

Commissioner Johannes Hahn
European Neighborhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations
European Commission
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels
Belgium

Re: Media censorship is a reality in Serbia

19 February 2015

Dear Commissioner Hahn,

On behalf of the [European Federation of Journalists \(EFJ\)](http://www.efj.org), representing over 300.000 journalists across Europe, we are writing to you with grave concerns over the state of media freedom in Serbia.

We are very surprised to hear your reaction on Monday 15 February about violations of media freedom in Serbia suggesting that there is not enough evidence for the European Commission to act on it.

During the press briefing, you said that *"I have heard this several times [concerns about media freedom] and I am asking always about proof. I am willing to follow up such reproaches, but I need evidence and not only rumours."* This clearly shows that there is a lack of information for you on this issue.

The alarming state of media freedom in Serbia is not a rumour but the reality. This is recorded not only by media freedom reports published by various NGOs, but also by journalists and their associations. Journalists' associations and unions which help defend their rights also face resistance and political pressure.

According to our affiliates, the Independent Association of Journalists in Serbia (NUNS), Journalists' Association of Serbia (UNS) and Journalists' Union of Serbia (SINOS), journalists are facing various types of censorship on a daily basis.

During the last 12 months, the EFJ and our affiliates have recorded the following cases of violations of media freedom:

- After a series of investigations on issues of public interest, the Serbian authorities and pro-governmental media organisations started a [public campaign](#) against BIRN journalists labelling them as "EU mercenaries, spies and liars" or people working against Serbian national interests.

- Serbian journalists gathered outside the studios of national broadcaster *B92* protesting against the decision to cancel politics talk show *Utisak Nedelje* because of its critical views against the government and state officials
- Critical articles and blogs were removed; websites, including the independent news outlet *Pescanik*, were blocked and subjected to DDoS attacks.
- Dragan Nikolic, journalist at RTV Mladenovac was interrogated by the [police for sharing a Facebook post](#); he also faced [physical and verbal attacks](#).
- 90% of journalists [responding to a recent survey](#) said censorship and self-censorship does exist in Serbian media
- in pro-government outlets of carrying out propaganda for foreign countries
- Serbia has also adopted a new labour law which was heavily opposed by trade unions and union leaders who faced media attacks and smear campaigns.
- There is a [lack of transparency of media ownership](#) which led to less independence in the media in Serbia.
- Lily Lynch, the founder and editor of the English-language online magazine, [The Balkanist](#), used to be based in Belgrade. She recently decided to leave Serbia due to [the pressure she has faced](#) as an independent journalist.

OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatović has also raised her concerns over cases of violations of media freedom on numerous occasions.

- 3 July 2014 [OSCE media freedom representative condemns attack on editor in Serbia](#)
- 27 May 2014 [Government online censorship in Serbia worrying trend, says OSCE media freedom representative](#)

[The European Parliament organised on 18 November a conference on media freedom in the Western Balkan states and highlighted the media freedom issues in Serbia.](#)

In the Commission progress report on Serbia in 2014, the Commission highlighted the [“concerns about deteriorating conditions for the full exercise of freedom of expression”](#) and [“a growing trend of self-censorship”](#).

These evidences of media violations in Serbia are overwhelming. Sadly, this is the reality journalists are facing in Serbia today. They are in a constant battle to fight for their fundamental rights to freedom of expression and to inform the public.

Serbia, as a candidate country to the European Commission, should make efforts to fulfill the standards set out by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights on media freedom and freedom of expression. The European Commission should remain its independence and set out standards in the European Union community on fundamental rights when negotiating membership with candidate countries.

The EFJ and its local affiliates in Serbia are ready to cooperate with you and your cabinet to work on this issue. We also noted that you have made clarification regarding your remark given in the media briefing and reinstated the importance of media freedoms as non-negotiable fundamental rights.

While we appreciate this clarification, we are happy to provide further evidence of media freedom violations in Serbia in order to assist future action that will be taken by the European Commission.

We hope through our partnership with [the Council of Europe in a project monitor violations of media freedom and journalists' rights](#) can clear any doubt that the European Commission and you have regarding the state of media freedom in Serbia.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to request a meeting with you to discuss further on this issue and present you with further evidence on media violations in Serbia.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Mogens Blicher Bjerregård

Ricardo Gutierrez



EFJ President



EFJ General Secretary