

# Repression against human rights defenders

## Attacks on Women in Black:

***September 2016 - January 2017.***

*Dossier No. 8*



Due to the escalation of repression against activists of Women in Black in early 2014, Women in Black began compiling dossiers on analytical and systematic way, dealing with the attacks on activists. Dossier No. 8 deals with events that took place in the period from September 2016 to January 2017. What marked this period were the verdict in the Počuča Case, the rejection by the Prosecutors Office of the criminal charges for the assault in Leskovac, pro-government media attacks on Women in Black, as well as the continuation of the ignorant attitude of the state toward criminal charges and other motions of the Women in Black.

In the first part of this dossier we will deal with new attacks and the development of the situation regarding previous attacks in the mentioned period. In the second part we will look at the political and social context in Serbia.

### ***Počuča Case***

We remind that Radomir Počuča on 25. 03. 2014, at that time, a spokesman for the Special Police Unit of the MIA Serbia, through his Facebook account, openly called for the lynching of Women in Black. After starting of the court procedure, Počuča fled to Ukraine, where he joined pro-Russian rebels, but after few months he moved to Moscow. After 18 months on the run, in March 2016 he returned to the country. He was arrested while illegally crossing the border. Although his intention was clearly not to stand on trial, the Court had not ordered custody.

In April 2016, the trial began. Počuča during the trial, was asked by the victims lawyer, what does it means his sentence "... given by the pussy ...," and he replied that it means "to „share“ few slaps". In this way, he explicitly acknowledged that it was the call to violence against Women in Black. Women in Black in his testimony confirmed that due to Počučas calls for lynching, they had a feeling of vulnerability. In this way, all the conditions to pass a guilty verdict were present. Nevertheless on 14. 12. 2016, Judge Tatjana Sretenović brought acquittal in the trial against Radomir Pocuče for the crime of endangering the safety of activists of Women in Black. Women in Black, did not receive a copy of the judgment. A brief overview of the verdict, which we had, shows that the judge concluded that "the Počučas defence has been clear and consistent, and that he clearly explained his actions, and that we can conclude that his motives were patriotic, not endangering someone's security". The prosecution has filed an appeal against the verdict on 20. 01. 2017.<sup>1</sup>



At this point, we will refer to the atmosphere during the trial. The defendant Počuča was appearing at hearings in the company of people who were dressed in uniforms. Some of these people were convicted for the most serious crimes, one of them was Nemanja Ristić, against whom, in June 2016, we submit criminal charges for endangering the security of Women in Black, which will be discussed in more details in the section referring to the ignorant attitude of state toward criminal charges and other motions of Women in Black. We also emphasized the behaviour of individual police officers, who were responsible for security on the premises or outside the courthouse. Although they were there to protect the victims, they showed their familiarity with the defendant and other persons from his company, which reinforced a sense of insecurity among victims.

1 Žalba na presudu od 20. 01. 2017.



## Leskovac Case

For the attack in Leskovac we also file criminal charges for offenses against the security and for obstructing and preventing public assembly. As perpetrators are listed Marko Cakić and more unknown persons, some of whom were members of the extremist organization Dveri. In September, the Prosecutor's Office in Leskovac dismissed our criminal charges on the grounds that „there is no grounds for suspicion that a criminal offense for which the proceedings are conducted ex officio was hap-pend“. We filed an objection on this decision on 26. 09. 2016<sup>2</sup>. Higher Prosecutors Office in Leskovac dismissed the objection, as unfounded on 10. 10. 2016<sup>3</sup>. Despite our the letters to the Prosecutors Office from november<sup>4</sup> and december<sup>5</sup>, in which we asked from them to informed us about the outcome, we recived the answer only on 18. 01. 2017. Please note that in addition to criminal charges, we submitted video of the entire event, where one can clearly see all the perpetrators, as well as actions that will make the criminal offenses listed in criminal charges. We also submitted were printscreens of Facebook posts of suspect Marko Cakić, who was posting during the event, what is happening. In one post, he wrote, “at this moment we are throwing eggs on them“. Prosecutor's Office has not examined the suspect Cakić nor took into account the video of the event. Prosecutor's Office also didn't examined persons who are in the criminal complaint named as witnesses, as well as victims and rejected criminal charges, without explanation, except for one sentence “there is no reasons for prosecution“. After objection to this decision, the Higher Prosecutor's Office rejected the complaint, also not taking into account not a single piece of evidence that were submitted. In the explanation, The Higher Public Prosecutor refer to an official report of Police Unit in Leskovac<sup>6</sup>, in which it is stated “during the event, there were no controversial circumstances, someone threw 2 eggs towards the participants, but no one was hit, and people who threw the eggs were not identified“. For the Prosecution this is was enough to dismiss the complaint as unfounded.

## Attacks on Women in Black in newspaper Informer

Daily newspaper Informer is controlled and influenced by the government. The editorial policy is based on the full support of Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic, as well as on the brutal attacks on anyone who criticizes the government. Informer is a tabloid, whose price is two times lower than other newspapers, and therefore has the highest circulation. The connection of government with this tabloid, is reflected in the amount of advertising that state authorities and companies controlled by the state pays to Informer.

On November 9th , the Informer is published front page article “WOMEN IN BLACK LARGEST FOREIGN MERCENARIES: West gave them 1,587,596 euros to accuse Serbia for war crimes”<sup>7</sup>. This article states that the Women in Black received in the last two years fore mentioned amount of money in order to “attack and destabilize the state of Serbia“. They cited the donors, as well as the amounts of money that are given, and the organization Women in Black was called “anti-Serb“. “Source“ for the information contained herein is “an unnamed source, whose identity is known to the editor“. The release from November 12th states that that person has “received serious threats because of information provided by to the informer.“ In the November 9th edition, in the first plan was put photos of coordinator of Women in Black, Stasa Zajović and a with big figures numbers 1,587,596 euro were printed. It was a clear insinuation that she personally got this amount of money. The data published in the article are completely inaccurate. Women in Black for that period, from the donors and for specific projects got almost ten times less money than what is was stated in the text. It is interesting that none of the actual donors of Women in Black was not



2 Prigovor na odluku od 26. 09. 2016.

3 Rešenje Višeg javnog tužilaštva u Leskovcu od 10. 10. 2016.

4 Dopis Višem javnom tužilaštvu u Leskovcu od 11. 11. 2016.

5 Dopis Višem javnom tužilaštvu u Leskovcu od 27. 12. 2016.

6 Službena beleška PU Leskovac, PI Jug od 24. 05. 2016.

7 <http://informer.rs/vesti/politika/101988/ZENE-CRNOM-NAJVECI-STRANI-PLACENICI-Zapad-dao-evra-optuzuju-Srbiju-ratne-zlocine>

Srbiju-ratne-zlocine

mentioned in the text, but are listed donors who never or in a given period are not funded projects of Women in Black. Data on donors and projects of Women in Black are publicly available, but also in the Tax Administration anyone can easily check the income of the organization. All this suggests that the this article is not the result of the even the slightest journalistic effort, but in form and in content represents the warrant and call for a clash with the Stasa Zajović and Women in Black.

Although the aforementioned article brought out serious charges, prosecution or any other state body did not reacted. On the other hand, Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic and Minister of Interior Affairs Nebojša Stefanović have repeatedly mentioned that non-governmental organizations receive and spend millions. On the criticism of Women in Black addressed to the police and the authorities because of the practice of illegal deportations of refugees, Minister Stefanovic said that "the Serbian state helps refugees and that Women in Black could also help and provide shelter for refugees, because they have so much money." This tactic is well-known, according to which the media controlled by the authorities published false information, then the politicians in the government refer to them as "something that was in the media", "something that is common knowledge," and the similar.<sup>8</sup>

Women in Black on December 2nd filed a lawsuit against Informer for publishing false information. The process is still in the preparatory stage, we recived answer from the defendant and we are expecting preparatory hearing. We will look briefly at the contents of the reply to the complaint by defendant, although it has no legal effect. It is interesting the way the Informer perceives its readers, as well as the content that they published. On our allegations that the vast majority of readers, the content published in the media, taking as true, and neither was able nor verify the veracity of the data stated in the press, the defendant responded that "this claim is wrong, that the readers do not think that what is written in informer is true, nor is it up to them to determine the veracity of the claim, but that it is the job of the competent authority".<sup>9</sup>

Please note that this case is only the culmination of many years of media campaigns in which Women in Black and other non-governmental organizations were declared as traitors and foreign mercenaries.

### ***The attitude of the state towards attacks on Women in Black***

As in all previous reports can be concluded, the attitude of state authorities towards the attacks on activists of Women in Black is ignorant and passive. As an example we will presented the case of the assault in Belgrade in June 2016 .

For the attack we filed a criminal charges against Nemanja Ristic and other unknown perpetrators, some of whom were members of the extremist organization "Zavetnici", for offenses against the security and for obstructing and preventing public assembly. Since June, when we filed criminal charges, despite several letters to the Prosecutors Office in which we requested information on actions taken on the basis of criminal charges, we still did not received any reply. Please note that the suspect Nemanja Ristić is a person who has been convicted for the most serious crimes<sup>10</sup> and that he is in close ties with Russias authorities and secret service structures.<sup>11</sup> During the visit of Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergey Lavrov, Ristić, as well as other members of the organization "Zavetnici" met with him. For Ristic, meanwhile, Interpol issued arrest warrant at the request of the authorities of Montenegro, on suspicion that he and other persons, some of them from Russia, planned to create disturbances during the parliamentary elections, which were held in October in Montenegro.<sup>12</sup>

All of the above leads us to the conclusion that the situation for activists of Women in Black is getting worse and that it is approaching to the open violence. The fact is that no attack on the Women in Black, have not been solved. The acquittal of the attackers from Valjevo, acquittal in Počuča Case, not responding to filed criminal charges, absence of the police response to attacks, insults and threats that are happening in front of their eyes, is sending a clear message to perpetrators that they will

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8 <http://rs.n1info.com/a211246/Vesti/Vesti/Zene-u-crnom-Vucic-i-Stefanovic-vode-kampanju-protiv-nas.html>

9 Odgovor na tužbu od 20. 12. 2016.

10 <http://www.portalanalitika.me/clanak/250993/ko-je-nemanja-ristic-osumnjiceni-za-ucesce-u-planiranju-teroristickih-napada-kad-cetnik-zaprijeti>

11 <http://rs.n1info.com/a214617/Vesti/Vesti/Nemanja-Ristic.html>

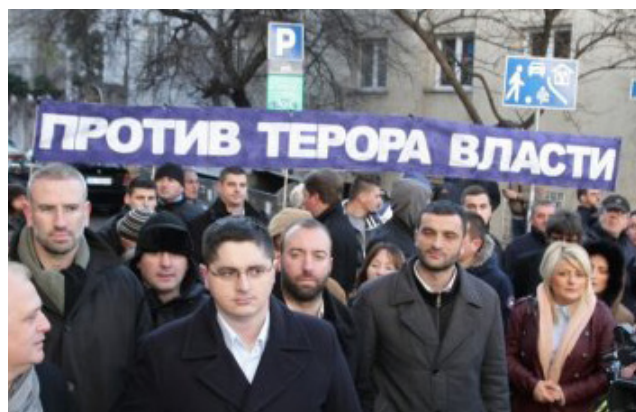
12 <http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/bogicevicu-ekstradicioni-pritvor-ristic-na-slobodi-ali-ne-smije-iz-beograda-920166>

not face its responsibility for the attacks. To this we must add the atmosphere of lynching, which is generated by authorities through its media, which falsely accusing the human rights activists to work against the country and for that receiving of large amounts of money, it all makes them targets for future attacks, who are in such an atmosphere, , created by the authorities are expected, desirable and justified in advance.

## Political and social context

As in previous reports, we again conclude the continued growth of authoritarian tendencies of government, as well as the strengthening of extremist and warmongering discourse.

The authorities continued to pressure and suppresses the few media that are critical to the government. An example of this is the trial of the journalists of the weekly NIN, after complaints of Minister of Interior Affairs Nebojsa Stefanovic, "for reputational damage." In an extraordinary fast procedure, they were found guilty and sentenced to pay 300,000 dinars to Minister Stefanovic.<sup>13</sup> During the hearing, a group of activists who came outside the court to support journalists, was physically attacked by people who came to accompany the Minister Stefanovic, which subsequently turned out that are officials of the ruling party.<sup>14</sup> Journalists who dare to ask questions to Prime Minister about scandals and criminal actions of the authorities are being verbally abused and insulted by the Prime Minister.



The authorities continue, through media they control, in the most brutal ways attack those who criticize them. Same as the Women in Black, and several other non-governmental organizations were similarly attacked in Informer. Attacks on non-governmental organizations intensify, and they are on the verge of open threats.

Of particular concern is the escalation of warmongering propaganda. Serbian authorities have taken advantage of the opening of the rail link from Belgrade to Kosovo for an open and mindless provocation. Exterior and interior of the train was designed in the colors of the Serbian flag, and the entire exterior of the train has been printed with the message "Kosovo is Serbia". The decision of the Kosovo authorities not to allow the entry of such a train on the territory of Kosovo, was followed by the unreasonable and unjustified reaction of Serbian Prime Minister, who spoke about the Albanians plan to "unprovoked" attack the train, "that Serbia will not watch peacefully" and similar. The furthest in his statements went President Tomislav Nikolic, who said that "Serbia is ready to send troops to Kosovo." The obvious intention of Serbian authorities was to provoke the Kosovo side.

Denial of the war-crimes continues. The President of Serbia officialy met with Momcilo Krajisnik, a convicted war criminal.<sup>15</sup> The ruling party SNS in Vojvodina organized a series of debates, in which spoke convicted war criminal Veselin Sljivancanin. On one of the debates, in Indjija, a group of activists who whistled when Sljivancanin began to speak were attacked and two activists were injured. The event was immediately followed by propaganda from the authorities, through their media, the activists were called hooligans and fascists. Culmination was when the Minister of Internal Affairs Stefanovic stated that activists attacked citizens and injured 20 people, and that they on this occasion "cursed Serbian mother" to citizens. About senselessness of these claims speaks that the attacked activists were from



13 <http://rs.n1info.com/a218167/Vesti/Vesti/Presuda-u-slucaju-Stefanovic-NIN.html>

14 [http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2016&mm=11&dd=29&nav\\_id=1204497](http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2016&mm=11&dd=29&nav_id=1204497)

15 <http://ba.n1info.com/a131989/Svijet/Regija/Nikolic-i-Krajisnik-o-zastiti-cirilice.html>

Youth Initiative for Human Rights, peace organizations, and that among 9 activists there were 6 girls, while in the audience there were about 200 people. Although these statements are absurd and bizarre, we should be concerned, because they come from the minister of police, whose job is to protect citizens and to tell the truth.<sup>16</sup>

About connections between authorities and extremist groups, there is also a fact that the Government of Serbia hired as an adviser, Misa Vacić, known extremists, who was convicted for violence and spreading hatred against LGBT population. Although the authorities first denied that information, soon after Vacić confirmed that he works for the government as an adviser.<sup>17</sup>

In the period covered by this report, the “war” against the refugees by Serbian authorities is continued. The practice of illegal deportations continued and intensified. In this task are engaged Army, Police, the Commissariat for Refugees of Serbia. Despite numerous testimonies, not a single case of torture of refugees by government officials, has been prosecuted.

In an abandoned warehouse near Belgrade bus station there are around 1,000 refugees. There’s no basic living conditions. Although the refugees are there since the last summer the Serbian authorities did nothing to improve their situation. On the contrary, they did and are doing everything to make their situation even more difficult. In early November, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, which is in charge of taking care of refugees, has warned all organizations and individuals that any form of assistance to refugees in Belgrade is not acceptable. For this reason, the large humanitarian organizations have withdrawn and refugees are left without help, practically left to themselves. Despite the great enthusiasm of individuals and informal groups that continued to help refugees, because of the small capacity at their disposal, as well as a large number of people in need, such aid is far from enough.



Their irresponsibility and lack of professionalism, media close to the government have shown when reporting on an alleged attack by refugees on a woman in Obrenovac. Although it was soon apparent that this is a false information and that in this case, the refugees were attacked, the media reported on the front pages of “dangerous refugees,” and the truth of the event were posted briefly on the inside pages.<sup>18</sup>

*Mirko Medenica  
Belgrade, February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2017*

16 <http://rs.n1info.com/a221932/Vesti/Vesti/Aktivisti-Inicijative-mladih-pretuceni-na-tribini-SNS-a.html>

17 <http://rs.n1info.com/a216448/Vesti/Vesti/Misa-Vacic-savetnik-u-Vladi-Srbije.html>

18 <https://www.cenzolovka.rs/etika/kako-se-navodni-horor-u-obrenovcu-pretvorio-u-totalnu-stravu-u-medijima/>