

# 2022 Report on the Activities of the Standing Working Group for Safety of Journalists

- Standing Working Group for Safety of  
Journalists-

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## Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| I Introduction   | 02 |
| II Data on cases of assaults against journalists in 2022 | 04 |
| III Case studies from the PWG practice                   | 08 |
| IV PWG activities during 2022                            | 12 |
| V 2023 - 2025 PWG Action Plan                            | 15 |
| VI Conclusions and recommendations                       | 20 |

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

## I Introduction

Worldwide, journalists face increasingly complex security challenges that affect the way they exercise their important role as guardians of the public interest. Consequently, citizens are deprived of the information they need to participate in political life and other democratic processes in our societies. Protecting the safety of journalists therefore becomes a matter of preserving the fundamental values of a democratic society, which is why journalism needs all the support available, especially from the state institutions and international organizations such as the OSCE.

Due to the alarming number of attacks in recent years, the topic of journalists' safety has become extremely important in Serbia as well. As a joint and coordinated response of the state and the media community, the Permanent Working Group for Safety of Journalists (hereinafter: PWGPWG) was established in January 2017, while the Governmental Working Group for Safety of Journalists (hereinafter: VRG) was formed at the end of 2020. The key difference between the two groups is their different mandates. PWG is a platform for exchanging information about assaults against journalists and the ongoing investigations, as well as for using the Contact Points System for emergency response when a criminal offence is committed against journalists. On the other hand, the VRG exists to provide political support to the PWG when needed, to publicly condemn the most serious assaults and to exchange information directly with the Prime Minister who chairs each meeting of this Group.

The OSCE Mission to Serbia actively supports both processes from their inception. These joint efforts led to the realization of almost 30 activities on the implementation of the 2016 Agreement on the Safety of Journalists and two PWG Action Plans (2018-2019 and 2021-2022). Together with PWG partners, the Mission organized trainings for more than 200 prosecutors, police officers and journalists; produced numerous analyses and reports to help members of the Group to better understand the security risks journalists face; supported the launch of a 24/7 SOS telephone line for free legal assistance to journalists; created a platform for the international exchange of experiences and knowledge in this area, and many other activities and projects.

The results of the multiannual efforts are visible: Serbia significantly improved its position on the list of the Reporters without Borders - from 93 place in 2021 it moved to 79 in 2022. This shift is a joint achievement of all organizations and institutions participating in the work of the PWG and represents a strong message of true commitment to the improvement of the media freedom and safety of journalists in the country. However, this Report, similar to the European Commission 2022 Report on Serbia, concludes that despite certain progress, numerous challenges remain and journalists still do not feel safe. This implies that the OSCE Mission support should continue, to an even greater extent than so far.



The primary and common goal of the PWG and the OSCE Mission to Serbia is to save the lives of journalists, enhance the working environment for the the media and journalists, improve the efficiency of institutions and reduce impunity for assaults against media workers.

During 2022, the PWG significantly contributed to a more efficient resolution of cases of assaults against journalists at the local level. In local communities, journalists face specific challenges and are much more exposed to violence, threats and pressures, and for them justice is more difficult to achieve. However, the PWG managed to make visible progress in this area as well, and a good example is the case of threats to OK Radio from Vranje, targeted by powerful local criminals. Only four months after the incident, the perpetrators were sentenced in the first instance to prison terms in an action that is an excellent example of co-operation between state authorities and the media community.

Further, the PWG visit to Loznica, when journalist Vladimir Mitrić received death threats, was a key step in mobilizing local institutions to ensure the safety of the threatened journalist who has been living under 24/7 police protection for the past 18 years. Another example is the case of a physical assault on Daško Milinović, a journalist from Novi Sad, when each of the three attackers was quickly arrested and sentenced to more than a year in prison.

In all of these cases, the PWG was the link between the journalists at risk and local law enforcement authorities providing an effective and coordinated joint response. During 2022, the PWG managed to some extent to restore journalists' trust in institutions and to reduce polarization within the journalistic community.

According to the official database of the Republic Public Prosecutor's Office (hereinafter: RPPO), in the period from 1 January to 30 November 2022, 76 criminal cases were filed in connection with criminal offences committed against journalists, of which 3 cases in January, 4 in February, 9 in March, 12 cases in April, 3 in May, 11 in June, 5 in July, 8 in August, 10 in September, 4 in October and 7 in November. The first-instance or final decision was passed in 25 cases, which represents 32.89% of the total number. Compared to the 87 filed criminal cases in 2021, it can be said that a slight decrease in the number of assaults was registered. However, journalists' and media associations are not entirely satisfied with the speed of case processing and the final outcomes in terms of the level of convictions.

Therefore, after more than five years of the PWG existence, it can be concluded that it has the capacity to achieve the goals for which it was founded. From its establishment until today, the PWG has made a great and important contribution to the investigations and court proceedings in cases of criminal offences against journalists, which are, in fact, more efficient than before. However, the safety of journalists in Serbia is still not at a satisfactory level and requires continued intensive engagement of all stakeholders, including further support from the OSCE Mission. With this in mind, the PWG has prepared a new Action Plan for the period 2023 to 2025 in order to further enhance the

functionality of the Group outside of regular quarterly and increasingly frequent extraordinary meetings, to improve the awareness and knowledge of its members and contact points, and to increase coherence of the Group. The progress shown by the PWG in 2022 should be seen as a tool and inspiration for further positive systemic changes in the society, for continued work on building trust between the media community and law enforcement authorities, as well as for discussion on how the functioning of the Group could be additionally improved. Although this is not an easy task, the OSCE Mission to Serbia will remain a sincere, committed and reliable ally of the PWG in this process.

## **II Data on cases of assaults against journalists in 2022 related to the work they perform**

Data on cases of assaults and pressures on journalists and other media professionals are kept in various records. Republic Public Prosecutor's Office (RPPO) keeps records related to criminal acts committed against journalists, while on the other hand, individual journalists' associations keep records on assaults and pressures on media workers. The data from these records do not match because the data collection methodologies and categorization are different.

The key difference is that associations look at the broader picture of media freedom violations and record in their databases not only cases when there is a suspicion that a criminal offence has been committed to the detriment of journalists and the media outlet, but also various cases of the so-called pressures. On the other hand, RPPO registers in its records only the cases where there is a suspicion that a criminal offence has been committed.

RPPO has been keeping records since 2016. Namely, first the RPPO passed the Instructions in December, introducing the keeping of special records in the appellate, higher and basic public prosecutor's offices concerning criminal acts committed against persons who perform tasks of public importance in the field of public information, and in connection with the tasks they perform. That Binding Instructions also provided for the keeping of records of criminal acts of assaults against media websites, but such records are not kept nor are they mentioned in the new Instructions from 2020, because the focus was still on more efficient protection of the physical safety of journalists.

The Instructions stipulate that the records should contain information about the perpetrator of the criminal act, the victim, the criminal act, the actions taken, as well as information about the public prosecutor's and court decisions. Quarterly reports are envisaged, to be submitted to the RPPO through the appellate public prosecutor's offices.

In December 2020, the RPPO issued a new Binding Instructions that regulated in more detail the actions of public prosecutor offices in cases of endangering the safety of journalists. The range of criminal offences to which prosecutors must pay special attention is expanding, and in addition to the criminal offence of Endangering Security, the Instructions also include 35 other criminal offences whose execution may endanger the safety of journalists.

The new Instructions introduced certain novelties in order to improve the keeping of records, and it is foreseen that special records are managed by the deputy public prosecutor designated as the primary contact point, and that the deputy public prosecutor and the public prosecutor are responsible for the accuracy of the data in the records. Monthly reporting was introduced, according to which the Appellate Public Prosecutor's Offices are obliged to submit to the RPPO summary monthly reports on the

proceedings in the mentioned cases. The individual case clerk is obliged to indicate in red an order on the first page of the case file to allocate the case to special records and immediately deliver it to the registry office for recording.

Also, the new Instructions stipulate that the competent public prosecutor must examine the basis for disciplinary liability in case of non-compliance with the provisions of the Instructions due to a possible violation, i.e. refusal to perform the entrusted tasks and non-execution of the written instructions of the superior public prosecutor. The competent public prosecutor is obliged to inform the RPPO about the possible filing of disciplinary charges.

The records and statistical data are submitted regularly, every three months, to the representatives of journalists' and media associations participating in the work of the PWG.

According to the data obtained from the RPPO, in 2022 (in the period 1 January - 30 November), 76 criminal charges were filed with the public prosecutor offices in Serbia in connection with acts committed to the detriment of journalists. Of that number, a guilty verdict was passed in two cases, while one guilty verdict was in the meantime revoked on appeal and the case was returned to the first-instance court for a repeated proceeding. In one case, an acquittal was rendered (appeal proceedings is underway).

In 6 cases, proceedings are pending before the court based on the indictment of the public prosecutor. In 7 cases a decision was made to dismiss the criminal charges, while in 15 cases an official note was made that there is no basis for initiating criminal proceedings.

In the remaining 45 cases, proceedings pending before the prosecutor's office are in various stages. In two cases a request for international legal assistance was submitted, in five cases the evidence gathering actions are underway, while in 32 cases a request was made to collect the necessary information, and in one case, the review of the criminal charges and submitted evidence is underway for the purpose of decision passing. Also, 5 cases are in the records of unknown perpetrators.

As for the imposed sentences, it is encouraging that in two cases that were resolved by a conviction, a prison sentence was imposed. In one case, an effective 14 months prison sentence was imposed for one defendant, while for the other two defendants it was 8 months each. In the other case, 6 months house arrest without electronic surveillance was imposed with the security measure of restraining order with regards to the injured journalist. One judgement was passed after the court proceedings, while in one case a plea bargain agreement was concluded. The third guilty verdict also foresees 8 months house arrest, under electronic surveillance in the premises where the defendant lives, as well as the security measure of restraining order and banning communication with the injured journalist. However, this judgement has since been revoked and the case has been returned to the first-instance court for a repeated proceeding.

In 2021, 87 cases involving injured journalists were filed, of which a guilty verdict was reached in 10 cases, while an acquittal was reached in only one case. 32 cases ended either with a decision on dismissing the criminal charges or with an official note that there is no basis for initiating criminal proceedings. In four cases, proceedings before the court are pending. While 40 cases are pending before the prosecution, of which 13 cases are in the records of unknown perpetrators.

In contrast to 2022, in 2021 half of the imposed sentences were suspended sentences (5 cases). In one case, effective prison sentences were imposed on two defendants, while house arrest was imposed on the third one. Also, in one case house arrest with electronic surveillance was ordered, while in the other one it was ordered without electronic surveillance. In two cases, mandatory psychiatric treatment measure was ordered. These and other security measures also appear with the other sentences mentioned above.

The records show the trend of a large number of offences committed via the Internet and social networks that are under the jurisdiction of the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime. Out of the total number of reported cases in 2022 (76), 36 reports were submitted to this prosecutor's office, taking into account its jurisdiction. In 2021, that number was even higher, 50 such cases were reported out of a total of 87. In the vast majority of the cases, reports were submitted due to the suspicion that a threat has been made, i.e. that the criminal offence of Endangering the Safety has been committed.

This year, as in previous years, most physical assaults were recorded during street protests. Thus, in September, four physical assaults were recorded on the Europride day, and three assaults in the following days.

Since the beginning of record keeping, aggregate data shows that a large number of reported offences end up with a decision of the prosecutor's office that the features of a criminal offence for which prosecution is undertaken ex officio have not been effectuated. Namely, in the period from 1 January 2016 to 31 October 2022, out of 436 filed cases, the aforementioned decisions were made in 180 cases (41.28%), while in 256 cases (58.72%) the prosecution determined that there was a well-founded suspicion that a criminal offence has been committed to the detriment of the journalist.

Statistical data of the prosecutor's office show that in the mentioned period 48 convictions were passed, while in 18 cases the principle of opportunity was applied, i.e. the institute of deferred prosecution where the perpetrator was sanctioned by imposing an obligation (payment of a sum of money for humanitarian purposes, community sentence, etc.). In all the cases, the liabilities were fulfilled in full, while in one case the application of the mentioned institute is underway. In one case, a diversion measure was imposed against a juvenile offender. On the other hand, 6 acquittals were passed, one of which is not legally binding, while in five cases the prosecution's indictment was rejected or dismissed.

In the same period, in 178 cases a decision was passed to dismiss the criminal offence, or an official note was made that there is no basis for initiating criminal proceedings against adult offenders. In two cases, a decision was passed that there is no basis for initiating proceedings against juvenile offenders. There are 16 cases pending before the court, and in one case the criminal prosecution has been transferred to the authorities of another country. There are 160 cases in various procedural stages before the prosecutor's office, and 78, of that number, are in the records of unknown perpetrators.

On the other hand, two journalistic associations keep records of assaults and pressures on journalists, the Journalists' Association of Serbia (UNS) and the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS). Also in this case, the data in their records are not identical because each association has its own methodology, method of data collection and categorization.

NUNS has been keeping the Database of assaults and pressures on journalists and other media professionals since 2008. Physical assaults, verbal threats, attacks against the property, threats against the property and various types of pressures are recorded in the database. A large number of acts are recorded in the category of pressures, some of them can endanger the safety of journalists even though they do not contain a direct threat, while on the other hand there are cases that aggravate the daily work of journalists. The pressures include various forms of harassment that do not contain a direct threat, targeting by public officials and public figures, hate speech, dangerous discrediting campaigns, discrimination on various grounds, interference when reporting on public events, exclusion from invitation to the events of public importance, SLAPP lawsuits, as well as many other forms of pressure. The data recorded in the database are cases brought to the association's attention directly by the journalists, or the information obtained from the media outlets was entered into the database after verification.

According to the Independent Association of Journalists (NUNS) NUNS database, 116 incidents have been recorded until mid-December 2022, of which 30 were verbal threats, 9 physical assaults, 3 attacks against the property, 2 threats against the property and 68 pressures. While in 2021 there were 151 cases of assaults and pressures recorded (6 physical, 44 verbal threats, 5 attacks and threats against the property and 96 pressures). In the last few years a very high number of cases have been recorded in the database, and the number of different types of pressures is increasing. Also, the NUNS database records the trend of a high number of threats and harassments directed at journalists via the Internet, mainly via social networks.

Judging by the association's data, a smaller number of assaults and pressures were recorded in 2022, however, this year saw a lot of worryingly grave cases of assaults and threats. There is still a negative atmosphere in the society when it comes to journalists, caused also by a large number of recorded cases where journalists are targeted by high-ranking officials.

### III. Case studies from the PWG practice

Of all the cases of endangering the safety of journalists recorded this year, which were 76 according to the data of the RPPPO, three were chosen and explained in more detail in order to illustrate the role of the PWG in their processing. Those are the cases: OK radio from Vranje, threats to Drvo-tehnika magazine journalist Dragojlo Blagojević and very worrying threats to the editorial staff of the daily newspaper Danas.

- The case of threats to OK radio from Vranje (No comment cafe)

The threats to the owner of OK Radio from Vranje began late in 2021 by Dejan Nikolić Kantar, convicted four times for criminal offences, twice for endangering safety. Nikolić is the owner of a chain of gambling house and wanted to expand his betting house, which is next door to OK Radio. He tried to buy the premises of the OK radio, including the No comment cafe, to which the owner, Olivera Vladković, did not agree. Without a building permit, Nikolić initiated the construction of a new space, next to OK Radio's premises. The construction inspection prohibited the works, but they continued nevertheless. Escalation occurred at the beginning of June, when part of the Radio's premises was walled up by these works. This was preceded by an intrusion into a part of the premises where the No Comment Cafe was situated, the destruction of the interior, and then the verbal threat by Mr. Nikolić to the employed journalists over the phone.

Representatives of the PWG visited Vranje, met with the OK Radio employees, then with contact points in the police and prosecutor's office, as well as with the representatives of local self-government. They were informed in detail about the actions being implemented, and then they informed the public about the conclusions. Beside the PWG, an extraordinary session was also held by the VRG, which condemned these threats, and the Deputy Republic Public Prosecutor, Branko Stamenković, assessed that this act represented a gauntlet thrown in the face of the rule of law. The competent prosecutor's office filed an indictment, and the court soon scheduled a trial.

The PWG representatives attended all hearings and then had meetings with local journalists and contact points. They reported the details of the case to the public. The PWG member Veran Matić was also a victim of a smear campaign, with posters plastered all over Vranje, with offensive and accusatory text and photos. The perpetrators were identified and released after the trial. The Mol conducted a security assessment for OK Radio employees and determined protection measures, and then a security assessment for the PWG member Ljiljana Stojanović, who was provided preventive protection by the police for several weeks. The same assessment was made for Veran Matić.

Although the court worked under difficult circumstances, including the gathering of hundreds of people employed and paid by Nikolić, judge Jelena Dimitrijević managed the process very professionally and efficiently and passed guilty verdicts of 14 months in prison for the first defendant and eight months in prison for the two accomplices. During

one of the hearings, the defendant repeated the threats, which were reported and for which the prosecution is currently collecting additional testimonies and data. The court also ordered the detention of the first defendant in the District Prison in Belgrade, in order to provide him with adequate health care, despite his desire to stay in a local clinical centre.

In this case, the mechanism of contact points of the prosecutor's office, the police and journalists' associations functioned very well, and the PWG representatives made a significant step forward in their work by being present in local areas where the safety of journalists was threatened.

As of the writing of this report, the local self-government has still not executed its obligation to demolish the illegally built facility, and the employees of OK Radio are still unable to work. In this case, the direct intervention of the Government of the Republic of Serbia is necessary, because this situation represents a demonstration of the power of the first-instance convicted person and the continuation of worrying messages of threats against journalists and the local community.

At the time of the criminal offence perpetration, the convicted person was already serving a four-month sentence for the criminal offence of organizing illegal gambling. To the question sent to the Games of Chance Authority, how is it possible for a person who has several criminal convictions, the last one for illegal gambling, to get a license to organize games of chance, journalists' and media associations received the answer that this person did not report about the existing criminal record.

After that, the betting houses were temporarily closed, but soon the Administrative Court passed a temporary measure annulling the decision of the Games of Chance Authority and allowing the betting houses to continue operating. This is an example showing the lack of synchronization among the judicial authorities when it comes to the cases that are multi-layered, complex, because the accused made a fortune from the criminal act of organizing illegal games, and then he legalized that business and expended it in a short period of time. Despite that, the Administrative Court estimated that the fate of 160 employees, who receive salaries from the activity stemming from the execution of a criminal act, is more important than the sanctioning of organized crime.

When it comes to the penal policy towards Nikolić, a mild penal policy was observed considering the imposed sanction of four months with serving the sentence in home conditions without electronic surveillance. In addition, he is allowed to go to a fictitious workplace, and on top of all that, he is allowed to have a walk for an extra hour, because prisoners in prisons have that right as well.

The Administration for the Implementation of Penal Sanctions was not informed about the actions of Dejan Nikolić, that he was abusing the privileges received, and it passed a decision to revoke those privileges, but Nikolić was already in custody due to a new criminal offence committed while serving his sentence. There are many examples in

which it can be seen that Dejan Nikolić was very often favoured with a mild penal policy and in the process of the execution of sentences. And when it comes to the dynamics of trials in other cases, they are often postponed due to his reported health problems. He is currently on trial for threats and assault against the head of the Police Department and for threats and violence against his ex-girlfriend.

The PWG representative's assessment is that in all cases related to Nikolić, it is necessary to engage the top of the executive power through its concrete assistance to the local self-government to execute the demolition of the illegal building. It is very important to carry out extensive investigations into the business of Dejan Nikolić Kantar and related entities, the origin of the assets - because there are clear indications and testimonies that this is a blatant example of organized crime. Nikolić's behavior and his comments in the courtroom can be interpreted as his determination to continue committing crimes even after serving his sentence.

- The case of threats to journalist Dragojlo Blagojević

The editor and owner of the magazine Drvo tehnika, Dragojlo Blagojević, reported the threats that he received by phone around midnight, between 12 and 13 July 2022. A month and a half later, the Third Basic Public Prosecutor's Office issued a decision rejecting the criminal charges, as the Ministry of Interior determined after the investigation that there was no call at the time reported by the journalist.

Despite this, the PWG member, Veran Matić, through personal involvement, found out that MTS Telekom has on its records a call at the time claimed by journalist Blagojević. At the urgently convened session of the PWG, the representative of the prosecution, Mr. Branko Stamenković, after learning about this new development of the situation, said that he would set a precedent and order to the competent prosecutor's office to request data on the calls directed to Blagojević's phone directly from Telekom, without involving the police. After a certain time, an official confirmation was received from Telekom that the controversial call did take place, as well as information about the entire telephone traffic from 12 to 15 July, testifying to more than twenty calls, opposing the findings of the police and confirming the statements of journalist Blagojević.

After that information, the competent prosecutor's office restarted the investigation in order to determine who threatened the journalist, but also the investigation into how it could happen that the police had inaccurate data. According to Telekom data, the threatening call came from abroad and reached Blagojević's landline through SBB's infrastructure. This operator provided information about the incoming call and identified the country from which the call came, as well as the number. Through international legal assistance, the prosecutor's office requested the identification of the owner of the number. However, as of the writing of this report, the requested information was not received, primarily due to the slowness of the international legal assistance procedure, on the part of the institutions of the country the information was requested from.

At the same time, in the investigation related to the omissions on the part of the police, a notification was received from the expert that a problem was detected in the software that registers only the calls received by MTS Telecom subscribers and that it will be addressed. This is a serious shortcoming that also poses a threat to national security, and therefore it needs to be addressed thoroughly.

In any case, although the results of the investigation into threats against journalist Dragojlo Blagojević are still pending, it can be said that the PWG has made certain steps ahead in this case. Primarily, this is a new operational model that implies permanent sessions of the PWG when it comes to serious assaults against journalists. Members of the PWG were in constant electronic communication and held a large number of emergency meetings to closely monitor this case and exchange the information obtained. Also, certain deficiencies were identified in the way the police investigated cases of threats in the digital environment, more specifically in accessing the retained data available to the operators. It is expected that these deficiencies will be corrected in the near future, thanks to the PWG significant contribution.

- The case of threats to the daily newspaper Danas:

At the beginning of November, the editorial office of the daily newspaper Danas received a threatening e-mail, which was assessed as potentially very dangerous and worrying, because it referred to the Charlie Hebdo scenario happening to them. In that case, 11 members of the editorial staff of this French newspaper were killed. The sent message contained a precise description of what will happen to them, with detailed knowledge of the journalists employed by Danas who will be the primary targets, and with the layout of the rooms where the editorial office is located. Several freelancers who are associates of Danas were added to the list of potential targets. Such a threat did not only disturb the editorial office, but also the entire journalistic community and the PWG. The contact points system reacted swiftly and all the necessary investigative actions were carried out in a very short period of time.

The PWG, together with the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, Ambassador Jan Braathu, visited the editorial staff of this media outlet, obtained information about how the work is organized under the conditions of threats, and shared with the editor and the employed journalists the information about the course of the investigation.

It was soon determined that the threat came through Proton mail, a company from Switzerland known for encrypting messages and anonymizing senders. In this case, considering that it is a serious act, even with elements of terrorism, Proton provided certain information, but not the key information that would lead to the discovery of the identity of the person who threatened. On the other hand, the Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime registered a problem that exists in the sender identification process due to the fact that local providers use one IP address for hundreds and even thousands of user accounts. This practically makes it almost impossible to identify the sender of the message. The representatives of the media community were informed that all the

capacities of the competent authorities are being used, but that the final results have not been achieved so far. The RPPO requested additional information from the competent bodies in Switzerland, as well as from Proton, but as of the writing of this report there were no answers that would allow the police and the prosecutor's office to identify the person who made the threat.

In the meantime, the MoI has assigned permanent security guards in front of the Danas offices, and security assessments have been made for editors and journalists. In this case, the PWG is permanently active, having constant sessions, but with the passage of time the possibilities for a successful resolution of the case decrease.

The impossibility of solving this case, related to the organization and work of domestic providers, must be communicated to the highest state authorities in order to reach an agreement to correct omissions and to avoid situations in which it is impossible to identify from which address the threatening message was sent and who is the owner of the account.

## **IV PWG activities during 2022**

In the middle of 2020, the PWG, in co-operation with the OSCE Mission, developed the 2021-2022 Action Plan, comprising 11 activities that the members of the PWG unanimously adopted in December of the same year. Out of the 11 activities for the aforementioned two-year period, during 2021, PWG implemented the following:

- Analysis of potential amendments to the Criminal Code
- Launch of the Safe Journalists website
- Production of two video podcasts on the safety of journalists
- Preparation of the Report on PWG activities for the period 2017-2021

On the other hand, during 2022, the PWG implemented the remaining activities provided for in this document (only one remained, which, due to certain technical and administrative reasons, will be transferred to the first quarter of 2023):

- Study visit to the Dutch Working Group for the Safety of Journalists
- Development of the Analysis "Media portrayal of vulnerability and threat to journalists in Serbia"
- Development of the Analysis of the former communication and the level of openness of the competent state institutions with regards to the cases of endangering the safety of journalists
- Marking the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists by organizing a panel discussion "Safety of journalists in Serbia: Achievements and Challenges of Working Groups"
- Preparation of the 2022 PWG Annual Report
- Participation of PWG representatives at numerous international and domestic conferences and forums

As mentioned, various activities were carried out in 2022 within the PWG Action Plan for 2021 and 2022. Two analyses were developed, one of them being "Media portrayal of vulnerability and threat to journalists in Serbia". It included the analysis of daily newspaper articles (316 in total), with the aim to determine the specifics of the media narrative about endangering journalists and media organizations and the mechanism by which that narrative or different narratives are designed. The analysis is based on a clear demarcation and determination of the difference between reasoned critique of professional work and clearly stated viewpoints compared to unsubstantiated critique of personal characteristics and preferences, which threatens professional and personal integrity.

Also, an "Analysis of previous communication models and the degree of openness of competent state institutions in cases of threats to the safety of journalists" was carried out, which analysed the degree of openness through focus group discussions and an anonymous survey, as well as the position of the victim in criminal proceedings. The



analysis showed an insufficient degree of openness of institutions, but also an increase in the visibility of PWG compared to the previous period, defining recommendations on how to further improve the openness.

One of the activities foreseen in the Action Plan was a study visit to the Netherlands, held in May 2022, which allowed PWG members to learn about the methods of the Dutch Working Group for the Safety of Journalists, which was established by the police, prosecutor's offices and associations of journalists and editors-in-chief. The visit was organized by the OSCE Mission, and was attended by 9 representatives of the PWG. The PWG representatives had the opportunity to discuss and exchange experiences with the journalists' association from the Netherlands and to learn how their working group functions, the method of financing, about the similarities and differences, and how they implemented their mechanism in individual cases. Best practices were exchanged, the main challenges faced by colleagues from the Netherlands were discussed, as well as the ways to solve them. The members of the PWG got acquainted with the work of other institutions in the Netherlands, such as the institution of the Ombudsman and the self-regulatory body, the Press Council. They had the opportunity to talk with the professor from the Faculty of Law of the University of Amsterdam about the problems related to the safety of journalists, the enactments and resolutions that were passed concerning that topic, but also about new trends when it comes to media freedom, as well as the European Media Freedom Act.

The activities of the Standing Working Group in 2022 were more intensive and certain positive practices were established, and the solidarity it demonstrated in certain cases was of great importance for the journalists. This year was marked by very disturbing cases of threats to journalists and the media outlets, and the PWG representatives recognized the need to change and adapt the way of their work and to intensify activities, not only in regular and extraordinary meetings, but also through visits to the newsrooms and journalists, to local media outlets, support for journalists and media outlets facing difficult court proceedings, but also discussions with certain institutions outside the PWG.

On several occasions, the PWG representatives, together with the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, Ambassador Jan Braathu, visited endangered journalists and newsrooms. They visited the daily newspaper Danas, and they also had a conversation with the journalist Jelena Obućina, providing support and showing solidarity with media actors who are exposed to various forms of threats and assaults due to their reporting.

In this year, the PWG was more active in the field of communication with the public, primarily through the statements by its representatives in the media and their participation in various broadcasts. The PWG published press releases on several occasions, which contributed to making it more recognizable to the public and its activities being mentioned in a larger number of articles than before.

The Agreement stipulates that the PWG holds regular quarterly meetings and, if necessary, extraordinary meetings as well. In 2022, the PWG held eight meetings, of which

four were regular and four extraordinary meetings. This dynamic is in accordance with the Rulebook on PWG procedures, which stipulates that the Group meets regularly once every three months. Apart from the regular activities, familiarization with the current situation when it comes to cases from the records and the actions taken by competent institutions, current topics and events, certain very serious cases required additional activities and a more extensive analysis by the PWG members. Four extraordinary meetings were held in the second half of the year, and most of them concerned the aforementioned case of threats to journalist Dragojlo Blagojević, but also other serious threats, such as threats to the editorial office of the daily newspaper Danas. The members of the PWG were informed about the actions of the competent institutions and were able to contribute to the progress and investigations of individual cases by their actions and knowledge.

In 2022, the PWG representatives attended a working breakfast organized at the Dutch Embassy, attended by the ambassadors of the Netherlands, Canada and the Great Britain. At the meeting, they discussed the work of the PWG, but also the current situation when it comes to the safety of journalists in general.

In co-operation with the OSCE Mission to Serbia and the Embassy of Austria, and with the support of the EU Delegation in Serbia, a panel discussion was organized in Belgrade on 2 November, titled "Safety of journalists in Serbia: Achievements and challenges of working groups for the safety of journalists". The aim of this event was to inform the participants about the recent developments in three important cases of endangering the safety of journalists (Dragojlo Blagojević, Jelena Zorić and OK Radio), and to provide a platform for debate of all stakeholders, based on facts about achievements and challenges faced by the existing mechanisms to protect the safety of journalists: Standing Working Group for Safety of Journalists and the Governmental Working Group for Safety of Journalists. Moreover, the event represents further support for all stakeholders and their significant efforts to improve the safety of journalists, media freedom and freedom of expression in the country, and for defining conclusions and recommendations that will be useful for defining the new PWG Action Plan for the period 2023 - 2025.

Also, in 2022, an event was organized to cover the topic of potential amendments to the Criminal Code in the part that concerns the safety of journalists. Certain representatives of the PWG participated in the round table "Protecting the safety of journalists through amendments to the Criminal Code - can we reach a consensus?", where the reasons for proposing amendments to this law were recalled, and the representatives of the PWG and other participants expressed their opinions on the subject.

Beside the mentioned individual visits to certain newsrooms and journalists, institutions, the PWG representatives, both association representatives and institution representatives, appeared at public events, both open and closed. They participated in debates where they presented the work of the PWG, highlighted good practices, but also opportunities for improvement, and most importantly, informed the public and



journalists about its existence and activities, so that journalists would use this mechanism more.

Another important PWG activity that was rolled out during 2022 is the SOS telephone line for reporting threats and assaults against journalists. This service involves the daily duty of lawyers and legal experts who provide journalists with free legal advice in cases where their safety is threatened. The SOS line averages between 20 and 40 calls per month. Of that number, between five and ten will be reported through the system of Contact Points. Regular reports containing data on the functioning of the SOS line are sent to the Cabinet of the Prime Minister and to the Ministry of Culture and Information - now the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications. This is important because in this way the highest authorities are informed about political pressures, and in some specific cases there is direct intervention by the Prime Minister or members of the cabinet.

In addition, the website [bezbedninovinari.rs](http://bezbedninovinari.rs) continues to function, publishing all relevant information on the contact points and RPPO reports that are prepared quarterly. Also, articles dealing with the topic of journalists' safety from different angles are published, as well as explanation of the necessary legal steps that should be taken on every occasion when a journalist's safety is threatened.



## **V 2023 - 2025 PWG Action Plan**

At the meetings of the PWG during 2022, there were frequent discussions about the need to design new activities in the following period for improving the work and efficiency of the Group, and above all for defining a new Action Plan for the period 2023 - 2025.

Defining the new Action Plan has become particularly important considering the fact that the Agreement on co-operation and measures to improve the safety of journalists, signed in December 2016, has been fully implemented. The agreement provided for 10 measures and all of them were implemented.

In addition, the PWG Action Plan for the period 2018-2019, which provided for 15 activities, was also fully implemented. Almost the same applies to the PWG Action Plan for the period 2021-2022, which contained 11 activities, of which only one remained. That one, due to certain technical and administrative reasons, will be transferred to the first quarter of 2023.

Bearing all this in mind, as well as the need for the PWG to be active outside of regular quarterly meetings, the members of the Group adopted the below-mentioned activity plan for the following three-year period. Each of the proposed activities contains information on the time frame for implementation, and a proposed partner which, with the support of the OSCE, will take a leading role in the implementation. All the defined activities became part of the Action Plan, based on numerous reports and analyses prepared by PWG during the previous two years.

At the end of this section there is also a table of activities displaying the dynamics of their implementation during the next three years. All necessary funds for the implementation of the proposed Action Plan will be provided by the OSCE Mission to Serbia.

### Activities - 2023 - 2025 Action Plan

#### ***Activity 1: Regular annual training of police and prosecution contact points on the implementation of the Binding Instructions of the Republic Public Prosecutor regarding criminal cases of endangering the safety of journalists 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 will entail even more efficient other stages of the procedure, such as gathering evidence, writing more grounded indictments, and general detection and prosecution of perpetrators. Consequently, a joint training should be organized once a year for the next three years, for the representatives of the prosecution and the police, which would include the topic of applying the binding

instructions of the RPPO, but also other topics of significance for more efficient prosecution of criminal offences against journalists, including the fight against sexual and other types of gender-based violence, as well as specific threats and harassment of female journalists.

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|---|-------------------------------|
| Partner in the implementation of this activity: | RPPO and MoI                  |
| Time frame:                                     | Once a year from 2023 to 2025 |

***Activity 2: Designing a curriculum and associated trainings for journalists on security, including general binding instructions of the prosecution and enhancing the knowledge of media workers about legal procedures, criminal acts, the rights of the injured party, the importance of reporting every assault, preparing journalists for hearings at the prosecutor's office, etc.***

This activity is planned not only due to the need to organize trainings for journalists, but also because it is a project of the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina, for which funds have already been secured and whose realization starts in 2023. This activity will be dedicated to local communities and will have two stages. In the first stage, at the beginning of the year, a curriculum will be developed based on the research into the needs of journalists, while a series of workshops would start in March, the exact dates of which will be announced later.

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| Partner in the implementation of this activity: | Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (IJAV) |
| Time frame:                                     | Throughout 2023  |

***Activity 3: Quarterly visits of the PWG representatives to the local communities***

During 2022, it was established that the presence of the PWG in local communities is 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 this case. The engagement of the PWG in local communities leads to raising the public's awareness and taking part of the burden that local journalists endure, as well as sends a strong message that cases of endangering the safety of journalists will not go unpunished. The practice of PWG representatives' visits to local communities must be continued so that it becomes a regular activity that will be carried out once every three months or more often if required.

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| Partner in the implementation of this activity: | Journalists' Association of Serbia (UNS)   |
| Time frame:                                     | Each third month starting from March 2023. |

***Activity 4: Establishment of 24/7 psychological assistance for journalists who are traumatized after the commission of criminal acts against them***

Additional forms and models of co-operation were often discussed at the PWG meetings, and whether new tasks should be added to the existing mandate of the Group. When it comes to the PWG, it seems that this particularly refers to the measures aimed at preventing future assaults, but also to providing support after an assault in the form of referral to health institutions, support in overcoming trauma, as well as possible compensation in the form of aid funds. At the end of 2022, the OSCE Mission to Serbia formed a team that will prepare an Analysis of Journalists' Mental Health and will provide recommendations for multi-annual activities and projects aimed at improving the working environment for journalists. It is expected that one of the activities will be the establishment of 24/7 free psychological assistance for journalists exposed to trauma, similar to the 24/7 SOS telephone line, and possibly as a uniform support package for media workers.

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| Partner in the implementation of this activity: | Association of Independent Electronic Media      |
| Time frame:                                     | June - December 2023, and afterwards 2024 - 2025 |

***Activity 5: Panel discussion on the rights of journalists as the injured parties, with a focus on secondary victimization of journalists during investigative proceedings***

The problem of secondary victimization, especially when the injured journalists come into contact with suspects during the investigative procedure, in the opinion of the media community representatives, constitutes additional pressure on journalists. Journalists often pull back because of this, or even stop reporting threats and assaults. When the injured party is interrogated, the defendant has the right to ask questions. If it were prevented, it would represent a field for a potential appeal for the defendant, due to significant violations of the provisions of the criminal procedure. That is the state of the legal system and currently minor changes in application might be possible, such as the protection of private data and the protection of the injured parties by the associations, ensuring the presence of legal representatives instead of the injured journalists. In order to try to find both short-term and long-term solutions to the problem of secondary victimization of journalists, the PWG will organize an expert discussion on this topic.

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|---|---|
| Partner in the implementation of this activity: | Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS) |
| Time frame:                                     | May 2023 (World Press Freedom Day)                    |

***Activity 6: Continuation of engagement (primarily media and journalists' associations) on defining amendments to the Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia that would enable more comprehensive and efficient criminal justice protection of journalists.***

One of the conclusions of the panel discussion on working groups for the safety of journalists, held in November 2022, was that the existing criminal justice framework and the way in which the criminal offence "Endangerment of safety" referred to in Article 138 paragraph 3 of the CC is interpreted are no longer sufficient for the efficient processing

of assaults and threats against journalists. Changes are necessary because there are more and more situations in which thus defined criminal acts cannot provide journalists with adequate criminal justice protection. Journalists' associations should assume the already initiated work on the amendments to the Criminal Code by engaging a legal expert who would take into account already existing proposals (such as Professor Stojanović's opinion), but also the proposals of civil society, and draft the amendments that would represent the consensus of all sides.

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| Partner in the implementation of this activity: | Association of Online Media (Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation) |
| Time frame:                                     | February - May 2023                                      |

***Activity 7: Preparation of a quarterly PWG newsletter with information on cases and the work of the Group, which would be disseminated to journalists via the mailing lists of journalists' and media associations***

When it comes to the communication of journalists' and media associations with their members about the existence of the Agreement and the PWG, as well as about specific cases, it seems that there is a certain room for improvement that would be beneficial to everyone. According to the results of the research on the transparency of state authorities in cases of safety of journalists, only 37.5% of surveyed journalists stated that they receive information about the work of the PWG from their associations. 25% of them stated that they do not receive it, while 37.55% believe that they have some information, but that they are not sufficiently familiar with the details. The mentioned newsletters would actually represent already existing quarterly newsletters produced by the RPPO, but they would be modified into a shorter text with basic information that would be interesting to journalists.

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

***Activity 8: Preparation of the annual report on the activities of the Standing Working Group for Safety of Journalists***

The Rulebook on the activities of the PWG provides for the mandatory publication of semi-annual reports on the Group's activities, which was not done until the end of 2021. At the end of that year, the first four-year report on the activities of the PWG was published, and at the end of this year the report for 2022 was also published. In order to comply with this important obligation and continue with the good practice of publishing annual reports, which significantly contributes to better public information about the activities of the Group as well as its credibility, every year two members of the PWG will work on the preparation of annual reports, with the help of the OSCE Mission representatives.



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| Partner in the implementation of this activity: | Media Association                             |
| Time frame:                                     | every November and December from 2023 to 2025 |

***Activity 9: PWG study visit to one of the OSCE member countries with the aim of establishing international co-operation and exchange of experiences in the fight to improve the safety of journalists***

In May 2022, PWG representatives had 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 very successful and greatly contributed to improving the coherence of the Group and gaining new knowledge that can be used for more efficient work locally. It would be important to continue with these activities, and the specific countries to be visited will be chosen based on the agreement between the OSCE Mission and the members of the Group.

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

***Activity 10: Regional consultations of the representatives of prosecutor's offices, police, judges and journalists with the aim of promoting mechanisms for improving the safety of journalists in the countries of the region.***

Regional consultations will aim to exchange and promote best practices and experiences when introducing national mechanisms to improve the safety of journalists. This event will gather up to eight participants from every country in the region, representing the prosecution, police, judiciary and journalists' and media associations, and a significant number of local experts, journalists, and representatives of academia and government institutions.

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| Partner in the implementation of this activity: | Logistics and organization - OSCE Mission to Serbia and OSCE RFOM |
| Time frame:                                     | March 2023  |

***Activity 11: Participation of the PWG members in international forums and conferences in order to improve knowledge related to international standards and best practices in the field of protection of journalists' safety***

An exact time frame cannot be foreseen for this activity at the moment, but it is important that the PWG has the possibility to send its members to international conferences, such as those organized by the office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, or the Council of Europe, or for example the International Journalism Festival in Perugia, as well as other professional meetings and consultations organized by international civil society organizations such as: Article 19, the Committee to Protect Journalists, the

International Press Institute and other similar projects of co-operation between institutions and the non-governmental sector in Europe.

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

Table - Time frame for the implementation of the proposed activities

| 2023        |      |      |      |      |     |      |      |      |       |      |      |      |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|-------|------|------|------|
|             | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | June | July | Aug. | Sept. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
| Activity 1  |      |      |      |      |     |      |      |      |       | x    |      |      |
| Activity 2  | x    | x    | x    | x    | x   | x    | x    | x    | x     | x    | x    | x    |
| Activity 3  |      |      | x    |      |     | x    |      |      | x     |      |      | x    |
| Activity 4  |      |      |      |      |     | x    | x    | x    | x     | x    | x    | x    |
| Activity 5  |      |      |      |      | x   |      |      |      |       |      |      |      |
| Activity 6  |      | x    | x    | x    | x   |      |      |      |       |      |      |      |
| Activity 7  |      |      | x    |      |     | x    |      |      | x     |      |      | x    |
| Activity 8  |      |      |      |      |     |      |      |      |       |      | x    | x    |
| Activity 10 |      |      | x    |      |     |      |      |      |       |      |      |      |
| Activity 11 | x    | x    | x    | x    | x   | x    | x    | x    | x     | x    | x    | x    |

| 2024        |      |      |      |      |     |      |      |      |       |      |      |      |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|-------|------|------|------|
| Title:      | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | June | July | Aug. | Sept. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
| Activity 1  |      |      |      |      | x   |      |      |      |       |      |      |      |
| Activity 3  |      |      | x    |      |     | x    |      |      | x     |      |      | x    |
| Activity 4  | x    | x    | x    | x    | x   | x    | x    | x    | x     | x    | x    | x    |
| Activity 7  |      |      | x    |      |     | x    |      |      | x     |      |      | x    |
| Activity 8  |      |      |      |      |     |      |      |      |       |      | x    | x    |
| Activity 9  |      |      |      |      | x   |      |      |      |       |      |      |      |
| Activity 11 | x    | x    | x    | x    | x   | x    | x    | x    | x     | x    | x    | x    |

| 2025        |      |      |      |      |     |      |      |      |       |      |      |      |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|-------|------|------|------|
| Title       | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | June | July | Aug. | Sept. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
| Activity 1  |      |      |      |      |     |      |      |      |       |      | x    |      |
| Activity 3  |      |      | x    |      |     | x    |      |      | x     |      |      | x    |
| Activity 4  | x    | x    | x    | x    | x   | x    | x    | x    | x     | x    | x    | x    |
| Activity 7  |      |      | x    |      |     | x    |      |      | x     |      |      | x    |
| Activity 8  |      |      |      |      |     |      |      |      |       |      | x    | x    |
| Activity 11 | x    | x    | x    | x    | x   | x    | x    | x    | x     | x    | x    | x    |

## VI Conclusions and Recommendations

- After more than five years of the PWG existence, it can be concluded that it has the capacity to achieve the goals for which it was founded. From its establishment until today, the PWG has made a great and important contribution to the investigations and court proceedings in cases of criminal offences against journalists, which are, in fact, more efficient than before. However, the safety of journalists in Serbia is still not at a satisfactory level and requires continued intensive engagement of all stakeholders, including further support from the OSCE Mission.
- When it comes to existing initiatives in Serbia that concern the improvement of the safety for journalists, it can be said that projects like the PWG and the 24/7 SOS line put Serbia at a great advantage compared to other countries facing similar challenges.
- Although data on assaults against journalists and other media professionals kept by the RPPO and journalists' associations differ, primarily due to different methodologies, it can be concluded from the collected data that the number of assaults against journalists is still worrying. During 2022, very serious cases of assaults against the media and journalists were recorded, to which the PWG responded adequately and in accordance with its mandate defined in the Rulebook on the activities of this body.
- According to the official database of the RPPO, in the period from 1 January to 30 November 2022, 76 criminal cases were filed in connection with criminal offences committed against journalists, of which 3 cases in January, 4 in February, 9 in March, 12 cases in April, 3 in May, 11 in June, 5 in July, 8 in August, 10 in September, 4 in October and 7 in November. The first-instance or final decision was passed in 25 cases, which represents 32.89% of the total number. Compared to the 87 filed criminal cases in 2021, it can be said that a slight decrease in the number of assaults was registered.
- The records of the prosecutor's offices (so-called quarterly bulletins) are delivered to the PWG representatives regularly, in the last few months in a slightly modified format - with tables containing all cases, but also with statistical data. It is encouraging that in the last two years for some very serious cases prison sentences have been imposed, some effective and in other cases - house arrests. Also, urgent reaction of the prosecutor's office and the police in the first initial stages of the procedure was observed in a large number of cases, however, the problem is the later stages of the procedure, which, in the opinion of journalists' and media associations, continue to take a long time. When looking at aggregated data from the beginning of 2016, there is still a large number of pending cases,

and the large number of cases that are in the records of unknown perpetrators is particularly worrying.

- Journalists' and media associations have noted a decrease in the number of dismissed criminal charges for assaults against journalists, which is a step forward compared to previous years. However, they expressed dissatisfaction with the case processing speed and the final outcomes. In the opinion of journalists' and media associations, the PWG is the only mechanism that produces certain results.
- A large number of threats and attacks are still not reported to the police and the prosecutor's office, which indicates that there is still a distrust of journalists in the institutions. It is necessary to work on building trust and improving relations between the media community and the state, and certain activities in this direction are foreseen in the new PWG Action Plan for the period 2023 - 2025.
- The PWG activities in 2022 were more intensive compared to the previous years. There was more frequent communication between the members of the PWG in the meetings, while extraordinary meetings were also organized regarding severe cases whenever there was a need for it. This year, the PWG representatives abandoned the standard ways of communication and established new positive practices, such as visits to the newsrooms and endangered journalists, visits to local communities, meetings with representatives of institutions and contact points, as well as monitoring individual cases before the court.
- The presence of the PWG in local communities is very important. The case of OK Radio from Vranje showed that it is one of the turning points that significantly contributes to solving cases at local level. In that way, the publicity is raised, part of the burden sustained by local journalists is taken over, and a message is sent that the cases will not go unpunished. The practice of PWG representatives visiting local communities should be continued, and this constitutes a new regular activity introduced by the new Action Plan.
- Also, PWG's communication with the public has improved compared to the previous period, although still not to the required extent. Representatives of the PWG were more accessible to the media, they gave statements, and in certain cases the PWG addressed the public through announcements. The group has become more visible in the public eye, and journalists are starting to recognize its contribution. Nonetheless, additional improvement of communication between the PWG and the public, as well as with the media outlets should be addressed in the future. It is necessary to make statements more often, as well as press releases in cases where it is possible and justified.
- It is necessary to work on increasing the visibility and availability of the contact points in the police and the prosecutor's offices, with the aim of enabling journalists to communicate with them faster and simpler and get to know the

contact points in their areas. Although the functioning of the Contact Points System has been greatly improved in the last two years, the practice of organizing different types of trainings should continue, primarily bearing in mind that the contact points change over time. Also, the contact points must be aware of their obligations in accordance with the binding instructions of the Republic Public Prosecutor regarding the safety of journalists, so this activity is foreseen in the new Action Plan.

- Journalists are not fully informed about the newly established obligations of prosecutors concerning the adopted Instructions on urgent action in case of endangered safety of journalists, nor their rights as injured parties in criminal proceedings. Bearing that in mind, the PWG has foreseen in the new Action Plan the organization of trainings for journalists on this topic.
- The problem of secondary victimization, especially when the injured journalists come into contact with suspects during the investigative procedure, constitutes additional pressure on journalists in the opinion of the journalists' and media associations. Journalists often pull back because of this, or even stop reporting threats and assaults. The PWG plans to organize an expert debate on this topic in 2023 in order to find the best possible way for journalists to learn about their rights as the injured parties and to further alleviate the problem of secondary victimization.
- In the criminal procedure, the roles of each authority - police, court and prosecutor's office - are clearly defined. Those roles carry powers, but also certain restraints, and journalists must be aware of that, which is why their knowledge of legal procedures, criminal offences, the rights of the injured party and similar legal topics should be improved through a series of trainings that the PWG will organize in the coming period.
- The criminal justice system and the way in which the criminal offence of Endangerment of safety, referred to in Article 138 paragraph 3, is understood are no longer sufficient for the efficient processing of threats to journalists. Changes are necessary, because the prosecutor's office and the police are often unable to provide journalists adequate protection with thus defined criminal acts. Journalists' associations should continue their work related to the amendments to the Criminal Code.
- Better communication between journalists' associations and their members is necessary, as is raising the legal capacity of the associations, and improving their opportunities to participate in criminal justice procedures in terms of representing injured journalists.
- It is necessary for politicians and other relevant holders of public office to start clearly and publicly condemning assaults and threats against journalists, which is

their obligation considering e.g. the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision on the Safety of Journalists passed in 2018 in Milan by all 57 participating states of this organization, including Serbia. Journalists believe that as long as hostile tones towards journalists and the media outlets come from the highest political positions every day, the safety of journalists will remain a severe problem despite some positive developments.

- In cases of the most serious threats and assaults against journalists and editorial staff, it would be very important not to go public with information about those cases until all urgent and necessary actions have been taken, in order not to destroy the traces of the criminal act perpetration. In this way, the work of the police and the prosecutor's office would be facilitated, which could result in an even more efficient finding of the perpetrators of crimes against journalists.
- In co-operation with the OSCE Mission to Serbia, the PWG should consider the possibilities for improving the efficiency of information exchange procedures in the international legal assistance proceedings in order to facilitate the co-operation of competent institutions in solving cases of endangering the safety of journalists.