

Subject: Reply by Montenegro concerning an alert no 174/2021 on the Safety of Journalists Platform of the Council of Europe

Freedom of media is crucial to the functioning of a democratic society, and the Government of Montenegro is dedicated to upholding the independence of the media and creating an environment that supports safe and unrestricted work of journalists. Continuous efforts are being made to enhance media freedom and support the safety and welfare of journalists through the effective implementation of recently adopted strategies and an updated legal framework.

The Government of Montenegro is fully committed to the principles and values of the Council of Europe and firmly believes that the genuine freedom of expression and promotion of free and pluralistic public service media are essential to fulfilling the ideals enshrined in the Statute of the Council of Europe.

Of particular importance for the state's comprehensive approach to the challenges faced by journalists is the work of the Commission for Monitoring the Actions of Competent Authorities in Investigations of Cases of Threats and Violence against Journalists, Murders of Journalists and Attacks on Media Property, established by the Government of Montenegro in 2013, which works with relevant institutions to jointly solve cases of attacks on journalists.¹

The last Report of the Commission particularly highlights the importance of the strengthened cooperation with the Prosecutor's office, which has adopted all general recommendations as provided by the Commission. In particular, it notes that in March 2024, the Supreme State Prosecutor issued the Binding Instruction for the Procedure of State Prosecution Offices in Cases of Threats and Violence against Journalists, Murder of Journalists, and Attacks on Media Property. This has created a conducive environment for addressing and improving the situation in this area.

Regarding the given alert, the Platform reported that on 5 September 2021, a reporting crew from N1 television were obstructed and had stones thrown at them by a group of protesters as they tried to cover protests in Cetinje. N1 reporter Aleksandra Tolj Ružić filmed a live broadcast from the streets, where police used tear gas, and the crowds dispersed into smaller groups. A group of masked protesters then began to shout and spat at them for recording. As the team walked away, some of the protesters began throwing stones and other projectiles. None of the team were reported to have been injured.

In a separate incident the same day, Ružić was surrounded by a small group of protesters and harassed as she was live on air, speaking to a presenter in the N1 studio. They demanded to know why she was recording and ordered her to stop filming. She explained that she was documenting the protest and use of teargas by police for the N1 New Day programme. However, they continued to obstruct her work. They demanded she deleted any recordings she had on her phone. She explained this was impossible as it was a Facebook live stream. One man can be heard saying "let me get your phone". Footage shows another man hit the phone in attempt to knock it out of her hand. Ružić said someone poured water over her and another spat at her.

According to the information received from the Police Administration – Department for the Police Coordination and Related Activities, officers of the Cetinje Security Department acted upon a request by the Cetinje Basic State Prosecutor's Office for gathering necessary information in response to a letter from the journalist association "Safe Journalist" sent to the SSP's Office. Having in mind its territorial jurisdiction, the Basic State Prosecutor ordered the identification of individuals from the provided video material and the collection of information regarding the circumstances of the event, all aiming to bringing a decision on the given case. **Police officers identified two individuals and collected information from them on the circumstances of the event, which were further delivered to the Basic State Prosecutor.**

Emphasizing the fundamental role of media freedom for democracy, Montenegro remains committed to further collaborate with the Platform on strengthening the media environment.

¹ The current composition of the Commission (as of 22 April 2021) gathers representatives from various stakeholders, including the Government (line ministries and police officials), the State Prosecution, NGOs, media organizations, associations of journalists and investigative journalists.