

27 March 2014

## **Round Table on Safety of Journalists: From commitment to action**

**19 May 2014 - Strasbourg**

Initiative: Secretary General of the Council of Europe, supported by the Committee of Ministers

Aims:

- Identify ways of better addressing threats and violence against journalists
- Invite input on how to establish an early warning mechanism and rapid response capacity notably through the setting up of an Internet based platform

Key questions:

- What is being done, in practical terms, by each organisation for the safety of journalists in hostile environments?
- Are there early warning mechanisms in place and are they fit for purpose and capable of triggering the necessary protective or remedial action?
- The question of impunity – what measures are in place to address the lack of investigation into attacks against journalists, and what can the Council of Europe add?
- What are effective ways of protecting journalism? Electronic personal alarm systems, human / social shields and communities to protect journalists – how to apply and maximise impact and protection? (Example: Natalia Project)
- What deeper problems are underlying the lack of safety for journalists, or is it a stand-alone issue?
- How can protection be ensured for those who are not professional journalists but are communicating in the public interest, such as human rights defenders or whistle- blowers?
- How can an Internet-based platform contribute to establishing rapid response capacity? What conditions would have to be met for creating such a platform and ensuring such capacity?

### **Background**

In the course of 2013, the safety of journalists and other media actors emerged as a dominant topic fuelled by constant reports of intimidation and violence also within Council of Europe member states. Safety of journalists is a strategic element and priority of the Austrian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (November 2013 – May 2014).

The Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for media and information society (Belgrade, November 2013) adopted the Resolution on Safety of Journalists. In this resolution, the ministers expressed their deep concern about continuing physical violence including killings, inhuman treatments,

harassment, judicial intimidation, threats, as well as arbitrary measures such as detentions, expulsions, surveillances, searches and seizures.

The ministers condemned such attacks and the impunity of the perpetrators, as constituting violations of rights guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights. In this regard, the keynote speech of Dunja Mijatovic, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, substantially contributed to the success of the conference.

The Ministerial Conference supported the UN Action Plan and encouraged member states and the Council of Europe to do more.

The Committee of Ministers pursued dialogue on the topic, devoting a thematic debate to it on 12 December 2013, based on a discussion paper of the Secretary General. As highlighted in this paper, international standards on freedom of expression adopted over the years, including those within the Council of Europe would remain a dead letter without an effective right to safety for journalists and other media actors, who play a vital part in and for a democratic society.

Following the thematic debate, the Committee of Ministers invited the Secretary General to submit operational proposals, emphasizing the need for co-ordination with other international organisations, in particular the European Union, the OSCE and the United Nations. The Round Table on Safety of Journalists, to be held on 19 May 2014, is part of these operational proposals made by the Secretary General <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=2150257&Site=COE> and endorsed by the Committee of Ministers. It is intended that international organisations and institutions and freedom of expression / media organisations identify concrete common action and further steps that the Council of Europe could take to establish rapid response capacity.

Contact details: Media Division Council of Europe

Onur Andreotti,  
Tel: +33 (0)3 90 21 42 12  
e-mail: [onur.andreotti@coe.int](mailto:onur.andreotti@coe.int)

Julia Whitham  
Tel: +33 (0)3 88 41 35 66  
e-mail: [julia.whitham@coe.int](mailto:julia.whitham@coe.int)