

Veran Matić

Chairman of the Commission for Investigating Killings of Journalists

Member of the Working Group for the Security and Protection of Journalists of the Government of Serbia

Member of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists
Republic of Serbia

2 March 2023

Re: Protection of writer and journalist Marko Vidojković

Dear Veran Matić,

I am writing on behalf of PEN International, the world association of writers dedicated to promoting literature and defending freedom of expression, to express our grave concerns regarding threats made to writer and journalist Marko Vidojković. We are respectfully asking for your support in ensuring the Serbian authorities consider Vidojković's case with due diligence, find the perpetrators and ensure his safety.

The death threats against writer and journalist Marko Vidojković have intensified since the publication of his best-selling novel *Djubre* (Trash), in September 2020. Vidojković said he received over 50 death threats in 2021 and 2022 and reported more than 20 of them to the Prosecutor's Office through lawyers working with Nezavisno udruženje novinara Srbije (NUNS), resulting in only two criminal convictions. Anonymous threats depicted him being shot in the head, burned or beaten to death, hanged, having his tongue cut out, and having his arms broken so he could no longer write. Vidojković reported being publicly smeared on numerous occasions by some government officials and pro-government outlets from 2019 onwards, with such outlets coordinating targeted campaigns against him – thus giving rise to online abuse and death threats. Vidojković also told PEN International that Aleksandar Šapić, vice-president of the ruling SNS and mayor of Belgrade, is harassing him legally through three lawsuits that further undermine his security and financial position.

Already in June 2021, Teresa Ribeiro, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, called for an immediate investigation into the death threats directed at Marko Vidojković, highlighting the risks that online violence poses to the safety of journalists and their ability to carry out their work, free from self-censorship.

In January 2023, PEN International published a statement condemning the threats against Marko Vidojković and urging the Serbian authorities to take all the necessary steps to identify those

President / Président / Presidente
Burhan Sönmez

International Secretary / Secrétaire
International / Secretario Internacional
Regula Venske

Interim Treasurer / Intérimaire Trésorier
Tesorero Interino
Eric Lax

Executive Director / Directrice
Exécutive / Directora Ejecutiva
Romana Cacchioli

Presidents Emeritus / Présidents
Emérites / Presidentes Eméritos
Jennifer Clement, Homero Aridjis,
John Ralston Saul, Per Wästberg,
Mario Vargas Llosa

Vice Presidents / Vice-présidents /
Vicepresidentes

Svetlana Alexievich, Margaret Atwood,
Niels Barford, J.M. Coetzee, Terry
Carlbom, Lucina Kathmann, Kata
Kulavkova, Eric Lax, Joanne Leedom-
Ackerman, Perumal Murugan, Boris A.
Novak, Vida Ognjenović, Elizabeth
Norgren, William Nygaard,
Orhan Pamuk, Elena Poniatowska,
Nayantara Sahgal, Michael Scammell,
Eugene Schougin, Hori Takeaki,
Franca Tiberto, Luisa Valenzuela,
Ngugi Wa Thiong'o

The Board / Le Comité Exécutif /
El Consejo

President / Président / Presidente
International Secretary / Secrétaire
International / Secretario Internacional
Treasurer / Trésorier / Tesorero
David Francis, Iman Humaydan,
Beatrice Lamwaka, Ola Larsmo,
Gabriel Seisdedos, Salil Tripahi, Tanja
Tuma.

International PEN is trading as
PEN International.

International PEN is a company
registered in England and Wales
with registration number 05683997.
International PEN is a registered
charity in England and Wales
with registration number 1117088.
International PEN's registered office
is Koops Mill, 162-164 Abbey Street,
London SE1 2AN

responsible and hold them to account.¹ Considering that Vidojković's life was under serious threat, PEN International assisted his prompt evacuation and relocation; he and his family are currently in a safe location.

The continuing threats against Marko Vidojković come in the wake of sustained attacks against writers and journalists in Serbia, orchestrated by various actors, who aim to silence their work and critical reporting. As a member of the Council of Europe's Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists, PEN International welcomed the establishment of the Working Group for the Security and Protection of Journalists of the Government of Serbia in December 2020.² Such initiative provides a useful mechanism for civil society organisations to establish a direct link with policy makers and raise proposals on legal reform, and we trust that the Working Group is doing everything in its power to better ensure journalists' safety.

However, political will and more engagement by the relevant state institutions are necessary to change the existing situation on the ground. PEN International expresses concern over the fact that representatives of the authorities in Serbia do not sufficiently contribute to the creation of an environment suitable for media pluralism, including through clear and consistent public condemnations of all threats to writers and journalists and more effective investigations of cases of threats to their safety.

PEN International would be grateful for your support in obtaining an update on the steps taken by relevant government institutions to address the continuing threats against Marko Vidojković, and ensuring he can do his work free from harassment and attacks.

Your sincerely,



Romana Cacchioli
Executive Director
PEN International

Please address your response to: Aurélia Dondo, Head of Europe and Central Asia at PEN International: aurelia.dondo@pen-international.org.

¹ PEN International, Serbia: Investigate death threats against writer Marko Vidojković and hold those responsible to account, 12 January 2023, available at: <https://www.pen-international.org/news/serbia-investigate-death-threats-against-writer-marko-vidojkovic>

² Defending Press Freedom in Times of Tension and Conflict, Annual Report 2022 by the partner organisations to the Council of Europe Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists, April 2022, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/platform-protection-of-journalists-annual-report-2022/1680a64fe1>

Veran Matić
Predsednik Komisije za istraživanje ubistava novinara
Član Radne grupe za bezbednost i zaštitu novinara Vlade Republike Srbije
i Stalne radne grupe za bezbednost novinara

2. mart, 2023

Re: Zaštita pisca i novinara Marka Vidojkovića

Poštovani gospodine Matiću,

Obraćam vam se u ime PEN International, svetskog udruženja pisaca posvećenih promociji književnosti i odbrani slobode izražavanja, da bih izrazila ozbiljnu zabrinutost zbog pretnji upućenih piscu i novinaru Marku Vidojkoviću. Izrazito poštujući vaš angažman, očekujemo pomoć, kako bi srpske vlasti sa dužnom pažnjom razmotrile Vidojkovićev slučaj, pronašle počinioce i osigurale njegovu bezbednost.

Pretnje smrću piscu i novinaru Marku Vidojkoviću intenzivirane su od objavljivanja bestselera „Dubre“, u septembru 2020. Vidojković je naveo da je 2021. i 2022. dobio preko 50 pretnji smrću, da je više od 20 prijavio nadležnom tužilaštvu (preko pravne službe Nezavisnog udruženja novinara Srbije - NUNS), te da su pravnosnažne presude donete u dva slučaja. Pretili su mu da će biti upucan u glavu, spaljen ili pretučen na smrt, obešen, da će mu biti odsečen jezik i slomljene ruke, kako više ne bi mogao da piše. Vidojković je prijavio da su ga pojedini predstavnici vlasti i prorežimski mediji u brojnim prilikama javno blatili, od 2019. nadalje, pri čemu su navedeni mediji koordinisali ciljane kampanje protiv njega – što je dovelo do intenzivnog onlajn zlostavljanja i brojnih pretnji smrću. Vidojković je za PEN International izjavio i da ga Aleksandar Šapić, potpredsednik vladajuće SNS i gradonačelnik Beograda, pravno uznemirava sa tri sudske tužbe koje dalje podrivaju njegovu sigurnost i ekonomski položaj.

Tereza Ribeiro, predstavnik OEBS-a za slobodu medija je još u junu 2021. godine pozvala na hitnu istragu pretnji smrću upućenih Marku Vidojkoviću, ističući rizike koje nasilje na internetu predstavlja za bezbednost novinara i njihovu sposobnost da rade svoj posao, lišeni autocenzure.

U januaru 2023, PEN International objavio je saopštenje u kojem oštro osuđuje pretnje Marku Vidojkoviću i poziva srpske vlasti da preduzmu sve neophodne korake da identifikuju odgovorne i pozovu ih na odgovornost. S obzirom da je Vidojkovićev život ozbiljno ugrožen, PEN International je pomogao u njegovoj brznoj evakuaciji i preseljenju; on i njegova porodica su trenutno na bezbednoj lokaciji.

Neprekidne pretnje Marku Vidojkoviću dolaze u jeku neprestanih napada na pisce i novinare u Srbiji, orkestriranih od strane različitih aktera, koji imaju za cilj da učutkaju njihov rad i kritičko izveštavanje. Kao članica Platforme Saveta Evrope za unapređenje zaštite novinarstva i bezbednosti novinara, PEN International je pozdravio osnivanje Radne grupe za bezbednost i zaštitu novinara, u decembru 2020. Takva inicijativa predstavlja koristan mehanizam kojim bi organizacije civilnog društva uspostavile direktnu vezu sa političkim vođstvom, dajući predloge za adekvatne izmene zakona. Verujemo da Radna grupa čini sve što je u njenoj moći da obezbedi veću bezbednost novinara.

Neophodna je, međutim, politička volja i još intenzivnije angažovanje relevantnih državnih institucija da se postojeće stanje na terenu promeni. PEN International izražava zabrinutost zbog toga što predstavnici vlasti u Srbiji ne doprinose u dovoljnoj meri stvaranju okruženja pogodnog za medijski pluralizam, pre svega putem jasnih i doslednih javnih osuda svih pretnji piscima i novinarima i efikasnijim istragama slučajeva ugrožavanja njihove bezbednosti.

PEN International bi vam bio zahvalan na podršci u dobijanju ažuriranih informacija o koracima koje su relevantne državne institucije preduzele da bi odgovorile na neprekidne pretnje Marku Vidojkoviću i da bi obezbedile da svoj posao obavlja bez uznemiravanja i napada.

S poštovanjem,

Romana Cacchioli
Izvršni direktor
PEN International

Molimo Vas da svoj odgovor pošaljete na: Aurélia Dondo, šef odeljenja za Evropu i centralnu Aziju u PEN International: aurelia.dondo@pen-international.org.

