

SECURITY OF MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS

A VIEW FROM INSTITUTIONS



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INTRODUCTION

Because of its exceptional importance, freedom of expression is guaranteed by the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms¹ and by the Constitution of Montenegro.

The state has an obligation not to interfere with freedom of expression, except in exceptional circumstances, that are evaluated in accordance with the standards developed through the practice of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). That is why, in one of its decisions, the ECtHR emphasizes that, due to the dominant position of the state authorities, the state must show moderation in resorting to criminal proceedings. The authorities of a democratic state must be tolerant of criticism, even if it may be considered excessive, provocative or offensive.

According to the same standards², the state is obliged to provide protection to journalists who are exposed to the risk of physical and other attacks because of the use of freedom of expression, (DINK v. TURKEY, Application No. 2668/07, 6102/08, 30079/08, 7072/09 and 7124/09), to ensure the taking of investigative and protection measures against a campaign of violence and intimidation targeting journalists and media employees (FUENTES BOBO v. SPAIN, Application No. 39293/98), to protect journalists and the right to freedom of expression from attacks and private individuals (ÖZGÜR GÜN DEM v. TURKEY, Application No. 23144/93).

The European Court considers that, under Article 10 of the Convention on Human Rights, positive obligations of a state, in addition to establishing an effective system for the protection of journalists, require it to create a favorable environment for the participation of all interested persons in public debate, enabling them to express their opinions and ideas without fear, even if those views contradict the positions upheld by official authorities or a significant segment of public opinion. This protection applies even when—indeed, especially when—their opinions are irritating or shocking to others.

Having in mind the standards of the European Court and the data we collected invoking the Law on Free Access to Information, as well as through the answers to the inquiries to the competent institutions, this study should indicate the effective

¹ https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/Convention_MNE

² <https://rm.coe.int/guide-on-article-10-freedom-of-expression-srb/native/1680ad61f7> <https://rm.coe.int/guide-on-article-10-freedom-of-expression-srb/native/1680ad61f7> <https://rm.coe.int/guide-on-article-10-freedom-of-expression-srb/native/1680ad61f7>

ctiveness of the proceedings and final judgments in cases of threats and attacks on journalists on that basis in the last two years, after the mandatory instructions of the Supreme State Prosecutor **Milorad Marković**³.

In the study, we did not deal with serious cases of assault and murder that date back to the previous period, some of which are still formally active or have been closed due to the lack of evidence (that is, the inadequate work of the police and judicial authorities during the previous three decades). We expect the Supreme State Prosecutor and the Commission for Investigating Attacks on Journalists⁴ (where journalist **Sead Sadiković** represents the Association of Professional Journalist of Montenegro/DPNCG) to determine the omissions of the authorities in the investigations of the murder of **Duško Jovanović**, attacks on **Olivera Lakić**, **Mladen Stojović**, **Tufik Softić**, as well as illegal arrests and wiretapping of journalists.

LAW AMENDING AND PREVENTION

The institute of criminal liability for threatening security, inflicting serious bodily harm, coercion and murder of journalists, i.e. persons who do work of public importance in the field of public information, has been part of Montenegrin legislation for four years. In practice, the application of the provisions of the Criminal Code (KZ) did not meet the expectations of the media community that attacks on journalists would be more efficiently prosecuted and the introduction of special criminal offenses and tougher penalties would affect the prevention of attacks.

Data from the Police Directorate, the State Prosecutor’s Office, the Judicial Council and the misdemeanor courts testify that many attacks and threats (more than a third) were treated as misdemeanors. Even in cases when journalists were the targets of attacks during their work assignments, the prosecution did not recognize it.

It is particularly worrying that statistics indicate an increase in online threats and harassment in 2024 and 2025, as well as the fact that the targets of attacks are mostly women journalists. Pending the Criminal Code amendments directed towards additional tightening of penalties for attacks on journalists⁵, an open dilemma remains- what is the issue in applying the existing provisions. Also, how to process the growing online violence and threats, especially towards women journalists.

³ https://tuzilastvo.me/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Uputstvo_za_postupanje_u_slucajevima_napada_i_nasilja_nad_novinarima-1.pdf
⁴ <https://komisija.me/komisija>
⁵ <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/5672d078-a06e-4829-a5ba-56fadf6bcd93>

COLLISION OF GOOD INTENTIONS AND PRACTICE

On December 29th 2021, the Parliament of Montenegro unanimously, with the votes of representatives of the government and the opposition, adopted amendments to the Criminal Code of Montenegro, which prescribe stricter criminal protection for journalists. This happened a year after the change of government at the elections in August 2020, when the new majority wanted to show that journalists and the media are its allies.

The amendments to the Criminal Code prescribe the qualified forms of criminal offenses “threatening security”, “aggravated murder”, “grievous bodily harm” and “coercion”, when they are committed against a person who performs public information work, in relation to the performance of that work. **A job of public importance is considered to be the performance of a profession or duty associated with an increased risk for the security of the person who performs it in the field of public information, health care and legal assistance before judicial and other state bodies.**

Research by the Association of Professional Journalists of Montenegro (DPNCG) showed that during 2024 and until the end of September 2025, 12 final criminal verdicts (17 non-final) were handed down before ordinary courts on this basis and three final misdemeanor verdicts before misdemeanor courts.

The Police Directorate referred to the Prosecutor’s Office 37 attacks on journalists or media houses, while the State Prosecutor’s Office opened 26 cases. Of these, ten (10) were prosecuted before the misdemeanor courts, one criminal complaint submitted by a women journalist was dismissed, two indictments were filed, while the other cases are under investigation.

Our research showed that out of 26 cases in the Supreme State Prosecutor’s Office, 14 refer to women journalists, while in the misdemeanor courts eight out of 11 procedures concern women journalists. Of three final misdemeanor verdicts, in two cases the targets of the attacks were women journalists.

Table: Most of the proceedings and verdicts concern women journalists

Institution / Type of procedure	Total number of cases	Number related to women journalists	Percentage (%)
Supreme State Prosecutor's Office	26	14	53,8 %
Misdemeanor courts	11	8	72,7 %
Legally binding misdemeanor convictions	3	2	66,7 %

According to the Police Directorate, three women journalists are currently under physical protection, while one journalist has operational preventive protection.

This tendency is not encouraging, especially because the Supreme State Prosecutor Milorad Marković, after being elected as the head of the prosecutor's organization on January 27, 2024, gave binding instructions to state prosecutors for dealing with cases of attacks on journalists.⁶

Our case studies show that the The State Prosecutor office determination to prosecute attacks more efficiently and practical implementation of it are not in complete agreement, that some prosecutors still do not recognize when journalists' work has been impeded, however there is progress. Especially, as prosecutors present cases before misdemeanor courts also- which was not the case before.

POLICE REPORTS IN 2024 AND IN TEN MONTHS OF 2025

In 2024, the Police Directorate registered 17 incidents of attacks on journalists in connection with professional engagement, of which 12 were online violence. According to the official data submitted for the purposes of this analysis, of the other five incidents, one was a physical attack that the prosecutor qualified as a criminal act of violent behavior (the case of Ana Raičković), while the remaining four cases were treated as violations of the Law on Public Peace and Order.

Of those 17 cases, seven were qualified by prosecutors as criminal offenses prosecuted ex officio, while misdemeanor charges were filed in relation to six incidents due to violations of the Law on Public Peace and Order.

In four cases, the competent prosecutor assessed that there were no elements of a criminal offense.

In 2025 (before the end of October), the growing trend of threats and attacks on journalists continued, particularly online. For the first ten months of 2025, the Police Administration registered 20 incidents of attacks on journalists based on their professional engagement. Of these, 18 were online threats, while two physical attacks are related to the case in Gornje Zaostro in Berane ⁷.

⁶ https://tuzilastvo.me/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Uputstvo_za_postupanje_u_slucajevima_napada_i_nasilja_nad_novinarima-1.pdf

⁷ <https://rtcg.me/vijesti/drustvo/740579/napadnuti-fotoreporteri-vijesti-i-pobjede-u-gornjem-zaostro-ubicemo-te-golim-rukama.html>

During the first five months of 2025, the Prosecutor's Office classified five reported events as criminal offenses, in four cases misdemeanor proceedings were initiated against the perpetrators, while three events were under evaluation by the prosecutor's office (according to the data obtained). The UP did not state how the prosecution qualified the crimes reported in the following five months (June - October). Since the Gornje Zaostro incident took place during that time interval, it is known that two criminal and two misdemeanor charges were filed in that case.

STATE PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE ACTIONS IN 2024

In 2024, the Supreme State Prosecutor's Office opened 14 cases regarding verbal and physical violence or threats to journalists. At the end of the calendar year, some of the cases remained open and some were referred to the misdemeanor court. According to the same data from VDT, two (non-final) court verdicts were passed.

The State Prosecutor's Office opened seven cases for the criminal offense of threatening security. Of these, two (2) were for journalists and the editorial staff of TV E, one for RTCG journalist, three for newspaper *Vijesti* journalists and one for threatening the security of the M portal editor in chief. Of these, in two cases non-final court judgments were issued, while in three cases the application was rejected

The most serious attack that took place in 2024 was prosecuted under the provisions of the Criminal Code for violent behavior. It concerned the newspaper *Pobjeda* editor (whom the State Prosecution registered as a *TV E* journalist because she was targeted on that basis during the attack).

These are the Supreme State Prosecutor's office data of the formed subjects:

- ***the case regarding the criminal complaint filed by A.R., "E TV" journalist. Criminal offense qualified as violent behavior under Article 399 of the Criminal Code of Montenegro.*** The indictment was first filed December 3, 2024, and after being returned by the Basic Court in Podgorica, it was filed on January 13, 2025. On April 24, 2025, a first-instance verdict was handed down against three persons, while one was acquitted.
- ***the case regarding the criminal complaint filed by J.B., "E TV" journalist, for the criminal offense of threatening security under Article 168 para-***

graph 4 in connection with paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code of Montenegro. The Prosecutor's Office filed an indictment and the Basic Court in Berane issued a guilty verdict.

- **the case based on the criminal complaint filed by "E TV", being to the detriment of several employees in the newsroom of the television. Criminal offense qualified as threatening security under Article 168 paragraph 2 in connection with paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code of Montenegro.** The pre-trial proceedings are ongoing.
- **the case regarding the criminal complaint filed by V.O., ND "Vijesti" journalist. Criminal offense qualified as threatening security under Article 168 paragraph 4 in connection with paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code of Montenegro.** The pre-trial proceedings are ongoing.
- **the case regarding the criminal complaint filed by J.J., ND "Vijesti" journalist, in connection with the content of the SKY application correspondence.** The pre-trial proceedings are ongoing.
- **the case regarding the criminal complaint filed by B.D., "RTCG" journalist, and S.T., criminal offense qualified as threatening security under Article 168 paragraph 4 in connection with paragraphs 2 and 1 of the Criminal Code of Montenegro.** An indictment was filed, and the Basic Court in Podgorica issued a guilty verdict on December 20, 2024.
- **the case regarding the criminal complaint filed by D.N., "M portal" journalist. Criminal offense qualified as threatening security under Article 168 paragraph 4 in connection with paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code of Montenegro.** According to the data of the Police Department, a foreign citizen was identified, against whom a criminal complaint for threatening security was filed on September 24th 2025.
- **the case regarding the criminal complaint filed by J.J., ND "Vijesti" journalist, in which the complaint was dismissed, while the criminal offense was qualified as threatening security under Article 168 paragraph 4 in connection with paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code of Montenegro.**
- **the case regarding the criminal complaint filed by V.O., RT "Podgorica" journalist, in connection with the comments published on the "Vijesti" portal. The pre-trial proceedings are ongoing.**

Part of the cases were prosecuted and represented by the prosecutors before the misdemeanor courts, where, by the end of the year, according to the the Supreme State Prosecutor's office, no judgment had been reached.

These are the data from the State Prosecutor's Office on these cases:

- regarding criminal complaint filed by the "Gradska TV" journalist S. K., (the act) was classified as a misdemeanor and misdemeanor proceedings were initiated based on the committed misdemeanor under Article 7 paragraph 2 of the Law on Public Peace and Order
- the case regarding the criminal complaint filed by ND "Vijesti" journalists M.R. and L.M., classified as a misdemeanor, which is why a request was made to initiate misdemeanor proceedings.
- the case of the criminal complaint filed by journalist D.M., classified as a misdemeanor, the State Prosecutor submitted a request to initiate misdemeanor proceedings for the committed misdemeanor under Article 8 of the Law on Public Peace and Order.

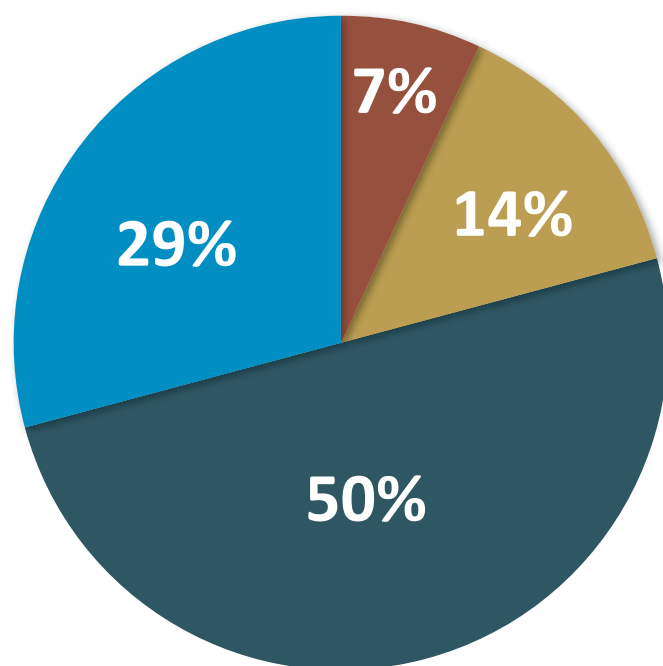
Two cases, which the DPNCG registered as attacks related to the work performance, were not adequately processed. Both concern local correspondents.

These are the the Supreme State Prosecutor's office data on those two cases – Vijesti and Monitor correspondent from Kolašin, Dragana Šćepanović, and TV Vijesti correspondent from Bijelo Polje, Alisa Hajdarpašić.

- the case regarding the criminal complaint filed by ND Vijesti journalist D.Š. in connection with several published texts and offensive comments on the "Aktuelno.me" portal. Misdemeanor report filed.
- the case regarding the criminal complaint filed by ND Vijesti journalist A.H. Criminal offense qualified as threatening security under Article 168 paragraph 3 in connection with paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Criminal Code of Montenegro. After the investigation, the acting state prosecutor issued a decision dismissing the criminal complaint and filed a request to initiate misdemeanor proceedings. The High State Prosecutor's Office in Bijelo Polje, acting on the complaint, assessed that it was founded and sent the case back for re-decision. On March 31st 2025, the acting prosecutor issued a decision rejecting the criminal complaint because the actions of the suspects do not contain elements of the nature of the reported criminal offense or any other criminal offense for which prosecution is undertaken ex officio. An acquittal was granted in the misdemeanor proceedings also.

Due to the importance of prosecuting attacks and intimidation of women journalists, with the aim of impeding their work, and the specifics of the relevant actions, we conducted case studies in Ana Raičković, Alisa Hajdarpašić and Dragana Šćepanović cases.

VDT 2024 DATA TABLE



■ threatening security ■ misdemeanors ■ violent behavior ■ pre-trial proceedings

STATE PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE IN 2025

This year (2025) was marked by another case of impeding the work of the newspapers Pobjeda and Vijesti journalists/reporters, Stevo Vasiljević and Boris Pejović, for which the Basic State Prosecutor's Office in Berane (ODT) prosecuted several people from the aspect of criminal and misdemeanor liability (case study below). By the time of writing the report, the Misdemeanor Division in Berane rejected one misdemeanor report, one proceeding is ongoing, the trial upon the indictment against one person has started before the Basic Court in Berane, and another criminal indictment has been filed.

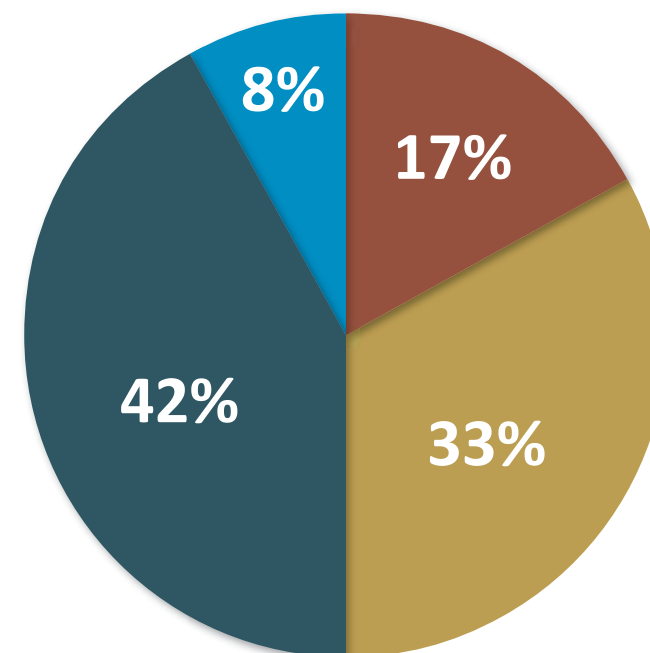
In addition to these cases, according to the data of the Supreme State Prosecutor's Office, for the first nine months of 2025, 12 cases were filed regarding verbal and physical violence or threats to journalists, most of which are in the pre-trial proceedings phase.

Out of the total number of complaints, five are in the pre-trial proceedings phase, and in four cases misdemeanor charges have been filed. One case resulted in non-final court verdict, and indictments were filed in two cases.

These are the the Supreme State's office data on the formed cases:

- the case regarding the criminal complaint filed by "M Portal" journalist D.N., regarding threats on Internet. After the case was formed, Danica Nikolić was heard as the claimant, and on the same day, the Unit for Combating High-Tech Crime was ordered to take measures and actions to identify the perpetrator. The pre-trial proceedings are ongoing.
- the case regarding the criminal complaint filed by N.K., "Pobjeda" journalist, regarding comments on the social network "Facebook". The case is in the misdemeanor court since the acting prosecutor filed a request to initiate misdemeanor proceedings.
- the case regarding the criminal complaint filed by N.Z., "Pobjeda" newspaper editor-in-chief - acting state prosecutor conducted an investigation on the official vehicle damage, and the next day held a hearing of the applicant as a witness. The pre-trial proceedings are ongoing.
- the case regarding the criminal complaint filed by "E TV" journalist A.R. regarding the comments on the "Aktuelno" portal, the applicant Ana Raičević was heard as a witness the day after, and the Police Directorate was ordered

VDT 2025 DATA TABLE



■ misdemeanors ■ pre-trial proceedings ongoing ■ non-final verdicts ■ indictments

to take measures and actions to identify the perpetrator. The pre-trial proceedings are ongoing.

- the case regarding the criminal complaint filed by photojournalist and videographer S.P. “Libertas Press”, regarding incident in Njegoševa Street, in front of the High Court in Podgorica. The acting prosecutor, after hearing the applicant, submitted a request to the Misdemeanor Court to initiate misdemeanor proceedings.
- the case regarding the criminal complaint filed by V.R. “Volim Podgorica” portal journalists, regarding comments on the “X” network. The acting prosecutor heard the applicant as the claimant witness and ordered the police to take action to identify the perpetrators. The pre-trial proceedings are ongoing.
- the case regarding the criminal complaint filed by A.B., “Portal Analitika” journalist, regarding comments on the social network “Instagram”. The acting prosecutor sent a request to the Police Directorate to take action to establish the identity of the perpetrator and after the conversation with the journalist, hearing date for him as the claimant has been set. The pre-trial proceedings are ongoing.
- the case regarding the criminal complaint filed by “RTCG” journalist D.P., regarding the threats sent to her. After questioning the suspect and the journalist as the claimant, an order to detain the suspect was issued, and the Basic Court in Podgorica, on the proposal of the Prosecutor’s Office, issued a decision on custody.
- Case of attack in Gornje Zaostro against S.V. and BP. (details in case study)

HOW THE ORDINARY COURTS RULED

In 2024 and the first nine months of 2025, basic courts had **12 final verdicts, convicting 13 people. Of these, 10 were criminally convicted for compromising security, one person was convicted of coercion, and two for causing serious bodily injury.**

When it comes to criminal sanctions, **eight were sentenced to prison terms, three to probation and two people to mandatory psychiatric treatment.**

Of the 10 persons convicted of threatening the security of journalists, six were given prison terms, three got suspended sentences, and one person was sentenced to mandatory psychiatric treatment.

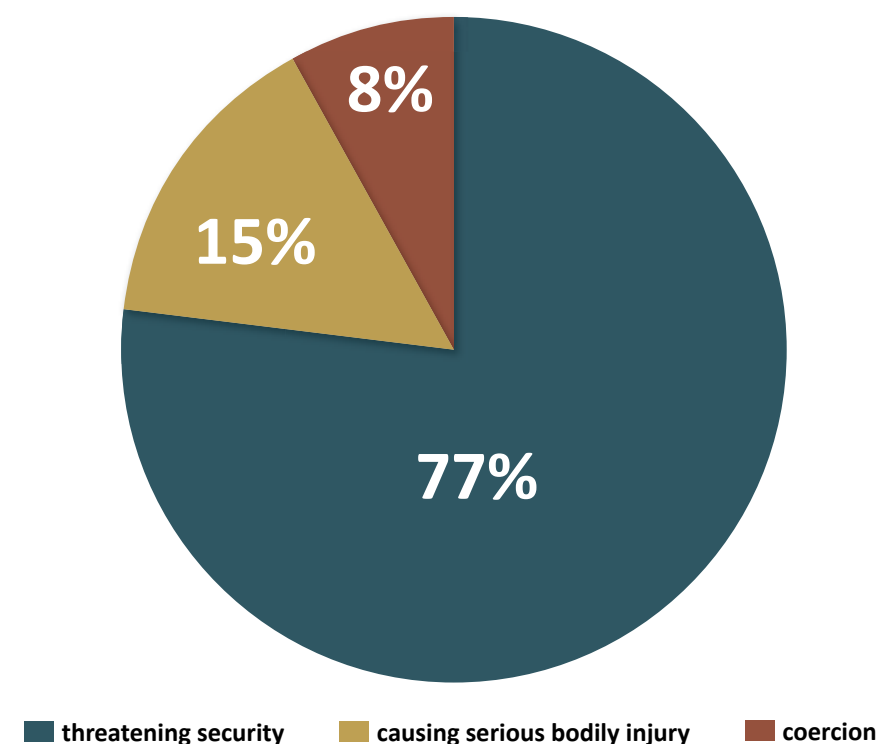
In 2024, six judgments were passed and all of them are final.

Five people were convicted of threatening security, four of them got prison sentences and one got suspended sentence. One person got final conviction of coercion with compulsory psychiatric treatment.

In 2025, up until September 30th, six final judgments were passed, convicting seven persons. Five of these were sentenced for threatening security, and two were sentenced to prison, two to probation and one to mandatory psychiatric treatment.

Two people were sentenced to prison terms for causing serious bodily injury.

JUDICIAL COUNCIL FINAL VERDICTS 2024-2025
12 VERDICTS, 13 CONVICTS



MISDEMEANOR COURTS HAD THEIR HANDS FULL

In this period, the High Misdemeanors Court of Montenegro worked on three cases, confirming the first instance decisions. Three people were fined a total of 670 euros. One because of comments on the *IN4S* portal against the *Standard* portal editor **Jasmina Muminović**, and the other two because of threats to the correspondent of *Vijesti* from Tivat, **Siniša Luković**.

The third decision is to reject the appeal against the verdict by which the KCCG doctor was convicted for harassing and insulting *Gradska TV* journalist **Magdalena Čelanović**. Based upon this, the Supreme State Prosecutor's Office initiated proceedings for the protection of legality before the Supreme Court, suggesting that it should be established that the verdict of the Misdemeanor Court of Montenegro violated the law in favor of the defendant **Vladimir Peruničić**.

The document of the High Misdemeanors Court submitted for the purposes of this study states that they had the following cases related to attacks on journalists:

- *Case PŽP. no. 89/24-6 against the defendant V.D. from P., upon applicant's appeal for the initiation of misdemeanor proceedings - Police Department, Security Department Podgorica. The court received aforementioned case on January 17th, 2024. By decision PŽP.br.89/24-6 dated April 29, 2024, the High Misdemeanors Court of Montenegro rejected the appeal as unfounded and confirmed the decision of the Misdemeanors Court in Podgorica PP.br.1281/23-27-45 dated November 21, 2023, by which the defendant was declared guilty and fined in the amount of 250.00 euros, for a misdemeanor under Article 19 of the Law on Public Peace and Order, because on December 20, 2020, around 4:45 p.m., while he was in the M.B.P. street, in a public place, because of a comment read on the "IN4S" portal, written by the editor-in-chief of the "Standard" portal M.J., in the way that he posted a comment on the "IN4S" portal platform with the content "M?" did she manage to pick up her father's teeth and intestines after he blew himself up like a true mujahideen".*
- *Case PŽP. no. 1574/24-3, against the defendants V.Z. and V.V. both from Tivat, based on violations under Article 7 paragraph 2 of the Law on Public Peace and Order, to the detriment of journalist S.L. The misdemeanor proceedings in this case were initiated on October 23, 2023. The Misdemeanors Court in Budva - Division in Kotor, on September 29, 2024. issued a decision declaring the defendants guilty. The defendants were fined EUR 210.00 each and they were obliged to pay the costs of the procedure in the amount*

of EUR 30.00 each. The aforementioned case was received in the High Misdemeanor Court on October 21, 2024, for decision-making based on the appeal of the defendants. On February 12, 2025. In 2008, the Higher Misdemeanor Court of Montenegro issued a decision confirming the first-instance decision.

- *According to the decision of the Misdemeanor Court in Podgorica PP no. 5451/25 of 26 April 2025, by which V.P. was imposed a fine in the amount of 1,000 euros and a protective measure of mandatory addiction treatment for alcoholics, appeals were filed by the 24 June 2025. By Basic State Prosecutor's Office in Podgorica and the injured party's attorney. The files were submitted to the Higher Misdemeanor Court for decision-making on appeals on the Higher Misdemeanor Court in Podgorica decision PŽP no. 1327/25-3 of 7 July 2025. complaint by the ODT was rejected as incomplete upon II, 202 paragraph 3 in relation to paragraph 1 item 5 of the Law on Misdemeanors, while the appeal of the attorney of the injured party was rejected as impermissible, according to Article 208 paragraph 4 of the Law on Misdemeanors.*

The case files are currently processed in the Supreme State Prosecutor's Office upon the initiative to file a request for the protection of legality submitted by the ODT in Podgorica.

When it comes to misdemeanor courts, the one in Podgorica had nine (9) cases, mainly for violations of the Law on Public Peace and Order, and the Bijelo Polje Misdemeanor Court had three (3). Most of their decisions are awaited, and these are the formed cases:

- Case formed at the request of the Police Department-Police Station for public peace and order from February 20th, 2023. against **Pejović Dalibor**, for misdemeanor under Article 7 of the Law on Public Peace and Order. Claimant journalist **Jelena Marković** ("TV Nikšić"). The case is not closed.
- Case formed at the request of the Police Department-Police Station for public peace and order from 5th December 2023. against **Radonjić Radonja**, for misdemeanor under Article 7 of the Law on Public Peace and Order. Claimant journalist **Milosavić Nikola** (TV *Vijesti*). The case is not closed.
- The case formed at the request of the Police Department-Police Station for public peace and order dated February 27, 2024. against **Nemanja Vlahović**, for misdemeanor under Article 7 of the Law on Public Peace and Order. Claimant journalist **Baranin Nataša**. Case closed, acquittal decision from December 18th, 2024, valid from February 12th, 2025.
- The case formed at the request of the Police Department-Police Station for public peace and order dated March 18th, 2024. – against **Andrej Milović**, for misdemeanor under Article 7 of the Law on Public Peace and Order.

Claimant journalist **Grbić Radmila** (*Libertas Press*). The case is not closed.

- The case formed at the request of the Basic State Prosecutor's Office in Podgorica from October 21st, 2024- against **Bahović Admir**, for misdemeanor under Article 8 of the Law on Public Peace and Order. Claimant Televizija Vijesti cameraman. The case is not closed.
- Case formed at the request of the Basic State Prosecutor's Office in Podgorica from December 31st, 2024, against **Kaluđerović Gordana**, for misdemeanor under Article 7 of the Law on Public Peace and Order. Claimant journalist **Sanja Kovačević** (*City Television*). Case closed, fine 250 euros + 10 euros costs. The decision is not final.
- At the request of the Police Department-Police Station for public peace and order, Regional Security Center, Podgorica Division, from February 19th, 2025, against **Sakib Ibrišimović**, for misdemeanor under Article 7 of the Law on Public Peace and Order. Claimant journalist and editor of the Volim Podgorica portal. The case is not closed.
- The case formed at the request of the Basic State Prosecutor's Office in Podgorica dated April 26th, 2025, against **Vladimir Peruničić**, for misdemeanor under Article 7 of the Law on Public Peace and Order. Claimant journalist **Magdalena Čelanović**. The case was closed with the decision dated April 26th, 2025, by which the accused was fined 1,000 euros and 30 euros for the procedure costs. The defendant's lawyer filed an appeal against the decision on May 20th, 2025. Acting on appeal, the High Misdemeanor Court of Montenegro issued a decision on July 7th, 2025, confirming the rulings of the Misdemeanor Court in Podgorica dated April 26th, 2025. The decision became final on July 7th, 2025.
- The case formed at the request of the Basic State Prosecutor's Office in Podgorica on July 11th, 2025, against **Klikovac Đorđije**, for misdemeanor under Article 7 of the Law on Public Peace and Order, Section 2. Claimant journalist **Mazalica Jelena** (*Kodex.me*) and cameraman **Branko Lazarević**. The case was concluded on 11.7.2025. with decision to fine **Klikovac Đorđije** 500 euros and 30 euros the procedure costs. The decision is not final.
- Case formed in 2024 at the request of the Bijelo Polje ODT, under Article 7 of the Law on Public Peace and Order, in the journalist **Alisa Hajdarpašić** case, the proceedings against **Sakib Čindrak** are ongoing before the court of first instance (in the meantime ended with an acquittal).
- In the Kolašin court division, the ODT Kolašin filed a request to initiate a misdemeanor proceeding in which **Dragana Šćepanović** was claimant. The case was established on June 18, 2025.

- In Berane court division, 2 (two) cases were established based on the complaints of journalists. In the first case, which was formed on August 9, 2025, in which the claimant is journalist **Stevo Vasiljević**, the request to initiate the procedure was rejected, in accordance with 61.161 paragraphs 4 and 5 of the Law on Misdemeanors, while in the second case which was formed on August 13, 2025, several persons were included in the claim by the journalists **Boris Pejović** and Stevo Vasiljević as claimants.

Table with all cases related to attacks on journalists and/or their property before the Misdemeanors Court in Podgorica in the period from January 1, 2024. until Septemeber 23,2025:

Case Law Identifier	Defendant	Claimant	Media	Law Article	Case status
PP.br.10210/23	Pejović Dalibor	Marković Jelena	TV Nikšić	Art. 7	Ongoing case before Judge Sabina Canović
PP.br.15291/23	Radonjić Radonja	Milosavić Nikola	TV Vijesti	Art. 7	Ongoing case before Judge Ana Radulović
PP.br.2692/24-4	Vlahović Nemanja	Baranin Nataša	—	Art. 7	Acquittal decision, final from December 02,2025
PP.br.2700/24-39-44	Milović Andrej	Grbić Radmila	Libertas Press	Art. 7	Ongoing case before Judge Iva Popivoda
PP.br.12463/24-4	Bahović Admir	Snimatelj "Televizija Vijesti"	Televizija Vijesti	Art. 8	Ongoing case before Judge Ana Radulović
PP.br.16899/24	Klauđerović Gordana	Kovačević Sanja	Gradska televizija	Art. 7	€250 fine, decision not final
PP.br.2401/25	Ibrišimović Sakib	Urednica portala "Volim Podgoricu"	Volim Podgoricu	Art. 7	Ongoing case
PP.br.5451/25-42	Peruničić Vladimir	Magdalena Čelanović	—	Art. 7 (2)	1000€ fine, appeals rejected, final from July 7, 2025
PP.br.9182/25-2	Klikovac Đorđije	Mazalica Jelena i kamerman Lazarević	Kodex.me	Art. 7 (2)	500€ fine, decision not final until Septemeber 23, 2025

WOMEN JOURNALISTS AS A TARGETS

In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in gender-based violence against women journalists, regardless of the media editorial policy. This is confirmed by statistical data and the fact that the physical protection by police administration is provided for three women journalists who have written or are still writing about organized crime and corruption. They are **Olivera Lakić⁸**, **Jelena Jovanović⁹** and **Ana Račković¹⁰**. The UP protection was assigned to them, as listed, after a security assessment, the contents of which are not known to the public.

Lakić was the target of attacks twice after she wrote about organized tobacco smuggling, and a trial is ongoing before the High Court in Podgorica based on the indictment of the Special State Prosecutor's Office, in which the criminal group is also accused of planning her murder.

Jovanović received several threats and is the target of demonization and fabricated accusations in certain media.

Račković was given police protection after she was attacked by businessman Zoran Bećirović accompanied by his security guards, whose portal is running a slanderous campaign against individuals, including her.

These three journalists, as well as numerous others, whose cases are pending before the State Prosecutor's Office, were insulted or threatened, directly or indirectly, on gender basis.

The VDT data show that out of 26 cases filed in the last two years, 14 relate to women journalists. Misdemeanor courts have 11 proceedings, 8 of which concern female journalists, and two of the three final misdemeanor verdicts refer to women journalists.

Of the 14 cases in 2024, nine were formed based on applications from female journalists, while in 2025, five applications were registered.

The records of the Police Department show that out of 17 registered events in 2024, 10 related to women journalists also, and out of 20 in 2025 (end of October 20), 13 related to women journalists.

The growing online violence on social networks is also largely gender-based. For the time being, the State Prosecutor's Office does not recognize this problem

through the procedures it leads, as evidenced by the two case studies (Dragana Šćepanović and Alisa Hajdarpašić).

The M portal editor, **Danica Nikolić**, received death and rape threats by mail three years ago. According to the information provided by the Police Department, four incidents related to her complaints from the previous period were clarified. It was determined that a foreign national was identified as having sent her threatening and offensive messages on four separate occasions between December 2022 and September 2025. "On September 24, 2025, a criminal complaint was filed against him to the competent state prosecutor on suspicion of having committed the criminal offense of threatening security," the police stated.

In gender-based attacks on women journalists, they are portrayed as morally depraved persons, attempts are made to devalue them as mothers and human beings, their appearance is commented on, and they are threatened with sexual violence.

As a member of the Council of Europe (CoE), Montenegro is obliged to respect its conventions, including the Istanbul convention.

By the SE recommendation on preventing and combating sexism CM/REC (2019), sexism is defined as "any act, gesture, visual representation, spoken or written words, practice or behavior based on the idea that a person or group of persons is inferior because of their sex, which occurs in the public or private sphere, whether online or offline, with the aim or purpose of, among other things, violating dignity and establishing and maintaining a system of gender stereotypes".

The group of experts, GREVIO ¹¹, which monitors the implementation of the CoE Convention and the fight against violence against women (Istanbul Convention), believes that gender-based violence against women on the Internet or through technology is just a continuation of different forms of that violence.

⁸ <https://rtcg.me/hronika/202680/ranjena-novinarka-vijesti-olivera-lakic.html>
<https://dpncg.com/aktuelnosti/vijesti/619-pocinje-sudenje-za-ranjanje-i-planiranje-ubistva-olivera-lakic-motivi-u-istrazivanjima-o-svercu-duvana>

⁹ <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/crna-hronika/562347/policija-uz-novinarku-vijesti-24-casa>

¹⁰ <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/crna-hronika/755730/ani-raickovic-dodijeljena-policijska-zastita>

¹¹ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/grevio>

PROSECUTION AND PENAL POLICY

For a more efficient prosecution of attackers on journalists, the State Prosecutor's office applies the Instruction of the Supreme State Prosecutor.

In the instructions of the Mr. Marković, the state prosecutor's offices are obliged to urgently intensify work in cases formed in connection with attacks on journalists and media property, and the heads of state prosecutor's offices to give written binding instructions to the acting state prosecutors in cases where pre-trial proceedings/investigation take an unreasonably long time.

Executives are also obliged to request from acting state prosecutors a detailed explanation of the reasons for which the statute of limitations has expired and to inform the Supreme State Prosecutor about it.

At the same time, according to the instructions of the VDT, acting state prosecutors are obliged to direct the investigation and to actively cooperate with the claimant during the procedure and at the same time inform them of all the actions taken.

Based on the instructions of the Supreme State Prosecutor, the heads of state prosecutor's offices are obliged, after submitting the work report of the Commission for Monitoring the Actions of Competent Authorities in Investigations of Cases of Threats and Violence against Journalists, Murders of Journalists and Attacks on Media Property (the Commission), to submit comments on the Commission's recommendations to the Supreme State Prosecutor's Office within seven days.

The Supreme State Prosecutor appointed **Maja Janković**, a state prosecutor in the Basic Prosecutor's office in Podgorica (assigned to work in the Special State Prosecutor's Office), as the coordinator for monitoring the implementation of the Instructions and cooperation with the Commission for Monitoring Flaws in Investigations of Attacks on Journalists.

For the purposes of this study, she explained why numerous attacks and threats against journalists were processed as misdemeanors in the State Prosecutor's Office, what is the obstacle to proving the connection between threats and attacks and the work performed by journalists, and what is the attitude of the Prosecutor's Office towards the tightening of criminal sanctions (amendments to the Criminal Code are being prepared):

"In each individual case, depending on the circumstances, the state prosecutor classifies whether it is a criminal offense or a misdemeanor. In cases where the threats do not meet the legal elements of the criminal offense of threatening security or the perpetrator's actions do not contain the essential elements of a crime for which he is prosecuted ex officio, such cases are qualified by the state

prosecutors mainly as offenses against public peace and order, of course if the conditions prescribed by law are met.

Concerning proving that the motive of the attack is directly related to the performance of journalistic work, it should be pointed out that in such situations there is a lack of clear evidence of the perpetrator's intention to threaten journalists because of the content of their work, and not for private or other reasons.

The problem, first of all, lies in evidentiary nature, and not in the provisions of the Criminal Code of Montenegro. The fact is that there are norms that enable the criminal protection of journalists - criminal offenses in which a qualified form occurs when a criminal offense is committed against persons who perform tasks of public importance in connection with the performance of these tasks, among which are journalists. The tightening of penalties in itself would not solve the problem, but an efficient evidence collection system contributes to the effective prosecution of perpetrators for crimes committed against journalists and media property".

In the part of proving online threats and comments, which come from addresses outside the country, prosecutor Janković stated:

"The main obstacle is limited international legal assistance in cases where servers, profiles and IP addresses are outside of Montenegro. The countries from which the data is requested often do not provide it due to their legal restrictions or because they do not treat threats or other incriminating actions as criminal offenses in their legislation. The solution is to strengthen international cooperation through bilateral agreements and faster procedures through the INTERPOL network, which is, after all, provided for by the binding instructions from 2024."

CASE STUDY 1:

ATTACK ON JOURNALIST ALISA HAJDARPAŠIĆ

Introduction: On 14 April 2024, journalist **Alisa Hajdarpašić**, a correspondent for TV Vijesti from Bijelo Polje, was attacked while carrying out her professional duties as she was following the activities of the Special Police Department in the Orahovica, near Bijelo Polje, in connection with the arrest of **Zoran Lazović**, a former intelligence sector official. The attack occurred at the moment when Hajdarpašić attempted to record the event (police search of the house).

Description of the event: At the time of the attack, the journalist was at the scene. Although she identified herself, a group of present people, mostly Lazović's friends, objected to her presence, attempting to prevent her from filming the event. In their statement to the prosecutor, they claimed that the Lazović family is reputable, the journalist was on private property, and she did not have identification showing she was a journalist.

Zoran Lazović is a long-time former high-ranking official of the National Security Agency and the Police Directorate. He is under investigation by the Special State Prosecutor's Office, along with his son Petar Lazović, for abuse of office and alleged links with organized crime.

According to the journalist's statement, **Vladan Kovačević** (employed by the Municipal Police and chairman of the Board of Directors of the local Waterworks company) encouraged local residents to surround her, while **Sakib Čindrak**, president of the Bistrica Local Community, pushed her and tried to prevent her from recording with her phone. The incident ended with the journalist leaving the scene (getting into her car), upset and under stress, after being confronted by a group of people who disapproved of her presence and who insulted her, including on the basis of gender, calling her "a scumbag, a whore."

In her statement to the police, Hajdarpašić said:

"Several times I repeated that I am a journalist and that I have the right to record, to which he (Kovačević) kept insisting that I had not identified myself, even though on the back of my phone, which was turned towards him, there was a clearly visible press badge showing my photograph, the Vijesti logo, and, in lar-

ge capital letters, ALISA HAJDARPAŠIĆ, JOURNALIST. The video also shows that he was positioned in a way that he could have easily seen the badge...With his encouragement, a group of residents surrounded me. Kovačević is responsible for creating an intimidating atmosphere in which my physical and psychological integrity was violated and in which I could not perform my work. Also, besides him, in the meantime I recognized Aleksandar Žurić, whose identity I had not been completely sure of that same day. However, Žurić behaved more appropriately, trying to calm the situation, although he agreed that I had no right to be at the disputed location. At a similar distance, from which he could clearly see my press badge, was also Sakib Čindrak... I would also like to highlight that I had previously cooperated with Čindrak professionally, solely as a journalist..."

Actions of the police and prosecutor's office: The journalist reported the incident to the police, after which members of the Intervention Unit arrived at her call and drove her back to Bijelo Polje, since due to the stress she was not able to operate her vehicle. In a supplemental statement to the State Prosecutor's Office, and later in a complaint to the Ministry of Interior, she complained about the conduct of police inspector **Ćemal Ljuca**, who hurried her to give her statement, saying there was no need for her to go to the Emergency Medical Service, and also tried to convince her not to file a report. At that time, Ljuca was the inspector in charge of cases of attacks on journalists.

The Basic State Prosecutor's Office in Bijelo Polje opened an investigation on 27 April 2024 on suspicion of the criminal offense of coercion against a person performing a job of public importance (Article 165, paragraph 3 in connection with paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Criminal Code). The proceedings were initiated by the state prosecutor at the Basic State Prosecutor's Office in Bijelo Polje, Jelena Vučetić, shortly after the media published information about the incident.

After questioning the journalist, the reported individuals (Vladan Kovačević, Sakib Čindrak, Mikica Radović, and Aleksandar Žurić), four witnesses, and after reviewing the CD containing the recordings made by the journalist on her mobile phone, the state prosecutor dismissed the police report on 24 July 2024.

The decision also cites the statements of the individuals against whom the complaint was filed.

Vladan Kovačević stated that his family is very close with the Lazović family and that he and another person went to the search scene. He described the event by claiming that a woman arrived in a rental car "at an inappropriate speed," that he asked her in what capacity she was recording him but did not receive an explanation, that she was not wearing a vest marked "press," that she became hysterical when members of the Intervention Unit arrived, and that he heard her mentioning Čindrak and describing him.

Sakib Čindrak stated that he has a godparent relationship with the Lazović family, that a certain woman was recording with her phone, that she did not have a press badge or identification showing she was a journalist, and that she nearly grazed a minor with her vehicle while parking.

Mikica Radović also stated that he has a godparent relationship with the Lazović family, that the journalist almost hit a person with her vehicle, and that she did not have any identification.

From the prosecutor's case file, it can be concluded that the witnesses and the individuals under suspicion gave almost identical statements and descriptions of the event. They claimed that they did not know that Hajdarpašić was a journalist, but all of them noticed how fast she was driving, what car she was in, how she parked, and that she was allegedly calm when she entered the vehicle after the incident, but "hysterical" when the Intervention Unit arrived to pick her up. They also said that they treated her politely and respectfully because she is a lady, and that she was the one who was actually insulting them.

In the decision delivered to the journalist's lawyer, **Veselin Radulović**, who was engaged by the Association of professional Journalists within its legal aid program, the prosecutor's office stated that there are no elements of a criminal offense prosecutable ex officio. They also noted that, regarding this event, a request for the initiation of misdemeanor proceedings against Sakib Čindrak had been filed with the Misdemeanor Court in Bijelo Polje.

In response to the decision to dismiss the criminal complaint, attorney Radulović submitted an appeal to the Higher State Prosecutor's Office in Bijelo Polje, in which he stated, among other things:

"First, from the submitted criminal complaint, that is, from the victim's statement, it follows that the reported individuals, during the critical event, through their actions obstructed the victim in performing her duties as a journalist, and in a manner that endangered her safety, causing her to feel constantly threatened. Evidence supporting this was submitted to the prosecutor's office, yet was not evaluated in the impugned decision. The reported individual, Sakib Čindrak, told her that she could not record an event that all the media had been reporting on that day and in the days and months that followed, and at one point, he pushed the victim. After a series of the most degrading insults directed at the victim by several persons, the reported individual Vladan Kovačević approached the vehicle in which the victim was seated and physically prevented her from closing the car door, while Kovačević continuously created an atmosphere of fear and an environment in which the victim felt threatened, and physically obstructed her from performing her duties as a journalist.

The impugned decision is incomprehensible and unlawful because it does not

provide reasons explaining why every statement made by the suspects was accepted while, at the same time, the statements of the victim and the evidence she submitted and pointed to were ignored. A large part of the decision consists of quoting the statements of the suspects, who denied committing the criminal offense, as well as the statements of other questioned individuals who are related to or have a godparent relationship with the Lazović family. However, the decision disregards the fact that the victim indicated that, at the critical moment, members of the Special Police Department, who were conducting an official house search, were present nearby. It is therefore incomprehensible why the prosecutor's office did not even attempt to obtain necessary information from those officers, but instead took statements solely from the suspects and from individuals who are relatives or godparents of the Lazović family and who had come to show support to the Lazović family during the incident.

It is particularly unfounded and unacceptable that the reasoning of the impugned decision consists entirely of quoting the statements of the reported individuals and persons who are godparents and relatives of the Lazović family, from which it is arbitrarily concluded that no one directed any threat toward the victim. Such conclusions are unacceptable and may have an encouraging effect on the commission of the criminal offense for which the suspects are charged, because the suspects, or any other person, may physically obstruct a journalist or any other person performing duties of public importance, in a manner that endangers their safety, without bearing any responsibility solely because they did not express direct verbal threats. A threat to someone's life or bodily integrity may also be conveyed non-verbally, that is, through actions that endanger a person's safety. What is relevant from a criminal-law perspective is the seriousness of the threat, not whether it was expressed exclusively verbally.

The Higher State Prosecutor's Office in Bijelo Polje upheld the appeal on 7th September 2024, assessing that the decision of the Basic State Prosecutor's Office had been premature, and ordering it to reopen the investigation. During the supplementary investigation, 11 police officers were questioned, most of whom were not at the scene or were inside a building during the incident. A specialist in forensic medicine was engaged. After analyzing the documentation from the Emergency Medical Service and the Bijelo Polje Health Center, which the journalist visited the day after the incident, he concluded that she had experienced a psychological reaction to severe stress, which could be linked to a stressful event.

However, prosecutor **Jelena Vučetić** again issued the same decision, dismissing the complaint on the grounds that the actions of the reported individuals did not contain the elements of the alleged criminal offense, nor of any criminal offense prosecutable ex officio. The prosecutor stated that the suspects had not issued threats, nor used any form of force, nor prevented the complainant from performing

ming her journalistic duties... as she said she had managed to record 4–5 shots, which was not sufficient to constitute an obstruction of her work.

Misdemeanor proceedings: After the Basic State Prosecutor’s Office in Bijelo Polje determined that there were no grounds for criminal prosecution against several individuals, the Misdemeanor Court in Bijelo Polje initiated proceedings, but after two hearings dismissed the complaint for violation of the Law on Public Order and Peace against Sakib Čindrak. Judge of the Misdemeanor Court, **Andrijana Bulatović**, stated that it was a “legitimate reaction to filming on private property.” Regarding the statements “don’t film, don’t film” and the act of pushing away the journalist’s hand while she was recording with her phone, the judge assessed that these do not constitute a violation of the Law on Public Order and Peace, nor violent behavior or an attack on life and bodily integrity.

“The sentence ‘this is private property, please don’t film, Alisa’ and ‘don’t film, don’t film’ represents a legitimate reaction to unauthorized filming on private property and cannot be interpreted as an incriminated act within the meaning of the Law on Public Order and Peace. The mere act of touching the phone, as evident from the recording, cannot be qualified as an attack on the victim’s life and body, nor as a form of violent behavior,” the misdemeanor judgment states.

The Association informed the public about this court decision through a press release, which was also published by the local Bijelo Polje news portal. One person commented under the article that the journalist should be “whipped as hard as possible” if she does not do her job properly, for which the police filed a report for endangering safety. The on-duty prosecutor at the Basic State Prosecutor’s Office in Bijelo Polje ordered up to 72 hours of detention for **Radojko Filipović** from that town.

SLAPP lawsuit and pressure on the journalist: While the Basic State Prosecutor’s Office in Bijelo Polje was conducting a criminal investigation into the incident, the suspects filed a SLAPP lawsuit against the journalist and TV Vijesti on 30th July 2024, in an attempt to pressure her into withdrawing her complaint. A civil lawsuit for non-pecuniary damages was filed by five members of the Lazović family. In it, they claim that the journalist caused them a “disturbance of psychological balance” because, as they stated, theirs is a respectable family, which includes doctors and professors. They requested compensation in the amount of 100 euros. Without going into the details of the event, they allege that she told them: “The time of you Lazovićs is over, you criminals and killers, all of you Lazovićs are criminals and killers,” as well as that she said she was a journalist of TV Vijesti and that they could not do anything to her. The court proceedings were returned to the beginning due to a change of judge at the Basic Court in Bijelo Polje. TV Vijesti and the journalist are represented by attorney **Siniša Gazivoda**.

CASE STUDY 2:

THE CASE OF JOURNALIST DRAGANA ŠĆEPANOVIĆ

Introduction: **Dragana Šćepanović**, a correspondent for the daily newspaper Vijesti and the weekly Monitor from Kolašin, has been targeted for more than four years by the portal Aktuelno, which has published 43 negatively toned articles about her (based on the number of tags on the portal under her name, Dragana Šćepanović).

The publications are mainly prompted by her reports or articles from Kolašin published in the newspaper and on the Vijesti portal. These publications do not adhere to professional journalistic standards; instead, they contain a series of accusations, some of which concern the journalist’s mental health. She is described as part of a “media gang,” accused of being opposed to the development of the northern region of the country, linked to “extorting investors,” and similar claims. The articles are signed with false initials, which the Police Administration confirmed while acting on the journalist’s complaint.

The founder of the portal¹² is A.D. Ski Resort Kolašin 1450, owned by **Zoran Bećirović**. On 24 April 2025, Bećirović was convicted at first instance and sentenced to one year in prison for the attack on Pobjeda journalist Ana Raičković. He is known as a “controversial businessman” – a person suspected of having gained wealth through close ties with certain high-ranking officials of the former government. In Kolašin, in addition to the ski resort, he owns other businesses, as well as offshore companies registered in Cyprus.

Description of the incident: Dragana Šćepanović had been subjected to months of belittling and accusations on the tabloid-style portal, and when, in February 2023, the portal announced a media campaign against her accompanied by her photograph, she “realized she could no longer ignore it”. On the homepage of the portal, next to her photograph, the following was published: “Dragana Šćepanović, correspondent of the Second-Serbia regime tabloid Vijesti from Kolašin, has for years been doing everything she can to sabotage the development of this municipality in the north, which the portal Aktuelno will write about in upcoming articles.”

12 <https://montenegro.mom-gmr.org/cg/mediji/detail/outlet/portal-aktuelno/>

She contacted the Association, which on 1 March 2023 sent letters to the Ministry of Culture and Media, the Supreme State Prosecutor's Office, the Basic Prosecutor's Offices in Podgorica and Kolašin, and the the Police Administration, informing them of the attempt to intimidate and discredit the journalist in order to prevent her from reporting from Kolašin. The letter included links to at least ten articles encouraging hostility toward Šćepanović.

Action by the police and the prosecutor's office: Following the Association's letter, the Ministry did not take any action, while the Basic State Prosecutor's Office in Podgorica determined on 13 June that there were no grounds to initiate criminal proceedings against the portal Aktuelno. The Podgorica office had territorial jurisdiction because the portal is registered in Podgorica.

State prosecutor **Nikola Boričić** informed attorney **Maja Živković**, who represents the journalist within Association's legal assistance program, of this decision in June 2023. In the decision to dismiss the complaint, he stated that the editor-in-chief of Aktuelno, **Balša Knežević**, had been questioned and said that "he and his journalists have no intention of endangering anyone's safety, including that of Šćepanović."

"Given that an inspection of the texts showed that they do not contain threats to the personal or property safety of Dragana Šćepanović, which she herself has not disputed, but rather contain offensive qualifications regarding her personality and professional orientation, as well as those of the media outlet in which she works, which do not constitute a criminal offense but may potentially represent grounds for a civil lawsuit for damages, I find that there are no grounds for undertaking criminal prosecution against any person for any offense prosecuted ex officio", the prosecutor concluded. During the inquiry, he did not even interview the journalist, relying instead on her earlier statement.

At the Kolašin Security Department of the Police Administration, the police had previously taken a statement from the journalist, and at that time she said she did not feel endangered. In the meantime, the portal launched a petition against her reporting from Kolašin, claiming that she was "driving away investors," and several fellow citizens suggested to her that she should stop writing about sensitive topics. The journalist interpreted this as a threat to her safety, and on 28 September 2023 she returned to the Kolašin police to give another statement, in which she said she "felt great fear, insecurity, and anxiety."

"I consider myself multiply endangered - now, after years of psychological torment, also physically. In addition to everything I have stated, I live in an atmosphere where several fellow citizens each day, supposedly well-intentionedly, warn me that I should stop covering certain topics, that I should not walk alone after dark, that I should be careful... The atmosphere of fear and insecurity is heightened by

the fact that in some of the texts on the portal I recognize fragments of private conversations with acquaintances in cafés or on the street", the journalist said, among other things, in her statement to the Kolašin Security Department police.

The Basic State Prosecutor in Kolašin, **Maja Šćepanović**, subsequently initiated proceedings against editor-in-chief **Balša Knežević** for the criminal offense of endangering safety under Article 168, paragraph 4 of the Criminal Code of Montenegro. However, on 17 December 2023, she issued a decision identical to that of her colleague in Podgorica.

In the decision dismissing the complaint, she stated that "the actions of the reported person do not contain the essential elements of the criminal offense he is being reported for, nor of any other criminal offense prosecuted ex officio." During the inquiry (pre-investigation phase), as noted in the decision, the prosecutor interviewed the journalist and Knežević, examined the texts, and instructed the police to "identify the creator" of those articles.

The journalist explained that her problems began when she started writing about the business operations of Zoran Bećirović, and that the attack on her integrity intensified in 2021, when the portal Aktuelno responded to each of her articles in Vijesti with an "unidentified journalistic form." She was labelled a "racketeer", among other things, and from March 2023 the attacks escalated. She stated that this affected her journalistic investigations because interviewees refused to speak to her out of fear that they would suffer the same treatment on that portal Aktuelno. She said she feels significant fear and vulnerability and receives daily warnings from fellow citizens advising her not to continue writing and not to walk alone.

Balša Knežević stated that they had nothing to do with the petition, that they were working to "defend the journalistic profession" and for the benefit of the people of Kolašin. He refused to reveal who authored the articles signed with initials.

The police attempted to identify the authors of the articles through an "analysis of source codes", but were unsuccessful because, as stated, "they do not contain any data related to the creators of the texts signed with those initials". The only thing that could be established is that one of the authors is **Nebojša Redžić**, who signed the article "Racketeers Ride Again". Meanwhile, Redžić was convicted¹³ of domestic violence.

The state prosecutor referred the journalist to civil court, stating that she may pursue her specific rights there under the Criminal Code, as well as under the Media Law, specifically regarding the liability of the founder and editor-in-chief

¹³ <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/crna-hronika/734773/uhapsen-novinar-nebojsa-redzic-terete-ga-za-nasilje-nad-suprugom>

for published media content.

Private lawsuit: The journalist then filed a lawsuit before the Basic Court in Podgorica, through attorney **Maja Živković**, who had been engaged by DPNCG within its legal support program. The suit was filed against the portal Aktuelno and its founder, A.D (joint-stock company) Ski Resort Kolašin 1450, seeking compensation for non-pecuniary damages.

The Basic Court in Podgorica upheld the lawsuit, stating that the journalist, as a public figure, had been insulted in an extremely offensive manner and that the use of inappropriate language was not justified by any public interest nor could it have any legitimate general significance.

The judgment was issued by Judge **Ivana Žujović**. She awarded compensation for non-pecuniary damage due to the mental anguish caused by the violation of the journalist's personal rights and ordered the portal to remove 10 articles that were the subject of the lawsuit. The portal is obligated to pay the awarded damages of €2,000 within 15 days of the judgment becoming final. The judgment is not yet final.

Misdemeanor complaint due to comments: Parallel to the unprofessional articles, the portal also published offensive comments about the journalist, most of which were gender-based and aimed at discrediting her as a woman.

The Basic State Prosecutor's Office in Kolašin initiated proceedings only after the portal's owner, Zoran Bećirović, physically assaulted and insulted Pobjeda journalist Ana Raičković, an incident that shocked the public and further alarmed the Vijesti correspondent.

At the verbal request of the prosecutor's office, on 11 November 2024, she electronically submitted new texts and inappropriate comments directed at her. Following the preliminary inquiry, on 18 June 2025 the prosecutor's office submitted a request to the Misdemeanor Department in Kolašin to initiate misdemeanor proceedings against the founder of the portal, under Article 72 paragraph 1 item 10 in connection with Article 44 paragraph 5 of the Media Act.

Prosecutor Maja Šćepanović stated that the texts did not contain elements of a criminal offense, but that the journalist, if she believed otherwise, could file a criminal complaint against an identifiable person. In the prosecutor's reasoning, it was noted that after the Police Directorate determined the IP addresses from which the offensive comments were posted, they sought assistance from the United States via international legal cooperation. The IP addresses belong to a company based in the U.S, so the prosecutor's office requested user information through mutual legal assistance. However, the request was denied. In the response from the U.S. Department of Justice, provided to the Prosecutor's Office, it was stated that freedom of speech is protected by the First Amendment of the U.S.

Constitution, including controversial and offensive speech.

Since the prosecutor's office was unable to identify the authors of the comments, it relied on the Media Act, which obliges the founder of a media outlet to remove comments that constitute unlawful content or violate legally protected rights such as dignity and reputation.

The misdemeanor proceedings on this basis are ongoing.

Second lawsuit: With the support of the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, Dragana Šćepanović filed a new lawsuit before the Basic Court in Kolašin against the founder of the portal Aktuelno for violation of her personal rights - specifically, the right to psychological (emotional) integrity, the right to honor, reputation, and dignity.

The journalist is represented by attorney Veselin Radulović, who, in addition to seeking compensation for non-pecuniary damages, also requested the removal of the articles that violate her rights and grossly offend her dignity.

"The European Court of Human Rights has held in its case law that there is no violation of Article 10 of the Convention when freedom of expression is restricted in cases involving serious allegations and excessive accusations made in the absence of a sufficient factual basis (Prager and Oberschlick v. Austria, 26 April 1995, Series A no. 313). In that case, the Court concluded that very harsh criticism directed at a person's personal and professional integrity, which was neither made in good faith nor in accordance with journalistic ethics, does not enjoy protection under Article 10 of the Convention", the lawyer stated, among other things, in the lawsuit.

The lawsuit was filed on 12 November 2025 before the Basic Court in Kolašin.

CASE STUDY 3:

THE CASE OF JOURNALIST ANA RAIČKOVIĆ

Introduction: Journalist and editor of the “crime chronicle” section at the newspaper Pobjeda, **Ana Raičković**, was attacked by controversial businessman **Zoran Čoćo Bećirović** and his bodyguard, former Ministry of Interior employee **Mladen Mijatović**, on November 10, 2024, while she was buying food in a restaurant in Podgorica. Also present were Bećirović’s son **Luka** and another bodyguard, **Ljubiša Dukić**. After a series of verbal insults, mostly gender-based, Bećirović and Mijatović assaulted her physically. The incident has been recorded as one of the more brutal attacks on a journalist in recent years.

On April 24, 2025, the Basic Court in Podgorica issued a first-instance verdict sentencing: **Zoran Bećirović** to one year in prison, **Luka Bećirović** to a suspended sentence of seven months, **Mladen Mijatović** to 10 months in prison, while **Ljubiša Dukić** was acquitted. Following a security assessment, police protection was assigned to the journalist. Mijatović and Bećirović have already served their sentences.

Description of the Incident: The incident occurred when the journalist approached the counter to order food. It began after the group recognized her from TV E, where she appeared in the investigative show “Shadows”, which focuses on organized crime. “Is this that journalist who works at the stinking TV E?” - was the first comment, followed by a series of gender-based insults. When she told them there was no need to threaten or insult her and that she would call the police and record them with her phone, they continued verbally attacking her. While she waited for the police, whom she had already notified about the attack, which escalated further once her son and fiancé arrived, Mijatović and Bećirović physically assaulted her. Mijatović grabbed her by the neck and choked her. Bećirović pulled her by the hair, continuously insulting her as a woman. This occurred after she got into her car, which Luka Bećirović kicked and struck several times. During her testimony before the Court, Ana Raičković stated that Bećirović repeatedly encouraged Mijatović to attack her physically. Ljubiša Dukić attempted to calm the situation, and for that reason, at the request of the journalist’s lawyer, he was acquitted in court.

Actions of the Prosecution and the Court: The Basic State Prosecutor’s Office in Podgorica in an indictment proposal, charged Bećirović, Mijatović, and Dukić with the criminal offense of violent behavior under Article 399 of the Criminal Code. That article states: “Whoever, by gross insulting or mistreating another person, using violence against another, provoking a fight, or by rude or reckless conduct endangers the peace of citizens or disturbs public order and peace, if the act is committed by a group, or if a person suffers minor bodily injury, or if citizens are severely humiliated, shall be punished by imprisonment from six months to five years.”

The indictment was filed on January 13, 2025, and the competent prosecutor, **Romina Vlahović**, requested one and a half years of imprisonment for both Bećirović and Mijatović, and two and a half years for Dukić.

Judge **Ilija Radulović** of the Basic Court delivered the verdict on April 24, 2025, after an expedited trial lasting a little over three months. According to the written judgment, when determining the sentence, the judge considered as an aggravating circumstance the fact that the violent behavior had been committed with intent, because Mijatović and Bećirović “were aware of their actions.” He also emphasized that the sentence was necessary to prevent them from repeating such conduct, to express “societal condemnation of the criminal offense and the obligation to respect the law,” and to “strengthen morals and encourage the development of social responsibility.”

Circumstances: During the incident, police inspector **Srđan Korać**, whose portfolio includes cases involving attacks on journalists, was also present in the restaurant. In his testimony before the Court, he stated that he did not see what happened because he was in the restroom at the time. However, he told the officers who arrived on the scene to secure the camera footage, saying that “everything would be clear from the recordings.”

Misuse of Medical Data: In addition to the indictment, the Basic State Prosecutor’s Office in Podgorica opened six more cases related to the incident involving journalist Ana Raičković. Most of them stem from her criminal complaints and concern attempts at indirect intimidation and discreditation through comments on the portal Aktuelno. However, in the official records of the Supreme State Prosecutor’s Office, only two cases are listed (the physical assault and the online comments).

One case was opened ex officio. It concerns the misuse of the journalist’s personal medical data, after the defense of the accused submitted to the judge Ilija Radulović, during the hearing on March 28, 2025, a medical specialist’s report from the Clinical Center of Montenegro and requested that it be admitted into evidence. Attorney **Danilo Mićović** proposed that the specialist’s report, whose

name he read aloud, be introduced as evidence, after which he commented on the journalist's symptoms and disclosed her medical diagnosis. The Court rejected the defense lawyer's proposal.

Following strong backlash in part of the public, the Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation in early April 2025, given that medical data are protected under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Article 27 of the Law on Patients' Rights, and the Law on Personal Data Protection. Meanwhile, the Protector of Patient's Rights at the Clinical Center, acting upon an initiative from the Media Union, determined that the "report in question was printed through the Heliant information system from the account of **Dr Marina Đaletić** on 29 May 2024, who conducted the medical examination, and again from the account of **Dr Veselinka Đurišić** on 26 March 2025."

According to media reports, he noted that the Clinical Center requested clarification from the director of the Institute for Children's Diseases, where Dr Đurišić is employed, regarding why the report had been printed from her computer.

"He stated that Dr Đurišić was on medical leave at the time the report was printed, and remains on leave. She also informed the director that she had not authorized anyone to use her login credentials in her absence," the media reported.

The Clinical Center also informed the Ombudsman that it is not possible to determine the IP address from which a report is printed through the system, meaning that it cannot be established who actually printed the document. The Clinical Center forwarded all collected information to the Police Directorate for further action. As of the time this report was written, the Podgorica Prosecutor's Office had not completed its investigation in this matter, which has been ongoing for more than seven months.

Due to unethical conduct by the defense attorneys, DPNCG filed a complaint on April 10, 2025 with the Bar Association of Montenegro, requesting that it determine whether the Code of Professional Ethics was violated by attorneys **Danilo Mićović** and **Marta Šćepanović**.

The complaint, available on the Bar Association's website, states that: "An attorney is obliged to perform the profession conscientiously, diligently, decisively and in a timely manner, with honesty toward the client, with full dedication to the entrusted case, and by using all of his knowledge and abilities and all legally permitted and justified means." Also states: "An attorney may use only lawful and honorable means. An attorney must not participate in or assist in the unlawful acquisition of rights..."

The Bar Association never responded to the complaint. Its president is, notably, attorney Danilo Mićović.

CASE STUDY 4:

THE "GORNJE ZAOSTRO" CASE

Introduction: On August 8, 2025, in the village of Gornje Zaostro near Berane, photojournalists **Stevo Vasiljević** (Pobjeda) and **Boris Pejović** (Vijesti) were attacked and almost lynched while attempting to photograph the removal of a monument to Chetnik commander Pavle Đurišić, a World War II war criminal. The monument had been illegally installed at the site where gatherings of supporters of the Chetnik movement are traditionally held. Competent authorities within the intelligence sector failed to take measures to prevent incidents, despite the fact that tensions were entirely foreseeable after the Ministry of Culture ordered the monument's removal, and despite the obligation to recognize that this was a high-risk event.

Description of the Incident: Vasiljević, Pejović, and journalist **Balša Rudović** were on assignment on August 8, covering and photographing the installation of the Đurišić monument. In the report of the Berane Security Department (Police Administration), based on information collected from citizen (Vasiljević), it is stated that upon arriving in Gornje Zaostro in the morning, they spoke with the organizer (whose name he did not know), who directed them to a member of the clergy. According to the same source, that person told them that if he consented and gave them his blessing to report from the event, they would have no problems.

That is exactly what happened: the photojournalist approached the clergyman and explained why they were there, adding, as he told police, that the clergyman was polite at that moment. After receiving the approval of both the clergy member and the organizer, he and Boris Pejović photographed the unveiling of the monument, sent reports and photos to their newsrooms, and then left for a break. When they returned around 2 p.m., they saw that the removal of the monument had already begun. As soon as they stepped out of the car and approached the site, a group of visibly intoxicated people, aged roughly 13 to 70, charged toward them, began pulling at them and making threats.

Vasiljević stated that about 15 people physically attacked him, "pulling my clothes and hair, slapping me on the head and body, ripping off and taking my equipment."

One person from the crowd tried to protect him and led him into a tent, where the rushing and threats continued. During that time, Vasiljević was threatened with a knife, someone smashed one of his two cameras with a bottle and swung the bottle in an attempt to hit him in the head, an attack prevented only because the same person who rescued him earlier intervened. His equipment was seized.

The man who saved him from lynching, whom he later learned from the police is named **Miodrag Radnić**, took him to the same clergyman who had given him permission to photograph that morning. Vasiljević asked the clergyman to calm the situation, but he “did not want to take part in that.” As they were leaving, they passed a man later identified as **Danko Femić**, who told Vasiljević that the camera memory cards would be found “with the bishop at the Đurđevi Stupovi Monastery.”

Vasiljević and Vijesti photojournalist Boris Pejović were separated in the chaos. As they later told police, neither of them knew what was happening to the other or could see him. Pejović stated that he was threatened, that if “anything appears in Vijesti, they would kill him with their bare hands”, and that he was also ordered to delete his photographs. Media outlets reported that two plainclothes police officers watched the attack on the journalists without intervening. In the police report, it is noted that when asked by an officer whether he had noticed any police present during the incident, Vasiljević replied that he had not.

According to his statement, **Milić Ralević** also helped him and his colleagues from Vijesti- he brought Pejović’s car, which had been parked nearby, allowing them to leave the scene. They headed toward Kolašin, when the police chief from Berane called them and asked them to return to give statements.

Actions of the Police and Prosecutor’s Office: The three journalists were first questioned at the Berane Security Department, and later before State Prosecutor **Amra Sujković** at the Berane Basic Prosecutor’s Office, who instructed the police to send them for medical examinations and then provide her with the medical documentation.

Because of the attack on Pejović and Vasiljević, the Berane Prosecutor’s Office initiated proceedings, which so far have resulted in two criminal charges and misdemeanor charges against five individuals.

According to the Ministry of Interior, police identified the person who smashed the glass on the photographer’s camera, and he will be prosecuted before the Berane Prosecutor’s Office.

Criminal Proceedings: On August 15, 2025, the Basic Court in Berane received an indictment proposal from the Berane Basic State Prosecutor’s Office (case no. Kt.br. 201/25), charging **Danko Femić**, from Podgorica, with two counts of the criminal offense of coercion under Article 165, paragraph 3 in connection with

paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Criminal Code of Montenegro, committed to the detriment of photojournalists Stevo Vasiljević and Boris Pejović, the Court informed us. The criminal case was registered under number K.br. 145/25 and assigned to Judge **Tomo Zečević**.

Femić was placed in pre-trial detention on August 11, which was lifted on October 14, 2025. The Basic Court imposed a supervision measure, which includes: “A prohibition on approaching or meeting with the injured parties, Pejović Boris and Vasiljević Stevo, at a distance of no less than 100 meters. These measures shall last as long as necessary, but no longer than until the judgment becomes final, with the need for their continuation to be reviewed every two months. If the accused violates these measures, pre-trial detention may be ordered.”

The trial began on October 13, 2025, and is ongoing.

On October 29, 2025, the Berane Prosecutor’s Office filed another indictment proposal with the Basic Court in Berane against defendants **N.R.** and **M.R.**, also for the criminal offense of coercion, committed to the detriment of Vijesti photojournalist Boris Pejović.

Misdemeanor Proceedings: The Berane Misdemeanor Department opened a case on August 13, 2025, based on a request from the Berane Prosecutor’s Office to initiate misdemeanor proceedings against five individuals for threats, physical assault, and rude or insulting behavior committed against the photojournalist. The proceedings are ongoing.

In another case opened on August 9, 2025, in which journalist Stevo Vasiljević is the injured party, the request to initiate proceedings was dismissed.

Security Assessment: According to information from the Ministry of Interior, one person (Stevo Vasiljević) has been assigned operational preventive protection. This measure applies to his presence in Berane, as he previously requested a security assessment from the Police Directorate due to fear of another attack. When he arrived in Berane to attend the trial of Danko Femić, two police inspectors awaited him at the town entrance and accompanied him to the courthouse.

CONCLUSIONS

- The State Prosecutor's Office and the Police Directorate show readiness to process cases of attacks on journalists that occurred in 2024-2025.
- Attacks and threats against journalists still represent a major challenge for investigative and judicial authorities, and the intensification of online threats is a particular challenge for prosecution.
- In situations where online threats and harassment arrive from addresses whose providers are outside Montenegro, the police and the prosecution find it difficult to secure evidence due to the legislation of those countries, which often represents an obstacle to their delivery.
- The provisions of the Criminal Code on harsher penalties for crimes against persons who do work of public importance in the field of information are not adequately applied, among other things, because some prosecutors and judges do not understand the characteristics and nature of journalistic work or are not acquainted with the practice of the European Court of Human Rights in the area of freedom of expression.
- Almost two-thirds of cases of attacks on women journalists were prosecuted on the basis of violations of the Law on Public Peace and Order. Misdemeanor courts lead lengthy proceedings and impose low penalties.
- State prosecutors also file misdemeanor charges for attacks on journalists.
- Procedures for prosecuting attacks on journalists are dissuasive, because victims of attacks give identical statements to the police and then to the state prosecutor's office. On these occasions, they are very often additionally victimized and deprived of legal support.
- Violence against women journalists in the digital sphere narrows the space for their participation in the public debate and makes the otherwise stressful work in the media even more difficult by reducing resistance to challenges.
- Judicial authorities do not keep special records on gender-based violence against women journalists.
- Courts are slow in making final decisions.
- Impunity for attacks, especially in local areas, contributes to their recurrence in the same or different form.
- Some police inspectors who are contact persons or act in cases of violence against journalists are not sensitized in terms of the protection of human rights and devictimization.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Publication of security assessments on threats to journalists and media houses.
- Constant legal and psychological support for journalists.
- A campaign to raise awareness about the role of journalists and the media, as well as the way for citizens to exercise their rights in the media (if they feel that they have been harmed).
- Continuation of education of state prosecutors and judges on the standards of the European Court of Human Rights in the freedom of expression area.
- Reporting to the public by the State Prosecutor's Office about failures in investigations of threats and attacks on journalists. Prosecution of those responsible for omissions, if there are sufficient elements for this.
- Amendments to the Law on Court Experts in order to introduce an expert in the media profession, who has experience and knowledge that would help in investigations and judgments in cases concerning journalistic work and the work of the media.
- Initiation of interstate agreements in order to create conditions for providing information about persons who threaten from Internet addresses whose providers are outside Montenegro.
- Amendments to the criminal legislation towards more efficient processing of gender-based violence against women journalists inclining to sexist-based violence (application of the Istanbul Convention).
- Imposing maximum misdemeanor penalties in cases involving attacks on journalists in connection with the work they perform.
- Simplification of procedures for processing attacks on journalists and creation of material conditions for work in the police and prosecutor's office in order to avoid additional victimization.
- Establishing operational procedures in the police for cases of attacks on journalists.
- Establishing a clear mechanism for effective reporting of attacks.
- Sensitization and education of police officers who are the contact persons for reports of attacks on journalists.
- Keeping special records of the Prosecutor's Office, the Judicial Council and the Police Directorate on gender-based violence against female journalists.
- Improving the efficiency of the judiciary towards making legally binding decisions in cases of attacks on journalists.

