



Delo's Brussels Correspondent Peter Žerjavič Threatened by Slovenian National Security Official – No. 69/2021

(<https://fom.coe.int/alerte/detail/97586167;globalSearch=false>)

Slovenia is a staunch defender of democratic principles and values and, in this respect, of the freedom and independence of the media and journalists. In Slovenia, the freedom of the media and, in particular, journalistic autonomy and editorial independence are specially protected by the Mass Media Act. Slovenia also defends the right to freedom of expression, which is particularly important for our country because of its not so distant history during the time of Yugoslavia, of which Slovenia was also part and which had a criminal offence called "verbal delict", and because, under the previous regime, journalistic and other publishing work was subject to strict censorship. The aforementioned statement of the State Secretary is understood in the light of the right to freedom of expression as a fundamental human right enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights.

We stress that objective and impartial media reporting is of utmost importance at a time when there is a growing phenomenon of misleading or fake news in the public domain, which threatens the democratic development and pluralism of society – these are constitutionally protected values of the Republic of Slovenia and fundamental values of the Council of Europe. With the rise of fake news, the media and journalists have an extremely important task to carry out their work professionally, impartially and objectively. If this was not the case, this could undermine our democratic principles and values. When talking about guaranteeing media freedom, it is necessary to consider this area comprehensively, including in terms of the responsibility of the media and journalists to respect professional and ethical standards of journalistic work and transparent ownership and pluralism of the media in a particular country. This is the only way to ensure the diversity and credibility of information in the public domain, which in turn strengthens trust in the media, preserves pluralism of opinion and strengthens democracy.

We also stress that, between March 2020 and today (November 2021), the Government of the Republic of Slovenia has not adopted any legal act or decision to harm or jeopardise the free operation of the Slovenian media and journalists or to interfere with the editorial policy of any media outlet. On the contrary, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government helped the media with emergency financial measures (providing a basic monthly income, paying social and health insurance contributions, co-financing the salaries of media workers who were temporarily laid off, providing an allowance for work in hazardous conditions to Radiotelevizija Slovenija, etc.).