

Colloquium on the role of media actors in confronting terrorism

A difficult equation between the right to be informed, media freedom and media ethics

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Concept paper

In recent times, journalists and other media professionals have faced great challenges when covering repeated terror attacks. The new dynamics of terrorism and the move to an increasingly digital and social media environment, with its wide reach and unprecedented speed with which information spreads across online channels, pose in particular a serious challenge to reporting on the issue.

Comprehensive standards set out by the Council of Europe (Committee of Ministers and Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe) and the European Court of Human Rights' case law provide firm leading principles for journalists and other media actors, but also for State authorities, on how to react in such situations of crisis.

Journalists and other media actors have a responsibility to make available accurate and comprehensive information on terrorist acts and potential threats and to avoid sensationalist media reports which lead to the spread of public terror, fear and feelings of chaos. Media coverage can be crucial in stimulating informed debate in situations of crisis. Media professionals can also make a positive contribution to the prevention of terrorism by displaying notably how member states and international organisations respond to these threats.

However, equally importantly in such context, the rights of journalists and other media professionals must be protected, including their right to access information in public interest and the right not to disclose their sources. Also, legislation, including anti-terrorist laws, and how it is applied in practice can give rise to a chilling effect on freedom of expression and public debate.

The Colloquium will bring together media actors and other relevant stakeholders, such as audio-visual regulatory bodies, media self-regulatory bodies, government representatives, civil society representatives and academics to look at:

- Dilemmas and challenges faced by media professionals covering terrorist acts and threats in today's changing media environment
- Use of digital media and platforms and the role of internet actors
- Regulation/co-regulation/self-regulation responses in such difficult contexts which protect the right to freedom of expression and media freedoms and other fundamental rights

It will serve as a forum where participants, mainly from European countries affected by terrorist attacks or threats, will exchange and examine experiences, present case studies and discuss inspiring practices. They will also look at ways to reinforce collective commitment to keep the public informed without contributing unduly to the impact of terrorism.