



**Subject: Submission of a Joint CSO Letter on Media Freedom in Serbia**

Dear Sir/ Madam,

We write as a coalition of civil society and media freedom organisations deeply concerned by the proposed sale of Adria News Network (ANN), including N1, NovaS, Radar and Danas, to Alpac Capital; a transaction which, if completed, risks accelerating the erosion of media pluralism and editorial independence in Serbia and the wider Western Balkans.

The influence of these media outlets extends beyond Serbia. They have served as rare bastions of independent reporting in the region of the Western Balkans and in other neighboring countries. Their work is critical to efforts to bind together a region that all too often has been defined by tension and conflict.

We believe this moment represents a critical turning point for democratic governance and media freedom in Serbia. Without urgent scrutiny and principled engagement from European institutions and democratic partners, some of the last major independent media outlets in the country may pass into a political and commercial ecosystem that is closely aligned with actors repeatedly associated with state influence over the media sector.

The implications extend beyond Serbia alone. The credibility of European commitments to democratic resilience, rule of law, media pluralism, and the standards expected of EU candidate countries are directly at stake.

**Background**

Media freedom in Serbia has deteriorated sharply in recent years, particularly following the collapse of the Novi Sad railway station canopy in November 2024 and the subsequent anti-corruption protests that spread across the country.

Journalists covering protests and allegations of state-facilitated corruption have faced sustained intimidation, including harassment, threats, smear campaigns, and physical attacks by pro-government groups and, in some instances, law enforcement actors. Independent reporters and editors have increasingly been portrayed by senior political figures and aligned media as 'foreign agents' or enemies of the state.

International organisations, including the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), Reporters Without Borders (RSF), and the International Press Institute (IPI), have repeatedly warned of worsening political interference in Serbia's media environment. Serbia now ranks among the lowest countries in Europe on major press freedom indices.

Against this backdrop, N1, NovaS and Danas have remained among the last nationally significant outlets widely regarded as editorially independent.

**The 2025 Recording**



In August 2025, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) published a leaked recording between Stan Miller, CEO of United Group, and Vladimir Lučić, CEO of state-owned Telekom Srbija.

The recording appeared to reveal discussions concerning the future of United Group's independent Serbian media assets. It suggested direct political interest at the highest levels of the Serbian state in the editorial and management structure of those outlets.

The publication of the recording triggered serious concern among European institutions and media freedom organisations. The European Parliament subsequently raised concerns regarding efforts to weaken independent media in Serbia, while the IPI stated that the recording suggested politically motivated interference in editorially independent outlets.

Particular alarm centred on references to Aleksandra Subotić, a widely respected defender of editorial independence within United Group's Serbian operations.

### **Developments under ANN**

Subsequent developments closely mirrored concerns raised following publication of the recording.

Following the restructuring of regional media assets under the ANN structure, Aleksandra Subotić was removed from her position. ANN subsequently appointed Rani Raad as Chairman. International media freedom organisations described these developments as alarming and warned that they risked undermining previously stated commitments to editorial independence.

Further concern followed the dismissal of Igor Božić, the long-serving and highly respected News Director of N1 Serbia. EFJ stated that the move appeared inconsistent with ANN's public assurances regarding protection from political interference.

A coalition of Serbian media organisations warned that these developments represented 'a serious signal' that independent media in Serbia was entering a decisive phase of political and structural pressure.

### **Concerns regarding Alpac Capital**

We understand that Alpac Capital is seeking to acquire the ANN portfolio, including N1, NovaS and Danas. This raises profound concerns regarding the future editorial independence of these outlets.

Alpac Capital and individuals associated with it have documented ties to political and commercial networks connected to both Viktor Orbán and President Aleksandar Vučić. In recent years, Alpac acquired Euronews with financing reportedly linked to Hungarian political and commercial interests.

Under Alpac Capital's ownership Euronews Serbia is licensed to state-owned Telekom Srbija, the same entity whose CEO was recorded discussing strategies to weaken N1 with the CEO of United Group. Under this license, journalists reportedly face documented censorship, bans on questioning Serbian government officials and dismissal for defending editorial standards. Alpac Capital has close links to both President Vučić and Viktor Orbán.

Publicly documented relationships between senior figures associated with Alpac Capital, Hungarian political networks, and individuals close to the Serbian leadership further intensify concerns regarding the prospective acquisition of Serbia's remaining independent broadcasters and news platforms. It would place some of the last editorially independent television news broadcasters, daily newspaper and online news platforms in Serbia under the control of a firm whose existing media holdings have been marked by documented allegations of censorship, political interference and the erosion of editorial standards.

European responsibilities



The European Union has repeatedly emphasised that media freedom, pluralism, democratic accountability, and rule of law are central conditions of Serbia's accession process.

The European Media Freedom Act establishes editorial independence and media pluralism as core democratic principles within the European framework. At the same time, the European Commission has already raised concerns regarding political interference in Serbia's media landscape and democratic backsliding more broadly.

We further note that ANN's licensing and corporate structure engages Luxembourg regulatory authorities and therefore raises broader European responsibilities extending beyond Serbia.

This transaction therefore cannot be viewed as a purely private commercial matter. Its implications are fundamentally political, democratic, and European in nature.

### **Our Request**

In light of the above, we respectfully urge:

- the European Commission to assess this transaction within the context of Serbia's accession obligations, rule of law benchmarks, and Growth Plan conditionality;
- relevant European institutions and member-state authorities to examine the implications of the proposed acquisition for media pluralism, editorial independence, and democratic resilience in Serbia and the Western Balkans;
- Luxembourg authorities and relevant media regulators to apply heightened scrutiny to ownership, licensing, or approval procedures connected to the transaction
- and European democratic partners and media freedom organisations to publicly affirm that further erosion of independent media in Serbia would be incompatible with the democratic standards expected of EU candidate countries.

We believe the coming days and weeks may prove decisive for the future of independent journalism in Serbia.

At stake is not only the future of several media outlets, but the preservation of democratic accountability, pluralism, and public trust in a region whose stability remains of profound importance to Europe as a whole.

Yours sincerely,

1. Association of Online Media (AOM)
2. Association of independent electronic media (ANEM)
3. Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia
4. Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina
5. Foundation Fond B92
6. Youth Initiative for Human Rights
7. Transparency Serbia
8. A11 Initiative
9. European Movement in Serbia
10. Helsinki committee for human rights in Serbia
11. CRTA (Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability)
12. Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights (YUCOM)
13. Belgrade Centre for Security Policy



YOUTH INITIATIVE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
INICIJATIVA MLADIH ZA LJUDSKA PRAVA  
NISMA E TË RINJVE PËR TË DREJTAT E NJERIUT

14. KROKODIL Association
15. Association Women for Peace
16. Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation
17. Civic Initiatives
18. Centre for Contemporary Politics
19. Belgrade Center for Human Rights
20. Rainbow Ignite
21. Autonomous Women's Center
22. Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute – RERI
23. BeFem
24. FemPlatz
25. Trag Foundation
26. Activist Community Base - SviĆe
27. Independent Women’s Center Dimitrovgrad