initiated by lawsuits filed after that date. However, apart from changes to certain statutory deadlines and the overall structure of the Law, its substance remains unchanged.¹⁹

APPLICATION OF INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS, ECTHR JUDGMENTS AND THE JOURNALISTS' CODE OF ETHICS IN THE ANALYSED JUDGMENTS

Out of a total of 339 analysed judgments (first-instance, second-instance and judgments upon revision), courts at all levels, in a large number of judgments, referred to the provisions of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (the ECHR), while the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights were cited somewhat less frequently. It is observed that courts more frequently rely on national laws in which provisions and principles from international instruments have been incorporated.

15 · *Ibid*, Art. 116.

16 · *Ibid*, Chapter XV.

17 · "Official Gazette of RS", No. 83/14, 58/15, 12/16.

18 · "Official Gazette of RS", No. 92/23 and 51/25.

19 · See, for example, Snežana Marjanović, Dragana Marčetić, "Media Law Through Case-Law", *Lege Artis*, March 2026.

In a certain number of judgments, European standards are utilised very well, and courts refer to specific decisions from the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (the ECtHR). Nevertheless, it remains noticeable that ECtHR decisions are more frequently cited in cases attracting greater public interest. Courts refer more often to older decisions, although there are also judgments citing more recent ECtHR judgments, as well as decisions rendered against Serbia. The provisions of the Journalists' Code of Ethics of Serbia are cited in a smaller number of judgments, predominantly when reasoning the failure to comply with the duty of journalistic diligence.

MEDIA COVERED BY THE ANALYSIS

The analysis covers: *Kurir* (11 cases, 22 judgments), *Srpski telegraf* (26 cases, 51 judgments), *Republika* (21 cases, 41 judgments), *Informer* (42 cases, 82 judgments), *Nova* (24 cases, 48 judgments), *Novosti* (12 cases, 24 judgments), *Alo* (41 cases, 80 judgments), *KRIK* (5 cases), *Danas* (seven cases, 13 judgments).²⁰

For the first time, media disputes involving television channels as defendants were analysed, primarily due to the fact that the Council of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM), which is competent to decide on complaints from citizens whose rights have been violated on television, has not been functioning for a long period. This is because the mandate of all its members expired by operation of law on 4 November 2024, and the National Assembly failed to elect new members. Given that compensation for damages can be sought in media disputes pursuant to the Law on Public Information and Media (LPIM) before the competent Higher Court in Belgrade, it was important to analyse the cases against these media outlets as well, in order to determine, *inter alia*, who the plaintiffs are and how the court protects their rights if they are violated, as well as how it assesses freedom of speech and opinion when it comes to this type of media. The analysis encompasses television channels holding national broadcasting licences, as well as the television channels *Nova S* and *N1*.

20 · Bearing in mind the large number of judgments rendered during the period covered by the analysis, as well as the limited capacity of the Higher Court in Belgrade (acting as the first-instance court in media disputes) regarding the anonymisation of judgments requested through applications for access to information of public importance, following an inspection of the list of final and legally binding cases, a smaller number of cases was selected to be provided.

LENGTH OF PROCEEDINGS

When it comes to the duration of “media disputes”, the applicable LPIM establishes special procedural rules and determines which persons may act as plaintiffs and who must be sued as a party to the proceedings. The type of liability of journalists, editors and publishers is prescribed, strict liability and joint and several liability are regulated, as well as the instances where liability is excluded.²¹ The Law stipulates that a lawsuit for compensation for damages must be filed within six months from the date of publication of the information.²²

Proceedings in this type of dispute are **urgent**²³, and in accordance with this principle, the other provisions of the Law have been enacted for its realisation. A statement of defence is not requested and is not mandatory. A preparatory hearing is not provided for, and the main hearing is scheduled within eight days of receipt of the lawsuit. The court renders and publicly pronounces the judgment immediately upon the conclusion of the main hearing, and a certified copy of the judgment is served on the parties within three days from the date the judgment was rendered. The time-limit for filing an appeal is eight days from the date of service of the judgment, and it is served on the opposing party without delay, who may submit a response within three days. The case file is then forwarded within five days to the second-instance court, which decides on the appeal within eight days of receipt of the appeal and the case file.

In the event of a change of the editor-in-chief, and if the plaintiff does not amend the lawsuit prior to the conclusion of the main hearing, the lawsuit is dismissed. The consent of the defendant is not required for the amendment of the lawsuit, and the court will not allow it if it determines that it constitutes an abuse of procedural powers. If the editor-in-chief changes after the judgment becomes legally binding, the established obligations transfer to the new editor, except for the obligation to compensate for damages.²⁴

Unless otherwise provided by this Law, the provisions of the Law on Civil Procedure (LCP) shall apply.

The significance of urgency in this type of dispute is also reflected in the

21 · *Ibid*, Art. 123-127.

22 · *Ibid*, Art. 129.

23 · *Ibid*, Art. 133-137.

24 · *Ibid*, Art. 139.

authority granted to the president of the court to, upon the motion of the plaintiff and without delay, reassign the case to another panel, provided that all actions taken remain valid and do not have to be repeated.²⁵ A departure from the general rules of civil procedure is permitted in this situation, based on the conditions established by law.

The analysis shows that the statutory time-limits provided for are still not consistently respected. Although a certain improvement has been observed compared to data from earlier reports,²⁶ the efficiency of the courts is still not satisfactory.

The longest total proceedings lasted 6 years and 1 month, while the shortest lasted 3 months. The average duration of media disputes in this period is around 2 years (23.9 months).

The longest first-instance proceedings lasted 5 years and 9 months (under a lawsuit filed by a public figure from the entertainment industry against the media outlet *Alo*), while the shortest lasted 2 months. The average duration of first-instance proceedings was 19 and a half months.

The longest second-instance proceedings lasted 2 years and 2 months, and such a length of appellate proceedings constitutes an exception. The average duration of second-instance proceedings was nearly 5 months.

On average, 4.7 hearings were scheduled per case.

Although the statutory time-limit was not met, in the largest number of cases, first-instance judgments are drafted within 15–30 days, and a smaller number even within eight days.

Cases in which the plaintiffs are politicians, public officials and public figures from the entertainment industry, as a rule, last the longest, as hearings are frequently adjourned, sometimes for longer periods, due to the plaintiffs' inability to attend the hearing. Apart from this difference, when it comes to the length of proceedings, it has not been established that there is any differential treatment by the courts regarding plaintiffs of different professions and statuses, nor when the defendants are the so-called pro-government or independent media.

25 · *Ibid*, Art. 140.

26 · Report *Protection of Freedom of Speech in the Judicial System of Serbia for the period from 2017 to the end of 2020 and Is There Justice for Freedom of Expression* (for the period from 2021 to the middle of 2023). Both reports can be read at <https://www.slavkocuruvijafondacija.rs/en/>.

NOTE:

Tables with the length of proceedings data for all media outlets are provided in the appendix

AMOUNT OF COMPENSATION FOR DAMAGES

When it comes to deciding on the amount of compensation for damages, a specific article of the LPIM stipulates that the court shall particularly assess whether the plaintiff attempted to mitigate the damage by using other legal remedies in accordance with the provisions of this Law, as well as whether the defendant prevented the plaintiff from mitigating the damage by publishing a reply, a correction, or other information.²⁷ In determining the amount of compensation, the court shall, with regard to the merits and the amount of the claim, assess the provision of Article 200 of the Law on Obligations (the LOO), as the general law.

During the observed period, no significant change was noted in the amount of awarded damages compared to the period covered by earlier analyses, even in proceedings where the same media outlet repeatedly publishes the same or similar unverified information about the same plaintiff against whom a judgment has already been rendered within the same timeframe due to the abuse of freedom of speech and opinion, non-compliance with the legally prescribed method of reporting, as well as principles relating to the duty of journalistic diligence and informing in the public interest.

The highest amount of (non-pecuniary) damages was sought by a public official, in the amount of 3,900,000 dinars, while the lowest amount sought during this period was 60,000 dinars. The highest sought amount of compensation for **pecuniary** damages was put forward in the lawsuits against *KRIK* (£320,000²⁸) and *Nova* (11,700,000 dinars, or €99,990).

In 11 lawsuits, a claim was put forward in **an amount exceeding one million dinars**, most notably against *Nova* – in six (25%) out of a total of 24 analysed cases, followed by two cases against *Srpski telegraf*, and one case each in the proceedings against the media outlets *Alo*, *Danas* and *KRIK*. **Bearing in mind the total number of proceedings pending against them, the submitted**

27 · LPIM, Art. 12.

28 · The judgment states the value of the dispute as £320,000, while the court portal shows an amount of 55,000,000.

claims amounting to more than one million dinars are significantly more prevalent in the case of the media outlets Nova, Danas and KRIK. Here, it is important to recall that disproportionately high claims for compensation for damages constitute one of the criteria taken into account when assessing whether a case involves SLAPP lawsuits.

It is noticeable that the sought amounts against the daily *Nova* are, on average, higher compared to the average amounts sought in proceedings against other analysed media. On average, a claim for compensation for damages was put forward in the amount of 1,250,000 dinars. In addition to the record-high claim by the company ‘Millennium Team’ against *Nova*, which sought compensation for damages in the amount of 11,750,000 dinars, a public official sought 2,700,000 dinars, while a politician and a group of citizens sought 2,000,000 dinars each. One plaintiff, an actor, filed two lawsuits in which he determined the amount at 1,000,000 dinars each.

The highest **awarded amount of compensation for damages** was 820,000 dinars (in a case against the media outlet *Alo*, which involved **multiple persons on the plaintiff’s side**/family members of a deceased person to whom the disputed text related). It is interesting that in this case, the second-instance court increased the awarded amount of compensation by a total of 200,000 dinars (from 620,000 to 820,000). When deciding on a fair amount of compensation for the violation of the right to respect for the memory of the deceased (right to reverence), the Court of Appeal, *inter alia*, took into account that the deceased family member of the plaintiffs was placed within a criminal milieu by the disputed text, which could put the plaintiffs, as his close relatives, in danger in the context of clan vendettas. The amount of the awarded compensation was increased by the decision of the Court of Appeal in order to provide the plaintiffs with moral satisfaction for the violated right to respect for the memory of the deceased, proportionately to the intensity of the mental anguish they suffered.²⁹

The highest amount of compensation for damages awarded to an **individual** amounted to **500,000 dinars** (awarded to the plaintiff – the mother of a minor child killed at the “Vladislav Ribnikar” Elementary School, in proceedings in which *Srpski telegraf et al.* were the defendants). The lowest awarded amounts of compensation in several judgments amounted to 30,000 dinars, while in one proceeding against *Alo*, a mere **20,000** dinars was awarded, which was also the lowest awarded amount in this period, under

29 · Court of Appeal in Belgrade, Gž3 12/25.

a lawsuit filed by the wife of an accused citizen. In one case against **Kurir**, a mere **25,000** dinars was awarded, under a lawsuit filed by a female citizen unknown to the public. Those proceedings lasted a total of three years and four months, four hearings were held, and it thus follows that the judicial mechanism was engaged in order to award a compensation amount of a mere 25,000 dinars after lengthy proceedings.

In proceedings against print media and portals, the average compensation awarded before the first-instance court amounts to **97,515** dinars. On average, a legally binding compensation amount of **95,405** dinars was awarded.³⁰ Below is a tabular representation of the average awarded amounts of compensation for damages individually for the observed print media and portals.

Media	First-instance awarded damages	Legally binding awarded damages
Kurir	66,500	49,166
Srpski telegraf	114,231	106,400
Informer	89,211	88,157
Novosti	90,417	90,417
Alo	110,556	110,000
Republika	115,000	113,000
Nova	82,352	62,500
Danas	56,667	43,333
KRIK	43,333	50,000

It could hardly be said that the awarded non-pecuniary damages constitute adequate, fair compensation, considering the nature of the established violations. It can also hardly be concluded that this type of dispute involves SLAPP lawsuits. The courts frequently awarded damages in the range of 40,000 to 60,000 dinars, and those proceedings sometimes lasted longer than two years, some even longer than four years, with multiple hearings being scheduled. The judicial mechanism is activated in order to award an amount of damages that is clearly not adequate to prevent future similar violations of rights, even in relation to the same plaintiffs, and it is questionable to what extent such an awarded amount constitutes real satisfaction for the violated rights.

30 · The proceedings taken into account were those against print media and portals, namely: *Kurir*, *Srpski telegraf*, *Informer*, *Nova*, *Novosti*, *Alo*, *Republika.rs*, *Danas* and *KRIK*.

As a rule, the awarded amounts of damages are significantly lower than those sought. The solution to the problem should therefore also be sought in increasing the efficiency of the proceedings, in order to achieve adequate satisfaction through the amount of damages awarded and to reduce the uncertainty for the defendants regarding what the amount of awarded damages might be and how long the proceedings might last.

ANALYSIS OF MEDIA DISPUTES IN RELATION TO THE OBSERVED PRINT MEDIA

In numerous cases, the published texts cross the threshold of hate speech, convey false information, and damage the honour and reputation of the plaintiffs. In such a situation, the court is obliged to pay particular attention to the amount of non-pecuniary damages awarded, which must not be standardised and uniformed at the expense of the effective protection of the plaintiffs' rights.

During the period covered by the analysis, several cases were also observed where lawsuits were filed by minors. The media outlet that most frequently violated the rights of minors was the portal *Republika.rs*, against which three lawsuits were filed on behalf of minors. One judgment, which awarded damages in the amount of 300,000 dinars, was partially quashed, while two final and binding proceedings where the plaintiffs were minors, damages were awarded in the amount of 100,000 dinars each. In one case against *Novosti*, a minor plaintiff was awarded damages in the amount of 200,000 dinars.

In the proceedings against *Srpski telegraf*, conducted due to continuous, intensive and sensationalist reporting on a minor child who tragically perished at school, an amount of 500,000 dinars was awarded (*inter alia*, due to the violation of the right to respect for the memory of the deceased). This is also the highest amount awarded to an individual plaintiff (the mother of the minor child to whom the reporting related).³¹ In the judgment, the court stated that even if state authorities publish data falling within the sphere of privacy of the perpetrator or the victim, the media must not convey that information, and that the error of the state authorities does not imply a "permission" to violate the ethical principles of the profession.³²

It is noticeable that the defendants regularly exercise their right of appeal. In

31 · Higher Court in Belgrade, P3. 680/23.

32 · *Ibid.*

the case of the three observed media outlets, the defendants filed appeals against all judgments, while in the case of the remaining media outlets, the defendants appealed against approximately 95% of the first-instance judgments. In contrast, the plaintiffs exercised their right of appeal less frequently. The reason for this may also be the circumstance that in the majority of cases, the plaintiffs were at least partially successful in the dispute, at least when it comes to proceedings against pro-government media.

In a number of cases where the defendant media outlet was *Informer*, a phenomenon was observed where, during the proceedings, the plaintiffs withdrew the lawsuit against Dragan J. Vučićević, the owner and editor of that media outlet.

The highest percentage of upheld judgments, 92.3%, was recorded in the proceedings against *Informer*, while the lowest was against the media outlet *Nova* (45.83%). The average percentage of upheld judgments is slightly over 70%, which indicates the quality of the rendered first-instance judgments.

An interesting example is the case of *Novosti*, where the defendants filed 11 appeals against 12 judgments, while the plaintiff filed an appeal in only one case, and all judgments were subsequently upheld.

The highest number of fully granted claims was recorded in the proceedings against *Informer* – the claim was granted in its entirety in seven out of a total of 42 proceedings.

The analysis of the outcomes of final and binding proceedings shows significant differences in the success of plaintiffs depending on the media outlet against which the proceedings were pending, i.e., differences can be observed between the media outlets for which the Press Council regularly establishes that they violate the Code of Journalists in Serbia, and those that rarely violate the Code.

In the proceedings **against *Informer*, the claim was granted partially or in its entirety in 38 out of 42 cases**, i.e., in **90.47%** of the total number of analysed cases (and **in 92.68% of final and binding cases**).

Out of the 26 analysed cases against *Srpski telegraf*, the claim was dismissed in only one case, **while in 96% of the final and binding proceedings, the plaintiffs' claim was at least partially granted**, meaning that a violation of the plaintiffs' rights had occurred.

In the proceedings **against *Kurir*, the plaintiffs' claims were partially granted in 83.33% of final and binding proceedings.**

In the **proceedings against *Alo*, the plaintiffs' claim was granted at least in part or in its entirety in 92.1% of the final cases,** meaning that a violation of the plaintiffs' rights had occurred.

In the cases against ***Novosti*, in each of the analysed proceedings, the plaintiffs' claim was at least partially granted – a violation of a certain right existed in 100% of the analysed cases.**

In the cases **against *Republika*, the claim was dismissed in its entirety in only one proceeding. In the remaining 95.23% of the proceedings, the claim was granted, partially or in its entirety,** meaning that there was a violation of the plaintiffs' rights.

Compared to the cases against pro-government tabloids (in which 93.7% of claims were granted partially or in their entirety), a significantly lower success rate of plaintiffs was recorded in the proceedings against the media outlets *Danas* and *Nova*.

In the proceedings **against the daily *Danas*, the claim was dismissed in its entirety in 57.14% of the proceedings** (in four out of seven). **In three cases (42.85%), the claim was partially granted.**

In the proceedings **against the media outlet *Nova*, the claim was partially granted in seven out of 24 proceedings (representing 29.16% of the analysed cases, or 41.17% of the final and binding proceedings).** In the proceedings against ***KRIK***, the claim was partially granted in two out of four final and binding cases (50%).

In the observed period, 14 journalists appeared in the capacity of plaintiff in media disputes, nine of whom sued *Informer*. It is evident that a small number of journalists decide to seek the protection of their rights before a court. It is also necessary to bear in mind that it is not possible to determine the profession of the plaintiff in all analysed judgments due to the manner in which they are anonymised. This is particularly pronounced in second-instance judgments, given that, in addition to the personal data of the plaintiffs, and frequently the defendants, a major part of the text that prompted the claims is also removed, making it impossible to determine the profession of the plaintiffs. The highest number of plaintiff-journalists

who sought judicial protection for a violated right appears in cases against the media outlet *Informer*.

In addition to non-pecuniary damages, plaintiffs most frequently request the **publication of the judgment**, asking the court to order the editor-in-chief to publish the final judgment without comment and without delay, at their own expense, and at the latest in the second subsequent issue of the newspaper, or in the second subsequent radio or television broadcast from the day the judgment became final and enforceable.³³ In the observed period, the court decided **to publish the entire judgment in only two cases**. In all other judgments, the court partially granted this claim, in such a way that the editor-in-chief was ordered to publish only the introduction and the operative part.

In the majority of judgments, the operative part specifies neither the headline nor the part of the text due to which the claim for non-pecuniary damages for mental anguish caused by the violation of personal rights was granted. **The legal norm loses its purpose if only the introduction and the operative part of the judgment are published, without the reasoning, because the public has no opportunity to learn what kind of violation the defendant committed.** The court fails to take this into account even when the length of the proceedings is so long that even the readers of the specific media outlet no longer know what the content of the text was. Bearing in mind that the Law on Civil Procedure (LCP) stipulates that “a judgment drawn up in writing must contain an introduction, an operative part, and reasoning”,³⁴ and the Law on Public Information and Media provides for the publication of the “judgment”, we must raise the question of whether the court’s interpretation that only a part of the judgment may be published is justified, which substantially undermines the purpose of this norm, preventing the public from gaining insight into the content of the judgment.

ANALYSIS OF CASES BASED ON CLAIMS AGAINST RESPONSIBLE PERSONS IN THE MEDIA OUTLET KRIK

The judgments rendered in cases against the portal *KRIK* were analysed separately due to the specific activity of this media outlet, as well as because it concerns journalists who engage exclusively in investigative journalism and reporting on criminal trials in particularly sensitive cases for which there is

33 · LPIM, Art. 131.

34 · Law on Civil Procedure (LCP) Art. 355 para. 1.

high public interest. Furthermore, it is a media outlet frequently highlighted as a victim of SLAPP lawsuits, which made it essential to observe the court's conduct in specific cases against *KRIK*.

Against the aforementioned media outlet, only four cases were final and binding during the period covered by the analysis, while a first-instance judgment was rendered in one additional case against which an appeal was filed, and upon which the Court of Appeal in Belgrade has not yet decided. However, the analysis was conducted because *KRIK* engages in investigative journalism, and because it is a media outlet whose editor-in-chief and journalists are under constant pressure from pro-government media, politicians, officials, and other persons they write about. Bearing in mind that frequent SLAPP lawsuits filed against them are also associated with their work, a complete analysis of the existing judgments, data on the duration of proceedings, the amount of the claims, and the decisions rendered was performed.

In the proceedings upon the lawsuit of a foreign legal entity headed by a businessman of our origin, which employs around 2,000 people and whose primary activity is the trade of non-ferrous metals and ore concentrates, investment in mining, and geological research, it was stated that the defendant published illicit information that the plaintiff was involved in corruption and had a problem with a bank. The plaintiff considers that they damaged his honour and reputation and requests that the defendant be ordered to pay pecuniary damages in the amount of £320,000³⁵, to remove the text from the internet portal upon the finality of the judgment, and that the defendant be prohibited from republishing specific information. In the reasoning, the court states that the Press Council established that the defendant violated the Code of Journalists in Serbia with the disputed text, but based on a larger number of presented pieces of evidence, the court concluded that the Code was not violated. The first-instance court dismissed the claim in its entirety because it considers that the editor acted with due diligence and that all published facts were documented. The court invoked the provisions of the Law on Public Information and Media, Articles 8 and 10 of the ECHR, and the case law of the ECtHR (*Handyside v. the United Kingdom*, 5493/72; *Axel Springer AG v. Germany*, 39954/08; *Jersild v. Denmark*, 15890/89; *Monnat v. Switzerland*, 73604/01, etc.). The claim is very high, but it concerns the compensation of pecuniary damages. The first-instance proceedings lasted 3 years and 1 month; 13 hearings were scheduled, nine held, and four adjourned. The

35 · This is the value of the subject matter of the dispute stated in the judgment, whereas the court portal indicates the amount of 55,000,000 dinars.

timeframe for drawing up the first-instance judgment was 60 days. Bearing in mind the volume of evidence and the length of the judgment, it can be concluded that the deviations from statutory deadlines are justified.

In the proceedings of a well-known businessman, the claim requested that the defendant be ordered to pay non-pecuniary damages in the amount of 200,000 dinars due to the violation of personal dignity. After 1 year and 6 months and 4 held hearings, the claim was partially granted, and the defendant was ordered to pay damages in the amount of 30,000 dinars, to remove the headline and subheading of the text; the defendant was prohibited from republishing the disputed information and ordered to publish the introduction and the operative part of the judgment. The claim for the payment of an additional 170,000 dinars, as well as for the removal of the text below the headline and subheading, was dismissed. In the judgment, in addition to national regulations, the court invoked specific judgments of the ECtHR. An appeal was filed by the plaintiff, the judgment was quashed, and the case was remanded back for a retrial. The second-instance proceedings lasted 11 months. The amount of the claim is below average, as is the amount of the awarded damages. Statutory deadlines were not respected.

In another analysed case, a final judgment upheld the first-instance judgment which had partially granted the claim of the plaintiff, a well-known person against whom criminal proceedings are pending. Due to the violation of the right to the presumption of innocence, the defendants were ordered to pay an amount of 30,000 dinars. The first-instance proceedings lasted 2 years and 4 months. The claim for the payment of an additional 370,000 dinars, and to prohibit the defendant from republishing texts violating the presumption of innocence under the threat of paying the plaintiff 400,000 dinars for each subsequent publication, was dismissed. In the proceedings, which lasted eight months, the appellate court dismissed the plaintiff's appeal, accepting the reasoning of the first-instance court that the information that the "accused is a drug lord" and that it concerns "his marijuana plantation" designated the plaintiff as the perpetrator of a punishable offence. Factual allegations "by their nature capable of causing mental anguish" were presented. The defendants' appeal on points of law was dismissed with the stance "that the aforementioned words in the text are weightier than the words stating that someone has been accused of cultivating marijuana, and such a formulation can lead to a violation of the presumption of innocence". This position divided the legal community regarding the correctness of such judicial conviction.

The Court of Appeal dismissed the defendants' appeal and upheld the first-instance judgment which had partially granted the claim of the plaintiff, an official, ordering the defendants to pay him 70,000 dinars due to the violation of honour and reputation, while dismissing it in the higher amount for an additional 30,000 dinars. The published text constituted a trial report with the headline "Political ties of the Kruševac criminal group: Prosecutor on Jotka's cauldron". The allegation was part of the wiretapped material played at the main hearing, which was introduced as the prosecutor's evidence. In accordance with the Law, the journalist literally conveyed the words in the text: "who is to kill him, why there is no one..., why he is at his cauldron, why there is no one to kill him". The author of the text added her own words of explanation of the phrase, **"meaning that he is on the payroll of the well-known..."**. The courts establish that this is not in accordance with the provision of Article 9, paragraph 2, in conjunction with Article 74 of the Law on Public Information and Media. The journalist also explained that the expression "to be at someone's cauldron" means that a person receives money from someone, which was not uttered and does not constitute courtroom reporting; therefore, in this specific case, it concerns unverified information, and it cannot be considered that the journalist acted with due diligence. The appellate court considers that public officials, as prescribed by the Law on Public Information and Media, must have a higher degree of tolerance towards information and criticism compared to persons whose work is not public, "but this does not mean that their right to honour and reputation does not exist and that criticism presenting false and unverified facts can be protected.... therefore, there is no public interest in learning such unverified information. The plaintiff had to be given time to comment on the allegations in the text... which was not done." The first-instance proceedings lasted eight months, as did the appellate ones. Two hearings were held. The timeframe for drawing up the first-instance judgment was 20 days. **The interpretation of the Law on Public Information and Media is very narrow and would significantly restrict the right of citizens to be informed in a timely manner about facts of public interest.**

KRIK attempted to contact the official (the plaintiff in this case) and obtain his comment via email, but he did not reply.³⁶ After the article was published, the third defendant, a journalist, attempted to speak with the official over

36 · Global Freedom of Expression, Columbia University, *Case Gašić v. KRIK, Dojčinović and Vojnović*, available at <https://globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu/cases/gasic-v-krik-dojcinovic-and-vojinovic/>, last accessed on 9 March 2026.

the phone, but he replied that he did not want to speak with *KRIK*.³⁷ This case also attracted the attention of the investigative initiative Global Freedom of Expression at Columbia University, which analyses and publishes court practice globally, i.e., cases of significance for freedom of expression, and which designated this case against *KRIK* as a SLAPP, stating that the judgment rendered in these proceedings could serve as a tool for intimidating journalists and have a chilling effect on journalism in Serbia.³⁸ Regarding the first-instance judgment in these proceedings against *KRIK*, which has meanwhile been upheld by a judgment of the Court of Appeal, it was stated that it restricts freedom of expression and may constitute a dangerous precedent regarding media freedom.³⁹

In the case conducted upon the lawsuit of a public official, the claim for the payment of damages in the amount of 705,360 dinars due to the violation of honour and reputation and the violation of the presumption of innocence was dismissed, as was the request to order the defendant to publish the final judgment. The Court of Appeal dismissed the plaintiff's appeal and upheld the judgment. The courts are of the stance that "this concerns information which the public has a justified interest to know, and that it relates to matters concerning the work of a state official, rather than the private life of the plaintiff. She is obliged to tolerate heightened criticism, particularly in the context that there is an accusation for the extended criminal offence of trading in influence". The first-instance proceedings were concluded in 2 years and 5 months with six hearings, and the appellate ones in three months. The plaintiff's claim did not significantly deviate from the average; the court dismissed it in its entirety. Statutory deadlines were not respected.

The Court of Appeal in Belgrade upheld the judgment dismissing the claim of the plaintiff, a police officer, for the payment of damages in the amount of 600,000 dinars due to the violation of honour and reputation. Criminal proceedings are pending against the plaintiff for committing the extended criminal offence of abuse of official position. The disputed text arose from conveying information contained in the documents of the competent state authorities, mostly from the indictment. The defendant was reporting from one of the most significant trials related to organised crime, against 15 persons. The court established that the published information was not such as to endanger the plaintiff's right to honour and reputation because it was used

37 · *Ibid.*

38 · *Ibid.*

39 · *Ibid.*

with full respect for journalistic diligence. *Ex officio*, the court established that the published texts did not violate the presumption of innocence or the right to privacy in relation to the plaintiff. The defendants never designated the plaintiff as the perpetrator of a criminal offence, but rather published information about suspicions which were not inherently capable of causing a violation of the plaintiff's rights. The first-instance proceedings lasted 11 months, and the second-instance ones seven months. The first-instance judgment was drawn up within a deadline of six days.

It can be concluded that in only one claim were exceptionally high pecuniary damages sought, which was dismissed in its entirety. In three cases, the claim was dismissed in its entirety, and in three partially. In four judgments, when rendering its decision, the court also invoked international conventions and ECtHR decisions. It cannot be concluded that the courts acted differently in this group of cases compared to the other defendant media outlets covered by this analysis. The established data in cases that are not final and binding will not be elaborated upon in further detail.

ANALYSIS OF THE PROTECTION OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN RELATION TO ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Bearing in mind the small number of final judgments in cases where the responsible persons in television stations were sued, a tabular overview is presented in the appendices of the analysis, from which it follows that in this type of proceedings, neither the duration of the proceedings nor the amount of awarded damages deviates from other types of media. The highest claims for damages, in the amounts of 1,500,000 dinars, were requested from the responsible persons of *TV Pink* and *TV N1* and were dismissed by final judgments.

In the judgment which partially accepted the claim and ordered the responsible persons for *TV Pink* to pay the plaintiff an amount of 30,000 dinars, the court established that the subject of the information was identifiable. The full name of the plaintiff was stated, linking him to "hooligans" who beat party members, and designating him as their leader. The allegations were presented in a sensationalist manner with the intent to attract the audience's attention and portray the plaintiff in a negative context. The court found that the published information – that the plaintiff led the attack on a Serbian Progressive Party official – was not permissible, as the defendants did not submit any evidence to substantiate the accuracy of the published information, meaning it was not proven. As it resulted in negative conse-

quences, the publication violated the plaintiff's honour and reputation. "If the published information is capable of causing such a type of injury, then it possesses a harm-inflicting capacity (the capacity to cause injury). For this, it is necessary to meet the following conditions: the falsity of the information, identifiability, the personal impact on the subject of the information, and the disproportionality of the information." The liability of the defendants arose from the fact that the information was published without prior verification and editorial assessment. There is no public interest in receiving false information.

In the judgment establishing that the plaintiff's right to privacy and dignity was violated, thereby ordering the defendant (*B-92*) to pay him a total amount of 40,000 dinars as compensation for non-pecuniary damages, the court states that privacy is protected independently – it is sufficient to publish a piece of data or a record of a person for a violation of the right to occur by the mere act of publication, provided that the person did not give consent for the publication and there are no statutory grounds for publication without the person's consent. If the published data is such that it injures honour and reputation, then the person has the right to compensation for damages on both grounds.

In the judgments establishing a violation of honour and reputation by television stations, the same politician appears as the plaintiff, upon whose claims a larger number of final judgments have been rendered due to the violation of honour and reputation through portals and print media. This points to the existence of negative media campaigns against certain individuals.

It follows from the responses of the Higher Court in Belgrade that for the requested period, there was not a single final judgment in relation to TV Happy, TV Nova, and Prva TV.⁴⁰

EXTRAORDINARY LEGAL REMEDIES

An appeal on points of law is always permissible if the claim for damages has been dismissed, within a deadline of 15 days from the receipt of the second-instance judgment, which is also the deadline for submitting a response to the appeal on points of law. An appeal on points of law is not permissible against a second-instance judgment in litigation conducted upon a claim for the publication of a reply.

40 · Letter of the Higher Court in Belgrade, Su II-17a No. 212/25 dated 15 January 2026.

During the observed period, the Supreme Court (SC) resolved four cases. By one ruling, the defendants' appeal on points of law was dismissed. The timeframe for drawing up the ruling was four months.

By Judgment Rev 10045/2025 dated 11 September 2025, the plaintiff's appeal on points of law was dismissed. Invoking the provisions of the Law on Public Information and Media and Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the Court took the stance, bearing in mind that the plaintiff is an official, that the defendant had conveyed a press release of a citizens' association with the aim of informing citizens on matters which the public has the right to know. This concerned criticism of the manner in which he performs his function, and there was a greater public interest in learning about it; thus, in the competition between two rights – freedom of expression and the right to honour and reputation – the rule of overriding interest corresponding to a democratic society was respected. The Court concludes that “the media play a key role as a public watchdog, and therefore interference with its freedom of expression can be justified only by a pressing social need when it is necessary, which is not the case here.” (Timeframe for drawing up the judgment: 4 months.)

Likewise, in the SC Judgment Rev 9658/2025 dated 11 September 2025, which reverses the judgments of the Court of Appeal and the Higher Court in Belgrade and dismisses the plaintiff's claim, the assessment is that the content of the disputed part of the text justifiably informed the public about the actions of a provincial official, and the plaintiff who engages in the independent profession of providing legal assistance to persons. The presumption of innocence was not violated, and the terms used do not deviate from the standards of journalistic expression. “The plaintiff's feeling of personal injury does not provide a ground for a claim for damages, given that the plaintiff is obliged to tolerate the expression of critical opinions relating to his work... since the profession he engages in implies public appearances for which there are principles contained in point 1 of the basic provisions of the Code of Professional Ethics of Lawyers.” This judgment also gives priority to the public interest and the protection of the right to freedom of speech and opinion within the proportionality of the protection of rights. (Timeframe for drawing up the judgment: 8.5 months.)

By SC Judgment Rev 15010/2025 dated 19 November 2025, the defendant's appeal on points of law was dismissed. Due to a violation of the presumption of innocence, the defendant was ordered to pay compensation for damages. The Court states that “the presumption of innocence is a consequence of

the development of civilisation, and it is linked to the existence of a state governed by the rule of law. It was first defined in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789). The primary reason for its adoption is the defence against wrongful conviction, as the conviction and punishment of an innocent person constitutes a greater harm to society than a culprit evading responsibility. It is necessarily linked to the right of the accused to a fair trial (Article 6, paragraph 1 of the ECHR). Respecting the presumption of innocence is not only necessary to guarantee the right to a fair trial, but it is also a fundamental means of achieving trust in the rule of law. The media are obliged to protect the privacy and identity of a suspect or the perpetrator of a criminal offence, even in the case of a confession of guilt...” The Court invokes the established case law of the European Court of Human Rights: *Akay v. Turkey* – judgment of 2002; *Ninn-Hansen v. Denmark* – judgment of 1999, *Anguelov v. Bulgaria* – judgment of 2004. Only a court in judicial proceedings can establish someone’s guilt.” The Court reasons that the allegation from the defendant’s appeal on points of law – stating that the comments against the plaintiff were uttered by the President of the Republic at a press conference – is without influence on the decision because that was not contained in the disputed text. (Timeframe for drawing up the judgment: 3 months.)

The presented legal positions in the judgments of the SC can certainly significantly influence the creation of case law. Given that the SC has no statutory deadline prescribed for rendering judgments, and bearing in mind the workload, the timeframe for drawing up the judgments must be assessed as satisfactory.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

One of the rare segments of the trial where an improvement was observed is that, in accordance with the Law on Public Information and Media, preparatory hearings are no longer scheduled. However, the proceedings remain lengthy, despite the statutory requirement for urgency.

It is notable that during the observed period, a very small number of cases were initiated and final judgments rendered against television channels with national broadcasting licences. Simultaneously, the number of media disputes increases each year.

The number of proceedings brought by the same plaintiffs against certain pro-government media outlets is also rising. One of the identified issues is the persistent repetition of the same violations by the same media outlets,

at the expense of the same plaintiffs, most commonly opposition politicians. The analysed court cases clearly indicate that certain opposition politicians have been exposed to continuous negative campaigns in pro-government media for years. Articles of identical or similar content are published about the same individual, without verifying the accuracy of the allegations. It is of further concern that the amount of damages awarded is not adjusted to the frequency and severity of the repeated violations, so as to have a deterrent effect.

An analysis of the outcomes of final and binding proceedings shows significant differences in the success rates of plaintiffs, depending on the media outlet against which the proceedings were pending. A clear distinction is observed between media outlets for which the Press Council regularly determines that they violate the Code of Journalists in Serbia, and those that rarely violate the Code.

Viewed collectively, **in the proceedings against Informer, Kurir, Alo, Novosti, Srpski telegraf, and Republika, the claim was granted in its entirety or in part in 93.7 per cent of the analysed final and binding cases.** Conversely, in the proceedings against the media outlets *Danas*, *Nova*, and *KRIK*, a significantly lower success rate of plaintiffs was recorded. In the proceedings against **KRIK**, the claim was partially granted in **50%** of final and binding proceedings – in two out of four cases. In the proceedings against **the newspaper *Danas*, the claim was dismissed in its entirety in 57.14 per cent of proceedings** (in four out of seven). **In three cases (42.85%), the claim was partially granted.** In the proceedings **against the media outlet *Nova*, the claim was partially granted in seven proceedings (29.16%), which accounts for 41.17% of the final and binding proceedings.**

Simultaneously, the number of cases in which the requested damages exceeded 1,000,000 dinars is the highest against *Nova* – in six (25%) out of a total of 24 analysed cases. Having regard to the total number of proceedings conducted against them, claims amounting to more than one million dinars are significantly more prevalent in the case of the media outlets *Nova*, *Danas* and *KRIK*.

The highest amount of damages awarded (820,000 dinars) arose from proceedings where multiple persons appeared on the side of the plaintiffs, while the highest amount awarded to an individual was 500,000 dinars. The lowest amount awarded amounted to a mere 20,000 dinars.

It is observed that judicial decisions rendered due to the defendants' non-compliance with statutory obligations when publishing articles do not significantly influence a change in the manner of their future work. Regrettably, the competent institutions take no action to ensure that such conduct by a specific media outlet is sanctioned. Media outlets such as *Alo* and *Informer* in particular continue to violate the rights of the same plaintiffs, whilst in the articles of *Srpski telegraf* and the portal *Republika.rs*, the violation of journalistic standards has also extended to vulnerable categories, such as minors.

In the period covered by the analysis, several cases were recorded in which the plaintiffs were minors or the proceedings were conducted due to the manner of reporting on minors. Given that cases initiated upon lawsuits filed on behalf of minors were not observed in the previous analysis, it follows that **in the meantime, there has been a further erosion of the standards of professional journalism, including in articles relating to minors.** This was undoubtedly contributed to by the sensationalist, continuous, and intensive reporting on the murders at the "Vladislav Ribnikar" Elementary School. It appears that the court has also recognised this in practice. Thus, during the period covered by this analysis, the highest amount of damages awarded to an individual (where a single person acted as the plaintiff) was precisely in a case relating to reporting on a minor girl who tragically lost her life at the "Vladislav Ribnikar" Elementary School (damages were awarded in the amount of 500,000 dinars). In those proceedings, *Srpski telegraf* published photographs and details from the funeral of the minor girl, despite the express opposition of the family, and continuously and intensively reported on the tragic event in a sensationalist and speculative manner, putting forward conjectures about the possible causes of the tragedy and publishing data falling within the realm of privacy of the perpetrator or the victim.

Judicial protection is neither sufficient nor effective enough to suppress violations of the rights protected in media disputes and to improve the manner of media reporting. Not only has there been a lack of improvement in the manner of reporting, but a further erosion of the already poor state of affairs concerning respect for professional standards has been observed in the meantime.

EXPRESSED POSITIONS OF THE COURT ON THE PROTECTION OF PERSONALITY RIGHTS AND FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Case No.	DIGNITY OF THE PERSON – ART. 90 LPIM (honour, reputation, reverence)
P3.908/2024 Plaintiff: The authors of the series “Vladalac”	By a final and binding judgment, the claim of the authors of the series “Vladalac” was partially granted, and the defendants (Dnevni list Informer et al.) were ordered to pay them 120,000 dinars each in respect of non-pecuniary damages for a violation of honour and reputation, and the editor-in-chief was ordered to publish only the introduction and the operative part of the judgment. The defendants challenged the legal standing (<i>locus standi</i>) of the plaintiffs, claiming that they could not be considered the authors of the series, and that their names were not mentioned in the disputed articles. The court determined that certain information in the disputed articles was untruthful and objectively offensive, and that it possessed harm-inflicting capacity in relation to the female plaintiffs identified in the credits of the series by name as the director/producer and the editor. Their honour and reputation were injured, and it was possible to recognise to whom the information related in the articles, regardless of the omission of their names. It was stated that “the identifiability of the subjects of information exists when a specific person can objectively be linked to the published information. It exists when a specific group of persons can link the plaintiffs to the events described in the disputed articles”. It was further concluded that “for a violation of honour and reputation, it is irrelevant whether the plaintiffs were considered authors of the series under the Law on Copyright and Related Rights, because compensation is not claimed in respect of a violation of copyright or related rights; the plaintiffs are the persons to whom the untruthful and objectively offensive allegations relate.” The articles stated, <i>inter alia</i>: “Those whose only policy is theft, and whose only ideology is extortion, filmed and broadcast a four-hour documentary containing nothing but hatred, a sick hatred towards the President of the RS”; “They are mercenaries of the conjoined tycoons Mišković, Đilas, and Šolak”; “They are foreign mercenaries because they were funded by the EU.”

P3.333/2024 Plaintiff: Activist	By a final and binding judgment, the claim was granted, and the defendants (the <i>Informer portal</i>) were ordered to pay 40,000 dinars in respect of non-pecuniary damages for a violation of honour and reputation in the articles titled “What is permitted to us is not to you! Đilas’s ‘student’ exposed the opposition’s propaganda in 10 seconds” and “(VIDEO) We will tear down the city, we will create chaos! People, listen to how Đilas, Marinika, and Aleksić threaten through their henchmen”. The editor-in-chief was ordered to publish the introduction and the operative part of the judgment. The court states that information must be verified with due diligence and that there is no public interest in receiving untruthful information. It further notes that it is not permissible to express a value judgment in a manner that disparages a specific individual or intends to cause them humiliation. It was determined that untruthful information was transmitted in the first headline, ascribing attributes to the plaintiff that he does not possess; he is neither a student nor a member of a political party. In the second headline and the body of the article, the court determined that the plaintiff’s words were neither faithfully transmitted nor spoken by him. The articles were accompanied by photographs, which rendered the plaintiff highly identifiable. The court notes that the publication did not constitute information of public importance, nor did it outweigh the interest of protecting the dignity of the person. The content of the text caused mental anguish to the plaintiff. The editor-in-chief failed to act in accordance with due journalistic diligence. The court therefore finds that the information in question was untruthful, crossed the threshold of tolerance, and was capable of causing harm to the dignity, honour, and reputation of the plaintiff.
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P3.174/2024

Plaintiff:
Politician

By a final and binding judgment, it was determined that the plaintiff's right to the dignity of the person and his right to honour and reputation were injured through the publication of untruthful and offensive information (on the **Alo portal**); the defendants were thus held jointly and severally liable to pay him the amount of **150,000 dinars** in respect of non-pecuniary damages, and the editor-in-chief was ordered to publish the introduction and the operative part of the judgment at his own expense.

The published text stated "that the plaintiff and his father-in-law extracted 24 million dinars from the city budget, that he was called in for an informative interview with the police, that proceedings are pending against him, that he increased his own salary...". The court determined that the published untruthful and impermissible information was capable of causing harm to the plaintiff's honour and reputation. The editor-in-chief, disregarding the duty of journalistic diligence, acted contrary to the Code of Journalists in Serbia by publishing untruthful information. The text was drafted on the basis of information from sources which were not verified in any other manner. The court points out that a journalist is obliged to adhere to the basic standards of the journalistic profession when reporting to the public, even if the political and ideological background advocated by the person to whom the information relates is in conflict with the political convictions of the journalist. Media outlets have the right to different editorial concepts, but it is the obligation of journalists and editors to make a clear distinction between transmitted facts, comments, assumptions, and conjectures. The court points out that the journalist and the responsible editor acted contrary to the Code of Journalists in Serbia, which prescribes the duty of a journalist to refuse the dissemination of political propaganda disguised as journalistic expression, and that the publication of accusations, slander, and rumours about any person holding opposite political convictions to those of the journalist is incompatible with journalism. The court took into account that the plaintiff is a public figure, that he faced condemnation in his community due to the text, and that his dignity was injured in both his private and professional life.

The question arises as to whether, by publishing only the introduction and the operative part of the judgment, in which not all the facts from the text are explicitly stated, the public could have been adequately informed as to what untruthful claims had actually been published about this politician in the disputed text.

P3.174/2024 Plaintiff: Agency owner	By a final and binding judgment, it was determined that the defendant editor-in-chief, at the time of the publication of the text on the internet portal Alo, injured the right to dignity of the plaintiff, who was identified as a person engaged in the “smuggling of foreigners and trafficking of Indians”; he was thus ordered, jointly and severally with the media founder, to pay her 120,000 dinars due to mental anguish and a violation of honour and reputation caused by the publication of untruthful information. The claim for the payment of an additional 180,000 dinars was dismissed. The defendant editor-in-chief was ordered to publish the introduction and the operative part of the judgment. The court dismissed the lawsuit in the part requesting that the editor-in-chief remove the text published on 15 October 2023 under the title “filmed smuggling people: Indian caught [her] in the act... smuggling workers”. It assessed that such a request was not defined with sufficient precision, that it was broadly formulated, and that it could lead to censorship. In rendering its decision, the court established and cited the content of the text, which stated, <i>inter alia</i>, that Sandža Mem, the Boss, offers Indians to Serbian firms without commission, and then transports and smuggles them into EU countries at a price of 5,000 to 10,000 euros. It further stated that she was caught in the act when an Indian filmed her driving workers away, and that her associates claim that the mafia has started threatening them. Following an order from the prosecution, the police verified whom she was cooperating with. The permits she requested were never contested. It was said that certain individuals threaten on her behalf and enable such behaviour. The location where she receives money was specified. The journalist did not establish contact with the plaintiff because she did not answer the phone call. Two images with blurred faces were published, one of which the plaintiff identified as her own, whilst below the other image, it was written that it was filmed in a parking lot when she came to collect the Indians. It was determined that the allegations in the text were untruthful; the assessment of the court was that the plaintiff was rendered identifiable by the published text, and therefore the request to remove the text without specific elaboration was logical. The question arises as to whether it can be considered that effective protection of dignity was provided if the text with untruthful content, which injured her honour and reputation, was not removed from the portal by order of the court.
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P3.174/2024 Plaintiff: Agency owner	The court was of the opinion that the author of the text had not sufficiently verified the published information and had failed to act with due diligence. She received the information from a person who had lived with the plaintiff and had been in an emotional relationship with her. She was aware that criminal proceedings for the criminal offence of stalking, in which the plaintiff was the injured party, were also pending against him. This did not appear suspicious to her, nor did she consider that it might be an act of revenge by a former partner. The court determined, contrary to the allegations in the text, that no criminal proceedings or investigation had been initiated against the plaintiff and that she had no prior convictions. There is no public interest in being informed of unverified and incomplete information, which the defendants failed to take into account. Regarding the amount of compensation, the claim was partially granted, taking into account the significance of the protected right that was violated and the purpose served by the compensation, but also noting that the plaintiff did not exercise her right to a reply, which is not an obligation. Consequently, the claim was dismissed in its remaining, larger part, namely for 180,000 dinars. The text linked the plaintiff to the mafia, her twelve-year-old child faced problems at school, her mother received threats, and she lost friends. A labour inspector visited the company following a report by the former partner and found no irregularities. The question remains whether the specific amount of damages awarded constitutes just monetary compensation in accordance with the LPIM and LOO under such established facts.
GŽ.3 49/25 Plaintiff: Politician	By a judgment of the appellate court, the appeal of the defendants (the newspapers Alo) was dismissed and the first-instance judgment was upheld. By this decision the defendants were ordered to pay non-pecuniary damages to the plaintiff in the amount of 60,000 dinars for the mental anguish suffered due to injuries to honour and reputation resulting from the publication of untruthful, incomplete, and offensive information.

Gž.3 49/25 Plaintiff: Politician	It was determined that a text was published in the newspaper under the titles “We do not have amnesia... got rich while he was in power, so he wants to do it again” and “playing the honest guy... extorting...”. The text stated “...he is acting like an honest politician these days and promising the earth to the citizens. And while he was in power... he was involved in suspicious dealings that brought huge money to him and people close to him”. It was also stated that the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, had previously spoken about the plaintiff’s malpractices. Prior to publication, the defendants did not contact the plaintiff to verify the published information. The appellate court concluded that the purpose of the disputed text was not to express a critical opinion, nor was the goal to inform the public about matters related to the political activities of the plaintiff, but rather claims and factual allegations were presented that have no basis in fact, as well as information the accuracy and credibility of which the defendants failed to prove. The circumstance that the plaintiff is a political office-holder is without influence on the legality and correctness of the decision, because untruthful information of offensive content was published about the plaintiff. The text constitutes content that is capable of causing harm to the dignity of the person of the plaintiff, given that through the published information, the person of the plaintiff is placed in a negative and offensive context, highly socially and morally unacceptable traits are ascribed to him, and he is characterised as a person who abuses his office for the purpose of negative activities. The judgment states that a critical opinion represents the expression of positions based on facts... which, <i>inter alia</i>, criticise the work of public officials in order to improve their work or point out problems in their work... The purpose of the text was the publication of claims that have no basis in fact, as well as information... which was not proven, and which it was possible to verify. Untruthful information was published about the plaintiff, which is impermissible even when it concerns persons who are office-holders. The court states that there is no public interest in being informed in such a manner and it does not outweigh the interest of protecting the dignity of the plaintiff.
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Gž3. 79/25 Plaintiff: Starlet	By an appellate judgment, the judgment dismissing the plaintiff's claim for the payment of damages for mental anguish due to a violation of dignity, honour, and reputation by the defendants (the Republika.rs portal) was upheld. The court assessed as groundless the plaintiff's allegations that she was insulted by being designated as a "starlet" in the text. Namely, the court concluded that the plaintiff, as a reality programme participant, had exposed her private life, as well as her emotional relationships, and even sexual intercourse, to the public over a long period. The court assessed that designating the plaintiff as a "starlet" constitutes a value judgment for which a sufficient factual basis exists. "The interest of the segment of the public that follows reality programmes towards the participants of those programmes continues even after the end of the programme, to all of which the participant of this programme consented by voluntarily exposing her private life to the public; thus, the plaintiff exposed her emotional and friendly relationships to the public, because by the decision to be a participant in this type of programme, she de facto invited the public to comment on her private life." In the appellate judgment, it is stated that the first-instance court correctly concluded that the disputed headline and the allegations of the text were not capable of causing harm to the honour and reputation of the plaintiff through their content. Through her activity in the media, the plaintiff generated public interest, and considering the manner in which the defendants distanced themselves from the transmitted claims, they acted in every respect in accordance with the obligation of due journalistic diligence.
P3. 521/24 Plaintiff: Politician	By a final and binding judgment, the claim was partially granted, and the defendants (the Alo portal) were ordered to pay the plaintiff the amount of 50,000 dinars for the mental anguish suffered due to a violation of his honour and reputation. In the published articles, the plaintiff was presented as an "eco-terrorist" and as someone who "threatens... prepares hell for Serbia". The published information was not verified, creating a false impression of the plaintiff, which injured his honour and reputation and led to his exposure to condemnation and suspicion within his community. The court notes that there is no public interest in receiving untruthful information when it was possible to ascertain the facts regarding its veracity prior to the publication.

P3. 680/23

Plaintiff:

Mother of a minor victim of the murder at the “Vladislav Ribnikar” Elementary School

By a final and binding judgment, the claim was partially granted, and the defendant (***Srpski telegraf***) was ordered to pay the plaintiff the amount of **500,000 dinars** in respect of damages for the mental anguish suffered due to the violation of the right to respect for the memory of the deceased (right to reverence).

In the lawsuit and at the hearing, through her legal representative, the plaintiff stated that on 3 May 2023, an unprecedented massacre in the history of our country was committed in Belgrade at the “Vladislav Ribnikar” Elementary School in Vračar, when the minor K. K., using a firearm during classes, killed nine students and a school security guard, while wounding several other students. One of the nine monstrously murdered children was the minor daughter of the plaintiff. A day after the murder, on 4 May 2023, as well as on 6 May 2023, and notably on the front page, a photograph of a list containing the first and last names of the children, students of the then VII-2 class, was published, among which was the name of the plaintiff’s murdered minor daughter – “the list of students he planned to kill”, as this media outlet titled the aforementioned list compiled by the minor K. K. Subsequently, in the same media outlet on 7 May 2023, photographs of the funeral and the message written on the death notice of the murdered girl were published, alongside the text spoken by the priest at the funeral, despite the fact that the family was explicit in their desire for the funeral not to receive media coverage. This was pointed out to all media outlets, including the defendants, by the family during the event itself. Thus, in this specific case, not only was there a lack of consent from the persons referred to in Article 83 of the LPIM, but it constituted an outright disregard of the family’s direct opposition to the disclosure of such information, both regarding the photographs from the funeral and the distasteful quoting of alleged statements by those present, thereby exposing the deepest grief of the families to the public.

Following this, on 17 October 2023, the defendants also published a written school essay by the deceased girl, stating her name. The consent of none of the persons under Article 81 of the LPIM, who would be authorised by law to grant consent for the publication of the aforementioned information, was obtained. Thereafter, the defendant media outlet continued to publish a series of articles reporting on the tragic event in a sensationalist and speculative manner. In its articles, *Nezavisne dnevne novine Telegraf* explicitly established a possible causal link between peer violence, which they had first fabricated themselves, and the committed massacre, all with the aim of creating material that would enable them to exploit the tragedy that occurred for as long as possible and derive a profit from it.

P3. 680/23

Plaintiff:

Mother of a minor victim of the murder at the “Vladislav Ribnikar” Elementary School

The court concluded that through the disputed articles, the defendants violated the plaintiff’s right to respect for the memory of the deceased. The position taken by the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *Solska and Rybicka v. Poland* (Applications nos. 30491/19 and 31083/17 of 20 September 2018) was cited, noting that although the exercise of the right to family life under Article 8 of the ECHR primarily concerns relationships among living family members, certain situations arising after the death of a family member, which fall within the realm of the right to respect for the memory of a deceased relative, namely within the realm of the right to respect for the memory of a person, can also be brought under the right to respect for family life under Article 8 of the Convention.

“It is the position of the court that in the specific case, the plaintiff’s fundamental human right to family life, and thus also her right to guard the memory and remembrance of her daughter, and in that sense her dignity and privacy, especially as a person who was a child at the moment of the tragic loss of life, required that the defendants, as a media outlet, refrain from informing the public about the details of the funeral, what was said at the funeral, and from photographing the scene of the funeral itself as well as those present at the funeral, and from publishing the said photographs, bearing in mind that a funeral is considered an intimate act which primarily concerns the family of the deceased person.”

Furthermore, regarding the publication of the content of the school essay of the plaintiff’s daughter, for which the family had not granted consent, the court states: “The published information is in every respect capable of deepening the grief and suffering of the plaintiff whose child tragically lost her life at school... and since the right to respect for the memory of a person implies the right of a close relative to preserve the memory of the life of a deceased family member... this implies that the plaintiff, as a mother, has the right to preserve and cherish the memory of her child in a context of peace, happiness, and love.” It was also concluded that the allegations and allusions of the defendants published in the disputed articles were highly inappropriate and capable of causing distress to the plaintiff and deepening her grief. Therefore, the plaintiff has legal standing to seek judicial protection in this legal matter. The court is of the view that the defendants, through their continuous reporting on the event at the “Vladislav Ribnikar” Elementary School itself, violated the standard of due journalistic diligence, whereby the court took into particular account that the reporting of the defendants was continuous and intensive.

P3. 680/23 Plaintiff: Mother of a minor victim of the murder at the “Vladislav Ribnikar” Elementary School	The court also recalls that, despite the fact that the event of 3 May 2023 at the “Vladislav Ribnikar” Elementary School is a matter of exceptional public interest, the public interest is by no means served by communicating information that constitutes speculation on the possible causes of the tragedy, alongside the publication of a list of first and last names of minors, including the first and last name of the plaintiff’s daughter. The judgment stresses that the said reporting is also contrary to the Journalists’ Code concerning reporting on accidents and criminal offences, and that even if the competent state authorities publish data falling within the realm of privacy of the perpetrator or the victim, the media must not transmit that information, as an error by state authorities does not imply a “licence” to violate the ethical principles of the profession.
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Case No.	RIGHT TO PRIVATE LIFE AND PERSONAL RECORD – ART. 91 LPIM (Art. 80 of the previously effective LPIM)
P3. 25/2025 Plaintiff: Wife of a public celebrity	By a final and binding judgment, the claim was partially granted, and the defendants (the Alo portal) were ordered to pay the plaintiff amounts of 25,000 dinars each in respect of non-pecuniary damages for the violation of the right to privacy and honour and reputation. The proceedings had been ongoing since 2021, and the judgment became final and binding in May 2025. An article was published on the portal stating facts from the personal life of the plaintiff, who is not a public figure. The court is of the view that the fact that she is married to a famous person does not render her a public figure. Therefore, her consent was required for the publication of information concerning her life. She was rendered identifiable to the wider public as well, particularly because her photograph was published without authorisation and without her consent, thereby violating her right to privacy in accordance with Article 80 of the LPIM, which was effective at the time the lawsuit was filed. In this specific case, the publication of the photograph cannot be justified by the existence of a public interest. Consequently, there is no balance between the right of the public to receive information and the right of a person for certain information not to be published. The court determined that the published information was also capable of causing harm to the reputation, honour, and privacy of the plaintiff, which is why it was established that she suffered non-pecuniary damages.

P3.59/2024 Plaintiff: Politician	By a final and binding judgment, the claim was granted, and the defendants (the daily newspaper Alo) were ordered to pay the plaintiff amounts of 100,000 dinars each (200,000 dinars in total) in respect of non-pecuniary damages for a violation of honour and reputation and the violation of the right to privacy. The editor-in-chief was also ordered to publish the judgment. The lawsuit stated that in the daily newspaper <i>Alo</i>, during the period from 1 to 3 December 2023, articles were continuously published that abounded in insults, insinuations, and inaccurate claims about the plaintiff, and multiple photographs from a private video recording of the plaintiff were published alongside the text, which had previously appeared on social networks and was subsequently taken and published by certain media outlets without the prior authorisation of the plaintiff. The court determined that the defendant published explicit intimate photographs of the plaintiff on the front page, which were partially blurred and extracted from the plaintiff's telephone that had been stolen after a burglary of his apartment. The theft was reported to the Vračar Police Station. The headlines, as well as the subheadings, were sensationalist. The court invoked the provisions of the LPIM, Articles 8 and 10 of the ECHR, and the case law of the ECtHR. The text stated: "The people pay so that he can take drugs and drink". It further stated that he is a "perverse Đilasite", emphasised that he "filmed himself high", "that he is under the influence of opiates", "that the people pay him so that he can take drugs and drink", "that he buys cocaine with his parliamentary salary", that "he spends the citizens' money allocated for his salary at a dealer's for cocaine", and "spends the people's money on drugs and ladies of the night". The articles transmitted statements from interlocutors expressing their opinions about the plaintiff and his behaviour, containing information that was not verified with due journalistic diligence regarding its truthfulness. The plaintiff was presented as a person who films himself during intimate relations, uses cocaine, and uses the money paid to him as a member of parliament to buy drugs and engage in orgies. The court considers that the information presented in the disputed articles did not serve to satisfy the public interest, but was sensationalist and inappropriate, with the intention of creating a negative attitude within the community towards the plaintiff. The information contained insults, factual accusations, and negative claims about the plaintiff which the defendants failed to verify prior to publication.
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P3.59/2024 Plaintiff: Politician	It was determined that the statutory requirements for an exception to the rule that a personal record may be published without the consent of the person to whom it relates were not met, which consent had not been requested from the plaintiff. The publication was unauthorised, resulting in a violation of the plaintiff's right to privacy. The position of the court is that these did not constitute criticisms of the plaintiff's work as a member of parliament, but rather information upon which the defendants offered no opinion whatsoever. The court expressed the view "that the public could have been communicated the information that a private intimate video recording featuring the plaintiff, as a politician and a public figure, had been published on social networks, even without presenting objectively offensive information and epithets about the plaintiff, and without photographs from that video recording, in which manner the interest of the public to be acquainted with this information would have been satisfied through the publication of complete and truthful information and without the publication of incriminating words and photographs". By publishing the disputed articles in this manner, the defendant violated the plaintiff's right to dignity, namely honour and reputation, and privacy, because the published information was capable of causing harm to the plaintiff through mental anguish due to the violation of personal rights.
GŽ3. 50/25 Plaintiff: Both parents and two minor children	By a decision of the Court of Appeal in Belgrade, the first-instance judgment was quashed, by which the defendants (the Republika.rs portal et al.) had been ordered to pay compensation for non-pecuniary damages for the mental anguish suffered due to the violation of the right to privacy, the groundless publication of a record of the plaintiffs' image, and a violation of honour and reputation. It was determined that an article was published under the title "Nothing is sacred to them!... led by... forced the family to leave the vehicle (video)". A video recording featuring all the plaintiffs was attached to the article, in which the car and its registration plate number were visible. A photograph of the video recording was also published. Following a warning from the plaintiffs, the video recording in question was removed from the video portal. It was determined that after the publication of the recording, the plaintiff faced problems at work, as well as unpleasantness from colleagues and parents at the kindergarten. No one contacted the plaintiffs to obtain their consent for the publication of the recording. In the text, the plaintiff and the children were designated as victims.

GŽ3. 50/25 Plaintiff: Both parents and two minor children	Although this case is still not final and binding, it is of significance to reflect on the reason why the first-instance judgment was quashed and why a prolongation of the proceedings, which could have been easily avoided, occurred. Namely, the court of second-instance determined that the conclusion of the first-instance court as to the basis on which it established a violation of the right to privacy was unclear, given that evidence through the viewing of the published video recording, upon which the claim was based, had not been admitted. It was concluded that the first-instance court's conclusion that the plaintiffs were rendered identifiable in the disputed recording was contradictory and unclear, despite the court not having viewed the recording. The court was ordered to remedy the committed substantial breach of procedure pursuant to Article 374, paragraph 2, point 12 of the Law on Civil Procedure in the retrial, and to render a new decision on the claims supported by clear and reasoned grounds.
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Case No.	PROHIBITION OF HATE SPEECH – ART. 86 LPIM (formerly Art. 112)
P3.115/2024 Plaintiff: Citizens' association	By a final and binding judgment, the claim was partially granted, determining that the editor-in-chief of the Alo portal violated the prohibition of hate speech against the plaintiff; he was thus ordered to publish the introduction and the operative part of the judgment, to remove the disputed text, and was prohibited from republishing the disputed text. The claim in relation to the publisher was dismissed in its entirety because the publisher lacked passive legal standing (<i>lack of locus standi</i>). Pursuant to Article 112, a lawsuit for the violation of the prohibition of hate speech is brought against the editor-in-chief. The court finds that qualifying an association as one that “does not wish Serbia well”, which “recognises alleged crimes and genocides and thus spits on the state of Serbia and our people” constitutes a ground for hatred and intolerance. The allegations were used for the purpose of discrediting the plaintiff. The message sent to the citizens through such expression represents a kind of invitation to violence and lynching against the plaintiff solely because they hold an opposing political conviction and a critical stance. The court took into account the fact that the plaintiff's Articles of Association state the objective of promoting universal human rights. It was reasoned that publishing the introduction and the operative part of the judgment satisfactorily communicates the outcome of the dispute to the public. It must be noted that the court specified the content of the text characterised as hate speech in the operative part itself. The court reasons that the purpose and goal of the protection is the prohibition of repeated hate speech. It must be directed at precisely specified information so that the freedom of expression of the media is not excessively restricted; therefore, the prohibition is restricted solely to the republication of the disputed text.

P3.115/2024 Plaintiff: Citizens' association	The plaintiff's claim for the payment of compensation for non-pecuniary damages was dismissed because this type of compensation is linked to natural persons. A legal person may suffer a violation of its good reputation, but this does not lead to compensation for non-pecuniary damages.
P3.446/2024 Plaintiff: Activist, public figure	By a final and binding judgment, it was established that through the publication of a text in the publication "<i>INTERNET PORTAL INFORMER</i>" under the titles "Supports ProGlas and the opposition, claims that Serbs are genocidal! Who is the plaintiff insisting that 'Mirdita' be held in Belgrade on Vidovdan?", and "Participating in a shameful campaign against Serbia, claimed that Serbs are a genocidal people", the plaintiff's right to the dignity of the person was injured. The editor-in-chief was ordered to publish the introduction and the operative part of the judgment in the second subsequent edition of the internet portal at his own expense, without comment. The lawsuit regarding the claim for damages was rejected due to <i>lis pendens</i>, as the same claim had been raised in a previously filed lawsuit. The court determined that the defendants took the plaintiff's address on <i>N1</i> television out of context and linked it to untruthful information. The text does not contribute to the purpose of public information in a democratic society, nor to public debate in the public interest, but its purpose is to support untruthful information in a tabloid manner and thus discredit the person of the plaintiff. Although she is a public figure, the plaintiff is not obliged to tolerate being presented in a negative light on the basis of untruthful and unverified allegations. When assessing the information disseminated to the public and the right of a person for certain information not to be published, it is necessary to ensure a fair balance between the right of the public to receive information and the personal rights of the plaintiff and respect for her dignity.

Case No.	PROHIBITION OF VIOLATING THE PRESUMPTION OF INNOCENCE – ART. 84 LPIM
Gž3. 20/25 Plaintiff: Citizen suspected of domestic violence	By an upheld first-instance judgment, the defendants (Alo) were ordered to pay the plaintiff the amount of 50,000 dinars in respect of non-pecuniary damages for the violation of the presumption of innocence. The court determined that the violation occurred because the published text stated that the plaintiff “beat”, “brutally beat, punched in the head”, “knocked out” ... whereby he was undoubtedly designated as the perpetrator of the criminal offence of domestic violence. This violated the presumption of innocence given that the criminal proceedings against the plaintiff had not been finally resolved. The court concluded that the plaintiff is entitled to compensation for non-pecuniary damages. The court states that the defendant’s allegations that it did not designate the plaintiff as the perpetrator of a criminal offence are groundless. Bearing in mind the description of the criminal offence of domestic violence and the allegations in the text, an impression is created among readers that the plaintiff committed the criminal offence, as no doubt is expressed; instead, findings are presented that the plaintiff [sic] is <i>de facto</i> the perpetrator of the criminal offence, while a final and binding criminal judgment had not been rendered at the time of publication of the specified texts, which is contrary to Article 73 of the LPIM. By publishing the text in the aforementioned manner, the freedom of opinion and freedom of the media were abused, as they are restricted by respect for the presumption of innocence, which the defendants failed to take into account. The interest in publication could have been achieved through a text that does not violate the rights of the plaintiff.

Higher Court in Belgrade, P3 682/22 Court of Appeal in Belgrade, Gž3 358/24 Plaintiff: Public enforcement officer	It is of significance to reflect on a case in which a public enforcement officer sued the newspaper Danas, where the first-instance judgment extended the protection of the right to the presumption of innocence to a scenario where it is untruthfully stated that criminal proceedings are pending against someone (in connection with an abuse of authority). The first-instance court concluded that the disputed text violated the presumption of innocence, finding that although the plaintiff was not explicitly designated as the perpetrator of a criminal offence, the allegations in the text indirectly claimed that she had committed the said criminal offences and that criminal proceedings were pending because of this. The reasoning of the first-instance court's judgment stresses: "even if someone is not explicitly designated as the perpetrator of a criminal offence, the presumption of innocence can still be violated if it is untruthfully stated that criminal proceedings are pending against them, provided it undermines the reputation and impartiality of a state body, within the meaning of Article 73" of the LPIM.⁴¹ The appellate court did not agree with this position. The first-instance judgment was modified in the part where it was ordered that non-pecuniary damages be paid for the violation of the right to the presumption of innocence, and an erroneous application of substantive law was established. It by no means follows from the content of the text that the plaintiff was designated as the perpetrator of the criminal offence for which it was stated that criminal proceedings were pending against her; instead, it was exclusively stated that two criminal proceedings were pending against her.⁴² In the view of the appellate court, the formulations used, as well as the context of the text, do not indicate that the average reader could conclude that the plaintiff is the perpetrator of the criminal offences reportedly pending against her.⁴³ The defendants filed an appeal on points of law (revision) in November 2024.
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41 · *Ibid.*

42 · Court of Appeal in Belgrade, Gž3 358/24 of 3 October 2024.

43 · *Ibid.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

This analysis also indicates that the previously given recommendations can, for the most part, be repeated. We reiterate that accepting these recommendations would improve the protection of the rights of citizens, journalists, and the media.

- Establish a specialised department with certified, specialised judges in the Higher Court in Belgrade, as the sole court that hears media disputes for the entire territory of Serbia. Form the necessary number of specialised panels in the appellate court. Regulate this through the LPIM, which would undoubtedly ensure better and more efficient processing of media disputes. This is also important due to the emergence of SLAPP lawsuits, for which there is no statutory regulation of procedure. Judicial practice will have to resolve the problems surrounding the resolution of this type of litigation, which will become increasingly frequent.
- Regularly organise periodic, continuous training for specialised judges, particularly to familiarise them with the case law of the ECtHR and the practice of the Press Council Complaints Commission in determining violations of the principles established by the Code of Journalists in Serbia.
- Ensure the necessary number of judges in the department for media disputes through the annual assignment schedule, based on the actual needs of the department.
- Ensure the necessary number of employees in supporting services for the proper implementation of the law.
- Train personnel on the anonymisation of judgments in this type of proceedings, so that the obtained judgments can be utilised for analysis.
- Organise regular meetings between journalists and judges of the specialised department, aimed at exchanging experiences to resolve operational issues.
- Ensure the application of statutory provisions in court that regulate communication with parties and lawyers via email, which would contribute to compliance with statutory deadlines.
- Judicial practice in which the amount of damages awarded will have to follow the specific facts of each case, paying particular attention to the frequency and repetition of rights violations against the same individual by the same media outlets. This criterion would have to be statutorily regulated, in order to prevent campaigns of intimidation, character assassination, and hate speech. This would

also reduce the potential for SLAPP lawsuits and the anxiety that an excessive claim will be granted, which could destroy the defendants.

- Utilise the powers of the Court President to replace a judge in a case when they fail to respect statutory deadlines.
- Seek an amendment to the statutory provision so that a judge can issue a decision on an interim measure *ex officio*, particularly in repetitive proceedings.
- Uphold requests for the publication of the entire judgment, precisely as provided for by the law.
- Statutorily regulate that the allocation of budget funds for the co-financing of a media outlet that continuously violates the provisions of the Code cannot be permitted, and ensure the necessary conditions for the enforcement of this provision.
- Ensure the existence of a legal remedy against decisions on co-financing.
- Prevent the same publisher of multiple media outlets from applying for the same project for each individual media outlet (thereby preventing a monopoly position).
- Establish strict sanctions for the distribution of media without an imprint, which will also be imposed when the author of the text is not specified.

APPENDIX

1a

LENGTH OF PROCEEDINGS AGAINST KURIR								
#	Plaintiff	Total scheduled [hearings]	No. of held hearings	No. of hearings not held	Time taken to draft the judgement	Duration of first-instance proceedings	Duration of appellate proceedings	Total duration of proceedings
1	Citizen	6	5	1	15-30 days	3 yr.	1 yr. 2 mos	4 yr. 2 mos
2	Politician	2	2	0	15-30 days	9 mos	4 mos	1 yr. 1 mos
3	Youtuber	5	3	2	15-30 days	2 yr. 3 mos	2 mos	2 yr. 5 mos
4	Youtuber	4	4	0	Up to 8 days	1 yr. 4 mos	7 mos	1 yr. 11 mos
5	Citizen	4	4	0	15-30 days	2 yr.	5 mos	2 yr. 5 mos
6	Citizen	5	5	0	15-30 days	9 mos	3 mes	1 yr.
7	Citizen	5	5	0	15-30 days	10 mos	11 mos	1 yr. 9 mos
8	Citizen	2	2	0	15-30 days	1 yr. 1 mos	1 mos	1 yr. 2 mos
9	Citizen	8	4	4	1-3 mos	3 yr. 4 mos	5 mos	3 yr. 9 mos
10	Citizens	5	4	1	8-15 days	2 yr. 5 mos	8 mos	3 yr. 1 mos
11	Citizen	5	4	1	15-30 days	3 yr. 2 mos	2 mos	3 yr. 4 mos

1b

AMOUNT OF DAMAGES AND OTHER CLAIMS AGAINST KURIR								
First-instance proceedings					Appeal proceedings			
#	Plaintiff	Amount of claim	Awarded	Publication of the introduction and the operative part	Dismissed	Appellant	Upheld	Quashed
1	Citizen	80,000	50,000	/	30,000	Defendant	/	yes
2	Politician	200,000	70,000	/	130,000	Plaintiff and defendant	/	yes
3	Youtuber	250,000	50,000	yes	200,000	Defendant	/	yes
4	YouTuber	150,000	30,000	/	120,000	Plaintiff and defendant	yes	/
5	Citizen	200,000	/	/	200,000	Plaintiff	yes	/
6	Citizen	200,000	50,000	yes	150,000	Defendant	partially	/
7	Citizen	500,000	40,000	yes	460,000	Defendant	yes	/
8	Citizen	175,000	100,000	yes	75,000	Plaintiff and defendant	yes	/
9	Citizen	200,000	50,000	/	150,000	Plaintiff and defendant	yes	/
10	Citizens	400,000	200,000	yes	200,000	Plaintiff and defendant	/	yes
11	Citizen	200,000	25,000	yes	175,000	Defendant	yes	/

2a

LENGTH OF PROCEEDINGS AGAINST SRPSKI TELEGRAF								
#	Plaintiff	Total scheduled [hearings]	No. of held hearings	No. of hearings not held	Time taken to draft the judgement	Duration of first-instance proceedings	Duration of appellate proceedings	Total duration of proceedings
1	Politician	3	3	/	8-15 days	7 mos	2 mos	9 mos
2	Police officer	4	4	/	15-30 days	3 mos	1 mos	4 mos
3	Starlet	6	5	1	15-30 days	3 mos	6 mos	9 mos
4	Citizen	4	2	2	8-15 days	1yr 5 mos	/	1yr 5 mos
5	Minors family	2	2	/	15-30 days	6 mos	7 mos	1 yr 1 mos
6	Citizen	6	3	3	8-15 days	2 yr 6 mos	5 mos	2 yr 11 mos
7	Businessman	7	5	2	8-15 days	4 mos	2 yr 2 mos	2 yr 6 mos
8	Public official	7	5	2	15-30 days	2 yr 7 mos	3 mos	2 yr 10 mos
9	Ministar	6	4	2	15-30 days	2 yr 2 mos	3 mos	2 yr 5 mos
10	Public official	4	3	1	15-30 days	1 yr 8 mos	11 mos	2 yr 7 mos
11	Public official	10	8	2	15-30 days	3 yr 7 mos	5 mos	4 yr 1 mos
12	Businessman	6	3	3	15-30 days	2 yr 11 mos	3 mos	3 yr 1 mos
13	Businessman	4	3	1	1-3 mos	1 yr 9 mos	1 mos	1 yr 10 mos
14	Public figure	11	4	7	15-30 days	4 yr	1 mos	4 yr 1 mos
15	Police officer	6	4	2	8-15 days	2 yr 3 mos	1 mos	2 yr 4 mos
16	Public official	4	3	1	15-30 days	2 yr	1 mos	2 yr 1 mos
17	Public figure	5	3	2	15-30 days	3 mos	10 mos	1 yr 1 mos
18	Public figure	4	3	1	15-30 days	1 yr	2 mos	1 yr 2 mos
19	Public official	12	5	7	1-3 mos	4 yr 1 mos	5 mos	4 yr 6 mos
20	Businessman	6	4	2	1-3 mos	2 yr 2 mos	2 mos	2 yr 4 mos
21	Businessman	5	4	1	15-30 days	2 yr 3 mos	9 mos	3 yr
22	Businessman	4	3	1	1-3 mos	1 yr 8 mos	2 mos	1 yr 10 mos
23	Citizen	9	6	3	8-15 days	3 yr 4 mos	5 mos	3 yr 9 mos
24	Politician	1	1	/	up to 8 days	7 mos	10 mos	1 yr 5 mos
25	Chief of Police Administration	4	3	1	15-30 days	2 yr 2 mos	3 mos	2 yr 5 mos
26	Journalist	4	3	1	8-15 days	1 yr 8 mos	2 mos	1 yr 10 mos

AMOUNT OF DAMAGES AND OTHER CLAIMS AGAINST SRPSKI TELEGRAF								
First-instance proceedings					Appeal proceedings			
Plaintiff	Amount of claim	Awarded	Publication of the introduction and the operative part	Dismissed	Appellant	Upheld	Quashed	Modified
1. Politician	100,000	50,000	yes	50,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
2. Police officer	150,000	150,000	yes	/	Defendant	yes	/	/
3. Starlet	100,000	60,000	/	40,000	Defendant	yes	/	For the introduction and the operative part
4. Citizen	150,000	80,000	/	70,000	/	/	/	/
5. Minor victim's family	1,400,000	500,000	yes	900,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
6. Citizen	150,000	40,000	/	90,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
7. Businessman	750,000	150,000	yes	600,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
8. Public official	500,000	80,000	yes	420,000	Plaintiff and Defendant	yes	For pecuniary damages	/
9. Minister	100,000	70,000	yes	30,000	Defendant	yes	/	dismissed for an additional 20,000
10. Public official	200,000	100,000	yes	100,000	Defendant	/	/	/
11. Public official	3,900,000	300,000	/	3,600,000	Defendant	/	/	damages reduced to 150,000
12. Businessman	250,000	50,000	/	200,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
13. Businessman	250,000	50,000	/	200,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
14. Public figure	120,000	60,000	yes	60,000	Defendant	/	/	claim dismissed
15. Police officer	500,000	150,000	/	350,000	Defendant	/	/	damages reduced to 100,000
16. Public official	750,000	310,000	yes	440,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
17. Public figure	250,000	80,000	yes	170,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
18. Public figure	250,000	100,000	/	150,000	Plaintiff and Defendant	yes	/	/
19. Public official	400,000	110,000	yes	290,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
20. Businessman	250,000	80,000	/	170,000	Plaintiff and Defendant	yes	/	/
21. Businessman	250,000	30,000	yes	220,000	Plaintiff	/	/	ordered to pay 50,000, dismissed for 200,000
22. Businessman	250,000	30,000	/	220,000	Plaintiff and Defendant	yes	/	/
23. Citizen	450,000	120,000	yes, entire	330,000	Defendant	/	da	/
24. Politician	100,000	40,000	yes	60,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
25. Chief of Police Administration	150,000	80,000	yes	70,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
26. Journalist	100,000	100,000	yes, entire	/	Defendant	upheld for 50,000	/	dismissed for 50,000

LENGTH OF PROCEEDINGS								
AGAINST INFORMER AND INSIDER TEAM								
#	Plaintiff	Total scheduled [hearings]	No. of held hearings	No. of hearings not held	Time taken to draft the judgement	Duration of first-instance proceedings	Duration of appellate proceedings	Total duration of proceedings
1	Journalists	8	6	2	Up to 15 days	4 yr. 3 mos	3mos	4 yr. 6 mos
2	Activist	3	2	1	Up to 15 days	11 months	2 me.	1yr. 1mos
3	Student	3	2	1	15-30 days	1 yr.	/	1 yr.
4	Journalist	2	2	/	up to 8 days	9 mos	2 mos	11 mos
5	Journalist	2	2	/	15-30 days	10 mos	1 mos	11 mos
6	Student	2	2	/	1-3 mos	10 mos	3 mos	1 yr. 1 mos
7	Activist	2	2	/	15-30 days	8 mos	/	8 mos
8	Politician	2	2	/	up to 8 days	6 mos	5 mos	11 mos
9	Politician	2	2	/	15-30 days	7 mos	2 mos	9 mos
10	Citizen	6	4	2	1-3 mos	1 yr. 7 mos	9 mos	2 yr. 4 mos
11	Politician	3	2	1	15-30 days	1 yr.	1 mos	1 yr. 1 mos
12	Journalist	2	2	/	15-30 days	8 mos	5 mos	1 yr. 1 mos
13	Journalist	2	2	/	1-3 mos	9 mos	3 mos	1 yr.
14	Politician	7	3	4	15-30 days	3 yr.	4 mos	3 yr. 4 mos
15	Politician	3	3	/	8-15 days	1 yr. 7 mos	2 mos	1 yr. 9 mos
16	Journalist	4	3	1	1-3 mos	1 yr. 10 mos	3 mos	2 yr. 1 mos
17	Politician	3	2	1	15-30 days	1 yr. 5 mos	2 mos	1 yr. 7 mos
18	Politician	4	2	2	over 3 mos	1 yr. 5 mos	1 mos	1 yr. 6 mos
19	Politician	3	3	/	15-30 days	2 yr. 1.5mos	1.5 mos	1 yr. 3 mos
20	Politician	6	4	2	15-30 days	2 yr. 6 mos	2 mos	2 yr. 8 mos
21	Citizen	2	2	/	8-15 days	10 mos	10 mos	1 yr. 8 m2s.
22	Student	3	2	1	15-30 days	1 yr.	1 mos	1 yr. 1 mos
23	Journalist	2	2	/	up to 8 days	9 mos	2 mos	11 mos
24	Journalist	2	2	/	1 mos	10 mos	3 mos	1 yr. 1 mos
25	Student	2	2	/	1 mos	10 mos	3 mos	1 yr. 1 mos
26	Politician	2	2	/	up to 8 days	6 mos	5 mos	11 mos
27	Politician	2	2	/	1 mos	7 mos	2 mos	9 mos
28	Association	1	1	/	do 8 days	4 mos	/	4 mos
29	Citizens	4	3	1	15-30 days	7 months	5 months	1 yr.
30	Citizens	6	4	2	15-30 days	2 yr. 3mos	9 months	3 yr.
31	Politician	6	4	2	8-25 days	2 yr. 1 mos	9 mos	2 yr. 10mos
32	Citizen	6	4	2	1-3 mos	2 yr.	6 months	2 yr. 6mos
33	Politician	2	2	/	1-3 mos	8 mos	1 mos	9 mos
34	Citizen	6	3	3	15-30 days	3 yr.	1 mos	3 yr. 1 mos
35	Citizen	4	4	/	15-30 days	10 mos	2 mos	1 yr. 1mos
36	Entertainment Figures	5	3	2	up to 8 days	1 yr. 9 mos	7 mes	2 yr. 4 mos
37	Citizen	4	3	1	15-30 days	1 yr. 7 mos	6 mos	2 yr. 1 mos
38	Entertainment Figures	6	3	3	1-3 mos	2 yr. 10 mos	8 mos	4 yr. 2 mos
39	Citizen	8	4	4	15-30 days	4 yr. 5 mos	2 mos	4 yr. 7 mos
40	Activist	4	3	1	8-15 days	9 mos	11 mos	1 yr. 8 mos
41	Citizen	1	1	/	15-30 days	2 mos	5 mos	7 mos
42	Journalist	7	2	5	1 - 3 mos	3 yr. 6 mos	2 mos	3 yr. 8 mos

3b

AMOUNT OF DAMAGES AND OTHER CLAIMS								
AGAINST INFORMER AND INSIDER TEAM								
#	Plaintiff	First-instance proceedings			Appeal proceedings			
		Amount of claim	Awarded	Publication of the introduction and the operative part	Dismissed	Appellant	Upheld	Quashed
								Modified
1	Journalists	1,000,000	360,000	/	640,000	Defendant	yes	/
2	Activist	80,000	80,000	/	/	Defendant	yes	/
3	Student	80,000	80,000	yes	/	Defendant	yes	/
4	Journalist	100,000	60,000	yes	40,000	Defendant	yes	/
5	Journalist	80,000	60,000	yes	20,000	Defendant	yes	/
6	Student	100,000	50,000	/	50,000	Defendant	yes	/
7	Activist	500,000	/	/	500,000	/	/	/
8	Politician	90,000	90,000	/	/	Defendant	yes	/
9	Politician	70,000	60,000	/	10,000	Defendant	yes	/
10	Citizen	100,000	50,000	/	50,000	Defendant	yes	/
11	Politician	200,000	100,000	yes	100,000	Defendant	yes	/
12	Journalist	80,000	40,000	/	40,000	Defendant	yes	/
13	Journalist	80,000	60,000	/	20,000	Defendant	yes	/
14	Politician	300,000	50,000	/	250,000	Defendant	yes	/
15	Politician	300,000	50,000	yes	250,000	Defendant	yes	/
16	Journalist	120,000	/	/	120,000	Plaintiff	/	yes
17	Politician	100,000	/	yes	20,000	Defendant	yes	/
18	Politician	100,000	50,000	yes	50,000	Defendant	yes	/
19	Politician	100,000	50,000	yes	50,000	Defendant	yes	/
20	Politician	200,000	80,000	yes	120,000	Defendant	yes	/
21	Citizen	100,000	80,000	yes	20,000	Defendant	yes	/
22	Student	80,000	80,000	yes	/	Defendant	yes	/
23	Journalist	100,000	60,000	yes	40,000	Defendant	yes	/
24	Journalist	80,000	60,000	yes	20,000	Defendant	yes	/
25	Student	100,000	50,000	/	50,000	Defendant	yes	/
26	Politician	90,000	90,000	/	/	Defendant	yes	/
27	Politician	70,000	60,000	/	/	Defendant	yes	/
28	Association	400,000	/	/	400,000	/	/	/
29	Citizen	200,000	150,000	yes	50,000	Defendant	yes	declaratory claim
30	Citizens	360,000	360,000	yes	/	Defendant	yes	/
31	Politician	90,000	70,000	yes	20,000	Defendant	yes	declaratory claim
32	Citizen	120,000	50,000	yes	70,000	Defendant	yes	/
33	Politician	100,000	100,000	yes	/	Defendant	yes	removal dismissed
34	Citizen	200,000	80,000	yes	20,000	Defendant	yes	/
35	Citizen	500,000	80,000	/	420,000	Defendant	60,000	dismissed for an additional 20,000
36	Entertainment Figures	150,000	50,000	yes	100,000	Plaintiff/Defendant	yes	/
37	Citizen	300,000	120,000	/	180,000	Defendant	yes	/
38	Entertainment Figures	490,000	80,000	yes	410,000	Defendant	60,000	dismissed for 20,000
39	Citizen	200,000	40,000	yes	160,000	Defendant	yes	/
40	Activist	700,000	100,000	Rejected	600,000	Defendant	yes	/
41	Citizen	200,000	60,000	yes	140,000	Plaintiff and Defendant	yes	/
42	Journalist	700,000	200,000	/	500,000	Defendant	yes	/

4a

LENGTH OF PROCEEDINGS								
AGAINST NOVA								
#	Plaintiff	Total scheduled [hearings]	No. of held hearings	No. of hearings not held	Time taken to draft the judgement	Duration of first-instance proceedings	Duration of appellate proceedings	Total duration of proceedings
1	Politician	7	3	4	15-30 days	3 yr.	4 mos	3 yr. 3 mos
2	Public official	8	5	3	15-30 days	3 yr. 4 mos	10 mos	4 yr. 3 mos
3	Public official	9	7	2	15-30 days	3 yr. 7 mos	3 mos	3 yr. 10 mos
4	Public official	9	6	3	15-30 days	3 yr.	3 mos	3 yr. 3 mos
5	Doctor	3	3	/	15-30 days	2 yr.	7 mos	2 yr. 7 mos
6	Public official	1	1	/	15-30 days	7 mos	4 mos	11 mos
7	Politician	3	1	2	15-30 days	9 mos	8 mos	1 yr. 5 mos
8	Public official	8	4	4	15-30 days	4 yr.	3 mos	4 yr. 3 mos
9	Politician	3	2	1	15-30 days	2 yr. 5 mos	6 mos	2 yr. 11 mos
10	Minister	8	5	3	10-15 days	3 yr.	4 mos	3 yr. 4 mos
11	Lawyer	5	4	1	1-3 mos	1 yr. 7 mos	7 mos	2 yr. 2 mos
12	Public official	2	1	1	1-3 mos	1 yr.	3 mos	1 yr. 3 mos
13	Businessman	1	1	/	15-30 days	6 mos	5 mos	11 mos
14	Group of persons	3	2	1	15-30 days	11 mos	8 mos	1 yr. 7 mos
15	Citizen	2	2	/	up to 8 days	1 yr. 3 mos	5 mos	1 yr. 8 mos
16	Politician	8	3	5	15-30 days	3 yr. 4 mos	9 mos	4 yr. 1 mos
17	Journalist	7	3	4	8-15 days	2 yr. 4 mos	5 mos	2 yr. 9 mos
18	Millennium Team	5	3	2	1 mos	2 yr.	7 mos	2 yr. 7 mos
19	Actor	4	4	/	15-30 days	3 yr. 5 mos	5 mos	3 yr. 10 mos
20	Police officer	2	2	/	1-3 mos	9 mos	1 yr.	1 yr. 9 mos
21	Public figure	9	6	3	1 mos	2 yr. 10 mes	3 mos	3 yr. 1 mos
22	Politician	2	2	/	2 mos	9 mos	4 mos	1 yr. 1 mos
23	Actor	3	2	1	1 mos	2 yr. 6 mos	9 mos	3 yr. 3 mos
24	Preschool Director	2	1	1	15-30 days	9 mos	11 mos	1 yr. 8 mos

4b

AMOUNT OF DAMAGES AND OTHER CLAIMS									
AGAINST NOVA									
First-instance proceedings					Appeal proceedings				
#	Plaintiff	Amount of claim	Awarded	Publication of the introduction and the operative part	Dismissed	Appellant	Upheld	Quashed	Modified
1	Politician	500,000	70,000	yes	430,000	Plaintiff and defendant	yes	/	/
2	Public official	450,000	100,000	yes	350,000	Defendant	/	yes	/
3	Public official	2,700,000	250,000	yes	1,450,000	Plaintiff and defendant	/	yes	/
4	Public official	1,200,000	/	/	1,200,000	Plaintiff	yes	/	/
5	Doctor	500,000	70,000	/	430,000	Defendant	/	yes	/
6	Public official	90,000	90,000	/	/	Defendant	/	/	Claim dismissed
7	Politicians	2,000,000	/	/	2,000,000	Tužici	yes	/	/
8	Public official	500,000	60,000	/	440,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
9	Politician	500,000	70,000	/	430,000	Plaintiff and defendant	/	yes	/
10	Minister	100,000	40,000	/	60,000	Defendant	/	yes	/
11	Lawyer	490,000	80,000	yes	410,000	Plaintiff and defendant	/	/	Upheld for 40,000
12	Public official	450,000	50,000	yes	400,000	Defendant	/	/	Claim dismissed
13	Businessman	450,000	90,000	yes	360,000	Defendant	/	/	Claim dismissed
14	Group of persons	2,000,000	/	/	2,000,000	Plaintiff	yes	/	/
15	Citizen	150,000	/	/	150,000	Plaintiff	yes	/	/
16	Politician	450,000	100,000	yes	350,000	Defendant	/	yes	/
17	Journalist	500,000	70,000	/	430,000	Plaintiff and defendant	/	yes	/
18	Millennium Team	11,750,000	/	/	11,175,000	Plaintiff	yes	/	/
19	Actor	1,000,000	80,000	/	920,000	Plaintiff	/	/	Partially modified
20	Police officer	500,000	50,000	yes	450,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
21	Public figure	2040000	/	/	2040000	Plaintiff	yes	/	/
22	Politician	600000	50000	/	550000	Plaintiff and defendant	partially	/	/
23	Actor	1000000	/	/	1000000	Plaintiff	yes	/	/
24	Preschool Director	80000	80000	yes	/	Defendant	/	/	Modified

5a

LENGTH OF PROCEEDINGS								
AGAINST NOVOSTI								
#	Plaintiff	Total scheduled [hearings]	No. of held hearings	No. of hearings not held	Time taken to draft the judgement	Duration of first-instance proceedings	Duration of appellate proceedings	Total duration of proceedings
1	Trade unionist	2	2	/	1-3 mos	1 yr	3 mos	1 yr 3 mos
2	Student	2	2	/	8-15 days	11 mos	6 mos	1 yr 5 mos
3	Journalist	2	2	/	up to 8 days	10 mos	1 mos	11 mos
4	Politician	4	4	/	15-30 days	1 yr 8 mos	2 mos	1 yr10 mos
5	Minor	3	3	/	15-30 days	7 mos	1 yr 3 mos	1 yr 10 mos
6	Businessman	2	2	/	15-30 days	8 mos	3 mos	11 mos
7	Trade unionist	3	3	/	15-30 days	1 yr 3mos	2 mos	1 yr 5 mos
8	Citizen	2	2	/	15-30 days	1 yr	1 mos	1 yr 1 mos
9	Politician	2	2	/	15-30 days	9 mos	2 mos	11 mos
10	Politician	2	2	/	up to 8 days	8 mos	1 mos	9 mos
11	Journalist	2	2	/	up to 8 days	10 mos	1 mos	11 mos
12	Professor	2	2	/	15-30 days	6 mos	1 mos	7 mos

5b

AMOUNT OF DAMAGES AND OTHER CLAIMS									
PROTIV NOVOSTI									
First-instance proceedings					Appeal proceedings				
#	Plaintiff	Amount of claim	Awarded	Publication of the introduction and the operative part	Dismissed	Appellant	Upheld	Quashed	Modified
1	Trade unionist	100,000	100,000	/	/	defendant	for	/	/
2	Student	80,000	80,000	yes	/	defendant	yes	/	/
3	Journalist	80,000	60,000	yes	20,000	defendant	yes	/	/
4	Politician	90,000	70,000	yes	20,000	plaintiff	yes	/	/
5	Minor	200,000	200,000	yes	/	defendant	yes	/	Declaratory claim dismissed
6	Businessman	200,000	150,000	yes	50,000	defendant	yes	/	
7	Trade unionist	100,000	80,000	yes	20,000	defendant	yes	/	/
8	Citizen	900,000	80,000	yes	820,000	defendant	yes	/	/
9	Politician	120,000	80,000	yes	40,000	defendant	yes	/	/
10	Politician	100,000	40,000	/	60,000	defendant	yes	/	/
11	Journalist	80,000	60,000	yes	20,000	defendant	yes	/	/
12	Professor	100,000	85,000	/	20,000	defendant	yes	/	/

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LENGTH OF PROCEEDINGS								
AGAINST ALO								
#	Plaintiff	Total scheduled [hearings]	No. of held hearings	No. of hearings not held	Time taken to draft the judgement	Duration of first-instance proceedings	Duration of appellate proceedings	Total duration of proceedings
1	Wife of a singer	6	4	2	Up to 8 days	3 yr. 4 mos	1 mos	3 yr. 5 mos
2	Politician	2	2	/	8-15 days	11 mos	2 mos	1 yr. 1 mos
3	Citizen	3	3	/	15-30 days	1. yr. 9 mos	2 mos	1 yr. 11 mos
4	Association	1	1	/	15-30 days	7,5 mos	4,5 mos	1 yr.
5	Wife of the accused	2	2	/	15-30 days	1 yr.	/	1 yr
6	Politician	6	4	2	15-30 days	1 yr. 9 mos	2 mos	1 yr. 11 mos
7	Businessman	2	2	/	15-30 days	8 mos	3 mos	11 mos
8	Military trade union	4	3	1	15-30 days	1 yr. 1 mos	1 mos	1 yr. 2 mos
9	Celebrity artist	9	5	4	1-3 mos	5 yr. 7 mos	1 mos	1 yr. 8 mos
10	Politician	2	2	/	15-30 days	6 mos	4 mos	10 mos
11	Politician	3	2	1	15-30 days	1 yr. 4 mos	4 mos	1 yr. 8 mos
12	Politician	3	3	/	15-30 days	1 yr. 2 mos	2,5 mes	1 yr. 4,5 mos
13	Citizen	8	5	3	2 mos	2 yr. 2 mos	5 mos	2 yr. 7 mos
14	Politician	1	1	/	15-30 days	5 mos	1 mos	6 mos
15	Citizen	5	5	/	2 mos	1 yr. 6 mos	4 mos	1 yr. 10 mos
16	Politician	7	3	4	15-30 days	2 yr. 8 mos	2 mos	2 yr. 10 mos
17	Professors (2)	2	2	/	15-30 days	7 mos	9 mos	1 yr. 4 mos
18	Lawyer	6	4	2	1-3 mos	2yr. 8 mos	2 mos	2 yr 10 mos
19	Politician	2	2	/	15-30 days	1 yr.	2 mos	1 yr. 2 mos
20	Politician	8	2	6	15-30 days	2 yr. 10 mos	1 mos	2 yr. 11 mos
21	Journalist	7	3	4	8-15 days	2 yr. 8 mos	4 mos	3 yr.
22	Politician	2	2	/	1-3 mos	1 yr.	10 mos	1 yr. 10 mos
23	Politician	5	1	4	15-30 days	1 yr. 9 mos	1 yr. 3 mos	3 yr.
24	Politician	3	3	/	11 mos	9 mos	4 mos	2 yr.
25	Police officer	6	3	3	1-3 mos	2 yr. 6 mos	2 mos	2 yr. 8 mos
26	Politician	2	2	/	15-30 days	1 yr.	7 mos	1 yr. 7 mos
27	Politician	3	3	/	8-15 days	1 yr. 3 mos	2 mos	1 yr. 5 mos
28	Politician	2	2	/	8-15 days	5 mos	9 mos	1 yr. 1 mos
29	Politician	7	4	3	15-30 days	3 yr.	2 mos	3 yr. 2 mos
30	Businessman	9	3	6	15-30 days	3 yr. 3 mos	5 mos	3 yr. 8 mos
31	Stylist	10	6	4	15-30 days	4 yr. 2 mos	3 mos	4 yr. 5 mos
32	Citizen	10	6	4	1-3 mos	5 yr.	11 mos	5 yr. 11 mos
33	Citizen	6	3	3	15-30 days	3 mos	2 mos	5 mos
34	Politician	3	2	1	15-30 days	1 yr. 5 mos	3mos	1 yr. 8 mos
35	Public figure	2	2	/	Up to 8 days	5 mos	1mes	6mos
36	Politician	9	5	4	15-30 days	1 yr	7 mos	1yr. 7 mos
37	Celebrity	13	5	8	15-30 days	5 yr. 9 mos	4 mos	6 yr. 1 mos
38	Activist	5	2	3	15-30 days	1 yr. 6 mos	2 mos	1 yr. 8 mos
39	Citizen	7	5	2	15-30 days	3 yr. 4 mos	2 mos	3 yr. 6 mos
40	Citizen	2	2	/	15-30 days	9 mos	4 mos	1 yr. 1 mos
41	Citizen	5	5	/	1-3 mos	2 yr.	5 mos	2 yr. 5 mos

AMOUNT OF DAMAGES AND OTHER CLAIMS									
AGAINST ALO									
First-instance proceedings					Appeal proceedings				
#	Plaintiff	Amount of claim	Awarded	Publication of the introduction and the operative part	Dismissed	Appellant	Upheld	Quashed	Modified
1	Wife of a singer	100,000	50,000	/	50,000	Plaintiff and Defendant	yes	/	/
2	Politician	200,000	200,000	/	/	Defendant	yes	/	/
3	Citizen	150,000	150,000	/	/	Defendant	yes	/	/
4	Association	300,000	hate speech	yes	for damage	Plaintiff	yes	/	/
5	Wife of the accuse	120,000	20,000	/	100,000	/	/	/	/
6	Politician	300,000	90,000	/	210,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
7	Businessman	300,000	120,000	/	180,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
8	Military trade union	70,000	/	/	for damage	Plaintiff	partially	partially	/
9	Celebrity artist	80,000	80,000	/	/	/	/	/	/
10	Politician	300,000	/	/	entire claim	Plaintiff	yes	/	/
11	Politician	300,000	50,000	yes	250,000	Defendant	yes	partially	/
12	Politician	300,000	150,000	yes	150,000	Defendant	70000	/	Dismissed for an additional 80,000
13	Citizen	200,000	80,000	yes	120,000	Plaintiff	yes	/	/
14	Politician	90,000	90,000	yes	/	Plaintiff and	yes	/	/
15	Citizen	200,000	50,000	yes	150,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
16	Politician	100,000	40,000	/	60,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
17	Professors (2)	400,000	300,000	/	100,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
18	Lawyer	400,000	/	/	400,000	Plaintiff	/	yes	/
19	Politician	200,000	100,000	/	100,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
20	Politician	100,000	80,000	/	20,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
21	Journalist	1,000,000	200,000	/	800,000	Defendant	150 000	/	Dismissed for 50,000
22	Politician	90,000	90,000	/	/	Defendant	70 000	/	Dismissed for 20,000
23	Politician	200,000	100,000	yes	100,000	Defendant	40 000	/	Only a part of the text to be
24	Politician	100,000	50,000	/	50,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
25	Police officer	150,000	90,000	yes	60,000	Defendant	30 000	/	Dismissed for 60,000
26	Politician	900,000	100,000	yes	800,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
27	Politician	200,000	80,000	yes	120,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
28	Politician	300,000	150,000	yes	150,000	Defendant	80 000	/	Dismissed for 70,000
29	Politician	360,000	210,000	yes	150,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
30	Businessman	500,000	70,000	yes	430,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
31	Stylist	500,000	40,000	yes	460,000	Plaintiff and	yes	/	/
32	Citizens	1,600,000	620,000	yes	980,000	Plaintiff and	yes	/	Upheld for 820,000
33	Citizen	100,000	50,000	yes	50,000	Plaintiff and	yes	/	/
34	Politician	300,000	100,000	yes	200,000	Defendant	yes	/	Claim for publication rejected
35	Public figure	900,000	/	/	900,000	Plaintiff	yes	/	/
36	Politician	300,000	60,000	/	240,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
37	Celebrity	450,000	50,000	yes	400,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
38	Activist	60,000	60,000	yes	/	Defendant	/	yes	/
39	Citizen	500,000	60,000	yes	440,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
40	Citizen	150,000	80,000	/	70,000	Defendant	/	yes	/
41	Citizen	400,000	70,000	/	330,000	Plaintiff and	50,000	/	Dismissed for 350,000

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LENGTH OF PROCEEDINGS								
AGAINST REPUBLIKA								
#	Plaintiff	Total scheduled [hearings]	No. of held hearings	No. of hearings not held	Time taken to draft the judgement	Duration of first-instance proceedings	Duration of appellate proceedings	Total duration of proceedings
1	Minor	3	3	/	15-30 days	10.5 mos	4.5 mos	1 yr 3 mos
2	Police officer	4	4	/	15-30 days	3 mos	1 mos	4 mos
3	Starlet	6	5	1	15-30 days	3.5 mos	6.5 mos	10 mos
4	Citizen	4	2	2	8-15 days	17 mos	/	17 mos
5	Politician	5	3	2	8-15 days	17 mos	2 mos	1 yr 7 mos
6	Businessman	10	6	4	8-15 days	6 mos	2 mos	8 mos
7	Businessman	1	/	1	8-15 days	2 mos	1 mos	3 mos
8	Minor	2	2	/	8-15 days	1 yr	2 mos	1 yr 2 mos
9	Citizen	4	2	2	10-15 days	17 mos	/	17 mos
10	Minor	2	2	/	8-15 days	1 yr	2 mos	1 yr 2 mos
11	Politician	1	1	/	8-15 days	7 mos	2 mos	9 mos
12	Public official	4	4	/	15-30 days	3 mos	3 mos	6 mos
13	Politician	4	4	/	1 mos	1 yr 7 mos	1 yr 5 mos	3 yr
14	Police officer	6	3	3	up to 8 days	2 yr 6 mos	5 mos	2 yr 11 mos
15	Politician	5	4	1	15-30 days	1 yr 10 mos	2 mos	2 yr
16	Doctor	9	2	7	1-3 mos	3 yr 2 mos	2 mos	3 yr 2 mos
17	Politician	1	1	/	8-15 days	7 mos	2 mos	9 mos
18	Public figure	3	2	1	1-3 mos	1 yr 2 mos	3 mos	1 yr 5 mos
19	Citizen	9	3	6	1-3 mos	3 yr 5 mos	8 mos	4 yr 1 mos
20	Starlet	3	2	1	15-30 days	1 yr 2 mos	1 mos	1 yr 3 mos
21	Citizen	5	3	2	1-3 mos	2 yr 6 mos	3 mos	2 yr 9 mos

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AMOUNT OF DAMAGES AND OTHER CLAIMS									
AGAINST REPUBLIKA									
First-instance proceedings					Appeal proceedings				
#	Plaintiff	Amount of claim	Awarded	Publication of the introduction on and the operative part	Dismissed	Appellant	Upheld	Quashed	Modified
1	Minor	300,000	100,000	/	200,000	Defendant	Partially	Partially	/
2	Police officer	150,000	150,000	yes	/	Defendant	yes	/	/
3	Starlet	100,000	60,000	/	40,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
4	Citizen	150,000	100,000	/	50,000	/	/	/	/
5	Politician	100,000	50,000	yes	50,000	Defendant	for damages	For the	/
6	Businessman	500,000	250,000	yes	250,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
7	Businessman	200,000	50,000	/	150,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
8	Minor	600,000	300,000	/	300,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
9	Citizen	350,000	100,000	yes	250,000	Defendant and Plaintiff	yes	/	/
10	Minor	100,000	100,000	yes	/	Defendant	yes	/	/
11	Politician	150,000	60,000	yes	90,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
12	Public official	150,000	150,000	yes	/	Defendant	yes	/	Claim for the introduction and the
13	Politician	200,000	60,000	/	140,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
14	Police officer	750,000	50,000	/	700,000	Plaintiff	/	/	Upheld for 80,000, dismissed for 670,000
15	Politician	240,000	160,000	yes	80,000	Plaintiff and Defendant	/	For the	Upheld for 120,000, dismissed for 120,000
16	Doctor	200,000	150,000	/	50,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
17	Politician	100,000	50,000	yes	50,000	Defendant	for damages	For the	/
18	Public figure	100,000	60,000	yes	40,000	Defendant	upheld for 30,000	/	30,000 dismissed
19	Citizen	600,000	100,000	/	500,000	Defendant	yes	/	/
20	Starlet	100,000	/	/	100,000	Plaintiff	yes	/	/
21	Citizen	220,000	200,000	/	20,000	Defendant	yes	/	/

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AMOUNT OF DAMAGES AND OTHER CLAIMS												
AGAINST DANAS												
#	Plaintiff	No. of hearings	Claim	Upheld	Dismissed	Duration 1°	Duration 2°	Total duration	Appellant	Upheld	Quashed	Modified
1	Entrepreneur	4	500,000	/	500,000	1 yr. 1 mos	1 yr. 6 mos	2 yr. 7 mos	Plaintiff and defendant	Yes	/	For costs
2	Millennium Team	5 held 5 not held	11750000	/	11750000	3 yr. 6 mos	8 mos	4 yr. 2 mos	Plaintiff and defendant	Yes	/	For costs
3	Public official	3 held 3 not held	500000	40000	460000	2 yr. 11 mos	1 yr. 4 mos	4 yr. 3 mos	Plaintiff	Yes	/	/
4	Businessman	1	200000	50000	150000	6 mos	1 yr. 6 mos	2 yr.	Plaintiff and defendant	Partially, ND	/	Partially
5	Public official	2 held 2 not held	300000	/	300000	1 yr. 8 mos	3 mos 8 dana	1 yr. 11 mos	Plaintiff	Yes	/	/
6	Film director	2	500000	/	500000	1 yr.	1 yr. 1 mos	1 yr. 2 mos	Plaintiff	Yes	/	/
7	Public enforcement officer	3 held 1 not held	120000	80000	40000	1 yr. 2 mos	6 mos	1 yr. 8 mos	Plaintiff	Partially, ND	/	by 40,000

*ND (non-pecuniary damage)

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AMOUNT OF DAMAGES AND OTHER CLAIMS AGAINST ELECTRONIC MEDIA											
TV PINK											
#	Plaintiff	No. of hearings	Claim	Upheld	Dismissed	Duration 1°	Duration 2°	Total duration	Appellant	Upheld	Quashed
1	Citizen	3	200,000	70,000	30,000	1 yr 2 mos	1 yr	2 yr 2 mos	Plaintiff	yes	/
2	Politician	5	100,000	50,000	50,000	2 yr	6 mos	2 yr 6 mos	Defendant	yes	/
3	Citizen	3	70,000	70,000	/	1 yr 3 mos	6 mos	1 yr 9 mos	Defendant	yes	/
4	Citizen	1	1,500,000	/	Dismissed	6 mos	4 mos	10 mos	Plaintiff	yes	yes
5	Student	2	100,000	30,000	70,000	8 mos	/	8 mos	/	/	/
B92											
1	Politician	3	90,000	50,000	40,000	1 yr	/	1 yr	/	/	/
2	Citizen	3	80,000	40,000	40,000	3 mos	1 mos	4 mos	Plaintiff and defendant	yes	/
TV N1											
1	Citizen	6	1,500,000	/	1,500,000	2 yr	6 mos	2 yr 6 mos	Plaintiff	yes	/
2	Legal person	1	200,000	/	200,000	2 mos	/	2 mos	/	/	/

SLAPP LAWSUITS – THREE YEARS LATER: BIG DREAMS, MODEST OUTCOMES

Bearing in mind that the previous, *Third Report on the Protection of Freedom of Expression in the Judicial System of Serbia*, titled “Is There Justice for Freedom of Expression?”, was published in 2023 by the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, it can be assessed that sufficient time has passed to undertake a new review of the situation concerning SLAPP lawsuits, at both international and national level. A new overview of developments and their analysis are important for monitoring the continuity of previously observed patterns of pressure on freedom of expression, as well as for assessing whether new tendencies in regulation and/or practice have emerged in the meantime. At the same time, such an analysis can contribute to better formulation of further steps and defining the measures necessary to combat this phenomenon, which for years has significantly impacted the daily life and work of numerous participants in public discourse, primarily journalists and activists, who represent one of the pillars of a democratic society.

In May 2024, Directive (EU) 2024/1069 on protecting persons who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded claims or abusive court proceedings (“Strategic lawsuits against public participation” – SLAPP) entered into force.⁴⁴ This legally binding international document insists that states enable proceedings initiated by a manifestly unfounded lawsuit to be concluded at an early stage, that the plaintiff bears the costs of the proceedings, and that penalties and other measures be imposed against plaintiffs who abuse the right to judicial protection, alongside other forms of procedural safeguards for persons affected by SLAPP lawsuits.

The Directive defines “abusive court proceedings against public participation” as proceedings that are not brought genuinely to assert or exercise a right, but rather to prevent, restrict, or penalise public participation, often

44 · Directive (EU) 2024/1069 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 on protecting persons who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded claims or abusive court proceedings (“Strategic lawsuits against public participation”), PE/88/2023/REV/1, <https://tinyurl.com/2pruc8mh> (accessed 10 March 2026). For further details on the provisions of the proposed EU Directive, see Ana Zdravković, “SLAPP Lawsuits – Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation”, *Is There Justice for Freedom of Expression? Third Report on the Protection of Freedom of Expression in the Judicial System of Serbia*, Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, 2023, 44–48.

exploiting an imbalance of power between the parties and the pursuit of legally unfounded claims. Indicators of such a purpose, for instance, include:

- (a) the disproportionate, excessive, or unreasonable nature of the claim or part thereof, including the excessive value of the subject matter of the dispute;
- (b) the existence of multiple proceedings initiated by the plaintiff or associated persons in relation to similar matters;
- (c) intimidation, harassment, or threats by the plaintiff or their representatives, prior to or during the proceedings, as well as similar conduct by the plaintiff in similar or concurrent proceedings;
- (d) the use of procedural tactics in bad faith, such as delaying the proceedings, abusing the choice of jurisdiction, or discontinuing the proceedings at a later stage.⁴⁵

However, it is important to emphasise that this Directive will apply only to matters in civil or commercial cases that have cross-border implications, including proceedings for the determination of interim and protective measures, as well as counterclaims, regardless of the type of court.⁴⁶ According to the text of the Directive, a matter is considered to have no cross-border implications when both parties are domiciled in the same Member State in which the court seized is situated and when all other elements relevant to the situation are connected only to that Member State.⁴⁷ This circumstance has been characterised among legal experts as one of the main limitations of the Directive, as the vast majority of national SLAPP proceedings remain outside its scope.⁴⁸ On the other hand, it is a fact that the cross-border aspect of a case is broadly defined by the Directive, but it remains to be seen how this provision will be interpreted in practice. Finally, the deadline for Member States to align their national legislation with the provisions of the Directive, by adopting the necessary laws and other regulations, is 7 May 2026.⁴⁹ As this report is being drafted during the final phase of the transposition period, it is crucial in the months ahead to review the degree of readiness of EU Member States to fulfil this obligation and to monitor the practical effectiveness of the Directive.

Under the auspices of the Council of Europe, in 2024, the Committee of

45 · Article 4 para. 1 item 3) of the EU Directive 2024/1069.

46 · Article 2 of the EU Directive 2024/1069.

47 · Article 5 para. 1 of the EU Directive 2024/1069.

48 · The Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation on behalf of CASE, *A 2025 Report on SLAPPs in Europe: Democracy in the Dock*, 2026, 5.

49 · Article 22 para. 1 of the EU Directive 2024/1069.

Ministers adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)2 on countering SLAPPs. Its scope of application is broader than that of the EU Directive, as it applies to all those who exercise the right to public participation (acting as public watchdogs), and its standards should be respected not only in civil, but also in criminal and administrative proceedings, regardless of whether there are cross-border implications.⁵⁰ The Recommendation defines SLAPPs as legal actions threatened, initiated, or pursued as a means of harassing or intimidating a target, with the aim of preventing, inhibiting, restricting, or penalising freedom of expression on matters of public interest and the exercise of rights associated with public participation.⁵¹ The Recommendation also contains an illustrative list of indicators on the basis of which a SLAPP lawsuit can be recognised in a specific case, with the clarification that the greater the number of indicators present, the higher the probability that the case involves this phenomenon:

- (a) the plaintiff tries to exploit an imbalance of power, such as their financial advantage or political or societal influence, to put pressure on the defendant;
- (b) the arguments put forward by the plaintiff are partially or fully unfounded;
- (c) the remedies requested by the plaintiff are disproportionate, excessive or unreasonable;
- (d) the claims amount to abuse of laws or procedures;
- (e) the plaintiff engages in procedural and litigation tactics designed to drive up costs for the defendant, such as delaying proceedings, selecting a forum that is unfavourable to public participation or vexatious to the defendant, provoking an onerous workload and pursuing appeals with little or no prospect of success;
- (f) the legal action deliberately targets individuals rather than the organisations responsible for the challenged action;
- (g) the legal action is accompanied by a public relations offensive designed to bully, discredit or intimidate actors participating in public debate or aimed at diverting attention from the substantial issue at stake;
- (h) the plaintiff or their representatives engage in legal intimidation, harassment or threats, or have a history of doing so;

50 · Council of Europe, *Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on countering the use of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs)*, CM/Rec(2024)2, 5 April 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680af2805> (accessed 10 March 2026). For further details on the provisions of the proposed EU Directive, see Ana Zdravković, “SLAPP Lawsuits – Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation”, 2023, 39-43.

51 · Appendix to Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on countering the use of SLAPPs, para. 1.

- (i) the plaintiff or associated parties engage in multiple and co-ordinated or cross-border legal actions on the basis of the same set of facts or in relation to similar matters;
- (j) the plaintiff systematically refuses to engage with non-judicial mechanisms to resolve the claim.⁵²

Although both instruments essentially address the concept of SLAPP lawsuits in the same manner, the Recommendation defines them more broadly, insisting that an attack can consist merely of a threat, whereas the EU Directive narrows the concept to abusive court proceedings against public participation, emphasizing their unfounded nature, the aspect of abuse, and the imbalance of power between the parties.

Ultimately, the provisions of the EU Directive are more concise and less elaborated than those contained in the Council of Europe Recommendation, and such a difference can be explained by the distinct legal nature of these instruments. While the Recommendation represents a legally non-binding act, the Directive is binding, and EU Member States are obliged to transpose it into their national legislation. For this reason, the text of the Directive must be formulated so as to enable the achievement of a political and legal compromise among the Member States, while leaving a certain amount of room to adapt its content to the specificities of national legal orders. Therefore, its conciseness and lesser normative elaboration are likely the consequence of the need to ensure its acceptability, effective transposition and practical application at the national level. Thus, it can be concluded that the Directive, to a greater extent than the Recommendation, reflects a compromise based on common European standards while accommodating the diversity of the legal systems of the Member States.

For Serbia, it is particularly important to underline that the Council of Europe Recommendation repeatedly and directly refers to the articles of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), thereby creating an inextricable link with the provisions of this binding international convention. In this way, although formally a non-binding act, the Recommendation indirectly acquires binding force, because the ECtHR – whose case law is directly applied in Serbia as a source of law – will likely find it difficult to accept that states have respected the right to freedom of expression or any other right under the ECHR without having aligned their legislation and practice with this Recommendation.

⁵² · *Ibid*, para. 8.

The “Regional Baseline Assessment of Legislation and Public Policy Needs for Implementing Council of Europe and European Union Standards to Counter the Use of SLAPPs” was published at the end of 2024 to provide an analysis of the currently applicable legislative framework and adopted public policies relevant to SLAPP lawsuits within the Western Balkan states, as well as the amendments that need to be adopted for the successful enforcement and implementation of European anti-SLAPP standards prescribed by the EU Directive and the Council of Europe Recommendation.⁵³ It is notable that the analysis showed that the vast majority of the examined states already contain a series of provisions that can be used against SLAPP lawsuits and their plaintiffs, which provide a sound basis for the adoption of anti-SLAPP legislation.⁵⁴ For instance, in most states, the burden of proof is distributed between the parties, and the rules on the prohibition of abuse of rights, compensation for pecuniary and non-pecuniary damages, and provisions stipulating that the losing party bears the costs of the proceedings also provide useful starting point.⁵⁵ The solution from North Macedonia, according to which maximum amounts of non-pecuniary damages are prescribed in civil proceedings for a violation of reputation and honour, was praised as particularly good and can serve as a model for other states when designing anti-SLAPP regulations.⁵⁶ As one of the shortcomings, the analysis emphasises the circumstance that no current normative framework of the Western Balkan states provides a basis for recognizing victim status for defendants in SLAPP lawsuit proceedings, but it was explained that this type of provision can be found in whistle-blower protection laws, and thus similar protection should be recognised regarding SLAPP lawsuits. In any case, the core recommendation of this analysis to all states is the adoption of a specific, standalone anti-SLAPP law, modelled after the Council of Europe Recommendation, not only because this would provide comprehensive protection against this phenomenon, but also because the adoption of amendments to the existing legislative framework would entail a more complex and time-consuming procedure due to the requirements regarding the parliamentary majority needed to pass amendments in certain states of the region.⁵⁷ Additionally, emphasis is placed on the continuous implementation of training and capac-

53 · PRO-FREX, *Regional Baseline Assessment of Legislative and Policy Needs for Implementing Council of Europe and European Union Standards on Countering the Use of SLAPPs – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia*, Council of Europe Division for Cooperation on Freedom of Expression, DC-FoE_2024_20, 2024.

54 · *Ibid.*

55 · *Ibid.*

56 · *Ibid.*

57 · *Ibid.*

ity building for legal professionals, primarily judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and police officers, to handle these cases.⁵⁸

During 2025, states nominally continued with the implementation of the aforementioned international instruments, and the European Anti-SLAPP Monitor was launched as a joint initiative of CASE and the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF).⁵⁹ The objective of this mechanism is to provide information on the status of the implementation and enforcement of European instruments on SLAPPs across all European members, which is why it should serve as a tool for accountability and transparency to keep the application and respect of standards in this field under scrutiny. According to the current data of this mechanism, almost a third of states have not yet even initiated the implementation procedure, one has carried out partial implementation, and none has completed this procedure so far.⁶⁰ Based on this, it can be concluded that the majority of states will likely fail to meet the deadline for transposing the Directive by May 2026.

The “Guide for Legal Professionals on Freedom of Expression, SLAPPs and related ECHR Standards” was published in mid-2025 under the PRO-FREX programme for Serbia.⁶¹

The Guide opens by noting that, pursuant to Article 10 of the ECHR, the right to freedom of expression may be subject to restrictions only if they satisfy the three-part test established in ECtHR case law. First, the restriction must be prescribed by law. This means, first and foremost, that the legal basis for interfering with this freedom must be accessible, foreseeable, and formulated with sufficient precision to enable individuals to regulate their conduct accordingly.⁶² Second, the restriction must pursue one or more of the legitimate aims explicitly listed in Article 10, paragraph 2. These include the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, the prevention of disorder or crime, the protection of health or morals, the protection of the reputation or rights of others, preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary. Finally, the restriction must be necessary in a democratic society, meaning that the interference must correspond to a “pressing social

58 · *Ibid.*

59 · <https://slapp-monitor.eu> (accessed 10 March 2026)

60 · *Ibid.*

61 · Protecting Freedom of Expression and of the Media in Serbia (PROFLEX), *Guide for Legal Professionals on Freedom of Expression, SLAPPs and related ECHR Standards*, LEX/PAD_2025_11, 2025.

62 · *Groppera Radio AG and Others v. Switzerland*, Application No. 10890/84, judgment of 28.3.1990, para. 68.

need” and must be proportionate to the legitimate aim pursued, with no less restrictive means available to achieve the same goal.⁶³ It is particularly important to underline that when assessing proportionality, the context of the expression must be taken into account. In the view of the Court, a high degree of protection should be granted to political speech, journalists, and artists when their expression constitutes social commentary, as well as to all other forms of public debate on matters of public interest.⁶⁴

Additionally, the burden of proof regarding the circumstance that the restriction was justified and satisfied the stated cumulative conditions rests with the public authorities, and the courts must exercise strict scrutiny, especially in cases involving the media and matters of public interest.⁶⁵

One of the central messages of the Guide is that the media, but also civil society organisations, activists, researchers, and other actors contributing to public debate, hold the status of a “public watchdog” and, as such, must enjoy certain privileges, such as the protection of the confidentiality of sources of information, enhanced protection against searches of premises, and the seizure of materials.⁶⁶ Therefore, there is a very narrow margin for restricting their freedom of expression, particularly when they report on political matters or other topics of public interest, and the Guide specifically warns against the so-called chilling effect. This refers to the deterrent effect of restrictive measures that can discourage future reporting, impacting both the persons directly affected and other participants in the public discussion who wish to avoid the same fate.⁶⁷ For this reason, when assessing the amount of damages to be awarded, the impact of the sum on the defendant must be taken into account. This requires a specific evaluation of their financial situation and the potential deterrent effect the award could have on the defendant and others.⁶⁸ Furthermore, consideration should be given to how well-known the defendant is to the public, as well as the minimum or average wage in the

63 · *Axel Springer SE and RTL Television GmbH v. Germany*, Application No. 51405/12, judgment of 21.9.2017, para. 56.

64 · *Morice v. France*, Application No. 29369/10, judgment of 23.4.2015, paras. 124-127; *Pentikäinen v. Finland*, Application No. 11882/10, judgment of 20.10.2015, paras. 87-91; *Vereinigung Bildender Künstler v. Austria*, Application No. 68354/01, judgment of 25.1.2007.

65 · *Handyside v. the UK*, Application No. 5493/72, judgment of 7.12.1979; *Sunday Times v. the UK (No. 1)*, Application No. 6538/74, judgment of 26.4.1979.

66 · *Guide for Legal Professionals on Freedom of Expression, SLAPPs and related ECHR Standards*, 13.

67 · *Ibid*, 12, 27.

68 · *Ibid*, 27. See *Mesić v. Croatia*, Application No. 19362/18, judgment of 5. 5. 2022.

state whose court renders the decision, or within that specific profession.⁶⁹ For instance, in one case, the Court determined that the awarded damages were equivalent to 35 monthly salaries of the defendant, resulting in several years of severe financial hardship to settle the amount.⁷⁰ The extent to which this issue is relative and requires individual assessment depending on the circumstances of each specific case is also shown by the fact that the Court established that even a symbolic award of damages of just 1 euro can have a chilling effect, as the mere existence of a judgment can significantly intimidate public watchdogs, regardless of the financial consequences.⁷¹

The Guide underlines that freedom of expression protects journalists when they act in good faith, on the basis of a sufficiently reliable factual basis, and in accordance with the standards of professional ethics.⁷² In the words of the ECtHR: “in situations where on the one hand a statement of fact is made and insufficient evidence is adduced to prove it, and on the other the journalist is discussing an issue of genuine public interest, verifying whether the journalist has acted professionally and in good faith becomes paramount.”⁷³

The well-known standard was also reiterated, according to which the limits of acceptable criticism are wider regarding politicians than private individuals, as they inevitably and knowingly lay themselves open to close scrutiny of their every word and deed by both journalists and the public at large, and must consequently display a greater degree of tolerance.⁷⁴ However, the Guide recalled that, in the view of the Court, the same applies to other public figures, such as, for example, journalists, lecturers, businessmen, and all other persons who either seek publicity or may be subject to criticism due to the public nature of their work or the public statements they have made.⁷⁵

In the chapter on the right to private life, it is explained that for the application of Article 8 of the ECHR, it is necessary for the attack on a person’s reputation to attain a certain level of seriousness and cause prejudice in the

69 · *Tolmachev v. Russia*, Application No. 42182/11, judgment of 2. 6. 2020, paras. 52-53.

70 · *Kasabova v. Bulgaria*, Application No. 22385/03, judgment of 19. 4. 2011, par. 71.

71 · *Brasiliér v. France*, Application No. 71343/01, judgment of 11. 4. 2006.

72 · *Guide for Legal Professionals on Freedom of Expression, SLAPPs and related ECHR Standards*, 17-18.

73 · *Flux v. Moldova* (no. 7), Application No. 25367/05, judgment of 24.11.2009, para. 41.

74 · *Lingens v. Austria*, Application No. 9815/82, judgment of 8.7.1986, para. 42.

75 · *Guide for Legal Professionals on Freedom of Expression, SLAPPs and related ECHR Standards*, 22. For journalist, see *Gelevski v. North Macedonia*, Application No. 28032/12, judgment of 8.10.2020; for lecturer, see *Brunet-Lecomte and Lyon Mag' v. France*, Application No. 13327/04, judgment of 20.11.2008; for businessman, see *Verlagsgruppe News GmbH v. Austria* (no. 2), Application No. 10520/02, judgment of 14.12.2006.

context of the enjoyment of that right,⁷⁶ and that the ECtHR does not grant automatic priority to either right in such cases, but rather attempts to find a balance between the competing interests, employing the following criteria: contribution to a public debate, how well-known the person is to the public, their prior conduct, the method of obtaining the information and its veracity, as well as the content, form, and consequences of the publication.⁷⁷

Finally, the Guide also addresses the standards regarding the “right to be forgotten” and the liability of (online) platforms for content published by third parties.⁷⁸

However, without undermining the significance of the analysed standards from the ECtHR case law, which are of essential importance for all media disputes, the fact remains that the Guide promises guidelines for action regarding SLAPP lawsuits right in its title, whereas in the main text, it uses the term SLAPP only four times, and exclusively in the introduction!⁷⁹ In other words, although the vast majority of the cited standards genuinely concern cases initiated by SLAPP lawsuits, a high degree of engagement by legal practitioners, primarily judges, is required to apply all these standards in their practice. This clearly illustrates the complexity of SLAPP lawsuits, which demand a significant engagement from various stakeholders in order to put an end to this practice, provide clear guidelines to legal practitioners, and facilitate the implementation of existing standards in this field.

In this regard, unfortunately, no substantive legislative or policy measures have been taken in the Republic of Serbia over the past period. Although the European Commission stated in its 2024 Report on Serbia that SLAPP lawsuits “increasingly affect the work of investigative media and civil society organisations” and that “Serbia will need to align with European standards, including early dismissal of manifestly unfounded claims and remedies against abusive court proceedings”,⁸⁰ whereas in its 2025 Report it went a step further, explicitly requesting that Serbia align with the EU anti-SLAPP

76 · *Axel Springer AG v. Germany*, Application No. 39954/08, judgment of 7. 2. 2012, para. 83.

77 · *Guide for Legal Professionals on Freedom of Expression, SLAPPs and related ECHR Standards*, 35.

78 · *Ibid*, 49-56.

79 · Not counting the citation from the judgment *OOO Memo v. Russia*, Application No. 2840/10, judgment of 15.3.2022. on page 9 of the Guide.

80 · European Commission, *Commission Staff Working Document – Serbia 2024 Report*, SWD(2024) 695 final, Brussels, 30.10.2024, 38.

Directive.⁸¹ The state has still failed to act upon these remarks. This is particularly disturbing considering that relevant international associations have recorded a series of lawsuits over the last three years before domestic courts, which they qualified as SLAPPs. For instance, CASE recorded in its 2025 report that Serbia had 13 SLAPP cases during 2024, which positioned it near the top of the list of countries with the highest number of registered SLAPP cases in Europe that year.⁸² Furthermore, a number of renowned media freedom advocacy organisations issued a statement citing two cases initiated by a lawsuit brought by the Mayor of Belgrade against BIRN as the prime example of SLAPPs, in connection with their reporting on the origin and legalisation of property, in which he sought damages totalling nearly 12 million dinars.⁸³ The exact same qualification of these lawsuits was put forward by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, who also characterised as a SLAPP a lawsuit filed by police officers against *KRIK*, concerning an article in which *KRIK* claimed that a previously filed lawsuit against them by the same plaintiffs—regarding reporting on issues within the police unit to which the plaintiffs belong—was in fact a SLAPP lawsuit.⁸⁴ It is particularly alarming that the claim was granted, and *KRIK* was ordered to pay damages in the amount of around 400,000 dinars, precisely for the mere assertion that a SLAPP lawsuit had been brought against them.⁸⁵ Unusual cases based on lawsuits against *KRIK* continued to be established in the subsequent period; thus, in 2024, a judge of the Court of Appeal in Belgrade filed three lawsuits, two of which were criminal (in respect of which the proceedings were subsequently joined) and one civil, against a journalist and the editor-in-chief of this media outlet for a violation of privacy due to reporting on judges in Serbia, among whom she was included.⁸⁶ Even if the rules of journalistic ethics were violated in the aforementioned case, or if

81 · European Commission, *Commission Staff Working Document – Serbia 2025 Report*, SWD(2025) 755 final, Brussels, 4.11.2025, 40-41.

82 · Immediately after Italy and Germany, see The Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation on behalf of CASE, *A 2025 Report on SLAPPs in Europe: Democracy in the Dock*, 2026, 15.

83 · ARTICLE 19 Europe, European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), International Press Institute (IPI), OBC Transeuropa (OBCT), Reporters Without Borders (RSF), The Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation, *Serbia: Independent journalism faces biggest crisis in years*, 2023, <https://www.article19.org/resources/serbia-independent-journalism-faces-biggest-crisis-in-years/> (accessed on 18 March 2026); See also Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe Dunja Mijatović, *Report Following her visit to Serbia from 13 to 17 March 2023*, CommHR(2023)25, 6 September 2023, para. 74.

84 · *Ibid*, para. 73.

85 · <https://www.bezbedninovinari.rs/article/654/krik-pravosnazno-osuden-zbog-teksta-o-tome-ko-je-tuzio-redakciju> (accessed on 18 March 2026)

86 · <https://safejournalists.net/judge-sues-krik-seeks-jail-time-for-journalists-and-occupational-ban/> (accessed on 18 March 2026) and <https://birn.rs/nastavak-sudjenja-kriku-zbog-baza-o-sudijama/> (accessed on 8 May 2026)

the plaintiff's rights were injured, which the competent courts will decide on the merits, it is highly unusual, if not contrary to international norms, to request a draconian prison sentence for a criminal offence against honour and reputation, even though it remains punishable under the Criminal Code, and it is particularly worrying that such a request came precisely from a member of the judiciary, who ought to be familiar with the standards in this matter.

In order for all judicial office-holders to be informed about the rules and principles of media law, especially those relevant to SLAPPs, the Council of Europe has over the past three years continued to organise training and professional capacity building through seminars, training sessions and practical manuals. However, the realistic reach of such efforts will remain modest unless the state, and all members of its executive, legislative, and especially judicial branches, recognise the nature and seriousness of the phenomenon and commit to effectively countering it.

CRIMINAL LAW PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS IN SERBIA

IN 2024 AND 2025: MEDIA FREEDOM TRAPPED IN A DOWNWARD SPIRAL

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

“Media freedom in Serbia remains trapped in a downward spiral due to a record level of physical violence against journalists, death threats, and on-line smear campaigns, a worrying level of impunity, as well as firm political control over the media environment.”⁸⁷

MFRR, conclusion following a two-day mission to Belgrade, 26–27 March 2026

Over the past two years, the level of media freedom in Serbia has been steadily declining. The absence of an adequate response to media lynching and the rising violence against journalists contribute significantly to this devastating tendency. The hostile environment in which the media operate heavily resembles the era from a quarter of a century ago, when the persecution of dissenting voices culminated in murders. The cases involving the killings of journalists from that period, Slavko Ćuruvija and Milan Pantić, as well as the death of Dada Vujasinović, which was hastily ruled a suicide, have never been resolved, and no one has been convicted of these murders. The only case that reached a judicial outcome, but not justice and a judicial determination of the truth, was the murder of journalist Slavko Ćuruvija. The course and outcome of that trial, as well as the final and binding acquittal,⁸⁸ which the Supreme Court determined was rendered with substantial breaches of the rules of procedure,⁸⁹ represent a devastating example of the state’s systemic failure to bring the perpetrators to justice, to protect the right to life of journalists, and to conduct an effective investigation in the event of a violation of that right, without which there can be no talk of an adequate protection of freedom of expression.

87 · MFRR, *Serbian authorities must stop the spiral of violence against journalists*, 31 March 2026, available at <https://en.nuns.rs/serbian-authorities-must-stop-the-spiral-of-violence-against-journalists/>.

88 · Court of Appeal in Belgrade, Kž1-Po1 9/22 of 19 April 2023.

89 · Supreme Court, Kzz OK 38/2024 of 13 October 2025. Judgment published on 8 January 2026, available at <https://shorturl.at/slwe8>.

The erosion of media freedom and the deterioration of the safety of journalists in Serbia have intensified particularly since November 2024. Following the collapse of the newly renovated canopy at the Novi Sad railway station, which killed 16 people, alongside mass student and civic protests against corruption, increasingly frequent attacks ensued against journalists covering the protests and writing critically about the authorities.

The safety of journalists is also endangered by daily verbal attacks on critical media outlets launched by ruling party politicians and high-ranking state officials, thereby signalling that the targeting of journalists is socially acceptable.⁹⁰ A similar message is conveyed by the absence of an adequate institutional response to the increasingly frequent attacks on journalists.

Bearing in mind that verbal attacks coming from high positions of political power can represent an introduction to other forms of pressure and violence, the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation has been monitoring verbal attacks by politicians against journalists since August 2025.⁹¹ During the first six months of monitoring alone, 834 verbal attacks on journalists by the highest representatives of the authorities were recorded.⁹² The year behind us was also marked by a record-high number of physical attacks on journalists, which is 440 per cent higher than in 2024.⁹³ This situation is fundamentally contrary to the obligations that the state has in the field of freedom of expression, including the creation of an enabling environment that allows everyone to participate in public debate and freely express thoughts and views without fear, even when those views are opposed to those advocated by the representatives of the authorities or a significant part of the public.

90 · Maja Sever warns that such behaviour by the authorities (targeting, insulting, and calling out journalists) is “a green light for a whole series of reactions from people, ordinary people in society who think that if journalists can be attacked in this way, meaning from the highest official positions, why shouldn’t we attack and insult them too”. N1, “Maja Sever: Vuk Cvijić should be seriously concerned for his safety, muting the microphone of the N1 reporter – shocking”, 19 December 2025, available at <https://n1info.rs/vesti/maja-sever-vuk-cvijic-treba-ozbiljno-da-bude-zabrinut-za-svoju-bezbednost-srbija-prednjaci-u-napadu-na-novinare/>.

91 · Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, *Targeted by the Power, Monthly Guide: Politicians against Journalists in Serbia*, <https://www.slavkocuruvijafondacija.rs/en/targeted-by-power/>.

92 · Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, *In half a year, 834 verbal attacks by officials on journalists and the media*, 20 February 2026, available at <https://www.slavkocuruvijafondacija.rs/en/834-verbal-attacks-by-public-officials-against-journalists-and-media-in-six-months/>. At the same time, this refers only to verbal attacks by the 60 highest representatives of the authorities who are the focus of the monitoring, both due to their positions of power and the frequency of their verbal attacks on journalists.

93 · ANEM, Standing Working Group for the Safety of Journalists: *The number of physical attacks on media workers increased by 440 per cent in 2025*, 22 December 2025, available at <https://shorturl.at/q7XpN>.

Instead, all prominent critics of the authorities, and especially journalists, are exposed to near-daily persecution, discrediting, and delegitimisation, and Serbia, instead of an enabling one, is becoming a dangerous place for exercising the journalistic profession.

In parallel with the rise in violence and pressure on critical media outlets, there has also been an increase in the number of pro-government media outlets⁹⁴ that serve ruling party politicians as a platform for verbal attacks on media that are not under the control of the authorities. Pro-government media outlets themselves often launch negative campaigns aimed at discrediting, marginalising, and stifling all critical voices. Media outlets that abuse freedom of expression in this manner receive substantial funds from the state through the mechanism of project co-financing, which has become a tool of governance in the hands of the ruling party, and they also have access to other forms of support, such as national broadcasting licences and the absence of adequate sanctions for the continuous violation of regulations and professional and ethical media standards.⁹⁵

Repression against journalists and other citizens became more pronounced in July 2025.⁹⁶ Complaints for violence were filed against “unidentified police members, as well as against unknown persons wearing balaclavas and in police uniforms”.⁹⁷

In analysis of the safety of journalists over the past two years also requires a reflection on the numerous attacks on media workers that took place in the enclosed area encompassing Pionirski Park and the section in front of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, colloquially referred to as “Ćacilend”.⁹⁸ From the complaints filed by media workers, it is clear that the

94 · Marija Vučić, “A Land Flooded with Propaganda: A Map of Local Media Owned by New/Old Regime Players”, *Cenzolovka*, 26 March 2026, available at <https://shorturl.at/WleTZ>.

95 · See, also, Aleksandra Dragojlov, “Influence of Political Clientelism on Media Freedom under Vucic and the Progressive Party”, *Cambridge University Press, Nationalities Papers*, Volume 54, Issue 2, 23 May 2025, available at <https://shorturl.at/B8d3P>, page 2 et seq.

96 · See ANEM, Monitoring of the Media Scene in Serbia for the Month of July 2025, available at <https://bezbedni-novinari.mpanel.app/storage/files/documents/2025-07-anem-monitoring-fin-1757054433.pdf>, page 3.

97 · *Ibid*.

98 · ANEM, *Chronology of Attacks on Media Workers in the Area Between Pionirski Park and the Assembly of Serbia*, 2025, available at <https://bezbedni-novinari.mpanel.app/storage/files/documents/hronologija-napada-u-pionirskom-parku-2025.pdf>. See, also, Sofija Paročić and Branislav Grković, “Ćaci’s Party Guardians”, KRIK, available at <https://www.krik.rs/caciji-cuvari-partije/>, as well as Nina Čolić, “Journalists under Attack near Ćacilend”, CINS, 3 February 2026, available at <https://www.cins.rs/en/journalists-under-attack-in-cacilend/>.

police frequently ignored their duty to respond adequately to the attacks.⁹⁹ According to publications by investigative media outlets, individuals sentenced to multi-year prison terms were also present in that zone.¹⁰⁰

The months-long rising repression against critical journalists culminated in violence on the day of the local elections, 29 March 2026, when multiple journalists were attacked or beaten near several polling stations. Some of the attacks took place right before the eyes of the police, who refused to respond adequately. On that day, journalists were chased and threatened with axes, kicked in the stomach,¹⁰¹ sprayed with pepper spray,¹⁰² had their phones and/or work equipment broken or seized, were insulted, and were obstructed in their work. Masked individuals chased the journalist of Revolt, student and activist Lazar Dinić, until he fell into the Timok River, and then beat him until they fractured his cranial bones, while forcing him to say “Aca is the President” (an allusion to the President of the Republic, author’s note).¹⁰³

The question that necessarily arises is how to improve the protection of the safety of journalists and ensure that previous attacks on journalists are processed in a timely manner and the perpetrators are adequately punished.

The objective of this report is to provide an insight into criminal law protection in practice by analysing the cases of attacks on journalists and the manner in which the competent institutions acted regarding the reported criminal offences committed against journalists and media workers. It analyses cases established in prosecutors’ offices during 2024 and 2025, as well as cases from earlier years that, with greater or lesser delay, were concluded over the past two years. In addition to information on the status/outcome of cases established in prosecutors’ offices regarding events committed against journalists, the report relies on data from relevant reports of domestic and international

99 · *Ibid.*

100 · *Ibid.*

101 · See, for example, Jelena L. Petković, “Zorica Popović on the Crime Against Journalists in Bor: An Axe Against People?! That’s When I Saw We Were Attacked by Murderers”, *Cenzolovka*, 31 March 2026, available at <https://www.cenzolovka.rs/pritisci-i-napadi/zorica-popovic-o-zlocinu-nad-novinarima-u-boru-sekirom-na-ljude-tad-sam-videla-da-su-nas-napale-ubice/>.

102 · Katarina Stevanović, “Brutal Attacks on Journalists: What are the Prosecutors’ Offices and the Police Doing?”, *Vreme*, 31 March 2026, available at <https://vreme.com/en/vesti/napadi-na-novinare-lokalni-izbori-tuzilastva-i-policija/>.

103 · Ana Marković, “‘Masked Thugs from a Black Jeep Chased Me Until I Fell into the Timok, and Then They Beat Me and Broke My Bones’: The Horrific Experience of Student Lazar During Election Day in Bor”, *Nova.rs*, 2 April 2026, available at <https://nova.rs/vesti/drustvo/student-lazar-dinic-o-stravicnom-prebijanju-koje-je-jedva-preziveo-u-boru>.

media associations and organisations, as well as human rights protection mechanisms. Apart from the data of the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office (VJT) and the Standing Working Group for the Safety of Journalists (SRG) on criminal offences committed against journalists, the report is also based on documentation and information gathered through requests for access to information of public importance,¹⁰⁴ as well as from the attacked journalists themselves who were targeted during 2024, 2025, and the first three months of 2026. Given that the VJT and SRG publish the most significant statistical data relating to criminal offences committed against journalists, the primary objective of this analysis is to demonstrate the essential characteristics of the current protection of journalists in Serbia pursuant to criminal law by reviewing the actions (or omissions) of the institutions.

Data on the actions taken regarding criminal offences against journalists indicate that in a year marked by a record-high number of reported criminal offences against journalists, a very small number of convictions were rendered and a small number of motions of indictment were submitted. The reaction of the competent institutions can encourage further attacks on journalists. Therefore, this report seeks to contribute to the understanding of the reasons why an adequate reaction to attacks on journalists is absent, resulting in a lack of both a deterrent effect on potential attackers and a clear message that violence must be followed by an effective investigation and an appropriate punishment.

INTIMIDATION, PRESSURES AND VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS

During 2025, a drastic increase was recorded in the number of reported offences involving threats to journalists and media workers. In the prosecutors' offices in Serbia, 134 cases were established in 2025 due to events/criminal offences committed against the safety of journalists, whereas there were 65 in 2024. It is particularly worrying **that physical attacks are**

104 · Requests for access to information of public importance were submitted to the following prosecutors' offices and courts: First Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade, Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad, High Public Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime (VJT VKT), Third Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade, Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Subotica, Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Kragujevac, Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Niš, Basic Court in Niš, Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Zaječar, Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Šabac, Basic Court in Šabac, Basic Court in Surdulica, Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Valjevo, Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Sremska Mitrovica, and the Higher Court in Belgrade. Apart from the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Sremska Mitrovica and the Third Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade, all courts and prosecutors' offices responded to the requests for access to information of public importance.

becoming increasingly frequent. For instance, in 2025, as many as 27 criminal complaints were registered due to physical attacks on journalists, which is 440 per cent higher than in the previous year, when five physical attacks were recorded.¹⁰⁵

In 2025, another worrying tendency was noticed, which is the increasingly frequent failure of the police to act.¹⁰⁶ In half of the cases, the police failed to respond to the request of the prosecutors' office to gather the necessary information, which in fact prevents the conduct of effective investigations.¹⁰⁷

A case that clearly illustrates this is the case of the attack on Vuk Cvijić by Milan Lađević, where it took the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) several months to deliver the surveillance camera recordings to the competent prosecutors' office.¹⁰⁸ Another problem is that prosecutors' offices do not sufficiently utilise the mechanisms available to them, meaning that they rarely apply the powers they hold in relation to the police on the basis of the Criminal Procedure Code.¹⁰⁹ The insufficiently effective response of the police to the requests of the prosecutors' office regarding attacks on journalists complicates the acquisition of evidence on the basis of which it would be possible to initiate criminal proceedings.¹¹⁰ Bearing in mind that an increasing number

105 · Journalists' Association of Serbia, Standing Working Group for the Safety of Journalists: *The number of physical attacks on media workers increased by 440 per cent in 2025*, 23 December 2025, available at <https://www.uns.org.rs/sr/desk/vesti-iz-medija/182292/stalna-radna-grupa-za-bezbednost-novinarar-broj-fizickih-napada-na-medijske-radnike-povecan-za-440-odsto-u-2025-godini.html>.

106 · At the meeting of the Standing Working Group for the Safety of Journalists on 22 December 2025, it was established that in half of the cases, the police failed to respond to the request of the prosecutor's office to gather the necessary information, which in fact prevents the conduct of effective investigations. "As for physical attacks, the identity of the perpetrators was established in only nine cases, while it remains unknown in 18, and that is a police job," emphasised prosecutor Branko Stamenković. ANEM, *Standing Working Group for the Safety of Journalists: The number of physical attacks on media workers increased by 440 per cent in 2025*, 22 December 2025, available at <https://anem.org.rs/en/strane/stalna-radna-grupa-za-bezbednost-novinarar-broj-fizickih-napada-na-medijske-radnike-povecan-za-440-odsto-u-2025-godini>.

107 · *Ibid.*

108 · Kruna Savović, *Analysis of the Effectiveness of the Actions of Public Prosecutors' Offices and the Ministry of the Interior in Serbia in Cases of Attacks on Journalists in the Period from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2024*, ANEM and Law Office "Savović", Belgrade, December 2025, available at <https://bezbedni-novinari.mpanel.app/storage/files/documents/anem-analiza-rada-tuzilastva-i-mup.pdf>, page 2.

109 · *Ibid.*

110 · Article 19, *Authorities in Serbia must halt the spiral of violence against journalists*, 31 March 2026, available at <https://www.article19.org/resources/serbia-authorities-must-stop-spiral-of-violence-against-journalists/>.

of police officers are among the suspects for attacks on journalists,¹¹¹ there is a fear that the lack of cooperation by the police is not an accidental or sporadic phenomenon.

During 2025, only three convictions were rendered, which represents an exceptionally low percentage in relation to the total number of cases established in that year (134).¹¹²

In total, in the cases established during **2025**, as of 31 December 2025, the following actions were taken:

- In 3 cases, a conviction was rendered;
- In 4 cases, proceedings are pending before the court following an accusatory pleading filed by the public prosecutor;

111 · In the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS/IJAS) database, from November 2024 to the end of 2025, at least 26 attacks on journalists involving the police were registered in the context of protests alone. A search of the NUNS/IJAS database on attacks and pressures on journalists shows that from 1 November 2024 to the end of 2025, the following police attacks on journalists were recorded solely in the context of protests: against Žarko Bogosavljević, portal Razglas News, on 17.11.2025 and 17.01.2025, against a journalist of Blokada-Info, also 17.11.2025, against N1 journalist Tanja Kosović on 17.11.2025, against Danas journalist Vojin Radovanović on 2.11.2025, against the journalist of the Mašina portal Darija Stjepić on 11.10.2025, against the journalist of the Storyteller portal Brankica Matić on 11.10.2025, against Beta and Autonoma journalist Dalibor Stupar on 11.10.2025, against the female journalists and the camera operator of the A1 portal on 11.10.2025, against independent journalist Luka Pešić on 28.9.2025, the identity checking of photojournalist Gavriilo Andrić 28.9.2025, then on 13.8.2025, as well as on 10.6.2025 and on 16.5.2025, against the journalist of Puls Generacije Jovana Trošić on 28.9.2025, against Vreme journalist Katarina Stevanović on 5.9.2025, against 26 journalists of Blokada-Info, on 17.11.2025, against journalist Ksenija Pavkov and the camera operator and news team of N1 on 5.9.2025, against journalist Nemanja Šarović and the camera operator from the KTV Zrenjanin team on 5.9.2025, against the journalist of the Mašina portal Marko Miletić on 13.8.2025, against the journalist of Zoomer Marina Nenadović on 13.8.2025, against Nova S and N1 journalists Nenad Jovanović and Dragan Jeković on 29.7.2025, against the journalist of the Pančevo Si Ti portal Nenad Živković on 15.7.2025, against Radar journalist Vuk Cvijić on 2.7.2025, against Danas journalist Aleksandar Latas on 17.1.2025, against Nova S journalist Darko Eker on 17.1.2025. On several occasions, the police did not participate in the attacks but failed to react to prevent them. Additionally, cases of denial of entry into the country represent a specific category of pressure on journalists and freedom of expression. For instance, on the eve of the announced mass student protest on 15 March 2026, at least six journalistic teams from Croatia were unable to enter Serbia because they were denied entry at the border crossing on the grounds of a negative security risk assessment concerning the protection of the security of the Republic of Serbia and its citizens. Source: NUNS/IJAS database. While reporting from a rally in Vrbas on 12 August 2025, journalist Marko Miletić was not attacked by the police, but they did nothing when SNS supporters hit him with stones, frozen bottles, and pieces of fireworks. ANEM, *Standing Working Group for the Safety of Journalists: The number of physical attacks on media workers increased by 440 per cent in 2025*, op. cit. See, also, ANEM, Press Release, *Standing Working Group in Bajina Bašta: Media and citizens under pressure ahead of the local elections on 29 March*, 24 March 2026.

112 · Safe Journalists, *VJT statistics of attacks on journalists from 2016 to the end of 2025*, 19 January 2026, available at <https://bezbedninovinari.rs/article/1400/vjt-statistika-napada-na-novinare-od-2016-do-kraja-2025-godine>.

- In 12 cases, a decision on the dismissal of the criminal complaint was rendered;
- In 18 cases, an official note was recorded stating that there are no grounds for initiating criminal proceedings;
- In 18 cases, the conduct of evidentiary actions is pending; In 58 cases, a request for gathering the necessary information was submitted;
- In 8 cases, the allegations of the criminal complaint or reports on information gathered during the pre-investigation proceedings are being reviewed for the purpose of rendering a decision;
- In 13 cases, the potential perpetrator has not been identified even after taking measures in the pre-investigation proceedings.¹¹³

In the cases established during **2024**, as of 31 December 2025, the following actions were taken:

- In 1 case, a conviction was rendered;
- In 1 case, the suspect accepted to fulfil the obligation specified in the order on the deferral of criminal prosecution, and upon its fulfilment, the criminal complaint was dismissed (the case was resolved through the application of the principle of opportunity);
- In 1 case, the court dismissed the proposal for imposing a security measure of mandatory psychiatric treatment and suspended the criminal proceedings;
- In 9 cases, a decision on the dismissal of the criminal complaint was rendered;
- In 12 cases, an internal note (službena beleška) was recorded stating that there are no grounds for initiating criminal proceedings;
- In 3 cases, proceedings are pending before the court following an accusatory pleading filed by the public prosecutor;
- In 3 cases, the conduct of evidentiary actions is pending;
- In 1 case, proceedings for international legal assistance in criminal matters are pending;
- In 19 cases, a request for gathering the necessary information was submitted;
- In 1 case, reports on information gathered during the pre-investigation proceedings are being reviewed for the purpose of rendering a decision;
- In 14 cases, the potential perpetrator has not been identified even after taking measures in the pre-investigation proceedings.¹¹⁴

113 · *Ibid.*

114 · VJT statistics on attacks against journalists from 2016 until the end of 2025, *op. cit.*

Year	Formed cases	Active cases	Resolved cases*
2024	65	41	24
2025	134	101	33
TOTAL	199	142	57
Total %	100%	71,36%	28,64%

* Resolved cases include cases in which a first-instance, non-final judicial decision was rendered, as well as cases in which an internal note was recorded stating that there are no grounds for conducting criminal proceedings, decisions dismissing the criminal complaint (against which either no objection was lodged or a decision rejecting the objection was rendered), as well as cases in which the principle of opportunity was applied.

Since the beginning of keeping the database on attacks against journalists, a total of 755 cases were established in the prosecution offices of the Republic of Serbia from 2016 until the end of February 2026 on the basis of complaints for criminal offences against journalists. According to the statistical data of the prosecutors' offices for this period, a total of 420 cases were resolved, which constitutes 55.63% of the total number of cases.¹¹⁵

Furthermore, a very small number of cases from 2025 reached the court at all – only four by the end of 2025. These data alone point to the need to pay special attention to the issue of the protection of journalists under criminal law and to consider possibilities for its improvement.

Bearing in mind the small number of convictions, the focus of the analysis is on why the majority of cases did not reach the court. In addition, attention is directed towards a significant number of cases that will not reach the court at all, given that the criminal complaints were dismissed or an internal note was recorded stating that there are no grounds for criminal prosecution. The report also reflects on which media outlets are most frequently the targets of attacks. Since an increase in attacks has been recorded during the coverage of protests or in connection with reporting on protests, special attention has been paid to the protection of journalists covering protests. Bearing in mind the significant role of the police, both for preventing violence against journalists who perform their work under dangerous circumstances and for shedding light on committed criminal offences against journalists, the report also reflects on the actions of the police, their attitude towards journalists on the ground, as well as the cooperation of the police with prosecutors' offices during investigations.

115 · Safe Journalists, *VJT statistics of attacks on journalists from 2016 to the end of February 2026*, op. cit.

CONTINUOUS ATTACKS ON SPECIFIC MEDIA OUTLETS AND JOURNALISTS

In 2025, according to the records of the prosecutors' offices, the highest number of reported criminal offences was directed at journalists or media workers of N1 television, as many as **23**.¹¹⁶ Columnist Nenad Kulačin reported **seven** attacks, followed by *Radar*, *TV Nova S*, *RTS*, *Glas Zaječara*, *Niška inicijativa*, *Informer Television*, and *Kurir*, with **five** reported criminal offences each; *Insajder Production* with **four** reported attacks; *Magločistač*, *Informer*, *KTV Zrenjanin*, Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV), *Bečejski mozaik*, and Marko Vidojković, with **three** attacks each, while several media outlets and independent journalists reported one or two attacks each.

Data on cases established in public prosecutors' offices demonstrate **that attacks on the journalists of certain newsrooms are not isolated incidents, but are continuous**. Therefore, it is important to recall that, when it comes to freedom of expression and the right to freedom to impart information and ideas, states have an obligation not only to refrain from unjustified interference with the enjoyment of these rights, but there also exist positive obligations of public authorities, including their duty to ensure that freedom of expression is not threatened by the actions of third parties.¹¹⁷ Thus, for instance, **state authorities are obliged to conduct an investigation and provide appropriate protection when violence against a specific media outlet is frequent**.¹¹⁸

If attacks, threats, and intimidation directed at a single journalistic newsroom are frequent, a failure to act can also be considered an unjustified interference with freedom of expression, meaning that the state violates freedom of expression not only when it interferes with this freedom through its own bodies, but also when an appropriate state response to various attacks to which a media outlet is exposed, including by individuals, is absent.¹¹⁹ By failing to respond adequately to violence against journalists, even when it originates outside the state structure, the state itself violates freedom of expression and a range of other rights of journalists.¹²⁰

116 · VJT SRG, Periodic Notice, situation as of 31 December 2025, *op. cit.*

117 · See, for example, Ivana Krstić, Tanasije Marinković, *European Human Rights Law*, Council of Europe, 2016, 2016, page 208.

118 · *Ibid.*

119 · *Ibid.*

120 · See, also, ECtHR, *Özgür Gündem v. Turkey*, Application No. 23144/93, judgment of 16 March 2000.

The case of N1 television is an example that clearly illustrates this. Although at least 23 attacks were reported during 2025 (around 18 per cent of the total number of reported offences against journalists in 2025), only a single conviction was rendered, and in no other case of an attack on N1 journalists during 2025 did the matter reach the court by the end of the year; i.e., no motion for indictment nor indictment were submitted.¹²¹ In the majority of cases, the gathering of the necessary information is pending. During 2024, N1 journalists were attacked 19 times, which constitutes 29.23 per cent of the total number of cases established in prosecutors' offices regarding offences against journalists in 2024. Monitoring by the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation shows that N1 is the most frequent target when it comes to verbal attacks from positions of power on the media and journalists.¹²²

In addition to these data, the reasons for which criminal complaints of journalists are dismissed are also worrying.

Although the frequency of attacks on a single media house would dictate special caution, the impression is created that criminal complaints are lightly dismissed. Thus, for instance, the criminal complaint of N1 journalist Mladen Savatović – filed because he received numerous messages of a threatening nature: that he should be “beaten into line”, that he “should be dealt with by summary procedure”, that “everything at N1 should be destroyed”, accompanied by a photograph in which the person who sent the threat is armed, namely holding a rifle, was dismissed. The aforementioned messages and threats were not sufficient to initiate criminal proceedings, and the criminal complaint was dismissed on the grounds that, inter alia, the message was not directed against the personality of the victim as a journalist and could

121 · A motion for indictment was submitted in 4 cases, of which the victims in 2 cases were Informer journalists, in one Nenad Kulačin, and in one the editor of *Niška inicijativa*. Periodic Notice of the VJT Standing Working Group (SRG) as of 31 December 2025.

122 · The latest monthly overview of verbal attacks by politicians shows that in March, as “usually, the most frequent targets of verbal attacks were the newsrooms of the N1 and Nova S televisions and portals, followed by the daily newspaper Danas and the weekly Radar”. Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, *Targeted by the Powerful*, Issue 8, March 2026, available at <https://mailchi.mp/9b2c6e9365c7/targeted-by-power-monthly-report-serbias-politicians-vs-journalists-december-2025-issue-64258947e=9a28aac7>.

not be subsumed under clear and concrete threats.¹²³

Local media outlets are also frequent targets of attacks, and an inadequate or slow response regarding attacks on small local media worsens their already difficult position.

Thus, three cases each were established in prosecutors' offices during 2025 regarding attacks on the newsrooms of *Magločistač* and *Bečejski mozaik*. Due to attacks on journalists and/or editors of *Niška inicijativa*, five cases were established (and an additional two cases in 2024), while two cases were established for attacks on the journalists of *Južne vesti* and a correspondent of the *Srbinfo* portal. Out of these, a motion for indictment was submitted in only one case, based on the criminal complaint of the editor of *Niška inicijativa*. In addition, in 2025, a conviction was rendered in the case of an attack on the editor and journalist of *IN Medija*, who has been facing pressures for years.¹²⁴ In the records of the VJT SRG, attacks on the newsroom of *IN Medija* from Indija were also recorded in 2020, when due to an attack on a member of the newsroom, a minor perpetrator was ordered to fulfil a correctional order (i.e., a special measure prescribed by Article 6 of the Law on Juvenile Perpetrators of Criminal Offences and Criminal Law Protection of Minors, the purpose of which is not to initiate criminal proceedings against a minor or to suspend proceedings, namely to influence the proper development of the minor and the strengthening of their personal responsibility through the application of a correctional order, so that they do not commit criminal

123 · Namely, the criminal complaint was filed for the criminal offence under Article 138, paragraph 3 in conjunction with paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code, which is one of the most frequently reported offences against journalists – endangerment of the safety of persons performing activities of public importance in the field of public information. In practice, during the application of Article 138, paragraph 3, protection is absent if the threats do not contain an imminent and concrete threat to the life or body of the victim or a person close to them. The same article, Article 138, paragraph 3, also protects the President of the Republic, members of parliament, the Prime Minister and members of the Government, judges of the Constitutional Court, judges, public prosecutors and their deputies, and police officers. Previous analyses by the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation pointed to double standards in practice when it comes to the criminal law protection of journalists, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, other persons protected by Article 138, paragraph 3, particularly the President of the Republic. When the safety of political officials (especially the President of the Republic) is endangered, the sentencing policy is significantly stricter and cases more frequently reach a judicial epilogue than when the safety of media workers is endangered. For more details, see Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, *Freedom of Expression Before the Court, Second Regular Report on the Protection of Freedom of Expression in the Judicial System of Serbia*, Belgrade, 2022, available at <https://shorturl.at/pxJdY>, page 89 and further. For more details on the dismissal of journalist Savatović's criminal complaint, see also the subsection "Reasons for which criminal complaints of journalists are dismissed".

124 · Records of the VJT SRG, *op. cit.* On the position of local media, see also Mina Delić, "Attacks on Local Journalists – Attacks That Are Not Seen", *Slobodna reč*, 30 March 2026, available at <https://slobodnarec.rs/2026/03/30/napadi-na-lokalne-novinare-napadi-koji-se-ne-vide/>.

offences in the future). Regarding the attack on the editor of that newsroom in 2022, a conviction was rendered and a suspended prison sentence of one year was imposed, with an operational probation period of three years. Furthermore, while reporting from the municipal administration building on 4 March 2024, editor Verica Marinčić was pushed out by security, and the incident remained without a legal outcome.¹²⁵ These data point to a multi-year continuity in attacks on certain local media outlets. The pattern of frequent attacks on local media is also confirmed by two convictions for endangering the safety of two *Južne vesti* journalists, rendered in 2024 but due to events from earlier years.

Regarding the events and criminal offences against the journalists and the editor of *Glas Zaječara*, five cases were established in 2025, *inter alia*, due to a criminal complaint filed regarding the filming of yards and apartments with drones (by the Security Intelligence Agency – BIA, as it turned out later),¹²⁶ due to the seizure of a telephone during an attempt to report from a gathering and on topics of significance for the local community, and due to a disturbing message sent to the editor. However, none of these cases will reach the court, because all the criminal complaints of *Glas Zaječara* journalist Miljko Stojanović and editor Anđela Ristantijević were dismissed, or an internal note was recorded stating that there are no grounds for initiating criminal proceedings. The routine dismissal of criminal complaints contributes to the fact that numerous attacks on journalists are, in most cases, never even reviewed by a court.

VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS MOSTLY WITHOUT A JUDICIAL EPILOGUE

A review of the course and status of cases established during 2024, and especially during 2025, points to the first observed problem – the low number of final judgments regarding criminal offences committed against journalists. Moreover, it is worrying that such a low percentage of reported cases of violence against journalists during this period ever reached the court.

Despite the growing number of attacks on journalists, the number of con-

125 · For more details on this case, as well as on the multi-year endangering of the safety of editor and journalist Verica Marinčić, see, for example, ANEM, Monitoring of the Media Scene in Serbia for the Month of March 2024, available at <https://bezbedni-novinari.mpanel.app/storage/files/documents/2024-03-anem-monitoring.pdf>, pages 6-7.

126 · Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Zaječar, Internal Note of 28 August 2025. For more details, see the section "Tracking, Surveillance, and Jeopardising of Journalistic Sources".

victions is very low and is lower compared to previous years when up to 12 convicting decisions were rendered annually. In cases established during 2025, only three convictions were rendered,¹²⁷ and regarding the events from 2024, one judgment was rendered by the end of 2025. Even when taking into account cases established in earlier years that were resolved in the past two years, the number of court judgments rendered regarding attacks on journalists increases only negligibly and remains disturbingly low in relation to the recorded number of cases involving the endangerment of safety or other attacks and pressures against journalists monitored by the Standing Working Group (SRG).

In only two cases was an (unconditional) prison sentence imposed—regarding the criminal offence of violent behaviour under Article 344, paragraph 2 of the Criminal Code against an *Informer* journalist, as well as regarding the endangerment of the safety of a *Kurir* journalist, in the first instance. In both cases, pro-government media outlets were involved. In the case of the endangerment of the safety of the *Kurir* journalist, following an appeal, the appellate court modified the decision on the sanction and imposed a suspended prison sentence of seven months, with an operational probation period of three years, even though the circumstances that the defendant had been convicted of murder as a minor and had escaped from home confinement point to the justification of imposing a stricter sentence.¹²⁸

Furthermore, based on data from the records of the VJT SRG, it follows that in 2025, detention was proposed in only two cases of attacks on journalists,

127 · The following judgments were rendered in 2025 and 2024, regarding cases established in 2025 and 2024. Due to the endangerment of the safety of journalist Miodrag Blečić and the journalist and editor of *IN Medija* Verica Marinčić, on 28 May 2025, the Basic Court in Stara Pazova rendered a conviction, and a sentence of **six months in prison—as a suspended sentence for two years**—was imposed, as well as a restraining order and a prohibition of communication. Regarding the criminal offence under Article 344a, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code against Marjan Vučetić (*N1 television*), a conviction was rendered on 20 November 2025, imposing a sentence of **five months in prison—as a suspended sentence for one year**. Regarding the criminal offence under Article 344, paragraph 2 of the Criminal Code against a journalist of *Informer* television, the Basic Court in Novi Sad rendered a judgment on 19 December 2025, by which it sentenced the **first defendant to a prison term of six months, and the second defendant to a prison term of 10 months**, to be served under **home confinement**. Until the moment of concluding the report, the judgment had not become final and binding. Regarding the endangerment of the safety of Igor Božić (*N1*), a conviction was rendered on 29 May 2024, and a sentence of **one year in prison—as a suspended sentence for two years**—was imposed. Regarding the endangerment of the safety of a *Kurir* journalist, a conviction was rendered on 2 April 2025, and the defendant S. M. was sentenced to a **prison term of seven months** (a case from 2024). Following an appeal, **the decision on the sanction was modified and a suspended prison sentence of seven months was imposed**, with an operational probation period of three years.

128 · ANEM, “ANEM ALARM: The appellate court reduced the sentence of Saša Mirović who endangered the safety of Jelena S. Spasić, a *Kurir* journalist”, 15 April 2026, available at ____.

and both relate to the attack on Informer television. When the attacker of the N1 news team was identified and arrested in February 2026 – two and a half months after he smashed their camera right before the eyes of the police in November 2025, the prosecutors’ office proposed the ordering of detention in that case as well, but he was placed under home confinement, which is a milder measure.¹²⁹

If cases from earlier years that were concluded during 2024 and 2025 are also taken into account, the number of convictions rendered in the past two years increases only marginally.¹³⁰

In 2024, the proceedings regarding the arson of the house of **Žig Info** portal journalist Milan Jovanović were finally concluded, in which the defendant Dragoljub Simonović was sentenced to a prison term of **four years** and a fine of **100,000 dinars**, Vladimir Mihajlović was sentenced to a prison term of **three years and a fine of 100,000 dinars**, the defendant Igor Novaković

129 · See, for example, Maja Nikolić, “Guardian of Ćacilend arrested, detained, then sent home: Attacker of N1 news team is actually an attacker of equipment”, *N1*, 9 February 2026, available at <https://shorturl.at/ukRvz> as well as Tanjug, “Detention proposed for suspect accused of attacking N1 journalism crew”, 6 February 2026, available at <https://shorturl.at/4p7yU>.

130 · The following judgments are presented in the Periodic Review of the VJT SRG as of 31 December 2025. Due to the endangerment of the safety of *Blic* employees, on 25 November 2024, a conviction was rendered by which the defendant was handed a **suspended sentence – a prison term of 6 months with an operational probation period of two years**. Due to the endangerment of the safety of a *Večernje novosti* journalist, the Basic Court in Šabac rendered a conviction on 4 November 2024 and imposed a suspended sentence, **six months in prison, suspended sentence for one year**, and a measure under Article 89 of the Criminal Code. Due to the criminal offence under Article 344 of the Criminal Code against a journalist of *Bulgarian media BTN*, the Basic Court in Vladičin Han rendered a conviction by which it found the defendant guilty and imposed a **suspended sentence establishing a prison term of one year with an operational probation period of two years**. This judgment is not final and binding at the moment of concluding the report. Due to the criminal offence under Article 149 of the Criminal Code against journalist Milan Stojanović, *N1 portal*, on 31 October 2025, the defendants were found guilty and a **fine** was imposed on them. However, this decision was **quashed** on 3 February 2026 and the case was remanded back for a retrial. Due to the endangerment of the safety of Milorad Jevtović (*presek.rs*), by a judgment of the Higher Court in Belgrade dated 5 December 2024, the defendant was handed a **suspended sentence – a prison term of 6 months with an operational probation period of two years**. Due to the endangerment of the safety of journalist Aleksandar Stankov – *Južne vesti*, by a judgment of the Basic Court in Niš, the defendant was sentenced to a **prison term of six months**. The first-instance judgment was confirmed on 7 June 2024. Regarding the endangerment of the safety of journalist Matija Gačić – *Južne vesti*, by a judgment of the Basic Court in Niš dated 5 April 2024, the defendant was found guilty and a **suspended sentence was imposed on him establishing a sentence of 6 months in prison, with an operational probation period of two years**. The Higher Court in Kragujevac rendered a judgment on 6 February 2024 by which **the appeal of the public prosecutor of the Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Kragujevac was rejected** and the **first-instance judgment** of the Basic Court in Kragujevac dated 25 February 2023 **was confirmed**, by which the **defendant was acquitted of charges of committing the criminal offence of violent behaviour against an N1 journalist**. Finally, due to threats against *N1* journalist Mladen Savatović, a security measure of **mandatory psychiatric treatment and confinement in a health institution** was imposed on the suspect on 1 April 2024.

was sentenced to a term of **two years and six months in prison**, and the defendant Aleksandar Marinković to a prison term of **four years and a fine of 100,000 dinars**. This concerns proceedings regarding an event from 2018, which were initiated in 2019. A **plea agreement** was concluded with one individual, who was **sentenced to six months of imprisonment under home conditions and a fine**. The judgment was rendered almost six years after the house in which the journalist and his wife were located was burned down. Although the defendants were sentenced to prison terms for the arson of the journalist's house, the court did not consider the status of the victim—namely the circumstance that a journalist was involved—to be particularly significant.¹³¹ The first-instance court imposed a five-year prison sentence on the instigator—a high-ranking SNS official convicted of incitement to the arson of the house. As an aggravating circumstance, it assessed, *inter alia*, that he “committed the criminal offence out of base motives, because as a public official—the Mayor of the Grocka Municipality, who is not only obliged to tolerate criticism regarding the performance of his function but also to show a high degree of tolerance towards it, decided, by utilising his position and influence, to undertake illicit actions, all with the aim of warning the victim Milan Jovanović to stop investigating his work in the position of municipal mayor”. The appellate court reclassified the criminal offence from a more serious to a milder one, and consequently measured a milder sentence. Dragoljub Simonović's sentence was thus reduced from five to four years in prison.¹³²

131 · See also Ramiro Álvarez Ugarte et al (eds.), *Global Freedom of Expression*, Columbia University, Global Case-law on Violence Against Journalists, 2022, page 17.

132 · The appellate court concluded that, in relation to Dragoljub Simonović, the first-instance court failed to assess his age (the defendant was born in 1959). Here, it is important to recall Article 54, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code, which stipulates that the court shall measure the sentence for the perpetrator of a criminal offence within the limits prescribed by law for that offence, bearing in mind the purpose of punishment and taking into account all circumstances that affect the sentence to be lesser or greater (mitigating and aggravating circumstances), and particularly: the degree of guilt, the motives from which the offence was committed, the severity of the endangerment or a violation of the protected good, the circumstances under which the offence was committed, the prior life of the perpetrator, his personal circumstances, his conduct after the commission of the criminal offence and particularly his attitude towards the victim of the criminal offence, as well as other circumstances relating to the personality of the perpetrator. Furthermore, it is important to recall that the high-ranking SNS official convicted of incitement to the arson of the journalist's house insulted the victim journalist Jovanović in the courtroom during the proceedings and directed threats at the acting prosecutor, stating that “it might happen to the prosecutor that after these proceedings he does not work as a public prosecutor at all”, regarding which the Association of Prosecutors of Serbia also issued a statement. More details available at <https://www.cenzolovka.rs/pritisci-i-napadi/pretnje-u-sudnici/> and <https://www.cenzolovka.rs/pritisci-i-napadi/udruzenje-tuzilaca-trazi-da-vlast-osudi-izjavu-simonovica/>. See also Beta, “Veran Matić on the judgment for the arson of Jovanović's house: Violence against journalists is punishable after all”, 27 April 2024, available at <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/veran-matic-o-presudi-za-paljenje-jovanoviceve-kuce-nasilje-nad-novinarima-je-ipak-kaznjivo/>.

The judgment, awaited for years, represents one of several serious reasons why journalists cannot feel safe and secure. In this sense, a feeling of insecurity and lack of safety is also aroused by the (non-final) judgment by which the defendant was handed a suspended sentence two years after he, as determined in the first-instance judgment, threatened journalist Ana Lalić with death on Facebook.¹³³

Therefore, with the exception of the case of extreme violence when the house of journalist Milan Jovanović was set on fire while he was inside with his wife, suspended sentences were predominantly imposed for attacks against journalists in 2024 as well. Apart from this case, a prison sentence was also imposed in 2024 due to a criminal offence against a *Južne vesti* journalist, whereby it is necessary to bear in mind that the defendant in this case was a multiple repeat offender, including convictions for the same criminal offence (endangerment of safety under Article 138 of the Criminal Code).

In a year during which a drastic increase in attacks and violence against journalists was recorded, two prison sentences of six months each and one sentence of house arrest of 10 months were imposed before all courts.¹³⁴ In comparative practice, we find an example showing that a stricter sentence was imposed for an attempt to bribe a journalist—one year in prison—than what is imposed in Serbia for the endangerment of the safety of journalists.¹³⁵

Even in those cases of the endangerment of the safety of journalists that did end in convictions, **the awarded sanction was not measured so as to have an appropriate deterrent effect.** Thus, the appeal of the public prosecutor of the Basic Public Prosecutors' Office in Niš draws attention to the fact that in the judgment imposing a prison sentence for the criminal offence of stalking committed against a journalist, the circumstance that the

133 · Cenžolovka also wrote about the threats to Ana Lalić and the actions of the competent institutions. For more details, see Danica Nikolić, “Ana Lalić still does not feel safe: There is no information about the man who escaped after being arrested for threats”, *Cenžolovka*, 19 August 2024, available at <https://shorturl.at/AfOER>.

134 · Regarding the endangerment of the safety of a *Kurir* journalist, a prison sentence of seven months was imposed by a judgment of 2 April 2025 (a case from 2024). However, following an appeal, the decision on the sanction was modified and a seven-month suspended prison sentence was imposed, with an operational probation period of three years.

135 · Thus, for example, an HDZ member of parliament was sentenced to one year in prison for attempting to bribe a journalist (Drago Hedl). See, for example, Telegram, “Franjo Lucić tried to overturn the judgment at the Constitutional Court as well over offering a bribe to Telegram. He failed, the Constitutional Court decision published today is a new defeat for the once exceptionally powerful HDZ politician”, 13 September 2023, available at <https://www.telegram.hr/politika-kriminal/franjo-lucic-pokusao-i-na-ustavnom-sudu-srusiti-presudu-zbog-nudenja-mita-telegramu-nije-uspjao/>. Lawyer Vesna Alaburić pointed to this case at the conference of the Journalists' Association of Serbia (UNS) held on 18 December 2025.

defendant is a multiple repeat offender in committing, *inter alia*, identical criminal offences, was not taken into account to a sufficient extent. The defendant had already been convicted on eight occasions. As highlighted in the appeal, the aforementioned previous convictions, including those to multi-year prison terms, obviously did not influence him sufficiently to cease committing criminal offences, especially bearing in mind the circumstances under which he committed the offence for which he was convicted. The appeal emphasised that, given all the stated aggravating circumstances, the purpose of punishment in this specific case could only be achieved through a longer prison sentence. Therefore, it was proposed that the Higher Court in Niš modify the judgment of the Basic Court in Niš regarding the decision on the sanction, by sentencing the defendant to a prison term of at least one year and two months. However, the Higher Court confirmed the judgment of the Basic Court, and the modification regarding the sanction proposed by the prosecutor did not occur.

In that case, the accused sent numerous threatening SMS messages, persistently attempted to establish contact with the victim against his will, and committed the criminal offence of stalking under Article 138a, paragraph 2 of the Criminal Code against the *Južne vesti* journalist.¹³⁶ Among the messages sent by the accused to the journalist were also:

“All of you should be impaled.”

“Is there any difference between N1, nova SS Division, Danas, NIN and Južne vesti” – a message sent on two occasions.

“(...) You and the (...) editor-in-chief should buy coffins with the money meant to pull down the state.”

“Why did you, you mercenary scum, report me to the yellow police at the Niš Police Directorate?” “You p (...) of a person, Đilas’s pack, you are snitching on me to the police again, you mercenary maggot, all of you from Južne vesti are the evil of Serbia, UCK lobbyists and Đilas’s pack. Your (...) will never come to power again. You attack the Mayor of Niš (...) because she gave us a room for a memorial room (...). You threaten and attack the President of Serbia and his children, and you sue me at the police at the Niš Police Directorate who destroyed my life (...), but the yellow pack is no longer in power, now it’s the patriots, it won’t help you, the authorities (...) should ban Južne vesti because you are Nazis.”

136 · Judgment of the Basic Court in Niš, 5 K 370/2023 of 23 January 2024.

Then another message was sent: “you foreign mercenaries from N1, Nova SS Division, Danas, NIN, Vreme and Južne vesti should be impaled, because you are pulling down the state of Serbia while getting rich on the bones of Serbs”.

Despite eight previous convictions, the convicted person was handed a six-month prison sentence for these and similar threats, for which the female public prosecutor of the Basic Public Prosecutors’ Office in Niš highlights in the appeal against the judgment that it was not adequately measured to have an adequate deterrent effect.

POLITICAL RHETORIC AS A PRELUDE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS

The aforementioned proceedings before the Basic Court in Niš, conducted over threatening messages sent to a Južne vesti journalist, also point to the link between the rhetoric of politicians, the criminalisation of journalists, and the escalation of violence against journalists. Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation’s monitoring of verbal attacks by politicians against journalists, conducted since August 2025,¹³⁷ shows that ruling party politicians and the highest state officials label journalists of critical media outlets as traitors, mercenaries, and criminals, and accuse them of being Nazis and terrorists, tearing down the state, and attacking the President and his family – even using the exact same formulations, such as “Nova SS Division”, as those used by the individual convicted of harassing the Južne vesti journalist.¹³⁸

The problem of the hostile attitude of political and state office-holders in Serbia is highlighted not only by the monitoring of the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, but also, among others, by the Council of Europe in its Annual Report on the safety of journalists, as well as by the European Commission in its 2025 Annual Report on Serbia.¹³⁹

137 · For further details, see the monthly overviews of incidents where officials in Serbia, from a position of power, intimidate and target critical journalists and media, Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, Targeted by the Power, Monthly Guide: Politicians against Journalists in Serbia, available at <https://www.slavkocuruvijafondacija.rs/en/targeted-by-power/>.

138 · The person convicted of the criminal offence of stalking committed against a Južne vesti journalist used this phrase in the same manner as, for instance, politician and member of the main board of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) Siniša Vučinić, and many other politicians of the ruling party.

139 · Serbia received, *inter alia*, a recommendation to strengthen the protection and safety of journalists, specifically by ensuring that high-level officials refrain from verbal attacks against journalists, which include intimidation, stigmatisation, and delegitimisation. European Commission, *Serbia 2025 Report*, available at <https://shorturl.at/Sd5QL>, page 7.

It is important to point out that UN experts also published a statement in December 2025 highlighting that Serbia must end attacks against journalists, and drew attention to the danger of labelling journalists as terrorists. The rhetoric of public officials is dangerous and can be taken as tacit consent for threats and attacks against journalists.¹⁴⁰ Independent media are not enemies of the state, but a critical element of functional democracies.¹⁴¹

Criminal law protection is an exceptionally important segment of the struggle for the safety of journalists, but other institutions must also appropriately contribute to halting attacks against journalists. Daily targeting of journalists by politicians further endangers their safety. Therefore, it is necessary for other institutions, such as REM, to assume their share of responsibility in preventing the endangerment of the safety of journalists.¹⁴² The atmosphere of lynching, created by the highest representatives of the authorities, on the one hand incites the commission of violence against journalists, and on the other hand discourages institutions from providing journalists with the necessary protection.¹⁴³

Returning to the judgment of the Basic Court in Niš sentencing the individual convicted of stalking the *Južne vesti* journalist to six months in prison, although the public prosecutor justifiably highlights that a six-month sentence is insufficient to have an adequate deterrent effect, especially bearing in mind previous convictions, it is necessary to consider that out of numerous attacks against journalists, only rare cases reach a judicial epilogue, and an even smaller number end in a final and binding conviction. Therefore, in this case, the prosecutors' office and the court did perform what was within their competence, but it is clear that other institutions must also contribute to suppressing such targeting of critical journalists. Above all, it is essential for politicians to cease their verbal attacks without delay, which frequently represent a prelude or an invitation to subsequent threats and attacks against journalists, and send a dangerous message that the targeting of journalists is socially acceptable. Furthermore, in relation

140 · OHCHR, *Serbia must end attacks against journalists: UN experts*, 5 December 2025, available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/12/serbia-must-end-attacks-against-journalists-un-experts>.

141 · *Ibid.*

142 · It is also of significance to point out the case where a member of the main board of the ruling SNS party, in the show "*Beogrado, dobro jutro*" ("Good Morning, Belgrade"), broadcast on TV Studio B on 1 August 2025, offensively labelled *N1* and *Nova S* televisions as NDH1 and Nova SS. The Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) professional service, to which complaints against *Studio B* were submitted regarding this matter, did not consider that there were grounds to initiate proceedings.

143 · Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, *Targeted by the Power, Monthly Guide: Politicians against Journalists in Serbia*, *op. cit.*

to the total number of cases within the competence of the Basic Public Prosecutors' Office in Niš, the number of those that reached the court and obtained a judicial epilogue is not negligible.

In 2025, a devastating turn of events occurred in the case in which the individual responsible for pasting "wanted posters" with the image of journalist Isidora Kovačević in Šabac was acquitted. Following four-year-long proceedings and two first-instance convictions, the Higher Court in Šabac found that the actions of the defendant contained no elements of the criminal offence of endangerment of safety. "Namely, the first-instance court rendered a conviction by which it sentenced the defendant M. F. to a single prison term of two years for endangerment of the safety of journalist Isidora Kovačević and two other persons, one of whom was a minor, due to the pasting of 'wanted posters' with their images. The wanted posters were pasted after hooded individuals, armed with sticks and hammers, beat citizens on the Šabac bridge who were participating in a protest against the Rio Tinto company."¹⁴⁴ "Isidora Kovačević reported from the bridge and, on that occasion, published the names and functions of ruling party members who beat and harassed the gathered crowd."¹⁴⁵ However, the second-instance court rendered an acquittal. The reasoning of the judgment states that the criminal offence of endangerment of safety is committed by a person who endangers the safety of another person by a threat to attack the life or body of that person or a person close to them. This concerns a qualified threat, that is, a threat implying that the body or life of a passive subject or a person close to them will be attacked, and this attack should be understood to encompass either a threat of injury or a threat to endanger life or body. According to the findings of the second-instance court, the incriminated words on the pasted posters cannot be subsumed under "qualified threats", regardless of the fact that the victims declared identically that after learning of the critical event they felt insecurity and endangerment, namely fear for their life and body.¹⁴⁶

After such a message from the court, it is no wonder that Isidora Kovačević says that today she is more frightened than four years ago, when her city woke up covered with "wanted posters" bearing her image.¹⁴⁷ Numerous

144 · ANEM, "Monitoring of the Media Scene in Serbia for the Month of July 2025", available at <https://javniservis.net/sekcije/drustvo/monitoring-medijske-scene-u-srbiji-za-mesec-jul-2025-godine/>.

145 · *Ibid.*

146 · Higher Court in Šabac, 2 Kž1 240/25 of 16 October 2025.

147 · See, also, Stevan Ristić, "Interview: Ivana Stevanović, The regime's systemic crackdown on critical journalists", *Vreme*, 19 November 2025, available at <https://vreme.com/vreme/sistemski-obracun-rezima-sa-kritickim-novinarima/>.

cases of indirect threats and serious harassment do not even reach the court because they are dismissed by a decision of the prosecutors' office or, even more frequently, an official note is recorded stating that there are no grounds for initiating criminal proceedings. Thus, out of 134 cases established during 2025, a decision on the dismissal of the criminal complaint was rendered in 12 cases, and an internal note (*službena beleška*) was recorded stating that there are no grounds for initiating criminal proceedings in 18 cases.¹⁴⁸ In the cases from 2024, a decision on the dismissal of the criminal complaint was rendered in 9 cases, and an internal note was recorded stating that there are no grounds for initiating criminal proceedings in 12 cases.¹⁴⁹ It is noticeable that the use of the internal note is more frequent compared to the rendering of the decision on the dismissal of the criminal complaint.¹⁵⁰

Since a large number of cases of reported attacks against journalists end either with a decision on dismissal or with an internal note stating that there are no grounds for conducting criminal proceedings, it is of significance to also reflect on the reasons used to justify such decisions of the prosecutors' offices.

REASONS FOR WHICH CRIMINAL COMPLAINTS OF JOURNALISTS ARE DISMISSED

For a more complete picture of the criminal law protection of journalists, an insight is useful not only into the (few) judgments regarding criminal offences against journalists, but also into the (far more numerous) decisions that there are no grounds for conducting criminal proceedings due to events committed against journalists.

These decisions demonstrate the difficulties journalists face, the conditions and pressures under which they work, and the response of the competent institutions to such circumstances. Below is an overview of several cases where it was concluded, regarding the criminal complaints of journalists,

148 · VJT statistics of attacks on journalists from 2016 to the end of 2025, *op. cit.*

149 · *Ibid.*

150 · For more details on this, see Marija Babić, Rade Đurić, *Analysis: Actions of the prosecutor's office when deciding not to initiate ex officio prosecution – Internal note and decision on dismissal: a line between legality and misuse*, Independent Journalists Association of Serbia, 2025, available at <https://en.nuns.rs/media/2025/11/ANALYSIS.pdf>. On the difference between an official note and a decision on the dismissal of a criminal complaint, see also Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, *Freedom of Expression Before the Court, Second Regular Report on the Protection of Freedom of Expression in the Judicial System of Serbia*, 2022, available at <https://www.slavkocuruvijafondacija.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Freedom-of-expression-before-the-court-Second-regular-report.pdf>, pages 56-58.

that there are no grounds for conducting proceedings. The focus was on those cases where it is unquestionable that either some form of violence occurred, or there were threats or serious harassment for which no one will be held accountable, moreover, the cases will not even reach the court.

Thus, by a decision of the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Zaječar,¹⁵¹ the report of the Police Directorate in Zaječar dated 12 June 2025—which is considered a criminal complaint of the victim journalist of *Glas Zaječara*, whose phone was seized **during an attempt to film a rally of the Serbian Progressive Party was dismissed.**

Namely, during the gathering of the necessary information by the prosecutor's office, a member of the security service stated, *inter alia*, that “on 30 May 2025, he went to a public rally where the President of the Republic of Serbia was delivering a speech, that he worked in the security service and that he asked the **journalist of Glas Zaječara to leave the rally, and that it is true that he seized his mobile phone** because the journalist was filming directly into his face, close to his eyes, and that he told him he would return the phone, which he did upon the conclusion of the rally”.¹⁵²

The decision of the **Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Zaječar** states that, bearing in mind the undisputed fact that **“a mobile phone is a piece of private property, and that it unequivocally follows from the criminal complaint and the gathered information that (...) seized someone else's property—a mobile phone—from the victim, and returned it to him shortly afterwards, therefore without the intent of acquiring material benefit, the public prosecutor, on the basis of Article 284, paragraph 1, point 1 of the Criminal Procedure Code, rendered the decision as in the operative part, because the prosecution for the criminal offence of taking another's property under Article 211, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code is undertaken by a private lawsuit, and not *ex officio*”**.¹⁵³ The criminal complaint was dismissed.

151 · Decision of the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Zaječar, No. KT 501/25 of 3 September 2025.

152 · *Ibid.*

153 · *Ibid.*

Here, an insight into the official note compiled by the Police Directorate in Zaječar on 12 June 2025 regarding the complaint of the journalist of Glas Zaječara¹⁵⁴ is also of significance. Two high-ranking members of the Police Directorate in Zaječar¹⁵⁵ state that on 30 May 2025 they were engaged in securing the President of the Republic of Serbia, Mr Aleksandar Vučić, in the village of J., and that during the visit multiple news teams were noticed, including the journalist of the portal (...), who addressed the prosecutor's office with a complaint regarding the event of 30 May 2025. The official note states that "during the visit of the President of the Republic, it was not noticed that the journalist of the portal (...) was followed, insulted, or obstructed in performing his duties, nor was it noticed that he was pushed out of the area of the rally of the Serbian Progressive Party. Furthermore, no report was registered that the journalist's (...) phone was seized."

On the other hand, the prosecutor's office stated that it unequivocally follows from the gathered information that the phone had been seized from the victim journalist, and was returned to him after the rally. We recall that this was also confirmed by the suspect, who stated that he asked the journalist of Glas Zaječara to leave the rally, "and that it is true that he seized his phone." However, the police officers did not notice any of this.

In this case, the criminal complaint was dismissed because the prosecutor's office treated the seizure of the journalist's phone, which indisputably occurred, as the taking of another's property, which is not an offence prosecuted ex officio. Therefore, the police official note was not of crucial significance for the outcome of this case, but its content is nevertheless worrying. Even if the police officers stated everything truthfully in their statements, to the best of their knowledge, it follows that the police, who did notice the journalist, failed to notice even the conduct towards the journalist that the suspect himself admitted to and which was indisputably established to have occurred.

154 · Mol, General Police Directorate, Police Directorate in Zaječar, 03.19 No. 021-11/25-53 of 12 June 2025.

155 · One of these two police officers also gave a statement in the proceedings regarding the criminal complaint due to a physical attack by police officers against journalist Miljko Stojanović on 11 October 2025. In these proceedings as well, a decision was rendered dismissing the criminal complaint. For more details, see Anđela Risantićević, "The Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Zaječar dismissed the criminal complaint of journalist Miljko Stojanović against the Chief of the Zaječar Police Directorate", *Glas Zaječara*, 27 March 2026, available at https://www.glas-zajecara.com/drustvo/osnovno-javno-tuzilastvo-u-zajecaru-odbacilo-je-krivicnu-prijavu-novinara-miljka-stojanovica-protiv-nacelnika-pu-zajecar-38962?activatelid=456987&fbclid=IwDGRjcAQYohjBGNrBDJigWV4dG4DYWVtAjExAHNydGMGYXBwX2lkDDM1MDY4NTUzMTCyOAAHBK7czbP8gYmaD3GqfB2eNmSNPexltVO7Kb_T82sU5TSEpHmU3qTZzRVzZodJ_aem_R-AL9vaxBBYL1DyB6zgrZA_

It is also worrying that the prosecutor's office focused on the absence of intent to acquire material benefit in this case, since the mobile phone was returned upon the conclusion of the rally, while completely ignoring that the journalist was thereby prevented from performing his journalistic work. When it comes to journalists, a mobile phone is not just any piece of private, another's property, but under contemporary conditions, it represents one of the primary tools for performing journalistic work. By seizing the phone and returning it only upon the conclusion of the rally, the journalist was factually and essentially prevented from performing the task of informing the public. The subsumption of this act under the criminal offence of taking another's property is also surprising. In similar situations before other prosecutor's offices, there are examples where an indictment was submitted for unauthorised interference with filming—where it was concluded that the act constituted the criminal offence of preventing printing and dissemination of printed materials and broadcasting of programmes under Article 149, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code.¹⁵⁶

It is at the very least cynical, and dangerous for freedom of expression and media freedom, that the prosecutor's office takes the stance that the seizure of a phone from a journalist trying to film a rally, about which the public has an interest to be informed, constitutes a mere taking of another's property, “without the intent of acquiring benefit”, while ignoring what this event fundamentally represents, which is the unauthorised interference with filming and preventing journalists from performing their work.

This is generally one of the key observed problems when it comes to the criminal law protection of journalists in the observed period, **the dimension of freedom of expression in connection with criminal offences committed against journalists, and the social danger of attacks against journalists, are ignored.** The prosecutor's office approached this case as if it concerned the “temporary taking of another's property” (a phone) from any citizen, without taking into account at any point the circumstance that a journalist was involved who was seeking, and had both the right and the duty, to report to the public on a rally of significance for the local community.

Here, it is essential to recall that freedom of expression, in accordance with the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights, also encompasses the freedom to receive information and ideas.¹⁵⁷ Although freedom of expres-

156 · Documentation on file with the author.

157 · See, for example, Ivana Krstić, Tanasije Marinković, *European Human Rights Law*, op. cit., page 212.

sion is traditionally equated with the freedom to impart information and ideas, the essence of freedom of expression, according to the stance of the ECtHR, lies in their reception,¹⁵⁸ as well as in the public's right to know. The freedom to impart does not only concern the freedom to send information, but also takes into account the reader, the listener, the audience in general, and their right to freely receive information. Opposite the task of the media to convey information and ideas on issues discussed in the political arena and other areas of public interest, lies the right of the public to receive such information and ideas.¹⁵⁹ All of these important aspects of freedom of expression were ignored when the seizure of a phone from a journalist trying to report and film a rally of public importance was viewed merely as the taking of another's property, without the intent of acquiring benefit. Here, the focus should be on the damage caused to the public interest and the right of the public to receive information, rather than on the intent (or absence of intent) to acquire benefit.

By way of comparison, before another prosecutor's office, a case of interference with filming was considered as preventing the dissemination, printing, and broadcasting of a programme, even though there was no physical contact or seizure of a phone.¹⁶⁰ This concerns an *N1* journalist who was obstructed in filming by workers of a public utility company. The court proceedings are still ongoing. The first-instance conviction from December 2025 was quashed in February 2026.¹⁶¹

A similar outcome and problem can be observed in the actions of the First Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade regarding the attack on the *Insajder* news team.

On 1 May 2025, an *Insajder* journalist, in his capacity as a journalist-reporter for the show *Marker*, which is broadcast on *TV Insajder*, was engaged in reporting from an event in front of the National Assembly building, which was organised by the ruling coalition, during which he was also broadcasting live on *TV Insajder*. After he filmed a physical clash between two groups of people at that location, an unknown male individual approached him,

158 · *Ibid.*

159 · ECtHR, *Lingens v. Austria*, Application No. 9815/82, Judgment of 8 July 1986, paragraph 41; Ivana Krstić, Tanasije Marinković, *European Human Rights Law*, op. cit., page 213.

160 · Documentation on file with the author.

161 · *N1*, "Four years since the attack on N1 journalist Milan Stojanović: Workers of PUE "Naisus" before the court again", 19 February 2026, available at <https://n1info.rs/vesti/cetiri-godine-od-napada-na-novinara-n1-milana-stojanovica-radnici-jkp-naisus-a-ponovo-pred-sudom/>.

brought his phone camera to about 20 cm from the journalist's face, and filmed him. When the *Insajder* journalist also began to film that individual, the man addressed him with the words "You better run", and then struck his hand, causing the journalist to drop his phone.¹⁶² When he picked up the phone, he received the exact same strike again, and again dropped the phone with which he was trying to film the suspect.¹⁶³

The First Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade concluded that the words addressed to the victim, "You better run," are not considered a threat. Furthermore, in the decision dismissing the criminal complaint, it is stated that in this specific case, at the moment when the suspect struck his hand to further prevent filming with the mobile phone, **the recording was not being broadcast live on the television programme, but subsequently, on the basis of which the conclusion was drawn that the described action did not lead to the prevention or obstruction of the broadcasting of the television programme**, but that it was directed towards enabling the victim from continuing to film, and assessing that the stated action in the form of preventing, namely obstructing filming, is not incriminated as an action of the criminal offence under Article 149, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code. In another case, when considering whether it concerned the prevention/obstruction of filming and a criminal offence, the same prosecutor's office took into account the circumstance of whether the journalist was prevented from recording the event.¹⁶⁴

162 · First Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade, KT. No. 2991/25 of 4 September 2025, Decision on the dismissal of the criminal complaint.

163 · *Ibid.*

164 · The same prosecutor's office, considering a criminal complaint by a *KosSev* journalist, took into account the circumstance that the journalist was not prevented from filming the event in question when assessing whether a criminal offence had occurred. From this, it could be concluded that the circumstance of a journalist being prevented from filming the event in question is significant for assessing whether a criminal offence occurred, but this was nevertheless not the case in the proceedings regarding the attack on the *Insajder* news team. On 7 May 2025, in front of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, in the area in front of Pionirski Park where a paramilitary camp had been situated for months, the *KosSev* journalist attempted to record video and photographic content for the *KoSev* authorial archive, which would also encompass a part of the rally and the camp, but after she began filming, she experienced serious discomfort and questioning by unknown individuals from the camp. As stated in the complaint, "the filming was prevented by physical means, the journalist's movement was obstructed and she was stopped, after which an unlawful attempt was made to establish her identity and conduct further questioning." They interrogated her and filmed her, although they themselves are not journalists, and attempted to check her identity. Police officers were nearby but failed to react until two passers-by joined the communication, while at the same time a small group of young men approached from the area of the improvised camp. At that moment, the police officers approached and asked the young men to disperse. It was concluded, *inter alia*, that the actions of the unknown individual against whom the complaint was filed did not meet the legal elements of any criminal offence prosecuted *ex officio*, including the criminal offence of preventing the printing and dissemination of printed materials and the broadcasting of programmes under Article 149, paragraph 2 of the Criminal Code, because in this specific case there was no destruction of or damage to the audio and video equipment used for broadcasting programmes, nor was the journalist prevented from filming the event in question. First Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade, Internal Note, KTR No. 9716/25 of 28 October 2025.

Furthermore, the newsroom of *Glas Zaječara* and journalist Miljko Stojanović filed a criminal complaint for harassment, because for months a **drone had been filming the yard and house of journalist Miljko Stojanović, as well as several activists of the informal group “Zaječarci u blokadi” and the house of BBC News Serbian journalist Nemanja Mitrović.**¹⁶⁵ The Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Zaječar recorded an official note stating that “there are no grounds for initiating criminal proceedings against authorised official persons of the Security Intelligence Agency (BIA) for a criminal offence prosecuted *ex officio*, because their actions do not meet the legal elements of a criminal offence prosecuted *ex officio*”.¹⁶⁶

On 24 January 2025, the opposition coalition ‘Svanuće’ scheduled a press conference in the **Valjevo** City Assembly, to which journalists and reporters were invited. The criminal complaint stated that a member of private security pushed a camera operator of a local television station and subsequently, with a closed fist, struck a correspondent of a local portal below the left rib cage. The Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Valjevo dismissed the criminal complaint, considering that in this case it could only concern the infliction of light bodily injury, which is a criminal offence that is not prosecuted *ex officio*. As stated in the reasoning, bearing in mind that the victim himself did not mention that the suspect directed any threat, but that he struck him in the stomach area, it was concluded that the mentioned action of the suspect, even if it had actually occurred, does not constitute an action of commission of the criminal offence with which the suspect is charged.¹⁶⁷ In his defence, the defendant stated that he acted in accordance with the Law on Private Security, and that he was forced to deflect a physical attack with the back of his hand in order to protect himself, his colleagues, and the police who were behind his back.¹⁶⁸

The victim lodged an objection against the decision on the dismissal of the criminal complaint, pointing out, *inter alia*, that an expert medical evaluation

165 · ANEM, “The newsroom of Glas Zaječara asks why and on whose orders the filming of Miljko Stojanović’s yard and Anđela Risantijević’s apartment is being conducted?”, 1 July 2025, available at <https://shorturl.at/6CoBj>.

166 · Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Zaječar, Internal Note of 28 August 2025. For more details, see the subsection “Surveillance, Tracking, and Jeopardising of Journalistic Sources”.

167 · Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Valjevo, Kt. No. 92/25 of 7 March 2025. The criminal complaint was filed for the criminal offence of endangerment of safety. There is no information as to whether the competent prosecutor’s office analysed why the actions of the reported individual do not meet the essential elements of the criminal offence of violent behaviour, given that the event took place in the presence of a large number of people.

168 · *Ibid.*

of the injuries sustained by the victim had not been performed, and that this was the first time anyone had mentioned that he had to protect the police, as if the police lacked the capacity or means to protect themselves and instead had to be protected by the accused member of the private security service; he also recalled that it was absolutely untrue that anyone had attempted to forcibly enter the premises and that, in such an event, the members of the Valjevo Police Directorate who were present would have reacted. The High Public Prosecutor's Office rejected the objection as unfounded. In the opinion of this prosecutor's office as well, the case in question would at most concern a light bodily injury, which is persecuted under a private lawsuit. It was concluded that the stance of the acting prosecutor **that the member of the private security service acted in accordance with his powers** was correct.¹⁶⁹ We recall that the member of the private security service struck the journalist with the back of his hand in the stomach area.

This is one of the examples where the **institutional protection of journalists remains unattainable also because, under the applicable criminal law, the infliction of light bodily injury is not considered a criminal offence prosecuted ex officio**. Therefore, the dismissal of the criminal complaint is not surprising. The decision of the prosecutor's office states in a generalised manner that the suspect acted in accordance with Article 25 of the Rulebook on the Manner of Applying the Powers of Security Officers and Articles 56 and 52 of the Law on Private Security. In this manner, the reported striking of the journalist with a closed fist in the stomach area was subsumed under acting "in accordance with the powers" of private security.

The deficiency of such a statutory solution and practice, which completely ignores the dimension of freedom of expression and the social danger of the committed act, is clearly illustrated by the case of the physical attack against journalist Uglješa Bokić while reporting on the election day of 2 June 2024 in front of the Novi Sad Fair. A man wearing a cap approached Bokić, who was filming and attempting to conduct an interview with him, grabbed his phone, as demonstrated by the video recording, and struck the journalist in the chest with his fist. Following an examination at the Emergency Centre, Bokić was diagnosed with a contusion of the sternum. The prosecutor's office compiled an official note concluding that there are no grounds for initiating criminal proceedings, because it concerned a light bodily injury – a contusion of the sternum.¹⁷⁰

169 · *Ibid.*

170 · Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad, KTR 1858/24. Internal note made on 18 July 2024 – there are no grounds for initiating criminal proceedings.

Journalist Uglješa Bokić stated that he was not surprised by such an outcome.¹⁷¹

*“This only confirms the thesis that our institutions are literally dead. I reported this in order to prove this claim, because from the very beginning, I was certain that nothing would happen. In a country where those responsible for the murders of journalists have not been prosecuted, it would be strange if my case ended with a judgment, especially knowing that my attacker is close to the SNS.”*¹⁷²

Such an outcome was condemned by numerous media outlets and journalists’ associations. They pointed out that this is a shameful decision which could result in further encouragement of violence against journalists, which is increasingly crossing over from verbal to physical.¹⁷³

*“A contusion of the sternum established by a doctor is not a bodily injury in the forensic-medical sense for the expert witness, nor for the Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Novi Sad, so there is no criminal offence! Do they need to break our bones for that to be sufficient for the prosecutor? Is that the message—beat journalists freely, but carefully. Impunity, like in this case, can also inspire new violence, while discouraging journalists from reporting it, because they do not believe in a fair outcome.”*¹⁷⁴

Journalist Uglješa Bokić also points out that the Criminal Code, paradoxically, prescribes a higher sentence for the criminal offence of endangerment of safety, and it appears that a journalist is more protected from a verbal offence than from a physical one, which is clearly seen through two cases in which he was attacked, one case involved threats, and the other a physical attack.¹⁷⁵

One of the problems is also that the legislator did not provide for the findings and opinion of the forensic expert witness to be delivered to the victim, so in this specific case, Bokić did not have the opportunity to submit objections

171 · Nada Vukajlović, “It would be strange if my case ended with a judgment: Why the attacker of Danas journalist Uglješa Bokić will not be criminally prosecuted?”, *Danas*, 6 August 2024, available at <https://shorturl.at/F4qe0>.

172 · *Ibid.*

173 · Statement by the Vice President of the UNS and member of the Standing Working Group for the Safety of Journalists Olivera Milošević. Nada Vukajlović, “It would be strange if my case ended with a judgment”: Why the attacker of Danas journalist Uglješa Bokić will not be criminally prosecuted?”, *op. cit.*

174 · *Ibid.*

175 · Interview with Uglješa Bokić, 7 April 2026.

to the findings and opinion, nor to request a new expert evaluation.¹⁷⁶ A prosecutor of the High Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade, in a statement for the *Danas* newspaper, pointed out, *inter alia*, that she has no information as to whether the competent prosecutor's office analysed why the actions of the reported individual do not meet the essential elements of the criminal offence of ill-treatment and torture, or violent behaviour, given that the event took place in the presence of a large number of people. Furthermore, the prosecutor's office should have explained the reasons guiding its finding that the actions of the reported individual do not meet the elements of these criminal offences either.¹⁷⁷ The reasoning of the decision would also have to contain the reasons why the prosecutor's office did not submit a request for initiating misdemeanour proceedings.¹⁷⁸ At the same time, the existence of a light bodily injury is not a condition for the existence of the criminal offences of violent behaviour and ill-treatment and torture, nor for a misdemeanour.¹⁷⁹

Journalist Uglješa Bokić also points out that the actions of the prosecutor's office can differ depending on who the attacker of the journalists is, and he illustrates this through two cases in which he was the target of an attack. In the first case, the Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime identified the individual who sent the threats. "Unlike some earlier cases when my colleagues received threats, here the prosecutor's office has done its job correctly so far, albeit quite slowly, and I see the reason for that also in the fact that this individual (the attacker, author's note) is not influential, nor did he write the threats based on instructions, but on his own initiative, so consequently there is no one to protect him. In contrast to that, in 2024, I experienced a physical attack by an individual who was immediately known, but who in Novi Sad is very close to the ruling party, as well as to people from the criminogenic environment. On top of that, he is a former police officer. In this case, I gained the impression that the Novi Sad prosecutor's office lacked the will to prosecute that man."¹⁸⁰

On the other hand, there are examples in judicial practice where cases of

176 · See, also, the statements of the female prosecutor of the High Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade Milena Božović, who pointed to this problem in a statement for *Danas*. Cited according to Nada Vukajlović, Nada Vukajlović, "It would be strange if my case ended with a judgment": Why the attacker of *Danas* journalist Uglješa Bokić will not be criminally prosecuted?", *op. cit.*

177 · *Ibid.*

178 · *Ibid.*

179 · *Ibid.*

180 · Interview with Uglješa Bokić, 7 April 2026.

interference with filming were considered as preventing the dissemination, printing, and broadcasting of a programme, even though there was no physical contact or seizure of a phone. Thus, in one case, it was taken into account that the defendants addressed the journalist in an elevated, commanding tone, which was accompanied by aggressive gestures and created a situation in which the victim was forced to interrupt the filming. The defendants approached the journalist to a distance of about one metre, addressed him in an elevated tone, waved their hands in front of him, and repeatedly ordered him to “turn that off,” “turn it off when I tell you,” whereby their behaviour created an atmosphere of pressure and anxiety due to which the victim interrupted the filming. The court concluded that the defendants must have known that they had no authority, nor the right to prohibit the filming of works being executed on a public surface. It was concluded that the actions of the defendants described in the operative part of the judgment meet all the elements of the criminal offence of preventing the dissemination of printed materials and the broadcasting of programmes under Article 149, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code.¹⁸¹ This judgment is not yet final and binding, but it is nevertheless of significance because it draws attention to what the primary problem is when it comes to the lack of criminal law protection regarding the attacks against the Insajder news team, Uglješa Bokić, and the journalists in Zaječar and Valjevo. It remains a matter of regret that none of these cases will even be considered before a court because the competent prosecutor’s offices either dismissed the criminal complaints or recorded official notes, considering that it did not concern a criminal offence prosecuted *ex officio*.

Finally, the actions in the aforementioned cases that were concluded by prosecutorial decisions are not aligned with the UNESCO guidelines for prosecutors regarding criminal offences against journalists. According to these guidelines, when conducting, supervising, or providing advisory assistance in an investigation concerning an alleged criminal offence committed against a journalist, prosecutors should initiate or recommend the implementation of a contextual analysis of the link between the alleged criminal offence

181 · Basic Court in Niš, 9K No. 178/2024 of 31 October 2025.

and the victim's media activities, both past and present.¹⁸² Depending on the circumstances, it may be necessary for the investigation to encompass the entire media environment, as well as those who could benefit from the committed criminal offence.¹⁸³

In the aforementioned cases that were concluded by prosecutorial decisions/ official notes, the circumstance that journalists were involved, the media environment, and the link between the committed acts and the performance of the victims' journalistic work were not taken into account at all (even though the committed acts indisputably prevented the performance of journalistic work).

WHAT IS NOT CONSIDERED A THREAT WITH POTENTIAL OF ENDANGERING THE SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

One of the most frequently reported offences against journalists is the endangerment of the safety of persons performing activities in the field of public information, under Article 138, paragraph 3 of the Criminal Code. In practice, during the application of Article 138, paragraph 3, protection is absent if conditional threats are made or if the threats do not contain an imminent and concrete threat to the life or body of the victim or a person close to them. "The threat must contain an announcement and a presentation to the victim that they will be attacked; namely, it is not sufficient for it to contain merely the suspect's wishes for some evil to happen to the victim, but the suspect must precisely declare that he will inflict such evil upon the victim".¹⁸⁴ However, the rationales as to why certain threats are not considered

182 · UNESCO and International Association of Prosecutors (IAP), *Guidelines for Prosecutors on Cases of Crimes Against Journalists*, 2020, available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375138>, 2. These guidelines do not aim to grant a special status to journalists, as all citizens are equal before the law, and they do not in any way limit the obligations relating to the sufficiency of evidence, the principle of opportunity, or, more broadly, the obligations linked to the discretionary powers of prosecutors to initiate criminal proceedings in accordance with national laws, practice, and procedures. The aim is to create conditions that truly enable the practice of the journalistic profession, *inter alia*, by identifying the elements that need to be analysed in the decision-making process when an alleged criminal offence is committed against a journalist. Thus, the guidelines provide that the prosecutors should consider the context of performing journalistic activities and their impact on fundamental rights every time an alleged criminal offence is committed against a person due to the performance of the journalistic profession.

183 · *Ibid*, page 6.

184 · High Public Prosecutor's Office, Special Department for High-Tech Crime, official note KTR VTK 720/25 of 14 January 2026, by which it was concluded that the case established regarding the criminal complaint of journalist Tatalović needs to be archived because there are no grounds for initiating criminal proceedings against any individual for any criminal offence prosecuted *ex officio*.

sufficient for providing criminal law protection to journalists are frequently unconvincing and difficult to accept.

By way of example, this test of the existence of an imminent and concrete threat, required for the judicial protection of journalists due to the endangerment of safety, was not passed by the threats sent to N1 journalist Mladen Savatović via X, Instagram, and Facebook.

“Everything on N1 should be destroyed”, “you should be dealt with by summary procedure”, “brought to order with a beating”

On 5 July 2025, journalist Mladen Savatović was reporting from a student protest held that evening in front of the Faculty of Law in Belgrade. An incident occurred at that protest in which the protest participants booed an *Informer* television reporter, Branka Lazić. The victim did not participate in the attacks against the *Informer* reporter at any point, as demonstrated by the video recording attached to the criminal complaint, but the *Informer* media outlet labelled Mladen Savatović as an accomplice to the attack, after which threatening and offensive messages arrived on the victim’s accounts on Facebook and Instagram, as well as on X, for days.¹⁸⁵

In addition to numerous offensive and vulgar messages and comments, Savatović was sent messages stating that he should be **brought to order with a beating**, that whoever sees him should “slap him upside the head... a real proper one, to make him think he was hit by a supersonic cannon,” and that he **“should be dealt with by summary procedure.”** He was sent a message which, in addition to numerous insults, also contained a threat that **“everything on N1 should be destroyed,”** and this **message was accompanied by an image of a user holding a rifle in his hand**, which is particularly disturbing and speaks to the seriousness of the threat. The High Public Prosecutor’s Office, Special Department for High-Tech Crime, performed an insight into all submitted attachments, texts, and disputed posts sent to Mladen Savatović. The prosecutor reached the conclusion that the disputed content cannot be subsumed under clear and concrete threats.¹⁸⁶ Surprisingly, the prosecutor states: “a conclusion can be drawn that the **subject of the criminal complaint is of an incidental and tense nature** and is not directed against the personality of the victim as a journalist,

185 · High Public Prosecutor’s Office in Belgrade, Special Department for High-Tech Crime, KTN vtk No. 2025/25 of 11 August 2025; Appellate Public Prosecutor’s Office in Belgrade, KTPO No. 289/25 of 26 September 2025.

186 · High Public Prosecutor’s Office in Belgrade, Special Department for High-Tech Crime, Decision on the dismissal of the criminal complaint, KTN vtk No. 2025/25 of 11 August 2025.

but was instructed by a debate on a social network and the dissemination of untrue information, which **are not related to the work that the victim performed as a journalist**, but related to the dissemination of information about his relationship with another journalist, for which reasons I find that the reported act is not a criminal offence prosecuted *ex officio*.” Thus, even the threat sent to the N1 television journalist that “everything on N1 should be destroyed,” accompanied by an image of an armed sender, was not considered by the acting prosecutor to be connected to the work that the victim performs as a journalist. Deciding on the objection against the decision on the dismissal of the criminal complaint, the Appellate Public Prosecutor’s Office also rejected the objection, concluding that through the analysis of the incriminated actions specified in the criminal complaint, the first-instance prosecutor’s office correctly drew the conclusion **that the posts of the reported individuals do not contain an imminent and concrete threat to the life or body of the victim**, and therefore cannot be equated with the actions of commission of the criminal offence of endangerment of safety under Article 138 of the Criminal Code, nor of any other criminal offence prosecuted *ex officio*, for which clear and argued reasons were given, which this prosecutor’s office also supports.¹⁸⁷

In another case, Anđela Risantijević, the editor and journalist of the local media outlet **Glas Zaječara**, was sent a message with offensive and vulgar comments relating to her deceased sister, about whom it was subsequently written “that’s why she’s being bitten by worms now, and you will be too, you sack of...” The High Public Prosecutor’s Office for High-Tech Crime concluded that the sent messages do not constitute a concrete threat to the life or body of Anđela Risantijević, but are primarily of a vulgar and offensive content, and thus represent inappropriate communication, the content of which does not indicate the existence of a real danger; therefore, there are no elements of the criminal offence of endangerment of safety, nor of another criminal offence prosecuted *ex officio*, and consequently an internal note was recorded stating that there are no grounds for initiating criminal proceedings.¹⁸⁸

A call to violence against N1 employees was not considered sufficiently concrete or objectively possible by the prosecutor’s office

Below an **N1** post, a comment was left: “What sick hatred and lies you sowed,

187 · Appellate Public Prosecutor’s Office in Belgrade, KTPO No. 289/25 of 26 September 2025.

188 · VJT VTK, KTR VTK No. 1776/25 of 16 June 2025.

you sowed. The Serbian people will not forgive you. I publicly announce Jelena Karleuša is calling for violence against the employees at *NI*.”¹⁸⁹ The competent Special Department for High-Tech Crime of the Supreme Public Prosecutor’s Office decided to archive the case, keeping in mind that the actions do not meet the elements of the criminal offence of endangering safety under Article 138, paragraph 3, nor any other criminal offence prosecuted *ex officio*. It was concluded that the post in question does not contain a threat because it does not specify any action, “and furthermore, it is not objectively possible.”¹⁹⁰

“YOU SHOULD BE DEALT WITH BY SUMMARY PROCEDURE”

The criminal complaint of a *Glas Šumadije* journalist, to whom it was written on Facebook “YOU SHOULD BE DEALT WITH BY SUMMARY PROCEDURE,” was dismissed because it was not possible to establish the identity of the user of the Facebook profile from which the threats were sent.¹⁹¹ As stated in the decision, assessing the allegations of the Mol report from which it follows that on the basis of the URL address it was not possible to establish the identity of the user of the disputed profile on Facebook, and since in this specific case there is no other evidence that any individual committed the criminal offence of endangerment of safety, or any other criminal offence prosecuted *ex officio*, due to a lack of evidence, the criminal complaint was dismissed.¹⁹²

The inability to establish the identity of the perpetrators is at the same time one of the frequent reasons why the reaction regarding attacks against journalists is delayed or absent. When it comes to cases established during 2024, the potential perpetrator was not identified in 14 cases even after undertaking measures in the pre-investigation proceedings, as well as in 13 cases in 2025.¹⁹³ In total, from 2016 to the end of 2025, the potential perpetrator was not identified in 156 cases (35.7%) even after undertaking pre-investigation actions.¹⁹⁴

189 · NUNS, “Karleuša’s Song of Hatred”, 1 May 2025, available at <https://nuns.rs/karleusina-pesma-mrznje/>.

190 · High Public Prosecutor’s Office in Belgrade, Special Department for High-Tech Crime, Official Note, KTR VTK No. 1435/25 of 15 May 2025.

191 · High Public Prosecutor’s Office in Belgrade, Special Department for High-Tech Crime, Decision on the dismissal of the criminal complaint, KTN VTK No. 253/25 of 25 March 2025.

192 · *Ibid.*

193 · Safe Journalists, VJT statistics of attacks on journalists from 2016 to the end of 2025, available at <https://bezbedninovinari.rs/article/1400/vjt-statistika-napada-na-novinare-od-2016-do-kraja-2025-godine>.

194 · *Ibid.*

SUMMARY OF 2024 AND 2025: WHAT IS NOT CONSIDERED A CRIMINAL OFFENCE PROSECUTED EX OFFICIO

- Striking an Insajder journalist in the hand twice, causing him on both occasions to drop the phone with which he was trying to film the man who attacked him while reporting from a ruling coalition rally (light bodily injury);
- Striking a journalist, resulting in a contusion of the sternum (light bodily injury);
- Striking a journalist with a closed fist in the stomach area (in accordance with the powers of private security);
- Messages stating that an N1 journalist “should be brought to order with a beating,” “should be dealt with by summary procedure,” and a message that “everything on N1 should be destroyed,” accompanied by an image of the sender holding a rifle in his hand—as it was deemed unrelated to the performance of journalistic work;
- “You should be dealt with by summary procedure”—a message written to a Glas Šumadije journalist on Facebook (lack of evidence; perpetrator unknown);
- “If only the police would raid *N1*, arrest, and along the way thoroughly beat up the traitors working there! Or at least let the citizens loose with pitchforks,” “Ustaše, N1, die, Ustaše, die,” “Terrorist TV. How long will the lies go on about who is attacking whom, I f... your terrorist mother.”¹⁹⁵ It was concluded that the messages do not contain a direct, concrete, and serious threat, but rather wishes for some evil to happen to the journalists of the *N1* newsroom, on the basis of which it was concluded that there are no grounds for initiating criminal proceedings.
- “May God grant that all employees at Danas be severely struck down and their entire seed wiped out, that they watch while being unable to help their sick family, that they rot from within and be wiped out. In Christ’s name we pray to the Lord God that Danas and all the employed terrorists be punished for all their misdeeds in the worst way and pay the highest price for all misdeeds against Serbia and the Serbian people! DEATH TO TRAITORS! BEGONE YOU CORRUPTED CATTLE, MAY A DOG F... YOUR MOTHER IN THE MOUTH AND MAY THE TURKS IMPALE YOUR CHILDREN! Because you are corrupted scum and terrorist Ustaše, BEGONE!”¹⁹⁶ It was established that no direct and serious threat exists, but that these constitute comments of an offensive nature.

195 · VJT VTK, KTR vtk 2617/25 of 24 November 2025, internal note – archive the case because there are no grounds for initiating criminal proceedings.

196 · VJT KTK, KTR VTK No. 2915/25 of 15 October 2025, internal note – archive the case because it was concluded that there are no grounds for initiating criminal proceedings.

- “All of you should have your mothers f..... and you should no longer exist, you traitorous cattle,” “Crush them, then pile them up with the other garbage and light a match.” Comments posted below video content showing an excerpt from a *Kurir* television show, addressed to the host of that television station.¹⁹⁷ The High Public Prosecutor’s Office for High-Tech Crime deemed that the reported act in the case in question is not a criminal offence prosecuted *ex officio*, because there are no threats of an attack against the life or body of the *TV Kurir* host or persons close to her, and since the victim does not feel endangered, there is neither a subjective nor an objective element of the criminal offence, nor of any other criminal offence prosecuted *ex officio*. Therefore, the criminal complaint was dismissed, and subsequently, the Appellate Public Prosecutor’s Office also rejected the objection against the decision on the dismissal of the criminal complaint.¹⁹⁸
- A message to the editor of *Glas Zaječara* that she will soon be eaten by worms like her deceased sister, it was concluded that the messages represent inappropriate communication rather than a concrete threat, the content of which does not indicate the existence of a real danger.
- Thrusting a sandwich into the face of an Informer employee by a participant in a protest against lithium mining, provocations, verbal attacks, shouting, offensive comments, and statements alluding to the professional bias of the victim. It was concluded that words of an offensive nature were addressed to the victim, and that the very act of pushing a sandwich into the victim’s face is considered an act of a “real insult”, which is not a criminal offence prosecuted *ex officio* by the public prosecutor’s office, but rather through a private lawsuit. The suspects were prosecuted for the misdemeanour of indecent, insolent, and reckless behaviour, and by a judgment of the Misdemeanour Court in Belgrade, they were sentenced to prison terms—one defendant was sentenced to a prison term of 40 days, and two to terms of 30 days each.¹⁹⁹ It was concluded that there are no elements of the criminal offence of endangerment of safety, because neither the victim nor the witness stated that threats had been directed at them, and that there are no elements of the criminal offence of violent behaviour, because no consequence

197 · High Public Prosecutor’s Office, Special Prosecutor’s Office for High-Tech Crime, Decision on the dismissal of the criminal complaint, KTN VTK 1203/25 of 23 May 2025. During a telephone conversation with the applicant of the criminal complaint, she stated that she does not feel endangered on a daily basis, but that she certainly did not find the comments pleasant.

198 · Appellate Public Prosecutor’s Office in Belgrade, KTPO No. 303/25 of 1 October 2025.

199 · Misdemeanour Court in Belgrade, PR No. 1151/24 of 11 August 2024. By a decision of the Misdemeanour Appellate Court in Belgrade, PRŽ No. 18830/24 of 13 August 2024, the appeal of the defendants was accepted, the judgment of the first-instance misdemeanour court was quashed, and the case was sent back for a retrial. At the moment of deciding on the criminal complaint, the proceedings were still ongoing.

occurred in the form of a more significant endangerment of the tranquillity of citizens or a more severe disruption of public order and peace.

- An email sent to a journalist of the *Radar* weekly: “hey *Radar* crew I wouldn’t mess with the sheikhs, they have a short fuse. After this I am sure you will regret your long muddy tongue and that for PETTY CASH not your petty cash that you receive, but for petty cash, there are as many subcontractors as you want, kamikazes so to speak. You are unimaginably stupid.”²⁰⁰ It was concluded that no direct and serious threat exists that the reported individual would imminently endanger the safety of the applicant by an attack against her life or body or a person close to her, but rather that these constitute comments of an offensive nature.
- Regarding a criminal complaint by a *Kurir* journalist, filed due to being surrounded, insulted, and struck at a protest, an official note was recorded stating that there are no grounds for criminal prosecution because he failed to submit medical documentation, failed to specify witnesses, did not know whether someone threw something at him or struck him with a hand, and failed to specify any characteristics that would be suitable for the eventual identification of the individuals.
- Comments below the links to Nenad Kulačin’s podcast shows, which are predominantly of an offensive nature, but also messages with the following content: “Drop dead as soon as possible, may God grant it,” “You’ll get yours across the face, boy,” while photos of graffiti intended for Dinko Gruhonjić were also posted. It was concluded that no intent to endanger safety exists.
- A criminal complaint by a *Bečejski mozaik* journalist: “*Bečejski mozaik* you f..... b...., you delete comments of people who write the truth. Is Orbán paying you to make the secession of Vojvodina as easy as possible, I f... your rotten Horthyist mother in the mouth”. It was concluded that there are no elements of any criminal offence for which prosecution would be undertaken *ex officio*.
- A message sent to journalist Miljko Stojanović (*Glas Zaječara*) on Facebook: “You are a moron, boy. With you I will repeat 6 years ago,” “S... my c..., you and your Ukrainian woman and the blockaders together”. It was concluded that the comments do not contain an imminent, clear, and serious threat and that the essential elements of the criminal offence of endangerment of safety were not met, but rather, eventually, the elements of the criminal offence of insult, the prosecution for which is undertaken by a private lawsuit.
- The journalist of *Radar*, Vuk Cvijić, was struck in the face with a fist by Milan Lađević, the then editor of the pro-government *Srpski telegraf*, as a result of which Cvijić

200 · VJT VTK, Official Note, KTR VTK No. 1839/25 of 20 June 2025.

fell to the ground, which was also recorded by cameras. As stated in the decision on the dismissal of the criminal complaint, “from all the above listed it follows that the suspect (...) committed violence against the victim Vuk Cvijić, in such a manner that he struck him with a closed fist of his left hand in the right part of his face, and then pushed him away with both hands, as a result of which the victim fell to the ground.”²⁰¹ As they concluded that there are no elements of the criminal offence of violent behaviour because no consequence occurred in the form of a more severe anxiety of citizens or a more severe disruption of public order and peace, and for lighter bodily injuries prosecution is undertaken by a private lawsuit—the criminal complaint was dismissed.

- The criminal complaint of the *Glas Zaječara* journalist, filed against the Chief of the Zaječar Police Directorate and a Traffic Police officer of the police station of the Zaječar Police Directorate due to the criminal offence of ill-treatment and torture, was dismissed because it was established that no grounds for suspicion exist that a criminal offence prosecuted *ex officio* was committed. The decision dismissing the criminal complaint states, *inter alia*, that on the critical occasion the victim Miljko Stojanović sustained injuries in the form of a contusion of the chest in the clavicle region, as well as scratches/abrasions on a finger. According to the findings of the expert witness, “the injury in the form of a contusion of the chest could have been sustained through a mechanism of falling, striking a part of the chest against a hard surface such as asphalt, after previously being pushed away by one of the police officers (....). He could also have sustained the injury during pushing by one of the police officers with shields into the door of the ‘Timok’ cinema.” “The injury in the form of a scratch-abrasion of the fourth finger of the right hand could have been sustained during pushing and falling onto the asphalt in front of the city library, but also in front of the ‘Timok’ cinema, during pushing away by police officers, and subsequently by being pressed against the cinema door by one of the police officers with shields.” The prosecutor’s office concluded that there is no evidence or indication that the reported police officers ill-treated the journalist or acted towards him in a manner that insults human dignity.²⁰² It is indicative that a statement was given in the proceedings by the Deputy Chief of the Zaječar Police Directorate, who stated, *inter alia*, that at one point he “noticed the victim Miljko Stojanović in a prone position, on his stomach, but did not see whether anyone tripped or pushed the victim Miljko, or if he lay

201 · First Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Belgrade, Kt No. 597/25 of 11 March 2025.

202 · Anđela Rišantićević, “The Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Zaječar dismissed the criminal complaint of journalist Miljko Stojanović against the Chief of the Zaječar Police Directorate”, *Glas Zaječara*, 28 March 2026, available at <https://shorturl.at/OWPzp>.

down on the ground himself... He does not remember catching him by the arm, nor did he notice that any of the police officers used means of coercion against the victim Miljko Stojanović.” Regarding the second incident, when the phone was snatched from journalist Miljko Stojanović, the same police officer together with his colleague compiled an official note in which he noted that he noticed the journalist, but that he did not notice that he was obstructed in performing his work or pushed out, nor was it registered that his phone was seized, even though the suspect stated that he took Stojanović’s phone and asked him to leave the rally.

In numerous cases of attacks and intimidation of journalists, there is still no epilogue. On 11 July 2025, the newsroom of *N1* received a threatening letter in which they were accused of spreading propaganda and an anti-Serbian campaign. The letter states that they could experience the same fate as the journalists of the *Charlie Hebdo* newsroom. To this day, *N1* has not been informed about any insights that the competent state authorities might have reached.²⁰³

It is also of significance to reflect on the judgments of the Basic and Higher Court in Niš in an older case that was concluded in 2024.²⁰⁴ In this case, the accused attempted to take a phone from a journalist, demanded that he delete recordings from the phone, and addressed him with the threatening words “Delete that, I will break your arms and legs” and “If not me, there is someone who will,” and then struck the victim in the hand with which he was holding the mobile phone, as a result of which the mobile phone flew several metres to the side.²⁰⁵ The accused was found guilty of endangering the safety of a person performing activities of public importance in the field of information, and a six-month suspended prison sentence was imposed on him. Furthermore, the court finds that, contrary to the allegations of the

203 · *N1*, “Charlie Hebdo, white rabbits, blockade of *N1*, death threats: Report of UN special rapporteurs on violence against journalists in Serbia”, 27 January 2026, available at <https://shorturl.at/XkuMt>. The Third Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Belgrade, where this case was established, is the only prosecutor’s office, alongside the Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Sremska Mitrovica, which failed to submit the information requested via a request for access to information of public importance for the purposes of this analysis.

204 · Higher Court in Niš, Kž1 No. 169/24 of 18 September 2024.

205 · *Ibid*. The court took into account both the words and the behaviour of the accused, concluding that they constituted a serious threat and were obviously capable of causing a feeling of fear and insecurity in the victim. As emphasised in the reasoning: the threat as an element, namely the action of this criminal offence, is observed in the specific case within the context and manner of the threatening words addressed to the victim by the accused to delete the recording, that he would break his arms and legs, observed in their entirety and continuity, both in the manner of directing these words and the behaviour of the accused, and subsequently, and in the assessment of the court they constitute a “qualified threat” implying an attack against the life and body of the victim.

defence, this does not concern a conditional threat; the context of the words addressed by the accused to the victim is commanding, not conditional, and this applies both to the words of the threat themselves and the behaviour displayed by the accused after directing them.²⁰⁶

The defence attorney claimed that a threat can by no means be serious and achievable if it is conditioned upon the future uncertain behaviour of the victim, and that for the subject criminal offence to exist, a threat must not be conditioned upon the future uncertain behaviour of the victim person. Both the first-instance and the Higher Court concluded that these allegations are unfounded, and that the actions for which the defendant was found guilty meet all the elements of the criminal offence of endangerment of safety under Article 138, paragraph 3 in connection with paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code. **Namely, contrary to the allegations of the defence attorney, in this specific case it does not concern a conditional threat, bearing in mind that at the moment when the criminal offence was committed the subject photographs had already been taken, and that the defendant precisely threatened the victim in the manner described in the operative part of the judgment in order for him to delete the photographs; therefore, he demanded that the victim perform an action, and the threat in this specific case was not conditioned upon the future uncertain behaviour of the victim.**²⁰⁷

Nevertheless, these are judgments from 2024 relating to an event from 2022, whereas in 2025, despite a record and worryingly high number of attacks against journalists, convictions were very few, and many cases will not even reach the court.

TRACKING, SURVEILLANCE, AND JEOPARDISING OF JOURNALISTIC SOURCES

Journalists and the editor of *Glas Zaječara*, as well as activists of “Zaječarci u blokadi,” reported harassment due to drones that flew over their yards and apartments for days, which they assumed were filming their activities, yards, and apartments, and consequently filed criminal complaints. The prosecutor’s office dismissed these criminal complaints, lightly noting that it was “established that these **were BIA officers performing duties within their competence.**” As the reason for recording such an internal note, it

206 · *Ibid.*

207 · Higher Court in Niš, KŽ1 No. 169/24 of 18 September 2024.

is stated that “persons (...), all from Zaječar, came to the Zaječar Police Directorate and reported that a drone was flying above their houses and that it was assumed that the police were doing this and filming the activists of ‘Zaječarci u blokadi,’ and they consider that such conduct violates their rights. **From the report of the police officer ... and ... dated 1 July 2025, it is established that they acted upon a report that a drone was flying above the house in Street and that the citizens of that building reported that certain individuals were launching a drone from their building, after which it was established that these were BIA officers performing duties within their competence.** Given that Article 9 of the Law on the Security Intelligence Agency provides that, in performing duties within its competence, the agency applies appropriate operational methods, measures, and actions, as well as appropriate operational-technical means ensuring the **collection of data and information in order to eliminate and prevent activities aimed at undermining or overthrowing the constitutionally established order of the Republic of Serbia, there is no unlawfulness in the conduct of the BIA members.**”²⁰⁸

Moreover, the prosecutor’s office did not consider it necessary to render a decision on the dismissal of the criminal complaint, against which the victims would have the opportunity to lodge an objection, but rather an official note was recorded stating that there are no grounds for initiating criminal proceedings. Furthermore, the official note does not specify the reasons why these specific actions were being undertaken, but instead quotes Article 9 of the Law on the Security Intelligence Agency in an entirely generalised manner.

It is worrying that the tracking or surveillance of journalists is considered a common practice and that the security services are (mis)used for the purpose of targeting those who hold different views or critics of the government.²⁰⁹

David Lyon, a sociologist from Queen’s University in Ontario, says that “the use of surveillance drones by the police has several drawbacks—they can

208 · *Ibid.*

209 · We recall that such practice is not reserved only for journalists, but that the targets can also include, for instance, prosecutors themselves, as is the case with prosecutor Bojana Savović, who in March 2024 called on the BIA to direct its capacities in a more purposeful manner. See in that sense also the interview with prosecutor Bojana Savović, <https://radar.nova.rs/video/radar-intervju/bojana-savovic-prate-me-slusaju-i-presrecu/>.

be used for covert filming of private spaces such as homes or cars.”²¹⁰ Aljoša Ajanović from EDRI says that what makes drones particularly worrying is “their flexibility and unpredictability.”²¹¹ “People may know where fixed cameras are positioned, but drones can appear suddenly and operate across wide areas.”²¹² This unpredictability further amplifies the ‘chilling effect’: you do not know when you are under surveillance, nor from where you are being observed. It is easy to imagine that the mere sound of a drone buzzing above a public space can create a feeling that you are a target or under watch, even when you are doing nothing illegal.”²¹³

However, the criminal complaint of *Glas Zaječara* regarding harassment and potential recording with drones was considered insignificant to such an extent that not even a decision on the dismissal of the criminal complaint was rendered, but it was instead deemed sufficient to note via an internal note that this was being done by the BIA, and that there are no grounds for criminal prosecution *ex officio*.

A stance is present among the professional public that a break with the practice of abusing the security services to deal with those who hold different views has still not been made in Serbia.²¹⁴ NUNS states that the BIA has demonstrated multiple times that, instead of gathering evidence against criminals, it tracks and wiretaps journalists and activists.²¹⁵

Following a two-day mission to Belgrade on 26 and 27 March 2026, the MFRR warns that the uncontrolled use of spyware against journalists and media workers, as well as the absence of prompt and independent investigations in these cases, remain a serious cause for concern that requires the imme-

210 · Aleksa Tešić, “Surveillance Atlas of Serbia: Where are the systems for facial, voice, license plate recognition and behaviour analysis”, *BIRN*, 24 February 2026, available at <https://birn.rs/nadzorni-sistemi-u-srbiji-prepoznavanje-lica-glasa-i-tablica/>.

211 · *Ibid.*

212 · *Ibid.*

213 · *Ibid.*

214 · Vuk Z. Cvijić, “Exclusive: Bojana Savović, prosecutor of the High Public Prosecutor’s Office in Belgrade, They track me, wiretap me, and intercept my messages”, *Radar*, Issue 32, 17 October 2024, available at <https://radar.nova.rs/video/radar-intervju-bojana-savovic-prate-me-slusaju-i-presrecu/>.

215 · NUNS, “NUNS: We call on the prosecutor’s office to determine who is responsible for the abuse of digital forensic tools and tracking of journalists and activists”, 17 December 2024, available at <https://nuns.rs/nuns-pozivamo-tuzilastvo-da-utvrdi-ko-je-odgovoran-za-zloupotrebu-digitalnih-forenzickih-alata-i-pracenje-novinara-i-aktivista/>.

diate attention of the competent authorities.²¹⁶ It is also stated that so far no one has been held accountable for these cases, and that widespread violations have been documented through alerts published on the Council of Europe Platform and the Mapping Media Freedom platform, and have been confirmed by direct testimonies of female and male journalists from print, broadcast, and online media.²¹⁷

An Amnesty International report from December 2024 also shows how the authorities in Serbia routinely use surveillance technology and digital repression techniques as an instrument of broader control and repression directed against civil society and journalists.²¹⁸ The findings of the report reveal the pervasive, routine use of invasive spyware, including Pegasus by the NSO Group, as well as a new domestic spyware for Android devices named NoviSpy, which was first discovered in the aforementioned Amnesty International report.²¹⁹ Serbia's Security Intelligence Agency (BIA) and the Serbian police used NoviSpy and mobile forensic tools from the company Cellebrite in order to target independent activists from think-tank organisations, peaceful protesters, and independent journalists.²²⁰ This unlawful practice of digital surveillance, besides constituting a violation of the human rights to privacy and personal data protection, deeply affects other rights and freedoms, including the right to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.²²¹

According to the findings of the international organisation Amnesty International, among those on whose devices spyware was installed was also Slaviša Milanov, a journalist of the internet portal FAR.²²² More than two years after the spyware was (unlawfully) installed on his device, according to the allegations in the criminal complaint he filed, journalist Slaviša Milanov has

216 · MFRR, "Serbian authorities must stop the spiral of violence against journalists", 31 March 2026, available at <https://nuns.rs/vlasti-u-srbiji-moraju-da-zaustave-spiralu-nasilja-prema-novinarima-i-novinarkama/>.

217 · *Ibid.*

218 · Amnesty International, *A Digital Prison: Surveillance and the suppression of civil society in Serbia*, available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur70/8814/2024/sr/>.

219 · *Ibid.*

220 · *Ibid.*, 4.

221 · *Ibid.*

222 · Amnesty International, *A Digital Prison: Surveillance and the suppression of civil society in Serbia*, *op. cit.*; Danijela Apostolov Videnov, "FAR: Political and digital repression against the journalists of the bilingual newsroom", *Autonomija*, 4 March 2025, available at <https://www.cenzolovka.rs/pritisci-i-napadi/far-politicka-i-digitalna-represija-nad-novinarima-dvojezicne-redakcije/>.

not even been summoned to the prosecutor's office to give a statement.²²³ U In the meantime, a criminal complaint was filed on behalf of another journalist—Ljubomir Stefanović, the author of the YouTube channel *Slavija Info*.²²⁴ Stefanović informed the public that on 11 October 2024, members of the BIA forced him to enter a van, and subsequently took him without grounds to the premises of the MoI, where he spent around four hours.²²⁵ During that time, his phone was temporarily seized, and according to information available to NUNS, the Cellebrite tool used for unlocking phones and downloading data was utilised in the case of Ljubomir Stefanović, which also opens up the possibility for the installation of the NoviSpy spyware.²²⁶

The annual report of the partner organisations of the Council of Europe for the promotion of the safety of journalists states that cases of unlawful surveillance of journalists were also reported in 2025, particularly in Italy and Serbia, despite the outrage caused by previous disclosures, especially the Pegasus Project.²²⁷ Spyware constitutes a serious intrusion into the communications of journalists, particularly with their confidential sources, and the mere threat in the form of awareness of its existence creates an atmosphere of distrust and fear that undermines the role of the “public watchdog” and investigative journalism.²²⁸

According to information obtained from a contributor to *Cenzolovka*, a suspicion exists that his communication is being wiretapped, because an article was published in a pro-government media outlet which, besides

223 · See ANEM, “The case of stalking of Ljubomir Stefanović, editor-in-chief of the *Slavija Info* YouTube channel, by the police and the BIA”, 16 October 2025, available at <https://anem.org.rs/sr/strane/slucaj-proganjanja-ljubomira-stefanovica-glavnog-urednika-jutjub-kanala-slavija-info-od-strane-policije-i-bia>. See also, Vesna Radojević, “State surveillance: Spyware secretly installed on journalist's phone during interrogation at a police station”, *KRIK*, 16 December 2024, available at <https://raskrikavanje.rs/drzavni-nadzor-novinaru-tajno-instaliran-spijunski-softver-u-telefon-tokom-ispitivanja-u-policijskoj-stanici/>, as well as ANEM, “Monitoring of the Media Scene in Serbia for the Month of December 2024”, available at <https://shorturl.at/6hRFA>.

224 · *Ibid.*

225 · NUNS, “NUNS: We call on the prosecutor's office to determine who is responsible for the abuse of digital forensic tools and tracking of journalists and activists”, *op. cit.*

226 · *Ibid.*

227 · Platform Organisations of the Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalist, *Europe Press Freedom Report, On the Tipping Point: Press Freedom 2025, An annual assessment by the partner organisations of the Safety of Journalists Platform*, March 2026, available at <https://shorturl.at/rnuCa>, page 12. Journalistic sources are confidential and should be treated as such at every stage of the investigation and judicial proceedings. Prosecutors must ensure the protection of confidential data that could lead to the identification of sources in situations where journalistic sources could be disclosed during an investigation or proceedings.

228 · *Ibid.*

constituting the targeting of the journalist, also speaks about what the text the journalist was only working on at that moment would relate to, as well as who some of the experts providing expert support in connection with the preparation of the article are.²²⁹

When it comes to journalists, these unlawful practices carry another specific and serious risk, namely the jeopardising of journalistic sources.

States have a duty to secure the sources that journalists use in order to perform their work, including their anonymity. From this right of journalists arises the need to act with particular caution if they resort to the tracking and surveillance of journalists.²³⁰ “The European Court of Human Rights recently recalled that investigations that can lead to the disclosure of the identity of journalistic sources should be subjected to strict scrutiny.”²³¹

In the context of the protection of journalistic sources, it would also be significant to reflect on the case of journalist Uglješa Bokić, who on 25 December 2025 was summoned to a police station in Novi Sad by order of the Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Novi Sad due to the publication of excerpts from a police official note regarding the arrest of a Novi Sad lawyer, Nemanja Aleksić, who is close to the SNS. According to information published in the media, the police were ordered to ask Bokić who had provided him with the official note and when, as well as to hand it over to the police if he still possessed it. After giving his statement, Bokić said that he invoked the Law on Public Information and refused to disclose the source of his information to the police, and that he requested it be entered into the record that he considers this to be pressure on him, as well as on independent journalists.²³² The editorial board of Danas called the prosecutor’s office’s move “unacceptable pressure” on the journalist and the newsroom, as well as on “free journalism” in general, recalling that under the Law on Public Information, a journalist is under no obligation to disclose their sources. Under

229 · Interview from 21 March 2026.

230 · Global Freedom of Expression, *Global Case-Law on Violence against Journalists*, op. cit., page 12.

231 · This right enjoyed by journalists gives rise to the need for special care when it comes to applying surveillance over them. *Ibid*.

232 · Danijel Apro, “Bokić: The Prosecutor’s Request to Disclose My Source of Information is Pointless – Journalists are Protected by Law,” *Cenzolovka*, 25 December 2025, available at <https://www.cenzolovka.rs/pritisci-i-napadi/bokic-besmislen-zahtev-tuzilastva-da-odam-izvor-informacija-novinare-stiti-zakon/>.

the provisions of this law, a court may order this, but exclusively when the information concerns a criminal offence punishable by a prison sentence of at least five years and “if the data for that criminal offence cannot be obtained in any other manner.”²³³

The recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the protection of journalistic sources states that even in the event that the provision of data from the police or judicial authorities was unlawful, it is they who conduct internal investigations, and they do not (and must not) request journalists to disclose their sources. The guidelines for the conduct of prosecutors compiled by UNESCO and the International Association of Prosecutors also recall the necessity of protecting journalistic sources.²³⁴

The protection of journalistic sources is one of the basic conditions for press freedom. Without such protection, sources may be discouraged from providing assistance to the media in informing on matters that are of public interest.²³⁵ As a result, the vital role of the press as a public watchdog may be weakened, just as the ability of the press to provide accurate and reliable information may be called into question.²³⁶

The summoning of journalist Bokić for the purpose of giving a statement was also condemned by the NDNV. The association labelled that procedure as a direct attack on media freedom, the guarantees of the protection of journalistic sources, and the public’s right to be informed. According to the assessment of the NDNV, summoning a journalist to a police interrogation for publishing information of obvious public interest, under the threat of forced bringing, constitutes a gross violation of domestic and international standards of freedom of expression and the work of journalists. The protection of sources, the association believes, is one of the foundational principles of journalism and an indispensable condition for the existence of free and professional media.²³⁷

233 · *Ibid.*

234 · UNESCO and International Association of Prosecutors (IAP), *Guidelines for Prosecutors on Cases of Crimes Against Journalists*, *op. cit.*, page 2.

235 · ECtHR, *Goodwin v. the United Kingdom*, Application No. 17488/90, Judgment of 27 March 1996 (GC), para. 39.

236 · *Ibid.*

237 · Cenžolovka, “NDNV: Calling Danas Journalist for Questioning Directly Threatens the Protection of Sources”, 22 December 2025, available at <https://www.cenzolovka.rs/pritisci-i-napadi/ndnv-poziv-na-saslusanja-novinara-danasa-je-direktno-ugrozavanje-zastite-izvora/>.

The NDNV recalls that a journalist is obliged to protect their source, even at the cost of personal liability, and that no institution has the right to demand that a journalist disclose a source of information, except in exceptional circumstances strictly prescribed by law, which in this case obviously do not exist.²³⁸

ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS AT PROTESTS

In addition to the general obligations that states have regarding the protection of freedom of expression, there are other obligations arising from the jurisprudence of international courts and human rights protection bodies.²³⁹ Thus, journalists covering protests that may turn violent must be protected by the police forces.²⁴⁰ In the case of *Najafli v. Azerbaijan*, the European Court of Human Rights considered that the violence inflicted upon a journalist covering a protest was “unnecessary, excessive and unacceptable,” and that state authorities have a special duty to take care of journalists performing their work in such dangerous conditions.²⁴¹

This is yet another “test” on which the protection of the safety of journalists in Serbia, particularly over the last year and a half, has remained far below the level required by international human rights standards in the field of freedom of expression. Violence against journalists has intensified since the end of 2024 precisely due to (and during reporting from) the protests that followed the collapse of the canopy at the recently renovated Novi Sad railway station. Police officers not only fail to provide journalists with adequate protection from violence during reporting at protests, but they frequently attack journalists themselves or attend as silent observers of the attacks. Therefore, it is not surprising that during 2025, Serbia occupied one of the top three places in Europe when it comes to attacks against journalists during protests, along with Georgia and Turkey.²⁴²

238 · *Ibid.*

239 · ECtHR, *Najafli v. Azerbaijan*, *op. cit.* See also, *Global Case-Law on Violence Against Journalism*, Columbia University, page 11.

240 · *Ibid.*

241 · *Ibid.*

242 · During 2025, across Europe, journalists were frequently physically attacked during protests by the police, political actors, and the protesters themselves. This type of attack was registered in one-quarter of the countries covered by the report, with the highest levels recorded in Georgia, Serbia, and Turkey. Safety of Journalists Platform, *Europe Press Freedom Report On the Tipping Point: Press Freedom 2025, An annual assessment by the partner organisations of the Safety of Journalists Platform*, *op. cit.*

The police have a duty to ensure the safety and rights of journalists covering protests, and protection must be provided to all persons engaged in journalistic activities, regardless of whether they are accredited journalists or freelancers.²⁴³ At a rally where certain participants behave violently, police officers have an obligation to distinguish between violent individuals and other rally participants or observers, such as journalists, whose right to peaceful assembly remains intact.²⁴⁴

In fundamental contrast to these obligations, particularly when it comes to attacks against journalists while reporting from student and civic protests against corruption, the role of the police is frequently reduced to that of silent observers. “This happened in the most naked manner when an N1 team’s camera was broken in front of the camp that had been located in front of the National Assembly in Belgrade for months—the police did not even attempt to protect the news team from the attack.”²⁴⁵ “It is the duty of a police officer when he sees, even when he is not on duty, and this police officer was—he is obliged to react, and if he does not react to a criminal offence—then he enters into a criminal offence.”²⁴⁶

Similarly, while reporting from a protest in Vrbas, Marko Miletić, a journalist of the *Mašina* portal, was pelted with bottles, stones, and pyrotechnic devices by SNS supporters, who hit him with multiple stones, frozen bottles, and pieces of fireworks.²⁴⁷ In a live broadcast on *Mašina*’s social channels, it is clearly visible how journalist Miletić addresses the police after the attack, asking at what point the police will react and prevent the attackers from throwing pyrotechnic devices at him, to which the police officers merely turned away, and they did not react to the journalist’s statement that he had been hit.²⁴⁸

243 · United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, *Human Rights in the Context of Protests for Journalists*, available at <https://shorturl.at/HOLz4>, page 3.

244 · *Ibid.*

245 · Speaking about the attack on the N1 crew near the so-called “Ćacilend” and the police’s failure to react at the moment of the incident, *Radar* weekly journalist Vuk Cvijić said that since the “criminal camp” has existed, “the police have been in the role of an escort for criminals,” and during the attack on the N1 crew and journalistic equipment, this happened in the most blatant way. N1, “Cvijić: A police officer commits a criminal offense if they do not react to it, police are an escort for criminals”, 21 November 2025, available at <https://n1info.rs/vesti/cvijic-polica-jac-ulazi-u-krivicno-delo-ukoliko-na-njega-ne-reaguje-policija-eskorta-pratnja-kriminalcima/>.

246 · *Ibid.*

247 · NUNS, NUNS Database, Attack on journalists, Marko Miletić, Vrbas, 12 August 2025, available at <https://nuns.rs/incident/napad-na-novinare-marko-miletic-vrbas-12-08-2025/>.

248 · *Ibid.*

Even if a police reaction occurs, that reaction frequently consists of removing the journalists from the scene, instead of ensuring that they can unhindered perform their journalistic work. Thus, for example, during the reporting of a Nova S team from a rally in Niš on 17 May 2025, the police reaction followed only after the safety of the journalists had already been seriously endangered, and according to their knowledge, the perpetrators of violence were neither identified nor prosecuted, while the female journalist and the camera operator were removed from the scene of the event.²⁴⁹ While the journalist and camera operator were being moved by police officers, the attackers shouted “out, out” at them through a megaphone the entire time.²⁵⁰ In those moments, the journalist explained to the police how they had pushed and struck her from behind, but the police did not react to that either.²⁵¹

A particular cause for concern is represented by the numerous attacks on media workers that occurred in the area of the so-called “Ćacilend.”²⁵² During the first nine months since the pitching of tents in Pionirski Park, at least 25 cases of obstruction of media workers in their work and attacks against them were recorded.²⁵³ In one of those attacks, an N1 team’s camera was broken, as was previously mentioned.²⁵⁴ The police officers very frequently failed to react in order to protect the journalists and establish the identity of the perpetrators of violence.²⁵⁵ In one case, instead of the attacker, they forcibly detained the individual who was attacked.²⁵⁶

During a two-day mission to Belgrade on 26 and 27 March 2026 by partner organisations of the Council of Europe Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists and the MFRR initiative, following a meeting with the Ministry of the Interior, the Police Directorate for the City of Belgrade, and the Criminal Police Directorate, the delegation remained concerned over the absence of any acknowledgment of the seriousness of the problem and over the failures of the police in protecting journalists and in

249 · Criminal complaint filed with the Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office (OJT) in Niš regarding the attack on the female journalist and the cameraman of Nova S television on 17 May 2025 in Niš.

250 · *Ibid.*

251 · *Ibid.*

252 · For more details on these attacks, see especially ANEM, *Chronology of attacks on media workers in the area between Pionirski Park and the Parliament of Serbia*, 2025, *op. cit.*

253 · *Ibid.*

254 · *Ibid.*

255 · *Ibid.*

256 · *Ibid.*

investigations of violations of rights relating to journalists.²⁵⁷ The delegation was not informed of a single case in which a police officer bore responsibility due to unprofessional conduct or because he failed to react²⁵⁸ (when it was necessary, author's note). Even when concrete and well-documented examples were presented in which police officers were perpetrators of the attacks, the representatives of the law enforcement agencies failed to react in a manner that would indicate a willingness to draw lessons from these failures and fulfil their statutory obligation to protect journalists.²⁵⁹

It is of particular concern that certain members of the police are stepping out of their role as protectors of journalists and entering the role of not only observers but also perpetrators of violence against journalists. The case of an attack against *Radar* journalist Vuk Cvijić during reporting from a protest held in Belgrade on 15 August 2025—when a police officer sprayed him with a chemical agent—was reported to the prosecutor's office.²⁶⁰

"First my neck was burning, then I literally went blind, and after that the redness and burning spread to my arms as well," Cvijić explains.²⁶¹

The attack occurred out of nowhere, at a moment when nothing was happening in Kneza Miloša Street, and as a result of being sprayed, the journalist was completely blind for at least an hour.²⁶² A police officer in armour stepped out of the cordon, approached journalist Cvijić from behind, and sprayed him on the neck and face. The attack was witnessed by several persons, including a Nova S journalist, as well as all the other police officers who were present in that cordon and must have seen the attack; despite this, the attacker of Vuk Cvijić remained unknown up to the conclusion of this report.

257 · Article 19, "Authorities in Serbia must stop the spiral of violence against male and female journalists", 31 March 2026, *op. cit.*

258 · *Ibid.*

259 · *Ibid.*

260 · *Radar*, "Police treacherously attacked journalist Vuk Cvijić from behind: Radar journalist sprayed with an unknown substance", blinded for an hour, 16 August 2025, available at <https://radar.nova.rs/drustvo/novinara-vuka-cvijica-policija-mucki-napala-s-leda/>.

261 · *Ibid.*

262 · *Ibid.*

The question inevitably arises as to how it is possible for a police officer to step out of a cordon, spray a journalist in the face and neck with a chemical agent—which must have been seen by other police officers present in that cordon—and for the attacker to remain unknown. Journalist Uglješa Bokić emphasises that the solution to this problem must be systemic and adds:

“Currently at protests we have masked police officers who do not wear badges with their badge number and surname on their uniform. Although it is illegal, the government simply tolerates it and in such a situation it is difficult to undertake anything, because it is the state that consciously violates the law. If police officers wore their uniform in an adequate manner, it would be very easy to identify those who exceed their authority. When masked civilians are concerned, there we can already talk about an absence of will, because if a mask were something that protects the perpetrator of a criminal offence, then no murderer or robber would ever be identified. Therefore, I repeat, this is a matter of politics and the system; we already have the law.”²⁶³

That was the second police attack against Cvijić at the protests that followed November 2024, while the previous attack took place in front of the Faculty of Law.²⁶⁴ While he was filming the arrest and brutal beating of students, he was physically attacked by police officers attempting to prevent him from filming everything with his phone.²⁶⁵ The attack was recorded on a video recording which, alongside the criminal complaint, was submitted to the competent state authorities. Up to the moment of the conclusion of this report, not only has no single case of an attack against Vuk Cvijić in the context of reporting from protests been resolved or reached the court, but the perpetrator has not even been discovered in any of those cases.²⁶⁶

Inadequate processing of attacks by the police undermines the safety of journalists on multiple levels, because besides representing a discouraging message to journalists, it simultaneously sends a signal to police officers on the ground that the unlawful conduct of the police is not accompanied by corresponding consequences. Both the acts and omissions of the police have further contributed to protests becoming an exceptionally dangerous place for performing journalistic work, and to journalism in Serbia becoming an exceptionally risky profession. This problem is clearly and poignantly sum-

263 · Interview with Uglješa Bokić dated 7 April 2026.

264 · *Ibid.*

265 · *Ibid.*

266 · Data from the Periodic Notice of the VJT SRG, *op. cit.*

marised in the words of photojournalist Zorica Popović, who was attacked along with two other journalists on the day the local elections were held in Bor: **“That level of despair, when you know that someone will call the police, but that the police will do nothing. And you see that they brought an axe and that you are dealing with murderers.”** **“Someone called the police. The police arrived. The police laughed at us.”**²⁶⁷ The attackers were not afraid of the police, she points out: “I see a car coming from the opposite direction at an abnormal speed. I tell the police, this is one of them, stop him. The police do not move. They stand and watch.”²⁶⁸ The photojournalist also states that she established contact with a person from the police through informal channels in an attempt to find out who the persons who snatched her camera were, and received information that this person was allegedly offering to return her old camera or buy her a new one if she changed her statement and said that she had lost it in that crowd.²⁶⁹

Journalists were subjected by the police to striking,²⁷⁰ pushing, pushing away with shields, identity checks, spraying with a chemical agent, being forced to lie on the ground for about 15 minutes,²⁷¹ being pushed away with batons,²⁷² and subsequently being struck in the head with a baton.²⁷³ Not only are journalists factually unprotected from violence during field reporting, but they cannot even count on effective police and legal protection when violence against them occurs, which is happening increasingly frequently. This sends a dangerous message to potential attackers as well, and a fear of this is present among journalists.

The editor of the 021 portal from Novi Sad, Zoran Strika, reported an attack he experienced while reporting from a rally in Novi Sad on 12 April 2025—an

267 · Jelena L. Petković, “Zorica Popović on the crime against journalists in Bor: An axe against people? That’s when I saw we were attacked by murderers”, *Cenzolovka*, *op. cit.*

268 · *Ibid.*

269 · *Ibid.*

270 · NUNS, NUNS Database, Attack on journalists, Dragan Jeković and Nebojša Jovanović, Kraljevo, 29 July 2025, available at <https://nuns.rs/incident/napad-na-novinare-dragan-jekovic-i-nebojsa-jovanovic-kraljevo-29-07-2025/>.

271 · *N1*, “Vreme journalist lay on the ground: Told the police she was press, they ‘did not hear her’”, 5 September 2025, available at <https://n1info.rs/vesti/katarina-stevanovic-vreme-protest-novi-sad-policija/>.

272 · *Javni servis*, “Attacks on journalists in Novi Sad during protests”, 21 November 2025, available at: <https://javniservis.net/sekcije/drustvo/napadi-na-novinare-u-novom-sadu-tokom-protesta-srbijo-da-li-se-cujemo-video/>.

273 · See, for example, the post by user Marija Šehić on X, available at https://x.com/marija_antic/status/2039031749397610964 and the post by camera operator Marko Dragoslavić from FoNet on X dated 31 March 2026, available at: <https://x.com/DragoslavicM/status/2039057721438130314> <https://archive.ph/vgV2C>.

organised departure of citizens to a rally in Belgrade. As he described, the attack occurred while he was attempting to film an incident in which a man was beaten up at the rally. On that occasion, journalist Strika's phone was, *inter alia*, snatched and thrown into the Danube. Strika explains that immediately after the attack, the conduct of the inspector, and subsequently of the female prosecutor, was professional.²⁷⁴ "The problem was that at the moment of the attack, there were no police officers to intervene and protect both the person who was beaten up and me. My phone was thrown into the water after the police were called. It is clear to me that they cannot appear on the scene immediately, but I waited for them for a long time, both after they were called and after the phone was thrown."²⁷⁵ More than 10 months after that event, the attacker has not been identified. According to the information that journalist Strika received at a meeting of the Permanent Working Group on the Safety of Journalists, "the police found the young man who was beaten up (which Strika was filming and because of which his phone was snatched and thrown into the Danube, author's note). He, I assume out of fear, denied that he was beaten up and that he was at that location. Although there was a witness who saw the incident, although I filmed it, because of which my phone later ended up in the Danube, he said that he did not participate in any incident. In that sense, I believe that it is also more difficult for the police/prosecutor's office to identify the persons who threw my phone and, in some way, resolve this case."²⁷⁶

Below is an overview of several cases registered in the prosecutor's office that provide an insight into the difficulties that journalists encounter when reporting from protests, as well as into the actions of the competent institutions regarding the reported attacks against journalists reporting from protests.

274 · Interview with editor and journalist Zoran Strika, dated 11 February 2026.

275 · *Ibid.*

276 · *Ibid.*

“Due to the obstruction of journalists, it is becoming a problem to report from a rally”

5 November 2024
Žaklina Tatalović

During reporting from the protest in **Novi Sad on 5 November 2024**, an unknown man first approached the camera operator of **N1** television, Nikola Popović, and his colleague Žaklina Tatalović and, along with numerous curse words and insults, obstructed them in their work. “He obstructed us in our work for about 45 minutes, cursed, showed his middle finger, and did not want to move away. He was not masked and could often be seen in the frame last night. My colleague Žaklina Tatalović also reported live on the air at that time **how, due to the obstruction of journalists, it is becoming a problem to report from a rally**,” Popović stated.²⁷⁷ At that point, journalist Tatalović and he moved away and headed closer to the City Hall, when another **unknown person struck him and knocked down the camera**. The camera was damaged on that occasion. The face of that person is not visible on the recording.²⁷⁸ This was one of the first protests after the collapse of the canopy in Novi Sad. Up to the moment of the conclusion of this report, the case has not been resolved, nor has the perpetrator been identified. The attack was reported to the Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Novi Sad.²⁷⁹ U In relation to the first man, who obstructed the work of the news team, and for an event regarding which a complaint was not filed, a report on the identification of the perpetrator was submitted, and a request for initiating misdemeanour proceedings was submitted against that individual due to the misdemeanour of insulting, committing violence, threatening, or fighting under Article 9, paragraph 1 of the Law on Public Order and Peace.²⁸⁰

In relation to the individual who struck the camera operator and knocked down his camera, the Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Novi Sad, in its response to a request for access to information of public importance dated 3 March 2026, states that “all measures and actions are being undertaken to identify and locate the individual whose actions meet the elements of

277 · UNS, “Find and punish those responsible for the attack and obstruction of the N1 crew at the protest in Novi Sad”, 6 November 2024, available at <https://www.uns.org.rs/sr/saopstenja/165555/uns-pronaci-i-kazniti-odgovorne-za-napad-i-ometanje-ekipe-n1-na-protestu-u-novom-sadu.html?print=true>.

278 · *Ibid.*

279 · Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office Novi Sad, case number KTR 3535/24, transferred to KTN 4111/24.

280 · Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Novi Sad, Response to the request for access to information of public importance, Letter No. PI 6/2026, dated 3 March 2026.

the criminal offence of preventing the printing and dissemination of printed materials and the broadcasting of programmes under Article 149, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code”.²⁸¹

“Move away or we will apply means of coercion”

The Novi Sad Police Directorate submitted an official note to the Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Novi Sad regarding a notification from the Emergency Centre of the Clinical Centre of Vojvodina stating that a female journalist had presented herself for an examination with an injury she stated she sustained in front of the Basic Court building in Novi Sad. A medical report was attached. When giving her statement, the journalist stated that she is employed at *N1* television, that on 20 August 2025 she arrived in front of the court building in Novi Sad to report on the announced blockade of the court, that shortly afterwards the Police Intervention Unit began to arrive, and that she was marked with a fluorescent yellow vest with the word ‘Press’.²⁸² She stated that at one point, one of the members of the Intervention Unit issued an order: “Move away or we will apply means of coercion,” and one of the members of the Intervention Unit said “Let’s go, come on, come on,” at which moment the pushing back of the gathered citizens began, and she also began to retreat, and on that occasion one of the members of the Intervention Unit roughly pushed her towards a tree.²⁸³ The victim stated on two occasions that she was a journalist, but the member of the Intervention Unit continued to push her all the way to the tree, pinning her arm such that she dropped her phone. She could not identify the member of the Intervention Unit due to the way they were dressed, without any identification marks on their uniforms and with their faces covered. An official note was recorded stating that there are no grounds for initiating criminal proceedings. It was stated, *inter alia*, that on the basis of the available medical documentation, definitive, objective signs of injury were not established, and that the report submitted by the Sector for Internal Control of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Serbia stated that during the unannounced public gathering, as well as upon its conclusion, no actions were taken towards the female journalist by the police officers of the Novi Sad Police Directorate.²⁸⁴

The significance attributed to the police report in proceedings regarding a

281 · *Ibid.*

282 · ANEM, “Lea Apro: Police against journalists”, 1 September 2025, available at <https://anem.org.rs/sr/strane/lea-apro-policija-protiv-novinarar>.

283 · *Ibid.* Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Novi Sad, No. KTR 2552/25, 26 November 2025.

284 · *Ibid.*

criminal complaint that relates to the conduct of the police is surprising.

There is no doubt that violence was committed against the camera operator, but there will be no criminal prosecution.

On the same evening when the *N1* team was attacked, 5 November 2024, a camera operator of the *Euronews* media outlet was thrown to the ground with a wrestling move. The Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV) filed a criminal complaint for the criminal offence of violent behaviour under Article 344, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code, and a recording of the event,²⁸⁵ photographs of the attacker, as well as the details of the witnesses of the event - two journalists - were submitted alongside the criminal complaint.

It was established that the individual in question is Vuk Raonić,²⁸⁶ a member of the Serbian Progressive Party. Apart from the fact that the throwing of the camera operator to the ground is visible on the attached recording, two witnesses—a female and a male journalist—confirmed that the suspect threw the *Euronews* camera operator to the ground.²⁸⁷

The prosecutor's office performed an insight into the submitted video recording, in which, *inter alia*, the suspect is observed tripping the victim and throwing him onto the pavement with the camera in his hands. It was established that the gathered citizens displayed no significant reaction to the event in terms of manifesting a more severe anxiety, but rather continued their heated verbal dispute. Therefore, it was concluded that the prohibited consequence, which besides the action of commission is necessary for the existence of this criminal offence and which consists either in a more significant endangerment of the tranquillity of citizens or a more severe

285 · See also *Euronews Serbia*, "Euronews Serbia cameraman attacked while reporting from the protest in Novi Sad (VIDEO)", 5 November 2024, available at <https://shorturl.at/tJrVu>.

286 · See, for example, ANEM, "NDNV: Violence against journalists in Novi Sad rewarded with the position of Deputy Mayor", 15 December 2025, available at <https://shorturl.at/hH5j>, as well as Lea Apro, "Attacker of the cameraman became Assistant Mayor of Novi Sad: Criticisms by NDNV and the Bravo movement", *N1*, 15 December 2025, available at <https://n1info.rs/vesti/napadac-na-snimatelja-postao-pomocnik-gradonacelnika-novog-sada/>.

287 · Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad, No. KT-5156/24, dated 20 June 2025. The female journalist who was with the cameraman asked why they were knocking her cameraman down. When one of the bystanders tried to calm the situation down by saying "Everything is fine," she retorted by asking how he could say everything was fine when they saw what had happened.

disruption of public order and peace, did not occur in this specific case.²⁸⁸ It was also concluded that the described actions of the suspect were not of such intensity, in terms of the manifested degree of violence and harshness, namely bullying, as to cause serious consequences for the tranquillity of the witnesses or public order and peace, as is required by the applicable judicial practice and legal theory.²⁸⁹

The victim lodged an objection, in which it was stated, *inter alia*, that the endangerment of the tranquillity of citizens, as a consequence of the criminal offence, does not have to occur at the moment when the event took place, nor does the endangerment of the tranquillity of citizens relate only to the citizens present during the critical event.²⁹⁰ However, by a decision of the High Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad, the objection was rejected. It was concluded that it is undisputed that the suspect threw down the victim, who was acting as a TV *Euronews* camera operator, by tripping him, which is also visible on the submitted video recording. On the other hand, it is stated that the public prosecutor of the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad draws a correct conclusion that in this specific case, the consequence of this criminal offence did not occur in the form of a more significant endangerment of the tranquillity of citizens.

It was reiterated that it is undisputed that the actions of the suspect meet the elements of a corresponding misdemeanour, which does not require the occurrence of a qualified consequence in the form of a more significant endangerment of the tranquillity of citizens or a more severe disruption of public order and peace, and that a request for initiating misdemeanour proceedings will be submitted.

It is true that this concerns a consequential criminal offence and that it is nec-

288 · The decision of the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office (OJT) in Novi Sad dismissing the criminal complaint states: "Namely, it is undisputed that the named suspect participated in the subject event in such a manner that he knocked the victim to the sidewalk by tripping and pushing him. Therefore, the described actions could be classified under the legal description of the execution of the criminal offense of Violent Behaviour under Article 344, Paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code, but we consider that the prohibited consequence, which is necessary for the existence of this criminal offense in addition to the execution of the action, and which consists of either significantly endangering the tranquillity of citizens or more severe disruption of public order and peace, did not occur in this specific case."

289 · Decision of the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office (OJT) in Novi Sad dismissing the criminal complaint, *op. cit.*

290 · In the objection, the victim also pointed out that on the critical occasion he was on an official assignment as a TV *Euronews* cameraman, thereby performing tasks of public importance related to informing the public. Therefore, it is clear, keeping in mind the role that public information and persons performing tasks of public importance in the field of information have in a democratic society, that any attack on such a person, in connection with the tasks they perform, significantly disrupts the tranquillity of citizens. *Ibid.*

essary for a consequence to have occurred consisting either in a more significant endangerment of the tranquillity of citizens or a more severe disruption of public order and peace. Nevertheless, it remains questionable whether the violence committed by Vuk Raonić in this case is of such a nature and intensity that it cannot be considered that the tranquillity of citizens was significantly endangered, and whether the practice of the courts and prosecutor's offices speaks in favour of this being a misdemeanour or rather the criminal offence of violent behaviour.

What is undisputed is that in this case, violence was committed against the camera operator, who was thrown to the ground—this was confirmed by both the Basic and High Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad, but they considered that the consequence in the form of a more severe anxiety of citizens had not occurred.²⁹¹

However, one of the witnesses of the attack, a colleague of the victim, a female journalist-reporter, stated that she personally felt *anxiety on that occasion*, but that at that moment *she was under the influence of adrenaline and felt revolt and anger that someone would give themselves the right to do that*.²⁹²

Since in judicial practice “tranquillity, *inter alia*, denotes the absence of anxiety on the part of an individual, the belief that no danger threatens, *the absence of agitation and the like*,”²⁹³ the question arises as to why the testimony of the journalist, a colleague of the victim, could not be sufficient for the conclusion that a consequence did occur in the form of a more significant endangerment of the tranquillity of citizens.

291 · Here, it is interesting to reflect on an earlier example from practice in which the competent prosecutor's office (the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Užice) considered that the consequence required for the existence of the criminal offence of violent behaviour had occurred, and therefore submitted a motion for indictment and lodged an appeal against the dismissing first-instance judgment in a case where the defendant, as a citizen, attended a public protest and pelted a “banner” bearing the image of the president of the state with paint-filled eggs. In that case, the prosecutor's office considered that the consequence required for the existence of the criminal offence of violent behaviour had occurred, rather than it being a misdemeanour, and submitted a motion for indictment. One gains the impression that the threshold for establishing whether an act constitutes a misdemeanour or the criminal offence of violent behaviour was set more flexibly and lower when it concerned a paint attack against a “banner” with the president's image, and that the nature and intensity of that attack were considered more serious than when it concerned throwing a camera operator to the ground during the performance of activities in the field of public information. It remains a matter of regret that the court, in the case of the attack against the camera operator, will not have the opportunity to examine whether the intensity and nature of the attack were such that they led to a more significant endangerment of the tranquillity of citizens.

292 · Decision of the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad on the dismissal of the criminal complaint, *op. cit.*

293 · Judgment of the Higher Court in Belgrade, Kž1 No. 49/21 of 15 July 2021

Here, it is of significance to also bear in mind the judgment of the Supreme Court of Cassation (VKS) in which it is emphasised that the statutory phrase “more significantly endangers the tranquillity of citizens,” (...) does not determine the minimum number of persons whose tranquillity is endangered by violent behaviour, and therefore, in the assessment of that court, **for the occurrence of the consequence of this criminal offence, it is of significance that a more significant endangerment of the tranquillity of even a single person, a citizen, in addition to the person against whom the violence is committed, has occurred**”. In that case, the Supreme Court of Cassation concluded that for the existence of the criminal offence, it was sufficient that a feeling of anxiety and fear was caused in the person who was in the company of the individual against whom the violence was committed, as a result of the defendant’s behaviour, which led to a more significant endangerment of their tranquillity.²⁹⁴

Judging by that, the anxiety of the female journalist whose colleague, the camera operator was subjected to violence could also be sufficient to establish that the consequence required for the existence of the offence had occurred, and it would not even be necessary to establish whether anxiety had occurred among the other gathered citizens.

Furthermore, it is visible from the statement of the second witness that, *after the victim was thrown down, the witness moved back a few metres because he was frightened that someone would attack him as well.*

Instead of a Sanction, the Attacker Appointed to a High Position – A Disturbing Epilogue for the Journalistic Community

Without entering further into the analysis of whether the competent prosecutor’s office could have acted differently, it is certain that for the representatives of journalists’ associations, the outcome of these proceedings was devastating. It is equally worrying that the individual who physically attacked the camera operator shortly thereafter became the Assistant Mayor of Novi Sad.²⁹⁵ Journalists’ associations condemned the appointment of Vuk Raonić as Assistant Mayor, and the NDNV noted that, “instead of sanctions, Raonić received a political reward for violence and was promoted to one of the highest positions in the city.”²⁹⁶

294 · Judgment of the Supreme Court of Cassation, KZZ 259/23 of 14 March 2023

295 · ANEM, “ANEM, NDNV: Violence against journalists in Novi Sad rewarded with the position of Deputy Mayor”, *op. cit.*

296 · *Ibid.*

The Mayor of Novi Sad, Žarko Mićin, stated at the time that he intended to select Raonić for his inner team, and that he would request “personally that the prosecutor’s office submit information on whether any proceedings have been initiated against him, and if not, that means he is not to blame for that”.²⁹⁷

Criminal prosecution did not occur in this case because the prosecutor’s office, justifiably or not, concluded that the violence against the media worker in that instance did not lead to a greater anxiety of citizens, but rather that it was a misdemeanour, a breach of public order and peace. It remains a matter of regret that the court, in this case, will not have the opportunity to examine whether the intensity and nature of the attack against the camera operator were such that they led to a more significant endangerment of the tranquillity of citizens. What is indisputable is that the subsequent selection of Vuk Raonić, the attacker against the camera operator, to one of the essential positions in Novi Sad had a disturbing and worrying effect on the journalistic community.

THE ĆURUVIJA CASE – THE LEGALISTIC END TO A STATE CRIME

At the beginning of January 2026, a judgment of the Supreme Court was published, which, deciding on a request for the protection of legality, established that the acquittal in the case of the murder of journalist Slavko Ćuruvija involved substantial violations of procedural rules in favour of the defendants.²⁹⁸ However, due to procedural restrictions under the Criminal Procedure Code, the Supreme Court could only note the violation without affecting the final and binding nature of the decision.²⁹⁹ This situation represents a very clear and worrying indicator of the state of criminal law protection of freedom of expression in Serbia.

297 · NUNS, “Criminal complaint dismissed against SNS member who attacked cameraman: Prosecutor’s Office considers it not to be violent behaviour, will file a misdemeanour charge”, 2 July 2025; Lea Apro, “Attacker of the cameraman became Assistant Mayor of Novi Sad: Criticisms by NDNV and the Bravo movement”, *NI*, 15 December 2025.

298 · Supreme Court, KZZ OK 38/2024, dated 13 October 2025. The judgment was published on 8 January 2026.

299 · If the Supreme Court sustains a request for the protection of legality that has been submitted against the defendant, it shall establish by its judgment that a violation of the law exists, without affecting the final and binding nature of the decision. Article 493 of the Criminal Procedure Code, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, Nos. 72/2011, 101/2011, 121/2012, 32/2013, 45/2013, 55/2014, 35/2019, 27/2021 - CC decision, and 62/2021 - CC decision. Violations of the law, even the most severe ones, committed by final and binding decisions in favour of the defendant, cannot be remedied via a request for the protection of legality, and the proceedings conclude with a judgment establishing a violation of the law, without affecting the final and binding decision. T. Vasiljević, M. Grubač, *Commentary on the Criminal Procedure Code*, op. cit.

Namely, at the beginning of February 2024, nearly 25 years after the murder of the journalist and editor Slavko Ćuruvija, the Court of Appeal in Belgrade published an acquittal by which former members of the state security service: Radomir Marković, Milan Radonjić, Miroslav Kurak, and Ratko Romić, were finally and bindingly acquitted of charges for the murder of Slavko Ćuruvija.³⁰⁰ This reversed the first-instance judgment by which they had been sentenced to a total of 100 years in prison for the murder of the journalist.

Such a judgment represents a defeat not only for the journalistic community, but for society as a whole, in which impunity for the murders of journalists remains absolute. The Ćuruvija case was the only case of a journalist's murder in Serbia to reach a court, and one that could have broken the chain of impunity. The fact that the outcome of a nearly nine-year-long procedure is such that the murderers of journalist Slavko Ćuruvija have not been convicted represents a blatant example of the systemic failure of the state, which resulted in a legalistic end to a state crime.³⁰¹

The first-instance court initially rendered a judgment sentencing the defendants to a total of 100 years in prison for the criminal offence of aggravated murder.³⁰² By a judgment of the appellate court, the first-instance judgment was quashed and the case was remanded back for a retrial.³⁰³ In the retrial, an almost identical first-instance judgment was rendered.³⁰⁴ Subsequently, by a judgment of the Court of Appeal in Belgrade,³⁰⁵ the conviction of the Higher Court in Belgrade was reversed, such that those accused of the murder of the journalist and editor-in-chief Slavko Ćuruvija: Radomir Marković, Milan Radonjić, Miroslav Kurak, and Ratko Romić were acquitted of the charges; namely, Radomir Marković for the criminal offence of incitement to aggravated murder under Article 114, paragraph 1, point 5 of the Criminal Code (CC) in connection with Article 34 of the CC, and the defendants Milan Radonjić, Miroslav Kurak, and Ratko Romić as co-perpetrators of the criminal offence of aggravated murder under Article 114, paragraph 1, point 5 in connection

300 · Court of Appeal in Belgrade, Special Department for Organised Crime, Kž1-Po1 9/22 of 19 April 2023.

301 · "The Legalistic End to a State Crime" is the title of a panel discussion organised by the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation following the publication of the Supreme Court judgment, which established that the acquittal by the Court of Appeal in the Ćuruvija case committed substantial violations of procedural rules in favour of the defendants. A recording and transcript of the panel discussion are available at <https://pescanik.net/legalisticki-kraj-drzavnog-zlocina/>.

302 · Higher Court in Belgrade, Special Department for Organised Crime, K-Po1 No. 61/14 of 5 April 2019.

303 · Court of Appeal in Belgrade, Kž1-Po1 25/19.

304 · Higher Court in Belgrade, Special Department for Organised Crime, Kpo1 No. 73/20 of 2 December 2021.

305 · Court of Appeal in Belgrade, Special Department for Organised Crime, Kž1-Po1 9/22 of 19 April 2023.

with Article 33 of the CC. The judgment is final and binding and, under the currently applicable legislation, cannot be quashed against the defendants.

The investigation has been pushed 25 years back, with almost no prospect that access to justice will ever be enabled in the case of Ćuruvija's murder.

In September 2024, the public prosecutor of the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office submitted a request for the protection of legality to the Supreme Court on the grounds of substantial violations of the provisions of criminal procedure. The Supreme Court established that the request for the protection of legality was partially well-founded and that the acquittal involved substantial violations of the provisions of criminal procedure in favour of the defendants.³⁰⁶

The Supreme Court established that the rendering of the challenged judgment constituted a substantial violation of procedural rules, *inter alia*, because regarding the testimony of one of the key witnesses, the reasoning of the judgment stated that the witness did not stand by his earlier statement given before the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime (TOK) recorded in the minutes on 8 January 2014, which the Supreme Court found to be inconsistent with the trial records. A significant contradiction was established between what was stated in the reasons of the judgment regarding the content of the minutes and the statements of the witnesses concerning the decisive facts subject to proof, and the minutes themselves. The appellate court committed the same violation of the law when assessing the statements of four other witnesses.

Thus, the appellate court stated that two more witnesses did not stand by their statements given before the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime on 10 January 2014. However, from the minutes of the interrogation of one witness at the main trial before the first-instance court on 27 September 2016, it follows that the witness stated that he stands by the statement he gave regarding the circumstances on which he was interrogated by the TOK, and that he would neither add nor subtract anything. Regarding the second witness heard on the same day, there is also a significant contradiction between what the witness stated (which is confirmed by the transcript of the audio recording from the main trial) and the allegations in the reasoning of the second-instance judgment that those witnesses likewise failed to stand by their statements given before the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime on 10 January 2014.

306 · Judgment of the Supreme Court, KZZ OK 38/2024 of 13 October 2025. The judgment was published on 8 January 2026.

Furthermore, these are not the only omissions committed in the acquittal. In relation to two witnesses, the reasoning of the judgment stated that the witnesses had declared themselves only on information they had heard from someone, and that their statements contained completely different information; the Supreme Court established that this was contradictory to the content of the minutes of the interrogation of those witnesses before the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime, as well as the minutes of the main trial before the first-instance court, which were read at the trial before the second-instance court, and from which it follows that they testified in detail about facts personally known to them, and who, except in details, testified consistently in everything - which contradicts the assertions in the reasoning of the second-instance judgment that the said witnesses testified only about information they had heard from someone, and particularly the assertions that the same contain completely different information, due to which the court did not accept them as reliable evidence.³⁰⁷

Finally, regarding one of the key pieces of material evidence, the reports from mobile telephony base stations on the traffic generated between the defendants immediately before and after the murder of Slavko Ćuruvija, which place them in the vicinity of the murder scene, the appellate court stated that it could not accept this evidence as reliable and credible, citing reasons that the Supreme Court found to be completely unclear and to a significant degree contradictory, due to which another material violation of procedural rules was established.³⁰⁸

It follows from the judgment of the Supreme Court that the Court of Appeal, when rendering the acquittal in the Ćuruvija case, rejected key evidence for untenable, unclear, and contradictory reasons. It was untruthfully stated in relation to the testimonies of three witnesses that the witnesses did not stand by their statements. In relation to another two witnesses, it was incorrectly stated that they had no personal knowledge of the facts on which they testified, even though they did, and that the testimonies of the witnesses contain completely different information, *even though they testified consistently in everything except for details*, all of which the Supreme Court established on the basis of the content of the minutes or transcripts of the audio recordings from the main trial.

Due to the stated irregularities and the existence of a suspicion that the judges who rendered the acquittal in the Ćuruvija case committed severe disciplinary offences that seriously damage the reputation of the judicial function and public trust in the courts, the daughter of the murdered journalist Slavko Ćuruvija and the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation submitted disciplinary complaints against the judges of the Court of Appeal – Dušanka Đorđević, Marko Jocić, and Dragan Ćesarović. Disciplinary complaints were not submitted against the remaining two female members of the panel – judge Nada Hadži-Perović and the president

307 · Judgment of the Supreme Court, KZZ OK 38/2024 of 13 October 2025, page 4.

308 · *Ibid*, pages 5-6.

of the panel Vesna Petrović – because their judicial function had ceased due to reaching retirement age shortly after the judgment was rendered.³⁰⁹

The disciplinary complaints state that the established violations of the law and procedural rules in the acquittal in the Ćuruvija case are so numerous and drastic that they exclude the possibility of them being oversights within the regular performance of the judicial function, and that such numerous omissions, which simultaneously constitute substantial violations of procedural rules, could not have happened by chance to experienced judges in proceedings of such importance.³¹⁰ The disciplinary complaints also emphasise that the flagrant violations of the law and omissions in the judgment of the Court of Appeal, established by the Supreme Court, cast a new light on another circumstance indicating the possibility that the principle of impartiality was violated in the trial for the murder of Ćuruvija. Namely, publicly available information and media allegations that also emerged in the proceedings before the Second Basic Court in Belgrade,³¹¹ indicate that the husband of judge Dušanka Đorđević (a member of the judicial panel that rendered the acquittal), lawyer Aleksandar Đorđević, was a high-ranking member of the State Security of Serbia until 2000,³¹² which

309 · The submitted complaints requested that the disciplinary prosecutor submit a proposal to the Disciplinary Commission of the High Judicial Council (HJC) for conducting disciplinary proceedings, and that the Disciplinary Commission render a decision establishing the liability of the judges for severe disciplinary offences and submit a reasoned proposal for their dismissal. Namely, the Law on Judges provides that a judge shall be dismissed, *inter alia*, if it is established in disciplinary proceedings that they have committed a severe disciplinary offence which, in the assessment of the HJC, seriously damages the reputation of the judicial function or public trust in the courts. Numerous pieces of evidence were attached demonstrating that the unconscientious performance of the judicial function resulted in a consequence in the form of serious damage caused to the reputation of the judicial function and trust in the judiciary. For further details, see Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, “Jelena Ćuruvija seeks an assessment of the constitutionality of the Criminal Procedure Code, which prevented the review of the Court of Appeal’s acquittal for the murder of Slavko Ćuruvija, as well as the dismissal of the judges who rendered that judgment”, 2 February 2026, available at www.slavkocuruvijafondacija.rs/en/jelena-curuvija-requests-constitutional-review-of-the-criminal-procedure-code-that-prevents-the-reconsideration-of-the-acquittal-in-the-slavko-curuvija-murder-case-and-seeks-the-dismissal-of-the-judge/.

310 · *Ibid.*

311 · Second Basic Court in Belgrade, 15 P. No. 1615/24

312 · See, for example, Tamara Spaić, “Two judges from the panel that acquitted those accused of the murder of Ćuruvija had previously already acquitted Radonjić and Romić”, *Cenzolovka*, 7 February 2024, available at <https://shorturl.at/YGxfr>; B92, “From the DB into lawyering”, 14 January 2005, available at https://www.b92.net/o/info/vesti/index?nav_id=159957, <https://archive.ph/kW6nV>, as well as the post by attorney Aleksandar Olenik on X/Twitter, which reads: “The judge who acquitted the murderers of Ćuruvija from the BIA is also Dušanka Đorđević, the wife of the former head of the Sixth Department of the DB (BIA), now attorney Aleksandar Đorđević, the companion of Mira Marković.(...)”, available at <https://twitter.com/olenikadvokat/status/1753706925567398184?s=20>. See also Vuk Cvijić, “Trial of facts – criminal proceedings against KRIK, one of the most awarded editorial offices in Serbia”, *op. cit.*

he himself confirmed in an article in Radar on 9 April 2026.³¹³ As a reminder, the defendants previously accused of the murder of Slavko Ćuruvija, who were acquitted by the unlawful judgment of the Court of Appeal were also members of the State Security Service. The disciplinary complaints state that it would be customary for the acting judge in this situation to request her recusal, so that an impression of biased conduct would not be created in the public.³¹⁴ The victims in these proceedings could not request this because they were unaware of it. However, it was logical for Judge Đorđević to cease all work on the case and inform the president of the court, but she failed to do so, even though she must have been aware of these circumstances that cast doubt on her impartiality.³¹⁵

Despite the irregularities and substantial violations of the procedural rules, the acquittal by the appellate court could not be quashed, given that the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) does not leave open the possibility of quashing a final and binding decision against the defendants.³¹⁶ The consequences of the omissions committed by the judges of the appellate court, in conjunction with the provisions of the CPC on extraordinary legal remedies, are such that the Supreme Court could only establish that the law had been violated in favour of the defendants when rendering the acquittal in the Ćuruvija case.

The daughter of the murdered journalist Slavko Ćuruvija submitted an initiative to the Constitutional Court for the assessment of the constitutionality of the CPC provisions that prevent a final and binding reversing judgment from being

313 · Dr. Aleksandar Đorđević, attorney, “Untruths and half-truths at my expense”, Reaction, *Radar*, 9 April 2026, pp. 32-33. Attorney Aleksandar Đorđević, the husband of judge Dušanka Đorđević, does not dispute that he was a member of the state security or its Sixth Department, but rather disputes that he was a member of the Sixth Department assigned to securing Mirjana Marković, clarifying: “Since 1991, when I joined the line of security work, the Sixth Department absolutely never provided security for Mirjana Marković, nor for any member of President Milošević’s family, nor for the President himself, except exceptionally, a few times, for major security plans (the so-called Plan 1) and trips abroad,” adding at the end, “I emphasise that I proudly, responsibly, diligently, and dedicatedly performed the job of a ‘security officer’ just as I have been performing the job of an attorney for the past 25 years, and precisely in defence of both of my vocations, I felt it my duty to respond in this way to the untruths presented at my expense.”

314 · Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, “Jelena Ćuruvija seeks a review of the constitutionality of the Criminal Procedure Code, which made it impossible to seek a reconsideration of the acquittal of the Court of Appeal for the murder of Slavko Ćuruvija, as well as the dismissal of the judges who rendered that judgment”, *op. cit.*

315 · *Ibid.*

316 · By its judgment, the Supreme Court of Cassation will determine that a violation of the law exists without affecting the finality of the decision if it adopts a request for the protection of legality that was filed against the defendant. Article 493 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC), Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, Nos. 72/2011, 101/2011, 121/2012, 32/2013, 45/2013, 55/2014, 35/2019, 27/2021 - CC decision, and 62/2021 - CC decision. Violations of the law, even the most severe ones, committed by final decisions in favour of the defendant, cannot be corrected by a request for the protection of legality, and the proceedings end with a judgment establishing a violation of the law, without affecting the final decision. T. Vasiljević, M. Grubač, *Commentary on the Criminal Procedure Code*, *op. cit.*

quashed against the defendants.³¹⁷

Twenty-seven years after the murder of the journalist, it is clear that besides the violation of the journalist's right to life, as the most drastic form of violating freedom of expression, the state also violated its obligation to ensure an effective investigation into the murder case. Therefore, on 30 January 2026, the daughter of the murdered journalist also submitted a constitutional appeal to the Constitutional Court due to the violation of the procedural aspect of the right to life and the right to a legal remedy.³¹⁸

CONCLUSION

On a global level, two trends are noticeable when it comes to the criminal law protection of journalists from violence, which are reliance on international law and an enhanced awareness of the special duties and obligations that states have in preventing and punishing violence against journalists, on the one hand, and treating threats and violence against journalists as if they were any other criminal law matter, without considering these criminal offences in the light of freedom of expression, on the other hand.³¹⁹ When it comes to threats and violence against journalists in Serbia, the cases analysed here indicate that the actions of domestic institutions frequently place Serbia in the latter spectrum, where criminal offences against journalists are treated without taking into account freedom of expression and the link between the committed act and journalistic work. In this manner, the practice also departs from the guidelines for prosecutors compiled by UNESCO and the International Association of Prosecutors, which, *inter alia*, provide for the implementation of a contextual analysis of the link between the alleged criminal offence and the media activities of the victim, both past and present.³²⁰ Although these guidelines do not aim to grant a special status to journalists, since all citizens are equal before the law,³²¹ they can help avoid the other extreme – viewing criminal offences against journalists, which did occur in connection with the performance of journalistic work, as if they have no connection whatsoever with the performance

317 · For more details, see Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, “Jelena Ćuruvija seeks a review of the constitutionality of the Criminal Procedure Code, which made it impossible to seek a reconsideration of the acquittal of the Court of Appeal for the murder of Slavko Ćuruvija, as well as the dismissal of the judges who rendered that judgment”, *op. cit.*

318 · *Ibid.*

319 · Global Freedom of Expression, *Global Case-law on Violence Against Journalists*, *op. cit.*

320 · UNESCO and International Association of Prosecutors (IAP), *Guidelines for Prosecutors on Cases of Crimes Against Journalists*, *op. cit.*

321 · *Ibid.*

of journalistic work and the public's right to know. By taking into account the dimension of freedom of expression when considering criminal offences against journalists, unjust and absurd outcomes that undermine media freedom can be avoided. Taking into account the media environment when rendering a decision in proceedings concerning criminal offences against journalists can lead to a significant improvement in the media environment and the degree of safety of journalists, through a more effective response of institutions to cases of violence and threats to which journalists are exposed.

The report shows that certain newsrooms are frequently the target of violence, threats, intimidation, and obstruction in their work, and that the criminal complaints filed due to this are not considered with particular caution, but are instead lightly and routinely dismissed. It is of significance to also bear in mind the jurisprudence of the ECtHR, from which it follows that the state has an obligation not only to refrain from interfering with freedom of expression, but also has a positive obligation regarding freedom of expression—to undertake appropriate measures and to adequately react to various forms of violence and pressures that journalists endure.

The report predominantly analyses proceedings that concluded with a prosecutorial decision,³²² in order to consider whether criminal law protection could be more effective if, when making decisions, greater attention were paid to freedom of expression, the social danger of the committed offence, the overall media environment, the frequency of attacks, the status of the journalist, the connection between the journalistic profession and the committed offence, and the context in which the acts occurred. This analysis could serve as a basis for further discussion on how taking these factors into account can make criminal law protection more effective. Furthermore, one cannot avoid the impression that in certain cases criminal law protection was absent due to the patently unprofessional conduct of the prosecutors' offices. The creativity resorted to in individual cases of dismissing criminal complaints and, to say the least, the illogical reasons for their dismissal, raise suspicions about the professionalism

322 · The reason for this is that judgments within the period covered by the analysis are very few in number, and analysing proceedings in which there is virtually no progress is pointless.

and conscientiousness of their conduct.³²³

A particular cause for concern is the numerous cases in which the prosecution was unable to make virtually any progress due to inaction or obstruction by the police.³²⁴ Consequently, numerous examples of violence and threats directed at journalists have remained without any reaction or concrete progress in the investigation. This leads to a worrying level of impunity for offences against journalists. Despite clear data provided by the judicial institutions of Serbia themselves regarding the high number of attacks on male and female journalists, a profound discrepancy is noticeable between the seriousness of the situation on the ground and the assessment and response of the competent authorities.³²⁵ In numerous cases of attacks and intimidation of journalists, no progress is visible. For instance, the *N1* editorial office, which received a threatening letter on 11 July 2025 containing accusations of spreading propaganda and an anti-Serbian campaign, along with suggestions that they could suffer the same fate as the journalists of the *Charlie Hebdo* editorial office,³²⁶ has not been informed of any actual progress or findings in this case.³²⁷

On top of everything, complete impunity for the murders of journalists has existed in Serbia for over a quarter of a century. In the only case of a journalist's murder that reached the court, the Ćuruvija case, a final acquittal was rendered, which the Supreme Court found to contain substantial violations of procedural rules, but which cannot be amended due to procedural limitations.

The scale of violence against journalists has become alarming, particularly over

323 · Attorney and member of the Standing Working Group (SRG) for the Safety of Journalists Veljko Milić recalls that we are “witnesses that attacks on journalists took place in front of the police who failed to react, and within the prosecution, double standards exist in the application of the law depending on whether the perpetrator of the criminal offence is a person close to the authorities. The difference in treatment is also determined by which editorial office the journalist works for. Mina Delić, “Attacks on local journalists – attacks that go unseen”, *op. cit.* Journalist Uglješa Bokić points out that the conduct of the prosecution can also depend on who the attacker is, and illustrates using his own examples the difference in conduct in a case where the attacker was an individual who was not influential and had no one to protect them, versus, on the other hand, a case where the attacker was a person close to the SNS and individuals from criminogenic backgrounds. Interview with Uglješa Bokić from 7 April 2026.

324 · ANEM, “Standing Working Group for the Safety of Journalists: Number of physical attacks on media workers increased by 440 per cent in 2025”, *op. cit.*

325 · Article 19, “Authorities in Serbia must stop the spiral of violence against male and female journalists”, *op. cit.*

326 · *N1*, “Charlie Hebdo, white rabbits, blockade of N1, death threats: Report of UN Special Rapporteurs on violence against journalists in Serbia”, 27 January 2026, available at <https://shorturl.at/Jqf2q>. The Third Basic Public Prosecutor's Office (OJT) in Belgrade, where this case was established, is the only prosecutor's office, along with the OJT in Sremska Mitrovica, that failed to provide the information requested through the access to information of public importance request for the purposes of this analysis.

327 · *Ibid.*

the past year and a half, and in the context of protests and the crackdown by the top echelons of power against all critical voices perceived as a threat to the survival of the regime, which included critical journalists. A response from the competent institutions to the rise in violence against journalists has been absent, which can act as an incentive for potential attackers of journalists and lead to a further collapse in the level of media freedom. If we look at what the criminal law protection of journalists has looked like over the past two years, it cannot be concluded that the competent institutions have sent a clear message that violence against journalists is unacceptable and will be adequately punished.

The collapse in the level of media freedom culminated on the day of the local elections, 29 March 2026, when journalists were beaten up, attacked with an axe, had their equipment destroyed and seized, were insulted, and were obstructed in their work. The violence that journalists experienced on that day is an ultimate warning to the competent institutions that their response must be far more effective in order to prevent a further escalation of violence and impunity for violence against journalists. Otherwise, media freedom in Serbia will remain “trapped in a downward spiral of violence”.³²⁸

Finally, the prosecutors’ offices themselves, which ought to contribute to the protection of journalists, are being subjected to similar pressures as those faced by journalists, including surveillance,³²⁹ brutal attacks by tabloid media, and sabotage ranging from personnel to legislative policy.³³⁰ Professional media are an important support also for institutions whose primary function is the protection of rights.³³¹ Without professional media, these institutions likewise remain trapped in a downward spiral.

328 · In this manner, the state of media freedom in Serbia was faithfully described following the two-day MFRR mission on 26–27 March 2026 in Belgrade. MFRR, “Serbian authorities must stop the spiral of violence against journalists”, *op. cit.*

329 · Vuk Z. Cvijić, “Exclusive: Bojana Savović, prosecutor of the High Public Prosecutor’s Office in Belgrade, They track me, wiretap me, and intercept my messages”, *Radar*, *op. cit.*

330 · See also Sandra Petrušić, “Interview, Tanasije Marinković: I fear serious conflicts and violence in the next elections”, *Radar*, Issue 107, 4 April 2026.

331 · T. Marinković points to a similar issue: “Additionally, these prosecutors are exposed to brutal attacks by tabloid media. Therefore, the public, citizens, non-governmental organisations, and the remaining professional media must provide them with full support if we want them to continue carrying out their mission.” *Ibid.* Experiences from comparative law are similar: “If we want to consolidate the jurisprudential advances achieved in the protection of rights, including the right to freedom of expression, we should start by protecting the institutions whose function is to protect rights. If we allow governments to intimidate the institutions created to protect us, if we challenge democratic principles, the separation of powers, or judicial independence, we will once again have a president ruling without checks and balances. By then, it will be too late.” Anderson Javier Dirocie De León, Interview With Former Judge Daniela Salazar Marín: “Invoking International Standards Is Not a Matter of Chance”, *Global Freedom of Expression*, Columbia University, 11 September 2025, available at <https://shorturl.at/uc0na>.