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A MISSION TO INFORM
Journalists at risk speak out

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Council of Europe

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To Daphne Caruana Galizia and all journalists
who have lost their lives
in the exercise of their profession

Contents

Foreword

Journalists are constantly at risk of undue pressures and intimidation from those who feel threatened by their work. All across Council of Europe member states they may encounter police intimidation and legal harassment; smear campaigns and bullying offline, but more recently predominantly online; pressures from political actors and editors; and economic pressures exerted by media owners and sponsors. Journalists also face detention, threats and physical violence. As underlined by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe at its 129th session in Helsinki on 17 May 2019, strong action is required to reverse this deterioration of freedom of expression in Europe, at domestic and international level.

The Committee of Ministers emphasised the importance of the freedom of expression, online and offline, as a cornerstone of a democratic and pluralistic society, and agreed to reinforce the Organisation's work in this field and to enhance co-operation as regards the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists. The protection of journalists is thus an important objective – and at the same time a responsibility – of the Council of Europe and its member states.

The Council of Europe has adopted key documents intended to help member states ensure that journalists can fulfil their role as public watchdogs, such as Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors. The recommendation urges member states to take immediate measures to prevent violence and any kind of pressure against journalists, protect them, prosecute perpetrators, end impunity and promote information, education and awareness raising about the safety challenges journalists face in their work. In 2015, the Council of Europe also established the Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists to improve the responses of member states concerning threats to media freedom. Since then the platform has recorded over 750 alerts concerning different attacks on the freedom of expression.

The Council of Europe has striven to better understand what kinds of pressure journalists at risk are facing in order to identify more appropriate means to protect their safety. In 2017, the Council of Europe commissioned the quantitative study *Journalists under pressure – Unwanted interference, fear and self-censorship in Europe*. The study was carried out by one of the authors of this book, Marilyn Clark, along with Anna Grech. Surveying almost 1 000 journalists from all Council of Europe member states and Belarus, the study revealed a troubling picture of interference with free and impartial journalism. It became clear that this situation needed to be understood in greater depth, which led to the commissioning of this publication.

The present study brings together a unique collection of open testimonies from 20 journalists working in different member states of the Council of Europe. Each of these journalists spoke about the risks and pressures they perceived and experienced in exercising their profession, as well as their strategies to build resilience and carry

on in their "mission to inform". At times, the price these women and men have had to pay for standing by their obligation to inform the public in an impartial and complete way was enormous, ranging from intrusions and limitations on private and family life, to putting their lives at risk. This was, for example, the case of Daphne Caruana Galizia, who reported fearlessly on sensitive issues, notably corruption, and who was murdered just 10 days after giving a powerful interview for this book. This was the last interview Daphne Caruana Galizia ever gave.

A sample of 20 interviews cannot be representative of the situation in the Council of Europe member states. The merit of these interviews is to further exemplify different forms of interference with press freedom already identified in the 2017 study, as well as journalists' perceptions regarding the dangers of the profession and the strategies they employ to persevere in their work. Such an in-depth exploration should contribute to a better understanding of the situation on the ground. Through its analyses and findings, this study can be an important tool for stakeholders committed to improving the safety of journalists throughout the Council of Europe member states.

Christos Giakoumopoulos

Director General of Human Rights and Rule of Law of the Council of Europe

Executive summary

The freedom of the media to report without censorship or fear of reprisals is a pre-condition of democracy. Violence and harassment against journalists – often leading to the suppression of information and self-censorship – have become commonplace in many parts of Europe. This book is a unique exploration of the intimidation of journalists across Council of Europe member states and it provides an invaluable resource to everyone concerned with the protection of journalists, including government authorities and media practitioners.

The book is based on in-depth interviews with 20 journalists from 18 different countries.[1] The journalists were selected for their experience and skill in reporting in the public interest and exposing injustice and abuses. Each of these journalists shared their insights into the realities of doing cutting-edge journalism to bring the truth to light; they spoke about their first-hand experience of threats, hostility and intimidation, surveillance and cyberattacks, and about self-censorship, resilience and coping strategies, as well as about what they portray as routine failures by state authorities to give journalists the protection they need to fulfil their public watchdog role.

Each of the book's five chapters provides insights for understanding and putting in place essential safeguards in law and practice for journalists to fulfil their mission to inform.

Chapter I investigates the pressures experienced by the participating journalists in their work. The chapter identifies and analyses four types of threat and pressure: physical, psychological, judicial or legal, and economic. Those pressures are the result of actions by state actors such as politicians and public figures, as well as powerful vested interests, media owners and managers, internet trolls and others. In some cases, journalists identified networks of power-holders who conspire to silence critical voices.

Chapter II discovers how this group of journalists was affected by sustained intimidation and hostility, and the chilling effect of such intimidation on freedom of expression. The chapter reveals the high price journalists often pay for their commitment in terms of the psychological and other negative impacts on their personal lives. The journalists speak about the powerful sense of purpose that motivates them to risk reprisals by persisting in their reporting work in the face of threats and personal dangers. They also vehemently condemn the corrosive consequences of self-censorship.

Chapter III explores how the legal, political, economic and cultural contexts of their particular environments shape the experiences of journalists in terms of the obstacles and pressures that hinder their work. The chapter illuminates the ways in

1. Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.

which laws, practices and socio-cultural norms in different parts of Europe affect their ability to practise free and inquiring journalism. Council of Europe standards require that member states should maintain a favourable environment for freedom of expression and media freedom by fulfilling a range of obligations.

Chapter IV discusses how the interviewed journalists develop resilience to continue their work despite the often hostile environments in which they operate. This resilience is needed for journalists to perform their vital function of holding the powerful to account and countering the spread of corruption and abuses of power. The chapter examines the personal characteristics and social circumstances that affect the capacity of journalists to maintain optimal functioning. Often that calls for remarkable personal courage. The chapter concludes that the sense of mission to pursue these goals through independent and rigorous journalism is the spur that motivates these journalists to overcome the daunting challenges they face.

Chapter V takes stock of the lessons to be learned from these revealing testimonies and observations by journalists at the front line of their profession. It relates this first-hand data to the urgent efforts to encourage member states to implement guidelines set out in Council of Europe recommendations. The study calls for effective measures to protect the safety of journalists at risk, prosecute the perpetrators of attacks and create genuinely favourable environments for free, independent and diverse media. The forward-looking measures outlined include legal and regulatory reforms; effective measures of protection; improved oversight and reporting mechanisms to guard against threats; public media literacy programmes; and additional support through professional training and psychosocial support where needed.

Authors and acknowledgements

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Marilyn Clark is associate professor with the Department of Psychology in the Faculty for Social Wellbeing at the University of Malta. Her main research interests include addiction, forensic psychology, victimisation and safety of journalists. Professor Clark has published widely in various international journals as well as edited texts. She was key researcher in the Council of Europe 2017 study on unwarranted interference, fear and self-censorship, a milestone study shedding new light on the extent of intimidation of journalists in Europe. She is the current President of the Malta Chamber of Psychologists and sits on numerous boards, committees and working groups related to her areas of expertise.

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William Horsley is international director of the Centre for Freedom of the Media (CFOM) at the University of Sheffield. After many years as a BBC foreign correspondent, he now leads CFOM's projects to strengthen protection for journalists' safety in co-operation with organisations including the Council of Europe and UNESCO. He is also the Media Freedom Representative of the Association of European Journalists, which co-founded the first ever continent-wide online early warning system for threats to media freedom, the Council of Europe's Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists. The Platform continuously registers alerts on attacks on journalists and the media to seek effective remedies. He writes and broadcasts on issues related to media and democracy for CFOM and international media. He is the author of the *Safety of journalists – Guidebook* published by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

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Lambrini Papadopoulou, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, School of Journalism and Mass Communications

Glossary of terms

For the purposes of this publication, some terms are defined in the same manner as in the Council of Europe's 2017 study *Journalists under pressure – Unwanted interference, fear and self-censorship in Europe* by Marilyn Clark and Anna Grech.

Journalist – "A person who is regularly engaged in collecting or disseminating information to the public with a journalistic (public interest) purpose. The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers in 2000 defined a journalist as 'any natural or legal person who is regularly or professionally engaged in the collection and dissemination of information to the public via any means of mass communication' (Appendix to Recommendation No. R (2000) 7 on the right of journalists not to disclose their sources of information). Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)7 on a new notion of media recognised that the new media created by both technological and social change has seen the entry onto the scene of a new breed of reporters: bloggers, citizen journalists and others who create user-generated content. The adoption of this new notion of media necessitates the recognition that 'the scope of media actors has enlarged as a result of new forms of media in the digital age'."[2]

Unwarranted interference – "Acts and/or threats to a journalist's physical and/or moral integrity in the exercise of journalistic activities. This may take the form of actual violence or any form of undue pressure (physical, psychological, economic or legal) on journalists. Unwarranted interference may emanate from state or public officials, other powerful figures, advertisers, owners, editors or others."[3]

Self-censorship – The curtailment of what one says or writes in order to avoid likely reprisals, even without being explicitly told to do so.

Fear – "Feelings aroused by the anticipation of a threat of danger, harm or hostile interference."[4]

Cyberbullying – The online harassment or intimidation of journalists that can have serious psychological repercussions.

Media capture – "A situation where most or all of the news media institutions are operating as part of a government-business cartel that controls and manipulates the flow of information".[5]

2. Council of Europe Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 30 April 2014 at the 1198th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies, paragraph 2: https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016805c5e9d, accessed 30 June 2020.
3. https://rm.coe.int/journalists-under-pressure-fa-en-/168097e9e1.
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Abbreviations

CM – Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

CPJ – Committee to Protect Journalists

"The Convention" – The European Convention on Human Rights

"The Court" – European Court of Human Rights

EU – European Union

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NGO – non-governmental organisation

OSCE – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PACE – Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

"The 2017 Study" – M. Clark and A. Grech (2017), *Journalists under pressure – Unwarranted interference, fear and self-censorship in Europe*

"The Platform" – The Council of Europe's Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists

UK – United Kingdom

UN – United Nations

UNESCO – The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

US/USA – United States of America

Introduction

MEDIA FREEDOM IN EUROPE – A WORSENING CLIMATE FOR FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Media freedom means above all that journalists can do their job without experiencing interference and fear. However, in everyday reality, media freedom is often restricted or curtailed in various ways. Pressures and threats targeting journalists take different forms, including physical, psychological, economic and judicial intimidation. They emanate from a wide range of actors such as public authorities including the police and security agencies, business and special interest groups or criminal organisations, or they may come at any time from individuals, ranging from politicians and public figures, aggressive members of the public and hostile interviewees, to social media activists and internet trolls. The preamble of the 2016 Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 (Council of Europe 2016), a crucial document aiming to safeguard the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors, points to the harsh reality that:

> journalists and other media actors in Europe are increasingly being threatened, harassed, subjected to surveillance, intimidated, arbitrarily deprived of their liberty, physically attacked, tortured and even killed because of their investigative work, opinions or reporting, particularly when their work focuses on the misuse of power, corruption, human rights violations, criminal activities, terrorism and fundamentalism.

Ultimately, improper and threatening pressures exerted on journalists are aimed at silencing critical voices and free speech. In countries lacking strong democratic traditions the state is often the main source of pressure, with the result that critical sources of information are delegitimised or sidelined, the provision of news is distorted and the traditional watchdog role of the press is thwarted. Even in states which are categorised as established democracies, certain media actors face serious pressures through attacks on their credibility, marginalisation or discriminatory treatment, insulting or demeaning language, and direct or indirect editorial censorship.

In practice therefore free speech is often limited in some way. The most direct limitation is through censorship, which in journalism may be of two types:

- censorship or suppression of public information that are directly enforced by state authorities or by private parties who have the power to do so; or

- self-censorship by journalists themselves and others who self-publish or otherwise perform a journalistic function.[6] Self-censorship in journalism occurs when a journalist suppresses information of public interest in the absence of formal hindrances being often motivated by a wish to avoid penalties or reprisals. This most often occurs within a context or general climate of intimidation.

To understand the precise situation of journalists and risk, during 2016 the Council of Europe commissioned a quantitative study which explored the prevalence of self-reported intimidation experienced by journalists and its connection to self-censorship: *Journalists under pressure – Unwarranted interference, fear and self-censorship in Europe* (Clark and Grech 2017; henceforth "the 2017 study"). This study was based on a survey among 940 journalists from 47 Council of Europe member states and Belarus. It explored journalists' own perceptions and accounts of pressures encountered in their work, using a self-reporting questionnaire. Since many incidents of intimidation of journalists regularly go unreported, and consequently are not documented in official and police data, self-reporting studies can shed light on such invisible experiences. At the same time, such studies also constitute a unique source of information to understand and measure the obstacles to independent reporting experienced by media actors.[7] The 2017 study uncovered the extent of pressures exerted against the journalists who had responded to the survey. The questionnaire was responded to anonymously by a convenience sample[8] recruited through five main journalists' and freedom of expression organisations.

The results were telling. They indicate that there were high levels of perceived interference, including bullying behaviour and threats of violence, among journalists working in the Council of Europe member states. Psychological violence was the most common interference (recorded by 69% of respondents). This was closely followed by cyberbullying (53%) and intimidation by interest groups (50%). Closer analysis of psychological violence showed that this was accounted for by belittlement and/or humiliation (48%), intimidation (56%) and being slandered or targeted by smear campaigns (43%). These forms of hostile or threatening behaviour were most often perpetrated by public authorities. A significant percentage also reported belittlement (24%) and intimidation (19%) by their management and threats made by interviewees (19%). Thirty-nine per cent reported having experienced targeted surveillance, and 76% did not feel sufficiently protected against it. Thirty-five per cent

6. In Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on a new notion of media, the Committee of Ministers recommended that member states "adopt a new, broad notion of media which encompasses all actors involved in the production and dissemination, to potentially large numbers of people, of content (for example information, analysis, comment, opinion, education, culture, art and entertainment in text, audio, visual, audiovisual or other form) and applications which are designed to facilitate interactive mass communication (for example social networks) or other content-based large-scale interactive experiences (for example online games), while retaining (in all these cases) editorial control or oversight of the contents … ."
7. The authors acknowledge that there are also shortcomings to self-reporting studies, where individuals self-assess their experience of some phenomenon. Such studies may contain an inherent response bias with respondents either over- or under-reporting.
8. Convenience sampling, also known as "availability sampling" does not allow generalisation to the entire population. This is so because the sampling collects data from individuals who are conveniently able to take part in the study rather than being randomly selected.

reported having experienced intimidation by police, 43% by politically motivated groups and 50% by interest groups.

With advances in technology, it appears that the forms that such intimidation takes are also changing. Cyberbullying, defined as the online harassment of journalists that can have serious psychological repercussions and can result in self-censorship, is a common form of intimidation in current times (UNESCO 2017). Participants in the survey stressed that cyberattacks were often highly personal in nature and included negative comments about journalists' "appearance and presentation", as well as more extreme forms of personal abuse. Some journalists received messages telling them to "kill themselves". Female journalists were particularly vulnerable to "aggressive" abuse, including online threats of sexual violence such as rape. In one reported case of public defamation, photographs of a journalist were digitally manipulated into compromising images and then widely circulated on the internet. The data also demonstrated how smear campaigns and "belittlement at a professional level" aimed at damaging a journalist's professional credibility can have the effect of undermining and demoralising the person targeted.

Complaints of harassment by police and other law-enforcement agencies were also commonly mentioned in the survey. Twenty-three per cent of respondents reported experiencing arrest, investigation, threat of prosecution or actual prosecution under a number of laws (either civil or criminal), most notably defamation laws. In this regard, it is widely acknowledged that overly protective defamation laws that are accompanied by excessive sanctions can have a substantial chilling effect on free speech.[9]

The 2017 study also explored the extent to which journalists subjectively experience fear, defined as feeling a likelihood or anticipation of a threat of danger, harm or hostile interference. A high proportion of respondents feared or anticipated becoming victims of physical (41%) or psychological (60%) violence. Fifty-seven per cent

9. For example, in the landmark case *Cumpana and Mazare v. Romania* [GC], Application No. 33348/96, 17 December 2004, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights acknowledged that "[i]nvestigative journalists are liable to be inhibited from reporting on matters of general public interest … if they run the risk, as one of the standard sanctions imposable for unjustified attacks on the reputation of private individuals, of being sentenced to imprisonment or to a prohibition on the exercise of their profession", paragraph 113. Then the Court added that "[t]he chilling effect that the fear of such sanctions has on the exercise of journalistic freedom of expression is evident … This effect, which works to the detriment of society as a whole, is likewise a factor which goes to … the justification of the sanctions imposed ...", paragraph 114. Other organs of the Council of Europe have also condemned disproportionate sanctions for defamation. See for example the Council of Europe's Declaration on freedom of political debate in the media, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 12 February 2004. For more on the position of the Council of Europe on defamation see *Defamation – Brief overview of the Council of Europe guidelines and activities addressing the issue of defamation in relation to freedom of expression*: https://rm.coe.int/leaflet-defamation-en/168079ceca, accessed 30 June 2020. Concerns about disproportionate sanctions against journalists in cases of defamation were also expressed at UN level. For example, in Resolution 39/6 adopted by the UN Human Rights Council on 27 September 2018, states were called upon "to ensure that defamation and libel laws are not misused, in particular through excessive criminal sanctions, to illegitimately or arbitrarily censor journalists and interfere with their mission of informing the public, and where necessary to revise and repeal such laws, in compliance with States' obligations under international human rights law".

were anxious about being subjected to cyberbullying. The fear of interference from various actors was experienced by respondents to the survey as follows: 33% feared intimidation by police; 45% by groups with a vested interest; 42% by political groups; 37% by media owners; 33% by criminals; and 51% by various other individuals, ranging from angry interviewees to hostile members of the public. Thirty-eight per cent of the journalists taking the survey reported worrying about their own safety and 37% worried about the safety of friends and families.

The chilling effect of interference may come about because of the impact of psychological stress arising from having suffered violence in some form, or from the fear of experiencing violence in the future.[10] A significant percentage of respondents (67%) reported that intimidation, or the fear of it, affected them psychologically in a number of ways. A high proportion of respondents reported experiencing an increase in stress and anxiety levels. Others reported feelings of depression and low self-esteem. Overall, the impact of these various forms of unwarranted interference was so severe that 40% claimed that their personal life was affected.

Over one third of the participating journalists reported that unwarranted interference had impacted their working lives. Fear, a universal human emotion when faced with an event or a situation that threatens one's security and safety, motivates a person to seek protection. Fear is thus a very important basic survival mechanism. However, when fear is experienced pervasively to the point that it overwhelms one's ability to cope, it is likely to cause severe stress. Consequently, the emotion of fear may translate into behaviours that may lead one to avoid the situations perceived as threatening (Öhman 2010). Thirty-one per cent of participating journalists said they had "toned down sensitive, critical stories" and 15% reported having abandoned stories altogether. Thirty per cent spoke of having reported content in a "less controversial" manner and 33% said they were "selective" about what items to report. Twenty per cent said they had framed content so as to be "acceptable" to their managers and 23% had "withheld information". Nineteen per cent acknowledged shaping their stories to meet the political or business interests of their company or editor.

Self-censorship – to one degree or another – was thus a prevailing feature of responses when journalists were asked to describe the impact that unwarranted interferences had on their work. One respondent reported "nervousness about doing more reporting on the same theme". Another admitted that they had "changed the lead and focus of a story". Self-censorship was exemplified also in the words used by one journalist: "I double-checked my science and left some data out". Another respondent claimed to be a "little bit reserved with other 'powerful' stories", and "not being able to report all the facts at hand".

10. This echoes the Court's finding that the violation of journalists' freedom of speech through different forms of pressure and intimidation can have a "chilling effect" on the activities of the media and is detrimental to society that might not be (fully or adequately) informed about matters of public interest. See, for example, *Cumpana and Mazare v. Romania*, paragraph 114.

From these and other citations, and from the statistics collected in the quantitative survey, it is safe to conclude that unwarranted interference – or the fear of it – had a chilling effect on the journalists responding to the survey.

The picture that emerges is one of journalistic freedom being compromised because of a wide spectrum of unwarranted interferences, including from the journalists' own organisations – in other words their employers. Other individual journalists reported – in their own words – being "more afraid of covering protest marches" and feeling they "cannot tell the truth in published news stories". Such testimonies point to the far-reaching repercussions of intimidation directed against journalists due to their work. One respondent spoke plainly about the chilling effect that he felt: "I stopped working as a correspondent; I do work which does not satisfy me any longer but is safer" (Clark and Grech 2017: 28).

As one would expect, the impact of unwarranted interference on the daily work of journalists was most prominent in the responses by those who reported experiencing the most severe forms of interference, especially physical assault, threats and psychological violence or intimidation. Those who had experienced psychological violence were significantly more likely to worry about their personal safety and that of those closest to them. These journalists also worried more that they would be threatened with violence, become actual victims of physical assault, or experience sexual harassment, robbery, theft, cyberbullying or intimidation – either by the police, or by different interest groups or political forces.

The issue of self-censorship in the journalistic community is particularly difficult to explore because it is often invisible, and journalists may find it shameful to admit that fear of retribution is interfering with their ethical responsibility to report the news impartially in all circumstances. The issue of shame around self-censorship needs to be explored more extensively given its stark implications. On a personal level, self-censorship may bring shame and feelings of loss of integrity. On a group level, it may result in distrust and suspicion on the part of the public, threatening the foundations of healthy group and community relations such as dialogue, open discussion, tolerance and acceptance of diversity. On a wider societal level, self-censorship results in significant barriers to recounting the truth and providing the public with reliable information on which to base important decisions about their lives (Bar-Tal 2017). This in turn contributes to the wider phenomenon of decreasing public trust in democratic institutions including the media, and an increased consumption of news through social media bubbles with overall negative consequences for the quality of democracy. Robustly independent and sustainable media are necessary to safeguard against this, and journalists need to be empowered to build up their resilience against self-censorship.

SEEKING A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING: RATIONALE AND RESEARCH AGENDA

In the foreword to the 2017 study, the Council of Europe Secretary General called for a more "in-depth stocktaking of the state of freedom of expression across Europe" (Clark and Grech 2017: 10). A deeper understanding of journalists' personal experiences

of interferences with this freedom, drawing out the nuances of what it is like to be working as a journalist in a context of fear, can only be achieved by an analysis of in-depth narratives of such experiences.

The Council of Europe therefore sponsored the current in-depth qualitative study, with the following objectives:

- to understand the nature of the pressures faced by journalists in Europe;
- to investigate the impact of intimidation and pressure on journalists, such as self-censorship;
- to understand what meanings journalists attach to their experiences of intimidation and explain how journalists negotiate the risks inherent in their profession;
- to explore how the legal, political, economic and cultural factors and/or contexts influence the experiences of journalists in terms of pressures and intimidation hindering their work;
- to explore how journalists build resilience to continue their work;
- to reflect on ways to address pressures and intimidation meant to silence journalists.

The present volume was conceptualised in the context of the stark findings of the 2017 quantitative study. The reader will certainly benefit from a review of the 2017 study to be able to put the narratives recounted here in a broader context. The current publication makes reference to it on several occasions.

METHODOLOGY

Research approach

The research questions in this study lend themselves to a qualitative enquiry based on narratives regarding the intimidation of journalists and focusing on the strategies that journalists employed to make sense of and cope with pressures and other attacks related to their work. While in-depth qualitative research is not readily generalisable due to its focus on individual cases and small sample size, it does offer useful and in-depth explanations of the issues under investigation (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1998).

The aim of this qualitative research project is to develop an in-depth socio-psychological interpretation of the complexity of journalists' experiences of facing high levels of obstruction, intimidation or threat. This is done by exploring their subjective worlds and their feelings, motivations, perceptions and action strategies. The research approach is inductive and involves the analysis and interpretation of narratives. To remain as faithful as possible to the experiences of the journalists interviewed for this study, we chose to use journalists' own words as often as possible. The frankness of the interviewees made their narratives extremely revealing and rich. Their voices are a powerful testimony to the interferences meant to silence journalists in the exercise of their work. This is precisely the reason why their voices in the form of direct quotations from interviews are at the core of this text.

Our commentaries and analysis are meant to contextualise the excerpts of the interviews used and draw the lessons to be learned from the experiences of the journalists.

DATA COLLECTION STRATEGY

The data were collected through 20 in-depth interviews (see Appendix A). The interviewing tool adopted was SQUIN (single question used in inducing narrative – Wengraf 2006) (see Appendix B: Interview guide). This research tool structured the interview into three separate sub-sections.

- The first sub-section uses a single question to elicit a narrative and is interviewee-led. The interviewer intervenes only minimally and engages mainly in active listening.
- Sub-section 2 allows the interviewee a more active role by encouraging further elaboration on the issues discussed in sub-section 1.
- Sub-section 3 is theoretically driven and the interviewer may ask the interviewee to explore issues that were not explored in sub-sections 1 and 2 but that are deemed to be thematically relevant to the issues of improper constraints on journalism.

During each interview attention was given to ensuring that the journalist participants felt comfortable and secure enough to share details of their experience in the agreed interview format. The interviews were all conducted in English except for one that was done in Italian. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The sample: process and eligibility

In line with the research objectives and criteria developed in academic literature, the journalists selected for this study were principally those who were known to have had experienced significant intimidation and pressures and could provide in-depth narratives about these. As can be inferred from the biographies presented below, special attention was given to including a range of different experiences of targeted intimidation, emanating from a variety of sources.

Thus, while the sample is homogeneous in the sense of being based on a shared experience of pressure and intimidation, it is also diverse in that the harassment, threats and, in some cases, violence were manifested in different ways and in a variety of contexts. A list of 50 potential participants was drawn up by the experts in the working group[11] set up for the purposes of this project. Of those 50 journalists, 20 agreed to participate.

The sampling was also influenced by several other considerations. A gender balance was sought and 7 of the 20 final participants are women. A geographical distribution

11. A working group was set up to achieve the objectives for this project. The group contributed to the development of the research agenda; helped identify potential interviewees and acted as gatekeepers; contributed to the development of the conceptual categories emergent from the data; and contributed to the planning of the structure of the text.

was also sought and the sample includes participants from Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.

The sampling strategy also sought to include different types of journalistic careers. The final sample includes investigative journalists, freelance journalists, video journalists, bloggers, journalists working in radio and TV and print journalists.

Data analysis strategy

The data analysis followed a number of steps:

- transcription of the audio-recorded interviews to create a text for coding;
- coding (the process of labelling properties in the data);
- developing propositions from the codes and formulating these into an explanation about the phenomena described.

The data analysis process used a systematic coding strategy designed to identify and classify elements and concepts that emerge from the interview data. This rigorous process of analysis protects against researcher bias while attaining detail and consistency.

Credibility is crucial to establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research through a faithful representation of the data. A few credibility strategies were therefore adopted. The first concerned the use of skilled and experienced interviewers. Secondly, the interview transcripts were sent back to the participants who were given the opportunity to amend as required. Following this a systematic set of procedures to analyse the transcript data was handled as documented above. The process was also subjected to expert review through regular exchanges and consultations where the transcripts, along with the emerging codes, were discussed in detail. In the final instance, research participants were sent the completed text to ensure that they are in agreement with how the authors have interpreted their experiences. This validation process increases the rigour of the findings of the study and strengthens the trustworthiness, accuracy and validity of the results by confirming the participants' intended meanings.

Informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity

The participants were informed in advance about the detailed purpose and aims of the research, as well as what would be expected from them. This was presented to them in writing, through a recruitment letter. Voluntary participation in the project was guaranteed and the journalists could withdraw from the research at any stage. Participants were given the option of having their data anonymised or attributable.

All of the participants expressed the wish to have their data attributed to them in the final text. Ethical clearance was sought and given by the University of Malta's Research Ethics Committee.

Following the conclusion of the interview all participants were debriefed (Appendix C).

Limitations

The 20 interviews conducted yielded rich data. However, it is recognised that theoretical saturation was not reached, meaning that if further interviews had been conducted additional relevant themes would likely have been identified. Qualitative research is labour-intensive to conduct and the volume of data makes analysis and interpretation extremely time-consuming. This, combined with the limitations of effective capacity available, led to the decision to restrict the number of interview participants to 20. The consequence of this sampling limitation is that the findings drawn from this research cannot with confidence form the basis of generalised conclusions concerning the larger population of journalists in the Council of Europe member states as a whole. As was made clear above, the main objective of this ideographic exercise was not in any case to arrive at definitive conclusions about the conditions faced by journalists in general across Europe, but rather to present the fullest and most faithful account possible of the experiences of a selected group of journalists. The sampling strategy sought to engage journalists working in a variety of different settings, countries and types of journalism. Even so, the data cannot claim to represent the perspectives of all journalists.

In qualitative research – particularly when dealing, as here, with issues which may be seen as emotive and politically sensitive – extra care is required to ensure that scientific rigour and objectivity are safeguarded and maintained. This introductory chapter explains the strategies used to ensure the highest standards and credibility of the research. The key researcher in this project is a Professor of Psychology with extensive experience in conducting qualitative research projects of this nature. The subjectivity of the researcher's interpretation during the data collection, data analysis and coding process may be considered an inherent factor in qualitative research due to the possibility that another researcher might interpret the same data somewhat differently. This methodological concern was addressed by convening a four-person working group of experts to oversee and advise on the project, and provide their informed interpretations of the data.