

2024 Activity Report of the Permanent Working Group for Safety of Journalists

- Permanent Working Group for Safety of
Journalists -

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The views herein expressed are solely those of the author and contributors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the OSCE Mission to Serbia.

I. Executive summary

- The 2024 Annual Report on the Activities of Permanent Working Group for Safety of Journalists (PWG) presents the implementation of numerous activities and projects in 2024 aimed at improving journalists' safety in Serbia. This body was established in 2017 by the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office (SPPO), the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia (MoI) and all relevant journalists' and media associations: Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS), Journalists' Association of Serbia (UNS), Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV), Association of Media Outlets (AM), Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM) and Association of Online Media (AOM).
- The PWG held four plenary sessions and its representatives visited nine cities (Jagodina, Leskovac, Novi Sad, Prijepolje, Šabac, Sremska Mitrovica, Vranje, Zaječar and Zrenjanin) and met with over 300 local stakeholders, thereby contributing to improved dialogue and strengthening of mutual, often fragile, trust.
- There were 62 case files on attacks on journalists recorded in the prosecution's database in 2024; this is a decrease of 18.42% compared to 2023, when 76 cases were formed.
- The number of victims in all the cases was 49 in 2024, compared to 57 in 2023. The proportion of female victims, however, increased from 33% in 2023 to 55% in 2024.
- With regard to attacks in the digital environment, during 2024 nine injured parties were male (32.14%) and 19 were female (67.86%).
- The first-instance or final decision was rendered in 17 cases formed in 2024, which represented 27.42% of the total number.
- There was one conviction in the cases filed in 2024, which is a significant decrease compared to 2023, when there were 12 convictions.
- From the onset of official record-keeping by the prosecutor's office in 2016, through the end of 2024, a total of 587 cases were filed across all prosecutors' offices in the Republic of Serbia based on charges related to offences against journalist. According to the statistical data of the prosecutor's office for this period, a total of 350 cases, or 59.63%, were disposed.
- The PWG must continue fulfilling its important mandate by finding new ways to combat impunity for assaults on journalists, intensifying its efforts, including crime prevention, and, importantly, securing additional support from all relevant stakeholders, including the highest political authorities.

II. Introduction

The PWG continued with the implementation of numerous activities and projects in 2024 aimed at improving journalists' safety in Serbia.

This body was established in 2017 by the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office (SPPO), the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia (MoI) and all relevant journalists' and media associations: Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS), Journalists' Association of Serbia (UNS), Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV), Association of Media Outlets, Association of Independent Electronic Media and Association of Online Media).

Since its establishment, the PWG has also been supported by the OSCE Mission to Serbia. The PWG, in cooperation with its members, has helped implement over 50 activities under the Agreement on Cooperation and Measures to Improve the Safety of Journalists (2016) and three Action Plans (2018-2019, 2021-2022, and 2023-2025).

The PWG had reason to be satisfied with the results achieved in 2024, though there were certainly moments that could be seen as missed opportunities. One of the most significant activities in 2024 were the visits to local communities, where local prosecutors, police officers, and journalists discussed the security situation, current and unresolved cases, opportunities for improving co-operation, and other related topics. In 2024, PWG visited nine cities (Jagodina, Leskovac, Novi Sad, Prijepolje, Šabac, Sremska Mitrovica, Vranje, Zaječar and Zrenjanin) and met with over 300 local stakeholders, thereby contributing to improved dialogue and strengthening of mutual, often fragile, trust.

The effects of the previous long-term involvement of the PWG were a smaller number of cases of endangerment of journalists' safety, with 62 cases being filed in public prosecutor's offices. This is a step forward compared to the previous years, with 76 cases in 2023 and 87 in 2022.

However, while the number of cases filed in 2024 decreased, so too did the number of convictions. There was only one conviction for assault against journalists in 2024, a significant decrease compared to 2023 when there were 12 convictions. Additionally, in two cases, the courts ruled that those suspected of threatening journalists could defend themselves while under house arrest with an ankle monitor. In both instances, these individuals escaped and continue to pose a threat to the journalists they had threatened. Finally, out of 17 resolved cases from 2024, the prosecution rejected criminal charges in 14 of them, determining that there was no basis for initiating criminal proceedings. Some forms of pressure or harassment against journalists continue to be dismissed as they do not constitute a crime although they, according to the media community, create an environment that makes it less safe for journalists to operate.

To improve the safety of journalists, it is essential that every case of endangering journalists' safety be both properly investigated and also processed effectively under the law. Media freedom is a shared responsibility of all the relevant parties to the PWG.

This shared responsibility is also outlined in the 2018 OSCE Ministerial Council Decision, in which all 57 participating States (pS), including Serbia, committed to taking effective measures to end impunity for crimes against journalists. Holding people accountable is a key element in preventing future assaults, as is ensuring that law enforcement authorities conduct swift, effective and impartial investigations into acts of violence and threats against journalists in order to bring those responsible to justice.

The PWG's efforts to improve the safety of journalists continue to be recognized both locally and internationally. The latest European Commission Serbia Report (2024) stated that the PWG continued to react quickly in several cases of assaults and threats against journalists. The report also stated that threats, intimidation, hate speech, and violence against journalists — including female journalists — persist, including at the local level. It noted additionally that statements by senior officials regarding investigative journalists have a chilling effect on freedom of expression.

The PWG is the only platform that facilitates dialogue between representatives of the authorities and the media community regarding journalists' safety. Through their previous involvement in this body, all of its members have set an example of how dialogue is conducted in democratic societies. Dialogue does not mean reaching agreement on every single issue, but serves to build trust and as a method for overcoming problems and obstacles. Trust is a key element in the success of any effort to improve media freedom and the safety of journalists. However, trust requires hard work and commitment from all parties.

Given that the safety of journalists is one of the highest values in any democratic society, and that journalists across the country constantly face serious challenges and security risks, the PWG must continue to uphold its vital mandate. It must continue striving to find new, creative ways to combat impunity for assaults against journalists, to intensify its efforts, including crime prevention, and, importantly, to secure additional support from all relevant stakeholders, including the highest political authorities. As before, the OSCE Mission to Serbia will continue to be an honest, accountable, objective and reliable partner to the PWG in its exceptionally important work and in the implementation of the Action Plan, which is valid through 2025.

III. Data on cases of assaults against journalists in 2024

In 2024, based on filed criminal charges or reports, **62 cases were opened** in Serbia's public prosecutor's offices, **related to acts against journalists**. Namely, eight in January, two in February, 11 in March, six in April, one in May, eight in June, six in July, one in August, two in September, three in October, eight in November, and six in December.

The number of cases in 2024 is lower than in 2023, when 76 cases were opened. This is a decrease of 18.42%.

In cases opened in 2024, the following actions were taken:

- in one case, a guilty verdict was pronounced;
- in one case, the perpetrator was sanctioned by imposing the obligation prescribed by the Criminal Procedure Code regarding delayed criminal prosecution (principle of opportunity). The obligations were fulfilled in full;
- in one case, the court rejected the indictment proposal of the prosecution;
- in three cases, a decision was rendered to dismiss the criminal charges;
- in 11 cases, an official note was rendered that there is no basis for initiating criminal proceedings;
- in three cases, proceedings are pending before the court based on the indictment of the public prosecutor;
- in three cases, the evidence gathering is underway;
- in 34 cases, a request was submitted to police to collect necessary information;
- in five cases, potential perpetrators were not identified in the pre-investigation procedure conducted by the prosecution and police.,.

The first-instance or final decision was rendered in 17 cases, which represents 27.42% of the total number of cases.

In the cases filed in 2024, there was only one conviction, which is a significant decrease compared to 2023, with 12 convictions. It should be noted that in 2024, charges were pressed against unknown perpetrators in 37 cases - 33 of which were handled by the Special Public Prosecutor's Office for Cybercrime, and four by general jurisdiction prosecutors' offices. In these cases, progress of criminal proceedings depended on the discovery of the perpetrator's identity by the police (the perpetrators were identified in five cases), which complicated the investigation and the filing of indictments.

However, it should be noted that in 2024, the courts issued nine convictions against 12 individuals in cases filed during the previous reporting period, starting from 2016. The following sentences were imposed:

- two individuals were sentenced to four years of imprisonment and fined RSD 100,000 each;

- an individual was sentenced to three years of imprisonment and fined RSD 100,000;
- an individual was sentenced to two years and six months of imprisonment;
- an individual was sentenced to two years of imprisonment and a restraining order;
- an individual was sentenced to six months of imprisonment;
- three individuals were sentenced to six months of suspended prison, which will not be enforced if the defendants do not commit a new criminal offence within two years;
- one individual was sentenced to six months of suspended prison, which will not be enforced if the defendant does not commit a new criminal offence within one year, and a restraining order;
- one individual was sentenced to four months of suspended prison, which will not be enforced if the defendant does not commit a new criminal offence within two years; and
- one individual was remanded for mandatory psychiatric treatment in a health institution.

When it comes to the structure of reported criminal offences against the safety of journalists, the most frequently reported this year were threats, under Article 138 on Endangerment of Safety, of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia (48 cases). Additionally, charges were filed for violent behaviour under Article 344 of the Criminal Code (two cases), abuse and torture under Article 137 of the Criminal Code (one case), as well as for physical assaults (three cases), interference with filming (three cases), and insults and harassment (five cases).

Furthermore, out of the total number of filed cases, 42 were handled by the Special Public Prosecutor's Office for Cybercrime, accounting for 67.74% of all cases. Eight cases were filed in other general jurisdiction prosecutor's offices under the Appellate Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade, ten cases were filed under the Appellate Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad, and two cases under the Appellate Public Prosecutor's Office in Niš. There were no filed cases related to acts against the safety of journalists in the prosecutor's offices under the Appellate Public Prosecutor's Office in Kragujevac.

The number of cases filed with the Special Public Prosecutor's Office for Cybercrime indicates that the majority of charges for assaults against media workers are still related to illegal behaviour on the internet, primarily on social networks. Furthermore, a comparative analysis of the data showed a slight increase in the number of cases related to online threats in 2024, with 42 cases filed, compared to 38 cases in 2023 in the same prosecutor's office.

It is important to note that, starting in 2024, data on the gender and number of injured parties has also been introduced in the records of the public prosecutor's office for all reporting years since 2016. This improvement in record-keeping provides an additional perspective on the reported crimes and enables the monitoring of trends since the prosecutor's office began maintaining the database.

Namely, during 2024, cases were filed in public prosecutor's offices related to events affecting 65 injured parties, including 49 individuals performing public duties in the field of information. **Of these, 22 injured parties were male (44.9%), and 27 were female (55.1%).** In 2023, public prosecutor's offices handled cases based on criminal charges and reports related to events affecting 76 injured parties, including 57 individuals performing public duties in the field of information. Of these, 38 injured parties were male (66.67%) and 19 were female (33.33%). This indicated a sharp uptick in the percentage of women journalists being the victims in 2024 as compared to the previous year.

In regard to attacks in the digital sphere, Special Public Prosecutor's Office for Cybercrime filed cases affecting 40 injured parties, including 28 individuals performing public duties in the field of information. Of these, nine injured parties were male (32.14%), and 19 were female (67.86%). Compared to 2023, the number of injured parties has increased (from 37), as well while the proportion of attacks against female journalists has doubled (nine, or 33.33%). Of the 27 affected individuals performing public duties in the field of information, 18 were male (66.67%) in 2023.

The data analysis showed that the percentage of female injured parties in the total number of cases handled by the Special Public Prosecutor's Office for Cybercrime in 2024 (67.86%) has significantly increased compared to 2023 (33.33%).

Regarding data from journalists' associations, UNS recorded 111 cases of endangerment of journalists and media workers in 2024, which is 20 fewer than the previous year. The number of threats increased slightly compared to 2023, from 32 to 33 instances in 2024. UNS statistics also revealed that more threats were directed at female journalists than at their male counterparts.

The number of pressures and insults also decreased, with 29 cases recorded in 2024 compared to 52 such cases in 2023. This year, there was also one case of work prevention.

UNS recorded 13 physical assaults in 2024 - seven of which occurred in November and December, the largest number of them when reporting from protests. Although this represented three fewer physical assaults recorded in the database compared to 2023, with 16 assaults, the fact that more physical assaults occurred in the last two months than in the first 10 months of the year was concerning.

This year, one less assault against property was recorded compared to last year, with a total of four assaults this year, compared to five in 2023.

According to the NUNS database, which tracks the number and types of all assaults and pressures against journalists, a total of 166 incidents with media workers as injured parties were recorded in 2024. This is a decrease compared to 2023, when 184 incidents were registered. In the majority of cases, journalists faced pressure (73 and 123 respectively) and verbal threats (70 and 47 respectively), followed by physical assaults (17 and 11 respectively) and assaults on property (six and three respectively). Threats of assaults against journalists' property were not recorded in 2023 or 2024.

Data for the period from 2016 to 2024:

In December 2020, the then Republic (now the Supreme) Public Prosecutor's Office issued a new General Mandatory Instruction¹ that regulates the procedures for public prosecutor's offices in cases involving events that threaten the safety of journalists and other media workers. The Instruction introduced new measures to improve record keeping for these cases, including the regular monthly updates of the record of filed cases involving the endangerment of journalists' safety with data from all basic and higher public prosecutor's offices. Appellate public prosecutor's offices are obliged to deliver to the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office consolidated monthly reports on actions taken in all cases filed in the records. The summary report of the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office is delivered in the form of a so-called Bulletin to all members of the PWG, along with a report containing statistical data on actions taken and their analysis.

The practice of submitting the Prosecution Bulletin along with an additional report to PWG members on a monthly basis allows for the monitoring and comparison of cases recorded by journalists' and media associations, on one hand, and the prosecution records on the other. Information from the prosecutor's office records, on the status of each individual case, also serves as a basis for consideration of actions taken in individual cases at regular and extraordinary meetings of the PWG.

In the period from 2016, when the recording started, until the end of 2024, **a total of 587 cases involving endangerment of journalists were filed** with the public prosecutor's offices of the Republic of Serbia. According to the statistical data of the prosecutor's office for this period, **350 cases, or 59.63%, were disposed**, while 237 cases (40.37%) are still active and are in various stages of proceedings.

Of the 237 active cases (in which a final decision has not yet been rendered), indictment was filed in 11 cases, and court proceedings are ongoing. In eight cases, evidentiary actions are being taken; in three cases, requests for international legal assistance have been submitted to the competent judicial authorities of foreign countries; and in 105 cases, requests have been made to collect the necessary information. Throughout the whole period, in 110, or 46.61% of cases the perpetrators remained unknown even after the pre-investigation was conducted.

Although the total number of unidentified perpetrators remains high, it is important to note that the majority of cases with unknown perpetrators are from an previous years.

Year	Active cases	Cases in which the perpetrator has not been identified	% of John Doe cases in active cases
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¹See: <https://bezbedni-novinari.mpanel.app/storage/files/documents/obavezno-uputstvo-o-10-20-zashtita-novinara.pdf>

		(KTN - John Doe cases)	
2016	17	16	94.12%
2017	10	10	100%
2018	16	15	93.75%
2019	12	9	75%
2020	20	9	45%
2021	38	19	50%
2022	39	10	25.64%
2023	40	17	42.5%
2024	45	5	11.11%
Total	237	110	46.41%

When it comes to the cases that were disposed during the mentioned period - 91 cases were resolved by the court's decision, and 259 cases by the prosecutor's decision.

Of the 91 cases that were resolved by the court's decision, in 72 cases a conviction was rendered; in 12 cases there was an acquittal; while in seven cases the prosecution's indictment was dismissed or rejected.

On the other hand, 259 cases were resolved by prosecutor's decision. In 118 cases (45.56%) a decision was made to dismiss the criminal charges, while in 116 cases (44.79%) an official note was made that there is no basis for initiating criminal proceedings, i.e. there are no elements of a criminal act for which prosecution is undertaken ex officio. In two cases, a decision was rendered that there is no basis for initiating preparatory proceedings against a juvenile offender.

In 21 cases (8.11%), the prosecutor's decision sanctioned the perpetrator by imposing the obligation prescribed by the Criminal Procedure Code regarding deferred prosecution (so called "oportunitet" in Serbian). After fulfilling the obligations in full, a decision was rendered to dismiss the criminal charges. Bearing in mind that this institution imposes certain obligations on perpetrators of criminal acts, it can be considered a form of sanction. In most cases, an obligation to pay a sum of money for humanitarian purposes or to a special account of the Government was ordered.

In one case, the Public Prosecutor's Office issued an educational order against a minor offender. After fulfilling the obligations in full, a decision was rendered to dismiss the criminal charges. This is similar to the deferred prosecution, which is applied against adult offenders.

Additionally, in one case involving a perpetrator who is not a citizen of the Republic of Serbia, criminal prosecution was transferred to the competent judicial authorities of his home country.

IV. Case studies from the PWG

- The final verdict in the case of setting the house of Milan Jovanović on fire

On 26 April 2024), the criminal proceedings for setting on fire the house of Milan Jovanović, a journalist of the Internet portal *Žig Info* from Grocka, were legally concluded. Milan Jovanović's house was set on fire on 12 December 2018, in the early morning. At that time, Milan Jovanović and his wife Jela Deljanin were in the house.

Dragoljub Simonović, former Grocka municipality mayor, head of the municipal board of the Serbian Progressive Party and member of the party's Main Board, was found guilty but had his prison sentence reduced by the Court of Appeal in Belgrade. The sentence, originally five years in the first-instance verdict by the Higher Court in Belgrade, was reduced to four years.

The four-year prison sentence imposed by the first-instance verdict was reduced to three years for police officer Vladimir Mihailović, who was instructed by Simonović to find a person who would "warn" Jovanović, by setting his car on fire. In addition to the prison sentence, a fine of RSD 100,000 was imposed on both of them.

Igor Novaković, through whom police officer Mihailović reached the person who threw the Molotov cocktail into Milan Jovanović's garage, had his prison sentence reduced from three and a half years to two and a half years. Aleksandar Marinković, who threw the Molotov cocktail into Milan Jovanović's garage, had his prison sentence reduced from four and a half years to four years. He was also fined RSD 100,000,² the same amount as Simonović and Mihailović.

Dragoljub Simonović began serving his prison sentence in October. Novaković and Mihailović are also serving their prison sentences, while Marinković is still on the run.

As a reminder, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office requested that the court sentences Simonović to eight years in prison and police officer Vladimir Mihailović to five years in prison. The sentence of the same duration (as the sentence requested for Mihailović) - was also requested for Igor Novaković, while a six years prison sentence was requested for Aleksandar Marinković.

Even before Milan Jovanović's house was set on fire, members of the editorial staff of the Internet portal *Žig Info* had been subject to assaults.

In the official record of reported criminal acts committed against journalists, maintained by the SPPO since 2016 under the *Agreement on Co-operation and Measures for Improving the Safety of Journalists*, a case of assault against editor-in-chief Željko Matorčević was recorded. On that occasion, a case was filed with the Second Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for the criminal offence of 'Grievous Bodily Harm' under Article 121 of the Criminal

² See at: [Monitoring medijske scene u Srbiji za mesec april 2024. godine](#)

Code. The assault has not been solved to date. According to SPPO data, on 16 August 2019, a decision was made to dismiss the criminal charges. Matorčević filed an objection against that decision, and based on the decision of the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office from 10 October 2019, the criminal prosecution continued. After the evidentiary actions were carried out, a decision was rendered to dismiss the criminal charges against the reported person, and the case was transferred to the records of unknown perpetrators.

Members of the editorial staff of the Internet portal *Žig Info* also received threats in 2020. A case was filed with the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office - the Special Prosecutor's Office for the fight against high-tech crime - for endangering the safety (Article 138 of the Criminal Code) of journalist Zoran Lalić (the threatening message was sent to him in January 2020). The Prosecutor's Office sent seven urgent requests to the police to collect information. Only after receiving requested information, in December 2024 the prosecution concluded that there were no grounds for initiating criminal proceedings.

In addition, on 23 February 2023, Matorčević, reported an endangerment of safety. Three months later, a plea agreement was concluded with the defendant. Based on the agreement, a guilty verdict was pronounced, and the defendant was sentenced to six months' imprisonment, to be served in his place of residence. A temporary communication ban and restraining order were also imposed for a period of one year.

The case of setting on fire the house of journalist Milan Jovanović was one of the most important ones in the practice of the PWG to date, considering all the circumstances, including the gravity of the crime, and the background of those who participated in its execution. It is a case of great importance for establishing trust within the PWG, building it on entirely new foundations.

- Physical assaults against Vuk Cvijić, journalist of the weekly Radar

Vuk Cvijić, a journalist of the weekly Radar, was physically assaulted on 29 May in the center of Belgrade, in Kosovska Street. Cvijić reported that he was punched in the head by Milan Lađević, one of the co-owners of the daily *Srpski telegraf* and the internet portal *Republika.rs*.

As a possible reason for the assault, Vuk Cvijić cited articles he wrote about the former head of the Novi Sad police, Slobodan Malešić, in which Lađević was also mentioned.

Immediately after the disputed event, Cvijić contacted Veran Matić, a member of the PWG, who swiftly arrived at the scene. In the capacity of the contact point, Matić reported the assault to the police and the competent prosecutor's office.

The day after the attack, Cvijić handed over to the police the documentation he received after the examination at the Military Medical Academy (VMA). In the report, the doctors

stated that Cvijić's right side of the jaw was injured and the soft tissue in that region was bruised.³

Domestic and international organizations that deal with the issue of protecting freedom of expression, condemned the assault against Cvijić. Information about that assault was also recorded on the Council of Europe platform for the safety of journalists and the protection of journalism.⁴

Teresa Ribeiro, the then OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, announced on the X social network: "The recent assault against the journalist Vuk Cvijić in Serbia is unacceptable. I join the OSCE Mission to Serbia in praising the police and the prosecutor's office for their quick reaction, which should lead to a detailed investigation and to the satisfaction of justice."

Vuk Cvijić and Milan Lađević gave statements at the Prosecutor's Office in their capacity as citizens. Although the General Mandatory Instruction of the Prosecutor's Office stipulates that the case officer must, within 48 hours of taking over the case, take actions in accordance with the law— which includes inviting the injured party to the public prosecutor's office to provide additional information regarding the event—the First Basic Prosecutor's Office did not take a statement from Cvijić until 11 June 2024.

In the records kept by the SPPO, which concern the reported criminal acts committed against journalists, it is stated that the prosecution sent the Stari Grad Police Station a request to collect the necessary information. In the request, the police was asked to obtain footage from all nearby facilities that have video surveillance and footage of the said event, as well as to determine the identity of two possible eyewitnesses. Unfortunately, by the end of 2024, the police had not provided the prosecutor's office with requested footage. This resulted in dissatisfaction of media and journalist associations involved in the PWG's work, and it remains one of the issues to be addressed in the coming period. Resolving this issue should lead to more efficient processing of cases involving the endangerment of journalists' safety.

- Threats to Dinko Gruhonjić and Ana Lalić Hegediš

During March 2024 year, Ana Lalić Hegediš, a journalist for the *Nova.rs* portal and executive director of NDNV, began receiving a large number of calls for lynching, threats, and insults, which were sent to her via social networks as well as her private and official phones. Threatening messages were sent to her after she participated in the forum "In the jaws of nationalism,"⁵ held during the "Rebedu" Festival in Dubrovnik. The threats directed at Ana Lalić Hegediš also included members of her family.⁶

³ See at: [Vuk Cvijić: Odavno sam dostavio lekarski nalaz sa VMA, za koji tužilaštvo kaže da ga i dalje čeka](#), author Danica Nikolić, the article published on 14 August 2024 on the *Cenzolovka* portal

⁴ See at: [Publisher Insults and Attacks Journalist Vuk Cvijić over Report](#)

⁵ See at: [Ana Lalić pročitala na tribini pretnje smrću koje su joj upućene \(VIDEO\) - Javni servis](#)

⁶ See at: [Monitoring medijske scene u Srbiji za mesec mart 2024. godine](#)

During the same period, Dinko Gruhonjić, editor-in-chief of the Internet portal *Vojvodina Research and Analytical Center (Vojvođanski istraživačko – analitički centar, VOICE)* and associate professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, was subjected to harassment, assaults and death threats, after a manipulated⁷ video of his guest appearance at the aforementioned festival began circulating on social networks. The clip appeared eleven months after the guest appearance.

On 21 March, graffiti appeared at the entrance of the building where Gruhonjić lives: "Dinko - Šakić, you are ready for your everlasting home. Serbian Vojvodina". After the graffiti was removed by NDNV, and his colleagues and friends, a message was written in the same place: "You repainted in vain! Liman".

Regarding the case of the graffiti written on Gruhonjić's entrance - the competent prosecutor's office opened a case and conducted an interview with Gruhonjić. The Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad sent a request to the Police Administration (PA) Novi Sad to collect the necessary information. The report from the PA Novi Sad stated that the requested checks were carried out, but the identity of the perpetrators was not revealed, nor were the means of the criminal offence discovered. It was noted that the movements of the perpetrators were not recorded on the CCTV cameras, and that further investigation will continue. An additional request was submitted to collect the necessary information; however, until the identity of the perpetrator is revealed and further evidentiary actions are taken, the case was transferred to the records of unknown perpetrators.

In November 2024 a letter was sent to the Novi Sad police requesting the continuation of the investigation of the event, and that the competent prosecutor's office be immediately informed if new information arises.⁸

According to the record of reported criminal acts committed against journalists, maintained by the SPPO, four additional cases were filed regarding the endangerment of Dinko Gruhonjić's safety (Article 138 of the Criminal Code) following the appearance of the controversial video⁹. One case is under the jurisdiction of the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad, while the other cases are under the jurisdiction of the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office - the Special Prosecutor's Office for Cybercrime. In one of the mentioned cases, Ana Lalić Hegediš appears as the injured party alongside Dinko Gruhonjić.

The case under the jurisdiction of the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office concerns the incident that took place on 16 April 2024, when Gruhonjić was threatened on the street. The Prosecutor's Office interviewed the injured journalist, after which a request was submitted to the police to collect the necessary information. The request emphasizes that investigative actions should primarily focus on checking for video surveillance on nearby

⁷ See at: [Obmanjujuće isečen video kao dokaz da jedan Dinko veliča drugog - Raskrikavanje](#), autor: Stefan Kosanović, article published on 20 March 2024, on the *Raskrikavanje* portal

⁸ Record of reported criminal acts committed against journalists since 2016, maintained by the SPPO

⁹ See at: [Policija radi na slučaju pretnje nasiljem Dinku Gruhonjiću](#), RSE

properties, and that all necessary measures be taken to identify the perpetrators, secure traces of the criminal act, and collect items that could serve as evidence in the proceedings. An order for urgent action was also issued. After the police provided an answer, the prosecution sent a new request to collect information. The police responded to that request as well, after which the prosecution sent another one, followed by two calls for immediate action.

In the case filed due to the threatening messages from 15 March, Gruhonjić was interviewed, and a request was then sent to the police to collect the necessary information. The police identified the owner of the user account from which the message was sent, and a search was ordered for that person.

In the case filed due to the threatening messages from 4 April 2024, the injured party was interviewed by the prosecution, and afterwards a request was submitted for collection of the necessary information. A call for immediate action was also provided to the police.

In the case filed due to the threatening messages from 20 November (the case involves Ana Lalić Hegediš as well), the injured parties were interviewed, and requests were delivered to the police to collect the necessary information.

When it comes to threatening messages sent to Ana Lalić Hegediš, three cases were formed. All three cases are being handled by the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office - Special Prosecutor's Office for Cybercrime, due to the (potential) commission of the crime of Endangering Safety (Article 138 of the Criminal Code). In the case filed due to the message sent on 9 March, an indictment was filed on 5 June after the evidentiary actions were completed.

Regarding the threatening messages sent to Ana Lalić Hegediš on 11 March (referring to both her and her husband), the investigative authorities discovered the identity of the person who sent the messages. The man in question has the citizenship of both France and Serbia. The suspect was detained upon entering Serbia. The device from which the disputed messages were sent to Ana Lalić Hegediš and Dinko Gruhonjić was found in his possession. The suspect admitted to the prosecution that he had committed the crime. The prosecution submitted a proposal to the Higher Court in Belgrade to order detention; however, the court rejected the proposal and imposed a suspended measure, prohibiting the defendant from leaving his apartment. After the collection of evidence on 28 May, an indictment was filed against the individual. Two days later, the defendant's suspended measure was extended. The main hearing was scheduled for the beginning of July; however, the individual did not attend because, in violation of the suspended measure, he left his place of residence. Through communication with the institutions of the Republic of France, it was learned that officials from the competent authority visited the suspect's residence but did not find him there. According to the information available to the PWG, the Higher Court issued a warrant for the individual, but it is unclear whether an international warrant was also issued.

In the case filed due to the threats sent on 12 March 2024, the injured party was interviewed, and a request was sent to the police to collect the necessary information. After the police delivered the report, the prosecution requested additional information.

This case highlighted the drawbacks of the practice allowing suspects to defend themselves from house arrest with an ankle monitor, especially since, in the same year, another case was registered where individuals escaped, continuing to pose a threat to vulnerable journalists.

- Conviction for threats against Igor Božić, from N1 television

On 24 April, the proceedings concerning threats to Igor Božić, the programme director of N1 television, which were made in the form of comments on the media portal, were legally terminated. The threatening message read: *"N1...you are the worst gang. You are the worst villains of the Serbian people. You are paid as domestic traitors by foreign powers. You will take that blood money home, everything you wish for the Serbian people, that will happen to you personally. For a long time now, you have been publicly hostile to the people and the legitimate authorities. You will soon be neutralized, neutralized so that nothing will remain. There are several others like you ... Danas... Nova rs. One by one. A gang of villains."*

Investigative authorities identified the perpetrator, who later concluded a plea deal with the prosecution. The Higher Court in Belgrade accepted the plea deal and sentenced the defendant to a one-year suspended prison term. At the same time, it was determined that the prison sentence would be enforced if the defendant commits a new criminal offence within three years from the date the verdict becomes final.¹⁰

Additionally, according to the available information, the competent court did not provide the injured parties (Igor Božić and the journalists of N1 television) with a legally binding judgement in a timely manner, which, under Article 50, paragraph 1, item 3, it was obliged to do.

This case is an example of good practice in the work of the PWG and demonstrates very efficient prosecution of those responsible for endangering journalists' safety. Unfortunately, this is the only case filed in 2024 in which a final conviction was rendered.

¹⁰ See at: [Veran Matić - Sudovi obavezni da dostavljaju presude oštećenim novinarima i medijima](#), article published on 19 July 2024 on the *Bezbedninovinari.rs* portal.

V. PWG activities during 2024

With the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, the PWG adopted a new Action Plan for the period 2023 - 2025 in December 2022, aiming to develop new activities that will further improve its work and efficiency.

The Action Plan contained 11 activities, 10 of which were successfully implemented in 2024. Of note, all institutions, organizations and associations that take part in the PWG work and that had signed the Agreement establishing the PWG in December 2016 participated in the implementation of the Action Plan, which speaks of their active approach and the significance they assign to this process. The following activities were carried out:

- ***Regular and extraordinary meetings of the PWG***

The PWG Rules of Procedure provides for the holding of regular quarterly meetings of this body, and extraordinary ones if needed, as well. During 2024, the PWG held four regular meetings. The first meeting, attended by the then Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, Jan Braathu, was held on 25 March, the second on 6 June, the third on 22 October, while the last one was held on 18 December .

In addition to the four regular meetings, where information was exchanged about cases from the records of the prosecution offices, actions taken by competent institutions and current cases and events, two extraordinary meetings were also held based on the initiative of journalist and media associations due to specific events.

Additionally, in March of this year, PWG representatives organized a visit to Novi Sad on their own initiative in response to the assaults against Ana Lalić Hegediš and Dinko Gruhonjić.

Also, on 21 March, a meeting was held between PWG representatives and the Minister of Information and Telecommunications (MIT), Mihailo Jovanović. The Minister scheduled the meeting to learn about the PWG's work and to explore the possibility of the Ministry's official involvement in the body's activities. However, the PWG declined, noting that the Ministry has no jurisdiction in the field of criminal law and is not a signatory to the 2016 Agreement.

- **Quarterly visits of the PWG representatives to the local communities**

With the support of the OSCE, the PWG continued the practice of visiting various cities across Serbia, which it started in 2023, visiting nine cities in 2024: Šabac (in January), Vranje (in February), Zaječar (in March), Novi sad (in April), Jagodina (in June), Zrenjanin (in July), Sremska Mitrovica (in September), Leskovac (in September) and Prijepolje (in October).

Over 200 local prosecutors, police officers, and journalists participated in the aforementioned meetings.

The aim of these meetings was to familiarize journalists with the PWG's work mechanism and local contact points in the prosecutor's offices and police, fostering dynamic and open cooperation between journalists, prosecutors, and the police at the local level. During the meetings, information was exchanged regarding pending cases involving the endangerment of journalists' safety. The discussions serve as examples of good practice and cooperation between the PWG and regional institutions.

- **Quarterly newsletters about the work of PWG**

In order to improve the visibility of its work results and implemented activities both in the public and among journalists and members of journalist and media associations, the PWG produced four newsletters during 2024. The first one for the period January to March, the second for April to June, the third for July to September and the last for the period from October to December.

These quarterly reports contain detailed information on all ongoing cases and on the activities carried out within the PWG. The reports were forwarded to the media outlets, international organizations and partners, and to journalists in order to improve their awareness about the achieved results and the destiny of cases of endangering the safety of journalists that the PWG dealt with during 2024.

- **Regional conference on the safety of journalists, 28 February 2024**

The PWG, with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, organized a regional conference on journalists' safety on 28 February 2024 in Belgrade, to facilitate sharing and promoting best practices and existing initiatives for establishing national mechanisms to improve journalists' safety, as well as to implement the 2018 OSCE Ministerial Council Decision on the Safety of Journalists, and promote the OSCE Joint Statement on the Safety of Women Journalists, adopted in December 2023 in Skopje. Approximately 100 representatives from the police, prosecution, and media communities across the Western Balkan region attended the event. At the opening of the meeting, the representative of the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, the Head of the EU Delegation to Serbia, and the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia addressed the attendees.

- **Observing the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, 2 November 2024**

On 2 November, the Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM) and the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV), as members of the PWG, organized an event to observe the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, which was attended by around 30 journalists.

At the event, speakers included Emanuele Giaufret, Head of the European Union Delegation to Serbia; Jan Braathu, Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia; lawyer Kruna Savović; Veljko Milić, Director of Legal Affairs at the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina; Pavol Szalai, Head of the EU/Balkans Desk at Reporters Without Borders; and Veran Matić, President of ANEM.

- **Training on the journalists' safety in conflict situations, including protests, 19-20 September 2024**

In September 2024, the OSCE Mission to Serbia and PWG organized in Belgrade a two-day training session titled "*Journalists are not targets*", focusing on the safety of journalists in conflict situations, such as demonstrations, war zones, police interventions, etc. The training was attended by over 70 journalists from across Serbia.

The training sessions were facilitated by two international experts, a Spanish journalist and war correspondent, Marc Marginedas, who was held hostage by ISIS in Syria for six months, and who shared his traumatic experience, and David Bevan, the author of the Safety Handbook for Journalist of the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), who has spent over 30 years educating more than 6,000 journalists and freelancers about security protocols. These two eminent experts shared useful information with the present journalists, along with concrete advice related to reporting in crisis situations.

Veran Matić and Branko Čečen spoke at the training, as local lecturers, about the security threats faced by journalists in Serbia, the response of institutions to reported threats, and the increasing mental strain on journalists due to the challenges of their work and long-term exposure to constant stress. A journalist from Insajder, who previously worked for the Beta news agency, Žikica Stevanović, who was beaten by police officers during demonstrations in Belgrade in July 2020, regardless of the fact that he presented himself as a journalist, shared his experience in dealing with the institutions. Despite submitting numerous reports to the Department of Internal Control of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Prosecutor's Office, more than four years after the event, none of the proceedings have resulted in final verdicts.

- **SLAPP event in the OSCE Mission, 30 October 2024**

On October 30, the Mission, in cooperation with journalists' and media associations involved in the work of the PWG, organized a briefing on current Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP) cases in Serbia.

Representatives of five media outlets, victims of SLAPP, had the opportunity to inform 25 representatives of the international community in Serbia about the current situation related to these lawsuits. The Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia addressed the participants at the opening of the event. The discussion focused on existing and potential mechanisms for combating SLAPP lawsuits and ways to strengthen the legal framework to protect journalists and others speaking in the public interest.

- **Activities related to amendments to the Criminal Code**

The public debate on the Draft Law on Amendments to the Criminal Code (CC) took place from 1 October to 1 November 2024.

Members of the PWG, representatives of journalists' and media associations, submitted joint proposals for amendments to certain provisions of the CC. The proposals were formulated based on the expert opinions of three legal professionals engaged by the OSCE over the past few years to prepare an opinion for the PWG on potential amendments to the Criminal Code. The experts were: Zoran Stojanović, former Criminal Law professor at the Faculty of Law in Belgrade; Igor Vuković, full professor of Criminal Law at the Faculty of Law in Belgrade and Slobodan Beljanski, lawyer. Proposed amendments include the following criminal offences:

1. *Criminal offence Serious bodily harm (Article 121 CC)* - the amendment concerns paragraph 6, specifying that perpetrators will only be severely punished if the commission of the offence is related to the work of journalists.

2. *Criminal offence Light bodily harm (Article 122 CC)* - the amendment concerns paragraph 2, which should be expanded to include persons performing tasks of public importance, i.e. journalists. In this way, a stricter punishment is introduced for inflicting light bodily harm on journalists, if the criminal offence was committed in connection with their work. The punishment would be imprisonment for up to three years. This amendment would partially alleviate the current situation, where the punishment for threatening journalists is more severe than for inflicting serious bodily harm. With this correction, criminal prosecution will be initiated *ex officio* for light bodily harm inflicted on a person performing tasks of public importance.

3. *Criminal Offence of Coercion (Article 135 CC)* - the proponents suggest correcting paragraph 2 of this criminal offence, to extend its scope to persons performing tasks of public importance. This amendment introduces a stricter penalty if the offence is committed against a media worker. According to the proposed amendment, the sentence should range from six months to five years.

4. *Criminal offence of Endangering safety (Article 138 CC)* - paragraph 1 of this criminal offence needs to be amended by introducing the wording that the threat can be expressed directly or indirectly. This aims to ensure that both direct and indirect threats are punishable, regardless of whether they are expressed in the conditional tense or as conditional statements.

Under the current wording of Article 138 of the CC, the criminal offence of Endangering safety applies only if someone threatens a journalist's safety by threatening to harm their life or body, or the life or body of anyone close to them. The proposed amendments add two new grounds: threats to the physical freedom or valuable property of a journalist or anyone close to them. The amendments aim to expand the possibilities and situations in which law enforcement authorities can pursue charges, rather than dismiss them due to

the absence of all elements of the criminal offence. (The proposal is supported by ANEM, NDNV and UNS).

5. *Criminal offence of Stalking (Article 138a of the CC)* - amend paragraph 2 to include a harsher sanction if the victim of the criminal offence is a media worker. The prescribed punishment would be imprisonment for three months to five years. For the more serious form of this crime, when stalking results in significant danger, the valuable property is considered an additional factor, alongside the endangerment of life, health, and bodily harm. The goal of the proposed amendment is to facilitate more frequent use of this criminal offence to sanction various forms of pressures that create both a subjective and real sense of threat among journalists, even if they have not been classified as criminal offences.

- **Briefing for the international community on the PWG activities and the safety of journalists in Serbia, 4 November 2024**

On 4 November, the OSCE Mission to Serbia, in cooperation with the EU Delegation, organized a meeting in Belgrade on journalists' safety. Present were 12 representatives of the international community in Serbia: EUD, GIZ, French Embassy, Norwegian Embassy, Belgian Embassy, UK Embassy, German Embassy, Swiss Embassy, IREX, and Euronews.

Veran Matić, the president of ANEM and a member of the PWG presented the latest issues related to journalist safety and the work of the PWG, which is actively addressing the safety concerns of all journalists.

- **24/7 SOS hotline for journalists in danger**

During 2024, SOS hotline operators received an average of 15 to 40 calls per month, totalling over 300 calls for the year. This number also includes contacts by e-mail, and calls to the personal phone numbers of operators, some of which serve as PWG contact points.

Frequently, upon learning about the issues faced by journalists and media workers, the contact points call them to gather information and offer recommendations. After receiving a report, the operator/contact point visits the scene of the event, when possible. Most contacts through this mechanism occur during protests, as journalistic teams are most vulnerable at such times. The SOS hotline is part of the application and portal *bezbedninovinari.rs*, which features content related to journalist safety, SPPO reports, monthly media scene monitoring reports in Serbia, and other relevant documents.

- **Participation of the PWG members in international fora and conferences in order to improve knowledge related to international standards and best practices in the field of protection of journalists' safety**

During 2024, PWG members participated in several international events dealing with the safety of journalists. They had the opportunity to inform various actors about the activities and results of this body's work.

The PWG representative from the SPPO participated in the first meeting of contact points for the safety of journalists within the OSCE region, organized by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), which took place on 20 March in Rome. Additionally, several PWG members participated in the regional conference on journalists' safety, organized in May in Podgorica by the OSCE RFoM.

VI. 2025 PWG Action Plan

End of 2022, the PWG adopted an Action Plan outlining activities for 2022-2025, aimed at further improving the work and efficiency of the body. Below is a list of all activities, along with a timetable for their implementation.

I Activities – Action Plan

Activity 1: Annual training of police and prosecution contact points on the implementation of the Binding Instructions of the Republic Public Prosecutor (RPPO) regarding criminal cases of endangering the safety of journalists, monitoring the development of trends in the commission of these criminal acts, and other topics from the sphere of importance of public information in democratic societies

Representatives of the media community believe that there are differences in the quality and dedication of actions among individual prosecutor's offices and police administrations. They believe that it is necessary to establish more uniform practices at all levels and in the work of all contact points, which should entail even more efficient other stages of the procedure, such as collecting evidence, writing more grounded indictments, and generally, detection and prosecution of perpetrators. Consequently, a joint training will be organized in May 2025 for representatives from the prosecution and the police. This training will cover the application of the binding instructions from the RPPO, along with other relevant topics aimed at improving the prosecution of criminal offences against journalists. These topics will include combating sexual and gender-based violence, as well as addressing specific threats and harassment faced by female journalists.

Partner in the implementation of this activity:	RPPO and Mol
Time frame:	May 2025

Activity 2: Quarterly visits of PWG representatives to the local communities

During the past two years, it was determined that the presence of the PWG in local communities was extremely important. In the case of OK Radio from Vranje, it was one of the turning points that significantly contributed to a more efficient resolution of the OK Radio case. The engagement of the PWG in local communities helps raise public awareness and alleviates some of the burdens faced by local journalists. It also sends a strong message that threats to journalists' safety will not go unpunished. The practice of PWG representatives visiting local communities should be continued and established as a regular activity, occurring at least once every three months, or more frequently if needed. In 2024 alone, the PWG organized nine local meetings.

Partner in the implementation of this activity:	Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM)
Time frame:	Each third month starting from March 2025.

Activity 3: Panel discussion observing the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists

The International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists on 2 November will be observed in partnership with the PWG and the OSCE Mission to Serbia. The Mission will play a key role in organizing the event, while PWG members will assist with defining the agenda, selecting speakers, inviting participants via their mailing lists, and announcing the event on their websites. The event will further promote the work of the PWG and inform key stakeholders in the country about journalist safety, including data on assaults from the official prosecution database and information from journalists' associations NUNS and UNS.

Partner in the implementation of this activity:	NUNS, UNS, NDNV
Time frame:	November 2025

Activity 4: Preparation of a quarterly PWG Newsletter, containing information on cases and the Group's activities, which should be disseminated to journalists through the mailing lists of journalists' and media associations

There is room for improvement in how journalists' and media associations communicate with their members about the existence of the Agreement, the PWG, and specific cases as well, for mutual benefit. The research on the transparency of state authorities in cases of journalist safety found that only 37.5% of surveyed journalists reported receiving information about the PWG's work from their associations. Another 25% reported not receiving any information, while 37.5% indicated they have some information but are not sufficiently familiar with the details. The newsletters in question would be based on the existing quarterly newsletters produced by the RPPO, but modified into shorter versions containing basic information that would be of interest to journalists.

Partner in the implementation of this activity:	RPPO with the assistance of the OSCE
Time frame:	every 3 months starting from March 2023

Activity 5: Preparation of the Annual Activity Report of the Permanent Working Group (PWG) for Safety of Journalists.

The PWG Rules of Procedure mandate the publication of annual Activity Reports of the Group. The first report covering 2017-2021 was published in 2021, followed by annual reports since 2022. The 2025 Report will be published by the end of 2025. To fulfil this important obligation and maintain the good practice of publishing annual reports, which greatly enhances public awareness of the Group's activities and boosts its credibility, two PWG members will work each year on preparing the reports, with support from the OSCE Mission to Serbia.

Partner in the implementation of this activity:	Media Association
Time frame:	November and December 2025

Activity 6: PWG study visit to one of the OSCE participating States aimed at fostering international co-operation and sharing experiences to enhance journalist safety

In May 2022, PWG representatives conducted a study visit to the Dutch Working Group for Safety of Journalists, which was established in July 2018. According to the participants, this activity was highly successful, significantly improving the Group's coherence and providing new knowledge that can be applied to enhance work locally. It is important to continue these activities, with the specific countries to be visited selected based on an agreement between the Mission and the Group's members.

Partner in the implementation of this activity:	Logistics and organization - OSCE Mission to Serbia
Time frame:	May 2024

Activity 7: Participation of the PWG members in international fora and conferences in order to improve knowledge related to international standards and best practices in the field of protection of journalists' safety

An exact timeframe for this activity cannot be determined at the moment, but it is important for the PWG to have the opportunity to send its members to international conferences, such as those organized by the OSCE RFoM, the Council of Europe (CoE), or to the International Journalism Festival in Perugia, as well as other professional meetings and consultations organized by international civil society organizations, including: Article 19, the Committee for Protection of Journalists, the International Press Institute and other similar co-operation projects between institutions and the non-governmental sector in Europe.

Partner in the implementation of this activity:	OSCE Mission to Serbia and Association of Online Media
Time frame:	During the following 3 years, depending on the event

Activity 8: Organization of regular PWG quarterly and extraordinary meetings

Regular PWG sessions are held every three months, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure, while extraordinary sessions are held as needed. For 2025, regular meetings are scheduled for March, June, September and December. The Mission will participate in all meetings and discussions, covering travel expenses and providing light refreshments for participants.

Partner in the implementation of this activity:	OSCE Mission to Serbia and Association of Online Media
Time frame:	During the following 3 years, depending on the event

2025												
Title	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Activity 1					x							
Activity 2			x			x			x			x
Activity 3											x	
Activity 4			x			x			x			x
Activity 5											x	x
Activity 6					x						x	
Activity 7	x	X	x	X	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Activity 8			x			x			x			x

VII. Conclusions and recommendations

- In 2024, based on filed criminal charges or reports, 62 cases related to acts against journalists were opened in the Republic of Serbia public prosecutor's offices: eight in January, two in February, 11 in March, six in April, one in May, eight in June, six in July, one in August, two in September, three in October, eight in November, and six in December. The number of cases in 2024 is lower than in 2023, when 76 cases were opened.
- The first-instance or final decision was rendered in 17 cases, which represents 27.42% of the total number. There was one conviction in the cases filed in 2024, which is a significant decrease compared to 2023, when there were 12 convictions.
- When it comes to the structure of reported criminal offences against the safety of journalists, the most frequently reported this year were threats, i.e. the commission of the criminal offence Endangerment of Safety, referred to in Article 138 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia (48 cases). Out of the total number of filed cases, 42 were handled by the Special Public Prosecutor's Office for Cybercrime, accounting for 67.74% of all cases.

In addition, there has been an increase in proportion of women journalists who were assaulted, from 33% in 2023 to 55.1% in 2024. There were 65 injured parties in all the cases filed in public prosecutor's offices in 2024, out of which 49 individuals performing public duties in the field of information. Of these, 22 injured parties were male (44.9%), and 27 were female (55.1%). In 2023, public prosecutor's offices handled cases based on criminal charges and reports related to events affecting 76 injured parties, including 57 individuals performing public duties in the field of information. Of these, 38 injured parties were male (66.67%) and 19 were female (33.33%).

- According to the NUNS database, which tracks the assaults against journalists, a total of 166 incidents with media workers as injured parties were recorded in 2024, a decrease from 184 incidents registered in 2023. Regarding data from the Journalists' Association of Serbia (UNS), 111 cases of endangerment of journalists and media workers were recorded in 2024, which is 20 fewer than in 2023.
- From the onset of the official record keeping by the prosecutor's office in 2016, until the end of 2024 a total of 587 cases were filed across all prosecutor's offices in the Republic of Serbia based on charges related to offences against journalist. A total of 350 cases, or 59.63%, were disposed, while 237 cases (40.37%) are still active and are in various stages of the proceedings. According to prosecution representatives, this is a case resolution rate unmatched in any other area.
- Of the disposed cases, 91 were resolved by the court's decision, and 259 by the prosecutor's decision. Of the 91 cases resolved by the court, 72 resulted in

convictions, 12 ended in acquittals, and seven had the prosecution's indictment dismissed or rejected.

- Among individual pending cases, the assault against journalist Vuk Cvijić stands out because the MoI failed to provide the prosecutor's office with the requested footage from nearby surveillance cameras by the end of 2024. This has caused dissatisfaction among media and journalist associations involved in the PWG. The pending cases of threats to journalists, affecting not only this journalist but others as well, require continuous status updates and ongoing efforts to enhance the detection, and appropriate punishment of the perpetrators.
- Additionally, there were two cases where the courts ruled that suspects could defend themselves while under house arrest with ankle monitors. However, in both instances, these individuals escaped and continue to pose a threat to the journalists they had threatened. This outcome calls for a review of the justification behind such decisions and the establishment of more effective oversight in the implementation of this and similar measures.
- On the other hand, the case of threats to Igor Božić and TV N1 is an example of good practice in the work of the PWG and demonstrates very efficient prosecution of those responsible for endangering journalists' safety. Unfortunately, this is the only case in 2024 in which a final conviction was rendered.
- The PWG Action Plan for 2024 contained 11 activities, ten of which were successfully implemented during the year. It is especially important to emphasize that all institutions, organizations, and associations involved in the PWG and signatories of the Agreement from December 2016 have participated in implementing the Action Plan, reflecting their active involvement and the importance they place on this process.
- The PWG's efforts to enhance journalist safety continue to be recognized both locally and internationally. The latest European Commission Serbia Report 2024 stated that the PWG continued to react quickly in several cases of assaults and threats against journalists. The report also stated that threats, intimidation, hate speech, and violence against journalists—including women journalists—persist, including at the local level. It also noted that statements by senior officials regarding investigative journalists have a chilling effect on freedom of expression.
- The eight activities planned by the PWG for 2025 largely overlap with those of the previous year, which is understandable as the PWG seeks to maintain continuity in initiatives such as training for police, prosecutor's office, and journalist representatives, as well as visits to local communities to gather information on ongoing cases and the overall security situation for media professionals involved in smaller communities.

- The PWG must continue fulfilling its important mandate by finding new, creative ways to combat impunity for assaults on journalists, intensifying its efforts, including crime prevention, and, importantly, securing additional support from all relevant stakeholders, including the highest political authorities. As before, the OSCE Mission to Serbia will continue supporting the PWG in the implementation of the Action Plan, which is valid until end 2025.