

Thursday 8th October 2020

MFRR partners and media freedom organisations condemn conviction of journalist Jovo Martinovic by High Court of Montenegro

The [Media Freedom Rapid Response](#) partners and media freedom organisations strongly condemn today's decision by the High Court of Montenegro to sentence [investigative journalist Martinovic](#) to one year in prison for participating in drug trafficking. While he was acquitted on charges for membership in a criminal organization and will not spend time in prison due to the time already spent in pre-trial detention, he will have a criminal record. This verdict is an attack on investigative journalism and a damning indictment on media freedom in Montenegro.

Martinovic's conviction is a gross injustice, following almost five years of judicial persecution merely for doing his job. Beyond the violation of Martinovic's human rights, his prosecution and conviction moreover contribute to a chilling effect on media freedom in Montenegro and raise serious concerns about the effectiveness of the rule of law in the country, a key condition for accession to the European Union. Questions remain as to the court's readiness to take into consideration evidence from the defence or establish an understanding of the journalistic practices that readily explain Martinovic's actions.

[Ahead of the decision](#), we had repeatedly called on the Court to take full account of the overwhelming evidence of Martinovic's innocence and to acquit. It has been clear from the start that Martinovic, a specialist in covering organised crime for leading international media, was in contact with criminal networks solely due to his journalistic coverage. After his initial arrest, Martinovic spent almost 15 months in pre-trial detention before he was provisionally freed. Since then, he has had to dedicate resources to this lengthy politically motivated prosecution in which his fair trial rights were violated.

While Jovo Martinovic has stated he will appeal this verdict, the MFRR reiterates our condemnation, not just of the verdict, but of the entire proceedings. Martinovic should never have been charged or detained. His actions were in line with existing and established standards of journalism, especially when covering issues related to organised crime and corruption. The legacy of this process is the increased criminalisation of investigative journalism in Montenegro and could encourage other journalists and media workers to avoid sensitive but necessary reporting.

Signed by:

ARTICLE 19

Association of European Journalists (AEJ)

European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)

European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

International Press Institute (IPI)
Media Diversity Institute (MDI)
Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT)
Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO)
Trade Union of Media of Montenegro (TUMM)

This statement was coordinated by the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR), which tracks, monitors and responds to violations of press and media freedom in EU Member States and Candidate Countries. This project provides legal and practical support, public advocacy and information to protect journalists and media workers. The MFRR is organised by a consortium led by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) including ARTICLE 19, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), Free Press Unlimited (FPU), the Institute for Applied Informatics at the University of Leipzig (InfAI), International Press Institute (IPI) and CCI/Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT). The project is co-funded by the European Commission.

 **MEDIA FREEDOM
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