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PRESS RELEASE

The Slovene Association of Journalists and friends of the Slovenian Press Agency (STA) will mark World Press Freedom Day on 3 May by launching a crowdfunding campaign for the STA under the banner *Za obSTAnek*. The association has brought together several independent initiatives in the desire to react to efforts by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and its Government Communications Office to starve the agency of resources in contravention of the law.

The Government's refusal to settle its financial obligations regarding the public service that the STA continues to perform jeopardises the professional and editorial independence of the national press agency, which has so far been financially sound. The public service is performed by almost ninety employees, who are at risk of losing their jobs in the worst case scenario, a risk they face because they are doing their job professionally and independently. Were that to happen, the media would be left without an extraordinarily important source of verified and credible information about day-to-day events – and that would happen in a year when World Press Freedom Day celebrates information as a public good.

The situation is serious. It is time to STAnd up for STA and independent journalism.

The goal of the campaign is to raise two million euros, roughly the amount of public funds that the STA receives annually for the performance of public service. If every resident of Slovenia contributes one euro, we will have safeguarded the existence of a professional, independent and unbiased public service which the STA has been performing for almost 30 years.

Petra Lesjak Tušek, president of the Slovene Association of Journalists, said:

“Despite being starved of resources by the government, the colleagues at the STA remain strongly committed to professional work, even as their position grows more precarious every day. Journalists who have built their credibility with the help of STA content, essential as it is to our work and the public's right to be informed, retain a strong commitment as well. We will not abandon our commitment to unearthing facts and putting them into context, something that the Government appears not to be willing to stand. We are convinced that critical readers, viewers and listeners also remain committed to the expectation that critical journalists will survive in a democratic country, that

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Društvo novinarjev Slovenije je naslednik Društva slovenskih književnikov in časnikarjev, ustanovljenega 28. marca 1905 v Ljubljani, in Slovenskega časnikarskega društva, ustanovljenega 22. oktobra 1944 v Črnomlju.

media freedom will not be curtailed, and that attacks on journalists will not be acceptable in public discourse.”

Alenka Potočnik, president of the Trade Union of Slovenian Journalists, said:

“The developments concerning the financing of the STA public service show just how vulnerable media and journalists are. A few years ago the Trade Union of Slovenian Journalists raised its voice in support of staff at private media companies which curtailed labour rights and conducted layoffs in their desire to maximise profits, now we are in a position where the Government exerts pressure on both public service media, the STA and RTV Slovenija. In the case of the STA it has gone as far as suspending public service financing to jeopardise the company’s liquidity, putting at risk the jobs of around 90 employees and the social security of their families. The people deserve a high-quality information service, fast and credible information. Everyone, not just the media and journalists, must therefore stand up for the survival of the STA.”

It is worth recalling that objections to the public financing of the STA’s public service coincided with the assessment that a news report on a meeting between the Slovenian and Hungarian prime ministers was too short. Beyond a doubt, the aim of the pressure exerted by those in power is to replace the leadership of the agency and take control of its content production, attuning it more closely to the wishes of politicians. Likeability to any political bloc was not among the reasons why the Slovenian Press Agency was founded 30 years ago, in the midst of the nation’s independence efforts.

The agency has done everything to re-establish public service funding, but the Government Communications office has persistently rejected all requests for payment, most recently on 29 April. The position of the European Commission that public service financing does not constitute illegal state aid has not led to a change of mind either.

This is why the campaign *Za obSTAnek* is reaching out to everyone – to all the people, who deserve a high-quality public information service and who care about the fate of the STA and the staff working there, and who realise that without a free media, there can be no informed citizenry or a working democracy. We need the STA and the STA needs us.

ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN:

The campaign *Za obSTAnek* will be under way throughout May. You can donate directly via a bank transfer (account number Si56 6100 0002 5727 075) or by sending an SMS from a Slovenian mobile number to **1919** with the keywords **STA1** (donate 1 euro) or **STA5** (donate 5 euros). All information about the campaign is available at zaobstane.si (the English page is under construction and will be available soon).

The campaign is a collaboration between friends of the STA, including the Trade Union of Slovene Journalists, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), the European Alliance of News Agencies (EANA) and numerous Slovenian media including Dnevnik and Nedeljski Dnevnik, Delo, Večer, Primorske Novice, POP TV, Mladina, Žurnal24 and others. The action has been supported by the trade union associations ZSSS, Pergam and KSJS and also by Journalism Chair at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

Media, NGOs, companies and others who wish to become friends of the STA and take an active part in the campaign should write to generalni@novinar.com to receive an information package. Join us!

The campaign is designed to foster creativity. You can write your own message of support. Be creative. Your message may make waves. To learn more, go to zaobstanek.si.

Please donate.