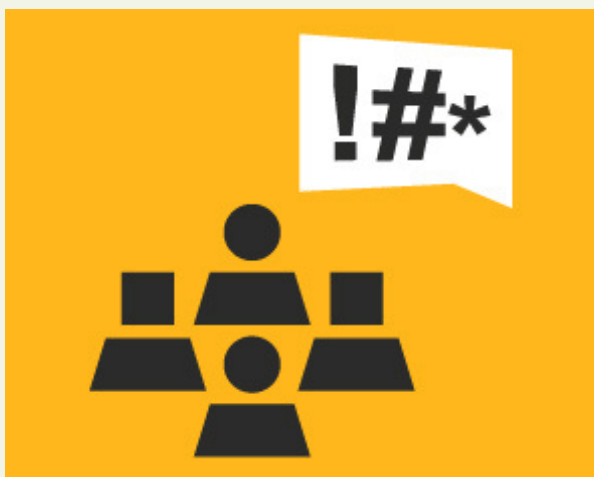




# NEWSLETTER

OVERVIEW OF THE STATE OF MEDIA FREEDOM AND SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS IN  
THE WESTERN BALKANS IN MAY 2026

## NUMBER OF CASES RECORDED IN THE SAFEJOURNALISTS DATABASE IN MAY



Albania: 7  
Bosnia and Herzegovina: 1  
Croatia: 4  
Kosovo: 3  
Montenegro: 2  
North Macedonia: 0  
Serbia: 8



Funded by  
the European Union

# ALBANIA

## SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

In May, **seven new cases** were recorded in the SafeJournalists database - two actual attacks, three other threats, and two threats against media outlets.

### *Threats against media outlets and organizations*

On 2 May, Democratic Party leader Sali Berisha publicly targeted News24/BalkanWeb over its coverage of opposition voices, accusing the outlet of providing disproportionate and politically motivated coverage. Berisha further described it as a “mafia of free speech,” “unscrupulous mafia,” and “shameful mafia.” Such narratives may contribute to a climate in which journalists and media workers are publicly associated with political interests, increasing the risk of pressure, online targeting, and intimidation.

On 19 May, fact-checking organization Faktoje reported being targeted in a Facebook post by public commentator Olsi Jazexhi, who described the outlet as a “Soros/USAID” page. The post framed Faktoje’s fact-checking and monitoring work as politically motivated, using rhetoric that sought to undermine the organization’s credibility and independence.

### *Other threats against journalists*

On 11 and 13 May, former MP Monika Kryemadhi publicly questioned the professional independence of investigative journalist Lindita Çela regarding her reporting on the CEZ-DIA affair, alleging political influence in her work. After Çela rejected the claims, Kryemadhi continued addressing her on social media.

On 15 May, journalist Bleona Sari was targeted through a social media post containing insulting and degrading language, including personal insinuations and remarks aimed at undermining her dignity and professional integrity. The publicly circulated content reflects a broader pattern of online harassment and hostile rhetoric directed at journalists, particularly women journalists, in the digital sphere.

On 19 May, SYRI TV journalist Fatjon Gjinaj reported being verbally attacked and threatened by former public official Agron Tare while covering a public-interest event outside SPAK in Tirana. According to the journalist and media coverage, Tare objected to being filmed, used insulting language, and made remarks perceived as threatening while Gjinaj was carrying out his professional duties.

### *Actual attack against journalists*

On 8 May, the Syri TV media crew was affected by a police water cannon while covering the Democratic Party protest in Tirana. According to reports, journalist Marsi Korreshi and cameraman Armando Varfi were struck by pressurized water while reporting live from the scene. Korreshi stated that she was hit twice at close range, with the second impact causing her to fall to the ground.



On 18 May, journalist Ervin Dushi reported to police that he had been physically assaulted that day in the “Skënderbeg” neighborhood of Shkodra. Following the report, authorities initiated an investigation, identified one suspect, and continued efforts to identify other individuals allegedly involved in the incident. The case was referred to the Prosecutor’s Office, and investigations remained ongoing to clarify the circumstances surrounding the assault.

## WOMEN JOURNALISTS

The [Women Journalists’ Safety: Brief 2025](#) based on SafeJournalists Network data, FOI requests, surveys, and interviews, show risks for women journalists remain systemic due to media sector conditions. Online harassment, reputational pressure, newsroom dynamics, ownership influence, and gender inequality contribute to self-censorship and limit women’s roles in journalism.

## OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

The burning of journalist Sami Curri’s car in Bulqizë has raised serious concerns about the safety of local journalists in Albania and the need for a prompt institutional response. On [4 May 2026](#), media organizations, civil society actors, and international partners, coordinated by SCiDEV, visited Bulqizë and Peshkopi to express solidarity with Curri and to discuss the case with authorities, emphasizing the need for a coordinated, timely investigation. The SafeJournalists Network calls for a prompt, thorough, and effective investigation into the incident, including any potential link to Curri’s journalistic work.

The latest [exchange](#) between Prime Minister Edi Rama and Reporters Without Borders (RSF), following Albania’s 2026 World Press Freedom Index ranking of 83rd, has reignited debate over media freedom in the country. Rama challenged RSF’s findings using AI-based media monitoring data, arguing that opposition voices dominate media coverage. RSF and media freedom experts have rejected this framing, distinguishing visibility metrics from the structural conditions of media freedom. SafeJournalists continues to monitor such public disputes, as these exchanges risk shifting attention away from core issues such as ownership concentration, financial dependencies, regulatory independence, and pressures on journalists, all of which remain central to assessing media freedom, particularly in the context of Albania’s EU accession process.

Albania has entered a new and more demanding phase of its EU accession process. On 26 May 2026, the [8th Accession Conference](#) confirmed that Albania had overall [met the interim benchmarks for Cluster 1 – Fundamentals](#). This followed the European Commission’s Interim Benchmark Assessment Report and led to the adoption of the [Interim European Union Common Position](#), which sets out the closing benchmarks Albania must now meet. For media freedom, the [Interim European Union Common Position](#) is clear that Albania’s legal and institutional framework remains only partially aligned with the EU acquis and European standards. Albania is expected to complete amendments to the legal and regulatory framework and to ensure implementing and enforcement measures that strengthen media ownership transparency, media pluralism, editorial independence, transparency of media financing from both private and state resources, the autonomy of the media regulator and the independence of the public broadcaster. This framing is important because it recognises that media freedom is not only a question of legislation. It is also about power, financing, regulation, editorial independence and institutional safeguards. Read [here](#).



# BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

## SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

In May, the BH Journalists Association (BHJA) recorded **one new incident** in the SafeJournalists database - other threat to journalists.

Investigative journalists Anisa Mahmutović and Adis Mujdanović were publicly targeted, defamed and professionally discredited by lawyer Mimes Ajanović through a series of social media posts following their testimony before the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Commission for the Fight Against Corruption. The journalists had testified about their reporting on irregularities related to private universities, including the European University "Kallos" in Tuzla. BHJA and the Free Media Help Line strongly condemned the campaign against journalists, warning that such public targeting represents a serious form of pressure on investigative journalists and may encourage further attacks against them.

The case also prompted a reaction from the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), which expressed full solidarity with the targeted journalists and BHJA. The EFJ warned that online attacks and attempts to intimidate journalists and organisations providing support to them contribute to a hostile environment for media workers in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The organisation stressed that attacks on journalists reporting on issues of public interest undermine media freedom and democratic accountability.

## OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

- On the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, BHJA presented the findings of the survey Media Freedom in Bosnia and Herzegovina from the Perspective of Citizens. The results showed that citizens place the highest level of trust in the media compared to other social actors, while online news portals and social media remain the dominant sources of information. At the same time, respondents identified political influence as one of the key obstacles to free and independent journalism, highlighting the continued need for stronger safeguards for media freedom.
- BHJA and NUNS publicly called on the World Press Photo Foundation to revoke an award granted to photographer Bojan Stojanović, arguing that the recognition was inconsistent with professional and ethical standards. The initiative sparked an important debate about journalistic ethics, accountability and the responsibility of international institutions when evaluating work from conflict-sensitive environments.



- Bosnia and Herzegovina ranked near the bottom of the regional Journalists' Safety Index 2025, with only Serbia recording a lower score. The findings of the reports *Journalists' Safety Index BiH 2025* and *The Safety of Women Journalists and Media Workers – BiH Brief 2025*, presented on May 26 in Sarajevo, point to persistent challenges related to journalists' safety, institutional responses to threats and attacks and the broader environment for media freedom. Both reports showed that stronger political commitment and more effective protection mechanisms are urgently needed to improve safety and freedom of expression, as well as working conditions for journalists.

Despite continued public trust in the media, the targeting of investigative journalists and the country's poor performance in regional safety assessments demonstrate that journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to work under significant pressure. Stronger institutional protection, accountability for attacks and public support for independent journalism remain essential for strengthening media freedom and democratic resilience.

# CROATIA

## SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

In May, SafeJournalists recorded **four cases** against journalists and media workers in Croatia. The recorded incidents included two physical attacks on journalists and media crews, as well as two cases involving obstruction of journalistic work and intimidation.

### Other threats to journalists

29 May – Journalist and editor of the local media outlet Svetonedeljski list, Robert Radošević, was prevented from reporting from the ceremonial session of the City Council of the City of Sveta Nedelja. Despite requesting accreditation in advance, the media outlet received no response, and upon arrival a security guard denied the journalist entry to the hall, allegedly following instructions from the city protocol.

21 May – A cameraman of Vinkovci Television was verbally threatened and prevented from carrying out his work while filming in Vinkovci. According to available information, the incident occurred during field reporting when an individual approached the media worker in an aggressive manner, threatened and attempted to obstruct the recording process.

### Actual attacks on journalists

7 May – Journalist Siniša Vuković was physically attacked in Split. According to reports, the attack occurred after a verbal confrontation, when the journalist was assaulted by another individual. The incident was reported to the police, and medical assistance was sought following the attack.

4 May – A Nova TV crew was physically attacked while reporting in Marina near Trogir. During the incident, members of the media crew were verbally abused and physically confronted while attempting to carry out journalistic work on location. The attack included aggressive behaviour toward the camera operator and attempts to obstruct filming. The incident was reported to the police.



# KOSOVO

## SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

During May, the Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK) reacted to **three cases** affecting journalists and media freedom in Kosovo - one other threat to journalist, one actual attack on journalists and one attack on media outlets and organizations.

### Other threats to journalists

Journalist Benjamin Kurti of Gazeta Ekskluzive faced interference while carrying out his professional duties in Vushtri. The incident occurred when he interviewed the Director of the local Water Utility regarding complaints raised by citizens. According to reports, the official attempted to take Kurti's mobile phone during the interaction, preventing him from freely performing his journalistic work. The case highlights ongoing challenges journalists face when seeking accountability from public officials.

### Actual attacks on journalists

A serious incident occurred in the village of Prelez i Muhaxherëve in Ferizaj, where a Klan Kosova reporting team was attacked while working in a public area. Cameraman Arben Restelica was struck in the back with a stick by an individual while filming. Journalist Qëndresa Tërshani and Restelica subsequently reported the case to the police. The attack posed a direct threat to the physical safety of media workers and disrupted their ability to report freely.

### Attacks on Media Organizations

The online media outlet Paparaci experienced repeated interruptions to its work after internet cables in the building where its newsroom is located were deliberately cut. The latest incident marked at least the third occurrence within these last months. The disruptions significantly affected the newsroom's ability to operate normally and maintain continuous reporting. The case represents a form of interference with media operations and raised concerns about pressure on independent journalism.

# MONTENEGRO

## SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

In May, **two new incidents** were recorded in the SafeJournalists database – one threat against media outlets and organisations and one threat against lives and physical safety of journalist.

On 18 May, RTCG reported that First Bank had filed a lawsuit against the public broadcaster, seeking EUR 7,000 in damages over a news report that referenced earlier allegations by the NGO MANS concerning the bank's operations. The Bank had previously filed similar lawsuits against journalist Vesna Radojević, RTV Podgorica, but also civil society organisations and activists.

On 23 May, Standard journalist Kristina Perković reported she received death threats, when underneath her photo an Instagram user wrote a comment "Where are those children so I can \*\*\*... they will be eating your bones when I slaughter you". On 27 May, the Basic State Prosecutor's Office in Kotor announced the arrest of a suspect from Tivat on suspicion of endangering the safety of Perković and another person. The SafeJournalists Network strongly condemned those appalling death threats and called on the competent institutions to urgently identify and prosecute the person responsible.

## Court Developments

On May 27, the Basic Court in Podgorica has dismissed as unfounded a lawsuit filed by Andrej Vučić against Vijesti, its Editor-in-Chief Mihailo Jovović, editor Danilo Mihajlović and journalist Jelena Jovanović. Vučić had sought €5,000 in damages and the removal of an article concerning Sky ECC communications in which he was mentioned. The court found that publishing the information was in the public interest, as it related to communications that are the subject of criminal proceedings and that referred to the brother of the President of Serbia.

Meanwhile, on May 18, the trial of the defendants accused in the murder of businessman Miodrag Kruščić and the attack on investigative journalist Olivera Lakić continued before the High Court in Podgorica, despite the fact that the defense, once again asked for the judge's recusal.

## WOMEN JOURNALISTS

Out of the total 33 cases of attacks on journalists recorded by the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro (TUMM) in the SafeJournalists database during 2025, women were the victims in 18 cases. Their male colleagues were targeted in 8 cases, while the remaining 7 incidents involved attacks on groups of journalists or media organizations themselves. As shown by the TUMM study "Safety of Women Journalists and Media Workers – Montenegro, Brief Overview 2025," women journalists were most frequently targeted by digital threats and harassment, including death threats, insults, sexist comments, doxing and other forms of public discrediting.



## OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Speaking at the [OSCE South East Europe Media Conference](#) in Tirana, TUMM's President Radomir Kračković said that, although Montenegro is showing greater readiness to respond to attacks on journalists, the rise of hate speech, political polarisation and right-wing rhetoric is leading to a record number of incidents. Kračković said that in recent years more cases of attacks on journalists had reached a legal conclusion than before, but that the most serious cases still remain unresolved.

On the [22nd anniversary of the murder of editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper Dan, Duško Jovanović](#), TUMM stated that Montenegro has yet to demonstrate a genuine commitment to fully resolving the most serious crime in the history of Montenegrin journalism. "Twenty-two years of waiting, repeated declarations, grand promises and purported progress have failed to deliver what matters most – truth and accountability", they said.



# NORTH MACEDONIA

## SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

No cases of violations of the rights of journalists and media workers were recorded in North Macedonia in May. This absence of violations highlighted a period of calm in the media landscape. The overall stability reflected the continued commitment of institutions and civil society to safeguarding press freedom and ensuring the safety of journalists, reinforcing trust in the country's media environment.

# SERBIA

## SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

In May, the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS) recorded a total of **eight incidents** involving journalists and media workers. Three physical attacks and five cases involving death threats and threats to the physical safety of journalists were documented. Although the number of recorded attacks was lower than in previous months, the threats directed at journalists were exceptionally serious and brutal. Cases of physical obstruction of journalists while reporting from public gatherings were also recorded once again, indicating the continuing risks media professionals face while performing their work in the field.

### Serious Threats Against Journalists

The editorial staff of the news portal *Mašina* became the target of serious threats on social media. In a comment posted under an Instagram post in which the newsroom invited followers to support its work through donations, a user operating under the account name *batko67* wrote: "The only thing I'll donate to you is a bullet in the forehead." On the same day, after the newsroom informed the public about the threats, several additional disturbing comments were posted, including another threat from a different profile stating: "You'll end up in a barrel."

On 18 May, journalist Srđan Nonić received two disturbing messages containing threats and insults through his Facebook page *Niška inicijativa* (Niš Initiative). One message stated: "You're a disgusting scumbag. You should be hanged! Filthy piece of trash." After Nonić replied, "Who are you, hero? Introduce yourself. Do you want to hang me?", the same profile responded: "Let's meet. Come on, hero. Get in touch, scumbag." The same individual subsequently called Nonić, repeating similar insults and disturbing messages and demanding that they meet in person.

*SportKlub* journalist Nikola Stamenić received threats on 18 May following the publication of the article "Year-End Review 2025: Red Star's Liabilities Reach €86 Million." A direct threat was posted in the comments section by a user named Boško: "Nikola Stamenić, I have two sons and a daughter, and I swear on them personally that you will not live much longer because of these provocations and spreading hatred. I will make your life miserable. Take this very seriously. I will gain nothing from this, but my children and future generations who come after us will be able to live at least somewhat happily without lies, tensions, and hatred. People like you, and various Pantićs and Tegettijas, have no place on this Earth!"

Ana Mihajlovski, former editor of *Naš Portal*, was subjected to pressure and threats from an individual allegedly connected to the operation of the portal. As a result, she decided to step down from her editorial role and transfer ownership of the outlet. Following her public announcement that she was withdrawing from editorial duties and activities related to the portal, additional threats were made by other individuals.

### Obstruction of Journalists While Reporting on Public Events

Several cases of obstruction of journalists while covering public events were recorded during May. On 5 May, during a session of the Municipal Assembly of Kula, where the Assembly President was being elected amid tensions caused by repeated voting and alleged procedural irregularities, an N1 television reporter entered the assembly hall. Despite holding accreditation to cover the event, she was physically removed from the premises shortly afterwards.



On 8 May, journalist Aleksandar Blanuša was physically obstructed and attacked at the Great Market in Zrenjanin during clashes between members of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and activists of the United Phantoms Movement (PUF). Blanuša attempted to obtain a statement from Mayor Simo Salapura but was unable to do so because, according to his account, SNS activists and supporters pushed him, tripped him, and otherwise obstructed him in carrying out his journalistic duties. Activists stood in front of his camera, and at one point SNS officials allegedly attempted to seize his mobile phone. Several hours later, SNS supporters and activists gathered at a nearby roundabout and verbally abused both him and members of his family. Blanuša carried his press identification throughout the incident.

Following a protest held in Belgrade on 23 May, during which clashes occurred between police and a number of citizens, a Zoomer journalist reporting from the scene was pushed by police officers. While filming an intervention in which officers were striking a young man with batons, she was shoved with a police shield despite being clearly identified as a journalist and wearing a press vest.

## **Court actions**

### **Judgment Against the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation Puts Pressure on Freedom of Expression**

The Second Basic Court in Belgrade issued a first-instance judgment ordering the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation (SCF) to pay a total of RSD 1,035,000. The Foundation was ordered to pay each plaintiff RSD 200,000 in compensation for non-material damages related to emotional distress allegedly caused by harm to their honour and reputation, as well as legal costs. Former members of the State Security Service filed the lawsuit against the SCF over a public statement expressing dissatisfaction with the final acquittal issued by the Court of Appeal in the case concerning the murder of journalist Slavko Ćuruvija.

From the outset, concerns were raised that the lawsuit bore the characteristics of a SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) action. However, the court did not take the defence's arguments into account. It is particularly concerning that the court issued this decision after the Supreme Court had found significant violations of criminal procedure in the Court of Appeal's acquittal judgment that favoured the defendants—the former State Security officers who later sued the Foundation over its reaction to the acquittal. In addition to the fact that justice has not been achieved in the case of Slavko Ćuruvija's murder, the judgment constitutes additional pressure on the Foundation for publicly expressing dissatisfaction with the acquittal. Such a decision may have a chilling effect on freedom of expression and reporting on issues of significant public interest, sending a message that organisations and individuals who critically address such matters may become targets of legal proceedings.

The National Working Group for Combating SLAPPs assessed that the judgment represents dangerous pressure on freedom of expression and warned that decisions of this kind directly narrow the space for public debate and encourage the further use of the judiciary as an instrument of pressure.



## OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

### **Potential Sale of Adria News Network Media Threatens Media Freedom**

Information regarding the sale of some of the last remaining independent media outlets in Serbia to Alpac Capital represents a direct and inevitable threat to media freedom in Serbia and across the Western Balkans.

Through this transaction, one of the last editorially independent television news broadcasters, daily newspapers, and online media platforms in Serbia would come under the control of a company whose existing media investments have been marked by documented allegations of censorship, political interference, and the erosion of editorial standards. Alpac Capital, the prospective owner, acquired a majority stake in Euronews in 2022. Following that acquisition, the licence for Euronews Serbia was granted to the state-owned company Telekom Srbija. The company's CEO was subsequently recorded discussing strategies for weakening N1 television with a senior executive of United Group. The conversation reportedly included a personal request from President Aleksandar Vučić to remove one of the key guarantors of editorial independence from the company.

Investigative reporting by the French outlet *Direkt36* and the newspaper *Le Monde* later revealed that the acquisition had been partially financed through Hungarian state capital and companies closely linked to the political networks of Viktor Orbán.