

ANNUAL REPORT 2024



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WELCOME

As a young but firmly established member of the BIRN family, we are proud to reflect on another impactful year in which we continued to strengthen our role as a leading investigative media outlet in Montenegro.

In 2024, we remained committed to high-quality, in-depth journalism, focusing on under-reported topics with significant social relevance. Our goal has remained the same: to inform, engage, and drive meaningful public conversation.

This year, our team grew even stronger. We expanded our network of contributors, upgraded our digital platforms, and continued to publish stories that reached wide audiences and were regularly picked up by mainstream media.

We continued our commitment to transparency and accountability through a new focus: monitoring the spending of state-owned energy companies. This initiative provided the public with detailed insights into the use of public funds and opened space for greater scrutiny and debate on financial practices within powerful state-run enterprises.

As we close 2024, we're proud of what we've achieved and excited about what lies ahead. Thank you for being part of this journey, we look forward to another year of impactful storytelling, together.


VUK MARAŠ

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
BIRN MONTENEGRO

ABOUT BIRN MONTENEGRO

Balkan Investigative Reporting Network – Montenegro (BIRN Montenegro) is a dynamic force in the country's media landscape and the newest member of the BIRN family. We lead the charge in investigative journalism, tackling corruption, fostering accountability, and promoting transparency. Our work champions human rights, strengthens democratic values, and upholds the rule of law, while also advocating for cultural preservation and anti-discrimination.

BIRN Montenegro exists to support Montenegro's evolution into a vibrant, democratic society.

Our mission is straightforward: to keep the public well-informed through journalism that is professional, impartial, and reliable. We achieve this by equipping journalists, media professionals, and public sector actors with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive.

From day one, we have closely monitored government actions, civil society trends, and media activities. This rigorous oversight forms the backbone of our investigative efforts, ensuring that we spotlight underreported issues and deliver accurate, balanced analyses on matters that shape public opinion.

Collaboration is at the heart of what we do. We've built strong alliances with local and national media outlets, amplifying our impact and advancing media pluralism and professionalism across Montenegro.

Through mentorship and targeted support, we help media organizations transform into transparent, resilient institutions that embody democratic principles. These efforts play a vital role in fostering an independent, responsible press – a cornerstone of any thriving democracy.

As we move through 2024 and beyond, BIRN Montenegro remains steadfast in its mission to empower civil society, bolster democratic processes, and ensure access to credible, high-quality information. By expanding our partnerships, advocating for meaningful change, and investing in capacity-building initiatives, we aim to continue making a profound and lasting contribution to Montenegro's development and the evolution of its media sector.

KEY ACTIVITIES IN 2024



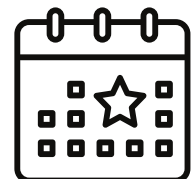
Developed and published 44 investigative stories

Developed, published and promoted a publication - Monitoring of the Consumption of Funds by Power State Owned Companies that tracked the spending of five state-owned energy companies



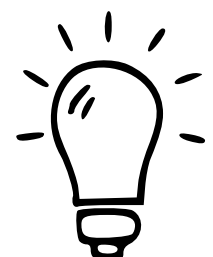
Organized and hosted two Anti-corruption Forums

Organized and hosted two Open Data events



Held mentoring sessions with nine local and national media outlets and one freelance journalist

Organized training sessions on professional reporting and anticorruption



BIRN STORIES



This summary of all investigative stories that BIRN published during 2024 highlights pressing political, economic, and social challenges in Montenegro. Covering issues such as government transparency, cybersecurity, war crimes, human rights, and economic policies, these stories shed light on systemic problems that affect both citizens and institutions.

BIRN investigative stories reveal a common theme of institutional inefficiency, with a lack of government responsiveness to citizen concerns, delayed justice for war crime survivors, and unresolved corruption allegations. Cybersecurity and economic policies also emerge as areas of concern, with the state struggling to manage digital threats while imposing tax policies that risk harming small businesses and NGOs.

01 /

***CORRUPTION AND
STATE RESOURCES***

/ 01

EPCG ALSO SUPPLIES CHRISTMAS TREES AND LIGHTS

The data analysis obtained through FOI (Freedom of Information) requests revealed the misuse of funds in state energy companies for donations to institutions and politically affiliated organizations. According to an extensive investigation of official data, Montenegro's state energy company, EPCG, has, through decisions and sponsorship agreements since 2019, approved tens of thousands of euros in donations to state officials for assistance in printing academic papers, books or opinions.

Donations were also allocated to politically affiliated organizations and state institutions already funded by the national budget. The analysis showed that misusing of funds continued even after the management was replaced in 2020, after the change of power in Montenegro.



DIOCESE, MAJLIS AND SPORTS - HOW DID EPCG SPEND MILLIONS ON DONATIONS?

The investigation revealed that Montenegro's state energy company, EPCG, has spent 2.8 million euros on donations and sponsorships since 2019. The majority of the funds were allocated to sponsorship agreements with sports clubs, national sports associations, religious organizations, as well as public institutions that were already financed by state and local budgets.

Based on the approved requests and contracts over the past five years, which BIRN reviewed, the funds were predominantly directed to organizations and individuals with political connections to the former leadership of EPCG.

LOSERS IN THE ENERGY SECTOR ARE GENEROUS WITH DONATIONS



The data analysis obtained through FOI (Freedom of Information) requests revealed that state companies made numerous donations and sponsorships despite operating at a loss in recent years. According to official data, Montenegro's largest state energy companies sponsored sports clubs, associations, and religious organizations.

Funds were allocated to finance clubs and the construction of religious buildings for the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Islamic Community in Montenegro. When making these decisions, the companies did not disclose clear criteria for why they invested in such promotional activities. Additionally, the companies provided financial support to institutions and organizations already funded by the state budget.

GOT A JOB FOR ELECTRIFICATION OF PLJEVLJA, THEN BECAME THE DIRECTOR OF THE PLJEVLJA COAL MINE

A BIRN investigation highlighted a potential conflict of interest in the appointment of Nemanja Lakovic as Executive Director of the Pljevlja Coal Mine, which is owned by the national energy company Elektroprivreda Crne Gore (EPCG). According to the findings, Lakovic was the owner and director of the Belgrade-based company "Synergy Tech," which, in a consortium with "Roto-Term," secured a 2.5 million euro contract for the electrification of Pljevlja, signed with EPCG in November 2022.

After being appointed acting Executive Director of the Coal Mine in April 2024, Lakovic transferred ownership of "Synergy Tech" to another individual. Despite being a political scientist by profession, the Coal Mine's Board of Directors unanimously appointed him as Executive Director. In its 2023 report, the State Audit Institution (DRI) warned that Pljevlja Coal Mine had hired 229 employees in the previous two years without conducting public competitions, which violates legal regulations.



THE MILLION-EURO BUSINESS OF STUDENT EXCURSIONS IS ORGANIZED BY ONLY TWO COMPANIES

The investigation focuses on organizing school excursions in the Montenegrin capital, Podgorica, with an annual value of 1.73 million euros. An analysis of public calls and school decisions revealed that two Podgorica-based companies manage 93% of excursions and so-called schools in nature, with most tenders receiving only one bid.

The research found that these companies faced competition in only three cases during the public bidding process, while representatives of parent organizations have raised concerns about possible irregularities. Schools claim that all procedures have been followed and that the public calls are transparent, while the companies argue that organizing student excursions involves complex logistics. They point out that few companies are engaged in this line of work due to the cost and logistical challenges.



THE BORDER AT LAKE SKADAR IS STILL PERMEABLE

The article addresses the shortcomings in border surveillance between Montenegro and Albania on Lake Skadar, which has been known for smuggling routes for decades. During the breakup of Yugoslavia and throughout the wars of the 1990s, Lake Skadar was notorious as a frequent smuggling route.

BIRN's sources claim that smugglers from Albania and Montenegro are taking advantage of the lack of police patrols to smuggle fish, drugs, and migrants freely. The police claim regular patrols are deployed on land and water to secure the border, with assistance from the Montenegrin army and Frontex.

02 /

DIGITAL RIGHTS

/ 02



BIG BROTHER: MONTENEGRIN INTERIOR MINISTRY ACQUIRED ISRAELI FACIAL RECOGNITION SOFTWARE

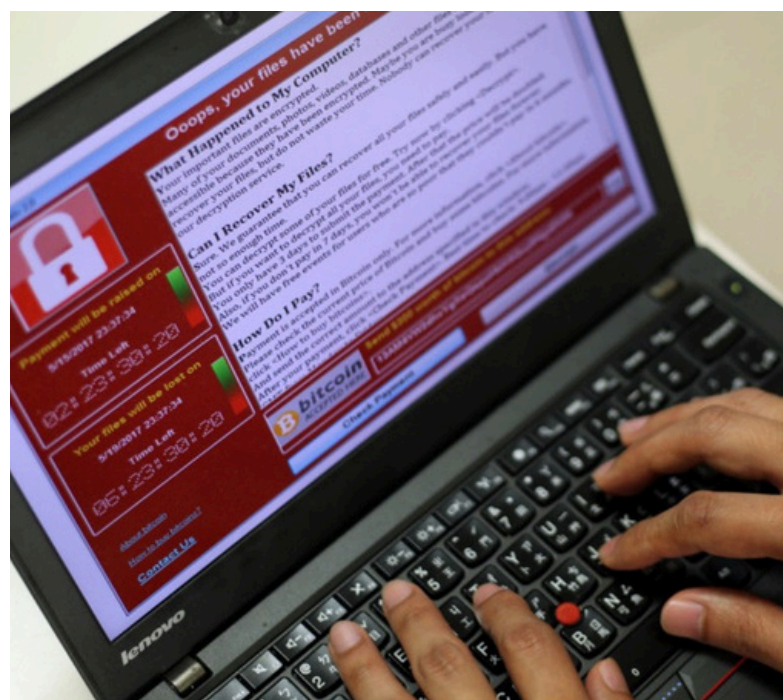
BIRN investigation showed that the Interior Ministry had bought facial recognition software and deployed it in public spaces in the capital, Podgorica, and the coastal towns of Bar and Budva. Analysis of Agency for Personal Data Protection documents showed that it bought Better Tomorrow software by the Israeli firm Any Vision and installed it in Podgorica. Facial recognition cameras of an unspecified manufacturer were also installed in Bar and Budva but are not yet fully operational. In August 2019, the Agency warned authorities that personal data protection measures must correspond to the nature and character of the data being processed, considering the highest level of technology and the costs of their implementation.

Human rights activists warned that the introduction of video surveillance in public areas could threaten fundamental human rights if there is inadequate monitoring of how the data collected is processed. After the BIRN investigation, the Agency ordered the Interior Ministry to use a video surveillance system but without facial recognition software.

BUREAUCRACY SLOWED DOWN THE ARRIVAL OF DIGITAL NOMADS

The story focuses on issues within the government's strategy for attracting digital nomads, which was announced in September 2022. Digital nomads do not work in traditional offices but remotely, allowing them to travel and work from any location with good internet access. The strategy outlined launching an electronic service for online applications to obtain nomad status and creating a web page dedicated to digital nomads.

However, the government has neither conducted a promotional campaign targeting digital nomads nor simplified the visa application process. Digital nomads already in Montenegro have raised concerns about poor communication between relevant institutions and excessive bureaucracy.

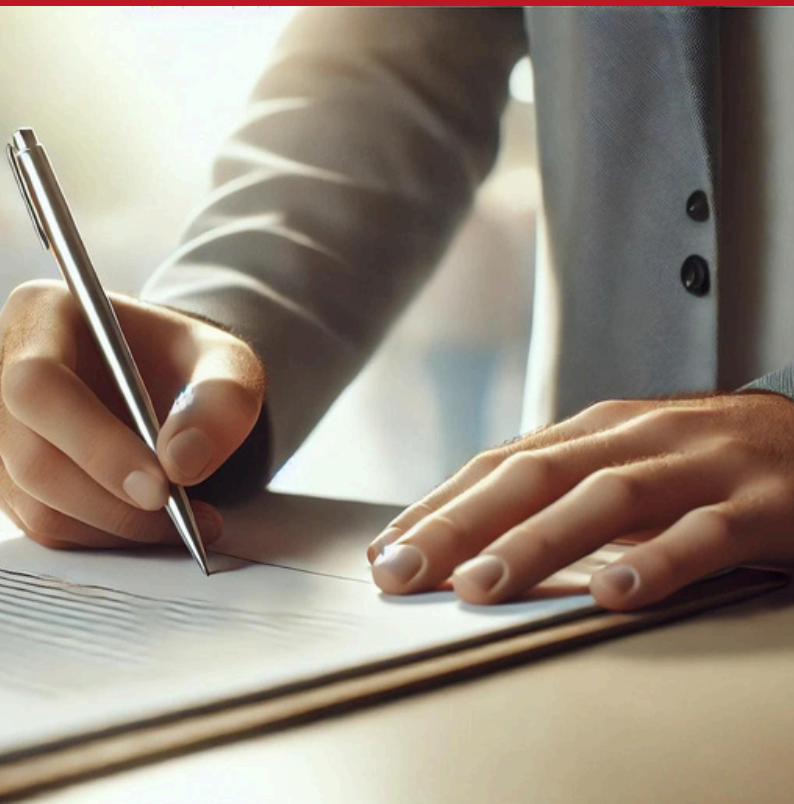


COMPUTER INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM IS STILL INVESTIGATING THE HACKER ATTACK ON THE WATER SUPPLY SYSTEM IN NIKSIC

The article focuses on the Government Computer Incident Response Team's investigation of cyberattacks on the water supply system in the central town of Niksic. The investigation determined that the system was under a ransomware attack on March 2024, but authorities still determine whether citizens' private data was compromised.

Niksic water supply system management claimed there were no private data leaks but didn't provide evidence for such claims to the Agency for Private Data Protection. Meanwhile, IT experts have warned that such incidents are often triggered by human error and insufficient investment in network security.

SIGN THE PETITION AND – WAIT



The research revealed that the Montenegrin government and parliament have responded poorly to citizen requests submitted through online petitions. According to analyzed official data, since 2021, citizens have submitted 123 online petitions, but only six met the criteria for a response from state institutions. A so-called e-petition is a written request by citizens asking a state body to initiate a procedure, implement a measure within its competence, or refrain from taking specific actions. Citizens can submit electronic petitions to the Montenegrin parliament or government via an online portal, and for the petitions to be considered, a minimum of 6,000 signatures is required, or 3,000 signatures for the government. The research also showed that after discussions on the initiatives, state institutions do not provide information on the outcomes of these citizen initiatives.

HACKERS BLOCKED THE OPEN DATA PORTAL

The Ministry of Public Administration of Montenegro has announced the establishment of a new open data portal by December 14, 2024. The previous portal became nonfunctional in August 2022 due to a cyberattack on the state's IT infrastructure. The original open data portal (www.data.gov.me) was launched in 2018 with the goal of more effectively ensuring the right to free access to information. However, research revealed that the database was never complete, offering only 165 datasets across 12 sectors, with no documents available in the fields of environmental protection, sustainable development, or tourism. NGOs and the State Agency for Personal Data Protection have warned that the portal never fully achieved its intended purpose and stressed the need for modernization to better serve citizens and provide easier access to relevant information.



CONCERN ABOUT THE NEW CYBER SECURITY STRUCTURE OF MONTENEGRO

The article highlights shortcomings in the Government's proposed Information Security Law, which grants the Ministry of Public Administration significant control over cybersecurity and introduces broad supervisory powers. The proposed law also increases political influence in cybersecurity, mainly through appointments to the management of the Cybersecurity Agency, a new central body responsible for protecting the information systems of entities outside the state administration.

Experts have warned that the law could create operational challenges for the new cybersecurity system due to unclear divisions of authority between state agencies. The Government, however, asserts that the cybersecurity system will be professionally structured and free from political influence.



NO ONE WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SURVEILLANCE OF JOURNALISTS IN GRADSKA TELEVISION

The article covers the case of a surveillance system at Gradska Television, the local public broadcaster in Montenegro's capital, Podgorica. On July 30, the new television management reported that journalists were allegedly being monitored through a video surveillance system installed on the broadcaster's premises.

The case was reported to the State Prosecutor's Office and the Agency for Personal Data Protection. The Agency requested the removal of the surveillance system, while the Prosecutor's Office concluded that no criminal offense had occurred, citing the absence of recordings to prove illegal monitoring.

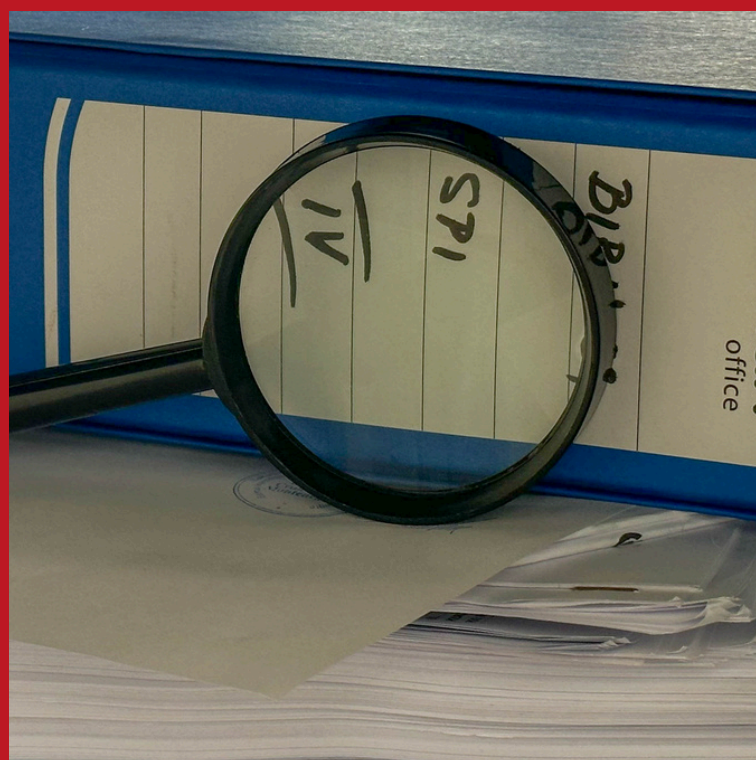
MEDIA PRESSURE INCREASES BEFORE THE ELECTIONS



The article analyzes the influence of Serbian media and the spread of disinformation on political events in Montenegro. Investigation indicates that media influence was intensified during significant political developments in Montenegro, such as the population census, local elections, or the Montenegrin Parliament's decision to support a resolution on the Srebrenica genocide. These political topics ignited tensions within Montenegrin society but were also further exacerbated by the spread of disinformation in the media and on social networks. Following the parliament's decision, media pressure on Montenegrin officials increased, and MPs who supported the resolution were reportedly detained at the Serbian border. Media experts argue that Serbia's media influence on Montenegro has grown, along with the more frequent spread of disinformation.

CITIZENS PAY WHILE INSTITUTIONS REMAIN SILENT

Investigation has shown that since 2019, €636,436 has been paid out from the state treasury due to lawsuits filed by citizens and NGOs over administrative silence. According to official data, citizens and NGOs have submitted 32,917 complaints about decisions and the lack of responses from institutions to their requests for free access to information. Authorities claim that some citizens and NGOs are overburdening the Administrative Court and the Agency for Personal Data Protection with complaints and lawsuits over administrative silence, allegedly to recover costs through legal disputes. However, representatives from civil society argue that the overburdening of the Agency and the Administrative Court is due to the inefficiency of institutions. They emphasize that amendments to the law should focus on preventing abuses while ensuring institutional accountability.



INVESTIGATION OF HACKER ATTACKS STUCK IN THE PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

The article highlights the poor progress in investigating cyberattacks, as the state prosecution is still attempting to identify the perpetrator of the August 2022 attack that paralyzed Montenegro's cyber infrastructure. In August 2022, the Montenegrin government's servers were hit by ransomware, a type of malicious software (malware) in which the attacker locks and encrypts the target's data and critical files and demands payment to unlock and decrypt them.

Although the "Cuba Ransomware" group claimed responsibility for the attack in September 2022, the state prosecution states that the case is still under investigation.

IT experts have raised concerns over the lack of published investigation results and the failure to determine how much data was compromised. The Ministry of Public Administration reported that the investigation identified the techniques and malicious viruses used by the attackers and announced plans to strengthen the cybersecurity system of the government's IT infrastructure.



03

RULE OF LAW

03

THE NUMBER OF GAMBLING ADDICTS IS GROWING IN MONTENEGRO



The story addresses the problem of gambling addiction in Montenegro, noting that gambling is promoted as a lifestyle. According to a 2019 survey by the European ESOAD center, one in three students in Montenegro gambles, most commonly in betting shops or bingo halls. The analysis shows that gambling addiction leads to other risky behaviors, such as borrowing or stealing money to place bets. Official data revealed that over the past five years, the number of betting shops and slot machine clubs in Montenegro has nearly doubled, with many located near schools. Meanwhile, addiction clinics are warning about the growing number of gambling addicts seeking their help.

THE GOVERNMENT STILL HAS NO SOLUTION FOR THE RESIDENTS OF THE ISLAND OF FLOWERS

The story investigates the problems faced by residents of the former military resort on the Island of Flowers near the Montenegrin coastal town of Tivat. During the war in the former Yugoslavia, at the time the Yugoslav army provided temporary accommodation at the former resort for its 100 employees who had fled their homes due to the conflict. But they remained living on the island to this day, as Montenegrin authorities failed to provide them with homes. In 2002, part of the resort was granted to the Serbian Orthodox Church in exchange for church land near the coastal town of Budva, while the Montenegrin government was obligated to provide permanent housing for the people in the resort. Although the government formed a team in September 2023, it still didn't propose a potential solution.



MONTENEGRO PAVES THE WAY FOR LEGAL RECOGNITION OF GENDER IDENTITY

The story focuses on the government's Legal Gender Recognition Law proposal that should allow anyone to change their registered gender without the previous requirement to undergo sex reassignment surgery and sterilization and to divorce if married. Under the proposed new law, authorities will be forbidden from asking for any evidence of medical interventions when considering a request for gender change in the register of births.

If adopted, the law will mark another human rights milestone in the socially conservative country of 630,000 people after it became the first non-European Union state in the Balkans to legalize same-sex partnerships in 2020. While human rights activists called parliament to adopt the law, religious communities urged MPs to reject it when it comes up for a vote.



THERE IS NO CHANGE OF GENDER MARKERS FOR MARRIED PERSONS

The article analyzes the shortcomings of the Government's proposed Law on Legal Recognition of Gender Identity, which introduces new restrictions on changing gender markers in the civil registry. The proposed law removes the requirement for medical confirmation of gender change before registration but requires a document confirming that the individual is not married. Human rights activists have warned that same-sex partners do not enjoy equal rights

compared to heterosexual individuals, despite the liberalization of laws affecting the LGBTIQ community. They also criticized the provision that prohibits minors from changing their gender marker, noting that civil society organizations had advocated for the age limit to be set at 15 years. Representatives of religious communities have criticized the proposed law on legal recognition of gender identity, while some political parties have yet to state whether they will support it in parliament.

THE COURTS MAY CONTINUE THE FIGHT OVER DO KWON'S EXTRADITION



The article examines the extradition case of South Korean crypto mogul Do Kwon, co-founder of Terraform Labs, arrested in March 2023 in Montenegro while trying to fly to Dubai with fake Costa Rican passports. Both South Korea and the U.S. have sought his extradition over charges tied to the collapse of Terraform Labs and major investor losses. Montenegro's courts initially approved extradition to the U.S., but later shifted in favor of South Korea—then reversed again, adding to the legal confusion. The case remains unsettled, with legal experts predicting more appeals and delays. It highlights the complexity of international extradition, especially when multiple countries are involved.

REPORT ON THE DEATH OF A PREGNANT WOMAN AFTER THE AUTOPSY FINDINGS

The article analyses the Montenegrin authorities' response to the death of a pregnant woman from Ulcinj who passed away due to complications after childbirth at the hospital in the coastal town of Bar. Following public protests, the state prosecution launched an investigation into the woman's death, while the Ministry of Health sought assistance from an expert commission from Slovenia. This commission will investigate the conditions under which the woman gave birth and was treated in both the Bar Hospital and the Montenegrin Clinical Center in Podgorica. Family members are demanding a transparent investigation and accountability for any potential medical negligence. Also, a survey of citizens and a study by the Montenegrin NGO Punta Institute revealed systemic challenges in Montenegro's healthcare sector, including insufficient funding, a shortage of medical staff and equipment, and pervasive corruption.



CHILDREN SPREAD PANIC TO AVOID SCHOOL

In this article BIRN investigated the issue of false bomb alerts, which have increased in Montenegro and neighboring countries since March 2022. According to data from the Police Directorate, 46 false bomb alerts have been recorded over the past two years, causing the the evacuation of schools, shopping centers, court buildings, and local government offices. The police claim that the perpetrators are mostly children under the age of 14, making them criminally unaccountable.

While parents warn that the false alerts disturb students and disrupt their education, school principals warn that children are using the false bomb threats to avoid school tests. BIRN's investigation showed that most of false alerts were in Capital Podgorica, while there were none in smaller municipalities like Andrijevica, Plav, and Gusinje.



THE DIPLOMA IS CRUCIAL EVEN IN CASE OF DEATH

The article highlights shortcomings in the Government's economic program, "Europe Now 2," which places workers in an unequal position regarding assistance payments in the event of death. Since the program provides two different minimum wage levels based on education, payouts for death benefits also vary.

Trade Union representatives have warned that the Government program discriminates against employees and have called on the Government and employers' unions to amend this provision. The Ministry of Labor claims that a government commission will monitor the implementation of the "Europe Now 2" program but did not specify whether the contentious provisions would be amended.

NO ONE CONTROLS PSYCHOTHERAPISTS



The investigation revealed that Montenegro does not have an official registry of psychologists and psychotherapists nor an institution responsible for overseeing their work. By the end of the year, the Law on Psychological Activity is expected to be adopted, introducing a registry of psychologists and procedures for issuing and revoking licenses. However, this law will not regulate the work of psychotherapists. Experts and the Association of Psychologists argue that the government must propose a separate law to regulate the work of psychotherapists to prevent abuse. They believe that professionals from these fields should oversee the work of psychologists and psychotherapists. The government has no plans to draft a law on psychotherapists despite acknowledging that this area needs legal regulation.

THE GOVERNMENT IS THE TARGET OF CRITICISM FOR THE PROPOSAL TO EXTEND DETENTION

The article analyses Montenegro's government proposal to keep defendants in organized crime cases in custody for up to five years pending a first-instance verdict. This proposal followed after the series of organized crime gang-related murders of gang members released from custody. Authorities warned that courts were taking too long to issue first-instance verdicts, adding that as many as 40 defendants had been released from custody last year alone after spending three years behind bars without a ruling. They claim that by extending by two years the time they can be kept in custody, gang members will at least be kept off the streets. Experts warned such measures do not address the root causes of court inefficiency- from a shortage of judges to defense delaying tactics. They said the problem of slow trials could be solved simply by increasing the number of judges.



04 /

WAR CRIMES

/ 04

MONTENEGRO STILL WITHOUT CHARGES AGAINST "WEEKEND WARRIORS"

The article points out the Montenegrin authority's poor results in investigating war crimes of so-called "weekend warriors" during the war in former Yugoslavia. 'Weekend warriors' were volunteer fighters who popped in and out of war zones in the 1990s. Many came from Montenegro, but few have ever faced justice for the war crimes they committed.



Despite the existence of evidence, including ICTY files, the Montenegrin Special State Prosecutor's Office has to date filed only three indictments for the participation of Montenegrin military volunteers in war crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. It investigates at least 12 cases, but critics say it is too slow.



THOSE IN CHARGE AVOID RECALLING THE WARTIME PAST

The article points out the government and local authorities' attitude regarding the erection of monuments related to war crimes committed in Montenegro during the wars of the 1990s. BIRN investigation has shown that, despite requests from civil society representatives and the families of victims, most sites where war crimes were committed in Montenegro remain without memorials. Currently, there are three monuments in Montenegro at locations where crimes occurred, but some of these are controversial.

Local authorities in the coastal town of Herceg Novi have ignored requests to erect a memorial plaque for wartime Bosniak refugees who were deported. In contrast, authorities in Kotor ordered the removal of a memorial plaque at the former military camp in Morinj. Montenegrin legislation stipulates that local authorities must approve the erection of monuments, after which the decision must be confirmed by the Ministry of Culture and Media. Human rights organizations warn that both state and local authorities are still unwilling to confront the country's wartime past.

SURVIVORS OF THE MASSACRE IN KALUDJERSKI LAZ ARE STILL WAITING FOR JUSTICE



The article deals with the investigation of the Kaludjerski Laz war crime from April 1999, in which members of the Yugoslav Army killed 21 ethnic Albanian refugees from Kosovo, including two children. Albanian refugees were killed near the northern town of Rozaje during the NATO bombing campaign on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Refugees from neighboring Kosovo were passing through this area, controlled by the Yugoslav Army, in search of safety at refugee centers in Montenegro. The Higher Court acquitted the army members accused of the war crime, but the families of the victims and their lawyers urged authorities to relaunch the investigation. They are also requesting that a memorial plaque be placed at the crime scene to honor the victims.

HOW THOSE CONVICTED OF WAR CRIMES AGAINST THE KLAPUH FAMILY AVOID PRISON

The investigation deals with the Klapuh family war crime case from July 1991, when three Bosniaks were murdered in the Piva River canyon near Pluzine after escaping from the Serb-held town of Foca in eastern Bosnia. In 1996, the Higher Court in Podgorica sentenced Bosnian Serb Army soldiers Zoran Vukovic, Janko Janjic, Radomir Kovac and Zoran Simovic to 20 years in jail each in absentia for the murders, but they have never served their sentences. In a separate case in 2001, the Hague Tribunal also sentenced Vukovic to 12 years' imprisonment for war crimes in the town of Foca. He was granted early release in 2008. According to the investigation, Kovac and Vukovic are living in Foca, while Bosnia rejected the extradition of former Serb soldiers as they were tried in absentia. Meanwhile, the only surviving family member, Ferid Klapuh, requested the exhumation of the Klapuh family's bodies, which were buried in an unmarked grave in the city of Niksic in Montenegro.



MONTENEGRO WITHOUT NEW VERDICTS FOR WAR CRIMES

The article analyses Montenegrin authorities' efforts on prosecuting war crimes, pointing that the progress has been visible in new investigations, even though there are no new verdicts yet. Civil rights activists warned that the prosecution of war crimes in Montenegro is still a big challenge, while the victims of war crimes still do not have effective access to justice in Montenegro, decades after war crimes took place.

The article pointed that Montenegro amended its criminal code in June 2024 to address the legal and practical obstacles preventing the effective investigation and prosecution of war crimes.



THE MONTENEGRIN PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE IS NOT INVESTIGATING ALLEGATIONS OF RAPE IN FOCA

The investigation focuses on the small number of inquiries conducted by the Special State Prosecutor's Office regarding allegations of Montenegrin citizens' involvement in rapes during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The story's focus is on fugitive Ranko Radulovic, accused of raping a 23-year-old woman in his hometown of Niksic, central Montenegro.

Investigation showed that in 2020, two protected witnesses at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, ICTY, accused Radulovic of raping them during the war in Bosnia. Also, Bosnia indicted Radulovic in 2020 for the rape of Bosniak women held by Bosnian Serb forces in the town of Foca in 1992, but he was never investigated in Montenegro.

05 /

***ENVIRONMENT
AND SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT***

/ 05

THE GOVERNMENT TO DECIDE ON THE LNG TERMINAL ONLY AFTER THE ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY



The story covers Montenegro's plans to build a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal in the port of Bar after environmental groups warned it contradicts Montenegro's climate goals. In May 2023, the previous government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a US consortium to build an LNG terminal worth between 200 million and 500 million euros, pending an environmental assessment. The move has the backing of the US and the European Union as they seek to cut Europe's dependence on Russian gas, but environmental groups say it will only undermine efforts to decarbonize Montenegro. Meanwhile, Energy and Mining Minister Sasa Mujovic told BIRN that serious studies from credible addresses must precede such a project before the final decision.

BEAUTIFUL BUT 'CURSED': MONTENEGRO'S SOARING ALPS BLAME LOW PROFILE ON NEGLECT

The story analyzes the increase in foreign tourists' interest in the Prokletije mountains and the poor infrastructure problems undermining the region's tourist potential. The Prokletije mountains lie northeast of Montenegro, near the small town of Plav, about 120 kilometers from the capital, Podgorica. Apart from Montenegro, the range extends to Albania and Kosovo. The area experienced more excellent development after the part of Prokletije in Montenegro was declared a National Park in 2009, as Prokletije became an increasingly popular mountain and eco-tourism destination for visitors from all over the world. However, local restaurateurs and tour operators warn that weak infrastructure is a central problem slowing the region's further development.



DIVERS UNDER NO CONTROL WHILE THE LAW AWAITS ADOPTION

The article highlights that diving activities in Montenegro are not regulated by law, creating opportunities for abuse and corruption. The investigation has revealed that construction companies hire sport divers for underwater work despite their lack of required licenses, raising concerns about the quality of the work and diver safety. Experts argue that unlicensed divers are hired because their services are significantly cheaper than those of professionals, while authorities don't have legal powers to oversee and regulate their activities.

In practice, it means that recreational divers, who can obtain a license after a two-day training course at a local diving club, are performing tasks that should be done by divers with two years of training and an international license. The Divers' Association and the Regional Diving Center have urged authorities to adopt a diving law, a measure that has been delayed since 2013.

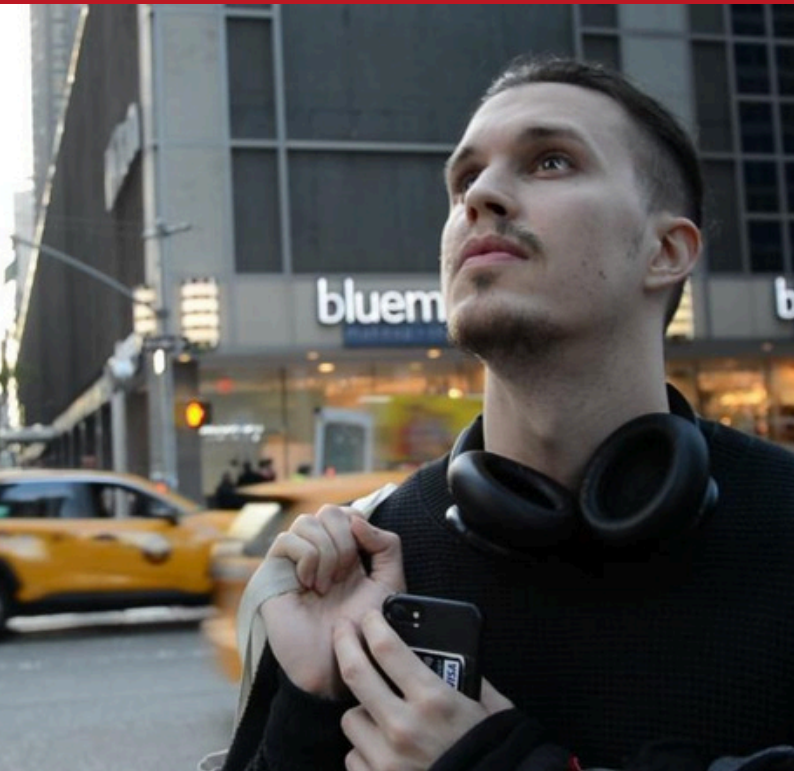


06 /

INTERVIEWS

/ 06

MONTENEGRIN TRIO CONQUERED THE WORLD OF VIDEO GAMES FROM THE LIVING ROOM



The interview with Montenegrin video game designer Miso Vukcevic focuses on the success of the Montenegrin trio, which created Bleak Faith: Forsaken, a survival horror that has become a hit with alternative gamers on Steam. Even though no big video game studio was behind the project, the game was released on March 2023. as the first Montenegrin PC game on Steam, the largest digital distribution platform for PC games. Bleak Faith: Forsaken is a third-person open-world survival horror action RPG (Role-playing game) where gamers play as one of the Forsaken, the last frontier of humanity against the growing horrors of the Omnistructure. The game has succeeded and is very popular, especially in the global alternative gaming scene.

DENIAL OF WAR CRIMES IN THE REGION IS MORE PRESENT THAN EVER

The interview with Serge Brammertz, the chief prosecutor at the United Nations International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals in The Hague which is the legal successor to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Brammerz warned that denial of war crimes and glorification of their perpetrators in the countries of the former Yugoslavia is more prevalent today than at any time before and represents the biggest threat to progress in the region. He praised Montenegrin authorities cooperation with the Tribunal, stressing that he saw a change in the attitude of authorities in Montenegro since the change of power in 2020.



07 /

ECONOMY

/ 07

INCREASED MINIMUM PENSIONS CAN WEAKEN THE LABOR MARKET

The article analyzes the potential impact on the labor market following the government's decision to increase the minimum pension from 280 to 450 euros. This move equates to Montenegro's minimum wage and pension, which could lead employees earning minimum wages to opt for retirement. Montenegrin law stipulates that employees aged 65 or older with 15 years of service are entitled to an old-age pension.

Data from the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare shows that by the end of the year, 1,600 employees could take advantage of the right to retire, with half currently earning salaries almost identical to the minimum pension amount. Economic experts have warned that this could negatively affect Montenegro's labor market, particularly among lower-paid jobs.



BALKAN FARMERS STRUGGLE TO ACCESS TENS OF MILLIONS OF EUROS IN EU FUNDS

This cross-border story analyses the challenges farmers in Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia face when accessing funds from the European Union's IPARD programme. Investigation showed that small farmers often struggle with paperwork and finding the capital they need to qualify. Corruption is also a problem, as is a lack of information about EU grants among most small farmers. Under the IPARD II program, Montenegro was eligible for 52 million euros in funding between 2014 and 2024, 80 percent from the EU.

By end-2023, some 35 million had been paid out to farmers, while country returned 1.7 million euros in unused funds in 2021 and 2022. The agriculture ministry blamed the practice among suppliers of increasing the price of machinery and equipment immediately before or during each public call for applications, meaning farmers have to pay the difference out of their own pockets.

ONLY INDIVIDUALS PROFITED FROM RUSSIAN BILLIONS



Data analysis reveals that nearly two billion euros have flowed from Russia into Montenegro since 2004, mostly into coastal real estate in areas like Budva, Tivat, Kotor, and Bar. This spurred a boom in property prices, luxury spending, and related sectors like telecom and furniture. However, the broader economy saw little sustainable growth. The real estate surge also caused serious ecological damage to protected coastal zones. Additionally, Russian investments in key industries such as KAP, Bauxite mines, and Nikšić Steelworks often resulted in failed privatizations, highlighting broader negative impacts beyond tourism and consumption.

INCREASE OF THE MINIMUM WAGE IS A PROBLEM FOR THE BUSINESS OF NGOS AND THE MEDIA

The story addresses the impact of the government's fiscal strategy for 2024-2027 on the operations of non-governmental organizations and media outlets. The government's strategy includes raising the minimum wage for employees with secondary education to 600 euros and those with higher education to 800 euros. Currently, the minimum wage in Montenegro is 450 euros. Commercial media outlets believe this could complicate business operations and create unequal employee conditions. It is argued that paying a minimum wage of 800 euros will be challenging for most NGOs in the civil sector. They have also warned that salaries are often predetermined through multi-year projects and changing them could violate donor commitments.



GOVERNMENT EXCISE TAXES COULD PUSH WINEMAKERS INTO THE GRAY MARKET

The analysis highlights the potential negative impact of the government's fiscal strategy proposal on small winemaking companies in Montenegro. The fiscal strategy for 2024-2027, set to be implemented starting October 1, includes introducing an excise tax on still wines, amounting to 25 cents per liter. Small wine producers and the Ministry of Agriculture have warned that this could hinder

wine production in Montenegro, as small producers, due to their limited production capacity, have struggled for years to compete with larger companies. Since 2007, the number of registered wine producers in Montenegro has grown from four to 117, but the government believes that introducing excise taxes could bring in four million euros annually for the state.



REDUCED THE PROMISED RAISES, ANNOUNCED NEW TAXES

The fact-check analysis focuses on the Montenegrin government's policies on the economy, reforms, and EU integration. The analysis, conducted after the government's reshuffle in July 2024, revealed that the government succeeded in accelerating the European integration process within less than a year. However, it also eased some of the economic and systemic promises from the program presented in November 2020.

The fact-check revealed that the government's announced economic reforms do not align with the promises made during the election campaign and could negatively affect small businesses and the state pension fund. The analysis also showed that the ruling majority failed to implement judicial reforms fully and that certain government decisions have disrupted relations with neighboring countries.

YEAR 2024

THE RUSSIANS ARE INCREASINGLY SHUTTING DOWN COMPANIES IN MONTENEGRO



A BIRN investigation found that nearly a quarter of Russian companies founded in Montenegro after the Ukraine invasion in February 2022 have already shut down. Between Feb 2022 and June 2024, over 6,500 companies were opened by Russian citizens, but more than 1,600 have closed—mainly small, IT-sector firms with no employees and low tax contributions (avg. €837 per year). Most closures occurred in coastal towns like Bar, Budva, and Kotor. Tax data shows 68 companies reported zero income, with total revenue reaching just €149,000. Authorities suspect some firms were used for illegal transactions, while the Employers' Union claims many Russians registered companies to gain legal residence, and are now leaving for other countries.

BIRN DOCUMENTARY – DISINFORMATION

BIRN documentary produced in Bosnia, Kosovo and Montenegro explores the scale of Kremlin-backed disinformation in these countries and its dangerous influence on the public. The documentary shows how Western Balkan countries audiences have become vulnerable to disinformation from Russian-backed channels, especially since the start of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.



MONITORING OF THE CONSUMPTION OF FUNDS BY POWER STATE OWNED COMPANIES

During a seven-month monitoring period, BIRN Montenegro tracked the spending of five state-owned energy companies: Elektroprivreda Crne Gore AD Nikšić, Crnogorski elektrodistributivni sistem DOO Podgorica (CEDIS), Crnogorski elektroprenosni sistem AD Podgorica (CGES), EPCG Solar Gradnja Nikšić DOO, and EPCG – Željezara Nikšić DOO. These companies were chosen due to public speculation that their funds were being used for political purposes by those in leadership positions.

The overall data shows that in the past six years, the five companies generated business revenues totaling €3,486,504,935. During the same period, their expenses amounted to €2,813,064,733, while salary costs, wage compensations, and other personnel expenses reached €373,333,448. The combined net result was €300,106,754, although some companies reported negative balances over multiple years. For instance, CEDIS ended 2021 and 2022 with losses, while Solar Gradnja has reported negative net results every year since its establishment. EPCG – Željezara Nikšić, founded in 2023, also reported a negative net result.

The number of employees has significantly increased, partly due to the establishment of new companies over the years.

The workforce grew from fewer than 2,600 employees in three companies in 2018 to over 3,800 employees across five companies in 2023, including Željezara.

During the observation period, these companies distributed over €6.5 million in donations and sponsorships. Notably, after the government changed on August 30, 2020, resulting in new leadership taking over these companies in 2021, the amount allocated for donations sharply increased. In 2019 and 2020, donations and sponsorships amounted to €929,000 and €812,000, respectively. After the leadership change, the total amount distributed soared to €1.4 million in 2021, nearly €2 million in 2022, and almost €1.4 million in 2023.

The primary recipients of donations included budgetary users, religious organizations and their affiliates, and sports organizations. Donations and sponsorships remain a significant area for potential abuse driven by political influence.

Regarding salaries and compensations for top executives in the energy companies, CGES was the only company that provided documentation related to management salaries, wage compensations, and other personal expenses.

In CGES, compensation for membership in the Board of Directors ranged from €673.68 in 2019 to €724.02 in 2022, while the Chairman's compensation varied from €2,425.72 in 2019 to €3,018.99 in 2022.

Additionally, EPCG – Željezara Nikšić shared data on salaries, but only through a Decision that specified the gross monthly salary of the Chairman of the Board of Directors as €1,514.73, Board members as €1,088.38, and the Executive Director as €2,988.50. Other companies effectively concealed this information by sending internal compensation policies instead of details about specific payments to officials.

Regarding corporate business card spending, four companies provided limited documentation as requested. EPCG – Željezara Nikšić reported that it does not have active official cards. Overall, the total amount spent via business cards during the observation period was just under €60,000 across all companies.

However, no information was provided regarding when Željezara discontinued its official cards or whether this happened shortly after it was revealed that the former Chairman of the Board of Directors, Marko Perunović, spent €19,000 gambling with an official card, which led to a criminal investigation.

During the implementation period of the project, BIRN produced and published three investigative stories that dealt with specific aspects of consumption in power companies that were the subject of monitoring – EPCG also supplies Christmas trees and lights; Diocese, Majlis and sports - how did EPCG spend millions on donations? and Losers in the energy sector are generous with donations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of the collected data, BIRN Montenegro has drafted the following recommendations:

- State-owned energy companies in Montenegro fail to provide sufficient transparency in accessing data that, under the Law on Free Access to Information, are neither restricted nor meet confidentiality classification criteria. Public access to data related to public spending must be proactively provided on these companies' websites in all segments.
- State-owned energy companies must make their regulations on compensation that increase the base salaries of management members, such as bonuses, incentives, and other benefits, publicly available. Additionally, they should disclose internal documents used to allocate funds to third parties.
- State-owned energy companies must make their organizational and job systematization regulations available to address public concerns about potential irrational or unlawful employment practices.
- State-owned energy companies must publish the monthly amounts of compensation and all other earnings for their management teams on their websites.
- State-owned energy companies must stop ignoring inquiries made under the Law on Free Access to Information or responding after the legally prescribed deadlines. Public interest in spending within the public sector, given the scale of resources these companies manage, must be recognized, and compliance with the law and its deadlines must be ensured.
- CGES Podgorica must implement the practice of issuing and recording official business cards in the names of individual holders instead of issuing cards solely in the name of the legal entity. This would minimize and more easily localize potential misuse.
- Elektroprivreda Crne Gore AD Nikšić must cease violating the Law on Free Access to Information and the Regulation on Compensation of Costs in the Procedure for Access to Information. Funds for covering procedural costs must be paid into the account of the State Budget of Montenegro, not individual legal entities.
- Comprehensive and regular oversight of these companies by relevant authorities is necessary to prevent and combat misuse of public funds.
- The Parliament of Montenegro, through its competent bodies, must ensure ongoing supervision and control of these companies due to their monopoly positions, significant financial resources, and vast potential for abuse.

Following the publication of the report, BIRN representatives engaged with key stakeholders, including Members of Parliament, the Minister of Energy, Saša Mujović, and representatives from companies referenced in the report, such as CEDIS and Željezara.

At a meeting with BIRN representatives, Minister Saša Mujović commended BIRN's role in promoting transparency and accountability through its reporting—particularly in highlighting issues like large-scale donations, the use of official payment cards, and the lack of publicly available data. Mujović emphasized that transparency and legality, as key principles of the Ministry, must be upheld across all publicly owned enterprises. He welcomed the recent monitoring report as a valuable tool for reducing misuse of public resources.

Building on these insights, Mujović reaffirmed his support for systemic changes in the energy sector. He introduced regular coordination meetings with company directors and board presidents, requiring more disciplined spending and timely reporting. Specific measures include mandated savings on vehicle use, travel, representation, and bonuses, with boards now obliged to submit regular updates on business plan implementation and notify the Ministry of any issues. Mujović stressed that such efforts reflect a broader commitment to responsible management and expressed his openness to continued dialogue with civil society and media as key partners in reform.





At BIRN's initiative, a consultative hearing was convened before the Parliamentary Anti-Corruption Committee. This session brought together representatives from all the companies featured in the report, as well as members of both the ruling majority and opposition parties.

During a consultative hearing before the Parliamentary Anti-Corruption Committee, Minister of Energy Saša Mujović and leaders of Montenegro's state-owned energy companies addressed concerns raised by BIRN Montenegro's report on public spending. The report highlighted a significant rise in employment and over €6.5 million allocated to sponsorships and donations between 2018 and 2024. BIRN pointed out that many of the recipients were religious organizations, sports clubs, and public institutions, with allegations of political misuse of funds and favoritism.

Company representatives defended the increased employment as necessary for expanded production and new investment cycles. They argued that donations were primarily directed toward education, healthcare, and sports. Some executives criticized BIRN's report and questioned the legitimacy of discussing NGO findings in Parliament, with certain leaders accusing BIRN of working against the government's interests.

However, Minister Mujović welcomed the findings, calling the report a valuable analytical tool, and emphasized the need for clear donation guidelines.

Mujović acknowledged that state companies are under constant pressure to provide donations and advocated for limiting such funding to socially beneficial areas, especially underdeveloped regions like Pljevlja, Plužine, and Nikšić. He underscored his ministry's commitment to transparency and said reforms are underway, with companies like CEDIS already adopting many of BIRN's recommendations.

Several executives promised improvements, including public donation policies and clearer employment practices. The session concluded with the Anti-Corruption Committee urging all energy companies to continue reforms, prioritize transparency, and invest in renewable energy and innovation, while strengthening anti-corruption mechanisms.

ANTI-CORRUPTION FORUM ON ENVIRONMENT

In March, 2024, BIRN Montenegro and Civic Alliance organized Montenegro's first Anti-Corruption Forum on Environmental Protection. The forum addressed environmental corruption as one of the country's critical challenges, emphasizing collaboration between authorities, civil society, and citizens to combat this pressing issue.

Speakers highlighted the need for all levels of government to responsibly manage ecological resources, ensure timely responses to corruption reports, and enforce stricter penalties for violations. Deputy Prime Minister Momo Koprivica underscored the importance of strengthening institutional frameworks and prosecuting all forms of corruption.

During the event, Vuk Maras, Executive Director of BIRN Montenegro, called for urgent state action, pointing out that "institutions have failed to address citizens' concerns adequately." Over the past year, BIRN Montenegro and Civic Alliance, with six local partners, submitted 80 initiatives and requests addressing environmental corruption.

Panel discussions emphasized the media's critical role in exposing environmental crimes, such as illegal waste disposal and harmful construction practices. Representatives from the Ministry of Spatial Planning and parliament debated systemic issues, including flawed legislation that prioritizes investor interests over ecological protection.

The forum concluded with a call for stronger accountability among state institutions, improved judicial outcomes, and comprehensive strategies to safeguard Montenegro's environment against corruption.



ANTI-CORRUPTION FORUM ON HEALTHCARE



In November, 2024, BIRN Montenegro and the Civic Alliance organized the second Anti-Corruption Forum dedicated to healthcare, addressing systemic issues such as bribery, fake diplomas, monopolistic practices, and procurement irregularities. The forum served as a platform for stakeholders from government, civil society, and media to discuss necessary reforms.

The forum highlighted the absence of convictions for healthcare corruption in Montenegro, despite persistent challenges. President Jakov Milatović emphasized the need for comprehensive reforms, including the digitalization of procurement processes, stricter oversight, and enhanced protection for whistleblowers. These measures aim to ensure greater transparency and accountability across the sector.

BIRN Montenegro's Executive Director, Vuk Maras, called for action from judicial authorities and pointed out the lack of accountability for critical incidents in the healthcare system. As part of the project, BIRN Montenegro, in collaboration with media and civil society partners, produced 15 investigative stories and nine policy analyses, shedding light on corruption-related issues impacting citizens and communities.

The forum also addressed broader systemic challenges, such as monopolistic practices in drug procurement, inflated medicine prices, and insufficient regulation of private healthcare providers.

Looking ahead, the forum called for a unified approach to combat corruption in healthcare, emphasizing the importance of strong institutions and public trust to ensure a functional and fair system for all.

OPEN DATA EVENTS

In September, BIRN Montenegro hosted the panel “The State of Open Data and Digitization in the Western Balkans,” bringing together key stakeholders to discuss the future of open data in Montenegro and the region. The panel underscored the importance of collaboration between government institutions, civil society, and citizens to unlock the potential of open data as a driver of transparency and good governance.

Key insights included the need for proactive data publication and the development of user-focused strategies. Speakers emphasized that open data initiatives must prioritize citizens’ needs and ensure broad accessibility. Participants also discussed the importance of enforcing accountability mechanisms to ensure institutions comply with data-sharing obligations.

A notable outcome was the announcement of two forthcoming open data portals.

A new government portal, supported by the UNDP, will launch by December 2024, offering improved functionality and security. Additionally, the Montenegrin Parliament plans to establish its own portal by mid-2025, reinforcing its commitment to transparency.

During the panel, BIRN Montenegro’s Executive Director, Vuk Maraš, presented a regional report on open data and e-government, highlighting alignment with EU standards but also pointing to challenges in implementation. These discussions reinforced the role of open data in reducing corruption, improving governance, and fostering public trust.

Through such initiatives, BIRN Montenegro continues to play a pivotal role in advancing open data and digitization efforts, contributing to a more transparent and accountable society.





In December 2024, BIRN Montenegro, in partnership with the Ministry of Public Administration, hosted the launch of Montenegro's revamped Open Data Portal in Podgorica. The event, which included a panel discussion on open data, marked a significant step toward fostering transparency, accountability, and public trust in governance.

The new portal, described by Minister Marash Dukaj as a "central point for accessing public-sector data in an open format," includes nearly 400 datasets organized by thematic areas. The portal replaces its predecessor, which was rendered non-functional after a 2022 cyberattack. This new platform aims to reduce reliance on formal information requests by proactively publishing accessible, high-quality data.

BIRN Montenegro's Executive Director, Vuk Maras, underscored the responsibility of all stakeholders to ensure the portal's success. "The Ministry has provided the tool; now it's up to all of us to make it fully operational," he noted.

The Secretary General of Parliament, Aleksandar Klarić, also announced that parliamentary data would now be available in user-friendly formats, enabling citizens to visualize and compare information.

The launch reflects Montenegro's commitment to modernizing public administration and aligns with broader efforts to embed open data as a cornerstone of democratic governance. Through this initiative, BIRN Montenegro continues to drive progress in making public institutions more transparent and accessible, reinforcing its role as a key advocate for open data and accountability.



EMPOWERING MEDIA THROUGH MENTORSHIP

As part of the Media for Change project, BIRN Montenegro provided mentoring sessions to nine local and national media outlets as well as one freelance journalist, focusing on enhancing their content creation processes. Through tailored guidance, we introduced participants to innovative tools like the ECR tool for surveys and strategies for publishing call-outs and other audience-driven content.

These hands-on sessions enabled media professionals to refine their approaches, improve efficiency, and deliver high-quality, impactful content to their audiences. By equipping journalists with practical skills and resources, BIRN Montenegro supported the production of compelling and relevant stories, further strengthening the role of media as a cornerstone of an informed and engaged society.

Details of the participating outlets and their published content will underscore the tangible outcomes of this initiative, showcasing its success in fostering excellence in journalism.

Media outlets that BIRN supported are CDM, Vijesti, Dan, Boka News, Feral Bar, RTNK, Radio Titograd, CIN CG, NU Pljevlja, and a freelance journalist Goranović Marija.



TRAINING SESSIONS BY BIRN

In 2024, BIRN organized several capacity-building training sessions to strengthen the knowledge and skills of journalists and civil society actors. These sessions focused on empowering participants to report effectively on corruption and disinformation while enhancing their investigative journalism capabilities.

1. Capacity Building Training: Corruption in Health Care

Trainer: Emsad Dizdarević, Transparency International Bosnia and Herzegovina

This training aimed to equip grantees with the essential knowledge and tools to report on corruption within the healthcare sector. Participants explored methodologies for uncovering corrupt practices, identifying key sources, and navigating ethical challenges in healthcare journalism.

2. Capacity Building Training: Investigative Journalism

Trainer: Ivana Milosavljević, Center for Investigative Journalism of Serbia

This session focused on the principles and techniques of investigative journalism, with an emphasis on uncovering corruption in various sectors. Participants learned about investigative methods, source verification, and storytelling techniques to produce impactful journalism. Ivana Milosavljević, a journalist from the Center for Investigative Journalism of Serbia, shared practical examples and case studies to illustrate best practices.

3. Capacity Building Training: Reporting and Addressing Anti-Corruption in the Environment

Trainer: Alena Beširević, Author at Naratorium

This training combined the principles of investigative journalism with a focus on anti-corruption in environmental issues. Participants gained insights into addressing corruption through collaborative efforts between journalism and NGOs. Drawing on her experience at Naratorium, Alena Beširević highlighted the importance of integrating storytelling with activism to drive awareness and action. The training provided actionable strategies for tackling corruption in environmental projects and policies.

Training for Journalists: Fact-Checking and Professional Journalism

Trainers:

- Ivana Jeremić, External Associate, BIRN Hub and the International Fact-Checker Network
- Milorad Ivanović, Editor, BIRN Serbia

This comprehensive training addressed two critical aspects of journalism: combating disinformation and maintaining professionalism. Ivana Jeremić's sessions provided participants with practical tools to identify and counter disinformation, covering topics such as definitions, terminologies, and effective countermeasures. Meanwhile, Milorad Ivanović focused on the challenges of professional journalism, including topic selection, work methodologies, and overcoming real-world obstacles. Both trainers used examples from their own practices to engage participants and encourage dynamic discussions.

IMPACT AND REACH

In the first 14 months of our publishing, our content has been seen by over 6,3 million users. Before the project start, BIRN Montenegro has launched its portal (www.birn.me), on 15th November 2023. Since that time, the number of users of our website has significantly grown.

Period	No. of users	Count
15-11-2023 / 31-12-2024	5.000	25.000
01-01-2024 / 30-06-2024	18.000	98.000
01-07-2024 / 31-12-2024	74.000	374.000

In the reporting period our social media channels have also significantly grown. Facebook followers increased from 992 to 2,500, while number of Instagram followers raised from 1550 to 4300. The number of X followers also increased from 147 to 190, while on TikTok we have generated 506 followers.

Facebook	Period	Reach	Impressions
	15-11-2023 / 31-12-2024	65.090	313.727
	01-01-2024 / 30-06-2024	206.555	1.658.001
	01-07-2024 / 31-12-2024	230.601	2.675.668

YEAR 2024

Instagram	Period	Reach	Impressions
	01-01-2024 / 30-06-2024	146.879	452.031
	01-07-2024 / 31-12-2024	178.640	955.193

TikTok account generated us 254.724 views.

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

The overall budget of BIRN Montenegro for 2024 was over 210.000 Euros. Out of the overall amount, over 90 thousand were spent on journalism, almost 48 thousand was spent on administration and finance, over 40 thousand was spent on programmatic activities, while remaining over 32 thousand was spent for activities and office running costs.

Journalism



42,85%

**Administration
and finance**



22,88%

**Programmatic
activities**



19,04%

**Activities and
office running**



15,23%



CONTACT US

BIRN Montenegro remains committed to delivering high-quality investigative journalism, impactful stories, and thorough monitoring reports. We invite you to join us in our mission to promote transparency, media pluralism, and the rule of law in Montenegro.

How to Stay Updated

Keep up with our latest updates and initiatives:

- Email: birn.montenegro@birnnetwork.org
- Website: www.birn.me

As we enter 2024, our dedication to fostering a well-informed and democratic society in Montenegro remains steadfast. BIRN Montenegro continues to be a trusted source of information and a strong advocate for positive change.

We encourage you to stay engaged and be part of our efforts to build a resilient media landscape.

Get in touch

Have questions or need more information about our work? We'd love to hear from you. Reach out to us anytime, and let's work together to create meaningful change. Together, we can drive progress and strengthen democracy in Montenegro.

Facebook



Instagram



X

