



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION OFFICE

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Dear Sirs,

Peter Kropsch, President of EANA and CEO of dpa
and Mr Alexandru Ion Giboi, Secretary General of EANA,

We have received with disbelief your letter that attempts to summarize some of the facts related to the developments around the Slovenian Press Agency. It would be the norm, in accordance with the principles of journalism ethics, to first examine some of the facts that you simply deny in the letter.

We, too, would prefer that the events that occurred in the Slovenian Press Agency had never happened. Unfortunately, they did happen, and they should serve as a reminder and warning to all so that something similar never happens again.

It is known that in 2009 the government led by the Social Democrats appointed Bojan Veselinovič as the director of the Slovenian Press Agency. Prior to that, the same government forced the resignation of the then director of the Slovenian Press Agency.

When Veselinovič officially took over as the director in 2009, one of his first moves involved coming into conflict with the then editor-in-chief Borut Meško. The conflict, which ended utterly tragically, is considered to be one of the gravest and most brutal political attacks on journalism since Slovenia became a democratic state.

It was obvious that director Veselinovič did not agree with the editorial policy of the then editor-in-chief, who as a journalist also provided a platform to those who were persecuted during the rule of the communist regime. Soon after Bojan Veselinovič took over as director and when Borut Meško was still the editor-in-chief, the Slovenian Press Agency published an interview with a renowned Slovenian communist dissident Ljubo Sirc, which apparently was not to director Veselinovič's liking. "One day after the interview was published, more precisely on 21 April, Veselinovič started bombarding me from the early morning hours with numerous requests for explanations which arrived by e-mail at the following times: 00:06, 00:09, 00:27, 12:32 (two requests that are different in their content!), 12:34, 14:59, 15:12, " is how Borut Meško publicly explained at the time the developments that followed the publication of the interview, which was also reported on by the Association of Journalists and Publicists. However, this was actually only the beginning of the pressures on the apparently politically unsuitable editor-in-chief.

In order to force the editor-in-chief to resign, Veselinovič started subjecting him to extreme bullying. One of the first measures was the request that the editor-in-chief write reports every day by 9 a.m. about what was going on in the editorial board and what he himself was doing, and then to write additional weekly reports.

By using invented reasons, he also accused Borut Meško of failing to meet his daily obligations and handed him the first warning before the termination of the employment contract. It is precisely because of this that the editor-in-chief fell severely ill soon after and was on sick leave for two months.

Despite the editorial board being strictly separated from the administrative part of the agency, director Veselinovič directly interfered in the editorial work, and among other things even demanded explanations from editors about whether the credibility of statements from press conferences by individual opposition MPs had been verified before they were published.

You probably agree that such interference by a politically installed director in journalist work is inadmissible. Not only from the legal aspect, but also from the professional aspect, because publishing articles within the shortest possible time is one of the important values of agency journalism. Any requests for censorship of opposition MPs are, meanwhile, inadmissible.

When the editor-in-chief returned from sick leave after two months, director Veselinovič immediately continued to exert immense pressure on him. Not only did he initiate the procedure to dismiss him from the post of editor-in-chief, but also the procedure to terminate his employment contract. Soon after, the editor-in-chief went on another sick leave and, notwithstanding the situation, the director then sent him contract termination papers. A few months after that, the editor-in-chief died due to a severe illness.

Dear Mr Kropsch and Mr Ion Giboi,

We are convinced that you, too, cannot accept journalists being treated in such a way.

We are also convinced that it must also be completely clear to you that this is not only about director Veselinovič dismissing the then editor-in-chief, but sending him contract termination papers on his sickbed. This happened with the strong support of the Social Democrats, the ruling party at the time.

What would other journalists think of such procedures? What was the message, not only for journalists of the Slovenian Press Agency who perhaps dared to think differently to the director, but for all other journalists in the country as well?

We are convinced that it is in such cases that the question of freedom of the press and media independence both starts and ends, and that a director of a press agency should never be someone, who is willing to trample on a fellow human being, human rights and workers' rights and, of course, the principles of journalism ethics, at any time.

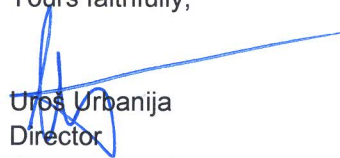
In conclusion, we are convinced that your statement that there is no evidence whatsoever for such an act is only a result of manipulations and lies as part of an attempt to convince you that the one who is capable of such an act of violence is a victim. And not the opposite.

The situation to which the director has brought the Slovenian Press Agency today is unacceptable. The Government Communication Office (UKOM) called on him as early as last October to send it business documentation on the basis of which the contract on the financing of the public service provided by the STA would be prepared in accordance with the law. Surprisingly, the director declined to hand over the documentation that he is required to provide in accordance with the signed contract.

It is also unimaginable that this year he has continued to send invoices for the alleged performance of public service to the Government Communication Office, while rejecting all initiatives from the Office to sign a new contract as soon as possible, which would, of course, be the legal basis for the Office to be able to confirm the payment of these invoices in the first place.

The Government of the Republic of Slovenia is aware of the difficult situation in which director Veselinovič has put all employees due to his modus operandi. For this reason, the Government is looking to resolve the situation as soon as possible. In any case, we are convinced that the legal way is the only right way.

Yours faithfully,



Uros Urbanija
Director
Government Communication Office