

**Ms Vera Jourová, Vice President
Commissioner for Values and Transparency
European Commission**

Brussels, 23th January 2024

Urgent Appeal Regarding Ongoing Violations of Press Freedom at RTV Slovenia

It has unfortunately become customary for me to inform you once again about another transgression against journalists at RTV Slovenia orchestrated by the current management of the public broadcaster. The most recent incident involves the same journalists persecuted by the management, as described in previous correspondence. These journalists have now received a substantial pay cut, pushing most of them near the poverty line. Among them is an award-winning war correspondent **Valentin Areh** who has gained fame reporting for esteemed media companies like the Associated Press, ZDF and CNN.

As highlighted in prior letters, the new management temporarily laid off 15 employees for one month, citing business and organizational reasons. They claimed an inability to fulfill the work specified in their employment contracts due to financial constraints and urgent internal restructuring. Strikingly, among the 2500 employees, those affected by the temporary layoffs were individuals who have long been a thorn in the side of the Slovenian Government. Selective action against targeted journalists seems to be a transparent political maneuver against those who do not conform to the viewpoints endorsed by the current government. After all, the Prime minister himself admitted to political purges that he encouraged at RTV Slovenia.

These same highly acclaimed journalists, with a proven track record in the private sector and illustrious careers, have been reduced to novices, experiencing salary reductions by several wage grades. **Valentin Areh** PhD, the aforementioned prized war correspondent and former acting director of RTV Slovenia, has been placed in the 34th salary grade (a downgrade of 17 grades), earning only 1,149.16 euros per month. Concluding this correspondence, I am including a public letter he addressed to the management of RTV Slovenia.

It seems that this is yet another in a series of mobbing attempts, designed to force the affected journalists to resign, as outright dismissal would be deemed impossible by the law. Despite justifying pay cuts and show cancellations by claiming the public broadcaster was in financial dire straits, the new management has revived political and ideological TV shows of yesteryear associated with the old guard of journalists aligned with the current government's political perspectives and ideology.

I hope it is now evident that RTV Slovenia has fallen victim to a radical faction of journalists and management, positioned by the recent RTV Slovenia Act proposed by the current government and endorsed into law by its coalition majority in parliament. Instances of mobbing, degradation, and cancellations have sadly become commonplace.

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During the tenure of the previous Slovenian government, your passionate commitment to the principles of the rule of law and journalistic freedom was very pronounced, albeit influenced by conjecture and perspectives primarily voiced by anti-government protestors aligned with left-wing political parties.

However, in the face of putinist purges occurring in both Slovenia and Poland (perpetrated by liberal governments with far-left elements), your silence is conspicuous. Moreover, you actively promoted the RTV Slovenia Act, which facilitated these developments. The European Commission's response is crucial in halting the Slovenian government and its media loyalists from fully subjugating the public broadcaster.

Enclosed is the letter esteemed RTV journalist **Valentin Areh** wrote to the management, which aptly encapsulates the duress RTV Slovenia journalists have been under during the reign of the new management of RTV.

I would at least appreciate your formal reply with confirmation of receiving all the letters I am sending to you.

Sincerely,



Romana Tomc

Sent to:

- Ms Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission
- Ms Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament
- Ms Sophie in 't Veld, Chair of the DRFMG Group

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The letter of Valentin Areh PhD

I am informing you that the management of RTV has just sent me a decision via email that there is no more work for me on public television [RTV Slovenia]. They have placed me on temporary lay-off. At the same time, they prevented me from entering work and accessing my personal belongings. Apparently, the management is expanding the personnel purge to those who did not work for the Panorama show as well [Panorama show fell victim to the purges orchestrated by the new management, resulting in its cancellation]. Despite having a doctorate in science and over 33 years of journalistic and editorial experience, working for POP TV, TV Slovenija, Associated Press Television News, ZDF, CNN, and other large foreign media houses, [Director of Television branch of RTV Slovenia] Ksenija Horvat claims that there is no more work. The position of the editor of Dnevnik and Odmevi [prime time news shows], which I have held for the past 15 years, is also unattainable for me. Polona Fijavž, the editor of the primetime news program, now entrusts this work without any problems to journalists without any editorial experience and with a high school education.

Today, the board members—Zvezdan Martič, Andrej Trček, and labor director Franci Pavšer—sent me a sneaky and cowardly contract. With this contract, they require me to agree to a 17-grade lower salary and start working as a beginner journalist. At the same time, I must renounce any lawsuit against RTV. In person or in writing, no one has explained to me the reasons for the lower salary, withdrawal of work, and the ban on entering the television building. Individual colleagues simply told me, "Revenge is sweet!" They claim that the Constitutional Court, courts, media, trade unions, and politics are on their side. Unfortunately, they do not realize that tomorrow others may come who will treat all those who carry out the purges and silently agree with them in exactly the same way. With this, the current management drove the last nail into RTV's coffin.

The management of RTV, with the support of political activists among journalists, continues the brutal purges of those journalists who did not want to identify themselves politically. According to the principle: if you are not with us, you are against us! The management of RTV increases the pressure on individual editors, journalists, and other program creators, engages in bullying, and interferes with journalistic work. Employees at Panorama are subject to psychological violence, threats, and insults. There is no legal basis for threats to terminate the employment of selected journalists. It is an obvious and gross violation of labor law institutes and legislation against those colleagues who insist on respecting program and professional standards. Despite this, the labor inspectorates remain silent.

Despite the violence, intimidation, and threats to journalists, the public did not witness the protest of the RTV Workers' Council, the public sector unions, the Association of Slovenian Journalists, the RTV journalists' unions, the Ministry of Culture, professional associations, and non-governmental organizations. In the past, they daily reported on the events on RTV. Everyone is silent. With this, they enabled the management to register as the first management of RTV in history, which radically reduced the program, severely curtailed culture (although RTV was once primarily a cultural institution), and prohibited its employees from entering TV Slovenija. With an illegal decision, they took away work.

Dr. Valentin Areh, TV Slovenia

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