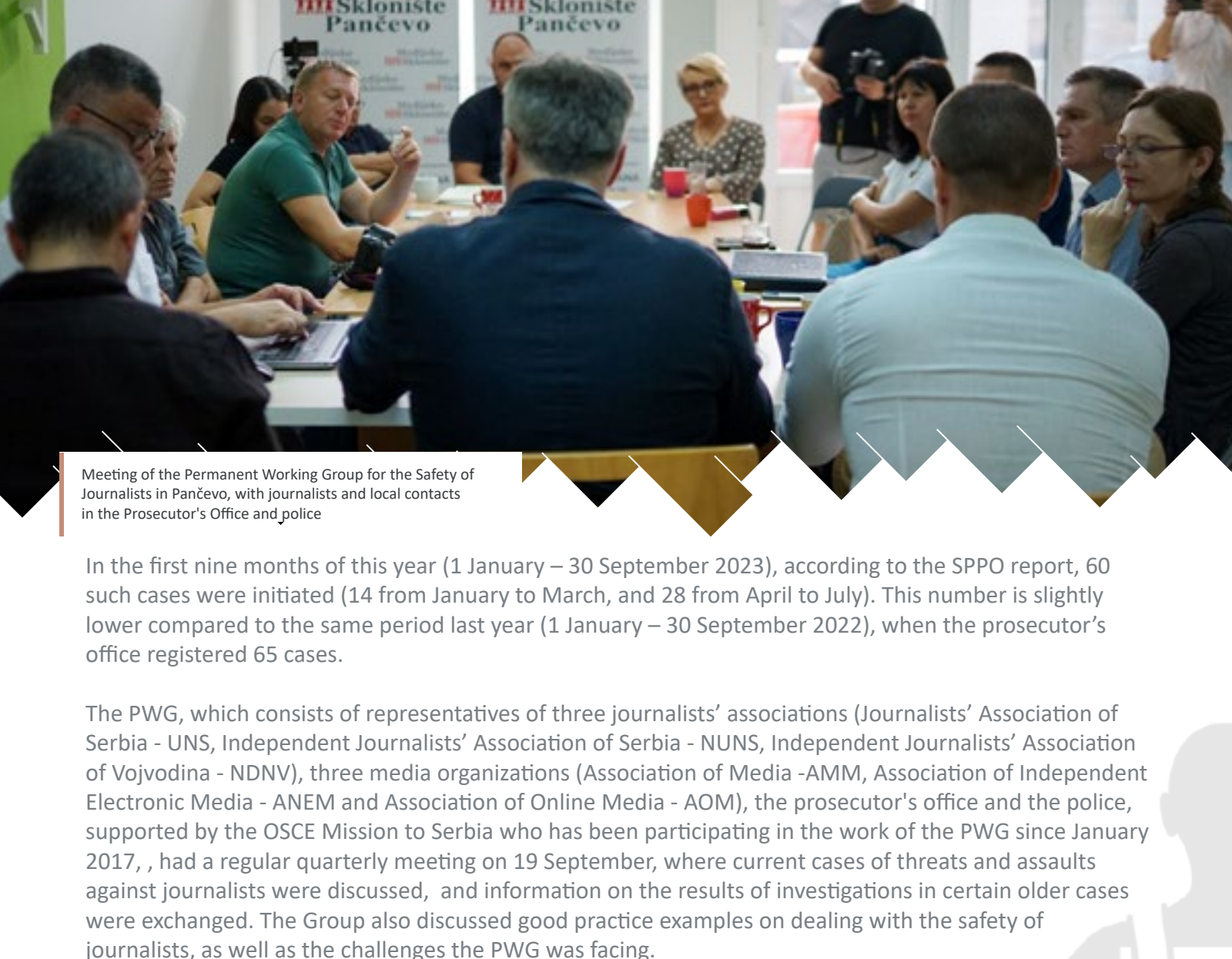




Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office: From June to September, 18 cases of endangering the safety of journalists, 60 since the beginning of the year

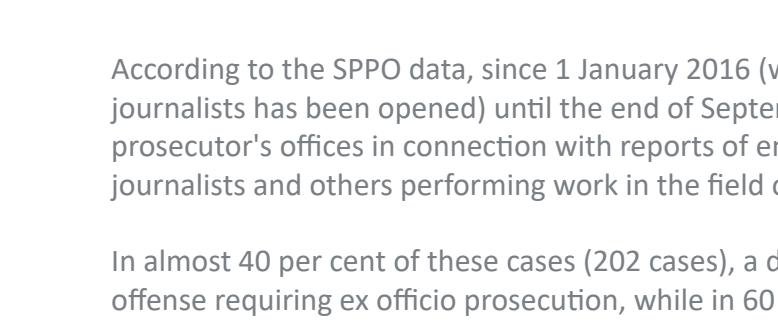
The quarterly report of the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office (SPPO), submitted to the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists (PWG), states that there were 18 reported cases of endangering the safety of journalists in the last three months - in July 8, in August 6 and in September 4.



Meeting of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists in Pančevo, with journalists and local contacts in the Prosecutor's Office and police

In the first nine months of this year (1 January – 30 September 2023), according to the SPPO report, 60 such cases were initiated (14 from January to March, and 28 from April to July). This number is slightly lower compared to the same period last year (1 January – 30 September 2022), when the prosecutor's office registered 65 cases.

The PWG, which consists of representatives of three journalists' associations (Journalists' Association of Serbia - UNS, Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia - NUNS, Association of Journalists of Vojvodina - NDNV), three media organizations (Association of Media - AMM, Association of Independent Electronic Media - ANEM and Association of Online Media - AOM), the prosecutor's office and the police, supported by the OSCE Mission to Serbia who has been participating in the work of the PWG since January 2017, had a regular quarterly meeting on 19 September, where current cases of threats and assaults against journalists were discussed, and information on the results of investigations in certain older cases were exchanged. The Group also discussed good practice examples on dealing with the safety of journalists, as well as the challenges the PWG was facing.



Zoran Živković, editor of the Pančevo Si Ti portal and Nataša Jovanović from the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation (AOM)

The SPPO reported that from January to September, 16 first-instance or final decisions were reached in cases of endangering the safety of journalists, which is slightly more than a quarter of the total number of cases (26.67 per cent). Out of this number, five first-instance or final decisions were reached between July and September.

This average is slightly lower than the average number in previous years. For example, from 1 January 2016 until today, the first-instance or final decision was reached in almost 60 per cent of cases (59.49 per cent). Last year, this happened in almost half of the cases, while in 2021 it happened in 54 per cent of cases.

According to the SPPO data, since 1 January 2016 (when a special record of criminal offenses against journalists has been opened) until the end of September this year, 506 cases were filed in public prosecutor's offices in connection with reports of endangering the safety, threats or assaults against journalists and others performing work in the field of information.

In almost 40 per cent of these cases (202 cases), a decision was reached that there was no criminal offense requiring ex officio prosecution, while in 60 per cent of cases (304) it was decided that there were reasonable grounds to suspect that the criminal offense against the safety of journalists has occurred.



Members of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists in Pančevo: Veran Matić, Rade Đurić, Veljko Milić, Nataša Jovanović and Sasa Mirković, ANEM project coordinator

Overview of cases filed from June to September this year

As in earlier periods, the cases reported between July and September most often involved violations of Article 138 of the Criminal Code, mainly due to threatening the safety of journalists.

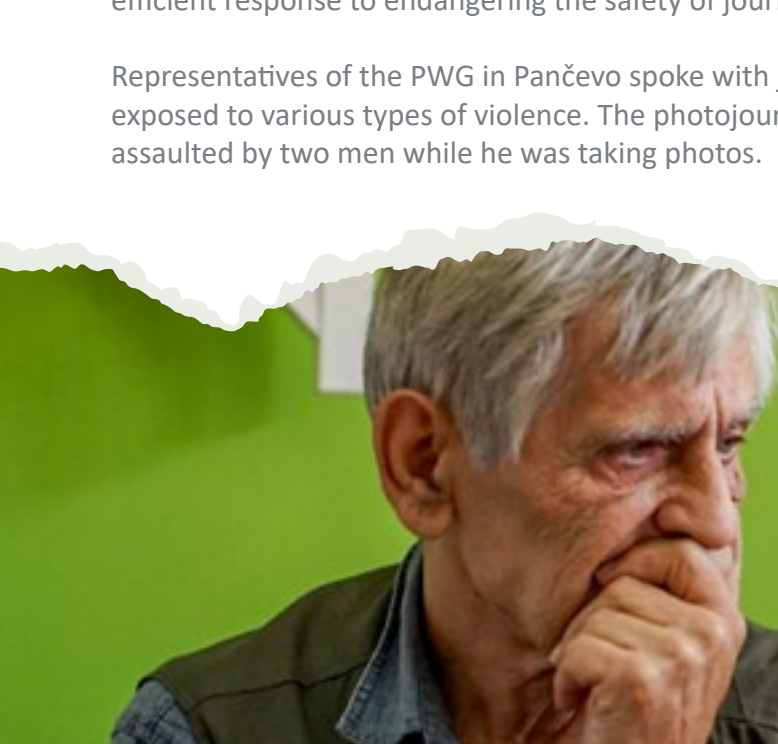
After the threats to **Dragoljub Petrović**, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Danas*, the perpetrator was discovered. The court rejected the prosecution's proposal to order detention, instead he was forbidden to leave the apartment and evidentiary proceedings are underway.

The investigations of threats to **Iva Ogarević**, journalist in *Blic*, **Sanja Petrov** from *Slobodna reč* in *Vranje* (case assigned to the prosecutor's office in *Vranje*), and two cases of threats to **Jelena Trajković** from *Sport Club* (United Media Group TV station) are ongoing.

In the case of endangering the safety of TV Nova S presenter **Marko Stepanović**, a plea bargain agreement was concluded with the perpetrator.

The investigation is also ongoing in cases of threats to journalist and participant of the reality show *Zadruha* on *Pink TV*, **Marko Đedović**, journalist **Stefan Cvetković** from *Bela Crkva*, and **Nikola Krstić** and **Vojin Radovanović** from *Danas*.

In the second case of threats to **Vojin Radovanović**, from July 2023, after it was discovered who threatened him, a plea bargain agreement with perpetrator was concluded.



Jovica Milošev and Lijljana Knežević, contacts in the Prosecutor's Office in Pančevo

After interviewing **Miodrag Bukovac**, a journalist from *TV Belami*, the Basic Public Prosecution (OJT) DPP from *Niš* transferred the case to the High Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime and the information gathering process was initiated.

In the case of **Slobodan Erić** from *Geopolitika*, information is being gathered, while the case is investigated against unknown perpetrators until the identity is revealed and further evidentiary actions are taken.

Data from journalist associations on assaults and pressures

Journalists' associations continue to record a higher number of different types of assaults and pressures against journalists compared to the prosecutor's office. Their statistics differ because journalists do not report all assaults to the prosecutor's office, but also because associations record different forms of pressures on journalists that do not constitute criminal acts.

In its database of assaults against journalists, NUNS states that by 30 September this year there were 146 cases of assaults and pressures against journalists. Since 13 June, when there were 99, the number of assaults and pressures has increased by 47. Of the total number, there were eight physical assaults, one assault against property, 36 verbal threats and 101 pressures.

UNS has not yet made the overview of its recorded attacks against journalists for the first nine months of this year.

PWG meeting with local journalists, prosecutors and police in Pančevo

After *Vranje*, *Niš* and *Novi Sad* in the first half of the year, PWG representatives visited *Pančevo* on 19 September in order to discuss, together with local journalists and representatives of the police and prosecutor's office, the security situation in which media professionals work. The visits were organized as part of the project "System of prevention of violence and protection of journalists", facilitated by the EU Delegation in Serbia, the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, and with the support of the OSCE Mission.

Veran Matić, president of ANEM and member of PWG, pointed out that the goal of such gatherings is to establish high-quality and productive cooperation at the local level between the contact points of the prosecution, the Ministry of Interior and the media, in order to further build a system of swift and efficient response to endangering the safety of journalists, but also to create conditions for prevention.

Representatives of the PWG in Pančevo spoke with journalists and other media workers who were exposed to various types of violence. The photojournalist from *Pančevac*, **Milan Šupica**, was physically assaulted by two men while he was taking photos.



Photojournalist Milan Šupica

"I took photos of flowers (after showing my press ID) and bought strawberries". Three men caught up with me in their car. They pulled me out of the car, took away my camera, took my ID, tore my bag, hit and injured me... The police came quickly. The prosecution did its job correctly. The verdict was confirmed in September, to six months in prison and a 50-meter access ban," Šupica said.

Prosecutors **Miloš Dejanović**, who is also the contact point for journalists, and **Lijljana Knežević** explained that the defendants were held in custody for 30 days, and that the first-instance verdict was passed very quickly, after a little more than a month. Mr. Dejanović pointed out that Šupica showed his press ID, which later enabled the prosecution to react adequately.

Slobodan Đukić, a journalist of the website *Pančevo Si Ti*, who had funeral wreaths left in front of his house a year ago, said that there was no progress in the investigation and that the criminal charges were dismissed "because there were no elements of a criminal offense". Mr. Đukić said that he still feels threatened and perceives the act as a threat and intimidation.

Jovica Milošev, the contact point for Pančevo Police Administration, stated that the police investigation in this case was still underway.



Journalist Srdan Vuksa and Olivera Sekulić Sođevan, former public prosecutor

Rade Đurić, a member of the PWG from NUNS, pointed out that the police in Pančevo did a good job, that **Bekir Dudić**, a member of the PWG from the police was helping, but that there have been difficulties in establishing contact with the prosecutors in *Smederevo*.

Petar Andrejić, the editor of *Starčevačke novine*, received threats on social networks after publishing, as he said, articles about the mismanagement of animal shelters. The case involved shelters in *Starčevo* as well as *Jagodina*, where a Facebook page was registered through which anonymous visitors posted insults and threats. He reported the threats to the police, and OJT in Pančevo sent the documentation to the Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime, which is competent for threats on social networks.

Veljko Milić, a member of the PWG from NDNV, emphasized that apart from those mentioned, there are no drastic cases of assaults against journalists in the *Južnobanatski* region. However, he pointed out that there are forms of 'targeting' that are not criminal acts and are not prosecuted ex officio, but can often create a stronger sense of threat and are more dangerous than an assessed threat.

He mentioned the case of a smear campaign against **Nenad Živković**, the editor of the *Pančevo Si Ti* portal, for which Živković filed four lawsuits against *RTV Pančevo* and *ePančevo*, and all of them were concluded in his favor in the first instance (a final judgment is reached in one of them).

Nataša Jovanović, a member of the PWG from the AOM and the *Slavko Ćuruvija* Foundation, pointed out that the number of solved cases is increasing and now there are 60 per cent of them against 40 per cent of unsolved ones. The trend is explained by the large number of dismissals of lawsuits, which is the most common outcome, but also by the increasing number of convictions. In addition, the number of cases that were opened three or four years ago and are being solved is increasing year after year.

"Justice is slow but not unattainable: there is less and less impunity, but the public is not aware of it" - stressed Jovanović.

Nenad Živković stressed that it is fortunate that there were no drastic assaults against journalists in southern Banat, but also that the media scene in *Pančevo* is "ruined and there is not enough solidarity". He supported this with the information that 70 journalists and editors were invited to a meeting with the police and prosecutor's office, and only a dozen of them responded.

He pointed out that he would like contact with the police and the prosecutor's office to be more frequent and that these two institutions should be more open to the media.

Veljko Milić, Veran Matić and Rade Đurić

"It makes the most sense to talk about prevention. Journalists are not saints, but they should not be subjected to demonstration of force either," said Mr. Živković.

Veran Matić presented the results of the PWG's work through the example of the protection of *OK Radio* journalist in *Vranje*. He reminded that due to the synchronized activities of the Group and exceptional co-operation with the prosecution and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, **Dejan Nikolić Kantar** was finally convicted to 14 months in prison, and subsequently for a repeated offense to 18 months in prison.

He also emphasized that after the PWG meeting in April in *Niš*, much better communication was achieved regarding the protection of journalists at the local level.

Mr. Matić believes that more intensive communication between the prosecutors and prosecutors' offices and the media is necessary and cited the example of the openness of **Branko Stamenković**, a member of the PWG and public prosecutor in the SPPO, as well as the prosecutor **Predrag Milovanović**, who is in charge of the case regarding the burning of **Milan Jovanović's** house.

Meeting of the PWG member, Veran Matić, with the Minister of Justice on the safety of journalists

The PWG member **Veran Matić** spoke with the Minister of Justice **Maja Popović** at the beginning of August about issues related to the safety of journalists. At the meeting, the need for better legal regulation of the safety of journalists was highlighted, while Matić introduced the minister to the work of the PWG, the functioning of the 24/7 SOS telephone line for reporting threats and assaults against journalists, and the advantages of establishing a system of contact points within the SPPO, the police and journalist associations, in order to respond urgently to cases of endangering the safety of journalists and media workers.

Veran Matić and Veljko Milić

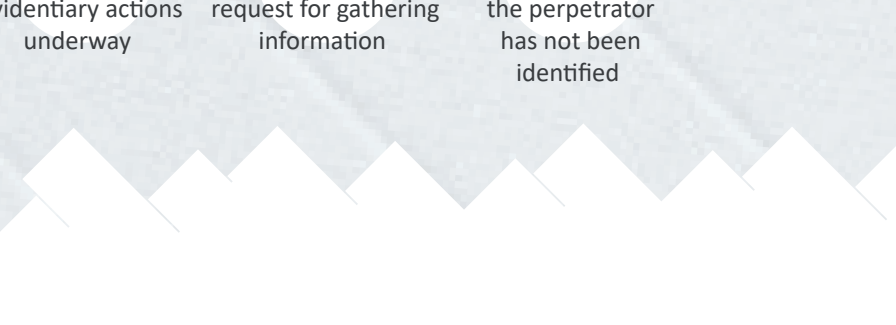
On that occasion, Minister Popović informed Matić that the Ministry of Justice initiated the procedure of monitoring the work of the High Court in *Vranje* due to the disappearance of case files (from the trial for endangering the safety of *OK Radio* journalist and others whom **Nikolić** threatened in the courtroom).

60 CASES OF ENDANGERING SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS IN 2023



*Data: SPPO from 1.1. to 30.9.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE IN CASES OF ENDANGERING THE SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS IN 2023:



*Data: SPPO from 1.1. to 30.9.