

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/kosovo-attacks-on-media-offices-20-07-2012,43076.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Kosovo

Tensions

Attacks on media offices

20 July 2012

Reporters Without Borders condemns two recent assaults on broadcast media facilities, one of which was targeted by gunfire and the other shut down by a city government order.

"These two nearly simultaneous incidents reveal the highly volatile climate in which media professionals are working in the region," the press freedom organization said.

On 17 July, local authorities in Mitrovica, in North Kosovo, burst into the offices of *Radio TV Mitrovica*, which has earned a reputation for critical coverage of events and for investigative journalism. Accompanied by police, city officials and municipal employees cut off *RTV M* programming, forced staff to leave, and tossed equipment and recorded material into the street. The officials then sealed the office shut, legally preventing entry.

The day before, Mitrovica Mayor Avni Kastrati had signed a decree requiring media workers to evacuate the premises. *RTV M* and the city have been legally disputing rights to the property since 1999. A court should have been allowed to make a decision, but the city government showed its unwillingness to wait for a legal determination. Three days before the raid, *RTV M* was advised that its staff should leave the property.

RTV M founder and director **Nexhmedin Spahiu** criticized the city action as "arbitrary." He said that authorities had waited until he was out of the country, in Cyprus, to carry out the operation. Spahiu said the mayor had ordered the raid in order to take possession of documents that provide evidence of corruption.

"It is unacceptable that a city government order what amounts to vandalism of a media organization, while a lawsuit is under way to settle the legal issue of rights to the property" Reporters Without Borders said.

"We demand that *RTV M* be compensated for the considerable damage it suffered and that the city order be quashed. *RTV M* must be able to freely operate in its office pending the outcome of the court case."

Meanwhile, 40 kms north of Mitrovica, shots were fired at the office of *Radio Kolasin* in the city of Zubin Potok. The attack took place on 19 July, two days after the raid on *RTV M*. A bank and the home of a police officer were targeted by gunfire at the same time.

No one was hurt in any of the incidents and the reasons for the attacks remain unknown. But they demonstrate the level of tension in which media workers are operating.

"We are shocked by the attack on *Radio Kolasin*," Reporters Without Borders said. "Initial investigation indicates that this was a planned assault. We demand that authorities take all measures to guarantee the safety of journalists and their workplaces."

Kosovo ranked 87 of 187 on the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index for 2012.
