

AI INDEX: EUR 63/06/99
5 November 1999

Bosnia-Herzegovina: Bosnian Serb authorities must act to stop violent attacks on media

Amnesty International is calling on the authorities in the Bosnian Serb entity of Republika Srpska in Bosnia-Herzegovina to uphold freedom of the press and immediately investigate two recent violent attacks on journalists working to expose human rights violations.

Both attacks were in connection with reports which included incriminating information on current and war-time Bosnian Serb officials.

On 3 November, Mirko Srdić of the Belgrade based Beta independent news agency, was beaten up by a prominent local municipal official in the northern town of Doboj, apparently in connection with a television documentary on local corruption. The official threatened to kill Mirko Srdić if he did not leave the town immediately.

Veljko Kopanja, editor in chief and owner of *Nezavisne Novine*, a Banja Luka newspaper had to have two legs amputated when a bomb exploded in his car on 22 October. In previous months, the newspaper carried a number of in-depth reports on human rights abuses against the non-Serb population in the north of the country, alleging that local officials had covered up these crimes to shield the perpetrators. Although newspaper staff complained to local police after receiving anonymous death threats, no police protection was offered.

Independent media workers have faced violence and other forms of harassment, including criminal prosecution, following publications in which they levelled criticism at state officials or their families. Both Veljko Kopanja and another *Nezavisne Novine* journalist, Ranko Vojvodić, were beaten up by unknown assailants for their reporting in 1998. Bosnian Serb journalist, Mirjana Mišić, was given a suspended prison sentence last year for a series of articles in the independent *Ekstra-Magazin* in which she exposed corruption among municipal officials in the eastern town of Zvornik.

“Journalists can play a key role in securing justice for victims of human rights abuses and promoting human rights by impartial and accurate reporting. They must be able to do so in a safe environment free from harassment and violence,” Amnesty International said.

ENDS.../

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on 44 171 413 5566 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>