



ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH

Sunday, 3 May 2020

English only

World Press Freedom Day – 3 May

On this World Press Freedom Day, the Advisory Council on Youth celebrates the freedom of the press across Europe. At the same time, we are worried that the current COVID-19 pandemic is being used as a pretext to introduce disproportionate restrictions on press freedom.

Freedom of the press is a crucial ingredient of democratic life and the realisation of other human rights: Art. 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights guarantees freedom of expression and freedom of information. Declarations on the protection and promotion of investigative journalism, as well as a declaration and guidelines on freedom of expression and information in the media in the context of the fight against terrorism, have further added to the work of the Council of Europe.

Young people in particular benefit from growing up with a free press, which sets high standards for their understanding of quality democratic discourse early on. Furthermore, a diverse press is indispensable for citizens' access to a plurality of voices – particularly relevant for young people who live on the margins of society. They greatly depend on free and committed journalism to let their voices be heard and to draw attention to systemic injustices.

Access to accurate information from free journalists, who pursue their investigative work despite the harsh conditions to which they are exposed, while asking the important questions – no matter how uncomfortable or risky – is crucial to keep voters informed, provoke a discussion, stimulate a vital and resilient civic space, and allow pluralistic democracies to flourish.

Recent developments have been alarming: last year's report on 'Threats and Attacks to Media Freedom in Europe', presented to the Council of Europe, lists 140 serious violations in 32 Council of Europe member states reported to the Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists in 2018.¹

Moreover, while the Advisory Council on Youth agrees that it is of crucial importance to counter disinformation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are extremely worried that some governments are unjustifiably targeting journalists on the grounds that circulation of certain information can cause panic.² On the contrary, we believe that, especially now, access to factual information is crucial for all citizens and that governments cannot claim a monopoly over information of public importance. Freedom of the press must not become a collateral victim of the measures that governments are taking to face the pandemic.

¹ Partner Organisations to the Council of Europe Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists. Democracy at Risk: Threats and Attacks against Media Freedom in Europe. Annual Report 2019. Retrieved April 15, 2020 from <https://bit.ly/2RPWrop>.

² Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, "Press freedom must not be undermined by measures to counter disinformation about COVID-19", Published on 3 April 2020, Retrieved April 20, 2020 from <https://bit.ly/2xINyj8>.

The Advisory Council calls on the member states to adhere to and support freedom of the press at all times and especially in times of crisis, concurring with the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Dunja Mijatović, that the member states must ensure measures to combat disinformation are “necessary, proportionate and subject to regular oversight, including by Parliament and national human rights institutions”.³

The Advisory Council furthermore declares its gratitude and support to journalists for their work in upholding democracy.

Finally, we call on young people not only to appreciate and support free journalism but also to stand in solidarity with journalists when necessary and defend our democratic right to a free press.

For more information:

- [Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists](#)
- [Committee of Ministers' recommendations, resolutions and declarations adopted in the field of media freedom and protection of journalists](#)

The opinions expressed in this statement are those of the Advisory Council on Youth and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Council of Europe or its member states.

³ *ibid.*