

# Europe Press Freedom Report

## On the Tipping Point: Press Freedom 2025



An annual assessment  
by the partner organisations  
of the Safety of Journalists Platform

March  
2026

safety of  
journalists  
platform



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**Cartooning for Peace**

*The association Cartooning for Peace was created in 2006 at the initiative of Kofi Annan, Nobel Peace Prize holder and former Secretary General of the United Nations, and press cartoonist Plantu. Now chaired by the French press cartoonist Kak, Cartooning for Peace is an international network of cartoonists committed to the promotion of freedom of expression, human rights and mutual respect among people upholding different cultures and beliefs, using the universal language of press cartoons.*

## Partner Organisations of the Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists

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# Contents

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<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>OVERVIEW OF PRESS FREEDOM IN EUROPE IN 2025</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>SAFETY, PRESSURE AND VULNERABILITY OF JOURNALISTS</b>	<b>20</b>
Journalism in the shadow of Russia's war on Ukraine	20
Risks to journalists reporting on protests	21
Detentions, arrests and criminal prosecution	22
Table. Journalists and other media actors in detention in Europe	25
Platform cases concerning impunity for the murder of journalists	28
Threats faced by women journalists	29
Precarity and employer pressure on journalists	30
Journalists in exile and transnational threats	31
<b>STRUCTURAL AND LEGAL THREATS TO PRESS FREEDOM</b>	<b>35</b>
Laws used to criminalise journalism	35
Making anti-SLAPP laws work	36
The spread of "foreign agent" laws	38
Surveillance and spyware targeting journalists	40
Media capture and control of public discourse	42
Political and financial pressures on Public Service Media	44
Box. Systemic threats to Public Service Media	46
<b>VOICES AND TESTIMONIES</b>	<b>48</b>
Kak's column. From Charlie Hebdo to today: the growing assault on press cartoonists	48
Sigfrido Ranucci: "I have never felt more exposed or vulnerable"	50
<b>COUNTRIES IN FOCUS</b>	<b>53</b>
Azerbaijan	53
Bulgaria	54
Georgia	55
Box. The Case of Mzia Amaglobeli	57
Hungary	58
Serbia	59
Slovak Republic	61
Türkiye	62
<b>INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS</b>	<b>64</b>
Measuring impact: national measures to improve press freedom and safety of journalists	64
Confronting democratic backsliding: Council of Europe action in 2025	67
European Union: from ambition to enforcement	69
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>71</b>
To the Council of Europe	71
To the institutions of the European Union	72
To the member states of the Council of Europe	72



# Executive summary

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In 2025, press freedom in Europe was under sustained pressure, driven by legal threats, attempts at media capture and transnational repression. This pressure was compounded by an increasingly hostile environment for journalism. This picture was mitigated by positive reforms in some member states and initiatives at the European level.

■ Russia's war against Ukraine remained the gravest threat to journalists in Europe, with media workers killed, injured, detained or disappearing in Russian-occupied areas. Repression of journalism within Russia intensified, including convictions in absentia of those reporting from exile.

■ Public service media in several states faced political interference and financial instability and restrictive laws, including "foreign agent" legislation, continued to be adopted. SLAPPs were widespread, chilling investigative reporting, despite EU and Council of Europe efforts to strengthen protections.

■ Protest-related alerts were recorded in at least a quarter of the states covered by the Safety of Journalists Platform (the Platform), with the highest levels of physical attacks on journalists recorded in Georgia, Serbia and Türkiye. Journalists were targeted by police, political actors and protesters, prevented from reporting, or sanctioned for their work, highlighting failures to ensure safe coverage and accountability for abuses. Online harassment and coordinated intimidation disproportionately targeted women journalists.

■ Some Council of Europe member states adopted measures to improve press freedom and journalist safety. Luxembourg and Portugal advanced national action plans and coordination mechanisms; Spain moved to strengthen legal protection of journalistic sources; Croatia proposed safeguards against abusive lawsuits; and Norway adopted a national strategy to counter disinformation and protect democratic debate. These steps reflect growing recognition among policymakers for the need for systematic action to defend journalism and press freedom.

■ EU measures, including the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), the anti-SLAPP Directive and digital enforcement tools, offer leverage if implemented decisively. Council of Europe initiatives, including the ongoing work on a New Democratic Pact for Europe, as well as the Journalists Matter campaign, the Platform's systemic alerts and engagement by the Group of Friends for the Safety of Journalists and Media Freedom, provide guidance and good practices.

■ Europe is approaching a critical juncture. Reversing the current trajectory will require decisive action by member states, the Council of Europe and European institutions to end impunity for attacks on journalists, safeguard independent and sustainably funded public service media, address structural threats such as media capture and restrictive legislation and counter online harassment and coordinated intimidation.

■ This requires far stronger state engagement with the Platform. In 2025, fewer than one in three alerts received a government response, and only 20% of all alerts since 2015 have been resolved, revealing a widening gap between political commitments and effective protection. Closing this gap is no longer optional: it is essential to prevent further erosion of press freedom at a moment when it stands at a tipping point.

# Overview of press freedom in Europe in 2025

In 2025, the Platform marked its 10th anniversary. Since its launch in April 2015, it has published more than 2 300 alerts on serious threats to media freedom in Council of Europe member states, Russia and Belarus.<sup>1</sup> The number of alerts has risen steadily, from 106 in 2015 to more than 330 in 2025, reflecting an increasingly hostile environment for journalists. A quarter of these concern attacks on the physical safety and integrity of journalists, including the deaths of 53 journalists or media professionals.

In 2025, hotspots of conflict and repression emerged as the primary sources of threats to journalists. Belarus, Georgia, Serbia, Russia, Türkiye and Ukraine's Russian-occupied territories recorded the highest numbers of alerts on the Platform. Beyond these hotspots, the report examines structural pressures on press freedom in several other countries, such as Hungary, which has served as a template for authoritarian governance since Prime Minister Orbán's return to power; Slovakia, where changes affecting public service media have raised doubts about its independence; and Azerbaijan, where the authorities have effectively disengaged from meaningful dialogue with the Platform.

## The drone war on journalism

In Ukraine, a decline in journalist fatalities in 2023-2024, linked to a stabilising front line and improved safety protocols for reporters, was reversed in 2025. This shift coincided with Russia's expanded use of first-person view (FPV) drones, which have been used to target journalists and media crews operating near the front line. The accessibility and precision of these weapons have sharply escalated the risks of war reporting and altered the conditions under which journalists can operate.

*In 2025, Ukrainian journalists Olena Hramova, Yevhen Karmazin and Tetyana Kulyk, and French photojournalist Antoni Lallican, were killed in Russian drone strikes.*

In 2025, four media workers, Ukrainian journalists Olena Hramova, Yevhen Karmazin and Tetyana Kulyk, and French photojournalist Antoni Lallican, were killed in Russian drone strikes. The *Kyiv Independent* notes that this type of attacks has effectively turned frontline areas into no-go zones for journalists.<sup>2</sup> Russian strikes have also caused extensive damage to telecommunications infrastructure and newsroom premises, further constraining independent reporting from the war zone.

The fate of journalists in Ukraine's Russian-occupied territories is particularly dire, as evidenced by Viktoria Roshchyna's case. The journalist went missing in 2023 while investigating the impact of the war in Russian-occupied eastern Ukraine and was later confirmed to have been detained by Russian forces. After her death in detention, her body, bearing numerous signs of torture, was returned to Ukraine in February 2025. Her death shocked the entire press freedom community. In her memory the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) announced the launch of an annual "Victory for Viktoria" commemoration "to honour war correspondents and journalists who risk, and often lose, their lives defending the right to information and truth in conflict zones".<sup>3</sup>

1. This report has been jointly prepared by the 15 partner organisations of the Platform. Each partner organisation retains responsibility for its own assessments and for the alerts it submits. All data presented reflects the alerts provided by the partner organisations, which remain solely responsible for their content, accuracy and completeness.
2. Terajima, Asami (2025), "How Russian drones are turning Ukraine's front line into a no-go zone for journalists", *Kyiv Independent*, <https://kyivindependent.com/we-had-only-a-few-seconds-before-it-hit-russian-drones-force-journalists-farther-from-ukraines-front-lines/>
3. Safety of Journalists Platform, September 2025, "Victory for Viktoria: PACE to honour journalists who risk and lose their lives to tell the truth", Council of Europe, <https://go.coe.int/gRVnW>

■ Three Ukrainian journalists, Dmytro Khyliuk, Mark Kaliush and Vladyslav Yesypenko, a contributor to *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (RFE/RL), were released in a prisoner exchange after years of unlawful detention. Their return carried symbolic significance for Ukrainian media advocates,<sup>4</sup> while underscoring the risks journalists face in occupied territories.

■ Adding to Ukraine's challenges, the U.S. Administration's gutting of international media assistance impacted Ukrainian media's coverage of the war. According to media expert Galyna Piskorska, "80% of Ukrainian media outlets received funding through USAID".<sup>5</sup> Small regional newsrooms, as well as investigative journalism projects have been particularly hit. These cuts have also undermined safety, leaving reporters, especially on the frontlines, without essential protections or emergency support.

## Russia's crackdown

■ In Russia, the war has eviscerated what was left of independent media, driven an entire community of journalists into exile and left the country with no credible domestic watchdog journalism. The authorities repressed and jailed the few remaining independent voices, toughened the legislation on so-called "foreign agents" and "undesirable organisations", increased the harassment of journalists in exile, obstructed their population's access to foreign news and banned independent access to Ukraine's occupied territories. International journalists have been forced to adapt their reporting methods and sources to access reliable information on Russia.

*In 2025, Russian authorities crushed the last remaining independent voices, tightened "foreign agent" laws and sealed off access to independent information.*

■ Malign Russian actors also ratcheted up their disinformation operations in Russia and abroad. In April 2025, the TASS state-run agency co-founded the Global Fact-Checking Network,<sup>6</sup> a cheap parody of the highly respected International Fact-Checking Network.<sup>7</sup> According to the Reckoning Project, a collective of journalists and experts documenting war crimes, Russia has also resorted to so-called "information alibis", which involves the pre-emptive dissemination of false information, i.e. before an attack takes place, in order to better deflect its responsibility.<sup>8</sup>

## Dangerous assignments

■ In several member states of the Council of Europe the ride has been rough. Political turmoil and public mobilisation have given rise to protests, which have been met with violence and severe restrictions on press freedom. Two countries stood out in their attacks against journalists: Georgia, where journalists were severely repressed while covering mass protests against a government accused of being authoritarian and anti-European; and Serbia, where large-scale demonstrations took place to denounce state negligence after the tragic collapse of a canopy at Novi Sad station.

■ Attacks on journalists remained widespread in 2025, accounting for 90 of 344 alerts (26%). These incidents included violence at public events and protests, perpetrated by both demonstrators and law enforcement agents. Persistent threats of physical violence further contributed to a climate of intimidation.

■ In October 2025 Sigfrido Ranucci, an Italian investigative journalist with the RAI public broadcaster, was targeted in a car bombing outside his home in Rome.<sup>9</sup> No one was hurt, but "I have never felt more exposed or vulnerable", he told the Platform. The incident highlighted the extent to which journalists in Europe continue to face sustained threats, with a worrying number requiring permanent or near-permanent police protection. Neapolitan journalist Roberto Saviano has lived under protection for two decades.

4. Alert "RFE/RL Contributor Vladislav Yesypenko Arrested, Charged with Espionage in Crimea", <https://go.coe.int/bpl5w>

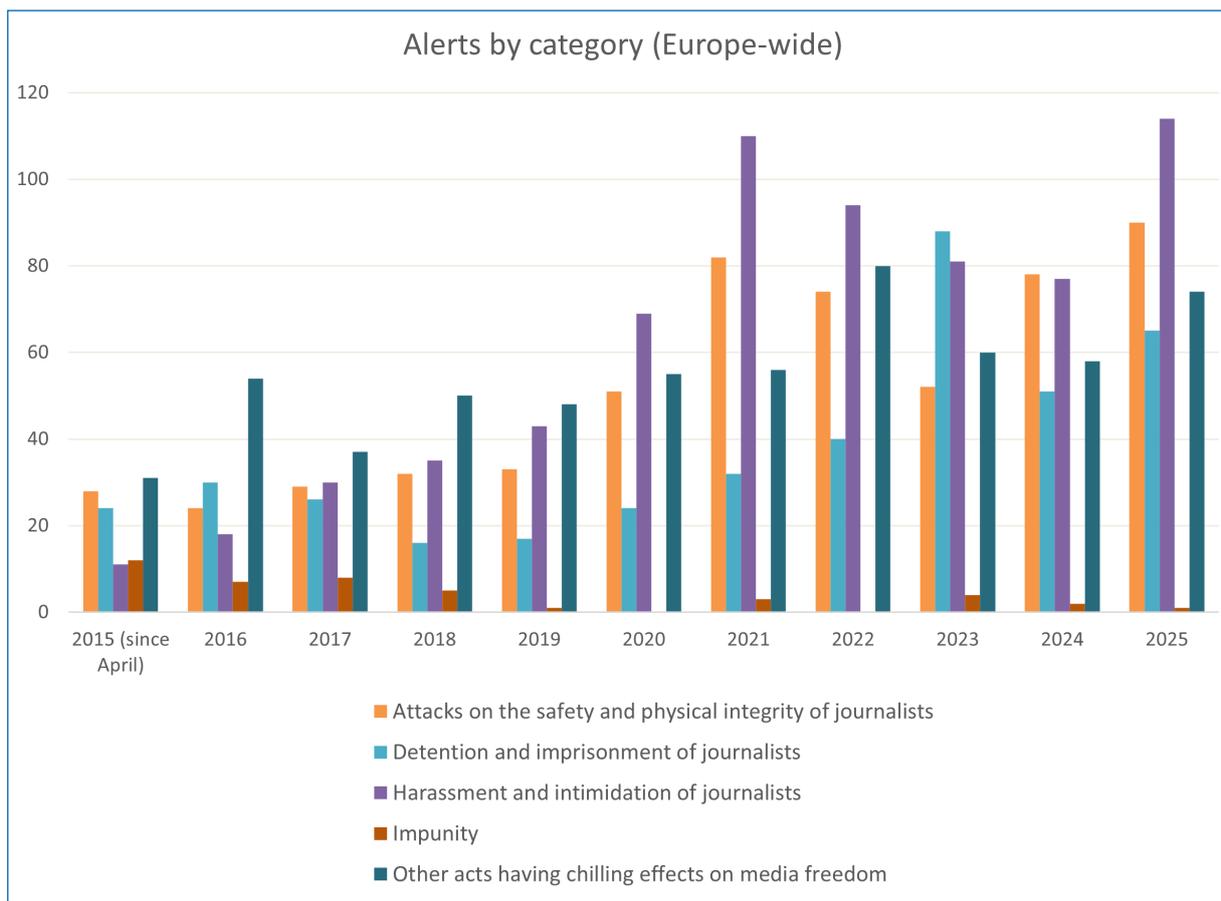
5. Piskorska, Galyna (2025), "Local newspapers are a lifeline in Ukraine, but USAID cuts may force many to close or become biased mouthpieces," *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/local-newspapers-are-a-lifeline-in-ukraine-but-usaid-cuts-may-force-many-to-close-or-become-biased-mouthpieces-250917>

6. *Deutsche Welle* (2025), "Fact check: Is Russia's new fact-checking platform credible?", <https://www.dw.com/en/russia-global-fact-checking-network-gfcn-disinformation-propaganda-v2/a-72763260>

7. The IFCN was started in 2015 by the independent US-based Poynter Institute.

8. The Reckoning Project/Global Rights Compliance, "Manufacturing Impunity: Russian Operations in Ukraine", <https://globalrightscpliance.org/project/from-disinformation-to-atrocity-confronting-russian-propagandists-who-manufacture-impunity/>

9. Alert "Investigative Journalist Sigfrido Ranucci Targeted in Car Bombing Outside his Home Near Rome", <https://go.coe.int/GyWfB>



Source: Council of Europe Safety of Journalists Platform

■ The “hybrid threat environment”, as described by Europol in a recent report,<sup>10</sup> underscores the need for heightened safety awareness and stronger security protocols in newsrooms. In July 2025, a report by the French Office for Anti-Drug Trafficking (OFAST) explicitly identified journalists as potential targets of so-called “intimidation crimes” aimed at silencing the profession.<sup>11</sup>

■ Effective accountability for these crimes remains rare. In a statement issued on the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, the Council of Europe’s Group of Friends for the Safety of Journalists and Media Freedom noted that 51 killings of media workers remain unresolved, adding that “in 90% of cases of murder of journalists, the perpetrators have not been brought to justice” - a situation it described as “tantamount to a licence to kill”.<sup>12</sup>

■ Against this backdrop, a section of the report focuses on Slovakia, examining the murders of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová, as well as the long-unresolved disappearance of journalist Pavol Rýpal, to illustrate the challenges of accountability for crimes against journalists.

■ In many countries, politicians and state representatives regularly engaged in severe verbal attacks against journalists. Whenever politicians attack journalists, their criticism is easily amplified online, trickling down to their supporters and potentially fuelling harassment. “This might lead to a very real form of *mob censorship*, where the collective power of digital masses is used to instil fear among journalists and silence them”.<sup>13</sup>

*As of 31 December 2025, 148 journalists and other media actors were held in detention across Europe.*

10. Europol (2025), “The changing DNA of serious and organised crime”, EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (EU-SOCTA), <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publication-events/main-reports/changing-dna-of-serious-and-organised-crime>  
11. Lazard, Violette; Monnier, Vincent (2025), “Narcotraffic. Face à l’emprise mafieuse”, *Le Nouvel Obs*  
12. Statement by the Group of Friends for the Safety of Journalists and Media Freedom (2025), “International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists 2nd November 2025”, <https://go.coe.int/JDdAq>  
13. Lamot, Kenza, Kathleen Beckers, and Peter Van Aelst (2025), “Silencing the Fourth Estate? Understanding the Impact of Online Public Violence Against Political Journalists”, *Journalism Practice*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2025.2575333>

■ In several European countries, the imprisonment of journalists on unfounded charges has become a recurrent tactic. As of 31 December 2025, 148 journalists and other media actors were held in detention across Europe. Russia was the leading jailer, followed by Azerbaijan, Belarus and Türkiye. Journalists are not only deprived of their liberty, but they are also regularly submitted to ill-treatment. In 2025, Georgian journalist Mzia Amaglobeli personified the fate of imprisoned journalists when the European Parliament rewarded her with the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. Arrested in January, she was sentenced to two years in prison in August. The report pays special tribute to her.

■ Online harassment has become so commonplace that many journalists do not even bother to file complaints. These threats and insults must not be normalised. Whether they are expressed by angry individuals or sponsored by states or interest groups they add to the psychological pressures on an already overworked and vulnerable profession and, at any moment, they may spill offline. Most physical attacks and murders of journalists, like Daphne Caruana Galizia in 2017 in Malta, had been preceded by harassment and online threats.

■ Women journalists have been disproportionately targeted by abuse as they face a double risk, being attacked on account of their work and due to their gender. A 2025 Stand Up for Journalism survey<sup>14</sup> found that up to 87% of women journalists reported experiencing online violence related to their work. This year’s report devotes a specific chapter to this often-underreported issue. Because of such levels of harassment, women journalists may resign themselves to retreating into less exposed beats or leaving the profession altogether.

*A 2025 survey found that up to 87% of women journalists face online violence linked to their work.*



Source: Council of Europe Safety of Journalists Platform

14. European Federation of Journalists (2025), “Stand Up for Journalism: New report urges recognition of online harassment as a systemic professional risk”, <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2025/11/25/stand-up-for-journalism-new-report-urges-recognition-of-online-harassment-as-a-systemic-professional-risk/>

## Legal abuse

Abusive lawsuits, the so-called Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), continued to plague independent journalism, despite sustained advocacy by press freedom groups. These procedures have a particularly serious chilling effect, especially on watchdog and investigative journalism, as they are initiated to scare journalists with the prospect of time-consuming procedures and the threat of crushing costs and damages. They also threaten the press indirectly by targeting NGOs or academic researchers, who are increasingly central actors in the media ecosystem as they investigate or report on matters of public interest. Maxime Audinet, author of a groundbreaking essay<sup>15</sup> on *Russia Today*, was sued by RT France for defamation. A French Court rejected the case in early 2025 but the message was clear: “To work on Russia, or other authoritarian or illiberal states exposes many researchers to gag lawsuits”,<sup>16</sup> he wrote in a *Le Monde* Op-Ed. Press freedom groups currently strive to assure an effective implementation of the EU anti-SLAPP directive and of the more extensive protections granted by the Council of Europe’s 2024 Recommendation on countering the use of SLAPPs.

Several member states have introduced or implemented laws to restrict journalists’ rights. Often under the Orwellian pretext of protecting the population against disinformation, cybercrime, terrorism, or extremism. Likewise, the “foreign agent” laws, which originated in Russia in 2012, have been adopted by political forces across the region. Russia, Belarus are the worst offenders. Governments in Georgia, Hungary, Serbia, Slovakia and Türkiye have either introduced or proposed to introduce similar laws. While pretending to enhance transparency and protect the nation, these laws can entrench power by undermining critical news outlets.

## Under surveillance

Cases of unlawful surveillance of journalists were reported in 2025, notably in Italy and Serbia, despite the outrage that previous revelations, in particular the Pegasus Project,<sup>17</sup> had provoked. Most alerts on this issue have received insufficiently detailed government replies. Spyware constitutes a serious intrusion into journalists’ communications, especially with their confidential sources. The mere threat of their existence creates an atmosphere of mistrust and fear which undermines watchdog and investigative journalism. The European Media Freedom Act, which came into full force in August 2025 in the EU, explicitly prohibits the use of spyware against journalists, although concerns remain related to the scope of the national security exemptions available to member states.

In Russia, the intrusive monitoring of the Internet under the pretext of fighting extremism further expanded state surveillance over online activity. Alerts on traditional “trench-coat” style surveillance, allegedly by national intelligence agencies, as well as on the unjustified recourse to investigatory powers, have been posted on Hungary and Romania.

*Russia and Belarus have weaponised international police cooperation to target journalists in exile.*

## Transnational repression

Transnational repression is not a new phenomenon as journalists, and not only exiles, have been targeted for decades by foreign states. These practices have involved murders, threats, assaults, online stalking, surveillance and cross border legal actions. According to a European Parliament report,<sup>18</sup> Russia and Belarus, who share a database of wanted suspects, have weaponised international police cooperation, via Interpol’s “red notices”<sup>19</sup> and direct extradition requests. They have multiplied criminal prosecutions and arrests in absentia of journalists

15. Audinet, Maxime (2024), “Un média d’influence d’État. Enquête sur la chaîne russe RT”, Institut national de l’audiovisuel, Paris, <https://www.ina.fr/ina-editions/un-media-d-influence-d-etat>
16. Audinet, Maxime (2025), “Travailler sur la Russie, comme sur d’autres Etats autoritaires ou aux tendances illibérales, expose nombre de chercheurs à “des procédures-bâillons”, *Le Monde*, [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2025/03/11/travailler-sur-la-russie-comme-sur-d-autres-etats-autoritaires-ou-aux-tendances-illiberales-expose-nombre-de-chercheurs-a-des-procedures-baillons\\_6579247\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2025/03/11/travailler-sur-la-russie-comme-sur-d-autres-etats-autoritaires-ou-aux-tendances-illiberales-expose-nombre-de-chercheurs-a-des-procedures-baillons_6579247_3232.html)
17. Forbidden Stories (2021), “About the Pegasus Project: Global Democracy under Cyber Attack”, <https://forbiddenstories.org/about-the-pegasus-project/>
18. European Parliament (2025), “MEPs warn of increasing repression of human rights activists across borders”, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20251110IPR31337/meps-warn-of-increasing-repression-of-human-rights-activists-across-borders>
19. Alert “SOTA Journalists in Exile Pyotr Ivanov and Ruslan Terekhov Face Criminal Charges”, <https://go.coe.int/ssVgH>

in exile on trumped-up charges. They have frozen their bank accounts or put pressure on their families back home. Their aim is to discredit exiled journalists and ruin their personal and professional life by isolating them from sources, who fear harsh official retribution, or by exposing them to legal uncertainties when travelling.

*At least 1 500 Russian journalists from nearly 70 media outlets have moved abroad.*

■ Exile media are a thorn in the side of repressive regimes. “At least 1 500 journalists working for nearly 70 media outlets have moved abroad and they are a stronghold of anti-Putin resistance”, writes *Le Monde*.<sup>20</sup> And, contrary to the Kremlin’s media mouthpieces, they enjoy a high level of credibility. From their foreign bases they provide a significant part of the Russian and international public with independent information, partly thanks to press freedom groups’ help in providing mirror sites or free access to satellite packages.<sup>21</sup> “These free media let us know what’s going on in Russia”,<sup>22</sup> says Jerzy Pomianowski, director of the European Endowment for Democracy.

■ These exiled media are more needed than ever as the U.S. international broadcasting network has been heavily hurt by the Trump administration’s funding cuts. Some exiled journalists have also faced mistrust and incomprehension in their host countries. “Despite the lofty speeches from political leaders”, said Russian exiled lawyer Galina Arapova, “exiled journalists receive little financial assistance but face numerous bureaucratic hurdles”,<sup>23</sup> like uncertainty over visa extensions. In October, aware of these difficulties the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe launched a platform for dialogue with Russian democratic forces in exile.<sup>24</sup>



*Côte (Canada) / Cartooning for Peace*

## Global assault on journalism

■ Two major “out of area” factors have impacted European journalism. The war in Gaza has posed severe challenges for many newsrooms as they were accused of bias, at the risk of self-censoring their reporting. Journalists have been threatened by mail<sup>25</sup> or online amid a sharp rise of antisemitism and islamophobia.<sup>26</sup> International

20. Quénelle, Benjamin (2025), “Russian media in exile: A stronghold of anti-Kremlin resistance”, *Le Monde*, [https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2025/03/23/russian-media-in-exile-a-stronghold-of-anti-kremlin-resistance\\_6739431\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2025/03/23/russian-media-in-exile-a-stronghold-of-anti-kremlin-resistance_6739431_4.html)
21. RSF (2022), “RSF creates “mirror” of leading Russian exile news site blocked by Kremlin”, <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-creates-mirror-leading-russian-exile-news-site-blocked-kremlin>
22. Quoted in Benjamin Quénelle, op.cit.
23. Ibid
24. Parliamentary Assembly (2025), “PACE creates a “platform for dialogue” with exiled Russian democratic forces”, <https://pace.coe.int/en/news/10042/pace-creates-a-platform-for-dialogue-with-exiled-russian-democratic-forces>
25. Alert “French Journalist Martin Saussard Threatened in Anonymous Letter”, <https://go.coe.int/FXYhU>
26. European Parliament briefing (2024), “Fighting the rise in antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred”, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/agenda/briefing/2024-02-05/8/fighting-the-rise-in-antisemitism-and-anti-muslim-hatred>

media continued to be banned from entering the Gaza enclave apart from embeds with the Israel Defence Forces (IDF).<sup>27</sup> As a result, they, as well as audiences across the world, remained dependent on extremely vulnerable Gaza-based Palestinian journalists working in conditions of constant danger. An unprecedented number of these journalists have been killed since 7 October 2023, highlighting the extreme risks faced by reporters working in Gaza.

■ The return of Donald Trump to the White House also had significant consequences for the European news eco-system. Some of Trump's Executive Orders are still being contested in court but the gutting of the U.S. Agency for Global Media threatens to toll the death knell for *Voice of America* (VOA) and RFE/RL. Both had been playing a particularly active role in reporting on authoritarianism in a number of Council of Europe countries, and in Russia and Belarus. The Hungarian language service of RFE/RL closed in November 2025 following a visit of Prime Minister Orbán to the White House. Besides, the cutting of USAID grants and uncertainties on the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) had a negative impact on independent media and press freedom projects in the region.

### *The weakening of VOA and RFE/RL has left a major gap in reporting on authoritarianism.*

■ Cuts to USAID funding have been documented across Europe. A survey of media outlets in exile conducted by the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) showed that “6 out of 30 of the surveyed media outlets and media organisations reported a complete lack of funding due to the current freeze of funds, which may lead to a complete cessation of these outlets due to the inability to pay employees”.<sup>28</sup> This raises significant concerns regarding the sustainability of media, especially those working in exile or in sensitive conditions, as replacement funds are increasingly hard to secure. “And it is not just media organisations that have been devastated by these cuts”, wrote a coalition of press freedom and media assistance groups. “Associated support organisations, such as unions, training institutions, legal services, and advocacy bodies, have also been severely impacted”.<sup>29</sup>

■ Figures with a track record of undermining press freedom rejoiced at these U.S. moves. “This is an awesome decision by Trump”, said Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief of the RT network and a vocal cheerleader of Putin and the invasion of Ukraine. “We couldn't shut them down, unfortunately, but America did so itself”.<sup>30</sup> These cuts are expected to silence independent voices across the “autocrats' axis”. They threaten to undercut watchdog journalism, which plays a crucial role in exposing abuses, corruption or war crimes. They may also weaken anti-disinformation projects and widen the space for Foreign Information and Manipulation Interference operations (FIMI). “Shuttering VOA news bureaus and U.S. transmission stations is a win for Putin, Xi and dictators around the world,” Senator Jeanne Shaheen, a senior member of the Foreign Relations Committee, said in March.<sup>31</sup> The Global Forum for Media Development urgently called on philanthropies, governments and international institutions to fill in the gaps.<sup>32</sup> In May, the European Commission announced that it was providing €5.5 million to RFE/RL. Individual EU members, among them Sweden and the Netherlands, contributed funds to the station.<sup>33</sup>

27. United Nations (2025), “Gaza Conflict Deadliest for Journalists in Decades”, Secretary-General Says in Message to International Media Seminar on Peace in Middle East”, <https://press.un.org/en/2025/sgsm22936.doc.htm>

28. Free Press Unlimited (2025), “Trump's foreign aid freeze disastrous for independent media worldwide”, <https://www.freepressunlimited.org/en/current/trumps-foreign-aid-freeze-disastrous-independent-media-worldwide>

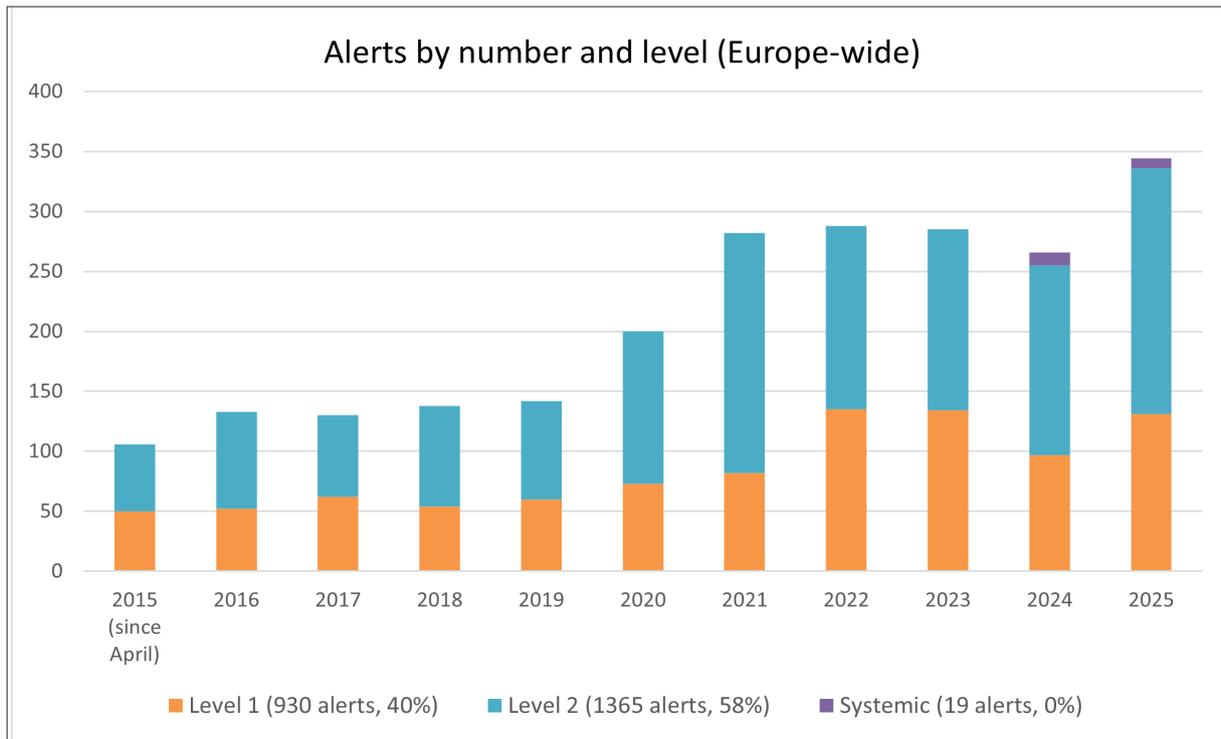
29. BBC (2025), “Crisis in journalism. The Impact of the US Government Funding Cuts on Global Media”, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/press-release/journalism-in-crisis-report>

30. Kozlov, Piotr (2025), “Today We Celebrate: Kremlin and Russian Propaganda Rejoice as Trump Guts RFE/RL”, *Moscow Times*, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/03/18/today-we-celebrate-kremlin-and-russian-propaganda-rejoice-as-trump-guts-rferl-voa-a88393>

31. X post published by Senate Foreign Relations Committee (2025), <https://x.com/SFRCdems/status/1996272370248511809>

32. Candid/Philanthropy News Digest (2025), “USAID funding cuts put foreign, independent newsrooms in jeopardy”, <https://philanthropynewsdigest.org/news/usa-id-funding-cuts-put-foreign-independent-newsrooms-in-jeopardy>

33. Government Offices of Sweden (2025), “SEK 20 million in support to Radio Free Europe”, <https://www.government.se/press-releases/2025/05/sek-20-million-in-support-to-radio-free-europe/>; “Netherlands supports Radio Free Europe with donation of €3 million”, <https://www.broadbandtvnews.com/2025/06/04/netherlands-supports-radio-free-europe-with-donation-of-e3-million/>



Source: Council of Europe Safety of Journalists Platform

## Media capture

■ In Hungary, government-friendly media groups have bought up major news outlets ahead of what is expected to be a bitterly fought parliamentary election in 2026. This acquisition added another layer in a tightly held system which already allows the ruling party to control the regulatory agencies, public service media and public advertising resources.

■ In her trailblazing book “The New Censorship”, Ayala Panievsky calls such captured media “anti-media”. “If journalism is ideally about informing the public, scrutinising the powerful and providing a space for public debate, anti-media media is about obfuscating and concealing information, providing disinformation and propaganda, and spreading hate speech and incitement”, she writes.<sup>34</sup> These “anti-media media” have contributed to the erosion of the norms that underpin European democracies.

■ Growing media concentration exacerbates journalists’ vulnerability. Investments in media ventures by financial and interest groups unrelated to journalism are often part of the media capture process. This development highlights the crucial need for strict transparency norms on media ownership, as required by the European Media Freedom Act.<sup>35</sup> Cases of dismissals, such as in Serbia,<sup>36</sup> Italy<sup>37</sup> and in Switzerland,<sup>38</sup> have illustrated the threats for journalists’ independence not just from external pressures but from their own hierarchy and owners.

■ Journalists had also to cope with the dominance of Big Tech platforms and social media as these politically well-connected digital behemoths continued to corner advertising resources and absorb the public’s attention away from the media. Compounding the challenge to safeguard news integrity, major platforms, co-opted by the Trump administration’s “free speech” crusade, backtracked from their commitment to fact-checking and transparent content moderation at the risk of overwhelming the news eco-system with mis- and disinformation boosted by artificial intelligence.

*Big Tech dominance and weakened platform safeguards are undermining the integrity of the news ecosystem.*

34. Panievsky, Ayala (2025), “The New Censorship. How The War on The Media Is Taking Us Down”, Footnote Press, London, p. 156.  
 35. Centre for Media Pluralism and Freedom (2024), “Ownership transparency obligations under Article 6 of the European Media Freedom Act: opportunities and challenges”, <https://cmpf.eui.eu/ownership-transparency-obligations-under-article-6-of-the-european-media-freedom-act-opportunities-and-challenges/>  
 36. Alert “Several Journalists Dismissed after Expressing Support for Student Protests”, <https://go.coe.int/QCWxy>  
 37. Alert “Journalist Gabriele Nunziati Fired Over Question to EU Official on Gaza”, <https://go.coe.int/07JVk>  
 38. Alert “Both ProtestInfo Journalists Dismissed Amid Ongoing Investigation”, <https://go.coe.int/my04Z>

■ To protect their independence, news organisations would be well-advised, writes media scholar Mathias Felipe de Lima Santos, “to actively participate in policy discussions shaping the future of the news-tech relationship”.<sup>39</sup>

## Public service media in the crosshairs

■ Strong, well-funded, independent and pluralistic public service media (PSM) are considered an essential element in a democratic media system. Stronger PSM correlates with lower polarisation, while high polarisation is linked to underfunded PSM. In September 2025, Platform partners issued a set of alerts focusing on structural threats to public service media in six Council of Europe member states: Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Hungary, Slovakia and Türkiye. They also voiced concern over proposed funding cuts and budget freezes hitting public service media in Poland, Lithuania and Switzerland. But the threats extend beyond these states as in many countries, politicians and pundits seek to discredit, marginalise, defund or privatise PSM.

■ This hostility to PSM contradicts a key provision of the European Media Freedom Act, which requires safeguards against political interference in their governance and mandates stable, adequate, and predictable funding. The goal of these attacks is the same: “to erode trust in a key pillar of information alongside the independent press (...). Their promise is to strangle public media corporations - many of them highly prestigious globally - or to bring them under their control”,<sup>40</sup> write Quino Petit and Ignazio Fariza in *El Pais*. This face-off has been particularly rough in some countries where the PSM enjoy high levels of trust. In November, the controversy about a misleading editing of Donald Trump’s speech before the assault on the Capitol on 6 January 2021 led to the resignation of the BBC’s top executives and to a subsequent ten-billion-dollar lawsuit by Donald Trump.<sup>41</sup> In France, the National Assembly set up a Commission of investigation on “the neutrality, the functioning and the funding of public broadcasting”, an initiative which was characterised by French journalist Denis Lafay as one more “step in the delegitimisation of public broadcasting”.<sup>42</sup>

## A profession in dire straits

■ These strategies surf on the precarious economic state of many news organisations and on the challenging conditions (poor pay, work stress, mental health,<sup>43</sup> unemployment, online and offline harassment and violence) which many journalists, in particular freelancers, must endure as part of their work. According to the latest study of the Media Pluralism Monitor,<sup>44</sup> only two European countries out of the 34 analysed offer good working conditions for journalists. The situation is considered so worrying that in December for the first time in its history, the European Economic and Social Committee, which brings together employers, trade unions and civil society, adopted a report on the working conditions of journalists.<sup>45</sup> It called on the European Commission to put forward an ambitious package with legislation and investments to ensure quality jobs in the media sector.

39. Felipe de Lima Santos, Mathias (2024), “Big tech is painting itself as journalism’s saviour. We should tread carefully”, *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/big-tech-is-painting-itself-as-journalisms-saviour-we-should-tread-carefully-236692>

40. Petit, Quino and Ignazio Fariza (2025), “The BBC is no exception: Far-right forces are targeting European public broadcasters”, *El Pais*, <https://english.elpais.com/international/2025-12-09/the-bbc-is-no-exception-far-right-forces-are-targeting-european-public-broadcasters.html>

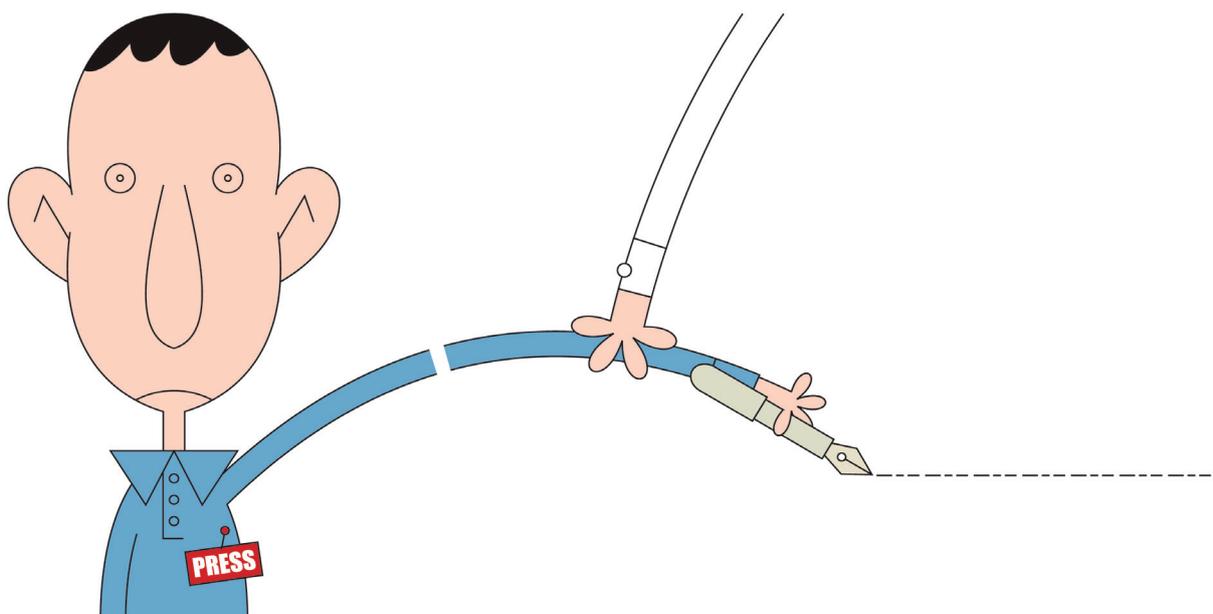
41. Nanji, Noor (2025), “BBC apologises to Trump over Panorama edit but refuses to pay compensation”, *BBC News*, 14 November 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c874nw4g2zzo>

42. Lafay, Denis (2025) “L’instrumentalisation ne fait aucun doute : la commission d’enquête parlementaire sur l’audiovisuel public mutera en tribunal”, *Le Nouvel Obs*, <https://www.nouvelobs.com/opinions/20251125.OBS110087/l-instrumentalisation-ne-fait-aucun-doute-la-commission-d-enquete-parlementaire-sur-l-audiovisuel-public-mutera-en-tribunal.html>

43. Emma Thomasson, Emma (2025), “Stronger Minds, Stronger Media: Why protecting journalists’ mental health is essential for journalism’s future”, *EFJ/The Self-Investigation*, 9 October 2025, [https://europeanjournalists.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/SUJ\\_Stronger-Minds-Stronger-Media\\_10.2025-1\\_compressed-1.pdf](https://europeanjournalists.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/SUJ_Stronger-Minds-Stronger-Media_10.2025-1_compressed-1.pdf)

44. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom, <https://cmpf.eui.eu/projects-cmpf/media-pluralism-monitor/>

45. EESC (2025), “Labour rights for journalists and media professionals as a safeguard for independence and truthful information”, in *Opinions*, <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/labour-rights-journalists-and-media-professionals-safeguard-independence-and-truthful-information>



Cristina (Portugal) / Cartooning for Peace

## A new democratic pact for Europe

Both the Council of Europe and the European Union are expected to represent and vouch for a democratic model based on the rule of law, human rights and press freedom. As the continent's leading human rights organisation, the Council of Europe has challenged the headwinds, announcing the launch of a New Democratic Pact for Europe to reaffirm its foundational values. In 2025, it deepened its Journalists Matter campaign, urged member states to adopt press safety initiatives and worked on the implementation of the 2024 anti-SLAPP recommendation. Its Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI) kept assuming its key standard-setting role in supporting freedom of expression – online and offline. Several Council of Europe member states (Estonia, Luxembourg, the UK, Norway, Spain, amongst others) also took steps to strengthen journalist safety.

Likewise, the European Commission confirmed its determination to make press freedom a priority. In the summer it committed itself to significantly increase financial support for independent journalism and media projects over the next seven-year Multi-Annual Financial Framework (2028-2034).<sup>46</sup> In November, it announced the European Democracy Shield aimed at reinforcing democratic institutions, including safeguarding the integrity of the information space, strengthening democratic institutions and civil society and supporting resilient media ecosystems. It also called for the effective implementation of EMFA and of the anti-SLAPP directive by its member states.

*Europe has reaffirmed its commitment to press freedom, but implementation remains the real test.*

## A litmus test for Europe

If the European institutions still talk the talk, will they walk the walk? Some point at hurdles ahead. "Europe's Democracy Shield is a noble idea without a sword", noted media pundit Peter Vandermeersch, before describing its provisions as "All excellent ideas, if they were enforceable".<sup>47</sup> Besides, will the EU have the backbone to stand up to the Trump administration's pressures? In late November, the EU Commissioner for Competition, Teresa

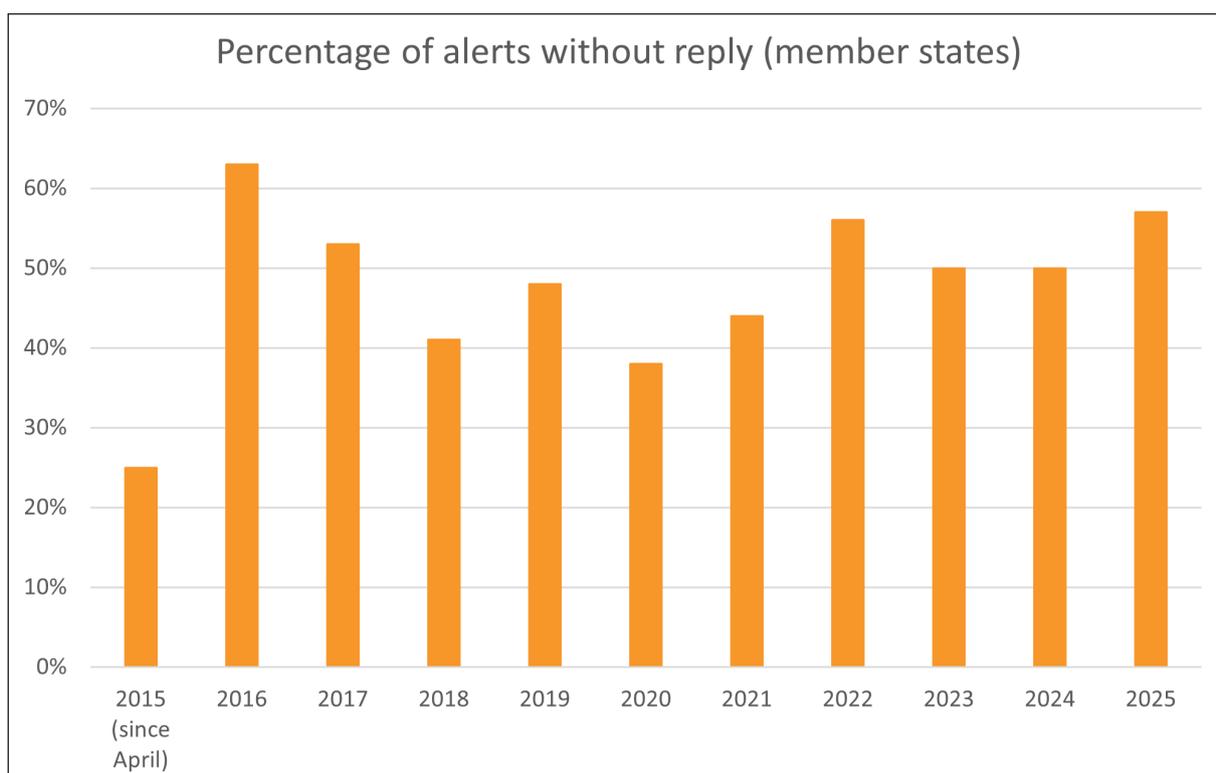
46. Journalism Funders Forum (2025), "The €3.2 Billion Proposal: How the EU Plans to Support Journalism", <https://journalismfundersforum.com/the-e3-2-billion-proposal-how-the-eu-plans-to-support-journalism/>

47. Vandermeersch, Peter (2025), "Press and Democracy", <https://pressanddemocracy.substack.com/>

Ribera,<sup>48</sup> accused Washington of trying to strong-arm the EU into watering down its tech rulebook. After the social media platform X was fined by the EU in December, Elon Musk, wrote Adam Satariano and Kate Conger, was “testing regulators’ resolve to enforce laws designed to improve transparency and prevent the spread of illicit content. (...). The split leaves European authorities wrestling with how aggressively they should enforce their laws, especially against a company with powerful allies in the White House.”<sup>49</sup>

■ The centre-right European People’s Party, together with some MEPs from Renew Europe and the Socialists, allied with national conservatives and the far right in the European Parliament have pushed through cutbacks on green reporting rules for companies. Could such tactics be deployed to undermine the EMFA or the DSA, legislation partly conceived to confront Urban-style illiberalism and Big Tech’s libertarianism?

■ In 2026, the Platform partners will closely monitor member states’ responses to alerts. To date, fewer than half of alerts have received a reply, reinforcing calls for stronger state engagement to ensure effective remedies for those concerned.



Source: Council of Europe Safety of Journalists Platform

## A bias for press freedom

■ Faced with a transnational and concerted strategy openly aimed at subverting, if not burying, liberal democracy, journalists are increasingly challenged on their capacity to provide a balanced and insightful analysis on what is going on, so that citizens, as expressed in a *Foreign Affairs* essay, may avoid “the twin dangers of complacency and fatalism”. “On the one hand, underestimating the threat posed to democracy (...) enables authoritarianism by encouraging inaction in the face of systematic abuse of power. On the other hand, overestimating the impact of authoritarianism (...) discourages the citizen actions required to defeat autocrats at the ballot box.”<sup>50</sup> Journalists are also called upon to define themselves: should they be mere chroniclers of the democratic demise under the guise of professional neutrality or the vanguard of a form of civic-oriented journalism that openly declares its bias for democracy?

48. Fortuna, Gerardo (2025), “Ribera lashes out at US ‘blackmail’”, Politico Brussels Playbook, <https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/brussels-playbook/ribera-lashes-out-at-us-blackmail/>

49. Satariano, Adam and Kate Conger (2025), “Elon Musk Taunts Europe and Tests Willingness to Enforce Online Laws”, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/12/technology/elon-musk-europe.html>

50. Levitsky, Stecen, Lucan A. Way, and Daniel Zubblatt (2026), “What Can Reverse Democratic Decline?”, *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/american-authoritarianism-levitsky-way-zublatt>

■ The Platform partners have consistently advocated for the rights and freedoms that autocratic rulers and illiberal movements have been trying to curb. They stand for a doctrine of journalism anchored in the values, norms and principles of the European Convention on Human Rights and the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights. This commitment is a matter of principle but also a recognition of journalists' essential interests. "If democracy is in danger, a free press is too", wrote former *Washington Post* executive editor Martin Baron on World News Day 2025. "An independent press cannot survive without a democracy and there has never been a democracy without a media that is free and independent".<sup>51</sup>



Angelo Lopez (United States) / Cartooning for Peace

51. Baron, Martin (2025), "Global lessons from a press in peril", World News Day, <https://worldnewsday.org/global-lessons-from-a-press-in-peril/>

# Safety, pressure and vulnerability of journalists

## Journalism in the shadow of Russia's war on Ukraine

■ As Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine enters its fifth year, media workers continue to operate under sustained pressure and face severe threats to their safety. Since the beginning of the invasion, 21 media workers have been killed while covering the war or because of their work.

■ In 2025, four media workers, French photojournalist Antoni Lallican and Ukrainian journalists Olena Hramova, Yevhen Karmazin, and Tetyana Kulyk, were killed in Russian drone strikes. On 13 October 2025, a crew with the German media group *WELT*, composed of local producer Ivan Zakharenko, reporter Ibrahim Naber and freelance camera operator Viktor Lysenko, came under attack of a Russian drone in the Dnipropetrovsk region while filming a report about a Ukrainian mobile air defence unit. Four more alerts were published by the Platform concerning journalists who came under direct fire, some sustaining serious injuries. At least six journalists were wounded after coming under direct Russian fire in 2025.

■ Following the death of Ukrainian journalist Viktoriia Roshchyna, Ukrainian and international civil society have amplified their concerns about the safety of journalists in Ukraine's regions under Russian occupation. Roshchyna had crossed into Ukraine's Russian-occupied territories to pierce the news blockade and investigate the fate of "ghost prisoners", Ukrainians illegally detained by Russia. The investigative outlet *Forbidden Stories* revealed that Viktoriia Roshchyna's body, which was returned to the Ukrainian authorities in February 2025, bore signs of torture and had several organs missing, suggesting an attempt to conceal the journalist's cause of death.<sup>52</sup>

### *At least 26 Ukrainian journalists remain in Russian captivity.*

■ Beyond the risks faced by media workers on the front lines, at least 26 Ukrainian journalists remain in Russian captivity.<sup>53</sup> Many are from Russian-occupied Crimea and belong to the Crimean Tatar community and are serving lengthy prison sentences on false charges, including "terrorism", "treason" or "sabotage". Others were detained following Russia's occupation of Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts.

■ This includes a group of young citizen journalists from Melitopol arrested in 2023 on accusations of preparing terrorist acts: on 23 October 2025, Yana Suvorova, a 21-year-old administrator of the Telegram channel *Melitopol tse Ukraina*, was sentenced by a Russian court to 14 years in prison. On 2 September 2025, RIA-Melitopol journalist Heorhiy Levchenko received 16 years, while Vladyslav Hershon (also from Telegram channel *Melitopol tse Ukraina*) was sentenced to 15 years.<sup>54</sup>

■ In 2025, Ukraine was able to free three journalists who had been unlawfully detained and imprisoned in Russia: Vladyslav Yesypenko, Dmytro Khyliuk and Mark Kaliush. They testified that Ukrainian media workers are subjected to ill-treatment and torture.

52. "Russia's 'Ghost Detainees': The Investigation That Cost Viktoriia Roshchyna Her Life", *Forbidden Stories*, <https://forbiddenstories.org/russia-detainees-investigation-viktorii-roshchyna/>

53. See at <https://fom.coe.int/en/listejournalistes/detentions?idPays=11709594>

54. Alert "Ukrainian Journalists Heorhiy Levchenko and Anastasiya Glukhovska Missing since Russian Detention", <https://go.coe.int/Nullg>

■ On 9 July 2025, the European Court of Human Rights held Russia responsible for widespread human rights violations linked to the conflict in Ukraine. The Grand Chamber unanimously found that between 11 May 2014, when the conflict began in Donetsk and Luhansk regions following the arrival of pro-Russian armed groups, and 16 September 2022, when Russia ceased being a party to the Convention, there were systematic violations of multiple provisions of the Convention, notably as a result of war censorship laws, which have been used to arrest journalists.<sup>55</sup>

■ Russian war censorship laws which criminalise “discrediting” the Russian Armed Forces and spreading “false information”, remain among the most potent instruments for silencing journalists and coverage of the war in Ukraine. As of the end of 2025, at least 13 journalists are serving prison sentences under these articles, while 36 are serving time for “terrorism” and “extremism”-related crimes, as well as “high treason”. Russian authorities also escalated their crackdown on exiled media workers who fled the country after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

## Risks to journalists reporting on protests

■ Violence, harassment and intimidation against journalists reporting on protests has been widely documented across the entire Council of Europe region. Street protests - on the war in Gaza, the climate crisis, corruption, contested elections or attacks on the rule of law - represented significant challenges for reporters. In 2025, alerts related to attacks during protests were recorded in at least a quarter of the states covered by the Platform. In 2025, the Platform recorded the highest levels of physical attacks on journalists during protests in Georgia, Serbia and Türkiye.

■ After the Turkish government banned public gatherings following the arrest of Istanbul Mayor and presidential candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu, at least 12 journalists<sup>56</sup> were physically assaulted by police between 21 and 23 March 2025, while on 24 March, at least 11 journalists<sup>57</sup> were detained during early morning raids on their homes. Turkish authorities have detained and questioned journalists İsmail Saymaz<sup>58</sup> and Cengiz Oğlağı<sup>59</sup> over their reporting on protests in 2012 and 2013, despite the coverage dating back more than a decade.

■ In February, in Georgia, journalists including Dea Mamiseishvili, Diana Chirgadze, George Patariaia, Vakho Kareli and Nata Uridia were attacked by police, who also attempted to block access and damage equipment to prevent reporting. The incidents were not limited to rank-and-file officers: a deputy director of the police department overseeing riot police reportedly grabbed the phone of *TV Pirveli* reporter Khatia Samkharadze.<sup>60</sup> Similar alerts were issued throughout the year, including in September<sup>61</sup> and October.<sup>62</sup> In September, the editor of *Publika* was attacked by a member of the ruling party.<sup>63</sup>

### *Journalists in Serbia faced repeated assaults by police and ruling party supporters during protests.*

■ In Serbia, journalists were attacked by police officers and the ruling party’s supporters during protests that followed the fatal canopy collapse in the Novi Sad railway station in November 2024. In March 2025, BIRN journalist Sasa Dragojlo was assaulted during a protest by a supporter of the ruling party.<sup>64</sup> On 28 June 2025, several journalists<sup>65</sup> covering a protest in Belgrade were assaulted by police officers, despite having identified themselves as members of the press. As a result of the unprecedented scale of the physical risks to journalists, the independent journalist union has taken the initiative to distribute safety equipment.<sup>66</sup>

55. Council of Europe Office in Ukraine (2025), “The ECHR holds Russia accountable for widespread abuses of human rights arising from the conflict in Ukraine since 2014, including the downing of flight MH17”, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/kyiv/-/the-echr-holds-russia-accountable-for-widespread-abuses-of-human-rights-arising-from-the-conflict-in-ukraine-since-2014-including-the-downing-of-flight-mh17>

56. Alert “At Least 12 Journalists Physically Assaulted by Police While Covering Demonstrations”, <https://go.coe.int/wL2g0>

57. Alert “At Least Eleven Journalists Detained for Covering Protests against Istanbul Mayor’s Arrest”, <https://go.coe.int/L0rIP>

58. Alert “Turkish Journalist İsmail Saymaz under House Arrest for 2013 Coverage of Gezi Park Protests”, <https://go.coe.int/3GMNS>

59. Alert “Former DIHA Journalist Cengiz Oğlağı in Custody Over Protest Coverage”, <https://go.coe.int/Frt1I>

60. Alert “Police Assaults, Obstructs, Harasses Georgian Journalists Covering Renewed Protests”, <https://go.coe.int/2B6ol>

61. Alert “Georgian Dream Supporters Assault and Obstruct Journalists”, <https://go.coe.int/KtWRK>

62. Alert “Journalists Covering Election Day Tbilisi Protests Attacked”, <https://go.coe.int/YJKzx>

63. Alert “Georgian Dream Supporters Assault and Obstruct Journalists”, <https://go.coe.int/KtWRK>

64. Alert “BIRN Journalist Sasa Dragojlo Assaulted While Covering Protest in Belgrade”, <https://go.coe.int/OTwSd>

65. Alert “Police Assault and Injure Journalists Covering Protest in Belgrade”, <https://go.coe.int/jKgyy>

66. Alert “Smear Campaign Against Independent Journalists Association of Serbia”, <https://go.coe.int/fwX7U>

■ Attacks on journalists documenting protests have also been recorded in Belgium,<sup>67</sup> Bulgaria,<sup>68</sup> Croatia,<sup>69</sup> Cyprus,<sup>70</sup> France,<sup>71</sup> Greece<sup>72</sup> and Romania.<sup>73</sup>

■ Member states have increasingly taken steps to prevent international journalists from covering protests. Georgian authorities denied entry to Italian journalist Giacomo Ferrara and Swiss freelance photojournalist Gregor Sommer after they refused to pay fines for allegedly “blocking the road” while covering earlier protests.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, journalists from POP TV, RTL and *Slobodna Dalmacija* were detained at the Serbian border before being denied entry.<sup>75</sup>

■ Journalists speaking out in defence of their colleagues may also draw the authorities’ ire. In Georgia, journalist Vasil Ivanov-Chikovani, host of Moambe, the main news programme of the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB), was suspended and subsequently dismissed in April 2025.<sup>76</sup> After having expressed his solidarity with his jailed colleague Mzia Amaglobeli, he had called out the absence of accountability for the police’s “excessive use of force against journalists”. Similar threats have been documented in Serbia, as journalists were dismissed after showing their solidarity with protesters.<sup>77</sup>

■ Governments must ensure that journalists can report safely on protests through clear protection protocols, properly trained police forces and independent investigations into all attacks, regardless of the perpetrator. These measures should be developed with journalists and media organisations to ensure credibility and impact. The Council of Europe must move from standards to enforcement - reinforcing compliance with Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 on the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists, backing dedicated safety programmes and maintaining active follow-up on cases involving threats or violence against journalists.

## Detentions, arrests and criminal prosecution

■ In 2025, the Platform recorded 65 new alerts related to the detention of journalists across Europe. At the end of 2025, 148 journalists were recorded in detention in the following European countries: Russia (58, including journalists detained by the Russian authorities in the occupied territories of Ukraine), Azerbaijan (36), Belarus (27), Türkiye (24), Armenia (2) and Georgia (1). (See table of journalists and other media workers in detention at the end of this section)

*Journalist detentions in Europe remained concentrated in a handful of countries, with 65 new cases recorded in 2025.*

■ This detention numbers reflect not only the scale of repression in a small number of countries, but also the systematic use of deprivation of liberty as a tool of media control. Arrests, pre-trial detention and criminal prosecution are increasingly deployed to silence critical reporting, deter coverage of protests and major public events and exhaust journalists and newsrooms through prolonged legal pressure. In many cases, charges rely on broadly framed offences - such as terrorism, extremism, national security or public order - which allow authorities wide discretion and limit judicial oversight.

■ Turkish authorities arrested and detained at least 24 journalists and media professionals during the year, many on terrorism-related charges. Swedish journalist Joakim Medin was detained upon arrival at Istanbul Airport on 27 March 2025 and imprisoned the following day.<sup>78</sup> Medin had travelled to Türkiye to cover the protests against the arrest of Istanbul Mayor and presidential candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu. A few days later, on 30 March 2025, the journalist was transferred to the high-security Marmara Prison in Silivri, on the outskirts of Istanbul. He was accused of “belonging to an armed terrorist organisation”, “insulting the president” and “spreading terrorist

67. Alert “Freelance Journalist Erika Di Benedetto Assaulted by Police while Covering a Protest”, <https://go.coe.int/uvDJa>

68. Alert “NOVA TV Crew Attacked while Covering Protest in Sopot”, <https://go.coe.int/IHTjE>

69. Alert “Faktograf Journalist Melita Vrsaljko Assaulted while Covering Local Event”, <https://go.coe.int/KTBMM>

70. Alert “Dialogos Journalist Bisan Ibrahim Subjected to Police Violence While Covering Protest”, <https://go.coe.int/kd8LY>

71. Alert “Several Journalists Covering Nationwide Protests Obstructed by Law Enforcement”, <https://go.coe.int/78xuQ>

72. Alert “Reporters and Photojournalists Assaulted and Obstructed while Covering Protests”, <https://go.coe.int/4YJtd>

73. Alert “B1TV Camera Operator Attacked, Digi24 Reporter Threatened and Harassed by Protesters”, <https://go.coe.int/OZt2C>

74. Alert “Italian Journalist Giacomo Ferrara and Swiss Photojournalist Gregor Sommer Denied Entry to Georgia”, <https://go.coe.int/udHI9>

75. Alert “Journalists Reporting on Protests Denied Entry to Serbia”, <https://go.coe.int/6y9rl>

76. Alert “News Anchor Vasil Ivanov-Chikovani Suspended after Protesting Political Influence at Georgian Public Broadcaster”, <https://go.coe.int/VoQAx>

77. Alert “Several Journalists Dismissed after Expressing Support for Student Protests”, <https://go.coe.int/QCWXY>

78. Alert “Swedish Journalist Joakim Medin Detained on Terrorism Charges”, <https://go.coe.int/lxBam>

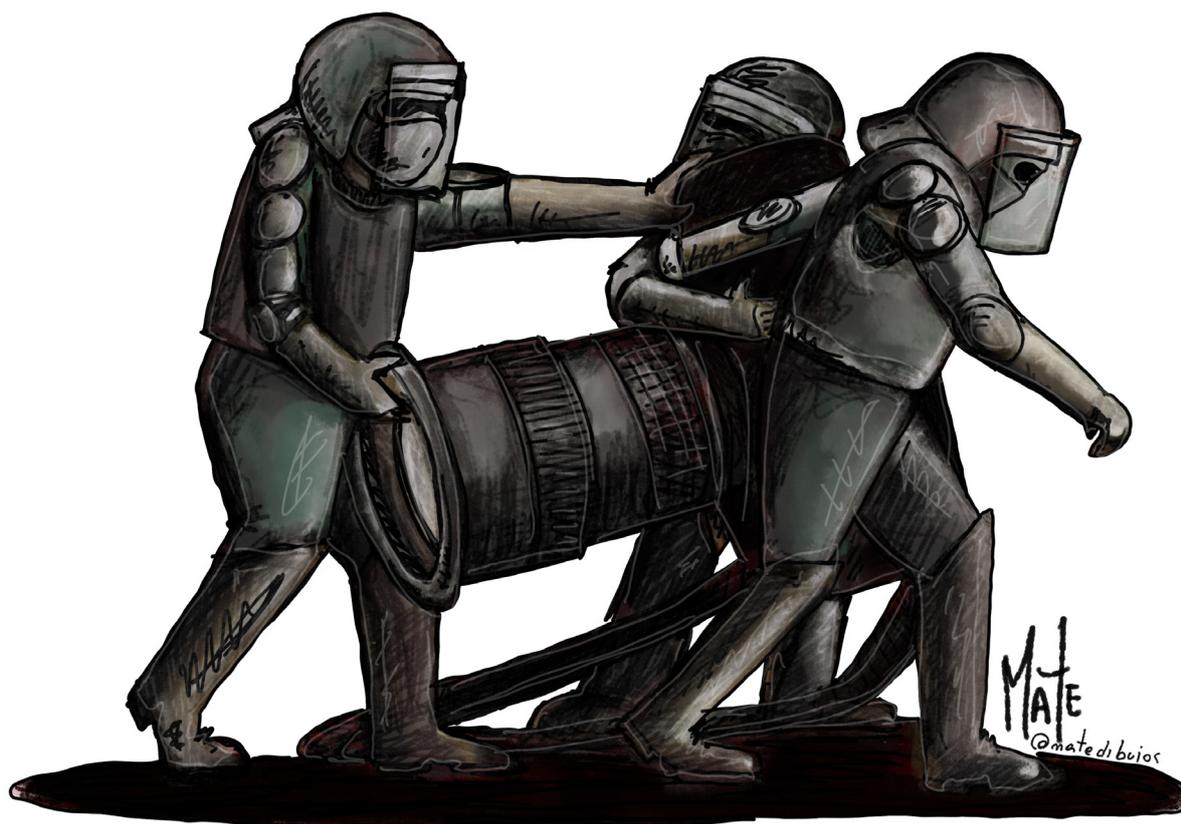
propaganda”<sup>79</sup> Following a sentence of eleven months and seven days in prison, Medin was released pending trial on 16 May 2025 and left for Sweden on the same day.

■ In 2025, the Platform recorded five other alerts related to the detention of journalists covering public protests. One case involves Can Öztürk, a T24 reporter arrested while reporting on a student protest at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul.<sup>80</sup> This follows the earlier police raid on the home of freelance journalist and TV commentator İsmail Saymaz.

■ In Georgia, Guram Murvanidze, a camera operator and photographer for the media outlet *Batumelebi*, was detained on administrative charges in Batumi.<sup>81</sup> He had been covering protests and social unrest. Authorities subsequently transferred Murvanidze to the Poti detention centre and opened an investigation into alleged “petty hooliganism” and “disobeying a lawful police order”.

■ In January 2025, Mzia Amaglobeli, journalist and co-founder of the independent media outlets *Batumelebi* and *Netgazeti*, was arrested.<sup>82</sup> On 6 August 2025, the Batumi City Court found Amaglobeli guilty of “resisting, threatening, or using violence against a protector of public order or other representative of the authorities” and sentenced her to two years in prison. The verdict was upheld by the Kutaisi Court of Appeals on 18 November 2025. She is the first woman journalist to be imprisoned in Georgia since the country’s independence in 1991. (See box on Mzia Amaglobeli in the section on Georgia)

■ At the end of 2025, Armenia was recorded for the first time on the Platform with journalists or other media actors in detention, following the pre-trial detention of podcasters Vazgen Saghatelyan and Narek Samsonyan on hooliganism charges.<sup>83</sup>



Mate (Argentina) / Cartooning for Peace

79. RSF (2025), “Who is Joakim Medin, the Swedish journalist who could face over 27 years in Turkish prison?”, <https://rsf.org/en/who-joakim-medin-swedish-journalist-who-could-face-over-27-years-turkish-prison>

80. Alert “T24 Journalist Can Öztürk Detained while Covering Student Protest”, <https://go.coe.int/xRIBz>

81. Alert “Batumelebi Camera Operator Guram Murvanidze Detained on Administrative Charges”, <https://go.coe.int/hdpJt>

82. Alert “Batumelebi Founder and Director Mzia Amaglobeli Detained on Criminal Charges”, <https://go.coe.int/NmD9G>

83. Alert “Podcasters Detained on Hooliganism Charges; Journalist Briefly Detained; Antifake.am Equipment Seized”, <https://go.coe.int/1n1oV>

■ In Belarus, detention has become part of a cycle of repression rather than an exceptional measure. The release of some journalists in 2025 did not signal a relaxation of policy, but rather a revolving-door approach in which new arrests offset those released, keeping the overall level of repression high. Prolonged pre-trial detentions, repeated re-arrests, or the threat of renewed prosecution have created conditions in which journalists are effectively removed from public life even when not formally imprisoned. Taken together, these practices demonstrate a deliberate strategy to normalise detention as a means of censorship, with lasting consequences for press freedom and public debate.

### *A revolving-door strategy of arrests has entrenched journalist detention in Belarus.*

■ Five new detention alerts were logged in 2025 on Belarus. Many of these concerned accusations of “extremism”, a label frequently used by Belarusian authorities to discredit and attack independent media. One example is Kiryl Pazniak, who was detained in early September over his connection to a banned “extremist” YouTube channel, *Platforma 375*.<sup>84</sup> Pazniak hosted discussions between government and opposition supporters on *Platforma 375* until 2022. Pazniak was charged with extremism and placed in a pretrial detention centre.

■ In Russia, the regime persisted in curbing independent journalism and silencing all dissenting voices throughout the year. Several new cases were added to the Platform in 2025, citing charges such as “discrediting the Russian army”, “spreading false information”, “inciting extremism” and “justifying terrorism”.

■ On 20 March 2025, Sasha Alexandrova, a prominent independent journalist, was arrested by Russia’s Federal Security Service (FSB) and placed in pre-trial detention by a court in Yakutsk.<sup>85</sup> She faces multiple charges, including “inciting terrorism”, “justifying terrorist acts” and “disseminating terrorist propaganda”.

■ In another case, Ekaterina Barabash, a film critic for the media outlet *Republic*, was detained and charged for allegedly disseminating “knowingly false information” about the Russian armed forces.<sup>86</sup> Designated a “foreign agent” and placed under house arrest, she removed her electronic monitoring device and fled Russia via clandestine routes. Her exfiltration was coordinated by Reporters Without Borders, which announced her safe arrival in France in May 2025.

■ Azerbaijan now ranks as the leading jailer of journalists among the Council of Europe member states, and second in Europe, after Russia, with 36 held behind bars at the end of 2025. Farid Ismayilov of independent outlet *Toplum TV* has been detained since January 2025 on currency smuggling charges linked to alleged Western donor funding.<sup>87</sup> In February, three other journalists, Shamshad Agha,<sup>88</sup> Nurlan Gahramanli and Fatima Mövlamli,<sup>89</sup> were detained on similar charges. In May, prominent independent journalist Ulviyya Guliyeva (Ulviyya Ali) was detained,<sup>90</sup> following the December 2024 arrests of six journalists affiliated with *Meydan TV*. Ahmad Mammadli, founder of *Yoldash Media*, has also been detained since May 2025 on hooliganism and assault charges widely denounced as fabricated.<sup>91</sup>

■ The detention figures recorded in 2025 highlight the limits of voluntary compliance in the absence of sustained pressure. In states where detention is deliberately used to suppress journalism, stronger use of Council of Europe oversight, political follow-up and accountability mechanisms is required to ensure compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights.

84. Alert “Belarusian Journalist Kiryl Pazniak Detained on Extremism Charges”, <https://go.coe.int/px4is>

85. Alert “Journalist Sasha Alexandrova Arrested on Charges of ‘Terrorist Propaganda’”, <https://go.coe.int/nu13n>

86. Alert “Republic Journalist Ekaterina Barabash Under House Arrest for Disseminating ‘False Information’”, <https://go.coe.int/3mNuN>

87. Alert “Toplum TV Channel Offices in Baku Searched, Journalists Charged with Smuggling”, <https://go.coe.int/MHfpU>

88. Alert “Arqument.az Editor in Chief Shamshad Agha Detained in Baku”, <https://go.coe.int/PDLzB>

89. Alert “At Least Six Journalists and Media Workers Detained on Currency Smuggling Charges”, <https://go.coe.int/lm4L>

90. Alert “Two Independent Journalists Ulviyya Ali and Ahmad Mammadli Arrested in Azerbaijan”, <https://go.coe.int/eROdG>

91. Ibid

# Table. Journalists and other media actors in detention in Europe

(148 journalists and other media actors in detention)<sup>92</sup>

## Member states of the Council of Europe (89)

### Armenia (2)

Narek Samsonyan  
Vazgen Saghatelyan

### Azerbaijan (36)

Ahmad Mammadli	Farid Ismayilov	Nurlan Gahramanli
Akhmad Mukhtar	Farid Mehralizada	Osman Narimanoglu Rzayev
Akif Gurbanov	Fatima Mövlamli	Polad Aslanov
Alasgar Mammadli	Hafız Babali	Ramil Babayev
Ali Zeynal	Ibrahim Humbatov	Ramin Jabrayilzade
Arshad Ibrahimov	Ilkin Amrahov	Rashad Ramazanov
Aslan Gurbanov	Imran Aliyev	Sevinc Vaqifqizi
Aynur Elgunesh	Khayala Aghayeva	Shamshad Agha
Aysel Umudova	Mahammad Kekalov	Teymur Kerimov
Aytaj Ahmadova	Musfiq Cabbar	Ulvi Hasanli
Bahruz Samadov	Nargiz Absalamova	Ulviyya Ali
Elnara Gasimova	Natig Javadli	Vugar Mammadov

### Georgia (1)

Mzia Amaglobeli

### Türkiye (24)

Ahmet Metin Sekizkardeş	Emin Aydın	Mehmet Kamış
Ali Ahmet Böken	Enver Aysever	Merdan Yanardağ
Ali Barış Kurt	Erdal Süsem	Murat Çapan
Ali Ünal	Erol Zavar	Mustafa Gök
Can Taşkın	Gültekin Avcı	Mutlu Çölgeçen
Cengiz Oğlağı	Hatice Duman	Şeref Yılmaz
Cihan Berk	Hidayet Karaca	Ufuk Şanlı
Doğan Pehlivan	Mehmet Baransu	Ziya Ataman

<sup>92</sup> Detentions as of 31 December 2025. The updated list can be found on the Platform, <https://fom.coe.int/en/listejournalistes/detentions>

## Ukraine (territories temporarily occupied by Russia (26))

Amet Suleymanov	Maksym Rupchov	Server Mustafayev
Anastasiya Glukhovska	Marlen Asanov	Seyran Saliev
Asan Akhtemov	Oleksandr Malyshev	Timur Ibragimov
Aziz Azizov	Osman Arifmemetov	Vilen Temeryanov
Ernes Ametov	Remzi Bekirov	Vladyslav Hershon
Hennadiy Osmak	Ruslan Suleymanov	Yana Suvorova
Heorhiy Levchenko	Rustem Osmanov	Yevhenii Ilchenko
Iryna Danilovich	Rustem Sheikhaliev	Zhanna Kyselova
Iryna Levchenko	Serhiy Tsyhipa	

## Other European countries and regions (59)

### Belarus (27)

Aleh Khamenka	Anton Kazelski	Pavel Dabravolski
Aleh Supruniuk	Daniil Palianski	Siarhei Chabotska
Ales Lyubyanchuk	Dzianis Ivashyn	Siarhei Satsuk
Ales Marchanka	Dzmitry Navazhylau	Uladzimir Yanukevich
Ales Sabaleuski	Ihar Ilyash	undisclosed
Aliaksandr Ignatsiuk	Katsiaryna Andreeva	undisclosed
Andrei Aliaksandrou	Kiryl Pazniak	Valerija Kastsiuhova
Andrei Famin	Lyudmila Chekina	Volha Radzivonava
Andrzej Poczobut	Palina Pitkevich	Yauhen Hlushkou

### Russia (32)

Abdulumumin Gadzhiev	Igor Kuznetsov	Ruslan Ushakov
Aleksandr Dorogov	Ivan Safronov	Sasha Alexandrova
Aleksandra Bayazitova	Konstantin Gabov	Sergey Karelin
Aleksei Slobodenyuk	Konstantin Smirnov	Sergey Kornilevsky
Alexander Nozdrinov	Maria Ponomarenko	Sergey Mikhaylov
Anna Bazhutova	Mikhail Afanasyev	Svetlana Khustik
Antonina Favorskaya	Nika Novak	Vadim Kharchenko
Artem Kriger	Olga Komleva	Vladislav Malushenko
Daniel Kholodny	Parvinakhan Abuzarova	Yan Katelevskiy
Dmitry Ivanov	Rafael Mamedov	Yevgeny Moskvina
Eduard Shmonin	Roman Ivanov	



حاني عباس

**Hani Abbas**

*Hani Abbas (Palestine) / Cartooning for Peace*

## Platform cases concerning impunity for the murder of journalists

Jarosław ZIĘTARA – Poland - 1992  
Slavko ĆURUVIJA – Serbia - 1999  
Giorgos KARAIVAZ – Greece - 2021  
Ján KUCIAK – Slovak Republic – 2018  
Jamal KHASHOGGI – Saudi Arabia Consulate in Türkiye – 2018  
Daphne CARUANA GALIZIA – Malta – 2017  
Saaed KARIMIAN – Türkiye – 2017  
Pavel SHEREMET – Ukraine – 2016  
Rohat AKTAŞ – Türkiye – 2016  
Naji JERF – Türkiye – 2015  
Timur KUASHEV – Russia – 2014  
Andrea ROCHELLI and Andrei MIRONOV – Ukraine – 2014  
Oleksandr KUCHYNSK – Ukraine – 2014  
Mikhail BEKETOV – Russia – 2013  
Akhmednabi AKHMEDNABIYEV – Russia – 2013  
Nikolai POTAPOV – Russia – 2013  
Rafiq TAGI – Azerbaijan – 2011  
Gadzhimurad KAMALOV – Russia – 2011  
Sokratis GIOLIAS – Greece - 2010  
Aleh BYABENIN – Belarus – 2010  
Pavol RÝPAL – Slovak Republic – 2008  
Hrant DINK – Türkiye – 2007  
Anna POLITKOVSKAYA – Russia – 2006  
Elmar HUSEYNOV – Azerbaijan – 2005  
Dusko JOVANOVIĆ – Montenegro – 2004  
Yuri SHCHEKOCHIKHIN – Russia - 2003  
Milan PANTIĆ – Serbia - 2001  
Martin O'HAGAN – United Kingdom – 2001  
Georgiy GONGADZE – Ukraine – 2000  
Kutlu ADALI – Cyprus - 1996  
Dada VUJASINOVIĆ – Serbia – 1994  
Uğur MUMCU – Türkiye – 1993

Impunity for the killings, kidnappings and disappearances of journalists in Kosovo\* between 1998 and 2005:

Senol ALIT (1999), Bardhyl AJETI (2005), Ismail BĚRBATOVIĆI (1998), Vladimir DOBRIĆIĆ (1998), Gabriel GRÜNER (1999), Bekim KASTRATI (2001), Volker KRÄMER (1999), Xhemajl MUSTAFA (2000), Shefki POPOVA (2000), Marian MELONAŠI (2000), Momir STOKUĆA (1999), Krist GEGAJ (1999), Aleksandar SIMOVIĆ (1999), Ljubomir KNEŽEVIĆ (1999), Enver MALOKU (1999), Afrim MALIQI (1998), Nebojša RADOŠEVIĆ (1998), Duro SLAVUJ and Ranko PERENIĆ (1998)

\*All references to Kosovo, whether to territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

## Threats faced by women journalists

Journalists are regularly targeted, but women journalists face compounded risks linked to both their work and their gender. For the first time, this report has a specific section which looks at the situation of women journalists, with a view to encouraging the development of safety and security measures. The nature of threats directed at women journalists warrant particular attention and a dedicated response from Council of Europe member states.

Recent studies consistently show that women journalists are routinely exposed to gender-based violence, including threats of rape, misogynistic abuse, stigmatisation, stalking and death threats.<sup>93</sup> Such attacks may lead to self-censorship and withdrawal from the public sphere, reducing the presence of women's voices in an already male-dominated media environment. While this dimension has been acknowledged in several Council of Europe instruments, it has only partly been addressed in the recent work of the Committee of Ministers.<sup>94</sup>

While the data is limited, bearing in mind the under-representation of women in the media and the barriers in reporting gender-based violence, the 2025 alerts suggest that women reporters were significantly more targeted by forms of verbal abuse. The analysis of alerts also shows that women journalists encountered distinct patterns of targeting, obstruction and attacks by private individuals and security forces in the context of covering public events.

In Türkiye, *BirGün* reporters Ebru Çelik and Deniz Güngör and *Nefes Gazetesi* reporter Egemen İsar were physically assaulted on 23 March 2025 by police in Istanbul's Saraçhane district while covering protests that erupted following the arrest of Istanbul Mayor and presidential candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu. The treatment of the two women reporters was marked by particularly degrading and violent conduct. Çelik was pepper sprayed at close range and then kicked on the ground by police officers. She fell to the ground, and her gas mask was removed by the police. She was then pepper sprayed in the face. Çelik, who was forced to take shelter in a hotel, reportedly had marks of beatings on her face and body. Güngör was also kicked by the police, pepper-sprayed and shot with rubber bullets despite repeatedly telling the police that she was a journalist.<sup>95</sup>

In Georgia, women journalists have increasingly reported gender-based physical and psychological violence by police while covering protests.<sup>96</sup>

Women journalists are also disproportionately targeted by online abuse and doxxing. In Serbia, on 26 July 2025, Kristina Demeter Filipčev, an editor and journalist at the online news portal *Bečejski mozaik*, was subjected to insults and threats, including rape threats and sexist insults, in response to a message announcing a 16-minute silence to commemorate the victims of the fatal canopy collapse in Novi Sad in 2024. One comment posted by the account holder "Peđa Teomirović" contained a profane insult and a violent, misogynistic threat directed at the journalist, including a reference to shaving her head and invoking wartime sexual violence. The journalist announced that she had filed a complaint. The Supreme Public Prosecution Office of Serbia responded to the alert by stating that the Special Prosecution Office for High-Tech Crime had launched a pre-investigation procedure aimed at identifying the perpetrators.<sup>97</sup> Nora Bouazzouni, a French freelance journalist, received an anonymous letter at her home on 19 March 2025 that contained several racist, hateful and misogynistic comments against her.<sup>98</sup>

*The threats faced by women journalists warrant a dedicated response.*

Compared with data from previous years, women journalists in 2025 appear considerably more exposed to physical attacks, threats to life and safety and verbal harassment. To address these threats, national action plans should incorporate gender-responsive measures, including protocols for evidence capture, restraining orders and assistance with raising complaints with digital platforms, as well as systematic data disaggregation to monitor gender-based patterns of harm over time.

93. UNESCO (2021), "The Chilling: global trends in online violence against women journalist", <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377223>

94. Committee of Ministers (2013), "Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 on gender equality and media"; see also Gender Equality Commission/Steering Committee on Media and Information Society(2020), "Gender Equality and Media: Analytical Report, 2019 Data"

95. Ibid

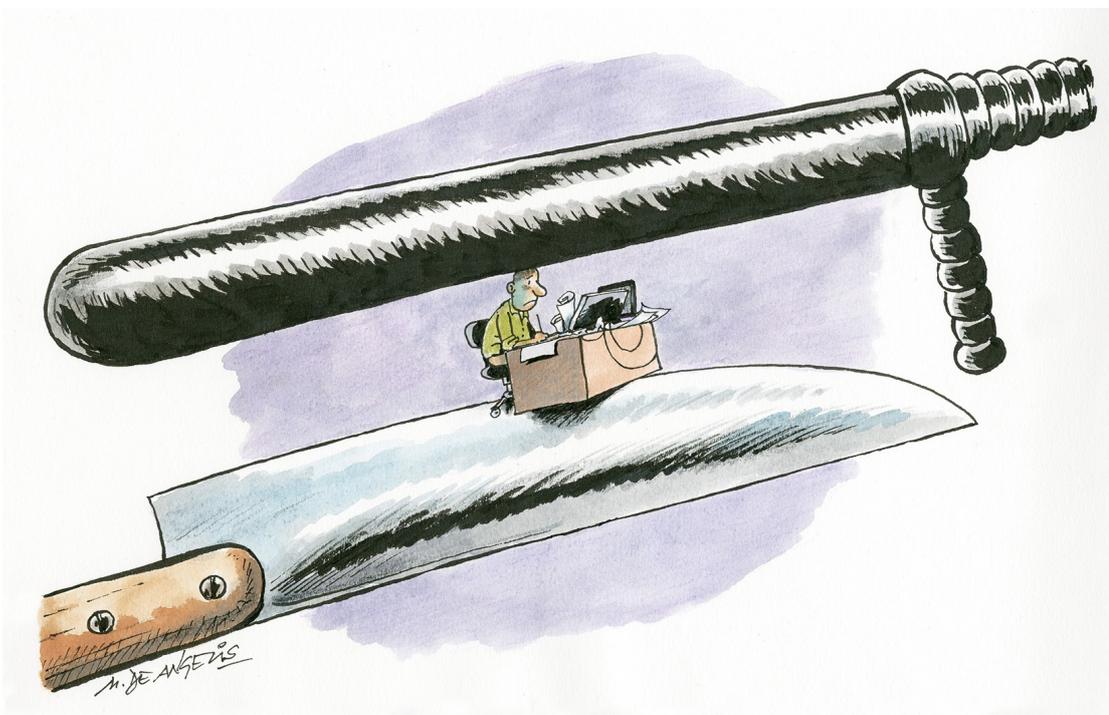
96. Alert "Batumelebi Founder and Director Mzia Amaglobeli Detained on Criminal Charges", <https://go.coe.int/NmD9G>

97. Alert "Journalist Kristina Demeter Filipčev Receive Threats and Insults Online", <https://go.coe.int/Jknpw>

98. Alert "Freelance Journalist Nora Bouazzouni Receives Racist and Hateful Letter", <https://go.coe.int/i1RiJ>

## Precarity and employer pressure on journalists

■ It is essential that journalists act independently from political and commercial or corporate interests, which means that journalists must have decent working conditions. As specified in Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 of the Committee of Ministers,<sup>99</sup> member states should pay attention to the importance of “adequate labour and employment laws to protect journalists and other media actors from arbitrary dismissal or reprisals and from precarious working conditions that may expose them to undue pressures to depart from accepted journalistic ethics and standards”.



Marco De Angelis (Italy) / Cartooning for Peace

■ According to the latest study by the Media Pluralism Monitor,<sup>100</sup> only two of the 34 European countries analysed - Denmark and Germany - provide good working conditions for journalists. In five others - Belgium, Estonia, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden - the risks associated with journalists’ working conditions remain limited. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Malta, Romania and Spain are characterised by very poor and precarious conditions. As the MPM 2025 report notes, “the working conditions of journalists are deplorable in most EU member states, with low salaries and weak or absent social security schemes”.

■ In December 2025, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted, for the first time, a report on the working conditions of journalists in Europe.<sup>101</sup> The report documents a marked deterioration in these conditions and their negative implications for democratic life and sets out recommendations addressed to European institutions and member-state governments. Endorsed by employers, trade unions and civil society representatives within the EESC, it calls on the European Commission to pay greater attention to the psychosocial risks faced by journalists and to advance an ambitious package of legislative and investment measures to support quality employment in the media sector.

■ The report also urges governments to promote social dialogue and collective bargaining for all journalists, including freelancers, notably through the transposition of the Directive on adequate minimum wages and by ensuring that EU competition rules do not impede collective bargaining by solo self-employed workers. It further calls on the European Commission and member states to address the problem of bogus self-employment in the media sector.

99. Committee of Ministers (2016), “Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors”, [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016806415d9#\\_ftn1](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016806415d9#_ftn1)

100. EUI Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF) (2025), “Monitoring media pluralism in the European Union: results of the MPM2025”, <https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstreams/6f582946-bb17-49fc-ab81-9a4b79b4d0ce/download>

101. EESC (2025), “Labour rights for journalists”, <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/labour-rights-journalists-and-media-professionals-safeguard-independence-and-truthful-information>

■ In 2025, the Platform recorded alerts illustrating the vulnerability of journalists towards their own employers. On 27 October, Italian news agency *Agenzia Nova* fired its Brussels correspondent, Gabriele Nunziati, for asking a question deemed “inappropriate” to the European Commission Chief Spokesperson.<sup>102</sup> On 10 October 2025, in Switzerland, the Executive Council of the Conference of Protestant Churches of Romandie (CER, French-speaking Protestant churches) announced their intention to dismiss the only two journalists working for their news agency, *ProtestInfo*, as they were investigating the handling by one of the CER member churches of a case of a theologian suspected of sexual abuse in the 1990s.<sup>103</sup> In both cases, the journalists concerned were simply doing their job and were dismissed by their employers without having committed any professional or ethical misconduct.

■ Finally, increasing pressure on public broadcasting funding can result in collective redundancies, such as those announced on 24 November 2025, by the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation. SBC will cut 900 of its 5 700 full-time positions by 2029, due, inter alia, to the reduction in the licence fee.

## Journalists in exile and transnational threats

■ The European Parliament’s first report on the transnational repression of human rights defenders defines it as “attacks and threats perpetrated by states, authoritarian regimes and their proxies, which aim to defend and promote their interests across national borders to coerce, control or silence dissidents, political opponents, journalists, activists, human rights defenders and members of the diaspora”. According to the report, ten countries around the world, including Russia, Belarus and Türkiye, are responsible for 80% of documented cases.<sup>104</sup> Transnational repression may include murders and physical attacks, legal actions in absentia and harassment amongst other threats.

■ Transnational repression, led by Russia and Belarus - from which hundreds of journalists have fled in recent years - is accelerating. One of the most striking examples made public this year is the spying by a group of Bulgarian nationals working for Russia on investigative journalists Christo Grozev and Roman Dobrokhotov, who were possible targets for kidnapping or assassination.<sup>105</sup>

■ Russia’s and Belarus’s transnational repression has relied on prosecution in absentia of exiled journalists. In 2025, Russia fined over 20 exiled journalists on administrative charges, predominantly for violating the “foreign agent” law and participating in an “undesirable organisation”.<sup>106</sup> In addition, Russian authorities targeted exiled journalists with criminal prosecutions in absentia. In April 2025, Russia passed laws expanding the scope of trials in absentia to include offenses related to extremism, fake news and “foreign agent” laws.<sup>107</sup>

### *At least 76 Russian journalists are wanted or sentenced in absentia on political charges.*

■ This comes as at least 76 Russian journalists are wanted or have been sentenced in absentia based on politically motivated charges, with 36 prison sentences already imposed by Russian courts.<sup>108</sup> At least 20 journalists have been sentenced in absentia for “dissemination of fake news about the Russian army”, “propaganda of terrorism” and failing to comply with the “foreign agent” law. In 2025, arrests and sentences in absentia under the “fake news” law sharply increased, including seven years for journalist Yevgenia Baltatarova,<sup>109</sup> eight years for Alexander Kushnar,<sup>110</sup> and five years for TV *Rain* journalist Anna Mongayt. On 23 December, Russian authorities revoked the Russian citizenship of investigative journalist and *IStories* publisher Roman Anin, after he had been convicted in absentia earlier in 2025 on charges of “spreading false information” about the Russian armed forces.

102. Alert “Journalist Gabriele Nunziati Fired Over Question to EU Official on Gaza”, <https://go.coe.int/07JVk>

103. Alert “Both ProtestInfo Journalists Dismissed Amid Ongoing Investigation”, <https://go.coe.int/my04Z>

104. European Parliament (2025), “MEPs warn of increasing repression of human rights activists across borders”, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20251110IPR31337/meps-warn-of-increasing-repression-of-human-rights-activists-across-borders>

105. De Simone, Daniel (2025), “I’m lucky to be alive, says journalist tracked by Russian spies”, BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1kjwmzvg23o>

106. Committee to Protect Journalists (2025), “Russia’s Repression Record”, <https://cpj.org/2025/10/russias-repression-record/>

107. Meduza (2025), “Госдума приняла пакет законов, направленных на «обеспечение защиты суверенитета России». Один из них предусматривает заочные суды за «фейки» об армии”, <https://meduza.io/news/2025/04/08/gosduma-prinyala-paket-zakonov-napravlennyh-na-obespechenie-zaschity-suvereniteta-rossii-odin-iz-nih-predusmatrivaet-zaochnye-sudy-za-feyki-ob-armii>

108. Justice for Journalists (JfJ) (2025), “Over 100 Media Workers Behind Bars in Russia and Belarus; 89 Arrested in Absentia”, <https://jfj.fund/over-100-media-workers-behind-bars-in-russia-and-belarus-89-arrested-in-absentia/>

109. Alert “Exiled Journalist Yevgenia Baltatarova Sentenced in Absentia to Seven Years in Prison”, <https://go.coe.int/qIOEv>

110. Alert “Exiled Journalist Alexander Kushnar Sentenced in Absentia to Eight Years in Prison”, <https://go.coe.int/AjUy0>



ALLIES

Anas Lakkis (Lebanon) / Cartooning for Peace

■ In addition, the Russian financial intelligence agency Rosfinmonitoring is placing a growing number of journalists on its terrorists and extremists list, effectively freezing their bank accounts in Russia.<sup>111</sup>

■ The labelling of exiled media outlets as “undesirable organisations”,<sup>112</sup> “foreign agents”<sup>113</sup> and “terrorist organisations”,<sup>114</sup> is further isolating them from their audiences in the country and making it harder to communicate with sources, by eroding the trust reporters must build to obtain information.<sup>115</sup>

■ Belarus’s criminal prosecution of exiled journalists follows a similar pattern. The authorities have opened criminal cases against more than 60 journalists in exile,<sup>116</sup> and at least 13 of them were sentenced to prison in absentia.<sup>117</sup> They are being charged under so-called “special proceedings”, a 2022 addition to the criminal procedure code that allows Belarusian authorities to convict people in absentia. On 3 June 2025, a Belarusian court sentenced exiled blogger Anton Matolka to 20 years in prison on a myriad of charges stemming from his reporting and online activity.<sup>118</sup> Journalists’ property is often seized pending a trial and confiscated after they are sentenced and ordered to pay heavy fines.<sup>119</sup>

■ Prosecutions in absentia are used to intimidate journalists living abroad and exert psychological pressure.<sup>120</sup> Those facing such charges are effectively barred from travel, as they risk immediate detention and extradition to Belarus or Russia. The two countries are also weaponising international police cooperation through shared wanted-person databases, Interpol red notices<sup>121</sup> and extradition requests. In 2025, Russia’s Prosecutor General sought the extradition of Prague-based journalist Farida Kurbangaleeva<sup>122</sup> from Czech authorities. Transnational repression has also taken the form of intimidation of journalists’ relatives,<sup>123</sup> including home searches and coercive visits at workplaces.<sup>124</sup>

■ At the same time, the Belarusian and Russian media in exile have become increasingly fragile. Dependence on short-term donor funding, intensified competition for limited grants and the suspension of US foreign aid have compounded financial pressures on exiled newsrooms.<sup>125</sup>

### *In 2025, Azerbaijan intensified prosecutions in absentia against exiled journalists and critics.*

■ In November 2025, Human Rights Watch reported an escalation in actions by Azerbaijan against exiled journalists and critics, including arrest warrants and prosecutions in absentia.<sup>126</sup> In September, a court in Azerbaijan sentenced France-based blogger Mahammad Mirzali to six and a half years’ imprisonment in absentia, while at least a dozen other exiled journalists and bloggers have faced similar charges. In November 2025, criminal cases were also opened against US-based broadcaster Sevinj Osmanqizi and exiled blogger Abid Gafarov.<sup>127</sup> On 14 January 2026, the Baku Serious Crimes Court held a trial in absentia against Gafarov, Osmanqizi and journalist Beydulla Manafov, sentencing each of them to eight years’ imprisonment.

111. Alert “Exiled Journalist Dmitry Kolezev Arrested, Charged with “Disseminating False Information”, Asya Zolnikova and Andrey Soldatov Face Administrative Charges”, <https://go.coe.int/XWaeX>

112. Alert “Russia: Prosecutor General Declares German Radio Station Echo an ‘Undesirable Organisation’”, <https://go.coe.int/ODkfb>

113. Alert “Russia: Wave of Journalists and Media Outlets Designated as ‘Foreign Agents’”, <https://go.coe.int/0ruk>

114. Alert “Supreme Court Labels News Publications ‘Terrorist Organisations’”, <https://go.coe.int/4LUeD>

115. Schenkan, Nate (2025), “The Golden Age of Transnational Repression”, *Journal of Democracy*, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-golden-age-of-transnational-repression/>

116. Committee to Protect Journalists (2025), “Belarus opens criminal cases against more than 60 journalists in exile”, <https://cpj.org/2025/05/belarus-opens-criminal-cases-against-more-than-60-journalists-in-exile/>

117. JFJ (2025), “Over 100 Media Workers Behind Bars”, <https://jfj.fund/over-100-media-workers-behind-bars-in-russia-and-belarus-89-arrested-in-absentia/>

118. Alert “Exiled Blogger Anton Matolka Sentenced in Absentia to 20 Years in Prison”, <https://go.coe.int/OWE8x>

119. CPJ (2025), “Belarus opens criminal cases”, <https://cpj.org/2025/05/belarus-opens-criminal-cases-against-more-than-60-journalists-in-exile/>

120. Meduza (2025), “Courts have begun regularly arresting Russians who have left the country in absentia. What are the dangers of this measure? And what should you do if your taken into custody ‘remotely’? An OVD-lawyers explain”, <https://meduza.io/cards/sudy-stali-regulyarno-zaochno-arestovyvat-uehavshih-rossiyan-chem-opasna-eta-mera-i-cto-delat-esli-vas-udaleno-vzyali-pod-strazhu>

121. Alert “Belarusian Journalist Andrey Gnyot Faces Extradition from Serbia to Belarus”, <https://go.coe.int/dmNR7>

122. Alert “Exiled Russian Journalist Farida Kurbangaleeva Faces Extradition Request”, <https://go.coe.int/zJ33F>

123. Alert “Astra Editor-in-Chief Anastasia Chumakova Added to the Register of ‘Extremists and Terrorists’, Charged with “Disseminating Fakes” about the Russian Army, Her Mother’s Home Searched”, <https://go.coe.int/3wuuD>

124. Alert “Family of Exiled Belarusian Journalist Siarhei Skulavets Repeatedly Questioned”, <https://go.coe.int/fsBJr>

125. Shahbazyan, Diana (2025), “Space for Freedom: Exiled journalists’ need assessment”, *DW Akademie*, <https://akademie.dw.com/en/space-for-freedom-exiled-journalists-need-assessment/a-72065841>

126. Gogia, Giorgi (2025), “Azerbaijan Escalates Crackdown on Exiled Critics”, *Human Rights Watch*, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/11/26/azerbaijan-escalates-crackdown-on-exiled-critics>

127. Alert “Exiled Journalists Sevinj Osmanqizi and Abid Gafarov Arrested in Absentia”, <https://go.coe.int/HXCWq>

■ European institutions and the Council of Europe should strengthen protection frameworks, prevent the misuse of extradition and Interpol mechanisms, and ensure sustained political response on cross-border intimidation. Host countries play a critical role by providing effective protection, secure legal status and freedom of movement for journalists in exile, and by ensuring they are not exposed to continued surveillance, harassment or coercion on their territory.

# Structural and legal threats to press freedom

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## Laws used to criminalise journalism

■ In 2025, legislation continued to be used as a tool to restrict journalistic work, limit access to information and undermine the right of the public to know. In several states, existing laws were enforced, or new provisions adopted, in ways that directly curtailed independent reporting.

■ Russia further expanded and enforced restrictive laws that severely curb press freedom and target independent and exile-based journalists.<sup>128</sup> Russian journalists are increasingly being prosecuted under national security and extremism laws.<sup>129</sup> In addition to the now familiar “foreign agents”, “undesirable organisations”, and “fake news about the Russian military” accusations, authorities are increasingly using “justifying terrorism” charges to target journalists in exile.<sup>130</sup>

*In 2025, Russia expanded its “undesirable organisations” list to include two Platform partners, Reporters Without Borders and Justice for Journalists.*

■ Media outlets and press freedom groups continue to be labelled “undesirable” in Russia. In 2025, two Platform partners, Reporters Without Borders and the Justice for Journalists Foundation, received this designation, with ARTICLE 19 being designated in 2024. German broadcaster *Deutsche Welle* (DW) was declared as “undesirable” in December.<sup>131</sup> Any cooperation with “undesirable organisations” carries administrative fines, with repeated violations punishable by up to five years in prison. On 16 July, Moscow prosecutors filed criminal charges against exiled journalist and *The Insider* editor-in-chief Timur Olevsky for alleged involvement with an “undesirable” organisation.<sup>132</sup>

■ Russian and Belarusian authorities continued to label journalists as terrorists or extremists, adding them to lists that may block access to bank accounts, restrict financial and property transactions, limit international travel and, in the context of Belarus, can also result in the confiscation of property. In June, Russia expanded the criteria for inclusion to cover individuals investigated for spreading “fakes” or “discrediting” the armed forces. Journalists including *Novaya Gazeta Europe* editor-in-chief Kirill Martynov, journalist Dmitry Kolezev and several TV *Rain* journalists have been added to the register in 2025.<sup>133</sup> In Belarus, journalists facing “special proceedings” are also typically charged with extremism.

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128. See at <https://data-scripts.ovd.info/agents/>

129. Katarzyna, Mariana (2025), “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation”, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/80/382>

130. Alert “Exiled Russian Journalist Farida Kurbangaleeva Faces Extradition Request”, <https://go.coe.int/ZJ33F>

131. *Deutsche Welle* (2025), “Russia labels DW an “undesirable organisation””, <https://www.dw.com/en/russia-labels-dw-an-undesirable-organization/a-75150923>

132. Alert “Exiled Journalist Timur Olevsky Charged with Participation in the Activities of an ‘Undesirable Organisation’”, <https://go.coe.int/XmDnQ>

133. Alert “TV *Rain* Journalists in Exile Ekaterina Kotrikadze, Valeria Ratnikova Arrested in Absentia, Editor in Chief Tikhon Dzyadko Charged”, <https://go.coe.int/qh72s>

■ Across Europe, laws presented as responses to legitimate public concerns have increasingly been used to target critical reporting. For example, on 12 March 2025, the Turkish Parliament adopted a Cybersecurity Law criminalising the reporting or sharing of information deemed “false” in relation to online data leaks, punishable by up to five years’ imprisonment.<sup>134</sup>

■ In 2025, Russia adopted new legislation criminalising the searching for content deemed “extremist”, including via the use of VPNs, with penalties ranging from 3 000 to 5 000 roubles (approximately €30–50).<sup>135</sup> The Ministry of Justice maintains a list of more than 5 000 items of such content, including material that goes beyond clear incitement and encompasses critical or journalistic content. Although authorities state the law applies only during criminal investigations, it significantly expands state surveillance and control over online activity, raising concerns for privacy, freedom of expression and access to independent information.

### *New court rules in Georgia restrict journalists’ ability to report from judicial proceedings.*

■ Laws have also been proposed to restrict journalistic access to legislative and judicial premises that would severely hinder the ability to inform the public. In July, the Georgian parliament passed amendments to the Organic Law on Common Courts that would restrict journalists’ ability to report from court premises and prohibit unauthorised photo, video, and audio recording or broadcasting in courthouses, courtrooms and surrounding areas.<sup>136</sup> A similar provision has been proposed in Albania, through an amendment to a proposed Criminal Code, which would prohibit commentary and reporting on judicial proceedings in broad terms.<sup>137</sup>

■ Domestic legal frameworks must not be used to weaken press freedom protections. Member states should ensure that all laws comply with international human rights standards, repeal provisions that criminalise the production or receipt of public interest journalism and guarantee journalists full and appropriate access to judicial and legislative premises to carry out their work.

## **Making anti-SLAPP laws work**

■ The topic of SLAPPs in Europe came to the forefront after Daphne Caruana Galizia’s assassination on 16 October 2017 in Malta, when it became known that she had been facing around 50 active defamation lawsuits at the time of her death. SLAPPs did, of course, exist before that time, but they were kept “under the carpet” as media outlets, journalists and other targets often avoided making such information public. While some media outlets were forced to modify or remove content from the internet, some journalists fought SLAPPs for years mostly out of public view. Others became so discouraged that they left the profession altogether.

■ It took a relatively short period for the Council of Europe and the European Union to develop legislative solutions. Today, an EU Directive,<sup>138</sup> an EU Recommendation<sup>139</sup> and a Council of Europe Recommendation on SLAPPs<sup>140</sup> are in place. The ball is now in the court of member states, which must ensure that these European rules are implemented nationally in a way that truly supports journalists and other public watchdogs as opposed to a box-ticking exercise to meet obligations towards the EU or the Council of Europe.

### *Europe has the tools to counter SLAPPs - implementation by member states is now decisive.*

134. Alert “New Law Criminalises “False” Reporting on Cybersecurity Data Leaks”, <https://go.coe.int/Gm5P2>

135. RBC (2025), “Что такое экстремистские материалы: реестр, ответственность за поиск”, <https://www.rbc.ru/base/12/11/2025/68f790419a79479f275413aa>

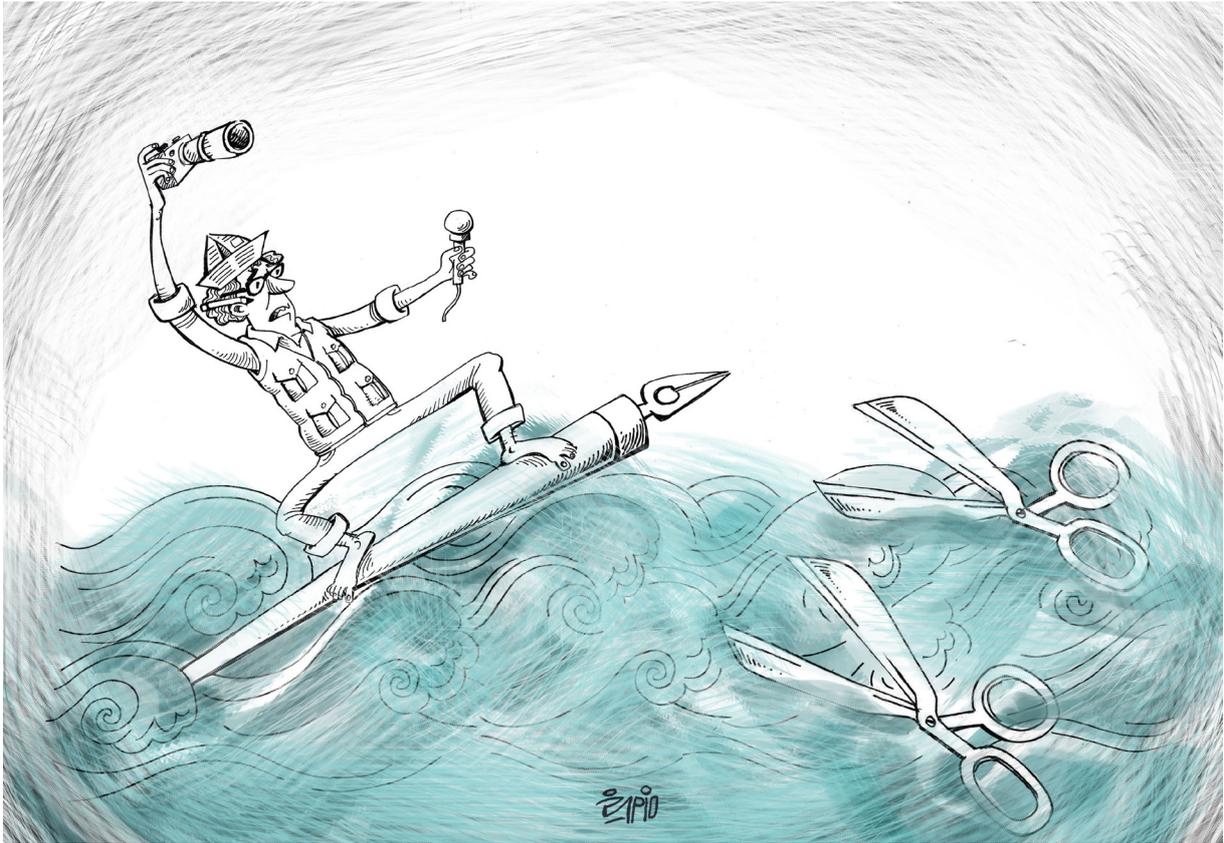
136. Alert “Georgian Parliament Moves to Restrict Media Coverage in Courts”, <https://go.coe.int/snytG>

137. Alert “Draft Criminal Code Includes Provisions Affecting Freedom of Expression and Media Freedom”, <https://go.coe.int/TdICE>

138. See at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1069/oj/eng>

139. See at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022H0758>

140. Council of Europe (2024), “Council of Europe adopts Recommendation on countering the use of SLAPPs”, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/-/council-of-europe-adopts-recommendation-on-countering-the-use-of-slapps>



*Firoozeh (Iran) / Cartooning for Peace*

■ As the deadline for the transposition of the EU Directive approaches in May 2026, the year 2025 has already been marked by a wave of initiatives across Europe, with member states taking steps to introduce legislation implementing both the EU Directive and the Council of Europe Recommendation on SLAPPs.

■ Malta is the first country to have transposed the EU Directive. While this step is welcomed, the scope of the law and the way it was drafted has been heavily criticised. If Daphne Caruana Galizia were alive today, Malta's transposition of the EU Directive alone would not help her, as most of the cases she faced were domestic SLAPPs, which the law does not cover, instead focusing only on cross-border cases. If the Maltese government were to implement the Council of Europe Recommendation as well, domestic SLAPPs would also be covered. Furthermore, the legislation was drafted without the involvement of civil society, independent experts, or proper public consultation.

■ The question remains: what does it take for European standards on SLAPPs to be implemented properly? There are several preconditions.

- ▶ Member states should transpose or implement the EU Directive, the EU Recommendation and the Council of Europe Recommendation simultaneously. This would ensure that domestic SLAPPs are addressed and that a more comprehensive set of indicators is available - one of the most important elements for helping judges and others identify and recognise SLAPPs.
- ▶ Implementation must be carried out transparently: using statistics and data that are collected by the Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe (CASE)<sup>141</sup> or national civil society organisations; involving civil society and independent experts; and organising genuine public consultations where feedback is taken seriously and reasons are provided when recommendations from civil society are rejected.
- ▶ Member states should make use of the Council of Europe's expertise, which can be provided upon request by public authorities or civil society. This includes the provision of legal opinions to ensure that national legislation is in line with European standards.

141. See at <https://www.the-case.eu/>

- It is also important that member states consider these instruments as minimum standards. For example, early dismissal should be available both upon request and *ex-officio* by the court; security for procedural costs and damages should be ensured; cost-capping measures should be introduced; and dissuasive measures, including penalties for claimants abusing the courts, should be included. Most importantly, legislation should provide for a reversal of the burden of proof so that SLAPP claimants bear the responsibility to show before the court why a legal claim is not a SLAPP.

### *At least 17 member states have initiated the implementation of European anti-SLAPP standards.*

■ According to the European Anti-SLAPP Monitor, an online tool that tracks the implementation of anti-SLAPP standards, at least seventeen member states have initiated implementation processes.<sup>142</sup> These efforts include the establishment of ministerial working groups and, in some cases, the proposal of concrete legislative measures.

■ Despite these developments, journalists across Europe continue to face SLAPPs. In Slovenia, the media outlet N1 was targeted with six civil defamation lawsuits filed by the University Psychiatric Clinic of Ljubljana.<sup>143</sup> These lawsuits followed a series of investigative reports alleging the use of violence within the clinic's facilities. After press freedom groups<sup>144</sup> offered legal support and engaged in advocacy with both N1 and the University Psychiatric Clinic, the latter ultimately decided to settle and withdraw the lawsuits. This case represents a successful example of coordinated documentation, advocacy and resolution, leading to the closure of the alert on the Platform. In Denmark, the investigative news outlet *Danwatch* received four strongly worded letters from the Moscow-based law firm ELWI, threatening defamation action. Ultimately, no legal action was initiated.<sup>145</sup>

■ The Platform, together with the Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe, of which many Platform partners are founding members, will focus on monitoring and assessing the quality of national anti-SLAPP legislation. The European Anti-SLAPP Monitor<sup>146</sup> has introduced a five-star system to measure the quality of such legislation and, once new laws are adopted, it will assess and publish the results. Member states now have a unique opportunity to put in place five-star legislation that ensures robust protection against SLAPPs, a growing phenomenon that has a devastating impact on press freedom and a chilling effect on journalists and media professionals.

## **The spread of “foreign agent” laws**

■ The so-called “foreign agent” law originated in Russia in 2012. Despite strong criticism from civil society, it became a model for authoritarian-leaning politicians across the region. The adoption and enforcement of “foreign agent” and restrictive grant laws are presented as promoting transparency in media funding, but their real purpose serves to silence dissent, cut off access to international funding and erode press freedom across the region. In just over a decade, governments in Georgia, Hungary, Serbia, Slovakia and Türkiye have either introduced, attempted to introduce or are preparing similar laws.

■ Labelling media as “foreign agents” stigmatises them. It paints them as acting on behalf of foreign interests against their own country, undermining their credibility and making them targets for abuse, threats and even physical attacks. These laws are also used in an unpredictable way, in violation of the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

■ The consequences extend beyond reputational damage. These laws hinder international cooperation: any collaboration with foreign organisations risks being branded as “foreign influence”. They also create heavy bureaucratic burdens and grant governments powerful tools they can exploit at will.

■ In Russia, the authorities have expanded “foreign agent” legislation, tightening control over journalists, media and NGOs.<sup>147</sup> Exiled journalists and bloggers such as Ilya Varlamov, Oksana Barsheva, Elena Shukaeva, Alla Konstantinova, and Yury Dud have been charged with spreading “false information” or evading obligations under the “foreign agent” law. A law adopted in June 2025 allows authorities to prosecute “foreign agents” in

142. European Anti-SLAPP monitor, developed by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom and CASE coalition, <https://slapp-monitor.eu/>

143. Alert “N1 Faces Six Lawsuits and €195,000 Compensation Demand”, <https://go.coe.int/u9esv>

144. The European Centre for Press and Media Freedom and the European Federation of Journalists

145. Alert “Russian Law Firm Targets Danwatch with Threatening Letters”, <https://go.coe.int/g1NjV>

146. See at <https://slapp-monitor.eu/about/>

147. Alert “Expanded Foreign Agents Law Adopted in the Russian Federation”, <https://go.coe.int/6aBMy>

absentia for administrative offenses committed. Later in the year, authorities have further tightened the “foreign agent” legislation, directly impacting 300 journalists labelled as foreign agents, most of whom live in exile.<sup>148</sup> In September, the Duma additionally passed<sup>149</sup> a bill to make individuals criminally liable after their first administrative violation of the “foreign agent” law. Prior to this, “foreign agents” were only liable after their second violation. On 14 November, exiled journalist Yury Dud was sentenced to one year and 10 months in prison for violating the “foreign agent” law, making this the first prison sentence handed to a journalist on such charges.<sup>150</sup>

■ Editor-in-chief of *Zab.ru* Nika Novak was sentenced to four years in prison after being convicted of “secret cooperation with a foreign organisation”. According to *Agentstvo News*, it refers to *Radio Liberty*, a media outlet listed as a “foreign agent” and an “undesirable organisation”, with which Novak cooperated since 2022.<sup>151</sup>

### *Russia’s “foreign agent” label has effectively excluded hundreds of journalists from public life.*

■ At least 327 media outlets and journalists have been labelled as “foreign agents” in Russia. This designation criminalises media workers and severely limits their civil rights, including their ability to participate in elections, work in public office, engage in educational activities, organise public events, create any content for minors, advertise their work, etc. As a result, citizens who receive the “foreign agent” designation are de facto excluded from public life, as well as from most employment opportunities. While in theory the designation does not involve any legal penalties per se, a “foreign agent” is in practice not able to function in Russian society. These limitations also seriously affect media workers in exile, who often do not have the possibility to receive any income from Russia despite high readership figures.

■ Georgia provided one of the most alarming examples in recent years. Already in May 2024, Parliament adopted the “foreign agent” law titled “Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence”, requiring foreign-funded media and civil society groups to register as “organisations pursuing the interests of foreign powers”, empowering the Ministry of Justice to conduct intrusive investigations, and allowing fines against NGOs and media organisations for non-compliance. Despite mass protests, international condemnation and a presidential veto, the law passed.<sup>152</sup>

■ In 2025, the ruling Georgian Dream party intensified its crackdown on media, adopting further pieces of legislation that erode press freedom by restricting foreign funding and stigmatising independent newsrooms. These pieces of legislation included the Foreign Agents Registration Act, amendments to the Law on Broadcasting and Amendments to the Law on Grants. (See the Georgia section)

### *Georgia’s “foreign agent” laws are pushing independent media and civil society to the brink.*

■ As a result of these repressive laws, directors of media outlets and civil society organisations now risk criminal prosecution if the state alleges that they acted on behalf of “foreign principals” and deliberately failed to register. Furthermore, NGOs and media organisations are required to obtain “the consent of the government or an authorised person or body designated by the government” before receiving any grants from outside Georgia. Unable to receive foreign funding and subjected to censorship, legal harassment and sustained economic retaliation, independent media and civil society in Georgia are on the brink of survival.<sup>153</sup>

■ The ruling party started actively implementing these laws. The authorities froze the bank accounts of several non-governmental organisations, including groups supporting press freedom.<sup>154</sup> A wave of inspections targeted independent media outlets and organisations assisting journalists, following amendments to the Law on Grants.<sup>155</sup>

148. *OVD-Info* (2025), Airtable, <https://airtable.com/appUmJQnojJlUH89V/shrLzXJ0PIDLqRllI/tbl1f1pN3GJb1Xq4q>

149. *Meduza* (2025), “State Duma approves law to punish foreign agents for offenses committed outside Russia”, <https://meduza.io/en/news/2025/06/17/state-duma-approves-law-to-punish-foreign-agents-for-offenses-committed-outside-russia>

150. Alert “Exiled Journalist Yury Dud Arrested in Absentia on Charges of Evading “Foreign Agent” Obligations”, <https://go.coe.int/Tf7wL>

151. Alert “The Former Editor-in-chief of the Chita Online Publication *Zab.ru* Nika Novak Arrested in Moscow”, <https://go.coe.int/lAnHO>

152. Safety of Journalists’ Platform and MFRR joint statement (2024), “Press Freedom and the Safety of Journalists in Peril, Rising Polarisation and a Climate of Fear – Findings of the Press Freedom Mission to Georgia”, <https://go.coe.int/Tupo7>

153. Joint statement of media freedom groups (2025), “Georgia: Independent media face new wave of repression as new laws come into effect”, <https://ipi.media/georgia-independent-media-face-new-wave-of-repression-as-new-laws-come-into-effect/>

154. Alert “Georgian Authorities Freeze Bank Accounts of NGOs, Including Groups Working on Media Freedom”, <https://go.coe.int/Pej3d>

155. Alert “Wave of Inspections Targets Media Support and Independent Media Outlets Under Amended Law on Grants”, <https://go.coe.int/Kp1bM>

■ In Hungary, on 13 May 2025 János Halász, a Member of Parliament of the ruling party, tabled a bill in Parliament to establish “a register of organisations that threaten ‘Hungarian sovereignty’ with foreign aid”.<sup>156</sup> The bill, which would arguably have posed the most serious threat to Hungary’s independent media in years, would have allowed for the blacklisting, financial restriction and potential closure of media outlets and civil society organisations receiving foreign funds as it would grant the Sovereignty Protection Office - a controversial body established in 2023 based under an also restrictive Sovereignty Protection act - sweeping powers to blacklist any foreign-funded entity deemed to threaten “Hungary’s sovereignty”.<sup>157</sup> While media were not directly named, the scope of activities outlined in the bill meant they would be included. After significant criticism, the bill was withdrawn, but the initiative demonstrated the government’s escalating hostility towards independent media.

■ In Slovakia, parliament passed a fast-tracked transparency law in April 2025 requiring NGOs to disclose donors contributing over €5 000, list governing body members and submit annual financial reports. Critics argued that the law’s vague language and broad powers for the registry authorities remained problematic, despite the government’s decision to drop explicitly stigmatising labels such as “foreign agents” and “lobbyists” from the bill after public pushback.<sup>158</sup> The final version of the law did not include reference to the media.

■ In Republika Srpska, one of the two entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the authorities have adopted a “foreign agent” law, introducing significant restrictions for NGOs and media organisations receiving support from abroad.<sup>159</sup> In addition to imposing the “foreign agent” labels, the law bans NGOs, investigative media included, “political work” and stipulates obligations to mark all NGO publications as “foreign agents”.<sup>160</sup> Failure to comply could result in serious sanctions being imposed by the Ministry of Justice, including a ban on their activities, as well as criminal proceedings.<sup>161</sup> On 29 May 2025, the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina struck down Republika Srpska provisions introducing “foreign agent” labels for NGOs as unconstitutional and incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights.

## Surveillance and spyware targeting journalists

■ In 2025, press freedom across Europe continued to face serious threats from both traditional surveillance methods and advanced spyware tools, exposing persistent opaque practices in several states. Over the past year, new legislation and surveillance operations have underscored a worrying decline in democratic safeguards.

*In February 2025, investigative journalists Bogdana (pseudonym) and Jelena Veljković were targeted in a Pegasus spyware attack in Serbia.*

■ In Serbia, in February 2025, according to Amnesty International’s Security Lab, two journalists from the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), Bogdana (pseudonym) and Jelena Veljkovic, were reportedly targeted with Pegasus spyware via suspicious Viber messages.<sup>162</sup> The messages contained links to a Serbian-language domain linked to NSO Group’s Pegasus spyware. At the time, both journalists were investigating foreign investments and alleged corruption in the country. Although the spyware was not installed because the links were not clicked, the attempt constituted a one-click Pegasus attack, with the infection link redirecting to a decoy news article, a tactic observed in previous Pegasus cases in Serbia. This marks the third documented instance in two years of Pegasus targeting Serbian civil society actors, including journalists. Amnesty International noted that the repeated use of Serbian-language domains and consistent targeting methods strongly suggest involvement by a Serbian state actor.

*In June 2025, three Italian journalists, including Francesco Cancellato and Ciro Pellegrino, were targeted with Graphite spyware.*

156. Alert “Hungary: Bill to Register Organisations Receiving Funds from Abroad Tabled in Parliament”, <https://go.coe.int/3O4ag>

157. MFRR statement (2025), “Hungary: Foreign funding bill poses most serious threat to independent media in years”, <https://ipi.media/hungary-foreign-funding-bill-poses-most-serious-threat-to-independent-media-in-years/>

158. Alert on Mapping Media Freedom, “Parliament passes controversial anti-NGO bill”, <https://www.mapmf.org/alert/33192>

159. Alert “Republika Srpska Adopts ‘Foreign Agent’ Law”, <https://go.coe.int/vzYy4>

160. Joint MFRR and SJN statement (2025), “Bosnia: Adoption of ‘foreign agent’ legislation in Republika Srpska must be suspended”, <https://ipi.media/bosnia-adoption-of-foreign-agent-legislation-in-republika-srpska-must-be-suspended/>

161. Alert on Mapping Media Freedom, “Foreign agent law adopted by the National Assembly of Republika Srpska”, <https://www.mapmf.org/alert/32980>

162. Alert “BIRN Journalists Targeted with Pegasus Spyware”, <https://go.coe.int/2IsVC>

■ In June 2025, two Italian journalists<sup>163</sup> Francesco Cancellato, editor-in-chief of *Fanpage*, and Ciro Pellegrino, head of its Naples editorial office, were targeted with Graphite spyware, developed by the Israeli company Paragon Solutions.<sup>164</sup> A third journalist chose to remain anonymous. Investigations confirmed that the spyware was used to monitor critical journalists and civil society members. The slow response of the authorities prompted the President of the Italian National Press Federation (FNSI), Vittorio Di Trapani, to denounce the “unacceptable inaction”, leading the FNSI and the National Order of Journalists to file a criminal complaint with the Rome public prosecutor.

■ In March 2025, freelance Romanian investigative journalist Victor Ilie revealed that during his work for the RISE Project in 2023, he had been under surveillance for two months by the Iași branch of the National Anti-Corruption Directorate (DNA).<sup>165</sup> The monitoring was linked to an undercover operation in which Ilie posed as a potential client offering a bribe to expose corruption. DNA agents tracked his movements, photographed him outside the RISE Project newsroom and tapped his phone. The investigation was ultimately closed due to lack of evidence of criminal intent. The case raised concerns about the targeting of journalists under the pretext of anti-corruption investigations. Press freedom organisations criticised DNA’s actions, emphasising potential violations of journalistic protections, particularly the right to safeguard sources.

■ Investigative reports suggested that the National Information Centre, one of Hungary’s intelligence agencies, has been tasked with collecting information on foreign-funded media, journalists and civil society operating in the country. None of the previously identified cases of spyware attacks on media in Hungary has seen any form of accountability or justice and national security justifications have been used to shield intelligence bodies from responsibility.<sup>166</sup>

### *Spain’s National Court reopened the Pegasus investigation in February 2025, renewing efforts to establish accountability for spyware abuse.*

■ In February 2025, Spain’s National Court reopened the Pegasus investigation, issuing requests<sup>167</sup> for information to the Paris Judicial Court and seeking judicial assistance from Israeli authorities. The move renewed efforts to establish accountability for the targeting of Spanish officials, journalists and activists with Pegasus spyware after the investigation stalled in 2024.

■ Platform partners have consistently condemned those cases of surveillance, including the two cases registered on the Platform concerning the alleged use of Paragon spyware against journalists in Italy. They denounced the authorities’ lack of transparency and called for a thorough investigation to establish who was responsible. To date, domestic investigations have been unsuccessful, and no one has been held accountable. Platform partners also called for the European Parliament to set up a committee of inquiry into the Paragon scandal and for strict application of the European Media Freedom Act. The EMFA explicitly prohibits the use of spyware against journalists, except in cases of serious crimes and with independent judicial authorisation. However, the 2025 alerts highlight a worrying gap between legal norms and actual practice.

■ In an open letter<sup>168</sup> to the European Union, eleven organisations, including Platform partners, called for urgent action in response to the increase in abuses related to spyware. The initiative highlighted growing concerns about the impunity and the lack of democratic control surrounding the use of these intrusive technologies. The organisations stressed that state surveillance, often justified in the name of national security, remains one of the most serious and opaque threats to press freedom. They called for strict limits on the use of spyware, full transparency on its acquisition and deployment and full implementation of protections provided by the EMFA.

■ Only rigorous application of these safeguards and effective democratic oversight will ensure that surveillance remains the exception, not the rule, in a Europe committed to freedom, pluralism and the right to information.

163. Alert “Italian Investigative Journalist Francesco Cancellato Targeted with Paragon Spyware”, <https://go.coe.int/qZJSH>

164. Alert “Italian Investigative Journalist Ciro Pellegrino Targeted with Spyware”, <https://go.coe.int/WF72I>

165. Alert “Freelance Journalist Victor Ilie under Surveillance by Anti-Corruption Authority”, <https://go.coe.int/lkOMY>

166. IPI (2024), “New IPI report examines spyware surveillance and the battle for accountability in European journalism”, <https://ipi.media/new-ipi-report-examines-spyware-surveillance-and-the-battle-for-accountability-in-european-journalism/>

167. Alert “Several Journalists Targeted with Pegasus Spyware”, <https://go.coe.int/ABmYL>

168. EFJ (2025), “Open letter: Recent spyware abuse cases require urgent EU action”, <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2025/06/26/open-letter-recent-spyware-abuse-cases-require-urgent-eu-action/>

## Media capture and control of public discourse

Media capture remained one of the gravest systemic threats to press freedom, media pluralism and independent journalism across Council of Europe member states in 2025, contributing to the erosion of democratic discourse and the independence of the press.

Media capture refers to the tactics and influence used by political or economic interests to control news media and journalism, with the aim of undermining editorial independence, consolidating power and ultimately shaping public discourse.

This system involves securing the strategic acquisition of private media by politically aligned companies; the submission of public service broadcasters to political influence; the domination of regulatory bodies by government proxies; and the control of state advertising bodies and financial flows to media.

The level of media capture in Europe varies dramatically between democratic states and authoritarian regimes and many countries continue to suffer from elements of this phenomenon, with damaging effects on democracy and independent journalism. While media ecosystems remained fully captured in some states in 2025, populist governments in others pursued legislative and regulatory measures to extend political control over national media, frequently ahead of elections.

In 2025, media capture remained near total in regimes such as Russia, where independent media critical of the government is non-existent. In Belarus, media capture likewise continued to be implemented with suffocating force in 2025 by the Lukashenko government.

In Türkiye, the role of the media regulator RTÜK in suppressing criticism of the government was brought into focus after it explicitly forbade broadcasters from airing protest footage and reportedly threatened network executives with license cancellation. The public broadcaster also censored coverage of major anti-government protests.



Chappatte (Switzerland) / Cartooning for Peace

■ In Serbia, the government instrumentalised the tight state capture of the media ecosystem to dampen criticism after the canopy collapse tragedy at the Novi Sad train station in late 2024 had sparked major nationwide protests against alleged government corruption. The ruling majority twice violated democratic norms to ensure the continuation of government influence over the key media regulator, the Council for Electronic Media (REM). The public broadcaster RTS, which lacks editorial independence and has faced criticism for toeing the government line, also failed to report on protests for multiple months.

### *In 2025, pro-government acquisitions further entrenched media capture in Hungary ahead of the 2026 elections.*

■ In Hungary, the ruling party Fidesz has maintained a system of media capture and control, constructed through sustained dominance over public media, continued consolidation of private outlets under politically allied ownership and persistent distortion of the market through control over state advertising, with severe consequences for media pluralism and independent journalism.

■ The acquisition in October 2025 of the Hungarian portfolio of the Swiss Ringier company by a pro-government private media group was the latest example of government-backed media capture via strategic acquisition.<sup>169</sup> The takeover includes the most popular tabloid *Blikk*, a move which is not fortuitous ahead of the April 2026 elections, expected to be hotly contested.

■ In Slovakia, reforms to the public broadcaster by the coalition government of returning Prime Minister Robert Fico - which merged existing radio and television broadcasters into a single new entity, Slovak Television and Radio (STVR) - has resulted in a subtle but noticeable shift in editorial focus, which critics have argued is less political and more favourable to the government.<sup>170</sup>

### *Poland moved to reverse state-driven media capture with plans to divest Polska Press.*

■ In a positive development in Poland, the state assets minister confirmed that the state-controlled energy company PKN Orlen is preparing to divest *Polska Press*, the local and regional media group controversially acquired under the former Law and Justice (PiS) government. According to Orlen's management, the sale process could begin after an internal restructuring, with a view to a potential sale in 2026. A transfer of *Polska Press* to a professional private media owner would reverse a prominent example of state-driven media capture in the EU.<sup>171</sup>

■ Due to their systemic nature, instances of media capture have been hard to address within the scope of the Platform and its annual report. To address this, in September 2025 the Platform partners supplemented alerts with a new category highlighting systemic threats to independent public service broadcasting.

■ EMFA's entry into full force in August 2025 provides a unique regulatory framework that, if properly implemented, can provide EU member states with new tools to counter some mechanisms of media capture, introducing safeguards for media independence, transparency in ownership and state advertising and measures to limit political interference in both private and public media.

■ Legislative efforts to align domestic legislation with provisions outlined by the EMFA in EU member states have so far been patchy and delayed. While some states have set up working groups to plan implementation of the regulation, other states have only just begun work or have suspended working groups, while other states such as Hungary have directly attacked the EMFA and challenged it in front of the European Court of Justice, seeking to have it nullified.

169. IPI (2025), "Hungary: New EU Media Board should assess Blikk acquisition by pro-government media group", <https://ipi.media/hungary-new-eu-media-board-should-assess-blikk-acquisition-by-pro-government-media-group/>

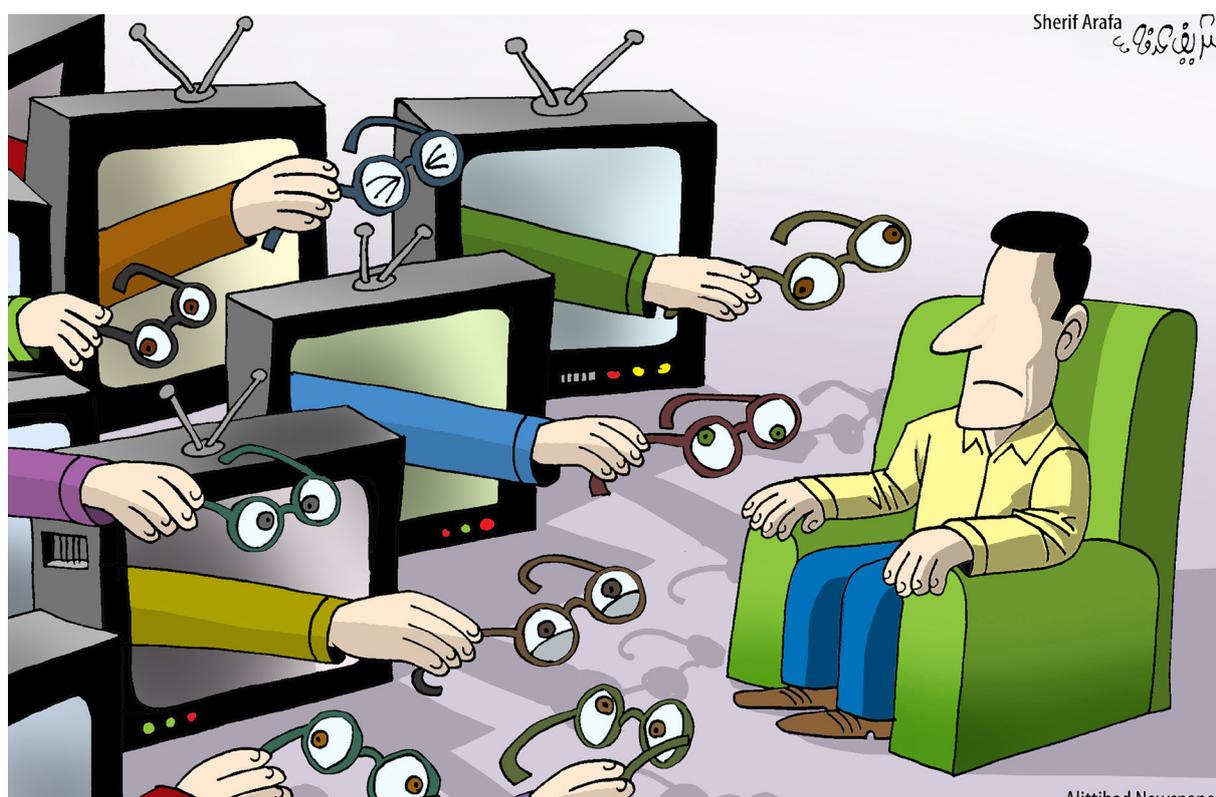
170. MFRR (2025), "Media freedom in Slovakia under threat", <https://www.mfrr.eu/media-freedom-in-slovakia-under-threat/>

171. Parka, Ryszard (2025), "Prezes Orlenu: proces sprzedaży Polska Press może ruszyć w przyszłym roku", *Press.pl*, [https://www.press.pl/tresc/90385,prezes-orkenu\\_-\\_proces-sprzedazy-polska-press-moze-ruszyc-w-przyszlym-roku](https://www.press.pl/tresc/90385,prezes-orkenu_-_proces-sprzedazy-polska-press-moze-ruszyc-w-przyszlym-roku)

## Political and financial pressures on Public Service Media

Independent and adequately funded public service media (PSM) are a cornerstone of a democratic society, providing citizens with access to fact-based, impartial information in an age increasingly defined by misinformation and online echo chambers. Yet their ability to fulfil their public service mandate is facing mounting challenges both online and offline. Governments across the Council of Europe member states are failing to safeguard the independent governance and funding of their public broadcasters.

The 2025 report of the Media Pluralism Monitor shows that 11 of the 32 studied countries do not have a politically independent public broadcaster. The countries with the highest rates of risk of political interference in the public media are Hungary, Malta and Türkiye, followed by Slovakia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Croatia, Poland, Greece, Serbia and Romania.<sup>172</sup>



Sherif Arafa (Egypt) / Cartooning for Peace

Efforts to reform Poland's public service media after political capture under the previous government have been hindered by legal and institutional deadlock, with management changes made outside a full legislative overhaul and liquidation proceedings for TVP, Polskie Radio and PAP still in place as of end 2025, leaving the system in prolonged constitutional uncertainty. Funding arrangements remain a major vulnerability. Poland's proposed budget for TVP, at just 0.06% of GDP, is among the lowest in Europe, far below the average of 0.12%. As the EBU emphasises, "independence without adequate funding risks being independence in name only".<sup>173</sup> Without predictable, multi-year financial models, PSM remains vulnerable to political interference and market pressures, ultimately undermining their democratic mission. Other elements of the Ministry of Culture's draft amendment to the Broadcasting Act aimed at improving the system of appointments and strengthening the public media's independence have been welcomed by press freedom groups.

172. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom, <https://cmpf.eui.eu/mpm-interactive-results/>

173. EBU (2025), "EBU urges Poland to match media freedom reforms with adequate funding for public service media", <https://www.ebu.ch/news/2025/11/poland-media-freedom-reforms-need-adequate-funding-for-public-service-media>

## *Bosnia and Herzegovina's public broadcaster BHRT is on the brink of collapse.*

■ In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the public service broadcaster, BHRT, remains on the brink of collapse due to a severe financial crisis. BHRT warns that it is facing possible shutdown and the loss of 700 jobs. Despite the High Representative's call for a new draft law addressing the sustainable financing of cultural institutions, no sustainable solution has been reached. With total liabilities exceeding 54 million KM (€28 million) and mounting internal and external debts, BHRT risks again having its accounts blocked by tax authorities or by court judgements for non-payment of salary contributions and even having the electricity turned off. In addition, the contract for the collection of the licence fee expiring at the end of 2025.

■ The new governing coalition in Czechia has revived concerns over political pressure on public service media. Under the previous government, legal amendments on appointments to the oversight council helped protect the broadcasters against political interference.<sup>174</sup> This was combined with a modest increase in the public service media licence fee, which was approved after nearly two decades, with the obligation extended to internet-capable devices. While intended to strengthen the financial stability of Czech Radio (ČRo) and Czech Television (ČT), the adjustment does not fully compensate for the erosion of real value over the past 20 years. Following the autumn 2025 elections, the ruling coalition parties announced plans to abolish the licence fee, ostensibly as a cost-saving measure. If implemented, such a proposal could have significant implications for the editorial independence and quality of public service media in Czechia and have drawn criticism from press freedom groups.<sup>175</sup>

■ In Kosovo\*, the Platform partners have called on authorities to urgently find a sustainable funding model for the public broadcaster Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK). Years of financial instability and recent growing political pressure have made it increasingly difficult for RTK to fully carry out its public service remit and serve the needs of society. Persistent underfunding jeopardises the broadcaster's operations and its ability to provide quality public service. During 2025, RTK was left without access to its budget and was unable to pay salaries for its staff, leading to protests of its staff. In addition to the growing political pressure and the financial constraints, RTK is also facing a managerial and governance crisis, with only three of eleven board members' positions currently filled and no legally appointed Director General.

■ In Lithuania, concerns have emerged about the potential political instrumentalisation of the state audit of LRT (Lithuanian National Radio and Television) commissioned by Parliament. The audit took place in a highly politicised context, with the government introducing unprecedented provisions relating to the public broadcaster in its programme. Following the publication of the audit results, fast-tracked legislative initiatives were introduced that placed LRT under a budget freeze. These measures significantly altered the funding model in place since 2015, which had provided safeguards for LRT's editorial and institutional independence.

■ At the end of 2025, Parliament adopted a legislative amendment aimed at facilitating the removal of the Director General of Lithuanian National Radio and Television. The amendment lowers the voting threshold for dismissal, introduces a secret ballot, and removes the requirement that such a decision be justified by the public interest. If implemented, these changes would weaken key safeguards protecting LRT's management from political pressure.

■ In Belgium, the French-language public broadcaster RTBF has been subjected to pressure from Georges-Louis Bouchez, president of the French-language liberal-conservative party Mouvement Réformateur (MR), part of Belgium's federal and regional governing coalitions. Bouchez publicly expressed intention to privatise or even "abolish" RTBF<sup>176</sup> and was criticised by the Association of Professional Journalists for "making unacceptable physical threats" against one of its journalists in a leaked phone conversation with another RTBF journalist.<sup>177</sup> He said his words were misinterpreted. The MR also threatened to boycott RTBF's newsroom in the context of this dispute.<sup>178</sup> In addition, at the initiative of the MR Minister responsible for French-language media, public

174. IPI (2022), "Czech Republic: Media freedom groups urge MPs to pass media act amendment", <https://ipi.media/czech-republic-media-freedom-groups-urge-mps-to-pass-media-act-amendment/>

175. RSF (2026), "Czechia: RSF and partners urge Prime Minister and Culture Minister to guarantee public media's independence", <https://rsf.org/en/czechia-rsf-and-partners-urge-prime-minister-and-culture-minister-guarantee-public-media-s>

176. Brabant, François (2025), "Georges-Louis Bouchez: Dans ma vision, la RTBF pourrait être privatisée ou supprimée", *Wilfried*, <https://www.wilfriedmag.be/articles/dans-ma-vision-la-rtbf-pourrait-etre-privatisee-ou-supprimee/>

177. Alert "Party Leader Threatens the Physical Safety of RTBF Journalist", <https://go.coe.int/JbGq4>

178. Association des journalistes professionnels (AJP) (2025), "L'AJP réagit face aux déclarations du MR sur le possible boycott de la RTBF", <https://www.ajp.be/lajp-reagit-face-aux-declarations-du-mr-sur-le-possible-boycott-de-la-rtbf/>

authorities abolished the indexation of RTBF's public funding and froze a planned 2% budget increase, leading the broadcaster's board to adopt a €132 million savings plan in April 2025, including staff reductions through the non-replacement of retiring employees.<sup>179</sup>

## *Implementation of the EMFA is under way across the EU, but progress remains uneven.*

■ Across many EU member states, work has begun to implement the EMFA. In Croatia, discussions have focused on enhancing transparency in governance and ensuring that public media are equipped to serve diverse audiences in the digital age. In Estonia, policymakers have emphasised integrating cultural policy, digital innovation and journalistic standards to strengthen public service content. Elsewhere, progress has been uneven, with PSM funding decisions delayed for months in France and Italy, despite their well-established public service media systems.

■ Public service media remain Europe's most trusted news source, and their future depends on being visible and accessible across digital platforms, resilient against disinformation, and, most of all, safeguarded from both economic and political pressures.

### **Box. Systemic threats to Public Service Media**

In September 2025, the Platform published a set of systemic alerts focusing on structural threats to public service media in six Council of Europe member states: Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Hungary, the Slovak Republic and Türkiye, as well as in Belarus and Russia.<sup>180</sup> These alerts highlight that, despite formal references to independence, weaknesses in governance, funding and oversight frameworks continue to expose public service media to political influence, undermining their capacity to serve as impartial, trusted institutions. The set follows the first series of systemic alerts issued in 2024 on defamation laws.

Across the six countries reviewed, the alerts often identify a common pattern: appointment procedures enable political actors to control or influence boards and senior management; funding arrangements are unstable, opaque or discretionary; and oversight mechanisms lack the independence required to safeguard editorial autonomy. These structural deficiencies fall short of Council of Europe standards, including Recommendation No. R(96)10 on the guarantee of the independence of public service broadcasting and contradict the safeguards envisaged in the European Media Freedom Act.

#### **Azerbaijan**

*İctimai Television* (İTV), the country's public broadcaster, formally operates under a legal framework that enshrines public service principles but in practice lacks functional, editorial and financial independence, with political influence shaping governance, funding and content. Press freedom organisations report that İTV's coverage aligns closely with government messaging, lacks pluralism and remains vulnerable to state control due to opaque, fully state-dependent financing and weak accountability safeguards.<sup>181</sup>

#### **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

The public service media remain structurally fragile due to political influence, the long-delayed establishment of the Public Broadcasting Corporation and an unsustainable, disputed funding system that has pushed BHRT to the brink of collapse. Assessments by European institutions and press freedom organisations consistently highlight chronic underfunding, governance interference and the urgent need for coordinated reform to ensure independence and fulfil the public service remit.<sup>182</sup>

#### **Georgia**

The public broadcaster has come under mounting political pressure, with dismissals, programme cancellations and internal censorship concerns undermining its editorial independence amid broader societal tensions. Recent governance and funding reforms, adopted without public consultation, have further exposed the public broadcaster to political influence, prompting domestic and international watchdogs to warn that its ability to operate as an independent public service media institution is at serious risk.<sup>183</sup>

179. RTBF (2025), "La RTBF adopte un plan d'économies de 132 millions, sans licenciements secs", <https://www.rtb.be/article/la-rtbf-adopte-un-plan-d-economies-de-132-millions-sans-licenciements-secs-11535417>

180. Safety of Journalists Platform publishes a new set of systemic alerts on threats to public service media, <https://fom.coe.int/en/pagesspeciales/detail/153>

181. Alert "Azerbaijan: Persisting Concerns Over Independence of Public Broadcaster", <https://go.coe.int/f4gob>

182. Alert "Bosnia and Herzegovina: Lack of Reform and Sustainable Funding Threaten Public Service Media System", <https://go.coe.int/XLAuf>

183. Alert "Georgia: Threats to the Independence of the Georgian Public Broadcaster", <https://go.coe.int/k36Uq>

## Hungary

The PSM operates under a highly centralised governance system that concentrates editorial, financial and managerial control in bodies aligned with the ruling majority, enabling political influence over content, appointments and funding. Independent assessments and European institutions have repeatedly found that weak oversight, non-transparent financing and a lack of genuine safeguards for balanced coverage undermine public service media independence and pluralism.<sup>184</sup>

## Slovakia

The 2024 reform dissolved RTVS and created STVR under a governance and funding model that enables extensive political influence, with all board members effectively appointed by the parliamentary majority and government and no safeguards to prevent politically affiliated individuals from taking leadership roles. The abolition of licence-fee funding, reduced state financing, opaque appointment procedures, and close links between STVR's new management and ruling party figures have raised serious concerns among European institutions and press freedom organisations about the broadcaster's ability to operate independently and fulfil its public service remit.<sup>185</sup>

## Türkiye

The public broadcaster TRT has seen its autonomy and editorial independence eroded by successive legal changes since 2018 that place governance, appointments and oversight under direct presidential control, without safeguards to prevent political influence. Independent monitors and European institutions report that these structural changes, together with politicised leadership reshuffles and heavily imbalanced election coverage, have undermined pluralism and weakened TRT's ability to operate as an impartial public service broadcaster.<sup>186</sup>

In Belarus and Russia, monitored by the Platform partners outside the dialogue mechanism of the Platform, state broadcasters are entirely subordinated to the executive and function without any safeguards for independence.

## Belarus

The state-owned broadcasters BTRC and ONT are fully controlled by the executive, with appointments, funding and editorial direction determined by the President's office and no legal safeguards for independence or pluralism. Press freedom organisations report that both broadcasters function as instruments of state propaganda, lacking transparency, institutional autonomy and professional oversight.<sup>187</sup>

## Russia

VGTRK, Russia's state-owned network, operates without any structural or editorial independence and serves as a central instrument for disseminating government narratives, disinformation and propaganda across its network. Press freedom organisations and international observers report that the broadcaster excludes dissenting voices, glorifies state policies and plays a key role in maintaining a tightly controlled, centralised media environment in Russia.<sup>188</sup>

All these systemic alerts demonstrate that the gravest risks to public service media across Europe are embedded in the design of governance, funding and oversight frameworks. Where political actors control appointments, where funding is not predictable and dependent on government discretion, and where oversight lacks independence, public service media cannot function as autonomous institutions capable of providing impartial and pluralistic information.

To address these challenges, the Platform partners emphasise the need for transparent, depoliticised and merit-based appointment procedures, adequate and predictable funding mechanisms independent of political pressure, strong legal guarantees of institutional and editorial autonomy and effective oversight and accountability structures. Strengthening these safeguards is essential to ensure that public service media can fulfil their democratic mission and remain a resilient counterweight to disinformation, political capture and declining public trust.

184. Alert "Hungary: Governance Structure Enables Political Influence over Public Service Media", <https://go.coe.int/HwahB>

185. Alert "Slovak Republic: Governance and Funding Structure of STVR Undermines Public Service Media Independence", <https://go.coe.int/YWt4Z>

186. Alert "Türkiye: Structural and Legal Challenges Affecting the Independence of Public Broadcasting", <https://go.coe.int/FQWZS>

187. Alert "Belarus: Lack of Political and Financial Independence of State-Owned Broadcasters", <https://go.coe.int/fbxYW>

188. Alert "Russia: VGTRK Functions as a State Propaganda Instrument Without Editorial Independence", <https://go.coe.int/oiiro>

# Voices and testimonies

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**Kak's column. From *Charlie Hebdo* to today:  
the growing assault on press cartoonists**



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■ The year 2025 marks the 10th anniversary of the attacks on the editorial staff of the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*. It is a grim reminder of the threats that loom over freedom of expression and press cartoonists.

■ The rise of authoritarian regimes is creating a particularly worrying global context. In addition to regimes where freedom has long been banned (Russia, China, Iran, etc.), there is an ever-growing list of countries whose political developments reflect a shift towards authoritarianism. In India, critical positions are criminalised by legislation that is used to silence journalists, human rights defenders and, in short, anyone who expresses critical views of the ruling power. The Indian authorities censor cartoonists' social media accounts and target their publications, with increasing recourse to particularly repressive digital security laws.

■ More and more press cartoonists are facing abusive legal proceedings that circumvent the law in order to censor them. Pre-trial detention is becoming a new weapon to oppress those who inform and debate, through the misuse of anti-terrorism laws, as in the case of Egyptian cartoonist Ashraf Omar, who has been in pre-trial detention for over a year. The increasing criminalisation of the media and journalists is also affecting Türkiye. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has made clear his desire to silence all critical voices. In July 2025, six members of the editorial staff of the satirical magazine *LeMan* were prosecuted for publishing a cartoon. Five of them were placed in pre-trial detention before being released under judicial supervision pending trial. In the case against Turkish cartoonist Zehra, the public prosecutor's office appealed the acquittal handed down in the first instance after years of proceedings.

■ In the United States, the political establishment, amid an authoritarian drift, is making freedom of expression a real battleground. The Trump administration is challenging the legitimacy of journalists and censoring works whose content does not correspond to the rewriting of history that is taking place in the United States. The case of cartoonist Ann Telnaes, who resigned from the *Washington Post* after it refused to publish one of her cartoons because of its critical message about the newspaper's owner, foreshadowed this authoritarian drift ahead of Donald Trump's inauguration.

■ Other threats loom over press cartoonists, who are seeing their professional opportunities in traditional media dwindle, for economic reasons, but also because of the growing self-censorship of some editorial offices. They must contend with new emerging media. Social networks expose them to new threats, unprecedented in their form and scale: censorship, online hate, shadow banning, harassment, threats, trolling, etc. The main digital platforms are owned by the powerful GAFAM multinationals, which have become real political players in a context where information is becoming a tool for excessive domination on the Internet. Their influence is worrying, especially when the political convictions of their owners shape the algorithms and rules that govern social media.

■ In March 2024, French cartoonist Coco was the victim of a wave of threats, including death threats, on social media after publishing a cartoon in *Libération* about the famine in Gaza. The results of a survey conducted among a large panel of press cartoonists around the world with the support of UNESCO's Global Media Defence Fund (GMDF) reveal that most of the cartoonists have been threatened online and that political content is particularly targeted on social media.

■ Press freedom and media pluralism are under constant threat and new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, require us to be increasingly vigilant. The work of press cartoonists has not been spared by the emergence of these new tools, which require urgent legal regulation. So how can we continue to produce political cartoons in these troubled times? By tirelessly pursuing the fight for press freedom alongside all committed actors, including the Council of Europe's Platform for the Safety of Journalists. Press cartoonists are resisting and continuing to make their voices heard through their pencils, despite the threats and challenges highlighted in the report by Cartooning for Peace and Cartoonists Rights about press cartoonists under threat around the world.

**Kak, President of Cartooning for Peace**

## Sigfrido Ranucci: "I have never felt more exposed or vulnerable"



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■ On 16 October, a bomb exploded outside my home in Pomezia, near Rome. An explosive device had been placed beneath my car; the blast destroyed it, damaged our other family car, ripped gates from their hinges and blew out windows, even scarring the house next door. No one was hurt, but investigators immediately called it a clear act of intimidation. The explosion was heard across Pomezia. The scene that greeted my family and me - shattered glass, mangled car frames, debris everywhere - was devastating. The device was powerful enough to kill anyone who might have been passing by at that moment.

■ As shocking as that night was, it was only the latest - and most spectacular - episode in a long sequence of threats I have faced since 2009 because of my work as a journalist. Together with my team, I investigate organised crime for *REPORT*, an investigative programme on Italy's public broadcaster, RAI. Because of early, danger signals tied to my reporting, I have been under police protection since 18 May 2010. That measure followed an investigation I conducted in Sicily into a sand quarry run by a Catania mafia clan. The Ercolano family asked a dangerous individual to keep me under surveillance. From that point on, the risks around my work ceased to be abstract.

■ In August 2021 the threat level rose again, and I was placed under full escort. I had received new threats related to reporting on mafia activities and on a series of public-procurement contracts in Italy. Around the same time, authorities intercepted a conversation inside Padua's prison: a drug trafficker linked to the far right and to the 'Ndrangheta asked two Albanians to kill me. I learned of this thanks to Matteo Piantedosi, now Interior Minister, who was then the Prefect of Rome and took care to warn me directly.

■ Over the last decade, these threats have been recurrent. From 2021 to 2023, members of my security repeatedly observed that I was being followed, sometimes at close range. In June 2024, after episodes of *REPORT* about the external complicities that shield the mafia, and about the assassinations of Piersanti Mattarella - President of the Sicilian Region, murdered in 1980 while in office - and Aldo Moro, the former Prime Minister kidnapped in 1978 by the Red Brigades and killed during captivity, the danger spiked. From an encrypted address I received an email ordering me to stop digging into the Moro case: "If you release more information on the Moro case, we will kill you."

■ Not long afterward, still in June 2024, my guards found pistol cartridges for a P38 hidden behind a bush directly in front of my home, placed there shortly before my return. The timing showed a precise knowledge of my plans and daily movements. It was a chilling sign that whoever was threatening me not only had the means to surveil me but also felt confident enough to stage provocations at my doorstep.

■ The escalation continued, but we did not stop working. On 7 June 2024, following a *REPORT* episode about an Albanian trafficking group connected to Mexico's Sinaloa cartel, lawyer Alexandro Maria Tirelli - who in the past has also represented Pablo Escobar - told me he had been approached by figures from the Sinaloa cartel. They sought to organise a defamation campaign against me and said that if it failed, they would be prepared to kill me. The intent was explicit: first destroy my credibility; if that did not silence me, eliminate me.

■ Set against this background, what unsettles me most about the 16 October bombing is that it does not appear to be tied directly to any single *REPORT* episode or investigation. Given the volume and variety of the threats I have received in recent years, ranging from mafia clans angered by our inquiries to extremists, to international traffickers, there is, sadly, no shortage of potential instigators behind this latest act of intimidation. It feels like the cumulative result of years of hostile attention rather than a single, isolated reaction to one broadcast.

■ I want to be clear: I have never believed there was a political hand behind the 16 October attack, and I feel fully supported by the authorities. My protection has been strengthened with a fixed post in front of my home and the option to travel in an armoured vehicle. I also feel the near-unanimous solidarity of my Italian colleagues, aside from a few national outlets aligned with the political right that continue to attack me.

■ Despite everything, I continue my journalistic work with the same passion and determination as ever. Yet I must admit that I have never felt more exposed or vulnerable.

**Sigfrido Ranucci, investigative journalist and presenter of *Report* (RAI)**



## Censura y autocensura

Solis (Mexico) / Cartooning for Peace

# Countries in focus

## Azerbaijan

■ The wave of repression that began in 2024 continued into 2025, with the adoption on 14 July 2025 of amendments that made the media law even more restrictive, stifling any form of independent journalism,<sup>189</sup> and saw many journalists receive heavy sentences. *Meydan TV*, *Toplum TV*, *Abzas Media* and *Kanal 13* all now operate entirely from exile, with no staff working in Azerbaijan. The country's most influential independent news outlet, *Turan News Agency*, opted to shut down entirely in February.

■ At the end of 2025, 36 journalists were imprisoned in Azerbaijan.<sup>190</sup> According to Amnesty International, this represents “the highest number of imprisoned media workers held on politically motivated charges since Azerbaijan joined the Council of Europe in 2001”.<sup>191</sup>

■ On 20 June 2025, the Baku Court of Serious Crimes sentenced seven media workers affiliated with the independent investigative outlet *Abzas Media*, including director Ulvi Hasanli, editor-in-chief Sevinc Vagifgizi, investigative journalist Hafiz Babaly, reporters Nargiz Absalamova and Elnara Gasymova, translator Muhammad Kekalov and economist and RFE/RL correspondent Farid Mehralizade, to prison terms ranging from seven and a half to nine years.<sup>192</sup> The charges included “currency smuggling”, “money laundering”, “tax evasion” and forgery of documents. The journalists have denied all accusations and denounced the trial as politically motivated. Their imprisonment is widely believed to be in retaliation for the media organisation's investigations into corruption among President Ilham Aliyev's family and inner circle.

*Azerbaijan held a record number of journalists in prison at the end of 2025.*

■ In February 2025, the Sabail District Court in Baku sentenced *Kanal 13* director Aziz Orujov to two years in prison.<sup>193</sup> The court convicted him of building a house for himself without authorisation on a plot of land that he had purchased on the city outskirts.

■ Three other journalists were arrested in 2025: Shamshad Agha, editor in chief of the news site *Arqument. az*,<sup>194</sup> and independent journalists Ulviyya Ali (legal name: Ulviyya Guliyeva), a reporter with *Voice of America's* Azerbaijan bureau and Ahmad Mammadli, founder of *Yoldash Media*.<sup>195</sup>

■ The country was already the subject of a systemic alert in 2024 for its legislation on defamation and insults.<sup>196</sup> A new systemic alert was published in 2025, noting the lack of independence of the public broadcaster.<sup>197</sup>

■ Foreign outlets now must apply for registration with the media registry within seven days of their mandatory registration with the state, or face liquidation. The authorities also reserve the right to restrict access to the media outlet's website. Among other provisions, the amended version of the law requires press agencies to have at least 20 national media outlets signed up to their news wire to be allowed to operate. This provision seems tailor-made to prevent the press agency *Turan*, which was forced to cease operations in February, from resuming operations. Printed newspapers must no longer contain expressions that are “contrary to public order,

189. RSF (2025), “Azerbaijan tightens media law to the point of absurdity, RSF warns of information blackout”, <https://rsf.org/en/azerbaijan-tightens-media-law-point-absurdity-rsf-warns-information-blackout>

190. Council of Europe, Safety of Journalists Platform “Journalists and other media actors currently in detention in Europe”, <https://fom.coe.int/en/listejournalistes/detentions>

191. Amnesty International (2025), “Azerbaijan: Seven journalists sentenced in latest shocking crackdown on free speech”, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/06/azerbaijan-seven-journalists-sentenced-in-latest-shocking-crackdown-on-free-speech/>

192. Alert “Abzas Media's Executive Director and Editor-in-chief Detained, Newsroom Raided”, <https://go.coe.int/3U9v4>

193. Alert “Azerbaijani Director of Internet Television Re-arrested”, <https://go.coe.int/TFLG>

194. Alert “Arqument.az Editor in Chief Shamshad Agha Detained in Baku”, <https://go.coe.int/PDLzB>

195. Alert “Two Independent Journalists Ulviyya Ali and Ahmad Mammadli Arrested in Azerbaijan”, <https://go.coe.int/eROdG>

196. Alert “Journalists Lack Adequate Protection under Defamation and Insult Laws and Practice”, <https://go.coe.int/YhKrD>

197. Alert “Persisting Concerns Over Independence of Public Broadcaster”, <https://go.coe.int/f4gob>

moral standards, or ethics". All these provisions offer new opportunities for arbitrary action by the authorities against journalists and the media.

■ On 21 November, President Ilham Aliyev signed a decree establishing a new centralised digital platform that significantly expands state surveillance powers. "The system, known as the Centralised Information and Digital Analytics System (MIRAS), will be controlled by the State Security Service and fully operational by May 2026",<sup>198</sup> writes Giorgi Gogia of Human Rights Watch.

■ Azerbaijan is one of two Council of Europe member states that have effectively ceased substantive dialogue with the Platform in recent years. Platform partners remain ready to engage in discussions with the authorities and recommend that Azerbaijan re-establish a functioning communication channel with the mechanism and provide substantive replies to alerts to address the underlying concerns.

## Bulgaria

■ Despite some modest improvements in recent years, Bulgaria remains a challenging environment for independent journalism. The media landscape continues to be shaped by deep political polarisation, political and economic influence over editorial work and legal and governance dysfunctions. These findings are consistent with the assessment carried out during the joint mission of the Platform partners to Sofia in September 2025.<sup>199</sup>

■ The safety of journalists has improved modestly compared to previous years. Physical attacks are relatively rare, yet hostility from politicians, online harassment - particularly gendered abuse - and threats linked to organised crime contribute to a climate of insecurity. Trust in law enforcement remains low, with slow and ineffective investigations and no national system for tracking attacks. At the time of writing, Bulgaria had not yet joined the Council of Europe's Journalists Matter campaign. Although no confirmed spyware cases against journalists have been recorded, Bulgaria has emerged as a hub for surveillance technology companies,<sup>200</sup> and reports suggest that intrusive tools such as Pegasus have been used by the authorities in the past.

■ Legal threats and SLAPPs remain a significant concern. Abusive lawsuits, often filed by major businesses, politicians or judges, continue to target investigative reporting. The attempted October 2025 amendment to the Penal Code - which would have enabled fines and prison sentences of up to six years for publishing personal information without consent, with no public-interest exemption - posed a serious threat to press freedom. Although withdrawn following public and international outcry, the episode highlighted the fragility of recent progress and the risk of future regression.

### *Modest gains for journalist safety remain fragile in Bulgaria amid legal and political pressures.*

■ Media pluralism is precarious. The sector is characterised by political influence, opaque ownership structures and the economic weight of a small advertising market. State advertising lacks transparency and remains vulnerable to politicisation, particularly at regional and local levels. The influence of sanctioned oligarch Delyan Peevski continues to raise concerns about indirect political control over parts of the media ecosystem. Market concentration remains high: two major groups - PPF Group and United Group - dominate key broadcast and telecom segments. While a cohort of independent and investigative outlets provide high-quality work, their numbers remain low and no domestic funding schemes support investigative journalism.

■ Bulgarian National Television (BNT) has been in a prolonged leadership deadlock due to the inability of the Council for Electronic Media (CEM) to secure a majority vote to elect a Director General. Court challenges, appeals and procedural disputes have further paralysed the process. During the mission to Bulgaria, stakeholders cited politicisation and insufficient resources as ongoing problems for both BNT and the media regulator. Though BNT and Bulgarian National Radio remain among the country's most trusted news sources, their independence is hampered by limited funding, political pressure and unresolved regulatory reform.

198. Human Rights Watch (2025), "Azerbaijan's Surveillance Platform Risks Sweeping Privacy Violations", <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/12/15/azerbaijans-surveillance-platform-risks-sweeping-privacy-violations>

199. Safety of Journalists Platform, "Fragile media freedom progress in Bulgaria at risk of backsliding without urgent reform", <https://go.coe.int/kTTDy>

200. Nikolov, Konstantin and Mary Ivanova (2021), "България е вратата към Европа за израелската NSO Group", capital.bg, [https://www.capital.bg/politika\\_i\\_ikonomika/sviat/2021/07/20/4234266\\_bulgariia\\_e\\_vratata\\_kum\\_evropa\\_z\\_a\\_izraelskata\\_nso/](https://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/sviat/2021/07/20/4234266_bulgariia_e_vratata_kum_evropa_z_a_izraelskata_nso/)

■ Access to information is weakened by institutional opacity and obstacles for filing FOI requests. Courts have issued rulings - such as the 2025 judgment against journalist Venelina Popova - that create chilling effects on public interest journalism. Low pay, precarious working conditions, limited self-regulation and the proliferation of low-quality online outlets undermine the status of the profession and contribute to low trust in the media, which in Bulgaria is among the lowest in the EU.

■ Bulgaria remains poorly prepared to implement the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), fully in force since August 2025. While the Ministry of Culture has initiated work on amendments to the Radio and Television Act, there is no clear strategy, timeline or broader process for alignment with other EMFA provisions.

■ Recent developments in Bulgaria indicate that improvements in the media environment remain vulnerable. Outstanding issues include strengthening media regulation, safeguarding the independence of public service media, addressing legal harassment and improving transparency in media ownership and state advertising. Continued institutional weaknesses have limited progress in these areas.

## Georgia

■ In 2025, the situation in Georgia continued to deteriorate at an alarming rate. A total of 32 alerts were submitted to the Platform, representing a 78% increase compared to 2024. The alerts reflect a broader dismantling of press freedom, driven by institutional repression, politicised law enforcement, the capture of state institutions and public service media and the erosion of effective checks and balances.

■ On 6 August 2025, following more than 200 days in pretrial detention and a highly politicised trial, Mzia Amaglobeli, the founder and director of two of Georgia's most prominent independent media outlets, *Batumelebi* and *Netgazeti*, was sentenced to two years in prison.<sup>201</sup> Since her arrest, Amaglobeli and her media organisations have faced smear campaigns, degrading treatment and economic retaliation.<sup>202</sup>

■ Arbitrary arrests are a significant issue. On 3 November 2025, Ninia Kakabadze, a journalist for *Mediachecker*, was detained on administrative charges of "blocking the road" after she covered a rally. Previously, in October, the police also briefly detained Mamuka Mgaloblishvili, a journalist for the media outlet *Publika*, on similar administrative charges.<sup>203</sup>

### *Georgia adopted a new "foreign agent" law in 2025, introducing heavy fines and prison sentences.*

■ The Georgian Parliament adopted several repressive pieces of legislation despite a national and international outcry. On 1 April 2025, the Parliament passed a new version of the "foreign agent" law, entitled the Foreign Agents Registration Act, which imposes obligations carrying fines up to GEL 25 000 (€8 250) and up to five years in prison.<sup>204</sup>

■ On 12 June 2025, the Parliament adopted amendments to the Law on Grants that require foreign donors to obtain prior approval from the executive branch before disbursing grants.<sup>205</sup>

■ The amendments to the Law of Broadcasting, which went into force in June 2025, expanded the powers of the captured media regulatory body, Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC), to regulate factual accuracy, fairness and privacy - previously overseen through self-regulation. The amendments enabled the GNCC to issue penalties of up to 3% of a broadcaster's annual revenue or revoke its license for breaching the new rules.<sup>206</sup>

■ Using the new amendments to the law on broadcasting, the authorities have already filed complaints against *Formula TV* and *TV Pirveli* with GNCC.<sup>207</sup>

201. Alert "Batumelebi Founder and Director Mzia Amaglobeli Detained on Criminal Charges", <https://go.coe.int/NmD9G>

202. IPI statement (2025), "Georgia: Ahead of verdict, press freedom groups renew call for Mzia Amaglobeli's release", <https://ipi.media/press-freedom-groups-renew-call-for-mzia-amaglobelis-release/>

203. Alert "Mediachecker Journalist Ninia Kakabadze Detained After Covering a Protest", <https://go.coe.int/7XHtS>

204. Alert "Draft "Foreign Agents Registration" Bill to Strengthen Sanctions", <https://go.coe.int/lnSg3>

205. Alert "Draft Amendments to the Law on Grants Require Prior Executive Approval for Foreign Grants", <https://go.coe.int/TecCT>

206. Alert "Draft Amendments to Restrict Foreign Funding and Tighten Administrative Control Over Broadcasting", <https://go.coe.int/yHzkK>

207. Alert "Complaints against Formula TV and TV Pirveli with Communications Commission", <https://go.coe.int/EuMM6>

■ In June 2025, Parliament adopted amendments to Georgia’s Law on Freedom of Speech and Expression that narrowed existing protections and increased liability for defamation and insult.<sup>208</sup> In the same month, Parliament advanced draft amendments to the Organic Law on Common Courts that would significantly restrict journalists’ ability to report from court premises by prohibiting photo, video and audio recording or broadcasting in courthouses, courtrooms, and surrounding areas unless specifically authorised by the court.<sup>209</sup>

■ By court orders, the bank accounts of several NGOs, including press freedom groups, were frozen.<sup>210</sup> Media organisations have also been targeted including online media *Project 64*, the organisation running *Mtis Ambebi* and the Organised Crime Research Media Centre, which runs investigative news outlet *iFact*.<sup>211</sup>

■ Concerns persisted regarding the editorial independence of Georgia’s Public Broadcaster (GPB). As noted in the 2025 Communication on EU enlargement policy, “the public broadcaster lacks independence, has a biased editorial policy and has contributed to the promotion of anti-EU rhetoric”.<sup>212</sup> The management of GPB dismissed journalists Vasil Ivanov Chikovani<sup>213</sup> and Nino Zautashvili<sup>214</sup> after they publicly raised concerns about political interference at the broadcaster and subsequently cancelled Zautashvili’s talk show. Several other journalists were dismissed in the period that followed.<sup>215</sup> Taken together, these dismissals, programme changes, restrictive editorial practices and developments affecting funding and governance have underscored ongoing concerns about the vulnerability of GPB’s independence to political influence.<sup>216</sup>

■ Georgia continued to deny entry to foreign journalists, including freelance British journalist Will Neal,<sup>217</sup> freelance French photojournalist Jérôme Chobeaux,<sup>218</sup> Italian journalist Giacomo Ferrara and Swiss photojournalist Gregor Sommer.<sup>219</sup>

■ Dozens of journalists continued to be physically attacked by law enforcement forces.<sup>220</sup> They have been repeatedly fined,<sup>221</sup> their work obstructed<sup>222</sup> and their equipment confiscated. Impunity for crimes against journalists remained widespread, with investigations often insufficient and perpetrators not held accountable, particularly those from the law enforcement structures.<sup>223</sup>

■ Despite an unprecedented crackdown on the media in Georgia, independent journalists have shown remarkable resilience and continue reporting from the ground. However, in the absence of effective checks and balances, legal safeguards and independent institutions, journalism in the country risks becoming unsustainable without immediate international support and pressure.

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208. Alert “Ruling Party Proposes Amendments Weakening Protections for Freedom of Expression and Journalists”, <https://go.coe.int/6pdCR>

209. Alert “Georgian Parliament Moves to Restrict Media Coverage in Courts”, <https://go.coe.int/snytG>

210. Alert “Georgian Authorities Freeze Bank Accounts of NGOs, Including Groups Working on Media Freedom”, <https://go.coe.int/Pej3d>

211. Alert “Wave of Inspections Targets Media Support and Independent Media Outlets Under Amended Law on Grants”, <https://go.coe.int/Kp1bM>

212. European Commission (2025), “EU communication on EU enlargement policy: Georgia Report 2025”, [https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/b3089ad4-26be-4c6a-84cc-b9d680fe0a48\\_en?filename=georgia-report-2025.pdf](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/b3089ad4-26be-4c6a-84cc-b9d680fe0a48_en?filename=georgia-report-2025.pdf)

213. Alert “News Anchor Vasil Ivanov-Chikovani Suspended after Protesting Political Influence at Georgian Public Broadcaster”, <https://go.coe.int/VoQAx>

214. Alert “Georgian Public Broadcaster Journalist Nino Zautashvili Dismissed”, <https://go.coe.int/SU396>

215. Alert “Georgian Public Broadcaster Cancels ‘Real Space’ Show”, <https://go.coe.int/dgG82>

216. Alert “Threats to the Independence of the Georgian Public Broadcaster”, <https://go.coe.int/k36Uq>

217. Alert “Freelance British Journalist Will Neal Denied Entry to Georgia”, <https://go.coe.int/nYCUw>

218. Alert “Freelance French Photojournalist Jérôme Chobeaux Denied Entry to Georgia”, <https://go.coe.int/dHS11>

219. Alert “Italian Journalist Giacomo Ferrara and Swiss Photojournalist Gregor Sommer Denied Entry to Georgia”, <https://go.coe.int/udHI9>

220. Alert “Police Assaults, Obstructs, Harasses Georgian Journalists Covering Renewed Protests”, <https://go.coe.int/2B6ol>

221. Alert “Journalists Fined Over Solidarity Protest for Mzia Amaglobeli’s Release”, <https://go.coe.int/uYeu0>

222. Alert “Editor-in-Chief of Mtis Ambebi and Sakartvelos Ambebi Gela Mtvilishvili Attacked”, <https://go.coe.int/Y9Mre>

223. MFRR (2025), “Monitoring Report January-June 2025”, <https://www.mfrr.eu/monitoring-report-january-june-2025/>

## Box. The Case of Mzia Amaglobeli



© Batumelebi

On 6 August 2025, following a highly politicised trial, Mzia Amaglobeli, the co-founder and director of two of Georgia's most prominent independent media outlets, *Batumelebi* and *Netgazeti*, was sentenced to two years in prison.<sup>224</sup> Her case has become emblematic of the fight for press freedom and democracy in Georgia. It has drawn widespread global attention amidst the ruling Georgian Dream party's increasing crackdown on the media.

*Georgian journalist Mzia Amaglobeli received a two-year prison sentence in August 2025 following a politicised trial.*

The journalist was arrested in early January and held in pretrial detention on politically motivated charges following a minor altercation with a police chief during a crackdown on democratic protests in Batumi. The grossly disproportionate nature of the charges that followed - which carried a sentence from four to seven years in prison - made clear that the veteran journalist was being targeted and punished for her decades-long work and dedication to independent reporting.

Mzia Amaglobeli has played a key role in developing Georgia's independent media landscape and shaping journalistic standards in the country. *Batumelebi* and *Netgazeti* co-founded by Amaglobeli are two of Georgia's most popular and respected award-winning online news portals covering corruption, abuse of power and human rights violations. Throughout her career, Amaglobeli has shown exemplary courage and a steadfast commitment to defending democratic values, press freedom and journalists' rights.

Protesting her treatment and the broader crackdown on independent media, Amaglobeli began a hunger strike in January. "These processes have been unfolding over the past year and are embedding themselves into our daily lives as a dictatorship. Freedom is far more valuable than life and it is at stake. Fight before it is too late", she wrote in a message from prison, which was published by *Batumelebi* and *Netgazeti*.<sup>225</sup> She ended her hunger strike in mid-February, after 38 days, after doctors warned that her life was in imminent danger.<sup>226</sup> During her imprisonment, her health and eyesight have deteriorated dangerously.<sup>227</sup>

224. Alert "Batumelebi Founder and Director Mzia Amaglobeli Detained on Criminal Charges", <https://go.coe.int/NmD9G>

225. Chichua, Nino (2025), "მზია ამაგლობელი: „ვშიმშილობ. სიცოცხლეზე ღირებული თავისუფლებაა“, *Netgazeti*, <https://netgazeti.ge/life/760615/>

226. Kakhaberidze, Tamta (2025), "შევეცდები, როგორმე შევძლო კვების აღდგენა" – მზია ამაგლობელი, *Netgazeti*, <https://netgazeti.ge/life/764139/>

227. IPI (2025) "IPI demands immediate release of veteran journalist Mzia Amaglobeli", <https://ipi.media/georgia-ipi-demands-immediate-release-of-veteran-journalist-mzia-amaglobeli/>

Since her arrest, senior Georgian officials have repeatedly smeared Amaglobeli and the crackdown has widened against her media organisations.<sup>228</sup> Hours after her arrest, *Batumelebi's* camera operator Guram Murvanidze was detained while performing his professional duties.<sup>229</sup> A few months later, *Batumelebi* and *Netgazeti* had their bank accounts frozen<sup>230</sup> - just before she was scheduled to testify in court.

Mzia Amaglobeli continues to defend her rights in both local and international courts, arguing that the act for which she was arrested should have resulted only in a proportionate administrative penalty, which she never sought to evade. However, she is considered by many to be a political prisoner, and she has compared her prosecution to Stalinist purges.

During her detention, Amaglobeli has been subjected to verbal abuse, physical intimidation and denial of basic necessities. As she testified in Batumi City Court, while in police custody, Batumi police chief Irakli Dgebuadze allegedly spat in her face, denied her water and toilet access<sup>231</sup> and blocked her from seeing her lawyers for hours.<sup>232</sup>

In an op-ed published by *The Guardian*,<sup>233</sup> Mzia Amaglobeli explained what moved her to resist and continue her fight for press freedom. "I have moments of weakness. Sometimes my eyes fill with tears", she wrote. "But I try not to stay in that state for long. The truth is, I have no other choice: this illegitimate government is trying to abolish journalism, the profession to which I have devoted 25 years of my life. My colleagues are in mortal danger simply for doing their job. For me to stay silent now would be to betray them, myself and about 60 other political prisoners in Georgia today [...] And I ask you, our European friends: do not let go of our hand. Together, we can defeat the darkness and ensure that freedom prevails. Because freedom, truly, is more valuable than life".

On 22 October, Mzia Amaglobeli, together with imprisoned Polish Belarusian journalist Andrzej Poczobut became the laureate of the 2025 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought as a symbol of Georgia's democratic resilience against rising authoritarianism.<sup>234</sup> She was granted several media awards, including the 2025 IPI-IMS World Press Freedom Hero award.<sup>235</sup>

## Hungary

■ Press freedom in Hungary continued to deteriorate in 2025, consolidating the country's position as the EU's most entrenched system of state-aligned media capture. The ruling party's decade-long strategy of political control over public service media, the concentration of private outlets in government-friendly hands and the use of state advertising to distort the market has produced an information environment in which genuinely independent journalism survives only at the margins.

■ The acquisition of outlets by owners aligned with the ruling party - including the 2025 purchase of Ringier's Hungarian portfolio by Indamedia - further reduced media pluralism, especially in the tabloid segment.<sup>236</sup> Independent outlets face structural disadvantages due to the near-total exclusion from state advertising and the allocation of public funds to pro-government media. Public service media remain firmly under political control, operating as vehicles for government messaging rather than independent sources of public interest news.

■ The closure, weeks later, of the Hungarian service of RFE/RL by the Trump administration shortly after a visit of Prime Minister Orbán to the White House, further weakened media pluralism ahead of the vote.<sup>237</sup>

228. Alert on Mapping Media Freedom, "Georgian Dream PM smears arrested veteran journalist Mzia Amaglobeli", <https://www.mapmf.org/alert/33598>

229. Alert "Batumelebi Camera Operator Guram Murvanidze Detained on Administrative Charges", <https://go.coe.int/hdpJt>

230. Alert "Revenue Service Orders Seizure of Gazeti Batumelebi and Netgazeti's Bank Accounts", <https://go.coe.int/wJU1>

231. Gvadzabia, Mikheil (2025), "Cursing, spitting, no restroom - Mzia Amaglobeli recounts Georgian police abuse", OC Media, <https://oc-media.org/cursing-spitting-no-restroom-mzia-amaglobeli-recounts-georgian-police-abuse/>

232. Amnesty International campaign (2025), "Georgia: Justice for journalist Mzia Amaglobeli", <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/EUR5692622025ENGLISH.pdf>

233. *The Guardian* (2025), "From my prison cell in Georgia, I implore Europe not to abandon us to Russia. Mzia Amaglobeli", <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/sep/27/prison-cell-georgia-implore-europe-abandon-russia>

234. European Parliament Press Release (2025), "Andrzej Poczobut and Mzia Amaglobeli: laureates of the 2025 Sakharov Prize", <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20251016IPR30949/andrzej-poczobut-and-mzia-amaglobeli-laureates-of-the-2025-sakharov-prize>

235. IPI (2025), "Seven distinguished journalists named recipients of the 2025 IPI-IMS World Press Freedom Hero award", <https://ipi.media/2025-world-press-freedom-hero-award/>

236. IPI (2025), "Hungary: New EU Media Board should assess Blikk acquisition by pro-government media group", <https://ipi.media/hungary-new-eu-media-board-should-assess-blikk-acquisition-by-pro-government-media-group/>

237. IPI (2025), "Hungary: RFE service shuttered by Trump administration for 'opposing' ally Orbán", <https://ipi.media/hungary-rfe-service-shuttered-by-trump-administration-for-opposing-ally-orban/>

■ Political harassment and smear campaigns intensified throughout 2025, fuelled by polarisation ahead of the April 2026 elections. Journalists and outlets critical of the government were increasingly portrayed as partisan actors or “foreign agents”, including by pro-government media linked to the KESMA foundation and by the Sovereignty Protection Office (SPO). This environment has driven widespread online abuse, coordinated disinformation attacks and reputational smearing of journalists seen as undermining government priorities.

■ Journalists report abusive use of data-protection and press-correction procedures to intimidate or punish critical reporting. Concerns persist that the lack of judicial independence exacerbates the chilling effect of such claims. No meaningful progress was made towards implementing the EU’s EMFA, which the Hungarian government publicly challenged before the European Court of Justice.

■ A major threat in 2025 was the draft “Transparency in Public Life” bill, which, if passed, would have enabled the blacklisting, financial restriction or closure of media receiving foreign funding. Although the bill was shelved, the ruling party’s two-thirds parliamentary majority and the prolonged state of emergency mean it could be revived at any time without consultation. Even dormant, the bill has already had a chilling effect, forcing media outlets and civil society to develop contingency plans for potential exile or closure. The SPO has continued to frame foreign-funded media as disloyal actors, feeding online hate campaigns and undermining public trust.

■ Digital threats remained significant. Following the 2021 revelation of Pegasus spyware used against journalists, impunity persists: no official has been held accountable and national security justifications continue to obstruct scrutiny. Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks periodically disrupted independent outlets and questions remain about potential coordination or external support behind these incidents.

■ Despite these pressures, Hungary retains a core of predominantly online independent media committed to fact-based, public-interest reporting. Many rely on subscriptions, donations and community support that remain relatively strong. Yet their position is extremely fragile in a landscape dominated by state-aligned actors, economic pressure and an increasingly hostile political climate.

■ The Platform partners’ mission to Budapest in October 2025 confirmed these trends and highlighted the shrinking space for independent journalism.<sup>238</sup> With the 2026 elections approaching, the systemic nature of Hungary’s media capture poses profound risks to pluralistic public debate and democratic accountability.

### *In December, the European Commission moved towards infringement proceedings against Hungary under the EMFA.*

■ In December, the European Commission sent Hungary a formal letter of notice under the EMFA, signalling its intention to open infringement proceedings for non-compliance with EU media law, notably concerning public service media, transparency of media ownership and the protection of journalistic sources.<sup>239</sup>

## **Serbia**

■ In 2025, Serbia emerged as a major flashpoint for attacks on press freedom in Europe. The number of Platform alerts rose sharply over the course of the year, as the media environment grew increasingly hostile for journalists, particularly in the aftermath of the fatal collapse of a railway canopy in Novi Sad on 1 November 2024, which triggered nationwide anti-corruption protests.

■ The situation deteriorated for independent journalists reporting on and at the front lines of the protests.<sup>240</sup> Excessive use of force by law enforcement posed a serious additional risk to journalists’ safety, with police officers responding either through inaction or by directly confronting journalists with violence and arbitrary arrests.<sup>241</sup> A protest in Belgrade on 28 June was particularly violent, resulting in injuries to numerous journalists.<sup>242</sup> Novi

238. Statement of the Safety of Journalists Platform following the mission to Hungary, (2025), <https://go.coe.int/Ly8VQ>

239. Shelton, John (2025), “EU slams Hungary over media infringement, threatens ECJ suit”, DW, <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-slams-hungary-over-media-infringement-threatens-ecj-suit/a-75118974>

240. EFJ (2025), “From Vienna to Novi Sad: Standing in solidarity with the people of Serbia”, <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2025/10/24/from-vienna-to-novi-sad-standing-in-solidarity-with-the-people-of-serbia/>

241. MFRR Statement (2025), “Serbia: Media Freedom Crisis Deepens, EU Must Take Action”, <https://www.mfrr.eu/serbia-media-freedom-continues-to-decline-at-alarming-speed-eu-must-take-action/>

242. Alert “Police Assault and Injure Journalists Covering Protest in Belgrade”, <https://go.coe.int/jKgyy>

Sad also saw repeated incidents of obstruction against journalists, including arrests and the confiscation of equipment.<sup>243</sup>

■ Statements by high-ranking officials, including President Aleksandar Vučić, helped foster hostility towards independent voices by framing them as “enemies” of the state. This hostility was particularly directed at the main remaining independent TV station N1. A recent instance involved President Vučić publicly endorsing a smear campaign by a pro-government tabloid against N1 journalists,<sup>244</sup> who were accused of not “seeing anything controversial” in an alleged, but fabricated, call for violence against the President. A day prior, *KTV* journalist Dikić was arrested and his home searched on charges of “calling for a violent change of the constitutional order” after his statement was twisted and shared by tabloids.<sup>245</sup> A few weeks before, Vučić publicly humiliated N1 journalist Mladen Savatović,<sup>246</sup> who had been repeatedly targeted by online homophobic remarks. Savatović received new threats in the following days.

■ In July, after President Vučić denounced N1 as “pure terrorism”,<sup>247</sup> the newsroom received a letter threatening it with a “*Charlie Hebdo*-style” attack, in addition to the online death threats that it receives daily.<sup>248</sup> This follows a pattern of discrediting journalists and fuelling hostility toward the media, with local journalists increasingly targeted<sup>249</sup> and facing higher safety risks.

■ Staff at N1, *Nova*, *Danas*, *Radar* and *Insajder TV*’s Brankica Stanković were also threatened with a “*Charlie Hebdo*-style” attack by different perpetrators. Media professionals like Nenad Kulačin, with his co-host Marko Vidojković<sup>250</sup> or Dinko Gruhonjić, were targeted along with their families,<sup>251</sup> including by smear and hate campaigns,<sup>252</sup> with perpetrators rarely brought to justice. Illegal use of advanced spyware tools for surveillance remained a major concern for journalists and their sources, following new infection attacks on journalists’ devices in 2025.<sup>253</sup>

■ Journalists’ unions were also targeted by smear campaigns. The newly created Association of Journalists of Serbia (ANS) spread false narratives,<sup>254</sup> labelling the Independent Journalists’ Association of Serbia (NUNS), an organisation that “supports the riot organisers”. The vilification campaign,<sup>255</sup> which was then publicly backed up by President Vučić, stemmed from NUNS providing safety equipment to journalists covering the protests.<sup>256</sup> NUNS was also targeted by the pro-government tabloid *Informer TV* with the divulgence of confidential financial information, as part of efforts to discredit the union for journalists.<sup>257</sup>

■ The 2025 Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom’s Media Monitoring Monitor (MPM), which maps risks for media pluralism and the safety of journalists across Europe, identified high risks (68%) in Serbia, over the concentration of the media market under a growing state-party control.<sup>258</sup> According to the MPM, the appointment process to the Council of the Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media (REM),<sup>259</sup> Serbia’s media regulator, was again conducted in a flawed manner, defined by many as lacking the necessary transparency and independence.

243. Alert “Several Journalists Forcibly Obstructed by Police While Covering Protest in Novi Sad”, <https://go.coe.int/QtMSr>

244. Alert on Mapping Media Freedom, “N1 Television journalist Danica Vučenić targeted with smear campaign backed by President Vučić”, <https://www.mapmf.org/alert/34305>

245. Alert on Mapping Media Freedom, “KTV journalist Aleksandar Dikić attributed false calls ‘for a violent change of the constitutional order’”, <https://www.mapmf.org/alert/34304>

246. Alert on Mapping Media Freedom, “N1 television journalist Mladen Savatović verbally abused by Serbian President Vučić”, <https://www.mapmf.org/alert/34237>

247. Alert “Serbia: President Denigrates Independent Broadcasters N1 and Nova”, <https://go.coe.int/BhnBa>

248. Ibid, Alert update

249. Alert on Mapping Media Freedom, “Journalist Kristina Demeter Filipčev repeatedly discredited by President of the Municipality of Bečej”, <https://www.mapmf.org/alert/34309>

250. Alert “Serbian Journalist Nenad Kulačin and His Family Threatened Online With Death”, <https://go.coe.int/Et4A4>

251. Alert update, “Death Threats on Leaders of Vojvodina Association of Independent Journalists Ana Lalić Hegediš and Dinko Gruhonjić”, <https://go.coe.int/QfYEi>

252. Alert “Several Serbian Journalists Targeted by Smear Campaign”, <https://go.coe.int/9H9hy>

253. Alert “BIRN Journalists Targeted with Pegasus Spyware”, <https://go.coe.int/2lsVC>

254. Alert “Smear Campaign Against Independent Journalists Association of Serbia”, <https://go.coe.int/fwX7U>

255. Alert update, “Smear Campaign Against Independent Journalists Association of Serbia”, <https://go.coe.int/fwX7U>

256. EFJ and IFJ Statement (2025), “Serbia: EFJ-IFJ condemn President Vučić’s support of smear campaign against NUNS as the country prepares to mark anniversary of deadly station collapse”, <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2025/10/31/serbia-efj-ifj-condemn-president-vucics-support-of-smear-campaign-against-nuns-as-the-country-prepares-to-mark-anniversary-of-deadly-station-collapse/>

257. Alert “Informer TV Broadcast Discloses Confidential Financial Information to Discredit the Independent Journalists’ Association of Serbia”, <https://go.coe.int/z9v40>

258. Milutinović, Irina (2025), “Monitoring media pluralism in the European Union: results of the MPM2025. Country report: Serbia”, <https://cadmus.eui.eu/entities/publication/e176c784-969b-4b57-bbad-829df1e44cbe>

259. MFRR Report (2025), “Serbia: Media regulator election again made a mockery of EU-required reforms”, <https://www.mfrr.eu/serbia-media-regulator-election-again-made-a-mockery-of-eu-required-reforms/>

■ In April, the main independent TV channels, N1 and *Nova TV*, were removed from satellite television service, leaving viewers with no choice but to watch these channels on the internet.<sup>260</sup> In July, investigations by the OCCRP (Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project) and KRIK (Crime and Corruption Reporting Network) revealed politically motivated plans to weaken their independence.<sup>261</sup> N1 and *Nova* have been the target of attacks by several high-ranking officials for allegedly acting against the state. This includes Information and Telecommunications Minister Boris Bratina, who declared that they “should not exist on the airwaves of our country”.<sup>262</sup>

■ The public broadcaster RTS, criticised for its coverage of protests, has not been spared from political interference.<sup>263</sup> Media professionals in various media outlets, such as *Euronews Serbia*,<sup>264</sup> *ELLE Serbia*, *Večernje Novosti* and *Politika*, have been fired or forced to resign, for resisting censorship and defending ethical journalism.<sup>265</sup>

### *Serbia is among Europe's leading countries for SLAPPs against the media.*

■ Serbia also remains one of the countries in Europe with the highest number of SLAPPs against the media, with investigative media outlets probing crime and corruption bearing the brunt of this legal pressure.<sup>266</sup>

■ The MFRR conducted a solidarity mission to Belgrade and Novi Sad on 7-9 April 2025, finding a press-freedom situation they describe as an “emergency”, marked by threats to journalists’ safety, the use of spyware, media capture and SLAPPs. In its report,<sup>267</sup> the MFRR urged the authorities to end public attacks on journalists, halt illegal police actions and unlawful surveillance, investigate both recent and historic attacks and ensure independent media regulation and public broadcasting. It also called on the European Union to publicly denounce assaults, smear campaigns, political interference in media and the use of spyware, and to consistently press Serbian authorities on the status of investigations into attacks on journalists.

## **Slovak Republic**

■ In 2025, the Slovak journalistic community was confronted with a troubling question: was Pavol Rýpal the country’s first journalist killed because of his work,<sup>268</sup> a decade before the murder of Ján Kuciak? This question was not new. It was raised when Rýpal disappeared on 22 April 2008 and resurfaced after Ján Kuciak’s assassination in 2018. On both occasions, the police examined Rýpal’s case. However, in the absence of evidence establishing a link between his work and his disappearance, the authorities did not conclude that he had been killed. He has remained classified as a missing person.

■ The 17-year-old case was reopened last summer following testimony by a Slovak national detained in Hungary. According to the 5 August edition of *Plus 1 deň*, Norbert Kostov told Slovak police that he had surveilled, abducted and killed journalist Pavol Rýpal with accomplices and that the killing had been commissioned by a mafia figure.<sup>269</sup> On 6 August, police confirmed that criminal proceedings for the “premeditated murder” of Pavol Rýpal had been opened earlier that month.

260. Alert on Mapping Media Freedom, “Serbia: N1 and Nova dropped from Total TV satellite”, <https://www.mapmf.org/alert/33176>

261. MFRR Statement (2025), “Serbia: MFRR partners warn against attempt to seize political control of last remaining independent TV stations N1 and Nova”, <https://www.mfrr.eu/serbia-mfrr-partners-warn-against-attempt-to-seize-political-control-of-last-remaining-independent-tv-stations-n1-and-nova/>

262. Alert on Mapping Media Freedom, “Information and Telecommunications Minister Boris Bratina publicly called for the removal of Radio Free Europe (RFE), N1 and Nova TV”, <https://www.mapmf.org/alert/34106>

263. EFJ Statement (2025), “Serbia: We demand an immediate end to retaliation against RTS employees for defending objective reporting”, <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2025/07/25/serbia-we-demand-an-immediate-end-to-retaliation-against-rtis-employees-for-defending-objective-reporting/>

264. Alert “Recent Dismissal Highlights Concerns at Euronews Serbia”, <https://go.coe.int/6o5Gj>

265. Alert “Several Journalists Dismissed after Expressing Support for Student Protests”, <https://go.coe.int/QCWXY>

266. Alert on Mapping Media Freedom, “KRIK sued for defamation by acting director of Serbian Railway Infrastructure”, <https://www.mapmf.org/alert/32814>

267. MFRR Mission Report (2025), “Media freedom in a state of emergency”, <https://www.mfrr.eu/serbia-media-freedom-in-a-state-of-emergency-new-report/>

268. Alert “Long-Unresolved Disappearance of Journalist Pavol Rýpal”, <https://go.coe.int/GW8QT>

269. Ďurovová, Henrieta (2025), “Dvojnásobný vrah prehovoril: Nové detaily o zmiznutí novinára Pala Rýpala, polícia koná”, <https://www1.pluska.sk/krimi/dvojnásobny-vrah-prehovoril-nove-a-desive-detaily-o-zmiznuti-novinara-pala-rypala>

## *New testimony prompted Slovakia to reopen the case of journalist Pavol Rýpal amid suspicions he was killed for his work.*

■ This development came as a shock to the Slovak public, where the prevailing assumption had been that Rýpal had disappeared voluntarily. That theory had been supported by a letter in which he asked his landlord to dispose of his belongings, as well as by accounts from people close to the 39-year-old journalist describing earlier short-term disappearances, which had reinforced the view that no crime had been committed.

■ The Slovak journalist Arpád Soltész, who personally knew both Pavol Rýpal and Ján Kuciak, believes that in “the case of [Pavol Rýpal], the whole society failed, not least ourselves, in the journalistic community, because we did not exercise sufficient pressure for it to be investigated”. The first director of the Investigative Centre of Ján Kuciak (ICJK) continues by saying that even if the police prove the journalist was killed, “which would be practically impossible” without the identification of his body, “it is such an old case that it would be inappropriate to expect a miracle from the police, prosecutor’s office and courts”.

■ The successor of Soltész at the helm of the ICJK, Lukáš Diko, believes, however, that it will be very important to follow all steps of the authorities in the case. Just as in the file of the assassination of Ján Kuciak, which was scheduled to be re-judged from 26 January 2026.

■ The retrial of the alleged mastermind Marián Kočner was ordered in May 2025 by Slovakia’s Supreme Court, which thereby overruled his second acquittal. The businessman with ties to the party Smer-SDD, which was in power when the journalist was killed and is currently leading the government, was acquitted in 2021 and 2023 by the Special Criminal Court. Marián Kočner is expected to attend his retrial, ordered by the Supreme Court and assigned to a different panel of judges, from prison, where he is serving a lengthy sentence for fraud against Slovakia’s largest television broadcaster, *TV Markíza*.

■ “The whole case is back to square one, so we absolutely cannot expect a final verdict in the upcoming years”, says Arpád Soltész.

■ There is, however, a lesson to take from the two cases. Lukáš Diko: “We and journalists must be very careful not to underestimate their safety. Even in cases of small attacks, we must push the police [...] and the state bodies [...] because the investigation and identification of perpetrators can have a preventive effect”.

## **Türkiye**

■ Türkiye is one of Europe’s most challenging environments for independent journalism, characterised by legal harassment, intimidation and censorship.

■ In 2025, authorities’ actions further eroded press freedom and media pluralism. Political pressure shaped the press freedom landscape, with high-profile detentions signalling an escalation of repression. On 19 March, Istanbul Mayor and presidential candidate of the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP), Ekrem İmamoğlu, was detained, followed by the detention of other mayors and municipal officials. The ensuing large-scale protests were met with a government crackdown, including mass arrests, the detention of journalists and restrictions on media coverage.

■ RTÜK, Türkiye’s media regulator, prohibited broadcasters from airing footage of the protests and reportedly threatened network executives with licence cancellation. At least 11 journalists were detained in early-morning raids related to their protest coverage and at least 12 others were assaulted by police while on duty.

■ Foreign journalists were also targeted in this crackdown, exemplified by the detention of Swedish reporter Joakim Medin, who was arrested at Istanbul Airport while travelling to cover the protests. Medin, who was charged with “terrorist organisation membership” and “insulting the Turkish president”, was released after more than a month in detention.<sup>270</sup> BBC correspondent Mark Lowen was also detained for 17 hours and subsequently deported, with authorities claiming he “posed a threat to public order”.<sup>271</sup>

■ Physical attacks remained the most brutal form of censorship. Environmental journalist and activist Hakan Tosun was fatally assaulted, with the investigation ongoing and key questions still unanswered about the motive

270. Alert “Swedish Journalist Joakim Medin Detained on Terrorism Charges”, <https://go.coe.int/lxBam>

271. Gozzi, Laura (2025), “BBC’s Mark Lowen deported from Turkey after covering protests”, BBC News, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly34rg5ee5o>

of the attack.<sup>272</sup> Other cases, including assaults, death threats, and harassment of journalists such as Ayşemden Akin,<sup>273</sup> İsmail Arı,<sup>274</sup> Alican Uludağ,<sup>275</sup> Rabia Önver, Şule Aydın and Murat Ağirel,<sup>276</sup> illustrate a broader pattern of intimidation against the press.

### *The arrest of LeMan staff marked a new instance of repression and coordinated legal and criminal pressure against satirical journalism.*

■ The arrest of staff members of the satirical *LeMan* Magazine after publishing a cartoon represented another instance of political repression, where financial, legal, and criminal pressure were simultaneously deployed. Authorities detained five *Leman* staff, launched investigations, confiscated the issue, blocked access to its website and sanctioned other outlets commenting on the case.<sup>277</sup>

■ Judicial pressure and fair trial concerns persist. Arrests and detentions of journalists are among the most frequent threats, with many subjected to prolonged pre-trial detention pending indictment. Most were charged with terrorism or defamation-related offenses. One example was Furkan Karabay,<sup>278</sup> a journalist whose social media posts were deemed to be “insulting public officials and the president”. He remained in pre-trial detention for more than 100 days before being formally indicted.

■ Similarly, prominent journalist Fatih Altaylı<sup>279</sup> was jailed after prosecutors alleged that his discussion of historical instances of Ottoman sultans being overthrown or assassinated constituted a “threat against the Turkish President”.

■ RTÜK intensified censorship by targeting critical television channels through vague charges, imposing at least 30 financial penalties. In the first half of 2025, fines nearing 100 million liras (close to €2 million) were issued by authorities. RTÜK imposed 10 program suspensions and 25 days of broadcast bans, including two full blackouts: *Sözcü TV* was taken off air for 10 days and *Tele1 TV* for five days. The regulator escalated its crackdown by warning that repeat violations could result in permanent license revocation.

■ Furthermore, the practices of the Press Advertising Agency led to the shrinking, closure, or forced mergers of local outlets. Strict and disproportionate criteria for receiving official advertising support functioned as an economic lever of control. Positively, the Constitutional Court annulled the agency’s power to suspend or cut off official advertisement funding, stating the law’s vagueness.

■ Turkish authorities restricted access to social media and messaging platforms during periods of political tension, including one instance where access was blocked for 21 hours. In parallel, RTÜK warned that outlets “undermining societal peace” could face fines or license suspensions.

■ Public debate also centred on the “agents of influence” bill, which would allow authorities to label individuals or organisations receiving foreign support as acting on behalf of “foreign interests”. Although the bill is on hold, concerns persist that it may resurface and criminalise independent journalism and civil society. These fears were reignited by the arrest of journalist and *TELE1* Editor-in-Chief Merdan Yanardağ on espionage charges.<sup>280</sup> The investigation led to Yanardağ’s arrest, with prosecutors alleging links to a network “in contact with foreign intelligence services”. Shortly after Yanardağ’s arrest, a court placed *TELE1* under trusteeship and seized its control.

272. Alert “Turkish Journalist Hakan Tosun Dies After Brutal Assault in Istanbul”, <https://go.coe.int/De2Rg>

273. Alert “Journalist Ayşemden Akin Receives Death Threats Over Investigation”, <https://go.coe.int/z9LIM>

274. Alert “Turkish Journalist İsmail Arı, Family Receive Death Threats After Report on Alleged Bribery”, <https://go.coe.int/dpML1>

275. MFRR Alert “Turkey: International groups alarmed by the targeting of journalist Alican Uludağ”, <https://www.mfrr.eu/turkey-international-groups-alarmed-by-the-targeting-of-journalist-alican-uludag/>

276. Alert “Journalists Rabia Önver, Şule Aydın, and Murat Ağirel Receive Death Threats”, <https://go.coe.int/3bOGg>

277. Alert “Several Journalists from Satirical Magazine *LeMan* Detained Over Cartoon”, <https://go.coe.int/5F6yl>

278. Alert “Turkish Journalist Furkan Karabay Arrested over Report on Social Media”, <https://go.coe.int/KeOa6>

279. Alert “Veteran Journalist Fatih Altaylı Arrested for Online Comments”, <https://go.coe.int/isfQt>

280. Alert “Turkish Authorities Seize Control of *TELE1*, Arrest Editor-in-chief Merdan Yanardağ on Espionage Charges”, <https://go.coe.int/Vo713>

# Institutional responses and policy frameworks

## Measuring impact: national measures to improve press freedom and safety of journalists

■ In 2025, Council of Europe member states adopted or implemented a range of national initiatives aimed at improving journalists' safety and press freedom. These measures are welcome as they reflect the commitment to respond structurally to the threats that are highlighted by alerts on the Platform.

■ Several countries launched National Action Plans or strategies to improve the safety of journalists.

■ Luxembourg unveiled a National Action Plan on the Safety of Journalists in April, emphasising a coordinated approach across ministries, law enforcement and media stakeholders. The plan includes measures to reduce safety risks, improve institutional cooperation, ensure accountability for attacks and educate the public on the role of journalism.<sup>281</sup>

■ In March 2025, the government of Portugal adopted a wide-ranging national action plan for the safety of journalists including measures to strengthen physical protections and to counter online abuse.<sup>282</sup> The plan established a dedicated hotline to report threats, with a direct help line and liaison officers to advise journalists in danger, and a virtual hub offering free legal counsel, psychological support and shelter for threatened media workers. The plan also mandates a journalist safety manual and urges passage of an anti-SLAPP law to curb abusive lawsuits against reporters. A new National Committee on Journalist Safety will coordinate these efforts and publish annual reports on emerging threats.

■ Switzerland continued to implement its National Action Plan for the Safety of Media Professionals (2023–2027). In November 2025 the Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM) published a commissioned study on the risk analysis on journalism in Switzerland. The report finds that journalists face hate messages, digital attacks and legal threats, and recommends stronger contact points, security training and better recognition of journalism's role.<sup>283</sup> Measures under the Plan this year included dialogue between journalists and police and efforts to understand and respond to abusive legal tactics against journalists.

## *Despite the war and martial law, in 2025 Ukraine took steps to restore parliamentary transparency and media access.*

■ Despite operating under martial law due to the war, Ukraine took steps in 2025 to improve parliamentary transparency and media access. In September, the Verkhovna Rada resumed live online broadcasts of plenary sessions on its parliamentary TV channel and in December, President Zelensky signed a law earlier adopted by the Verkhovna Rada on reopening committee meetings to the press, reinforcing journalists' scrutiny of legislative work.

■ Albania introduced protocols to ensure crimes against journalists are handled as a priority. The Police adopted a Protocol on the Safety of Journalists in May 2025, and the Prosecutor General issued a circular instructing prosecutors to treat attacks on media as an "institutional priority". These guidelines created points of contact in law enforcement for journalist cases and aimed to end the past culture of impunity. However, international assessments noted that Albania needed to back these steps with systematic training, data collection, and coordination between police and judiciary to make them truly effective.<sup>284</sup>

281. The Luxembourg Government, The National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists (2025–2028), [https://gouvernement.lu/en/dossiers.gouv2024\\_smc+en+dossiers+national-action-plan-on-the-safety-of-journalists+the-national-action-plan-for-the-safety-of-journalists.html](https://gouvernement.lu/en/dossiers.gouv2024_smc+en+dossiers+national-action-plan-on-the-safety-of-journalists+the-national-action-plan-for-the-safety-of-journalists.html)

282. Presidency of the Council of Ministers, "Resolução do Conselho de Ministros n.º 51/2025", <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/resolucao-conselho-ministros/51-2025-911089441>

283. OFCOM, Analyse des risques dans le journalisme en Suisse <https://www.bakom.admin.ch/fr/analyse-des-risques-dans-le-journalisme-en-suisse>

284. See Scidev, "Freedom of Expression Under the EU Growth Plan – Albania Must Turn Commitments into Action", <https://scidevcenter.org/2025/10/18/freedom-of-expression-under-the-eu-growth-plan-albania-must-turn-commitments-into-action/>

■ In November 2025, the government of Croatia adopted a draft law to implement the EMFA, aiming to establish a unified media regulator with expanded oversight powers across the media sector. Journalists' organisations expressed concerns that the draft law does not sufficiently safeguard editorial independence or ensure the depoliticisation of governance bodies. Parliamentary debate continued into early 2026, with stakeholders calling for stronger protections.

■ In Ireland, from January 2025, Coimisiún na Meán (the Media Commission) began operating under a self-financing model funded through statutory levies on broadcasters, audiovisual and online service providers. The financing framework requires that levy income cover the Commission's regulatory expenses not met by other funding sources, strengthening its financial stability and independence.



*Dubovsky (Ukraine) / Cartooning for Peace*

■ Slovenia adopted a new Media Act in September 2025, marking a major modernisation of media legislation aimed at strengthening transparency, pluralism and the protection of journalists' rights. The government also continued efforts to improve the funding and governance of public service media. In November 2025, draft amendments to the Radiotelevizija Slovenija Act were submitted to Parliament to provide more stable systemic funding and clearer governance arrangements, including a licence fee-based model designed to guarantee resources for minority and music programming. In December 2025, the government adopted a decree establishing state aid mechanisms under the new Media Act, including support for media pluralism, digital transition, production and journalists, and secured increased funding for the Slovenian Press Agency for 2026. Debates continue over long-term financial sustainability and the need to further reduce political influence over public service media financing.

■ In June 2025, Norway adopted a National Strategy to Strengthen Resilience Against Disinformation (2025–2030). This strategy outlines a comprehensive approach to counter false and harmful content, emphasising media literacy among the population, platform accountability and research-based policy on disinformation. It also addresses emerging threats such as deepfakes and AI-generated false media and calls for coordinated efforts across public authorities and sectors to safeguard public trust and democratic discourse.

■ Ahead of its May 2025 local elections, the government of the United Kingdom and the Electoral Commission updated security guidance to address the rise of AI-generated disinformation and online abuse in campaigns. For the first time, official election guidance warned that anyone involved in the electoral process – candidates, officials, journalists – could be targeted by deepfake videos or coordinated falsehoods spread online. The guidance outlined practical steps to verify digital content, secure communications, and maintain transparency through digital imprints on political ads, so voters can see who is behind online material. By explicitly acknowledging AI-enabled disinformation as an emerging threat to democracy, the UK encouraged proactive vigilance and gave election stakeholders tools to respond, such as reporting mechanisms and cybersecurity tips.

■ An important trend in 2025 was the push for legal reforms to counter SLAPPs, as member states moved to transpose the EU anti-SLAPP Directive. (see the section “Making anti-SLAPP laws work”)

■ In December 2025, the government of Belgium approved a draft anti-SLAPP law. The bill, pending parliamentary approval, will enable early dismissal of manifestly unfounded lawsuits and shift the burden of proof onto claimants in such cases. Judges could swiftly strike out vexatious claims and even penalise those who file them, offering stronger protection for journalists and activists.

■ In December 2025, Cyprus fast-tracked a bill titled the Protection of Public Participation Law. Importantly, if adopted, the Cypriot draft extends anti-SLAPP protections to domestic cases, not only cross-border. It would

allow courts to dismiss baseless lawsuits targeting speech on matters of public interest and require plaintiffs to prove their case is not abusive. Draft provisions include shifting legal costs to the SLAPP initiators and enabling damages for those hit with SLAPPs, creating a deterrent against legal harassment.

■ In June 2025, the Ministry of Justice of Germany published a draft bill to implement the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive by amending the Code of Civil Procedure. The proposal goes beyond EU minimums: it would make the new anti-SLAPP procedures available for domestic lawsuits as well as cross-border. Targets of an obvious SLAPP could apply for early dismissal of the case, and courts could sanction plaintiffs by awarding costs and damages to the defendant. The draft was under consultation through late 2025.

■ In June 2025, Greece adopted a new law to strengthen transparency and editorial safeguards in the printed and electronic press, in line with the European Media Freedom Act. Greece also continued work on transposing the EU anti-SLAPP Directive and upgraded the POESY SLAPPs Observatory, although press freedom bodies note that these measures have yet to deliver a perceptible improvement in journalists' protection in practice.

■ As this report went to print, Ireland was in the final legislative stages of overhauling its defamation laws through the Defamation (Amendment) Bill, which abolishes juries in defamation cases and introduces measures aimed at countering Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs). Press freedom groups regretted that the bill confines anti-SLAPP protections to defamation proceedings, omitting some safeguards required under the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive. They argued that this leaves gaps in protection against abusive litigation based on other causes of action, such as privacy, copyright and data protection and called on lawmakers to strengthen the legislation.

■ On 18 June 2025, new legal provisions took effect to tackle SLAPPs in England and Wales aimed at reporting on economic crime. Sections 194–195 of the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023 established the UK's first anti-SLAPP protections in law. Press freedom organisations have highlighted that the narrow and flawed mechanism could limit its effectiveness for those targeted by SLAPPs and continue to call for universal legislative protections. Separately, in Scotland, the Scottish Government announced in November 2025 following a public consultation that they agreed that “that the law should be reformed to address SLAPPs and would intend to do so at the next legislative opportunity”. The stated goal would be to protect those “speaking on matters of public interest” such as journalists. Moreover, the UK refreshed its National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists, originally launched in 2021. The updated Plan now explicitly addresses the emerging threat of SLAPPs, establishing a cross-sector anti-SLAPP Taskforce and improving guidance to law enforcement on recognising SLAPP-like complaints.

■ Another focus has been strengthening journalists' rights to source confidentiality.

■ In July 2025, the government of Spain approved a draft Organic Law to guarantee journalists' right to protect their sources. This proposed law for the first time will give full statutory protection to journalistic professional secrecy. It explicitly enshrines the right of journalists not to reveal source identities or hand over unpublished materials and forbids the installation of intrusive spyware on journalists' devices except in exceptional cases authorised by a judge (e.g. to prevent an imminent threat to life or state security). Any judicial override of source confidentiality would be tightly limited, requiring necessity, proportionality and prior court approval. This reform aims to reinforce the privacy of journalist-source communications and address past scandals involving spyware abuse.

■ Responding to concerns about source protection, Portugal's parliament in 2025 debated amendments to the Journalists' Statute to reinforce the ban on searches and seizures in newsrooms and to strengthen confidentiality of sources. Though a final law was not passed by year's end, the Justice Ministry took interim action by issuing guidelines: prosecutors were instructed to treat crimes against journalists as high-priority cases for investigation and prosecution, as a signal that attacks on the press will not be tolerated.

■ Some member states undertook initiatives to protect journalists at risk, whether from persecution, conflict or abusive prosecutions.

*Estonia has emerged as a safe haven for journalists fleeing repression. Germany, the Netherlands, France and Sweden have also stood out for their role in protecting journalists in exile.*

■ Estonia has emerged as a safe haven for persecuted journalists from repressive regimes. As part of its contribution to the global Media Freedom Coalition, the Estonian government issues around 35 emergency residency visas each year for at-risk foreign journalists (particularly from neighbouring Russia and Belarus). These long-term visas, along with humanitarian visas, allow threatened journalists to relocate to Estonia and continue their work safely. Estonia's program provides a crucial refuge and is seen as a model of solidarity with independent journalists under threat.

■ Several other countries, notably Germany, the Netherlands, France and Sweden, stand out for their role in protecting journalists in exile, combining legal safeguards, institutional support, hosting conditions and international leadership.

■ In May 2025, in Czechia, a court refused to extradite to Russia the exiled journalist Farida Kurbangaleeva. Kurbangaleeva, a former state TV anchor turned Kremlin critic, had been charged in Russia under draconian "false news" laws for her reporting on the war in Ukraine. The Prague Municipal Court recognised that the extradition request was politically motivated and therefore denied it. This decision not only protected Kurbangaleeva from imprisonment but also reinforced the principle that journalists should not be sent back to face persecution for their work.

## Confronting democratic backsliding: Council of Europe action in 2025

■ In 2025, the Council of Europe stepped up its response to democratic backsliding. The Secretary General Alain Berset launched the New Democratic Pact for Europe, a process designed to strengthen democratic values and resilience in the face of authoritarianism, disinformation and institutional erosion.<sup>285</sup> Platform partners stand ready to work with the Council of Europe and member states to translate this process into concrete reforms and measurable improvements for press freedom and journalist safety.

■ The Group of Friends for the safety of journalists and media freedom, on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Platform, on World Press Freedom Day<sup>286</sup> and on the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists,<sup>287</sup> reaffirmed commitment to media freedom and urged all member states to undertake ambitious measures to protect journalists and media freedom, to implement Council of Europe instruments and case-law of the European Court of Human Rights and to adopt national action plans for the safety of journalists. They further called on all member states to mobilise resources and pledged continued support for the Platform and engagement with the Journalists Matter Campaign.

■ The Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI) approved a draft Recommendation on online safety, platform accountability and user empowerment, which was submitted to the Committee of Ministers for consideration and possible adoption. The CDMSI also adopted policy documents providing guidance to member states on how to counter disinformation<sup>288</sup> and build a more resilient information environment.<sup>289</sup>

■ The Parliamentary Assembly played an active role in 2025 on issues including content moderation in social media,<sup>290</sup> foreign interference and democratic security;<sup>291</sup> democracy and the rule of law in Georgia;<sup>292</sup> the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the liberation of captive Ukrainian journalists.<sup>293</sup>

285. Council of Europe, "The New Democratic Pact for Europe", <https://www.coe.int/en/web/new-democratic-pact-for-europe>; Council of Europe, "Toward a New Democratic Pact for Europe", Report by the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/secretary-general/report-2025>

286. Group of Friends for the Safety of Journalists and Media Freedom, Joint statement on World Press Freedom Day, <https://go.coe.int/ydUPs>

287. Group of Friends for the Safety of Journalists and Media Freedom, Statement on the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists 2nd November 2025, <https://go.coe.int/JDdAq>

288. Council of Europe, "Resisting disinformation: 10 building blocks to strengthen information integrity", <https://rm.coe.int/cdmsi-2025-17rev-e-clean-resisting-disinformation-10-building-blocks-f/488029df7d>

289. Council of Europe, "National media and information literacy strategies – practical steps and indicators", <https://rm.coe.int/cdmsi-2025-09-guidelines-for-national-media-and-information-literacy-s/488029ec67>

290. Parliamentary Assembly, "Regulating content moderation on social media to safeguard freedom of expression", Resolution 2590(2025), <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/34156>

291. Parliamentary Assembly, "Foreign interference: a threat to democratic security in Europe", Resolution 2593(2025), <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/34252>

292. Parliamentary Assembly, "The situation in Georgia and follow-up to Resolution 2585 (2025) 'Challenge, on substantive grounds, of the still unratified credentials of the parliamentary delegation of Georgia'", Resolution 2600(2025), <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/34293>; Parliamentary Assembly, "Uphold democracy and the rule of law in Georgia", Resolution 2624(2025), <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/35692>

293. Parliamentary Assembly, "Legal and human rights aspects of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine", Resolution 2605(2025), <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/34487>; Parliamentary Assembly, "Russia: new threats to European democracies", Resolution 2622(2025), <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/35685>; Parliamentary Assembly, "Journalists matter: the need to step up efforts to liberate Ukrainian journalists held in captivity by the Russian Federation", Resolution 2618(2025), <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/35656>

■ The Commissioner for Human Rights in 2025 assessed the human rights situation in Georgia and intervened before the European Court of Human Rights on Georgia’s “foreign Influence” law.<sup>294</sup> The Venice Commission provided legal guidance before the European Court of Human Rights on the Georgian laws<sup>295</sup> and on reform of media regulation in the Republic of Moldova.<sup>296</sup>

■ In 2025, within the framework of the Journalists Matter Campaign, 41 of the 46 member states had designated national “focal points” to coordinate action on the safety of journalists with the Council of Europe. National committees for the safety of journalists were put in place in 27 member states, and 11 member states had adopted national action plans. In April 2025, the Campaign’s annual conference brought judges, prosecutors, media representatives and organisations to discuss best practices and build a paradigm against impunity over killings and other serious crimes against journalists.<sup>297</sup> A 2025 review of the Campaign called for wider outreach, stronger engagement with journalists and more effective action at national level. Platform partners stress that sustained Council of Europe engagement and close cooperation with civil society will be essential to the Campaign’s success.

■ In 2025, following Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)2 on countering the use of SLAPPs,<sup>298</sup> the Council of Europe promoted tools,<sup>299</sup> resources and training<sup>300</sup> helping judges, prosecutors, lawyers and other legal professionals spot, respond to, and tackle SLAPPs in line with European standards. The organisation launched a training programme on SLAPPs.<sup>301</sup>

■ The European Court of Human Rights delivered significant case-law on freedom of expression in 2025 in several cases against Russia. In *Ukraine and the Netherlands v. Russia*, the Court found multiple violations of Article 10 in Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine after 16 September 2022, including administrative interference with access to information, intimidation, detention and killing of journalists, restrictive information laws and arbitrary blocking of media outlets.<sup>302</sup> In *Novaya Gazeta and Others v. Russia*, the Court found that the prosecution and shutdown of media for “discrediting” the Russian military or spreading “fake news”, combined with retrospective application of the law and severe sanctions, violated Article 10 and formed part of a broader campaign to suppress dissent about the war in Ukraine.<sup>303</sup>

■ Looking ahead, high-level political commitment must translate into measurable action through strengthened implementation of the Journalists Matter campaign, including improved outreach to journalists and civil society, adequate resourcing, and more systematic engagement by member states through the Platform. Press freedom, media pluralism and journalist safety should be placed at the core of the New Democratic Pact for

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294. Commissioner for Human Rights, Memorandum, “Commissioner for Human Rights Calls for Stronger Protection of Human Rights in Georgia”, 26 March 2025, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/commissioner-for-human-rights-calls-for-stronger-protection-of-human-rights-in-georgia>; Commissioner for Human Rights, “Third-party intervention in ECtHR case on Georgia’s ‘Foreign influence’ law”, 21 October 2025, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/commissioner-of-flaherty-intervenes-in-ecthr-case-on-georgia-s-foreign-influence-law>
295. Venice Commission, “Georgia - Opinion on the Law on the Registration of Foreign Agents, the amendments to the Law on Grants and other Laws relating to ‘foreign influence’”, CDL-AD(2025)034-e, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/venice-commission/-/opinion-1243>; Venice Commission, “Amicus curiae brief for the European Court of Human Rights in *Gyla and Others v. Georgia* on regulation of foreign influence”, CDL-AD(2025)035-e, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/venice-commission/-/opinion-1249>
296. Venice Commission, “Republic of Moldova - Opinion on the legislative reforms on mass media regulation: the draft law on mass media, the draft law amending the Audiovisual Media Services Code, and the draft law amending the Law on advertising”, CDL-AD(2025)027-e, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/venice-commission/-/opinion-1240>
297. Council of Europe, “Annual Thematic Conference: Building the paradigm against impunity of crimes against journalists”, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/annual-thematic-conference-2025>
298. Committee of Ministers, Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)2 to member states on countering the use of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), <https://search.coe.int/cm/?i=091259488025f13d>
299. PRO-FREX, “Guide for legal professionals on freedom of expression, SLAPPs and related ECHR standards”, June 2025, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/-/new-guide-helps-legal-professionals-counter-slapps-through-echr-standards>; Council of Europe, “Limiting the use of criminal law to restrict freedom of expression – a guide to Council of Europe standards”, 9 September 2025, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/-/limiting-the-use-of-criminal-law-to-restrict-freedom-of-expression-new-guidance-to-member-states>
300. See, e.g. Anti-SLAPPs Training to Protect Journalists in North Macedonia, Mavrovo, 21-23 August 2025, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/-/anti-slapps-training-to-protect-journalists-in-north-macedonia>; Strengthening Judicial Protection for Journalists – SLAPPs Training in Prague, 9-10 October 2025, [https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/view-all-news-campaign-for-the-safety-of-journalists/-/asset\\_publisher/rWkteAS1KHfQ/content/strengthening-judicial-protection-for-journalists-slapps-training-in-prague/](https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/view-all-news-campaign-for-the-safety-of-journalists/-/asset_publisher/rWkteAS1KHfQ/content/strengthening-judicial-protection-for-journalists-slapps-training-in-prague/); Capacity building session on European standards on the protection from defamation and strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), Sarajevo, 16-17 October 2025, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/-/council-of-europe-supports-strategic-dialogue-on-democracy-and-media-freedom-at-the-donbas-media-forum-2025-1>
301. Launch of the Training Programme on Countering Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), 10 November 2025, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/-/new-training-programme-helps-protect-journalists-from-abusive-legal-tactics>
302. European Court of Human Rights, *Ukraine and the Netherlands v. Russia* [GC], Nos. 8019/16, 43800/14, 28525/20 and 11055/22, 9 July 2025, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre?i=002-14493>
303. European Court of Human Rights, *Novaya Gazeta and Others v. Russia*, Nos. 11884/22 and 161 others, 11 February 2025, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre?i=001-241738>

Europe, supported by regular review of states' follow-up to Platform alerts, reinforced peer engagement through the Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists, and a clear roadmap integrating journalist-safety objectives across Council of Europe policies and activities.

## European Union: from ambition to enforcement

■ In 2025, the European Union advanced positive measures to defend press freedom, though questions remain about whether the European Commission's actions will translate into meaningful change for journalists on the ground. 2026 will therefore be a litmus test of whether the European Commission has the political authority and resolve to fully enforce EU legislation protecting the information space, including the European Media Freedom Act and the Digital Services Act, by upholding the law and challenging powerful political and business actors. Such enforcement will need to be swift and decisive to address increasingly polarised democratic and rule-of-law contexts across Europe.

■ In 2025, the European Commission continued to present media freedom as a priority for EU action. In her annual State of the Union address to the European Parliament, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen warned that the dismantling or neutralisation of independent media weakens the ability to expose corruption and safeguard democracy.<sup>304</sup> She reiterated commitments to action, including through the proposed European Democracy Shield and increased funding. However, concerns have been raised that these commitments may be affected by the erosion of a centrist consensus within the EU, particularly in the European Parliament, where the centre-right has, on several issues, relied on support from far-right parties - raising questions about future political backing for press freedom initiatives.

■ The European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), which establishes a common regulatory framework to strengthen media independence, pluralism and editorial independence for both private and public media, became fully applicable in EU member states from 8 August 2025. In line with the provisions of the law, the new European Board for Media Services - an independent advisory body composed of national media regulatory authorities to promote the effective and consistent application of EMFA - began its official operations in February 2025. The Board's work, which includes issuing opinions, assisting with the Commission's supervising of EMFA's application and ensuring cooperation between regulatory authorities, was still in development at the year's end (although a 2026 Work Programme was expected). However, it has been active in reaching out to relevant stakeholders and gathering expertise on different topics.

■ Some member states were slow or had regulatory authorities who lacked sufficient capacity to implement the European Media Freedom Act after the 8 August deadline, raising early concerns about the Regulation's enforceability, despite its immediate and binding application across all member states. On 11 December, the European Commission issued its first infringement proceedings through EMFA against Hungary for its failure to comply with provisions on "interference in the work of journalists and media outlets in Hungary, restricting their economic activities and editorial freedom".<sup>305</sup> Press freedom groups have been pressing the European Commission to launch further infringement proceedings against EU member states in relation to EMFA. Hungary's legal proceedings to challenge EMFA in the EU's European Court of Justice however served as a clear indication about the country's refusal to enforce the law.

■ Article 5 of the EMFA establishes key protections for public service media, emphasising editorial and financial independence. Strong, consistent action now is essential: dedicated multi-year budgets and robust governance mechanisms must be established and re-affirmed where already existing, to ensure public service media remain resilient, impartial and capable of fulfilling their public service mandate. This is a decisive moment to translate the EMFA's principles into lasting, practical safeguards.

■ 2026 will be a crucial test of Brussels' ability to challenge US tech platforms under the Digital Services Act (DSA). In December 2025, the European Commission issued its first penalty under the DSA, imposing a €120 million fine on X for breaching transparency obligations. Investigations into other large platforms, like TikTok and Meta, were ongoing. Civil society pushed for further probes to be concluded. Despite risk assessments having been carried out, platforms had not taken mitigation measures to better protect the rights of journalists online, including working with at risk journalist communities to understand and respond to threats better.

304. European Commission, "State of the Union 2025", [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/state-union/state-union-2025\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/state-union/state-union-2025_en)

305. European Commission, "Commission calls on Hungary to comply with European Media Freedom Act and Audiovisual Media Services Directive", <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-calls-hungary-comply-european-media-freedom-act-and-audiovisual-media-services-directive>

■ In November 2025, the Commission unveiled the European Democracy Shield, a package of measures aimed at reinforcing democratic institutions, including safeguarding the integrity of the information space, strengthening democratic institutions and civil society and supporting resilient media ecosystems. The measures provoked initial criticism from some in the European Parliament in November, including for proposing actions which lacked ambition, building on already existing initiatives and or simply proposing further future strategies.<sup>306</sup> At the year's end, the European Parliament's Special Committee on the European Democracy Shield was set to deliver a report proposing improvements to the proposed framework.

■ Activities put forward in the text included building a crisis protocol for incidents relating to the DSA supporting independent fact-checking capabilities, monitoring implementation of the EMFA, a review of the 2021 Journalist Safety Recommendation and mobilising EU funding for independent journalism. Legislatively, it proposed a review of the Copyright Directive and the Audiovisual Media Services Directive. The revision of the Audiovisual Media Service Directive will seek to modernise the existing law to further help strengthen independence, improve transparency, regulate platforms more tightly and protect the integrity of audiovisual news. This may include building independence of national media regulators and obligations of online platforms distributing news, creating fairer audience access and tougher rules regarding the impact of artificial intelligence on the media ecosystem in Europe.

■ The European Commission's proposal for the upcoming EU budget, the 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), included €49 billion for education and democratic values, with a significant increase to media funding from the 2021-2027 period. Of this, €3.2 billion were set aside for supporting independent journalism and media projects through the Agora EU programme. However, the Commission's proposal came under immediate political pressure from member states eager to spend less and squeezed in a complex web of competing priorities. The negotiations for the MFF will conclude in 2027.

■ The scope and effectiveness of the EU's anti-SLAPP directive was still inconclusive. Some member states actively worked to transpose the directive by the May 2026 deadline and strengthen legal protections for journalists, collecting and sharing information on SLAPPs and developing a legal framework.

■ Member states continued to disagree on a common position for the Child Sexual Abuse Regulation. The draft law would compel online platforms to scan user content and metadata for harmful images, paving the way for backdoors to encrypted content, jeopardising journalists' ability to protect their sources and violating the right to confidential communications. Institutional negotiations, known as "trilogues" started on 10 December with a view to finalising the law in 2026, after years of deadlock.

■ Press freedom groups are determined to monitor the EU's actions so that it ensures the effective implementation of EMFA and the timely transposition of the anti-SLAPP directive in member states. The recommendation on journalists' safety should also translate into meaningful and concrete actions by EU member states. Social media platforms must also comply with their obligations to assure a safe digital space and protect journalists against online harassment and other digital threats. Journalists in exile should also be given adequate protection and assistance.

■ The European External Action Service also faced increased pressure to respond effectively to a growing assertiveness by authoritarian actors, as their clampdowns have a direct and detrimental impact on journalists on the ground. That includes countering transnational repression in EU member states. Platform partners asked the EEAS to use its full panoply of political, legal and financial instruments to support journalists and press freedom in Council of Europe's member states, even more critical since the U.S. administration has dropped any meaningful reference to human rights - and press freedom - in its national security strategy and foreign policy.<sup>307</sup>

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306. Roussi, Antoaneta and Eliza Gkritsi (2025), "European Parliament hammers Commission over anti-Kremlin "Democracy Shield"", *POLITICO*, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-anti-kremlin-meddling-shield-pummeled-parliament/>

307. Risse, Mathias (2025), "Reclaiming Western Identity: A Human Rights Day Response to America's New National Security Strategy", <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/centers/carr-ryan/our-work/carr-ryan-commentary/reclaiming-western-identity-human-rights-day>

# Recommendations

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**D**rawing on the findings of this report, the Platform partners present the following priority recommendations for the Council of Europe, the institutions of the European Union and member states to strengthen journalist safety, media independence and democratic resilience.

## To the Council of Europe

- ▶ **Press freedom and the New Democratic Pact for Europe:** Place press freedom and media pluralism at the core of democratic resilience within the New Democratic Pact for Europe, with safeguards against disinformation and media capture, and ensure that the conditions necessary for a healthy media ecosystem, including the safety of journalists, are systematically reflected across relevant Council of Europe policies and activities.
- ▶ **Engagement on the Safety of Journalists Platform:** Strengthen the Platform by enhancing its visibility and structuring dialogue with member states. Encourage member states that consistently fail to respond to alerts, notably Azerbaijan and Türkiye, to engage with the Platform and provide timely and substantive replies. Introduce regular Council of Europe reviews of states' follow-up to alerts to promote consistent engagement and accountability. The Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists should continue to be used to facilitate peer engagement and maintain sustained political attention to press freedom.
- ▶ **Enforce press freedom standards:** Ensure that member states comply with Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and relevant case law, notably by addressing impunity for crimes against journalists. Good practices should be promoted, while persistent non-compliance should be challenged politically through Convention tools.
- ▶ **Renew high-level political commitment to press freedom:** Strengthen existing initiatives, notably the Journalists Matter campaign, to ensure that political commitments translate into measurable action. Maintain the effective functioning of the network of national focal points and address shortcomings identified in the 2025 campaign review, including limited outreach to journalists and civil society. Use high-level political engagement to secure reforms, adequate resourcing and sustained implementation of commitments to protect journalists.
- ▶ **Combat legal harassment and SLAPPs:** Follow the 2024 Recommendation on countering SLAPPs by supporting its full implementation in member states. Governments should be urged to repeal or amend laws used to intimidate journalists, such as overly broad "false news" provisions and to incorporate European anti-SLAPP standards into national law to deter abusive litigation. Training programmes for judges and prosecutors should be expanded to strengthen the early identification and dismissal of SLAPPs.
- ▶ **Safeguard PSM independence and counter media capture:** Reinforce standards on independent public service media (PSM) and call for adequate and long-term funding. Make use of the Platform's systemic alerts to ensure guarantees of editorial autonomy, transparent and sustainable funding and independent governance. Guard against practices such as outlet concentration in ruling-party-aligned hands or the use of state economic levers to influence media.
- ▶ **Prioritise protection of women journalists:** Integrate a gender-sensitive and intersectional approach into press freedom work. In 2025, women journalists faced a sharp rise in gender-based threats, from online sexualised abuse to physical attacks. Using existing standards and campaigns, states should be urged to adopt concrete, gender-sensitive safety measures, including reporting mechanisms, evidence preservation and disaggregated data collection.

## To the institutions of the European Union

- ▶ **Fully enforce the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA):** Ensure that the EMFAs safeguards for media independence and pluralism are applied effectively across all EU member states. National compliance should be monitored, with infringement proceedings pursued where necessary. The European Board for Media Services should be supported, so that the EMFA functions as a meaningful barrier against media capture and political interference.
- ▶ **Secure implementation of the anti-SLAPP Directive:** Press for timely transposition of the anti-SLAPP Directive, supported by clear guidance to ensure compliance with its standards and by promotion of the complementary Council of Europe Recommendation for domestic cases. Cooperation with initiatives such as the European Anti-SLAPP Monitor can support assessment of national frameworks, alongside legal and training measures to protect journalists from abusive litigation.
- ▶ **Reinforce journalist protection through EU action:** Move from non-binding recommendations to clearer requirements by setting ambitious, measurable benchmarks for member states during the review of the 2021 Recommendation on the safety of journalists. These should build on existing measures, including specialised police training and rapid-response mechanisms, with particular attention to gender-based violence against women journalists and gender-sensitive safety protocols.
- ▶ **Strengthen enforcement against online threats and digital censorship:** Ensure effective application of the Digital Services Act so platforms meet their obligations to protect users, including journalists. The European Commission should require platforms to implement robust measures against online harassment, with priority given - including under the European Democracy Shield - to countering coordinated intimidation and “mob censorship” and to safeguarding a safe digital environment for journalism.
- ▶ **Strengthen media literacy as a preventive safeguard:** Greater emphasis should be placed on media literacy as a long-term safeguard against disinformation and societal polarisation, with the European Commission providing sustained support, coordination and leadership in this area.
- ▶ **Use EU financial and policy tools to support independent media:** The European Commission should strengthen support for independent and pluralistic media through targeted funding and appropriate democratic conditionality. The Commission and EU member states should also consider how existing rule-of-law and budgetary conditionality mechanisms can be applied to address serious violations of press freedom that undermine the rule of law and EU treaty values.
- ▶ **Strengthen the promotion of press freedom in EU external action:** The European Commission and the European External Action Service should make systematic use of the EU’s diplomatic, political and financial instruments to promote respect for press freedom in close coordination with the Council of Europe’s normative frameworks.
- ▶ **Strengthen EU protection for journalists in exile and counter transnational repression:** The European Commission and member states should ensure effective protection for journalists fleeing persecution, including responsive asylum, residency and emergency visa procedures in situations of heightened risk. They should also strengthen responses to transnational repression and support secure relocation and protection mechanisms within the EU.
- ▶ **Address psychosocial risks affecting journalists:** The European Commission and member states should give greater attention to psychosocial risks faced by journalists, including stress, burnout and online harassment, through coordinated policy measures, guidance and targeted funding. These efforts should support safer and sustainable working conditions in the media sector.

## To the member states of the Council of Europe

- ▶ **Improve cooperation with the Safety of Journalists Platform:** Member states should provide timely and substantive responses to Platform alerts. Enhanced engagement is essential for the Platform to function effectively as an accountability mechanism for press freedom across the Council of Europe region.
- ▶ **Address misuse of legal and judicial processes against journalists:** Repeal or amend laws used to intimidate journalists, including criminal defamation and overly broad “fake news” or “state secrets” provisions and ensure clear public-interest exemptions where restrictions apply. Member states should fully implement European anti-SLAPP standards in line with the 2024 Council of Europe Recommendation, enabling courts to swiftly dismiss abusive claims and protect journalists from disproportionate legal costs. Where legal actions are used to silence the press, authorities should condemn such practices and consider appropriate sanctions.

- ▶ **Protect women journalists and address gender-based violence:** Adopt measures to protect women journalists, who face misogynistic abuse, sexualised threats, doxxing and physical attacks. Gender-responsive and intersectional safeguards should be integrated into journalist safety policies, including guidance for law enforcement, protective measures and digital security support. Cooperation with women journalists' associations is essential to ensure confidential reporting and effective follow-up. Member states should implement Council of Europe standards on violence against women and apply them to women in the media, supported by regular gender-disaggregated data collection to monitor progress.
- ▶ **Offer protection against transnational repression:** Provide safe refuge to journalists fleeing persecution and cooperate to counter transnational repression on European soil. States are also encouraged to support exiled journalists' ability to continue their work in safety, including through temporary relocation, residency, or integration measures. A coordinated response is needed to ensure that Europe remains a place of refuge for journalists at risk.
- ▶ **Foster a culture of respect for press freedom:** Political and civic leaders should condemn attacks and threats against journalists, avoid rhetoric that legitimises intimidation and publicly affirm the role of independent journalism. Authorities should support practical safeguards, including self-regulation, address threats and incitement in accordance with the law and prioritise media literacy to counter polarisation and AI-driven disinformation.
- ▶ **Promote social dialogue and collective bargaining for all journalists, including freelancers:** National authorities should promote social dialogue and collective bargaining for all journalists, including freelancers and strengthen measures to prevent bogus self-employment in the media sector.

Visit the Platform website:  
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This publication presents the assessment of the state of press freedom in Europe in 2025, produced by the partner organisations of the Council of Europe's Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists.

Established in 2015 with the support of all Council of Europe member states, the Platform brings together the most prominent international press freedom and journalists' organisations to strengthen the protection of journalists, prevent attacks and combat impunity. Today, fifteen organisations cooperate with the Council of Europe through the Platform. As a leading continent-wide early warning mechanism for serious threats to media freedom, it enables the timely and systematic sharing of information with the Council of Europe and its member states, supports informed policy responses and strengthens the protection of press freedom across the region.

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.