

Montenegro is a civil and democratic society in which, without restrictions, different opinions can be expressed regarding all social issues and policies of the Government.

When it comes to media rights and freedoms, let us remind you that Montenegro is among a few countries in Europe that has decriminalized defamation. Moreover, the Government of Montenegro has been intensively working with the Council of Europe and the European Commission on a set of media laws for the media field to be aligned with the highest international standards.

The Government of Montenegro, in line with its commitments and need of Montenegrin society to establish a modern legal framework for cultural and democratic emancipation, prepared the Law on Freedom of Religion or Beliefs and Legal Status of Religious Communities. The Law was passed upon extensive social consultations and after Venice Commission gave a positive opinion on the Draft Law. Following that, the Law was adopted at the end of 2019 in the Parliament of Montenegro.

Protests over certain solutions of the adopted Law were expressed through a protest walks, but also a strong and negative political and inappropriate and aggressive media campaign with a lot of misinformation and fake news - aimed at disturbing the public and citizens, and encouraging riots and instability.

Activities were performed within Montenegro, but also from our closest neighborhood, with a clear intention to intimidate citizens, primarily the believers of Serbian Orthodox Church and Serbian community in Montenegro. Subversive activities were also directed towards compromising state, its symbols and holders of state power, as well as calling for a final confrontation with the constitutional order, the rule of law, and law enforcement agencies.

One of those activities was a fake news placed by FOS media editor Anđela Đikanović. Without respecting the due journalistic attention and rule of checking information from multiple sources, she published information on the alleged Montenegrin police's cancellation of obedience

while ensuring the safety of events for the Christmas Day, and for this reason special forces of Kosovo to be at disposal to Montenegro. Although the source of the information, for which Đikanovic claims is from diplomatic sources, is still to be identified, there are indications that the placement of this information was an attempt of the third party to interfere in internal affairs of Montenegro in order to destabilize the state and violate public order and peace.

According to the qualifications of the Basic State Prosecutor's Office, Đikanovic is suspected of committing the crime of panic and disorder evocation. By the order of competent prosecutor, she was imprisoned on January 5<sup>th</sup> 2020 at 9 pm and then, along with the criminal charge was brought to the State prosecutor in the Basic State Prosecutor's Office in Podgorica at 10 pm for a hearing, who ordered detention.

Đikanović was in the detention facility until January 6<sup>th</sup>, 5.20 p.m., when she was brought to an investigating judge. The legal representative of the suspect appealed the decision of the competent prosecutor, which was rejected by the investigating judge. The hearing ended at 6.42 p.m. and she was released to defend herself.

The Police Department conducted an analysis of all the electronic media, both local and regional, which transmitted this news, an analysis of posted comments by readers, as well as posts and comments on social networks. The conclusion of this analysis, which was submitted to the competent prosecutor, is that this fake news caused panic in both Montenegro and the region. More serious consequences have not occurred due to the rapid denial of the Government of Montenegro and the reaction of the competent state bodies. Therefore, in this particular case, having in mind sensitivity of the situation, we believe that this should not be considered as case of endangering media freedoms or violating the security of journalists.

Analyses of the competent state authorities indicate Montenegro's increasing exposure to hybrid threats. Montenegro and its state bodies must prevent any attempt of violating a stable public order and peace and must preserve state sovereignty and the constitutional order.

We remain committed to further strengthening the freedom of media and protection of journalists, as well as creating the conditions for raising professional standards.