Press freedom under attack in Slovenia

Markus Salzmann
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A journalist with the Slovenian daily *Delo* is to be charged in court for the publication of alleged sensitive state information. Anuska Delic is threatened with three years' imprisonment for the exposure of ties between a neo-Nazi group and the Democratic Party (SDS) led by former Prime Minister Janez Jansa at the end of 2011.

The trial against Delic is an attempt to silence critical voices and limit press freedom. It is directly connected to the drastic cuts and privatizations implemented in Slovenia at the behest of the European Union.

The charge was lodged in April 2013. The trial is to take place in the capital Ljubljana a year and a half later. According to media reports, the foreign intelligence service SOVA accused the journalist of publishing strictly confidential information on intelligence.

During the 2011 election campaign, Delic published a series of articles documenting the links between the SDS and the neo-Nazi group Blood and Honour. At the time, Janez Jansa was celebrated by Western governments and banks as a guarantor for a radical reform course.

After the election, Jansa took over as premier, a post he held from 2005 to 2008 as leader of a right-wing coalition; however, his government quickly fell apart due to a corruption scandal. Jansa himself was sentenced to two years imprisonment.

Delic uncovered that Dejan Prosen, a leader of Blood and Honour, was a member of SDS at the same time. Prosen denied the allegation and after the publication of the article, all photos of Prosen were deleted from the SDS web site.

According to Delic, the ties between neo-Nazis and senior officials within the government were known about a year before the publication of her article. She considers herself to be a victim of political persecution because she exposed the presence of neo-Nazis in one of the country's main parties. It was an abuse of the judiciary for political ends, she insists, as the purpose of the charge was to uncover her sources and take action against them.

Along with the Slovenian Journalists Association (DNS), the International Press Institute (IPI) and the Southeast European Media Organisation (SEMO) have protested against the judicial prosecution of the journalist. They expressed their concern, calling upon the Slovenian authorities to immediately halt the proceedings. SEMO General Secretary Oliver Vujovic feared that the trial could act as a precedent in Europe. "Slovenia and the EU are sending the wrong message with this trial", he said.

Dunja Mijatovic, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) representation for media freedom, also directed a letter to the Slovenian foreign ministry.

The restriction of press freedom is a response to the social crisis in the former Yugoslavian republic, which joined the European Union in 2004. The attempt to silence critical voices goes hand in hand with another round of massive social attacks. The government is under immense pressure from the international financial markets.

As a consequence of the global economic crisis in 2008, exports in Slovenia were reduced by 16 percent and GDP fell by 8 percent. Unemployment tripled between 2008 and 2013. This has been accompanied by a sustained political crisis, leading to the virtual collapse of the established bourgeois parties. In July, the little known jurist Miro Cerar won the election without a recognizable political program, becoming prime minister. Twenty-five years after the reintroduction of capitalism and 10 years after joining the EU, Slovenia is characterized by political, economic and social instability.

Along with Miro Cerar's self-named party (SMC, Party of Miro Cerar), the current government includes

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the conservative Pensioners' Party (Desus) and the Social Democrats (SD). The coalition relies on the support of 52 of the 90 parliamentary deputies. Cerar immediately reassured the financial markets and the EU that he would continue to pursue the austerity policies of the previous government.

However, at the beginning of September, *Delo*, seen as a left-liberal publication, complained that two months after the election the coalition was still being held up by personnel issues. "Decisions that cannot be deferred are waiting on the new government, above all privatisation and the restructuring of public finances," the paper warned.

At the end of last year, Slovenia narrowly averted using the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) to support its indebted banks. The government handed more than €4 billion in taxpayers' money to the banks last year alone. This was financed by austerity measures and the sale of publicly owned companies. The government of Alenka Bratusek produced a list of 15 companies to be privatized. To date, only three have been offloaded to private investors.

Dusan Mramor, the finance minister appointed by Cerar, is considered an advocate of stringent austerity measures and privatization. The economist was in government between 2002 and 2004. At that time he failed to impose a pension reform that would have entailed the total privatization of elderly care and a reduction in existing pension payments.

Cerar stated that his government would cut the budget deficit to the three percent level required by Brussels next year. Cerar declared at the beginning of the opening parliamentary sitting that financial policy would be "restrictive," public spending would be cut, and taxes increased. At the same time, foreign direct investment is to be sought.

Miloja Kolar, the new health minister, has announced a fundamental reform of the health care system. There have been long-standing plans to privatize health care, with so-called experts demanding the elimination of inefficient clinics and the strengthening of competition in health care.

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