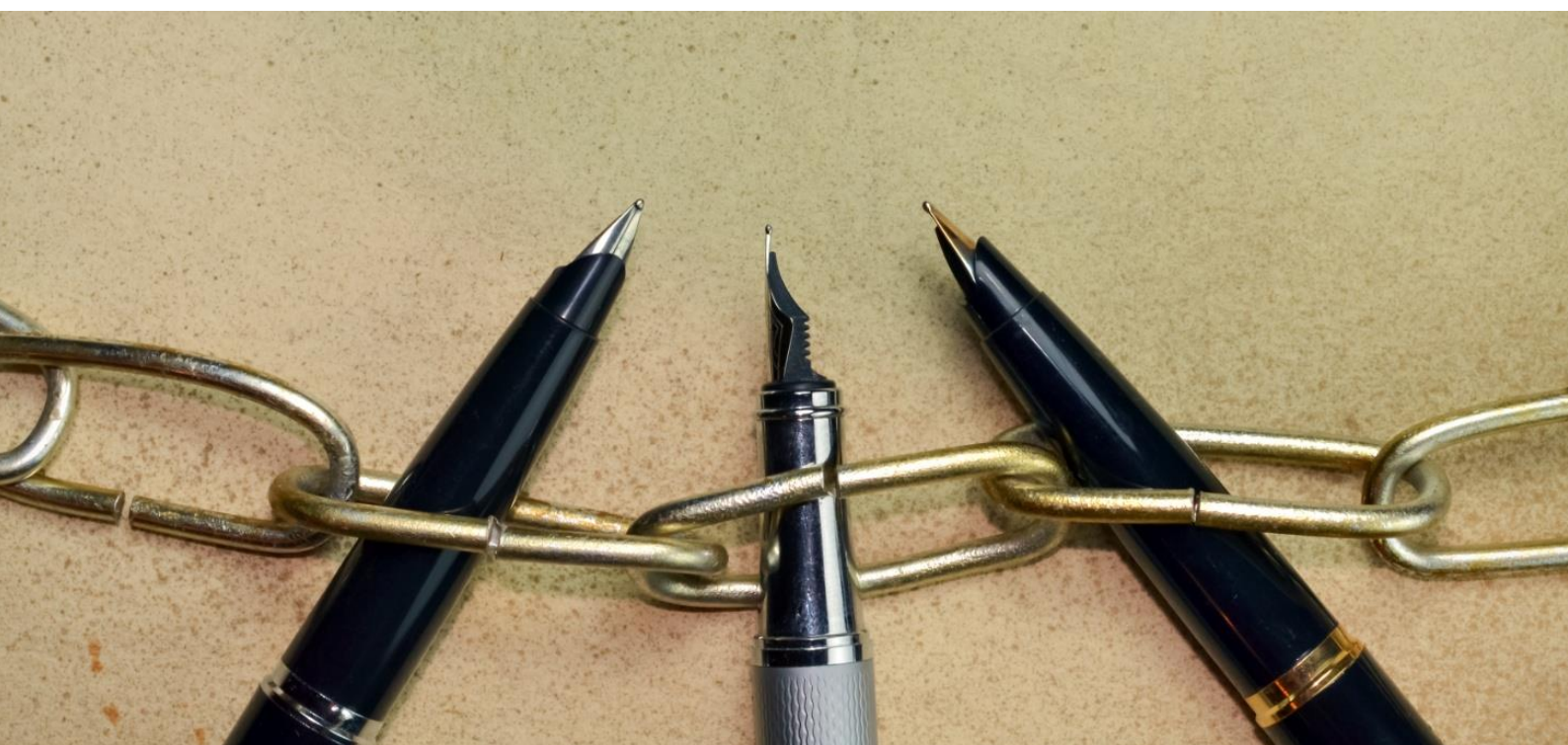




JOURNALISTS MATTER

Council of Europe Campaign for the Safety of Journalists



6 March 2023, Strasbourg

CONCEPT NOTE

www.CoE.int/JournalistsMatter



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Council of Europe Campaign for the Safety of Journalists

This document contains the concept of the Council of Europe “Campaign for the Safety of Journalists” for the period 2022-2027. It provides the background of the Campaign, identifies its objectives and target groups. It highlights the added value of the Council of Europe action in the field and proposes the Campaign’s roadmap, implementation structure, set of actions, methodology and expected results.

1. Background

Journalists play a vital role in safeguarding a democratic and pluralistic society. Recognised by the European Court of Human Rights as “public watchdogs”, they have a right and a duty to impart information and ideas of public interest within the framework of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Their duty to inform is mirrored by the public’s right to be informed and can be subject to narrow restrictions only if prescribed by law, necessary in a democratic society, and in pursuit of the legitimate aims listed under Article 10(2) of the Convention, as interpreted by the European Court of Human Rights.

Notably, according to the European Court on Human Rights, states are required to create a favourable environment for participation in public debate for all the persons concerned, enabling them to express their opinions and ideas without fear. Yet, intimidated, verbally and physically assaulted, threatened, target of abusive litigations, journalists are under constant threat and their mission at risk.

As amply evidenced by the record number and variety of alerts received in recent years by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe) **Platform for the protection of journalism and safety of journalists** (the Platform), journalists are the victims of a wide range of attacks impairing their everyday work. The online environment, while providing the remarkable opportunity to extend instant access to information at a worldwide level, has also provided a breeding ground for several other forms of attacks. In this context, although this happens offline as well, women journalists often encounter even harsher types of violence and threats on account of their gender. Certainly, what occurs online can have an impact offline, ultimately silencing journalists and, in the most horrific cases, condemning them to pay their refusal to be silent with their own liberty or life. Against this background, the rate of impunity remains extremely problematic.

This climate of violence against journalists represents a long-standing issue which concerns most of the member States of the Council of Europe and therefore asks for a high level of political attention and urgent action.



In the past years, the Council of Europe at its highest level has taken important steps forward in the efforts aimed at securing the right to freedom of expression, and better protecting journalism, journalists and their safety. In 2016 the Committee of Ministers adopted the **Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4** on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors, requiring to put in place a comprehensive legislative frameworks for the protection of their physical and moral integrity, to adopt appropriate criminal law provisions to prevent impunity and to afford journalists a broad and effective scope of protection. The Recommendation was shortly followed by the Implementation guide **“How to protect journalists and other media actors?”**, a practical tool containing concrete suggestions for an effective implementation of the Recommendation, soon to be completed so as to cover the four pillars of the Recommendation.

However, in recent years respect for freedom of expression has been in decline in many countries. As noted in the 2022 Annual Report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe **Moving Forward**, the personal safety of journalists and the economic and financial conditions under which the media is expected to produce journalism continue to deteriorate. The Covid-19 pandemic, followed by a war of aggression initiated in the very European soil, have had a particularly strong impact on journalism and the media.

Member States upgraded their commitment to combat threats on journalists' safety and related impunity at the **Conference of Ministers responsible for Media and Information Society** held in June 2021. There, the Ministers responsible for Media and Information Society issues met to agree on actions required to address the radical changes in the media and information environment in the digital era and to discuss solutions against the dangerous backsliding in the area of safety of journalists. The Ministerial Conference adopted four highly important political documents: a final declaration and four resolutions. Amongst these, with the **Resolution on the safety of journalists**, the member States renewed their commitment to make the protection of journalists an urgent political priority and,

amongst several important actions, invited the Council of Europe to carry out a comprehensive campaign at European level dedicated precisely to the promotion of the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists.

2. Objectives and targets

The Council of Europe campaign primary objective is to **effectively increase the safety of journalists and other media actors** in all situations.

It will be instrumental to step up the member States' effort to safeguard the vital role played by journalists in society and to effectively prevent, investigate and sanction threats and attacks against their safety, offline and online. Particular attention will be paid to the journalists reporting in times of crisis and/or conflict, who are at an even greater risk of undue pressures and attacks, as well as finding ways of supporting their safety in general. Furthermore, additional focus will be put on safety challenges facing women journalists, offline as well as in the online environment.

Under the motto "*Journalists matter*", the continent-wide campaign aims at sensitising governments, citizens and journalists themselves to the importance of ensuring the safety of journalists to defend the very essence of a pluralistic democracy.

To achieve an effective and sensible improvement in the development and/or implementation of national legal and institutional frameworks, in line with the Council of Europe standards, the campaign will also **promote corresponding campaigns at national level**.

Its ultimate ambition is not just to reach out to the most noticeable stakeholders, but to make everyone aware of the width, relevance and urgency of the issue and, ultimately, to change the situation effectively and significantly in practice.

Where necessary, additional support should be provided to the development of appropriate legal and institutional frameworks at national level.

Given that journalism is integrated at the heart of the social fabric, a larger number of **target groups** will need be addressed to achieve the desired impact:

- *Journalists*, who are the primary beneficiaries of the campaign, will be called to play a crucial role in campaigning for their safety and media freedom in general;
- *Press councils, national and international associations and institutions dealing with media freedom and journalists' rights*, who could enhance their involvement in and support to the protection of journalists' safety;
- *Media outlets*, who could more effectively and actively contribute to protecting journalists' safety;
- *Judges, prosecutors, law enforcement and other relevant public authorities* to raise their awareness and enhance their capacity for a more effective protection of the journalists' safety;
- *Public officials, elected bodies at all levels and political parties*, to improve the policies and legislations affecting journalists' safety and the freedom of expression;
- *Civil society*, including relevant independent human rights institutions, to raise their voice and spread the message, and act as key stakeholders able to take proactive steps and sensitise public authorities and the society in general on the situation in the field;
- *Educational institutions*, including secondary schools and universities, together with *youth organisations and the wider youth sector*, will be called to raise awareness on the safety of journalists, foster democratic participation, and engage young people in promoting media freedom and a culture of accountability.

3. Roadmap 2022 - 2027

Preparatory phase:

Development of the campaign project before the end of 2022 and launch of the creation of national focal points for the campaign. Identification of the first countries/geographical areas for the launch of the campaign activities, including in the light of ongoing Organisation's assistance and co-operation activities on freedom of expression, instrumental in promoting the implementation of the Council of Europe standards in the field of journalists' safety.

Following prior consultations within the Council of Europe, presentation of the concept, purpose, and main lines of the campaign to the Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI), entrusted by the Committee of Ministers with the coordination of the campaign, at the December 2022 Plenary meeting.

Public launch: scheduled on 5 October 2023, in the framework of the Conference on Freedom of Expression organised under the Latvian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers. At the launch event, the Council of Europe will also present the extended Implementation Guide, covering the 4 pillars of the 2016 Recommendation, as well as the Pocket Guide for Key Actions for improved safety of journalists. The launch will also provide the opportunity for the Platform's Contributing Partner organisations to inform about the outcome of the Annual Report and to provide an overview of alerts and sources of major concern and other relevant developments.



Campaign development: throughout the campaign member States will be encouraged to take concrete steps towards developing their national AP and putting in place effective mechanisms on the protection of journalists, by boosting their standards, filling existing gaps both in terms of protection guarantees and related practical measures, and enhancing coordination, as appropriate.

Throughout the Campaign, the Council of Europe will propose a set of the main lines of a national action plan (hereinafter "AP") on the safety of journalists and other media actors, also including indicators for assessing the effectiveness of standards' implementation. The national AP's indicators are expected to serve as a checklist based on which MS can adapt the actions needed according to their national realities.

The Council of Europe will facilitate the activities to be undertaken when pursuing such goals. Events on the best existing practices from countries that are equipped with effective national AP and/or mechanisms will be organised throughout the duration of the campaign.

To facilitate the exchange amongst relevant partners, collect best practices and identify effective solutions, the Council Europe will organise **four thematic events**, to take place annually throughout the duration of the campaign, around the four pillars of the CM/Rec(2016)4, namely: "prevention", "protection", "prosecution" and "promotion of information, education and awareness raising".

In parallel with the campaign's thematic events:

- **Nationally organised events** by member States under the auspices of Council of Europe will take place throughout the duration of the campaign. An example would be either States with operating national AP, to further exchanges with those that have not developed such plans and provide accounts of best practices and lessons learned, and/or States starting to elaborate their AP, making use of these events as multi-stakeholder platforms to share perspectives and reach effective and feasible solutions. The events will be organised according to national/regional needs and realities. Member States are encouraged to gradually take ownership of the campaign, whereas the Council of Europe will play a coordinating and facilitating role.
- **Other campaign-type activities**, such as awareness raising in various events and occasions, TV campaigns, interviews with and testimonies of journalists, thematic exchanges on specific issues related to journalists' safety, at the initiatives of the member States, journalists' associations and other relevant stakeholders.

Closing event: to be held in 2027 and aimed at presenting the campaign's main outcomes, providing an evaluation of the goals achieved and synthesis of the progresses made, while setting the basis to build up further on the identified best practices and lessons learned, also with a view to ensure the campaign's legacy.

4. Implementation

Coordination

The CDMSI was entrusted by the Committee of Ministers to steer the Council of Europe's work in the fields of freedom of expression, media, internet governance and other information society related issues. Tasked by the Committee of Ministers with the launch and coordination of the campaign, the CDMSI will be closely associated and duly informed by its Secretariat about the steps taken to prepare, launch and coordinate the campaign.

The Council of Europe Freedom of Expression and CDMSI division will act as the Organisation's 'focal point'. Council of Europe assistance and cooperation projects on media and freedom of expression will provide substantial input to the campaign and will be instrumental in addressing evolving needs, providing expertise according to member states' needs, developing, and implementing, relevant projects and assess their impact.

Regular consultations will be held, as necessary, with relevant stakeholders and partners outside the Organisation.

Close collaboration and consultation with the Council of Europe member States in the **Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists and Media Freedom in Strasbourg** will be critical in the launch and development of the campaign.

National coordination

With a view to ensuring coordination with the Council of Europe and amongst themselves, member States will be invited to designate **national focal points**, who will engage in regular dialogue with the campaign's managing structures and relevant counterparts. To ensure an optimal development of the campaign and achievement of its goals, the Council of Europe will also recommend the establishment of dedicated **national committees** (see Appendix).

The Council of Europe will facilitate the arrangement of **annual meetings of the national focal points**. A coordinator, under the Freedom of Expression and CDMSI division, will be the interface between the Council of Europe and the national focal points.

Cooperation projects

A crucial part following the launch of the campaign will be the identification of country specific needs and gaps, areas needing improvement in coordination with the national focal points and the design and implementation of appropriate projects and activities, under the Campaign umbrella, in particular by the Cooperation Division of the Council of Europe.

Campaign partners

Cooperation and coordination will be established with **key partners**, such as the Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists and its contributing Partner organisations. The Platform's annual reports, alerts and recommendations will be taken into due account to identify the key areas requiring action under the campaign.

Relevant regional, European and international organisations or institutions will be invited to join as campaign partners both to organise projects to promote the safety of journalists, in a consistent and coordinated manner, and based on commonly agreed standards, and to raise awareness on the Council of Europe campaign.

Amongst these are the United Nations, notably the UNESCO's work to support the protection of journalists worldwide. The Council of Europe campaign will be carried on in compliance with the commitments of the **UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity** and taking active part, in a coordinated manner, to the celebrations of the World Press Freedom Day and the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. Cooperation and coordination will also be ensured under the campaign with the European Union, including to build, next to the Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4, on the **European Commission's Recommendation on the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists**, and taking into account the evaluation of its implementation and the findings of the European Commission's annual Rule of Law Reports. Coordinated action and synergies will also be undertaken with the OSCE Representative on Media Freedom and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Developments and goals of the campaign will be shared, and benefit from the exchange, with relevant international associations of journalists as well as organisations that are observers to the CDMSI and to its subsidiary committees.

The implementation of the campaign will benefit from the support of **other relevant stakeholders** acting as campaign partners, such as journalists and volunteers. Journalists will be encouraged to actively support and promote the campaign and its objectives - by putting into the spotlight both the challenges faced and examples of concrete action and improvements - and to be among its main actors. Volunteers from the whole of Europe, acting under the coordination of the Council of Europe and national focal points, will also be encouraged to actively contribute to the development of the campaign and achievement of its goals.

Prominent personalities, such as internationally renowned journalists, human rights activists and political authorities, will be involved as appropriate to boost the visibility, scope and message of the campaign.

Reporting

A mid-term review will be carried out in early 2025 and a final review of the campaign will be presented prior to the closing event in 2027. The Committee of Ministers and the Secretary General will regularly be informed on the progress of the campaign. A final Report will present the main outcomes.

5. Methodology

Council of Europe Thematic events

The four thematic events will be the **main annual happening** of the Campaign organised by the Council of Europe, to which all relevant stakeholders, including member States representatives, journalists, academic experts and civil society organisations acting in the field of relevance, will be invited to participate and play an active role in the discussion. Each thematic event will be **focusing on one of the four pillars** of the (2016)⁴ Recommendation. Taking in consideration that the extended Implementation Guide will only be unveiled in 2023, the focused pillar of the thematic sessions will follow this order:

- i. Protection;
- ii. Prosecution;
- iii. Prevention;
- iv. Promotion of information, education and awareness raising.

The opening of each thematic session will see the **presentation of best practice examples**, e.g., worthy national initiatives - legislation, practical measures, relevant case-law - deserving specific consideration in light of the effective action taken and/or implemented in the framework of the pillar of reference. Then, a **case study** will be presented and analysed with a view to spot possible shortcomings and/or strengths, confront diverse viewpoints and make concrete proposals. Taking as a reference the indicators, background information, valuable practices and proposed actions already available in the Implementation Guide, participants will be invited to **discuss priority areas** and identify aspects deserving further consideration and ground-breaking solutions.

Thematic sessions will be accompanied by one or more **side event/s** to be selected considering the informative or documentary content, relevance, impact, and ability to complement and/or boost the campaign's message. Examples include video projections, photo exhibitions and fireside chats.

A more developed and enriched version of the relevant section of a national action plan (protection, prosecution, prevention, promotion), further elaborated in the light of the discussion, will be among the main outcomes of each thematic event.

Various bodies and departments of the Council of Europe working on relevant aspects relating to the safety of journalists and the protection of journalism will play a role in the discussion, according to their specific competence and experience. A particular role in ensuring an effective impact of the campaign will be taken by the Cooperation Division in charge of concrete cooperation activities with member States.

'National chapters'

To maximise the impact of the campaign, the Council of Europe encourages the member States to transpose it to the national context, by organising national chapters of the campaign.

The Council of Europe will accompany and facilitate the organisation of 'national chapters' by the member States according to the national needs identified in cooperation with the national committees. Such activities could take the form of thematic sessions, training programmes and awareness-raising activities linked to the scope of the campaign, including through Council of Europe's cooperation activities and projects in the field. The support will be provided also by ensuring the participation of relevant stakeholders, such as representing staff and experts, and mobilising, as appropriate, the partners/activists for change such as journalists and their associations, media, NGOs, politicians, IGOs and governmental representatives. Such activities will follow the launch event but may be organised in preparation of, or as a follow-up to, the yearly Council of Europe thematic event.

Best practices

The campaign will build on the best practices and lessons learned from previous successful Council of Europe campaigns, notably the *All different – All equal* campaign (2006-2009), *One in Five* campaign to stop sexual violence against children (2010-2015), the *No Hate Speech Movement* Youth Campaign (launched in 2012-2017).

Visibility and communication

Regarding **communication, offline and online**, the campaign will sponsor a “*Journalists matter*” and other selected messages through a wide range of available tools engaged to extensively broadcast campaign’s news, such as Council of Europe websites and social media channels, a podcast on safety challenges and campaign’s scope, interviews with journalists. Regular presence on Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram with a distinctive visual identity as well as synergy with relevant Council of Europe account will be ensured.

Alongside the launch event, **other promotional events** will be organised. **Promotional material** will be made available as appropriate **in the visibility kit on the Campaign webpage**.

6. Expected results

The expected **impact** of the campaign is that journalists across Europe are granted the safe environment they need to assume and play freely and more assertively their role of “public watchdogs”.

The combined action of the campaign’s efforts is expected to produce **public awareness regarding the importance of guaranteeing the safety, independence and pluralism in the media sector**; and, result in **adequate changes in national applicable laws and policies and their effective implementation**. It should also induce more **trans-border cooperation and pan-European solidarity** and contribute to a **cultural change** in enhancing general respect to journalists.

In particular, the following outcomes are sought:

- **Enhanced protection:** of journalists themselves as well as journalists’ sources and strong support to journalists and other media actors working to provide the public with accurate and trustworthy information, including in times of crisis or conflict. In practice, this should be translated into:
 - wide adoption and implementation of national action plans;
 - enhanced legal and institutional safeguards for the protection of journalists’ safety;
 - setting-up of sustainable Campaign Committees bringing together institutions, civil society, and media actors, designed to remain as dialogue platforms and coordination mechanisms even after the Campaign’s life;
 - setting up of effective remedies against the attacks;
 - better results regarding the investigations of crimes against journalists; and,
 - proper sanctioning of the perpetrators.
- **Increased awareness:** of the positive role of journalists both by the general public and the decision makers in 46 member States, including on the need to protect journalists in times of crisis or conflict according to the principles extracted from the relevant Council of Europe and other relevant international standards.
- **Joining forces:** the development of a culture of constructive dialogue between journalists and relevant stakeholders, including legislators, the judiciary and law enforcement authorities, towards a better protection of journalists on the ground.

Appendix

I. 'National chapters'

The Council of Europe encourages the member states to transpose the campaign to the national context by organising 'national chapters' of the campaign. The Council of Europe will accompany and facilitate the organisation of such 'national chapters' by tailoring actions according to the national needs. Such actions, under comprehensive national action plans, could take the form of legislative reviews and improvements, thematic workshops, training programmes, promotion and awareness-raising activities linked to the scope of the campaign, including through Council of Europe's cooperation projects. The support will be provided also by ensuring the participation of relevant stakeholders, such as representing experts and staff, and mobilising, as appropriate, relevant key partners.

National action plans

National action plans for the protection of journalists' safety should be developed around the four pillars of Recommendation (2016)⁴ and are expected to operate as dynamic work-plans, to be reviewed, adjusted and adapted according to the most recent developments in the field and in the light of the outcomes of the annual thematic events and other exchanges facilitated by the campaign. Under the national action plans, **specific protection mechanisms** will need to be put in place taking into consideration the domestic needs and context as well as existing best practices.

National committees. National focal points

To this scope, the Council of Europe recommends the creation of national committees for the safety of journalists and the designation of national focal points.

Each **National Committee** will operate as an interagency, multi-stakeholder structure, bringing together representatives of agencies and organizations involved in the transposition of the campaign at the national level. It should bring together the main stakeholders expected to be active in the various dimensions of the campaign at domestic level.

National Committees shall be entrusted with the key task of *designing a national action plan for the protection of journalists' safety*, as well that of *setting related protection mechanisms*, and of *coordinating and reviewing its implementation*. National Committees will have a key role in the identification of domestic needs and challenges as a pre-requirement for the determination of national priorities under the campaign.

Each member state should designate a **National Focal Point** to act as the interface between the domestic stakeholders entrusted with the 'national chapter' of the campaign and the Council of Europe Secretariat of the campaign, other members states' focal points as well as other international partners or stakeholders involved.

National Focal Points will be expected to share information about concrete initiatives undertaken at national level to the achievement of the campaign's goals and, at the same time, to inform corresponding national committees about the outcomes of the exchanges held at European level under the campaign and facilitate the sharing of good practices. To enable the exchange, the Council of Europe will facilitate the organization of one annual meeting amongst the national focal points.

More detailed information on National Committees and Focal Points will be provided to member states in due course.

II. Secretariat of the Campaign

The Campaign will be coordinated by the Freedom of Expression and CDMSI Division, Democratic Institutions and Freedoms Department of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe will entrust a [Programme Advisor](#) to act as **Campaign Manager**, the Organisation's interface with national focal points, in close relation with, and under the supervision of, the Freedom of Expression and CDMSI Division.

The Freedom of Expression and CDMSI Division of the Council of Europe will be responsible for:

- The coordination of the overall campaign in the Council of Europe, including the coordination with the various institutions and sectors of the organisation;
- The coordination with the National Committees;
- The programme of activities of the Campaign at European level and support to the NCs by the participation in relevant national/regional events, expert support etc.;
- The organisation of the annual thematic sessions as well as the annual meeting of the national focal points;
- The mobilisation of international partners: relevant regional, European and international organisations, partner organisations of the Platform for the protection of journalism and safety of journalists;
- The online instruments and visibility material dedicated to the Campaign (to be put in place with the support of the Council of Europe directorate for Communication and other relevant partners) and to be completed by/coordinated with visibility activities and material at national level;
- Organizing reporting and evaluation of the overall campaign, on the basis of national reports;
- Information and communication about the campaign, including the campaign institutional webpage.



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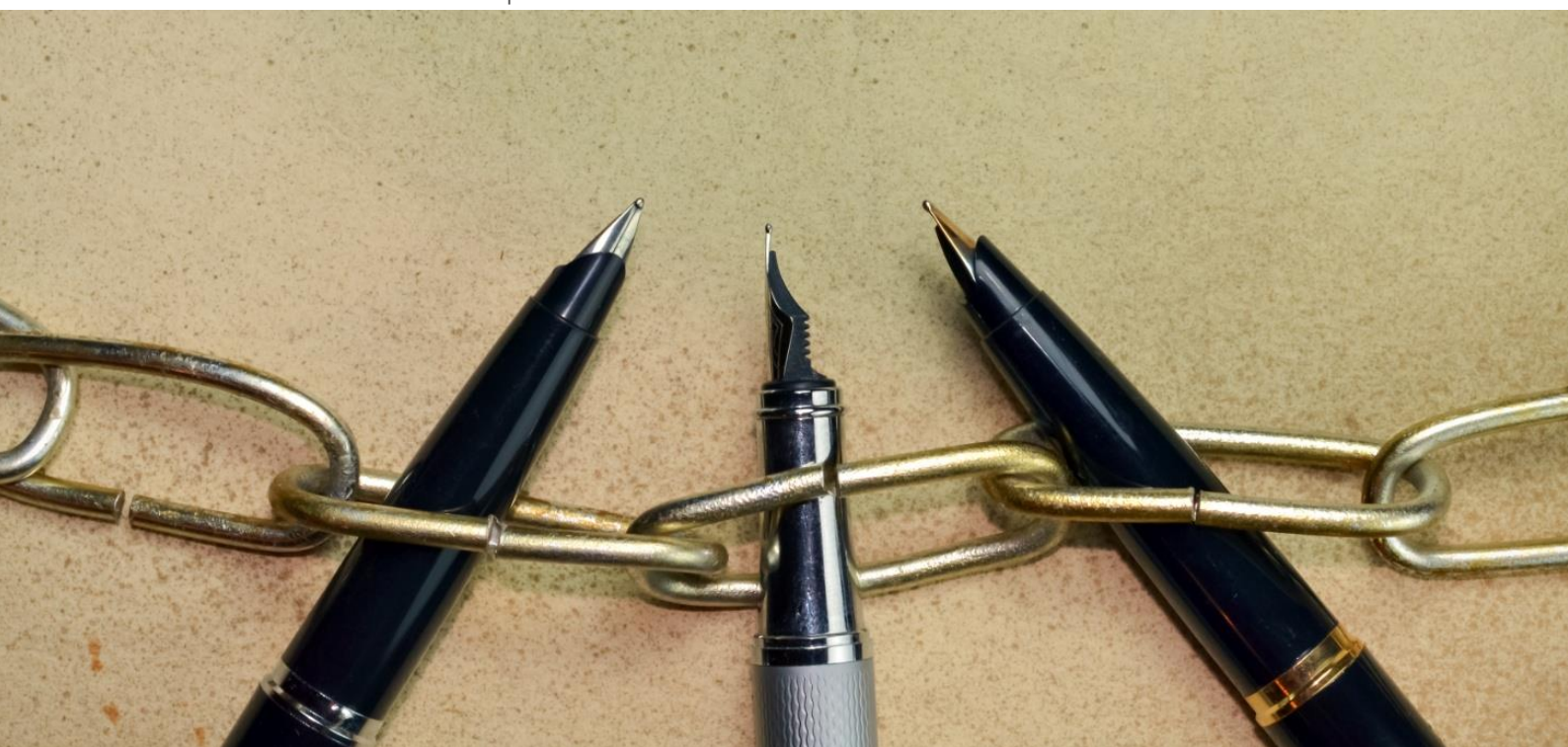
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www.coe.int

The **Council of Europe** is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.