



Local authority Požega
Major of Požega / President of Assembly
Trg Slobode 9
Požega 31210
Serbia

28 February 2018

End defamation of cultural manager and art historian Slađana Petrović Varagić

Mr Milan Božić, Major of Požega,, and Mrs Zorica Mitrović, President of Assembly

The EU working group on human rights violations in the arts, Arts, Rights, Justice, has recently learned about the latest defamation of the cultural manager and art historian Slađana Petrović Varagić. ARJ has been in touch with Mrs. Petrović Varagić since summer 2017.

Based on 89 e) of the UN report on the right to freedom of Artistic expression and creativity, A/HRC/23/34 of 2013, we would like to express our concern. This article reads: “(e) States should abide by their obligation to protect Artists and all persons participating in Artistic activities or dissemination of Artistic expressions and creations from violence by third parties. States should de-escalate tensions when these arise, maintain the rule of law and protect Artistic freedoms.”

The public defamation against Slađana Petrović Varagić , then director of the Požega Cultural Center, by the Mayor of Požega, Mr Milan Božić, began in 2015. At the same time, the directors of three other public institutions in Požega, the Public Library Požega, the Center for Social Work, and Spot's Objects, were equally urged to resign. None of them being a member of the ruling, or the coalition party. Unlike her peers, Mrs. Petrović Varagić had earned her position through an open call and could not be legally dismissed before her 4-year contract ended. So the Law of Culture in Serbia. After unsuccessful attempts to pressure her to resign, the Managing Board proposed the dismissal of Slađana Petrović Varagić from the position of the manager of the Požega Cultural Center on February 4, 2016. In a 90 minute “discussion” by the local parliament, Mrs. Petrović Varagić’s work and person were shamed. No legal grounds were found for her dismissal other than that she had not claimed tax refunds for her organisation. Which is not an act against the law.

Slađana Petrović Varagić filed a lawsuit to the Higher Court in Užice against the Požega Municipality for an unlawful dismissal before the mandate completion. The first instance verdict was in favor of Slađana Petrović Varagić. Then the Municipality of Požega filed an appeal and the proceedings were continued at the Appellation Court in Kragujevac. The dismissal was declared unlawful again. However, the Court of

Appeal dismissed paragraph 2 of the first instance verdict and stated that the court was not competent to decide on the return of Mrs. Slađana Petrović Varagić to the position of director of the Požega Cultural Center, but that it was the task of the employer to decide.

In April 2016 Mrs. Slađana Petrović Varagić submitted the Request to the Supreme Cassation Court in Belgrade for the review of the sentence by the Appellate Court regarding the item 2 to bring back the director to her post. In the meantime, she has been downgraded to the position of a curator of the City gallery.

In November 2017, the Požega Cultural Centre was liquidated, and her position as a curator of the City gallery was abolished. Still the local authorities would continue to pursue her public defamation. The latest attack on Slađana Petrović Varagić took place on February 6, 2018, after local citizens started daily protests against the plan of the local authorities to use public funds to buy an illegally built and overpriced building for the newly planned Sport-Cultural Center. This property is in the possession of the family of the President of Assembly, Mrs Zorica Mitrović. In order to draw the public attention away from the scandal, Mrs Zorica Mitrović reportedly accused Slađana Petrović Varagić during a TV interview on the local TV station of thievery. She claimed that Mrs. Petrović Varagić had misused the budget of the Požega Cultural Centre for acquisitions for its art collection during her directorship. Mrs. Zorica Mitrović showed photos of art works (paintings) which indeed were bought for the collection of the Cultural Centre Požega but by the Ministry of Culture and Information RS and on the base of the Ministry's open call for new acquisitions. Mrs. Mitrović also announced the preparation of an exhibition featuring all "undesirable artworks," an exhibition, which, she said, will be called "what was left of an unfortunate woman" referring to Mrs. Petrović Varagić.

Arts Rights Justice has reported this case to the office of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights in 2017, and will continue to document its development to further see Mrs. Petrović Varagić's rights protected.

Arts Rights Justice and its members will keep observing the arts freedom situation in Serbia. In 2017 alone, 5 cases of arts freedom violations and defamation have been reported to us.

The continued defamation of Mrs. Slađjana Petrović Varagić's personal and professional standing, and the various attempts to silence her, are in violation of international human rights laws.

We value Serbia's interest in the protection of human rights in the arts, and, along with the undersigned Artists and supporters of Artistic freedom in Serbia and internationally, we are confident that the Mayor of Požega, Mr Milan Božić, and all local authority officers, will do everything they can to immediately and unconditionally stop the public defamation and private pressures against Slađana Petrović Varagić.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

ARTS RIGHTS JUSTICE EUROPE

represented by the below listed member-signatories

List of signatories

Dr Srirak Plipat, Executive Director, Freemuse

Dr Sabine Kock, SMartAt e. Gen., Vienna, Austria

Nan van Houte, Secretary General, IETM, international network for contemporary performing arts, Brussel

Ruth Jakobi, Secretary General, European Music Council, Bonn

Lillian Fellmann, chair and coordinator, Arts Rights Justice

Angie Cotte, cultural activist

Thomas Irmer ACAR / ITI Germany.

Jodie Ginsberg, CEO, Index on Censorship, Index on Censorship, UK

Aleksandar Gubaš, programme coordinator, Knjigoskop

Nikoleta Kosovac, coordinator, LICEULICE

Petar Matović, Poet, Požega (Serbia)

Luka Knežević Strika, President, Association of the Independent Cultural Scene of Serbia

Sanja Krsmanović Tasić, president, Center for Drama in Education and Art - CEDEUM

Sunčica Milosavljević, PhD, programme director, BAZAART, Belgrade

Marko Pejović, programme manager Grupa "Hajde da..."

Milica Pekic, art historian, KIOSK, Belgrade

Mina Aleksić, Citizens association Prostor, Belgrade

Slobodan Stošić, independent Artist, Board Member of Independent Cultural Scene of Serbia, and collaborator of the Group for Conceptual Politics, Novi Sad

Tanja Ostojic, lik. umetnica/ Artist, Belgrade

Vesna Milosavljevic, Association of citizens, SEEcult.org

Branka Ćurčić, assignee and programme co-director, Group for Conceptual Politics, Novi Sad

Una Popovic, Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade

Ivan Petrovic, Artist-photographer, Belgrade

Olja Nikolic Kia, ArtEq

Vesna Tašić, Director, ZMUC

Goran Denić, Art Director, ZMUC

Aleksandar Gubaš, Programme Coordinator, Knjigoskop project, Belgrade

Khadija El Bennaoui, Director, Art Moves Africa

Tatjana Pajović, Artistic Director, POD Theatre

Patricia Kistenmacher, Latin-American network for social transformation

Prof. Dr. um Miodrag Krkobabić, College of Fine Arts and Applied Arts, Belgrade

Dr Zoran Erić, Chief Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade

Milovan Destil Markovic, Artist, Belgrade / Berlin
Claudia Chaseling, Artist, Berlin
Saša Janjić, art historian, curator, Telenor Collection, Belgrade, Serbia
Dusica Drazic, Artist and founder, “Out of sight. A venue for contemporary art”, Antwerp, Belgium
Sunčica Lambić-Fenjčev, curator, Zrenjanin
Simona Ognjanović, art historian and curator
Tamara Rakic , sculptor, Belgrade
Ivana Tomanović, Associate Professor, Arts Academy, University Novi Sad / Arts Academy, Alpha University Belgrade
Aleksandra Sekulic, Center fro Cultural Decontamination, Belgrade, Serbia
Isidora Fićović, Association of Fine Artists of Serbia, PhD FLU, Belgrade
Viktorija Simon Vuletic, senior curator, Municipal Museum of Subotica, Serbia
Perica Donkov, painter, Nis, Serbia
Marija Radisavčević Raković, Art Gallery Nadezda Petrovic, curator
Mirza Dedać, Belgrade
Danica Jovović Prodanović, Kulturni centar Beograda, urednik programa
Zoran Hamović, Direktor i glavni urednik, Manager and Editor-in-Chief
Visnja Petrovic, Novi Sad, Serbia
Ljiljana Šunjevarić
Bojana Knežević, independent Artist, co-founder, Femkanje, Belgrade
Isidora Ilić, Artist, Doplenger, Belgrade
Boško Prostran, Artist, Doplenger, Belgrade
Nemanja Nikolić, Visual Artist, U10 Art Collective, Belgrade
Branka Janković Knežević, Professor, Academy of Arts, Novi Sad
Ivana Dragutinović Sokolovski, visual Artist
Olivera Stošić Rakić, literary and debate editor in Belgrade Cultural Center, Serbia
Dragana B.Stevanovic, Artist / Associate Teacher, University of Novi Sad
Vera Vitorović, Udruženje Kontrapunkt, Belgrade
M.A. Dragana Martinovic, Theoretician of art and media
Andrea Palasti, Artist, Novi Sad, Serbia
Vladimir Paunovic, NGO "MillenniuM", Kragujevac, Serbia
Selman Trtovac, Artist
Katarina Radovic, Belgrade
Ljiljana Petrović
Costume designer and professor, Faculty of Applied Arts, Belgrade

Darka Radosavljević Vasiljević, executive manager Remont NUA, Belgrade
Mirjana Racković, curator/ museum adviser, Art Gallery "Nadezda Petrovic" Čačak
Ulka Marinković, curator, museum adviser, Art gallery "Nadežda Petrović" Čačak
Anica Vucetic, free lance visual Artist. Belgrade
Predrag Terzić, visual Artist, Belgrade
Nina Todorovic, Visual Artist, Belgrade
Maja Ćirić, Independent Curator
Lidija Delić, Artist, U10 Art Space, Belgrade
Maida Gruden, Dom kulture Studentski grad, urednik likovnog programa
Dejan Sretenovic, curator, Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade
Miloš Tomić, independent filmmaker, Belgrade
Jovana Budošan, Programme Director, MMC Led art / Shock Cooperative
Ljiljana Ćinkul, art critic, Belgrade
Dr. Nenad M. Kostić, Prof. emeritus, American universities, member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts
Dobrivoje Lale Eric, Art Historian, Belgrade
Prof Dr. Davor Dukić, Artist and Professor, Belgrade Polytechnic, college of vocational studies, Belgrade
Dragan Petrović, Visual Artist, Belgrade
Jovana Stojanović, Artist, Belgrade
Milivoj Misko Pavlovic, Visual Artist, Professor, Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Arts Belgrade
Dragana Pavlovic, Art Historian, professor, Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade
Mihailo Vasiljević, Artist, co-director, Center for Photography, Belgrade
Vesna Danilović, Programmes and Events Manager, Cultural Centre of Belgrade
Dragana Žarevac, Visual Artist, Belgrade