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## Journalist Ana Lalic Detained Overnight after Reporting on Conditions in Hospital

SOURCE OF THREAT ▶ State

CATEGORY  ▶ Detention and imprisonment of journalists

**PARTNER: EFJ/IFJ, Article 19, IPI, RSF**

Nova.rs journalist Ana Lalic was detained from 1 April evening to 2 April 2020 morning at the Novi Sad police station. Her laptop and mobile phones (professional and private) were seized during the search of her apartment and have not been returned.

According to media reports, Lalic was detained for “causing panic and unrest” with an article on the lack of basic equipment and poor working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic at the local hospital, Vojvodina Clinical Center. The clinical center management denied her story and filed a complaint to the police for defamation and upsetting the public.

Lalic was detained on the first day of the application of a new regulation penalising anyone releasing information about the coronavirus outbreak that is not ‘authorised’ by the Office of the Prime Minister or by individuals approved by the Crisis Management Taskforce. The Prime Minister apologised and promised to withdraw the regulation introduced on 28 March under the current state of emergency in Serbia.

### UPDATES

**28 Apr 2020:** On 27 April 2020, criminal charges against Nova.rs journalist Ana Lalic were dropped. Lalic was charged with causing panic and unrest under Criminal Code Article 343, after she had published an article with unnamed sources in Vojvodina Clinical Centre saying the medical staff at the Centre did not have enough protective gear.

**17 Apr 2020:** Since her release from jail on April 2, Lalić has been targeted in an online smear campaign. A paid advert has appeared regularly online which shows a photo of Lalić with a caption accusing her of acting against the “interests of the state”. She was also branded "state enemy number 1". She has also received numerous serious threats on social media and has faced persistent calls in pro-government media for authorities to

prosecute her, making her fear for her personal safety. Lalić, who is a board member at the Independent Journalists Association of Vojvodina (NDNV) has announced she will file lawsuits against those responsible.

**06 Apr 2020:** On 2 April 2020, her laptop and phones were returned to Ana Lalic. The journalist remains under investigation.

**03 Apr 2020:** On 2 April 2020, the Serbian Government revoked a decision aimed at regulating the centralisation of public information on the coronavirus pandemic during the current state of emergency.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- ➔ **Journalists' Association of Serbia (UNS) statement: "Ana Lalić posle puštanja: Uverena sam da radim pravu stvar"**
- ➔ **Nova.rs article : "Ana Lalić puštena iz pritvora"**
- ➔ **Balkan Insight article : "Serbian Reporter's Arrest Over Pandemic Article Draws PM's Apology"**

## STATE REPLIES



**11 May 2020** | Response from the Serbian authorities (Ministry of Interior)

- ➔ **Letter from the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Serbia to the Council of Europe**

## FOLLOW-UPS



**27 Oct 2020** | **NEW** CoE Human Rights Commissioner calls for "a comprehensive response" to counter SLAPPs effectively.

- ➔ **Human Rights Comment: "Time to take action against SLAPPs"**



**03 Apr 2020** | OSCE Media Freedom Representative welcomes reversal by Serbian Government of decision on public information.

- ➔ **Statement by Harlem Désir**

