

EDITORIAL AND OWNERSHIP (RE)ACTION TO IMPUNITY AND
PRESSURES ON JOURNALIST AND OTHER MEDIA WORKERS

The struggle without internal procedures and with (in)adequate institutional support

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Udruženje za odgovorni i održivi razvoj



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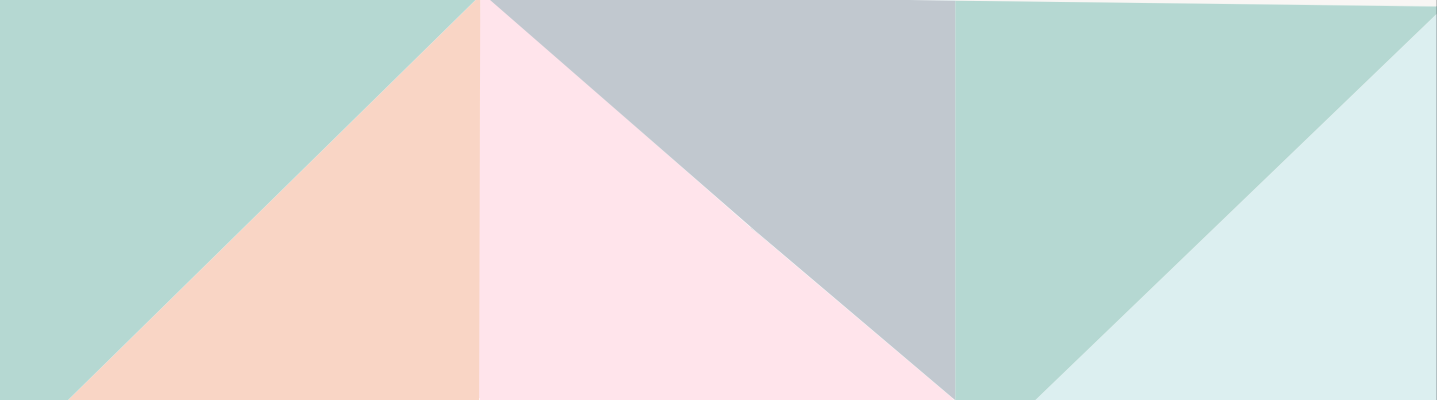
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INTRODUCTION

Who, how, and to what extent pressures employees in the media?

The research "The Other Side of the Journalism Medal", presented to the public by the Association for Sustainable Development (UZOR) in late November, has proven with numbers what all relevant bodies dealing with the issue of media workers' safety have been warning about – that every second journalist in Montenegro faces pressures while performing their job, and as many as 62.1% of journalists have witnessed situations in which their colleagues were victims of pressure.

This is yet another signal that, despite certain legal advances and a quantitative reduction in attacks on journalists, this issue has been undermining the foundations of media community safety for years.



The pressure on media employees is most often exerted by representatives of the government, followed by the business community, opposition representatives, and other media outlets.

The most common form of pressure is harassment, with targeted surveillance in second place, followed by economic pressure, including threats of dismissal and salary reduction.

Additionally, a significant number of journalists in our country face other forms of pressure, such as insults, overload with tasks, censorship, mobbing, and threats.

Digital development has multiplied the possibilities of intimidation, with journalists most often receiving threats via phone calls and SMS messages. "Traditional" direct encounters come in second place. Social media has become a convenient tool for pressuring journalists, with virtual and physical threats being made, sometimes through intermediaries.

To provide a detailed explanation of how media editors and owners respond to the pressures their employees face, and what institutional mechanisms they use to protect their colleagues, the research that preceded this analysis has been enriched with interviews with directors and editors of the most-watched TV stations in the country, editors of the most-read portals, as well as a representative from the Media Union of Montenegro – an organization with more than 600 members.

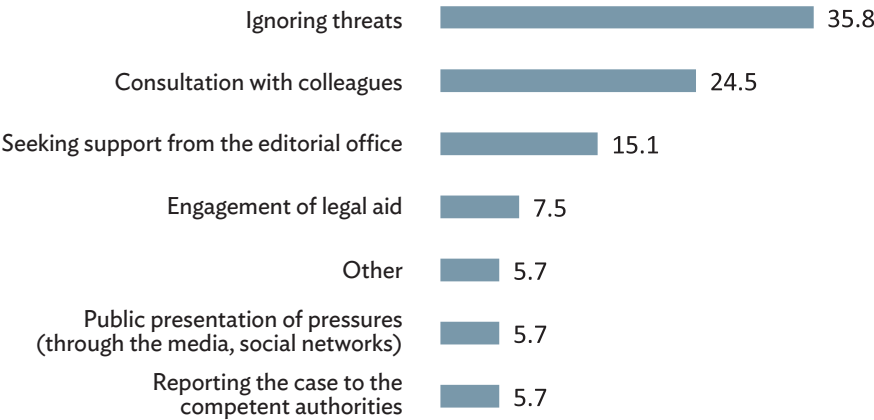
How Do Journalists Resist Pressure?

Media employees most commonly choose to ignore threats as their strategy for resisting pressure, while the second most popular response is consulting with colleagues.

The latest data shows that more formal assistance, such as legal support or reporting to relevant authorities, is a less frequently used option.

Most editors who participated in in-depth interviews indicate that professional integrity is the key tool for coping with pressure.

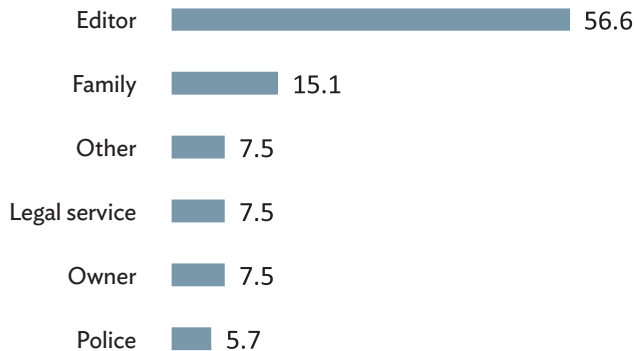
There is a prevailing attitude that it is important for journalists to make independent decisions about the content and topics they cover, despite external pressures.



Editors as a Safe Haven, Owners and Police at the Bottom of the List?

Among journalists who were exposed to pressure or attacks, the majority (56.6%) first turned to their editor. Family members were contacted in 15.1% of cases, while owners and legal services were the first

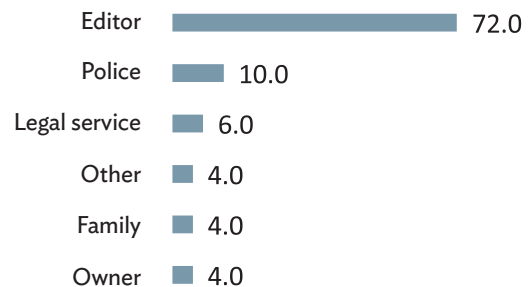
point of contact for 7.5% of respondents. The police were contacted as the first instance in 5.7% of cases, while 7.5% of respondents mentioned other options.



Data from the Research "The Other Side of the Journalism Medal"

These data show that journalists primarily rely on their editors when facing pressure or attacks, while other options, such as legal support, owners, or the police, are less frequently used as the first point of contact in these situations.

Additionally, among journalists who have not yet been exposed to pressure, the majority (72.0%) claim that, in the event of pressure or an attack, they would first contact their editor.



Data from the Research "The Other Side of the Journalism Medal"

The police would be the first contact for 10.0% of respondents, while 6.0% would contact the legal department. Owners, family, and other contacts were cited as the first point of contact by 4.0% of respondents.

This attitude among journalists suggests a clear

reluctance to share the details of situations that significantly affect their work with ownership structures. Open questions remain as to whether this happens because owners are a source of pressure in some situations, or whether journalists simply do not believe that owners can or want to help resolve the issue appropriately.

Media Outlets Lack Official Procedures for Reporting Pressures

The (in)security of journalists and the inadequate punishment of those who hinder their work is further influenced by the fact that most media outlets lack formal procedures for reporting and responding to pressures.

As many as five interviewed editors from different media outlets indicate that there are no official procedures for reporting pressures within their organizations.

An editor at a local TV station also states that they are not familiar with such procedures, and the absence of an internal document regulating this issue is confirmed by the directors of the most-watched TV stations in the country.

The lack of clearly defined support for journalists creates an environment where the struggle against pressures becomes an individual matter, addressed according to the personal judgment of the affected party—without unified rules and guidelines that would foster organized resistance.

Interviewed editors, directors, and owners unequivocally confirm the absence of official institutional mechanisms for protecting journalists within media outlets, with few exceptions, placing journalists in a precarious position, especially in the case of escalating pressures or attempts to interfere with editorial policy.

(In)adequate Protection Measures in Media Outlets and Doubts About Institutional Action

While uniform responses about the lack of internal procedures come from all major media outlets in the country, the question of the adequacy of protection measures for journalists within media organizations does not produce a unanimous stance from media employees—43.7% believe the protection measures are

adequate, while 42.7% claim these measures are insufficient.

Additionally, a relatively high number of respondents do not wish to discuss this topic, indicating its sensitivity or a lack of trust in the existing protection mechanisms.

Many editors believe that clear procedures and formal support need to be introduced in all media outlets in order for the level of protection to be adequate. They also emphasize that newsrooms should organize specific training sessions that thoroughly address this issue.

When discussing the readiness of institutions to protect journalists, editors highlight that those who should be responsible for ensuring their safety often obstruct their work in practice.

"The representatives of institutions who should be protecting us are often the source of pressure, so I don't see any will to properly resolve this issue."

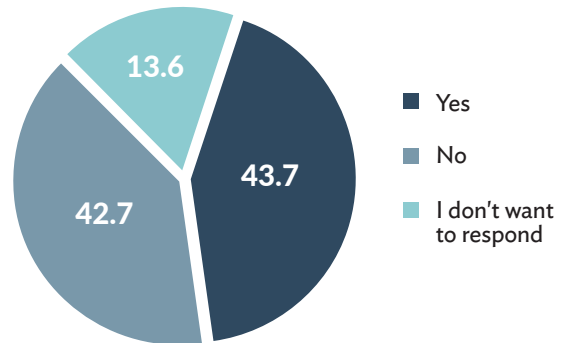
This statement from an editor of a Montenegrin TV station indicates that, in some situations, representatives of institutions prioritize the protection of certain political interests, which further complicates the safety environment for journalists who are professionally doing their job.

The director of a private television station notes that the problem lies in the extremely low public awareness of the role of journalists and the media:

"Even former journalists, when they become PRs, often pass on the pressure they receive from their superiors to journalists."

Journalists Dissatisfied with Police Response

Journalists who were forced to contact the police due to pressure or attacks rated the police's response on a scale of 1 to 5, with the average rating being 1.21. This very low average rating indicates dissatisfaction with the police's efficiency or responsibility in providing support in these situations.



Data from the Research
"The Other Side of the Journalism Medal"

Response from the Media Union of Montenegro

The Media Union of Montenegro, whose representatives are members of both assemblies of the Government's Commission for Monitoring Investigations of Attacks on Journalists, constantly emphasizes that their main task is to be an authentic representative of all employees in Montenegrin media.

Considering that this is an organization that represents nearly half of all media sector employees and includes journalists from more than 20 Montenegrin media outlets, a member of the Main Board was asked for clarification on how the Union responds to reported pressures faced by journalists, for the purposes of this analysis.

"The Media Union of Montenegro has been monitoring all cases of attacks and pressures on journalists since 2016. In addition to keeping records and potentially providing legal assistance to journalists who are subjected to attacks or pressure, we have a special mechanism that includes:

issuing statements on cases, sending letters to relevant institutions urging them to react as quickly as possible to attacks, and subsequently monitoring the resolution of all these cases in the prosecution and courts, up to the final verdicts."

He also emphasizes that they constantly remind authorities about the inadequate punishment of

those who attack or pressure journalists.

"The Media Union also periodically publishes data, research, and analyses on attacks and pressures on journalists, as well as on judicial practices. We also have periodic meetings with the police and the Supreme State Prosecutor's Office, where we request the resolution of the most serious cases."

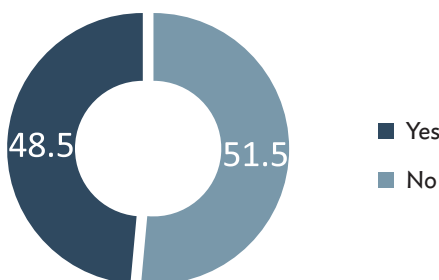
For a Successful Fight, Trained, Not Instinctive Reactions Are Needed

Most participants in in-depth interviews believe that formal support in the form of training, psychological assistance, and institutional procedures for reporting pressures could improve working conditions for journalists in Montenegro.

However, the data show that currently more than half of media employees do not have access to training that explains how to best cope with pressures.

The lack of quality training is a serious problem, because journalists in complex situations that happen to them, mostly rely on instinctive reactions.

Those who deal with investigative journalism and criminal topics are especially exposed to pressure, so adequate education and psychological support would have a significant impact on building their professional resilience



Data from the Research **"The Other Side of the Journalism Medal"**



Conclusions:

- Media employees most commonly ignore threats, or consult with colleagues about potential responses. Legal support or reporting to relevant authorities are rarely used options.
- When faced with pressure or attacks, journalists primarily rely on their editors, and very few seek help from media owners or the police, indicating a low level of trust in those institutions.
- The lack of formal procedures for reporting and responding to pressure in almost all media outlets creates an environment where the issue is resolved based on the personal judgment of the person under threat—without clear rules or guidelines that would enable owners or editors to create a systemic resistance.
- In some situations, representatives of institutions, instead of protecting media employees, exert pressure by representing certain political interests.
- Journalists, editors, and owners do not have access to training that explains in detail how to best cope with pressure, so they mostly rely on instinctive reactions in the complex situations they face.



Recommendations:

- Establish internal procedures in all media outlets, with clear guidelines on how to proceed when an employee reports pressure.
- Provide regular training and psychological support for journalists, editors, and media owners, ensuring that their responses to pressure are based on objective foundations and a standardized sequence of steps.
- With the assistance of the Media Union, continuously urge institutions to fulfill their responsibility to provide journalists with adequate working conditions, emphasizing that their safety should be a priority over the interests of any political entity.
- Promote collegial solidarity, which would positively influence the current high level of media polarization, making colleagues in other media outlets an additional layer of protection, rather than a source of pressure.

Building the (Media) House

We have noted that a large number of journalists, editors, and media leaders currently lack professional training that would provide them with clear guidelines for action in delicate situations and help them prevent the pressures they face daily.

Considering this, as well as the fact that there are virtually no internal procedures in media outlets, **UZOR** will take concrete steps in the near future to help address the deficiencies observed in current practices.

With the help of experts specializing in this issue, **UZOR** plans to develop a regulation for more effective pressure resistance, which will be made available to all professional media. Afterward, a formal signing of the document will be organized with the interested parties.

This idea was publicly supported at the conference "**Journalism in Montenegro: A Profession Growing Amidst Divisions and Pressures**" by representatives from three Montenegrin TV stations.





