

Dear META Team,

We are writing on behalf of a group of media outlets, journalist associations and civil society organisations from Serbia working in the fields of media freedom, human rights, and democratic governance.

We are reaching out regarding a series of Instagram account suspensions and deletions of independent media outlets and civil society organisations in Serbia that occurred this weekend, as we are currently witnessing new bot attacks on independent media accounts on META. Among those affected were the accounts of the N1, Nova.rs portal, the weekly Radar, and the Autonomija and VOICE portals (outlets of the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina), as well as civil society organisations CRTA and Osnažene and personal accounts known for sharing content critical of the authorities, including a personal account of a photojournalist.

We acknowledge the fact that the affected media outlets and CSOs have since had their accounts restored. However, this incident raises broader, systemic concerns that go beyond individual cases and require META's attention.

In Serbia, media freedom is already increasingly at risk, as independent outlets face significant political and economic pressures, while journalists frequently face attacks. In such contexts, even temporary enforcement actions such as these account suspensions can have disproportionate consequences.

What we observed in this case strongly suggests a coordinated attack. The suspensions occurred within a short timeframe and followed unusual and clearly artificial activity, such as sudden spikes in followers. Similar forms of malicious activity have previously targeted these and other independent media and civil society accounts in Serbia. The new bot attacks we are witnessing right now also feature artificial spikes in the number of followers. This raises concerns that such actions may be part of a broader pattern and could occur more often in the future, particularly affecting actors operating in an already fragile democratic environment.

In this context, we would appreciate clarification on the following points:

- What led to the suspension and deletion of the affected accounts?
- What safeguards are currently in place to prevent independent media outlets and CSOs from being penalised as a result of malicious activity?
- How does META ensure timely human review and contextual assessment in cases involving public interest in politically sensitive contexts?
- How can CSOs and media outlets protect their META accounts in order to prevent similar situations from happening in the future?

We raise these concerns with the aim of preventing similar incidents in the future and strengthening protections for independent media and civil society in Serbia. As independent media already struggle to reach audiences across the country through traditional channels, if these attacks on META platforms continue, they might have long-term negative consequences for media freedom and freedom of expression in the country. We would welcome the opportunity to continue this discussion and explore avenues for cooperation.

Sincerely,

Media Diversity Institute – Western Balkans

Civic Initiatives

Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS/IJAS)

Independent media outlets N1, Nova, Nova.rs, Radar and Danas

Slavko Curuvija Foundation

ANEM - Association of Independent Electronic Media

Independent Journalists Association of Vojvodina

Journalists' Association of Serbia

Lawyers' Committee For Human Rights

NGO Osnažene