Without support for increased labour rights and protections for freedom of expression, trust in media cannot be increased.

Bosnia & Herzegovina
It is believed that bad working conditions also affect the quality of journalism. If the pay were higher and working conditions were better, this would have had a positive effect on journalism.

Kosovo
Media owners should provide working contracts to employees and respect the labour law. The labour inspectorate should ensure that the labour law is enforced so that journalists do not become victims of exploitation.

Macedonia
Having a collective agreement is the in the essence of protection of journalists rights. There is an urgent need to change anti unionism atmosphere in the private media.

Montenegro
53% of journalists in Montenegro consider their economic situation had weakened considerably in the last years.

Serbia
Organizing social dialogue between media owners and journalists is key. The conditions for starting the negotiations should be enabled by the state.

Turkey
Creating media spaces for professional journalists to publish their work after reproducing it with new production techniques that are not applied in conventional newsrooms or existing digital editorial processes in Turkish mediascape.
**How can the precarious state of journalism in South East Europe & Turkey be improved?**

It’s is a real pleasure for me to have the opportunity to address you today on the question of the precarious state of journalism in SEE and Turkey. I would like first to thank the European Federation of Journalists, our project partner who has organized this event. In addition, I would like to thank the European Commission, in particular Andris Kesteris, for having accepted the invitation to speak and more generally to DG Near for their long-standing and important support to UNESCO’s work in South East Europe.

Many of the challenges faced by the media in South East Europe have occurred at the global level, as shown the new UNESCO global report World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development. The key findings of this report were presented to UNESCO’s 195 Member States last week at a side event to the Organization’s General Conference that the overarching trends on the global level demonstrates increased recognition of the right to seek and receive information, but more curbs on the right to impart.

The global report explores trends in four areas, which UNESCO summarizes through the acronyms FISH: media Freedom, media Independence, Safety of journalists, and having a plurality of media choices. The European Union representative in last week’s panel, Mr Christian Leffler noted that FISH need to swim in the OCEAN, standing for Openness, Capacity-building, Enabling environment, Accountability and Norms.

Citing recent findings from the Edelman Trust Barometer, The World Trends Report indicates that there has been a decrease in public trust in traditional news media, particularly in Europe and North America. The complex phenomena of
political polarization, both reflected in and exacerbated by the media, has led to a need for independent, verifiable journalism. There is pressure from all direction on journalists: from political leaders and regulatory authorities, attempting to delegitimize media and journalists. Moreover, the available funding is diminishing and traditional business models are failing, leading to increasing dependence on government and corporate subsidies and worries about potential impacts on editorial independence.

This is why we need projects such as this one; “Building Trust in Media in South East Europe and Turkey”. I am proud to report here to you that we are making great progress thanks to the commitment of our project partners.

With this Project, UNESCO has the ambitious objective to contribute to reversing the trend of the current decline of trust in media in South East Europe and Turkey. It is ambitious because the task is immense, as highlighted during the discussions of the DG Near Western Balkans Media Conference in Tirana last week. The current debate around so-called “fake news” reinforces our conviction that a project to build trust in media is needed more than ever and should be expanded.

Readers have lost their confidence in media and in their capacity to act as watchdogs of those in power. They are partly right: the tabloidization of media and media capture are manifestations of the current situation in the region. Yet good journalism does exist in the region, and it needs to be further stimulated and supported.

This is precisely what we are aiming at with our project. We are supporting media accountability mechanisms. Last month, the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia organized an award ceremony for quality journalism in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. A new media council in Albania is starting functioning. The Press Council in Serbia has launched a web app to be closer to online readers and adapt to the digital era. In parallel, and thanks to the Ethical Journalism Network and Aidan White, who is here today, we are working with media outlets individually to improve their good governance and their respect for ethical, professional standards.

At the same time, we have launched a process of media and information literacy (MIL) in South East Europe and Turkey, which is building critical minds for the critical times in which we live. Not only should media improve their quality, users need to be able to spot false information, to distinguish between verified journalism that reflects a commitment to truth professional standards from content that masquerades as journalism. Within our project, we have already conducted fruitful Media and Information Literacy consultations with ministries and various stakeholders in Albania and Serbia. The results show that MIL is at an embryonic stage in those countries. Yet as we received support from the authorities and many other actors, we at UNESCO are confident of our capacities to work effectively on the issue.

Let me also mention a recent survey “Back to the Drawing Board”, which was just published within our project and which shows that the profession of journalism is less and less attractive to young people. To give one example, this year only 20 students were enrolled at the faculty of journalism in Skopje. Moreover, the survey shows young people consider the journalism curricula in the region to be old-fashioned and not adapted to the needs of the profession. If young people are less and less attracted by the profession, it is probably because the curriculum is not attractive, but also and without a doubt
because the working conditions of a journalist are too precarious. This is why this component of the project we are implementing with the EFJ to improve journalists’ labour rights in SEE and Turkey is a crucial part for us. This morning, you will have a chance to hear about various issues, in particular the lack of strong unions in the region.

I am very much looking forward to hearing from the members of the LAREG+ - the Labour Rights Expert Group of the EFJ, which has now expanded with members from SEE within the framework of our Project.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks once again to our dear partner the EFJ, and I wish you all a day of rich and fruitful discussions.
How to improve the precarious state of journalism in South East Europe and Turkey was the topic of a press conference held by the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) on 14th November 2017 at the Press Club Brussels. The press conference took place in the framework of the EFJ project, Building Trust in Media in South East Europe and Turkey—a project supported financially by UNESCO and the European Union.

Andris Kesteris, principal advisor at DG for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR) at the European Commission and Tarja Turtia, UNESCO Programme Specialist, attended the event to hear representatives of trade unions and professional associations from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey, speak about the conditions faced by journalists and media workers. The discussion was moderated by Aidan White, director of the Ethical Journalism Network, who opened the event by addressing the brutal realities faced by journalists in South East Europe and Turkey.

The testimonies began with Vlado Apostolov from SSNM (Macedonia), who argued that journalists cannot do their jobs to a high standard if they are not economically free. “In Macedonia, journalists earn under 200 euros per month, often paid late, and...
unions are taboo”, he added. Low wages and delayed payments were problems identified by representatives from all countries.

Conditions are similar in Serbia, Maja Vasic-Nikolic (NUNS) reported, where the biggest problem is self-censorship as editors are influenced by media owners. Dejan Gligorijevic (SINOS) explained that public service broadcasters (PSB) are one of the few media organisations who have collective agreements in Serbia and underlined the total absence of social dialogue in the private sector.

The lack of collective agreements were highlighted as a general problem for media workers in the whole region. “Labour rights are weak; for example, there is a lack of labour laws at the state level in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, Rea Adilagic (BHN) stated. Labour inspectors do not investigate media employers, reported Marijana Camovic (SMCG) from Montenegro and Shkelqim Hysenaj (AGK) from Kosovo. Mr Hysenaj also acknowledged problems of safety, as “there have been 24 cases of physical attacks of journalists in Kosovo this year”, according to his association.

In Turkey, over 150 journalists are imprisoned and the “free” journalists face precarious working conditions with more than 10,000 journalists being unemployed, Mustafa Kuleli (TGS) explained. Here, “only 5% of journalists are unionised, as being in a union is risky”, he added. Mr Kuleli referred to three major challenges (political, economical, technological) affecting the future of journalists and the media industry.

Without support for increased labour rights and protections for freedom of expression, trust in media cannot be increased, argued Erisa Zykaj (APJA) from Albania.

So, what can be done to help?

Rainer Reichert (DJV), co-chair of the EFJ Labour Rights Expert Group (LAREG) emphasised the need to exchange best practices between Western and South East Europe. Mr Reichert also suggested the need to make the situations known to the EU. It was acknowledged by representatives that pressure from the EU could help, as candidate countries would not get EU status without addressing media restrictions.

Moderator Aidan White (EJN) also addressed the need to tackle the public service broadcasting. Mr White suggested incentivising media rights and plurality by supporting good practices, and suggested a regional-wide campaign about the value of independent journalism.

The national reports from these 7 countries were also shared at the LAREG+ meeting. A variety of possible solutions to the poor working conditions faced by journalists were discussed, including transnational agreements for media companies and an expert networking group, as well as a database so that unions can see the strategies of unions in other countries.

The next actions planned by the EFJ in the #TrustinMediaSEE project include a social media campaign to raise awareness about the precarious working conditions for journalists in the region, as well as a photo exhibition and two events in the region in the coming year 2018.
There is an estimation that about 800 journalists work in Montenegro. Generally, they are not willing to talk about their position and working conditions, and they decide to take this step only when they got fired.

In 2016, the official statistic house Monstat registered an increase in number of employees in the media. This is a growth of 130 people but SMCG asked the directors of the media and tried to find out whether and how much people they employed during the previous year and according to these data, 11 major media at the national and local level, who agreed to give answers, employed a total of 39 people in the past year, so, with the condition that no one in those media has been fired, it remains unclear where the rest of 100 people are employed.

Survey of SMCG confirmed that journalists’ salaries are generally less than the average salary on the state level, which, according to Monstat data, amounted to 510 Euros in June 2017. More than half of the respondents (54.7%) receive less than 500 Euros. The position of the editors is seen as “safe”, the amount of their

53% of journalists in Montenegro consider that the economic situation had weakened considerably in the last years reports the SMCG (Trade Union Media of Montenegro)
Salaries range from 1,000 to 3,000 Euros. In addition to low wages, the biggest problem is their delay, which is the most common situation in local public broadcasters. Such problems are also present in private media. After several unsuccessful attempts to find a way that the media settle their debts for 2016 and 2017, the Agency for Electronic Media initiated eight bankruptcy proceedings against the broadcasters for unpaid liabilities for broadcasting fees.

In August 2016, the Ministry of Finance approved a reprogramming of tax debt to the media in the total amount of 764,000 Euros, for newspapers and television Vijesti, TV Pink M and radio Antena M.

Non-payment of contributions, illegal employment, overtime and work during the holidays are just some of the problems that media employees face. The respondents agreed that their economic situation worsened even in relation to the previous year and 53% of them said that the economic situation had weakened considerably. In addition to economic ones, journalists also face problems when dealing with their professional status in newsroom. They are increasingly being overburdened, especially because of insisting that one journalist cover several areas, often being given tasks that do not fall into the description of their job, such as editing, designing page layout, taking photos, photo processing, etc.

Recommendations:
- Encourage employees to speak louder about their working conditions;
- Notify the public of the irregularities we encounter in media when it comes to working conditions;
- Represent the benefits of associating in trade unions and joint actions;
- Suggest amendments of the laws and seek their respect.
Journalistic environment in Turkey

Censorship, surveillance, editorial policies under political pressure

reports the TGS (Journalists Union of Turkey)

Recent studies demonstrate that, number of unemployed journalists in Turkey are now defined with ten thousands and freelancer market is becoming more exploiting than ever. Unemployment is a huge problem (approx. 30% in media sector) and journalists have lost their belief in their jobs to get a decent salary.

We think that precarization and collapse of the industry is triggered by three type of factors: Political, financial and technological.

Political issues: First of all, we need to make sure that people who lost their jobs but still risk their lives for producing news content and people who risk their jobs by being good journalists should be supported legally, technically and with an editorial approach those people lack due to unemployment. We define these problems due to censorship, surveillance, editorial policies under the category of political factors which cause precarization of journalistic labour in Turkey. And the number of journalists in prison tells a lot about political risks that journalists who are determined to practice journalism in proper way face.
Financial issues: The second aspect of this precarization, so the second factor, is that as Reuters Report of Digital Journalism in 2017 suggests, journalism is going under a financial crisis worldwide. Moreover, democracies in decline like Turkey is experiencing this process harshly as demand for mainstream news media is reduced while advertising market’s investments are concentrated on specific media outlets, which mostly tend to be under governmental pressure or owned by pro-government business people. However, this fiscal crisis has a lot to do with global crisis as well. Even newsrooms with governmental and capital support are narrowing their human sources because of budget deficits. This is partly because of lack of competition and lack of quality in journalistic sphere, while it is also about to lose of confidence in the media considering that as 40% of people in Turkey do not trust the media as Reuters Report suggests.

We need to inform journalists in Turkey about public opinion regarding journalism and we need to encourage them to adopt their journalistic experience to necessities of 2020s; which is assumed be more based on entrepreneurship and competitiveness rather than becoming big players on the field. We need to redesign the perception of journalism among journalists and we need to re-professionalize journalism; stating that journalistic labour shouldn't be cheap and journalistic practice shouldn't be open to governmental or business interventions.

Technological issues: As most of the researches point out, new media environment triggered many problems for traditional newsrooms and mainstream media outlets. While news consumers’ behaviors have changed, younger generations lost their confidence and interest in news media due to different tastes and perceptions. From Snapchat to Instagram; mainstream media outlets and average journalists in Turkey aren't able to understand emerging concepts in new media. Looking at calls for journalistic positions, journalism degree in undergraduate level is not enough to become a journalist, neither an internship in a popular or prestigious news outlet. People need new media skills and most of the undergraduates spend a lot of time and money for increasing their journalistic potential while older generations aren't aware of this dramatic change in media environment and it causes long-term unemployment for older or more experienced journalists when they lose their jobs.

Recommendations:

- Expanding non-profit education program for journalism professionals, journalists of the future such as university students and non-professional journalists like bloggers or citizen reporters in Turkey to enhance media literacy for a broader public.
- Creating opportunities for media professionals lacking skills that are needed in the age of new media and provide them an opportunity to avoid precariousness caused by shift to new broadcasting systems and technologies.
- Creating media spaces for professional journalists to publish their work after reproducing it with new production techniques that are not applied in conventional newsrooms or existing digital editorial processes in Turkish mediascape.
Precarization at work in Serbia
Unsure and uncertain position for journalists

Two years ago a research was conducted on Precarization in journalists professional and private life on a random sample of 1110 journalists in Serbia (740 employees and 370 unemployed).

The project was funded by Open Society Foundation and the Syndicalism Center. The team leader was the respected Serbian sociologist Srecko Mihajlovic.

The main messages of this research can be summarized as:

1. More than three-fifths - 60% of journalists think they are working and living in uncertain terms - under these include: legal uncertainty, job insecurity and working hours insecurity.

2. There is no media freedom in Serbia - 62% of respondents consider it.

reports SINOS (Journalists Union of Serbia)
Over three quarters of respondents believe that the media are controlled by the state - self-censorship is more widespread than censorship - according to 76% of journalists - 40% of journalists would leave journalism if they had the opportunity to choose.

For the past two years, since the survey has been conducted - nothing has changed for the better of journalists. On the contrary, the evaluation of domestic and foreign organizations that monitor the work of the media and the position of journalists are very worrisom.

Some statements first:
Freedom House, an independent watchdog organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom and democracy around the world, believes that - I quote - "More and more authoritarian authorities in Serbia are smothering media freedom, intimidate journalists, deny advertising space, and otherwise."

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), assessed that the media in Serbia were biased during the presidential campaign and that the regulatory bodies for the control of media content - did not do their job.

And the third competent organization - the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) criticized the attitude of Serbian authorities towards the media. EFJ President Mogens said that "Serbia is the worst example of violating the freedom of the media in the Balkans".

Contrary to these views, the Serbian President said last week that all media are free and that the people should know who pays the media. He cited the example of Television N1, which he said was "an American television campaigning against power".

So much for the ratings.

A few words about "What should be changed" from the view of the Serbian journalists' union (SINOS) to make things better:
1. Implement the idea of EFJ President Mogens on organizing a social dialogue between media owners and journalists. The conditions for starting the negotiations should be enabled by the state, or competent ministries of information.

2. These negotiations and the conclusion of collective agreements should ensure the minimum security of media work in the whole territory of each country.

3. Owners of the media must be familiar, not hiding behind the offshore companies

4. Project financing of the media in the public interest - must have more precise provisions, and the members of the commission that allocate money should be publicly recognized media workers.

5. The Serbian Media Regulatory Authority (REM) should be abolished, and a new one has to be selected out of political influence. REM does everything contrary to what it is founded for - it does not respond to pornographic content on some televisions, does not monitor parliamentary or presidential elections, does not protect the integrity of minors in media ...
Journalists and other media professionals in Serbia face difficult economic and working conditions. While journalists rarely have working contracts, accept engagement for humiliating honorary fees because they have no choice, there is no special mechanism that protects their labour and professional rights. There is no official statistical data about salaries in the media sector so findings of independent reports are used as sources. One 2015 report stated that 50% of journalists surveyed in a research refused to answer how much they are paid – and of those who were willing, 30% said they are paid 160 – 250 EUR, 20% 250 – 330 EUR and 19% stated they receive 330 – 415 EUR monthly, the average salary during that time was 434 EUR. NUNS research found that 75.79 % of the surveyed journalists agreed that the economic position of journalists over the past five years has greatly decreased. The same research found that media owners and managers frequently pressure editorial staff and certain journalists with potential layoffs, forcing journalists to switch to inadequate workplaces, or by proposing such solutions that make them quit their jobs on their own, while mobbing is also present.

This ultimately leads to self-censorship – the biggest problem Serbian journalism is facing. Journalists recognise it too: 73% say that self-censorship is widespread, 5% state there is none while 76 % thinks that there is more self-censorship than censorship, due to fear of job loss. Journalists can be fired from a media outlet if they don’t act in accordance with the will of the media owners and they are aware of what their employers deem unacceptable.
When journalists were asked about the influence of various factors on their work, indicating the level of freedom journalists have in their daily work, most stated they feel the influence of editors - 76.58% responded that editors have an extreme (11.71 per cent), very (27.93 per cent) or partial (36.94 per cent) effect on their work, while 19.82% believe that they have weak or no influence. While, optimistically, over 35% of the surveyed journalists would prefer to work in a media outlet where they will receive a lower salary, but more freedom to report impartially, over 40 per cent of respondents would leave the profession and work elsewhere because of the situation. Very few media outlets have internal rulebook about the independence of editorial policy from media owners.

The consequences are widespread – and most dramatically in relation to media pluralism and the right to be informed in the public interest. NUNS has produced special annexes to contracts that would protect professional rights of journalists, but only 12 media, mostly local ones have implemented it. Those media are the ones usually targeted as foreign mercenaries and enemies of the state by the state actors. It seems that those media who are dedicated to values of media pluralism are the ones who support professional integrity and respect of labour rights of their employees.

**Recommendations**

Through relevant laws, an environment that will enable social dialogue to be established between representatives of the media industry (media owners) and trade unions (journalists and other media workers) should be created. The laws also need to improve the efficiency of the work of labour inspectors when dealing with complaints regarding violations of the law for the media. It is also extremely important to strengthen the role of trade unions.

The position of journalists in newsrooms needs to be improved by increasing the level of independence the newsroom has from the media owners. This can be done by introducing internal regulations to manage the independence of editorial policy. Additionally, their position can be improved by providing effective legal protection from the influence of media owners and management, enhancing the organisation of unions.
Working conditions of journalists and media workers in Macedonia

reports SSNM (Trade union of journalists and media workers of Macedonia)

The ugly reality is that many Macedonian media workers are underpaid, a lot of them don’t get their salaries on time and a big part of our media community is not permanently employed.

Information from the Public revenue office reveals that 5,400 persons are getting some kind of an income from the Macedonian media. Around 1,200 of them are journalist and the others work on different positions in or out of the newsrooms.

The Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers in August 2017 conducted a survey about the precarious state of the journalists. We found out that 54 percent of the journalists and other media workers are not permanently employed.

That means that 35 percent are temporary employed, they have contracts that last for 3 or 6 months, and 19 percent are false freelancers. In other words every fifth media worker in Macedonia doesn’t have a pension and health insurance and can be easily fired at any time, without any explanation.

The statistics from the Ministry of finance shows that 40 percent of the media workers have salaries lesser than 200 euros, sum that equals the minimum wage in Macedonia. They are practically working poor.

80 percent of the media workers get less than 400 euros per month, this income is close to the amount of the average salary, and the most devastating fact is that 90 percent of the media workers in Macedonia have monthly income smaller than the price of the consumption basket that is estimated at 500 euros.

Even though the wages are small, a lot of the times they are also late. In Macedonia the employers are legally bind to pay off the workers until the first half of the month, but only 44 percent of the media workers get their salaries in that period.

"14% of the media workers never get their salaries on time."

The media in Macedonia like everywhere in the World are in transition, meaning that every
year there are less print outlets and even more internet news sites. That’s why there is a trend of journalist going on internet, so right now one third of the media labor is online.

Now the problem is that these people are the most under protected (30 percent of them are false freelancers), least paid (60 percent have under average salary) and they are working in newsrooms that merely meet the professional standards. They also often work from home.

Another survey that we conducted back in April 2017 shows that 72 percent of the media workers never get extra paid or days off for working over-time or working on holidays. When asked about their working hours, almost 45 percent of journalists said that they don’t get a whole day off when they finish their 40 hour working week.

Media workers face problems with the annual leave too. The employee is entitled to a paid annual leave of at least 20 working days and a maximum of 26. The employer shall be obliged to provide the employee with a minimum of 12 working days of annual leave in a row by the end of the current calendar year and the rest by June 30 next year.

The biggest problem is that there are lot of cases where employers include the days of the weekend in employee annual leave.

Also, in Macedonia we have many news organizations that openly don’t allow trade union association, so for quite of few journalist the union is a taboo and some media workers are afraid to revel that they are members of our union.

Humiliated and poor journalists and media workers, who have the status of economic slaves, can’t be free. They are vulnerable to pressures, corruption and are forced to sell out their professional dignity.

**Recommendations**

1. It is essential to limit the time frame for “temporary employment” which in Macedonia is 5 years to one year and preferably to 6 months.
2. To impose order on the work done illegally with so called false freelancers, which is only a euphemism hiding the cruel everyday reality that this "new class" of our colleagues that lives without basic social protection.
3. Changes in Labor Law and Media Law in order that social dialog in the media should be obligatory.
4. Having a collective agreement is the in the essence of protection of journalists rights so there is an urgent need to change anti unionism atmosphere in the private own media.
5. Labor and professional rights of the journalists should be treated as criteria in the negotiation process for new EU members and candidate countries.
Laws in Bosnia and Herzegovina governing labour rights in their text contain a number of provisions that should provide an effective protection of human rights and freedoms. However, in reality these laws are not implemented and as a result the fundamental rights of employees are being violated on a daily basis. A significant problem in the protection of these rights is the non-existence of the labour law at the state level whose provisions would apply on the overall territory of the country. Such a law would stipulate the basic rules in this area, as well as accompanying instruments to ensure the enforcement of this law by both the administrative and judicial authorities.

Economic uncertainty is the most common form of pressure on journalists. The mechanisms used are: precarious work, part-time work that lasts for years, fear of getting fired, etc.

According to a journalist, journalists are the most underpaid workers among highly educated workers. There are also cases of volunteering journalists in which owners and media editors even open informative programs with reports from these volunteers, but still they do not receive any compensation.

Not only labour rights of journalists working in private media are endangered. Many public media owe pays and tax contributions to their workers. The Independent Workers’ Trade Union (trade union of the PBS), Damir Smital, says the latest available data indicate that the PBS owes around seven million marks for unpaid taxes and contributions for retirement and health insurance. Millions of debts are also visible on Radio Television of Republika Srpska (another PBS). The Tax Administration...
of Republica Srpska reported that the debt of this PBS for taxes and contributions reached 5.8 million marks by 1 June 2017.3

According to Nikola Šobata, the leader of The Media and Graphics Trade Union of Republica Srpska the most critical are the local media. In April 2017, workers of RTV Bihać started a two-month strike of warning before the general strike, fighting for their pay and contributions.4

As far as journalism as a profession is concerned, Bosnian-Herzegovinian labor market is overrated. Bureaus of Employment in BiH are currently seeking employment in the for

at least 1,168 media workers of which 1,128 are journalists.

It is believed that bad working conditions also affect the quality of journalism. If the pay were higher and working conditions were better, this would have had a positive effect on journalism. Journalists could then be more critical. But still, bad working conditions are not a justification for bad journalism.
Journalists and media professional in Albania face censorship, political interference, financial pressure and unsafe working conditions. Several journalists working in TV newsrooms have reported receiving direct phone calls or indirect messages through their editors in chiefs to remove or modify parts of their reports that are unpleasant to the government representatives or local authorities. This has become a widespread phenomenon during the last two years in the country. There have been numerous cases of censorship as a mean to threat or silence investigative journalism, while this type of journalism is essential to guarantee accountability of public authorities and politics, to stop abuses of power and to ensure the detection and prosecution of criminal activity in all areas. Unjust dismissal of journalists, closure of investigative programs, threats or violations of journalists has occurred. Some investigative journalists left the country and asked for asylum in some of the Member States of the European Union.

An important part of media in Albania have been clearly affected by this situation in terms of editorial independence, staff recruitment, insecure employment, and self-censorship. It’s nevertheless worth underlying that self-censorship doesn’t come out of the blue, but as a result of media being under continuing and increasing political interference and economic and financial pressure by the Government.

The challenges that media in Albania face today have been reflected in the poor ranking of Albania as regards media freedom. The latest Freedom House’s report, an organization dedicated to the expansion of the freedom and democracy around the world, places Albania among the last 3 countries in the region of the Western Balkans. The EU-Albania Stabilization and Association Committee has also expressed concern about the poor ranking of Albania in the international press index for cases of self-censorship, political interference on media and problems with the implementation of legislation that should guarantee freedom of the press and the protection of social rights and employment of journalists in Albania. Another concern is the
concentration of media ownership in Albania in the hands of four families.

Unsafe working conditions
Media professionals in Albania are going through some stage of radical changes. A large part of journalists are working in precarious employment conditions and they face a lack of social security compared to labor market standards. Working without a written agreement in Albania it’s not an exception, it’s an « unwritten procedure». Many journalists accept to work for a media on the basis of a verbal agreement that they can themselves negotiate with the director of information or the owner of the media. This is because first of all, they don’t have the choice. Secondly, this allows them to stop working for a media when they feel under pressure and start working for another media within a very short period of time. Nevertheless, there are also cases of journalists opting for a job in communication service because they consider that journalism is going through a very tough period. In various TV, radio and newspaper newsrooms journalists are being overburdened and have to cover several areas that are not included in their job description. Collective contracts are not regarded by journalists as an advantage in Albania.

Draft resolution of the Albanian Parliament condemns unsafe working conditions of journalists
A draft resolution of the Albanian Assembly on condemnation of the Prime minister Edi Rama language use towards journalists and the recognition of the relevant role of free media in Albania condemns the fact that an increasing number of journalists are employed in unsafe conditions without the appropriate economic and social guarantees and requires improvement of working conditions for media professionals. It emphasizes the importance of collective agreements for journalists and their representation by trade unions.

It requests from the Government rigorous implementation of legislation on the protection of social rights and the work of journalists, including the Labor Code. It asks the Parliamentary Commission on Media Freedom to systematically monitor the Executive and Institutions responsible for implementing the Labor Code and the
legislation that protects rights of journalists. It also asks to prevent and punish any case of use of hate speech, humiliation, threats and rape, in any form whatsoever against journalists. This draft resolution calls also on the owners and media directors or journalists associations to take the appropriate, timely, proportionate and progressive measures when concerns are raised about freedom of expression, information, media freedom and the protection of the journalist’s status.

Media owners are asked to guarantee the freedom and integrity of journalists and not accept the daily aggression of Prime Minister Edi Rama or other senior government officials. It urges the European Commission to closely monitor media freedom in Albania and the impact that the use of hate speech and insults on journalists have, as it seriously affects the freedom of expression in Albania and the journey of our country being recommended the opening of accession talks to join the European Union.

Indignation over the attacks and insults of Prime Minister Edi Rama on journalists

The Association of Professional Journalists of Albania (APJA) has undertaken several actions to condemn dismissal of journalists, closure of investigative programs, threats on journalists and to condemn the humiliating speech of Prime Minister Edi Rama. APJA, as well as the Association of Electronic Media of Albania (AEMA) and the League of Albanian Journalists (LAJ), expressed profound indignation over the insults and the attacks done by Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama to the Albanian media calling them «ignorants» or «boiler» for reporting on drug trafficking involving former minister on October 25, 2017.

In this regard, APJA campaigned through different communication channel the main EFJ message: «The EFJ reminds that any journalist has the right to ask questions that politicians may dislike and this is not a reason to intimidate and attack them for their investigative work. This repeated behavior towards Albanian journalists must stop.» Nevertheless, The Prime minister of Albania still addresses journalists with offensive words, attacks or offends them during public communications. This behavior comes from a Prime Minister who has established a personal online TV, named ERTV (Edi Rama Television), who broadcast his events, meetings, or interviews with his ministers, and asks media to use his material and logo. This is done with complete lack of transparency about the people working for, or the money paid.

APJA supported the draft resolution initiated by Albanian opposition in the Albanian Assembly on condemnation of the Prime minister Edi Rama language use towards journalists and the recognition of the relevant role of free media in the development of democracy in Albania. This draft resolution regrets and condemns the Prime minister Edi Rama language use towards journalists. It considers that addressing journalists in Albania with the offensive world «Boiler», which in Albanian language has the meaning of something really dirty, polluted and useless, it constitutes an unprecedented aggression and use of humiliating and inhuman language.

This draft resolution also underlines that in cases of the lack of double control of journalistic sources, these are acceptable professional errors that need to be self-corrected and cannot serve as a justification for the use of humiliating language against them or undertaking attacks on journalists during the exercise of their duties. APJA requested that the draft should include the message of commissioner Johannes Hahn during the EU-Western Balkans Media Days in Tirana, on 10 November 2017:

"Freedom of expression is an essential value of the European Union and as such is an inalienable condition for any applicant or candidate country on the road to EU membership" We have drawn attention - and this conference is proof that we
continue to act so that political leaders in candidate and member states are responsible for guaranteeing media freedom, including the security and living conditions of journalists. From the perspective of the accession process, media freedom is an important indicator of the functioning of the rule of law. We constantly address this issue in our contacts with the relevant authorities. 

APJA urges the European Commission and the EU delegation in Tirana to be more attentive to the media situation in Albania, and the soft but efficient pressure exercised by the government.

How to improve the precarious state of journalism in Kosovo?

From January 1 to September 30, 2017, the AJK has registered 23 cases involving life threats, physical assault, verbal threats and property damage. In general, the justice system does not effectively address threats and acts of violence against journalists. Still, not a single one of the nine cases of threats and attacks on journalists registered this year by the Association of Journalists of Kosovo has been tried in court. Also other state institutions and political actors are not sufficiently responsible for the protection of journalists. The AJK’s report for the past year issued a number of recommendations for security and justice institutions, which were asked to be more effective in dealing with cases of journalists endangered by threats or attacks.

In general, the legal framework for media regulation guarantees the fundamental norms for the protection of media and journalists’ freedoms. While the legal framework is appropriate for media freedom, based on the overall assessment of interviewed journalists and experts, it is poorly implemented in practice. One of the reasons behind the current state is reportedly the slow reaction of the justice system in cases of threats and physical attacks on journalists.

Government efforts to decriminalize defamation and insult were successful in 2012. With this, this law now does not cause any ‘chilling’ effect among journalists, because according to this law journalists who slander or offend are not punished under the Criminal Code. Finally, the government presented a failed initiative to amend the Criminal Code, which would consider criminally responsible anyone, including the media, who would slander or offend a constitutional body, including the President, the Assembly, the Government and the Constitutional Court, foreseeing sentences ranging from three
months to five years in prison.

There is no legal provision that forces the media in Kosovo in relation to political pluralism in non-electoral periods, but this issue is regulated by a code of conduct for all the media. There is generally pluralism in the Kosovo media, including broadcast, print and online media. The Kosovo Constitution provides guarantees for media pluralism. The Law on the Independent Media Commission also supports the freedoms and pluralism of audio-visual media in Kosovo.

Recommendations

1. Public institutions should actively consider ways to improve implementation of the Law on Access to Public Documents and responses should be provided promptly.

2. State institutions to deal effectively with cases on threats and attacks against journalists, including considering establishing filtering mechanisms and working closely with journalist’s organizations.

3. Media owners to provide working contracts to employees and respect the labour law. The Labour Inspectorate to ensure that the Labour Law is enforced so that journalists do not become victims of exploitation.

4. Labour Inspectorate to perform regular inspections at media houses and to issue annual reports on media state related to labour rights of media employees.

5. Police to treat with priority all cases against journalists including physical assaults, threats, intimidation and blackmail.

6. Police to ensure that its officers will take part in training and debate on the relations between security forces and media.

7. Police to ensure that it will investigate thoroughly the cases involving journalists being imposed to risk.

8. Prosecution to treat with priority the cases of journalists and to offer processes in place for fast track of cases impending to justice.

9. Prosecution to ensure that its staff will take part in training and debate on the relations between prosecution and media.

10. Strengthen the Ombudsman by offering opportunities to increase capacities and continue to engage with media.

11. The courts to treat with priority the cases against journalists, including physical assaults, threats, intimidation and blackmail.

12. Political parties to restrain the pressure in the work of the public broadcaster, Radio Television of Kosovo.
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