



Conference of Ministers responsible for Media and Information Society

Artificial Intelligence – Intelligent Politics

Challenges and opportunities for media and democracy

10-11 June 2021

Resolution on the safety of journalists

The specialised Ministers of the Council of Europe member states, on the occasion of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Media and Information Society, jointly organised by the Council of Europe and the Republic of Cyprus and held online on 10-11 June 2021, adopt the following resolution:

1. The society is experiencing a profound transformation of the media environment, with repercussions at individual, community and societal levels. Search engines, social media platforms and other online services have taken over large parts of the distribution of news and information and have secured a substantial share of the revenues originating from advertisers. This in turn has impacted on business models of traditional journalism, the resources available for journalism as well as on journalists' working conditions, rendering them more vulnerable.
2. The key role of journalists and other media actors in exposing wrongdoing, corruption, crime and abuse of power exposes them to intimidation, threats, harassment and violence, arbitrary surveillance or interception of communications, misuse of national laws, abusive litigation (SLAPP), sometimes to arbitrary deprivation of liberty, and in some most extreme cases to torture and killings. While States have a duty to protect the physical and psychological integrity of all individuals within their jurisdiction, an attack aimed at silencing a journalist not only violates that person's human rights. It is simultaneously an interference with the right of journalists to freedom of expression, notably the right to hold opinions, seek and impart information, as well as a violation of the right of the public to receive information, with societal repercussions including an impact on democratic processes.
3. The risk of deterring journalists and other media actors from pursuing their work or of encouraging self-censorship is increased by the aggressive rhetoric, targeted

disinformation and smear campaigns carried out by some political and private actors in response to critical reporting. Politicians increasingly use social media, websites, blogs and other digital platforms for direct communication with their electorate, and sometimes also to circumvent journalists and avoid their scrutiny, thereby pushing them out of the public debate. Moreover, the authorities' failure to swiftly and decisively condemn an attack on a journalist or their family members increases the risk of further threats and violence against journalists and undermines public trust in the credibility of journalism.

4. Journalists are likewise often targeted and discriminated on personal grounds, notably gender. In addition to facing the same threats as their male counterparts, female journalists face specific gender-related threats both offline and online, including sexual and gender-based violence, sometimes also in the context of workplace discrimination, mob-related violence or abuse while in detention. In particular, gender-based online attacks, taking the form of sexual harassment, threats of physical violence and even rape, have exponentially increased and now, reportedly, affect two-thirds of women journalists. Beyond gender, journalists are targeted with abuse and threats online on various grounds such as race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth, sexual orientation or other status.¹
5. Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 on the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists and other media actors provides detailed guidance to member States organised around four pillars: prevention, protection, prosecution and promotion of information, education and awareness-raising. The text is based on the binding legal requirements of the European Convention on Human Rights and the relevant case-law of the European Court of Human Rights. Its implementation by member States has however, proved insufficient and/or ineffective and as a result, the situation has further degraded in the recent years.
6. Data collected by the Council of Europe Platform to promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists (the Platform) shows that, since the launch of the Platform in 2015, the environment for the media in Council of Europe member States has further degraded. The increasing trend of attacks on journalists encompasses a doubling on an annual basis of the number of recorded threats, including death threats, and a staggering total of 27 murders noted by the Platform in member States since 2015, 22 of which remain unsolved.
7. The prevailing impunity, which fuels further threats and attacks on journalists, remains the most serious concern. Since the elaboration of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity endorsed by the United Nations Chief Executives Board on 12 April 2012, impunity rates in journalists' killings across the world hover around 90%, according to the latest reports, and the same rate appears to apply to OSCE countries. Also, the Council of Europe member States too frequently fail to fulfil their obligation to conduct prompt and effective investigations and prosecution of these crimes, falling short of bringing those responsible to justice. Unfortunately, this allows a culture of impunity to take root.
8. The time for effective action is now. The urgency of the situation needs to be matched by an urgent engagement at the political level by member States. Dedicated national

¹ The position of the Russian Federation on this paragraph is expressed in its [interpretative statement](#) appended to the documents of the Ministerial Conference.

action plans on the safety of journalists and other media actors must be established and implemented to tackle this emergency in a comprehensive and coordinated manner, based on the above Recommendation. These national action plans should be grounded in an informed and well-researched analysis of the situation in the country, including the professional situation of journalists, the applicable legal framework for the safety of journalists, and the effectiveness of existing safety measures, and should include a gender perspective and other aspects of diversity². Most importantly, national action plans must be premised by the recognition at the highest political level that threats and violence against journalists and other media actors constitutes an attack on democracy.

In view of the above:

- a. We reiterate the role of journalists and other media actors as public watchdog as they are instrumental for the healthy operation of democracy.
- b. We acknowledge that, in order for journalists and other media actors to effectively and safely fulfil this role, they require appropriate protection and an enabling environment for freedom of expression and media freedom in which a vigorous public debate can thrive.
- c. We affirm that intimidation, threats, harassment, and violence against journalists and other media actors, as well as their family members, constitutes an attack on democracy and requires urgent attention and coordinated action at the highest political level, both domestically and internationally.
- d. We commit to devise, based on Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 and best practices of Council of Europe member States and other jurisdictions, dedicated national action plans on the safety of journalists, setting a comprehensive and effective programme of activity, with urgency-based priorities and adequate resources for their implementation. Strong political and operational leadership, coordination between the authorities involved, and the effective involvement – at all stages – of civil society, academia, journalists and their professional associations are instrumental to the success of such plans and should receive appropriate attention.
- e. We resolve, in the context of the national action plans, to promptly and decisively address the specific risks, challenges and threats that women journalists and other media actors face on account of their gender, also in the online sphere. We furthermore resolve to appropriately address the threats, abuse and intimidation faced by journalists and other media actors on grounds of their race, colour, ethnic or national origin, language, religion or sexual orientation or other personal characteristics.³
- f. We commit to dedicate specific attention and resources to stemming impunity for killings of, attacks on and ill-treatment of journalists and other media actors, by:

² The position of the Russian Federation on this paragraph is expressed in its [interpretative statement](#) appended to the documents of the Ministerial Conference.

³ The position of the Russian Federation on this paragraph is expressed in its [interpretative statement](#) appended to the documents of the Ministerial Conference.

- i. providing early warning mechanisms and threat assessments;
 - ii. ensuring that investigations into these crimes are prompt and effective;
 - iii. recognising such acts either as a dedicated category of crimes or as an aggravated circumstance leading to heavier penalties; and
 - iv. providing for practical and operational measures to stem impunity.
- g. We further commit to adequately enforce applicable employment laws to better protect journalists and other media actors from arbitrary dismissal or reprisals, and from precarious working conditions that make them more vulnerable to attacks.
 - h. We acknowledge the importance for the police and media to build a mutual understanding of their respective responsibilities and constraints, notably through training, regular dialogue and the joint development of guidelines for their interaction.
 - i. We pledge to swiftly and decisively condemn any attack on journalists and other media actors and their family members, whether these have taken place on national soil or in any other member state, and to make the protection of journalists a political priority, with the corresponding political accountability that this engages.
 - j. We pledge to strengthen international collaboration to promote safety of journalists and continue to place the issue high on the agendas of global and regional organisations to which we belong. Furthermore, we fully support initiatives (such as the Media Freedom Coalition set-up in the context of the Global Pledge on media freedom), that call on States to speak out and act when violations of media freedom take place.
 - k. We fully support the work to be carried out under the Council of Europe Implementation Strategy for Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors, both at domestic level and within the Organisation.

We invite the Council of Europe to:

- I. elaborate guidance for the drafting of national action plans on the safety of journalists and other media actors, in line with Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors as well as its implementation strategy and guide.
- II. disseminate and promote amongst member States the "Implementation Guide to 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".
- III. intensify the Organisation's efforts conducive to an effective, strategic and harmonized implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors. To that end:
 - 1. produce an annual report on the state of freedom of expression in Council of Europe member States as part of the annual reports of the Secretary General on the state of democracy, human rights and the rule of law;

2. conduct research into the grounds and reasons for impunity for the crimes against journalists in order to better understand the phenomenon and develop appropriate responses;
 3. carry out a comprehensive campaign, at European level, to promote the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists and support corresponding campaigns at national level.
- IV. continue to assist with the implementation of Council of Europe standards in the area of media freedom, independence and pluralism through co-operation and technical assistance activities, as well as support to the media sector and civil society organisations active in the Council of Europe member States.
 - V. take stock of innovative approaches and best practices developed by member States for the purpose of safeguarding journalists, as well as of the results achieved.
 - VI. support the work of the Council of Europe's Platform to promote the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists, and produce regular evaluation reports measuring the effectiveness and rapid response capacity of the platform, while striving for a comprehensive coverage of all incidents occurring in Council of Europe member States.
 - VII. review regularly, in consultation with the relevant stakeholders, and report on the measures taken to implement this Resolution.