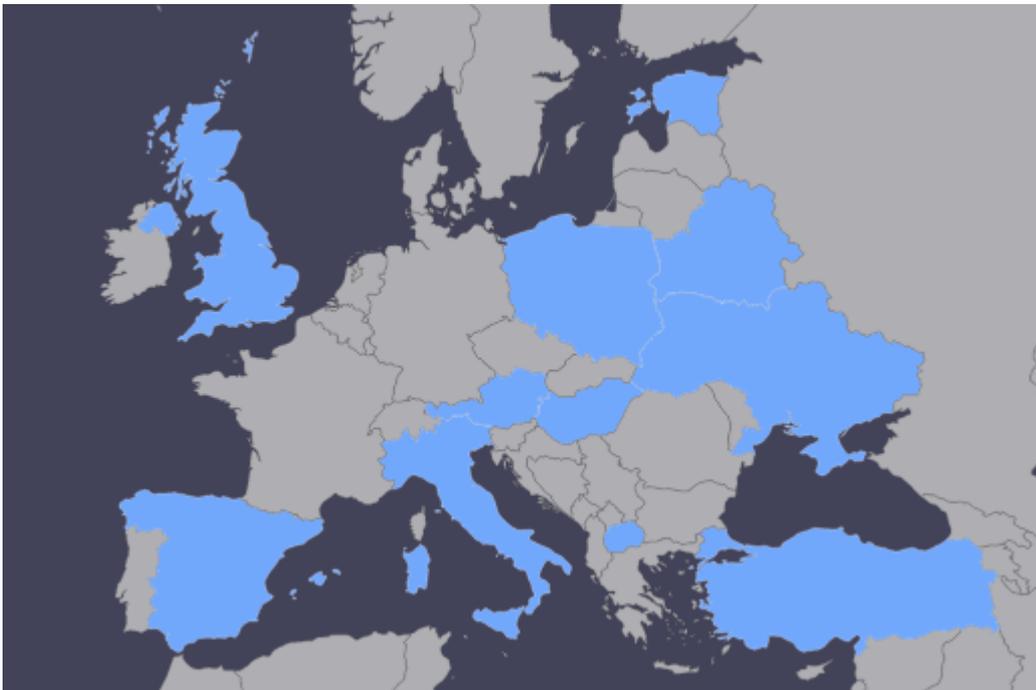


Building independent media to counter political interference



Introduction and methodology

This report comes at a time when the societies and economies of European countries have been impacted for over a year by the Covid-19 pandemic. The consequences of the virus were – and still are – harsh on large parts of the media, especially on print and broadcast media that rely heavily on advertising revenue.

The issue of political interference remains, and it represents an even bigger threat to journalists in the context of a public-health crisis and a political crisis. Media are more likely to be put under pressure precisely because of their reporting on the Covid-19 pandemic and the way authorities handled the pandemic – or failed to handle it.

This paper covers a very diverse group of countries, which is representative of the whole range of geopolitical situations in Europe:

- a major non-EU country (Turkey);
- three post-Soviet states – one a member of the EU (Estonia) and two with different directions of development (Belarus and Ukraine);
- central European countries (Hungary and Poland);
- a former Yugoslav Republic (North Macedonia); and
- western European states (Austria, Italy, Spain and the UK).

In the extreme diversity of these countries, from well-established democracies to clearly dictatorial regimes, we find a range of political interference in independent media. Such interference takes many forms, including: pressure on public media; targeted verbal or physical threats by increasingly-powerful populist parties and leaders; attempts to discredit journalism by smearing journalists and news outlets; and (sometimes well-intentioned) national-security and counter-terrorism legislation. In all these cases, the work of journalists and therefore the right of the public to be informed is put at risk.

Even in the many very difficult situations we see, there are reasons to be optimistic. Journalists and their professional organisations, civil society organisations and sometimes public authorities are promoting editorial independence, either in the workplace or through self-regulatory measures or through campaigns.

Preparing for this report, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) circulated a questionnaire to its affiliated organisations in the relevant countries (see Annex 1). The EFJ

received 10 answers to the questionnaire, from Estonia, Hungary, Italy, North Macedonia, Poland, Spain and Turkey. We used these as background data for this report. We collected additional information through telephone interviews (in Austria and Italy). Other data were gathered through EFJ activities, desk research and contacts in the countries.

Unless specified otherwise, quotations in this document are extracts from the questionnaire, were received on the telephone, or were recorded during the webinar that took place on 19 and 20 April 2021.[1] The recommendations were discussed at that webinar.

Political threats and pressures on journalists are, unfortunately, already routinely documented – by organisations such as the EFJ itself and by several other groups.[2] This short report aims to be accurate but not exhaustive. It also aims to be proactive by trying to put forward initiatives such as:

- good practices in campaigning to counter political interference in the media;
- good practices of self-regulatory mechanism in place to ensure media independence; and
- initiatives by journalists and representative organisations to advocate for media independence.

This report also develops recommendations for an advocacy plan of action to be implemented at European and national level in order to ensure media independence.

Marc Gruber, author

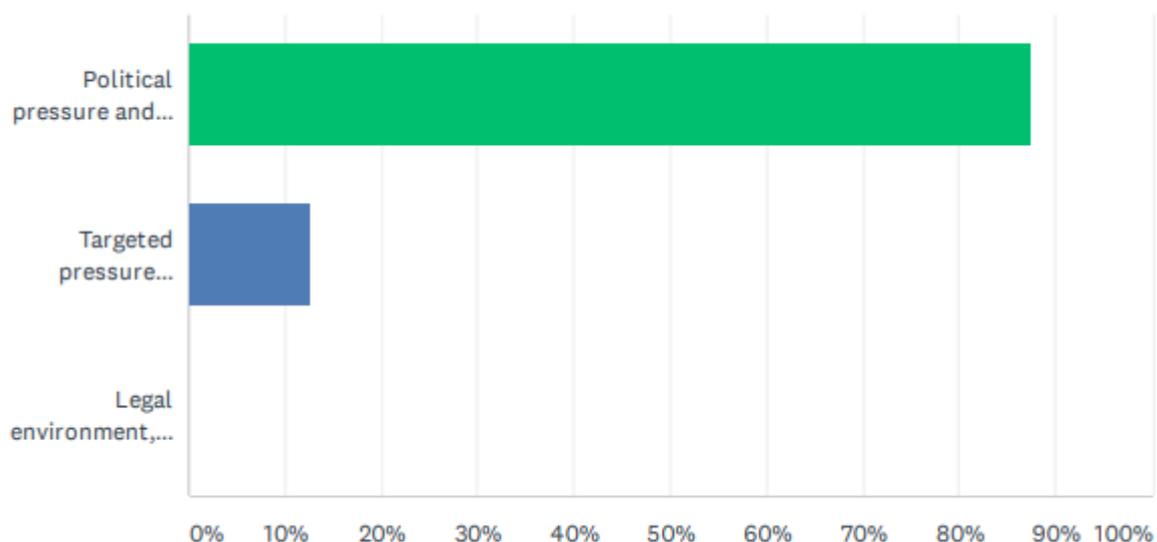
1. See report by *Arte* (in German, not available in all countries in Europe):
<https://www.arte.tv/de/videos/103356-000-A/oesterreich-regierungswerbung-in-der-presse/> †
2. In particular the [Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists of the Council of Europe](#), the [Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom](#), the [European Centre for Press and Media Freedom](#) and the [OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media](#).

1. Overview and analysis of threats against journalists

1.1 Systemic political pressure and interference prevalent in public service media and elsewhere

Interference in and pressures on public service media are by far the most worrying threats reported by organisations that responded to the questionnaire. This was explicitly the case in responses from Estonia, Hungary, North Macedonia, Poland, Spain and Turkey. In Italy, the Federazione Nazionale della Stampa Italiana (FNSI) considered that targeted pressure and threats against journalists – especially in relation to organised crime – were even more important than threats to public service media in that country.

The legal environment does not seem to be a priority for respondents, even if the legal context is logically linked to political interference, not only in media but on the rule of law in general – as is the case in, for example, repressive environments such as those in Belarus, Turkey, and to some extent Hungary. In Turkey, for example, “*political pressure and interference are the most important threats for journalists [and] also the main source of most other threats, including the worsening legal environment and physical threats,*” according to Mustafa Kuleli, General Secretary of the Journalists’ Union of Turkey (TGS).



When asked for details, respondents provided examples: in Spain, *“the public media, mainly national TV stations and autonomous radio stations, are governed more by political criteria than professional. Their configuration in the administration councils is based on the electoral political distribution.”* Our respondent added that *“regional governments consider that they own public media.”*

In **Estonia**, *“politicians of some specific parties are making public accusations against critical journalists and channels, refusing interviews by public media and accusing them of being ‘untrustworthy outlets.’”* Representatives of the political parties make up the supervisory body for the national broadcaster ERR: though this should have no direct influence on the content of reporting, it does influence the budget and selects the management board.

In **Austria**, the so-called “Ibizagate” scandal of 2019 showed that politicians, particularly the then Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache, had planned to privatise a channel of the public broadcaster ORF. Strache’s populist party FPÖ is particularly threatening towards public service media in the country. The government itself has also been trying to interfere in ORF’s work: in September 2018 the Minister of the Interior suggested that certain journalists should be investigated for their reporting on the activities of the Austrian intelligence services. In a subsequent email, the ministry’s spokesperson, Christoph Pölzl, asked the police to “restrict communication with that media to the legal minimum”. A specific form of media interference in Austria operates through the high level of “political framing” in media. The budget for *“Regierungswerbung”* – political communication by and for the government – amounted to €220 million for the current government. This raises obvious concerns about relations between the media and the authorities.^[1]

In **Italy**, public broadcaster RAI (*Radiotelevisione Italiana*) has been under pressure for decades. Despite the end of the *lottizzazione*, the system that officially distributed control of the channels according to political representation in the Parliament, RAI is still heavily subject to political interference: *“our autonomy is still put at risk,”* according to Vittorio di Trapani, head of USIGRAI, the in-house trade union of journalists at RAI. This is due to the fact that the members of the governing body of RAI are nominated jointly by the government and the Parliament, according to politically-motivated criteria. Another reason is the attribution of part of the income from the license fee – currently €350 million out of a total of around €2 billion – to commercial media, thus putting pressure on the public channels by putting them in direct competition with private corporations for their share of the license fee.

The **United Kingdom** has often been considered as the heart of independent public broadcasting in the world. The venerable “auntie Beeb” – the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) – is also affected by recurrent threats on its independence. A significant example of these threats occurred in 2019 when Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated that he would refuse to be interviewed by journalist Andrew Neil on the BBC, declaring at the same time that he was “looking at scrapping the licence fee”.^[2]

More recently, journalists and civil society organisations have been concerned by recurrent and co-ordinated limitations on Freedom of Information (FoI) requests by the government. The Non-Governmental Organisation Open Democracy titled a 2020 report on how the UK government is undermining freedom of information *The Art of Darkness*.^[3] In 2020 the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) also expressed concerns about “staged public relations” when the Prime Minister excluded photographers – apart from his official photographer – from major events and banned several journalists from briefings.^[4]

In **Hungary**, MÚOSZ (the National Association of Hungarian Journalists), refers to several domestic and international reports, concluding that “*political pressure and control reached an unprecedented level in an EU member state.*” The Hungarian Press Union added that political control over the media has – sadly – become “*legendary*” in the country. The website *Politico* revealed^[5] instructions emailed to journalists in public media by senior editors, requiring them to request permission before writing on the climate campaigner Greta Thunberg and to send draft reports for approval from “higher up” ahead of publication. Other “sensitive” topics included migration, EU politics, terrorism and church issues. The emails also include explicit orders to journalists not to mention reports from Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch.

The “unprecedented level” of media control in Hungary extends beyond the public service media. Friends or close relatives of government members have bought or otherwise succeeded in taking control of commercial media that were formerly independent or critical.^[6] This takeover of previously independent or critical media by government supporters was accompanied by an abuse of the media licensing system that led to popular radio stations losing their licences.^[7] These are clear forms of interference. An estimated 80% of media outlets across the country are now pro-government.^[8] The authorities have even tried to interfere with the activities of foreign media outlets, as when in March 2019 the Slovenian magazine *Mladina* ran a cover that displeased the Hungarian Prime Minister – prompting a request to the Slovenian authorities for “assistance in preventing similar incidents in future”.

In **Ukraine**, during an interview for this survey in 2020 Sergyi Tomilenko, the Chair of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine (NUJU), deplored *“the results of the reforms of public media”* adopted in 2014, declaring them *“very weak”*. In particular, there is a *“lack of dialogue between the leadership and the journalists”* and *“no openness to local realities”*.

There have been cuts at the new national public broadcaster, UA:PBC, which began operating in 2017. In late 2018, ahead of elections, Ukraine’s Parliament adopted a budget that was less than half that planned when UA:PBC was proposed. This cut has forced UA:PBC to withdraw from certain regions of the country and to stop analogue broadcasting. As a result, public media have very low audience figures (ratings), similarly to the situation in Hungary.

A draft Ukrainian law “on Media” is problematic for several reasons, such as an attempt to regulate all media – including online – through a single legal instrument, and a proposal to impose limits on freedom of the media according to an unclear notion of national security.[9] *“The situation of war in the country since 2014 led to restrictions of freedom of expression and to a heavy politicisation of the media, where authorities are literally looking for ‘bad journalists’, and to issues of obstruction to the work of journalists in some areas”,* according to Sergyi Tomilenko.

In **Belarus**, most electronic media, as well as the written press, belong to the state. Independent public service media are virtually non-existent, and other forms of independent media are limited. The only independent media outlets are either online or cable and satellite channels such as *Belsat*, which is based in Poland.[10] Even the internet is heavily controlled by the government, the more so since amendments to the Media Law were passed in June 2018. Since the elections in August 2020 the authorities have blocked over 70 websites and several social media groups. *“It is thanks to the few independent and courageous media that the world has learned about the violations of the electoral rules in 2020,”* Volha Siakhovich, the legal expert of the Belarus Association of Journalists (BAJ), reminds us.

In **Turkey**, public media are heavily politicised: after a decree in July 2018, public broadcaster TRT has been tied to the Directorate of Communications, under the direct control of the Presidency. A majority of the shares of the press agency Anadolu Agency (AA) belong to the Undersecretariat of the Treasury and to Şenol Kazancı, AA’s General Director, who was an adviser to President Erdoğan for three years until December 2014

before being appointed to AA. A recent estimate is that 90% of Turkish media outlets are controlled by pro-government businessmen.[11]

It is also worth mentioning that in **Poland** the power of the state media regulator (KRRiTV) to appoint heads of public broadcasters was removed by the Law and Justice Party after it took power in 2015. This right was transferred to a new “National Media Council”, controlled by the President and the Parliament, and there is now no provision forbidding the new council’s members from belonging to a political party. *“Public media are [since] then in the process of transformation from public media to ‘national media’, which means that [...] their message is largely backing the government, losing trust and credibility in the eyes of Poles. [This] is seen in public debates and in the measurement of TV and radio audiences,”* according to Dorota Nygren from the Society of Journalists of Poland.

1.2 Journalists are victims of targeted pressure and physical threats

Journalists and media across Europe are regularly victims of targeted attacks and threats. In recent years the number of SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) has dramatically increased. SLAPPs are usually initiated by wealthy or powerful litigants and are an abuse of the legal system. They pose a systemic threat to the media and a threat to democracy. By attempting to intimidate and silence the media through lengthy and expensive litigation, SLAPPs put pressure on public watchdogs’ time and resources. They also have a terrible chilling effect on journalists. More “classical” harassment and attacks continue and even seem to be increasing due to the rise of populist movements across Europe.

In **Hungary**, journalists are regularly accused by public figures and pro-government media of “serving anti-Hungarian interests” and of being backed by the Hungarian-American billionaire George Soros. The far-right has directly attacked journalists via the 888.hu website, which for example published a list of journalists that it accused of serving “the interests” of Soros, specifically calling eight journalists “foreign propagandists”.

In **Turkey** in 2020, in addition to the challenging legal environment discussed above, BIK (*Basin İlan Kurumu*), the public agency responsible for the distribution of the state advertising budget, imposed a ban on the two independent newspapers *Evrensel* and

BirGün, to curb their independent journalism and readiness to criticise the authorities.[12] This ban was lifted only after 6 months, following several calls by international press freedom groups, including the EFJ.[13]

In **Austria**, members of the populist party FPÖ are particularly threatening toward journalists. For example, in April 2019 the party released a campaign video for the EU election denouncing what it called “immigration fanatics”. In this video the award-winning Austrian television presenter and anchor Armin Wolf was portrayed as a biased journalist named “Armina Wolf” – and many FPÖ supporters sent hate messages to Wolf on Facebook. Earlier, in October 2018, Harald Vilimsky, General Secretary of the FPÖ, demanded that a journalist with the public broadcasting cooperation ORF resign after she made critical comments about his party during a programme.

SLAPPs have often affected journalists in countries such as **Poland**. The newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* published a series of articles on the construction in Warsaw of the “K Tower”, criticising the political leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski. On 20 February 2019, Kaczynski asked the Polish public prosecutor to initiate proceedings for defamation against the journalists concerned. Adam Glapiński, the President of the National Bank of Poland (NBP) and Grzegorz Bierecki, a Senator for the ruling party Law and Justice (PiS), also threatened to file lawsuits against five journalists for “damage to their reputation”. In 2018 alone, the PiS and state bodies mounted 50 legal challenges against the journalist Wojciech Czuchnowski, demanding apologies and compensation amounting to €12,000.

In **Italy**, journalists face a combination of threats and violence by mafia organisations[14] and an increasing number of attacks by far-right and populist groups. Representatives of the authorities, such as Luigi Di Maio and Matteo Salvini when each was Deputy Prime Minister, have regularly attacked the media and journalists, either verbally or on social media. Salvini has threatened to withdraw the police protection provided for the investigative journalist Roberto Saviano, despite the serious and repeated threats made against him. Di Maio has called journalists “jackals” and “prostitutes”[15] and initiated a policy to suppress public funding for the press.[16] In September 2018, Di Maio called on state-run companies to stop buying advertising in newspapers, which he accused of “polluting the public debate”. Political forces that are not in power are also threatening journalists.[17]

In **Estonia**, amid media polemics on the rise of populist parties,[18] members of the far-right populist party EKRE, a part of the ruling coalition in 2019, have verbally attacked journalists

with such intensity that the President decided to intervene.

In **North Macedonia**, the leader of the political party VMRO, Nikola Gruevski, described his opponents as “traitors” and a series of attacks against the media started from February 2017 onwards. On 28 February 2017, two journalists were beaten; nobody has been prosecuted for the attack.

In **Ukraine**, back in June 2017, journalist Stanyslav Aseev was kidnapped by the “State Security Agency” of the “Donetsk People’s Republic”.[19] On 18 November 2018, two Ukrainian journalists and a Canadian were pepper-sprayed in Kyiv by far-right groups opposing a demonstration against transphobia. They were also subjected to a campaign of harassment on social media.

In **Belarus**, the police and the counter-intelligence agency (KGB) constitute a concrete and constant threat to domestic and foreign journalists due to a deliberate campaign organised against them by the authorities.

1.3 Some states create or maintain a hostile legal environment with excessive or arbitrary anti-terrorist and anti-crime legislation

Belarus is a special and extreme case of a state with a hostile legal environment, with a legal situation which is clearly dictatorial. Journalists suffer repression for the simple fact of doing their job: 480 arrests were recorded in 2020, with 97 cases of journalists serving administrative arrests and a total of more than 1,200 days behind bars. As of 1 April 2021, 12 journalists were in jail.[20]

But other countries, with more or less subtlety, also impose excessive legislation.

In **Turkey**, the situation has been critical since the failed coup in 2016. Authorities under Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have closed 70 newspapers, 20 magazines, 34 radio stations and 33 television channels, accusing them of ties to terrorism.[21] Although the formal state of emergency was declared to be lifted in July 2018,[22] a large number of

provisions of the emergency decrees were retained in new legislation adopted subsequently.

For example the Turkish authorities repeatedly target the newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, whose journalists and other employees are regularly harassed, accused of “assisting a terrorist organisation”, arrested and imprisoned. In addition, courts or administrative authorities block and filter on-line news sites, particularly pro-Kurdish, atheist and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual) sites, and even entire social media websites.[23] Turkey remains the biggest jailer of journalists in Europe. Many journalists are jailed after being accused of complicity with terrorist groups or of “insulting the president”. A recent report showed that one in six journalist has an ongoing trial.[24] According to a report by the “Media for Democracy” project implemented by the Association of Journalists, the press cards of 894 journalists were cancelled in January 2020 (these are officially “under review” by the Directorate of Communications) and 600 of them were still “pending approval” at the end of 2020.[25] Turkey’s authorities in recent months have widened their efforts to silence the press by stepping up online censorship through the new law targeting social media, mobilising partisan regulatory bodies, and launching a new offensive against judicial independence. More generally, the country is the most frequent offender as a state according to the European Court of Human Rights in freedom of expression cases.[26]

Spain is “*not very high on the agenda for press freedom in Europe*,” noted Joan Barata from the *Plataforma en Defensa de la Libertad de Información*[27] (Platform in Defence of Freedom of Information) – but he identified legal measures putting pressure on journalists, such as the Law on Public Safety, which restricts journalists’ work during demonstrations. The Criminal Code still includes articles on the “protection of symbols”. And on 24 September 2017, the police filed a lawsuit against Mónica Terribas, a journalist for Catalunya Ràdio, accusing her of “encouraging breaches of public order by calling on the citizens of the region of Catalonia to report on the movements of the police during the independence referendum”.

The recent *NUJ Safety Report 2020* in **the UK**[28] revealed that in terms of legislative threats 38% of respondents highlighted FoI exemptions or delays, 34% of respondents identified libel and defamation issues, 18% highlighted national security legislation, 13% identified investigatory powers and surveillance and 11% of respondents said official secrets legislation undermines or prevents journalistic work.

In **Ukraine**, the legal situation is characterised by excessive and sometimes unclear “national security” criteria. These permit banning publications and expelling or denying entry to journalists. At the beginning of 2019, an entry ban was imposed on Austrian correspondent Christian Wehrschütz, who has reported from the country since 2014 for the Austrian national public broadcaster ORF.[29] Ukraine has also repeatedly prohibited foreign media activity (by Russians) on its territory.[30] The latest ban took place on 3 February 2021 when President Zelensky banned three TV broadcasters for a period of five years on grounds of “propaganda financed by the aggressors”.[31] Legislation against dissemination of “disinformation” that would have further threatened media independence was proposed in 2020, but the draft law was not adopted.

In **Poland**, we see heavy pressure on public service media and targeted SLAPPs. The government’s latest move was to propose a new tax on advertising in media, which would further undermine the sustainability of independent media. The draft proposal led to a demonstration by 45 media companies, which held a general “black-out” on 10 February 2021[32] – and to a call on 16 March 2021 by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, asking for guarantees that the law would not “lead to the suffocation of independent media outlets”.[33]

1. See report by *Arte* (in German, not available in all countries in Europe):
<https://www.arte.tv/de/videos/103356-000-A/oesterreich-regierungswerbung-in-der-presse/>
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2019-50718366>
3. <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/20415987-art-of-darkness-opendemocracy>
4. <https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/nuj-council-joins-concerns-of-press-photographers-over.html>
5. <https://www.politico.eu/article/hungarian-state-media-not-free-to-report-on-greta-thunberg-human-rights/>
6. <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2019/05/09/hungary-almost-78-of-the-media-are-pro-government/>
7. <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2021/02/04/mfrr-calls-for-eu-action-as-hungarys-last-independent-radio-is-silenced>
8. <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2019/05/09/hungary-almost-78-of-the-media-are-pro-government>.

9. <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/7/447508.pdf>
10. <https://belsat.eu/en/contact/>
11. <https://rsf.org/en/news/turkey-press-freedom-figures>
12. <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2020/02/07/turkey-must-end-public-ad-ban-on-independent-newspapers/>
13. <https://bianet.org/english/print/220589-press-advertisement-institution-ends-public-ad-ban-on-daily-birgun>
14. ECPMF, May 2019: “Italy, so much mafia, so little news” linked from <https://www.ecpmf.eu/monitor/fact-finding-mission/>
15. Journalists and their representative organisations fear this climate of violence fuelled by hostile rhetoric and have held demonstrations against these insults throughout the country through a campaign entitled “giù le mani dall’informazione” (hands off the news).
16. On 20 July 2018, Roberto Saviano was sued by Matteo Salvini for defamation, following a tweet in which Saviano called Salvini a “buffoon” and “minister of the underworld”.
17. For example, on 1 August 2018 the journalist and writer Enrico Nascimbeni was attacked by two men armed with a knife who called him “communist scum “. On 7 January 2019, Federico Marconi and Paolo Marchetti from *l’Espresso*, were assaulted by “Avanguardia Nazionale” and “Forza Nuova”, two neo-fascist groups. Death threats were also received by Enrico Mentana, editor-in-chief of the news channel LA7, via a letter signed with the Nazi swastika and a slogan from the Fascist era.
18. <https://www.dw.com/en/rise-of-estonias-populist-right-sends-journalists-packing/a-49376584>
19. On 17 August 2018, the Russian channel *Rossiya 24* broadcast an interview with the journalist in which he admitted to working for the Ukrainian secret service in Donbas but, of course, this information cannot be verified.
20. <https://baj.by/en/analytics/repressions-against-journalists-belarus-2021-chart>
21. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/03/under-erdogan-independent-turkish-media-find-revenues-squeezed>
22. <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/07/18/europe/turkey-state-of-emergency-intl/>
23. <https://rm.coe.int/state-of-democracy-human-rights-and-the-rule-of-law-role-of-institutio/168086c0c5> (p 43)
24. <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2021/02/15/media-monitoring-report-2020-in-turkey-one-in-six-journalists-has-an-ongoing-trial>
25. http://media4democracy.org/public/uploads/reports_8569972.pdf

26. 40 findings of violations in 2018, or over half of all such findings by the Court:
https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Stats_violation_2018_ENG.pdf
27. <https://libertadinformacion.cc/>
28. <https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/nuj-safety-report-2020.html>
29. Ukraine's SBU security service accused Christian Wehrschütz of illegal entry into the disputed Crimean peninsula and of "anti-Ukrainian propaganda".
30. On 14 May 2018, the Ukrainian authorities decided to ban the activities of the press agencies *Novosti*, *Rossiyasegodnya.rf* (*россиясегодня.рф*), *Sputniknews.com*, *Rsport.ria.ru*, *1prime.ru*, *Realty.ria.ru* and *rian.com.ua*, and the television channels *rtr-planeta.com*, *russia.tv*, *vesti.ru*, *tvkultura.ru* and *digitalrussia.tv* – see <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2018/05/25/efj-and-ifj-condemn-ban-on-russian-media-in-ukraine/>
31. <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2021/02/03/ukraine-president-bans-three-television-channels/>
32. <https://www.euronews.com/2021/02/10/news-blackout-amid-polish-protest-over-tax-that-would-be-a-powerful-blow-to-free-media>
33. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/poland-draft-media-laws-should-respect-european-human-rights-standards>

2. The way forward

The fight against undue pressure and for editorial independence can be carried out in various ways, according to the situation in the country in question. Where the legal framework is guaranteed and where journalists are well organised, strong self-regulation is the most important thing to organise. But in more challenging places, journalists need to become activists and to reach out to other groups in society.

2.1 Positive developments and best practices: self-regulation and its limits

As most respondents pointed out, the basis of legal protection for freedom of the media is the constitution of the country itself.[1] This is sometimes supported by specific laws governing public broadcasting or the media as a whole. Many countries also have self-regulating “Press Councils”[2] or equivalent, membership of which is usually voluntary.

In **North Macedonia** the Association of Journalists considers that they have effective legal protection for journalists’ independence: “the latest progress report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia submitted by the European Commission, for example, states that the overall constitutional and legal framework for the protection of freedom of expression is generally in place”, though there is a need to have a “consistent and transparent application”. This is the case in all countries that are members of the EU covered by this survey. Media organisations in North Macedonia[3] usually react to challenges together. This joint effort for self-regulation is pointed out as a factor for progress of the professional standards and the quality of journalism. North Macedonia also recently established a voluntary register of online media[4] as a mechanism for self-regulation in the area through media involvement. The main purpose of this register is to help the public more easily to recognise which media meet editorial criteria and adhere to standards of ethical reporting in their work.

In **Spain** and **Italy**, editorial independence is guaranteed in theory by code of conducts in major media outlets such as public broadcasters and press agencies. In addition to these in-house mechanisms, autonomous regions in Spain have set up media councils with extended competences.

In Andalucía, the Commission of Ethics and Guarantees of the Professional Journalists Corporation of Andalusia (CPPA) was established in 2015[5] with a general remit covering print, online, broadcasting and social media. Catalonia has set up a Council for Audiovisual Media (CAC) dealing with, among other issues, “pluralism and the treatment of the information”[6] and there is also a general Information Council of Catalonia (ICC), which makes binding decisions in cases involving parties that voluntarily accept its arbitration.[7]

In **the UK** self-regulation is part of a long tradition, initiated decades ago. The most recent development is the establishment of the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) [8] which replaced the former Press Complaints Commission. IPSO enforces an Editors’ Code of Practice that newspapers and magazines have agreed to follow. The NUJ has its Code of Conduct;[9] and there is a very complete Code of Conduct for the BBC[10] complementing the BBC Editorial Guidelines, which contain in particular a section on impartiality.[11]

In **Austria** the *Österreichischer Presserat* (OP)[12] deals with print media and “supplementing media” – websites of print media – as well as news agencies. A recent decision of the OP (dated 2 November 2020) dealt for example with a suspicion of political bias about the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict.[13]

In **North Macedonia**, again, the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia (CMEM)[14] brings its members together based on the principle of free will to accomplish the goals and activities stated in its rules. It can apply “moral sanctions” on those who fail to observe professional standards or the Code of Journalists.

In other countries the situation is in more complex. In **Estonia**, two self-regulatory bodies co-exist: the first, the Estonian Press Council (*Avaliku Sõna Nõukogu*, ASN)[15] was founded in 1991 and covers publishers, broadcasters, consumer organisations and journalists; and the second, the Press Council (*Pressinõukogu*, PN),[16] was formed in 2001, founded and financed by the then Association of Estonian Newspapers after disagreements within the first. The latter is the more powerful organisation, representing the public broadcaster ERR, local papers, but also some other, non-press, organisations such as lawyers and state institutions. “*At the public broadcaster editorial statutes are used, based on a code of conduct for journalists, and they protect us,*” according to a journalist working for ERR.[17]

In **Turkey**, the Turkish Press Council[18] was officially established in 1988, with the involvement of 28 newspapers, 22 magazines, 11 news agencies and 6 broadcasters. It

has, however, no “legal personality” of its own and works on a voluntary basis: therefore “*its effect is minimal*” according to the journalists’ union TGS.

Self-regulation and press councils have their limits, and these can be seen in the examples of Hungary and in Poland.

In **Hungary**, the National Association of Journalists (MÚOSZ) estimates that despite the existence of self-regulatory bodies such as *Korrektor*[19] or structures such as the “Editor-in-Chiefs Forum”[20] these “*do not provide real protection for journalists,*” because their decisions and opinions are not binding, and because “*the media authorities do not acknowledge them as real partners [...] they even consider them as enemies*”. MÚOSZ also criticises editorial boards such as the one that used to exist at the daily newspaper *Népszabadság*,

In **Ukraine**, a Commission on Journalists’ Ethics, based on the Code of Conduct, has existed since 2001.[21] Its remit is, however, restricted to “advocacy, mediation and education” on a voluntary basis and therefore it “*lacks teeth*” to defend journalists against political interference in a conflictual context.

In **Poland**, journalist Dorota Nygren notes that “*Even though there are two journalistic bodies that deal with journalistic material, there is no proper self-regulatory mechanism. The Polish media environment is highly polarised (and) Poland has no history of an independent and strong media council.*” The regulatory bodies that exist show clear support either for the government or for the opposition to it.

2.2 Actions by unions and individual initiatives

Campaigning for independent media and public service media

In **the UK**, the NUJ has been carrying out campaigns for the defence of the BBC for several years: currently it is demanding “Hands off the BBC”.[22] The NUJ was also a leading member of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (CPBF), which was established in 1979 to work for a more accountable, freer and diverse media.[23] Unfortunately the CPBF came to an end in 2018 at national level – though regional branches still exist. CPBF North is currently active with a website[24] and a presence on

Facebook[25]. It publishes books and pamphlets, and holds public meetings, such as a Zoom conference[26] on 22 January 2021 about the relations between British TV and populist leaders such as Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage.

Another current campaign by the NUJ deals with freedom of information (FoI) – “Defending the right to know”[27] – and with the issue of obstruction of political reporting. This follows evidence of illegitimate monitoring and journalists being put on a “watch list” indicating that their FoI requests will be delayed or denied. The NUJ has therefore called on journalists in the UK to submit “Subject Access Requests” under data protection law, in order to establish how the government is centrally managing FoI applications from the media, and what information they are holding about journalists and their requests.[28] “*The media industry is united in backing a campaign to expand the right to information and secure greater transparency in public life,*” according to the NUJ General Secretary Michelle Stanistreet. This is indeed a great example of “crowd” participation of journalists in a campaign.

In **Spain**, journalists’ organisations are members of *Teletodos* (perhaps “TV for all”),[29] a broad alliance that brings together professionals, academics, researchers and all citizens or groups interested in independent media and public service media in the country. *Teletodos* organises campaigns, gathers various blogs, submits joint declarations to the government[30] and organises public debates – which can also be followed on Youtube.[31]

Another campaign group, the Platform for the Defence of Free Expression (*Plataforma en Defensa de la Libertad de Información*, PDLI), unites journalists, lawyers, publishers, social movements and consumer advocates. Although its aim is the defence of freedom of information in the broad sense, the PDLI also campaigns against political pressure on the media, in particular on public service media.

In **Italy**, the in-house trade union of journalists at public broadcaster RAI (USIGRAI) has been campaigning for many years for reforms at RAI following two main priorities: reform of the ownership structure; and reform of the governing body. USIGRAI supports the proposals of a 2007 draft law (that was never adopted)[32] in asking that the shareholder of RAI should no longer be the Government through the Ministry of Economy and Finance, but a specific Foundation. In addition, USIGRAI calls for a “dual” system of governance, with a management board and a “Broadcasting Council”, similar to those that exist in Germany, to include representatives of civil society and social groups. Finally, UNIGRAI asks for a “differentiated” renewal of the membership of the RAI management board in order to prevent the political control that is exerted over public service media when the whole board

is appointed at the same time on a “winner takes all” political basis. *“These three measures would definitely avoid the current situation of direct political control over public service media”*, according to Vittorio di Trapani, head of USIGRAI.

Concerning **Austria**, several European organisations in December 2019 called for[33] a *“reform of the ORF law that will strengthen the ORF and make it fit for the future”* – asking to put an end to *“the political influence on the ORF”*. Journalists and their unions continue to support this call. They demand that management positions in the broadcasters must be filled according to professional, not political criteria; and that a board of trustees should take into account and reflect Austria’s civil society. A specific request is also that it must be consistently possible to dismiss members of the ORF Foundation Council if they attack ORF journalists for political reasons. There are “editorial statutes” for journalists working at ORF, but these do not protect anyone from a “targeted lay-off”.

It is interesting to see that demands in various countries such as Italy, Spain, Austria and to some extent Estonia follow the same line. Public service media are a joint concern in all countries across Europe, including those where independence has seemed to be guaranteed. Journalists are asking for depoliticisation of public service media management; more involvement of civil society; secure financing outside the “patronage” of a Ministry; and strong and clear procedures against members of the board in case of intimidation, harassment or threats based on political grounds.

Outside the EU, the Journalists Union of **Turkey** (TGS) regularly campaigns against political interference and for press freedom. In the past there were “large alliances” promoting these goals, such as the “Freedom for Journalists Platform” (GOP); but currently *“some rifts between these organisations in issues such as ‘who is really a journalist?’ undermine such a larger-scope solidarity [campaign]”*, according to the TGS. The main challenge, though, is *“the lack of public support for such campaigns”*.

Supporting journalists

In **Estonia**, the Union of Journalists *“monitors the situation with media and journalists freedom constantly and makes statements, both on local level and international, if need be”*. The union also *“represents journalists and argue for their independence in front of political authorities”*.

In **Spain**, representatives of the union of journalists FAPE declared that they “*often organise campaigns in defence of journalists [through] agreements and conventions for the improvement of information quality, especially with universities, institutions and local associations of journalists*”.

The NUJ in **the UK** has become “*more robust and public in its reactions,*” according to its senior campaigns and communications officer Sarah Kavanagh. She mentions as an example the condemnation of verbal abuse of journalist Nadine White by the government’s Equalities Minister, Kemi Badenoch.[34]

In **Hungary** the union MÚOSZ provides “*legal representation against government attacks such as listing of ‘hostile’ journalists and general legal advice*”. The situation in Hungary is critical because political pressure is applied not only to reinforce the position of politicians in power against their “enemies”, but also to promote a political, ideological and cultural agenda. Support for journalists is important because resisting this pressure has literally become a question of freedom of conscience on a daily basis for many of them.

In **Turkey**, solidarity and support are also of key importance. Primarily, the TGS is monitoring trials and arrests of journalists.[35] The union also carries out social media campaigns.

At the end of 2020 a coalition of professional groups and press freedom organisations held hybrid online/offline meetings[36] in Istanbul and Ankara with journalists, civil society, members of parliament, the judiciary and other authorities. These meetings assessed the newest threats to independent journalism, including detentions and criminal investigations of journalists who reported on the country’s management of the Covid-19 pandemic. The TGS regrets, however, that there is not enough long-term commitment from international organisations to support “the independent journalism ecosystem” in Turkey.

Concerning **Belarus**, the EFJ has been organising support and solidarity campaigns for journalists in the country for many years. Urgent actions since the elections of August 2020 have included a joint call by 29 journalists’ organisations on 18 February 2021[37] “*against those who repress press freedom in Belarus, be they politicians, police officers, prosecutors or judges*”. The Belarus Association of Journalists (BAJ) asks journalists in other countries to be “pen-pals,” writing letters to Belarusian journalists who are in jail.[38] Though this cannot be considered a campaign aimed (directly) at the authorities, it represents a strong commitment to individual journalists who are victims of political repression.

Journalists' initiatives as an alternative to politicised media

In **Hungary**, individual or collective initiatives to counter political interference have been launched in the difficult context of the past two years – by creating new, independent media. For example, in early September 2020, former journalists among the 80 who resigned from *Index* launched a crowdfunding campaign for a new outlet, *Telex*, in order to create a “*diverse, interesting, entertaining and impartial news site*” that “*does not toe the lines of either the opposition or the government*”. More than 33,000 people gave donations, including *Economia*, one of the Czech Republic’s largest media groups, which pledged €200,000.[39] *Telex* rapidly grew into a successful publication with a strong internal “Code of conduct and ethics”[40] endorsed by the staff and the management, dealing in particular with “impartiality” and “separation between news and opinion”. Another example is *Direkt36*,[41] founded by the journalist Gergő Sáling, who had earlier worked for *Origo*, one of Hungary’s biggest private news sites. The mission of *Direkt36* is “*to expose wrongdoings and abuse of power through fair but tough reporting*”. *Direkt36* has built a network of more than 2,500 crowdfunding supporters and it is also supported by international donors.

In **Turkey**, a group of journalists close to the union of journalists TGS created a “non-profit platform for next-generation journalists”, *jurno.com*,[42] with the support of the European Union. Such an initiative is one way for journalists to distance themselves from the established media, which are mainly controlled by the government and its supporters. *Jurno.com* publishes news stories from over 100 freelance journalists – 68% of them are women and 83% are under 40 years old. These focus on issues that are often censored or self-censored in Turkish media: social matters; LGBTI+ issues; feminist groups; and ethnic and religious minorities. “*We need to show that our role is to support journalists working professionally, not opponents or activists,*” said Mustafa Kuleli, the General Secretary of TGS.

In **Poland**, *Radio Nowy Swiat* (RNS)[43] went live on 10 July 2020 and is staffed by former journalists from *Trójka*, a music and current affairs public channel that was founded in the 1960s and owned by Polskie Radio (PR), the public service radio organisation that is under the control of the government. RNS currently depends on 31,500 “patrons” who have declared a monthly payment of PLN 700,000 (€157,000). RNS was followed by another group of former *Trójka* journalists who set up *Radio 357* thanks to a crowdfunding campaign in October 2020 and now claim nearly 25,000 “patrons”. [44]

1. In Spain, Article 20 of the Constitution even explicitly mentions “professional secrecy” for journalists – the right to protect confidential sources: “the law shall regulate the right to invoke personal conscience and professional secrecy in the exercise of these freedoms [of expression].” See <https://www.boe.es/legislacion/documentos/ConstitucionINGLES.pdf>
2. See the list provided by <https://presscouncils.eu>
3. Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM), the Independent Trade Union of Journalists and Media Workers (SSNM), the Macedonian Media Institute (MMI) and the Council for Media Ethics (CMEM)
4. <http://www.promedia.mk/>
5. <https://periodistasandalucia.es>
6. <https://www.cac.cat/ciutadania/pluralisme-i-tractament-informatiu>
7. <https://fcic.periodistes.cat>
8. <https://www.ipso.co.uk>
9. <https://www.nuj.org.uk/about-us/rules-and-guidance/code-of-conduct.html>
10. <https://www.bbc.com/aboutthebbc/reports/policies/codeofconduct>
11. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/impartiality/guidelines#impartialityinbbccontent>
12. <https://www.presserat.at>
13. https://www.presserat.at/rte/upload/entscheidungen_2020/brief_2020_270_02.11.2020.pdf
14. See <https://presscouncils.eu/members-north-macedonia> and <https://www.semm.mk>
15. <https://www.asn.org.ee/english/index.html>
16. <https://meedialiit.ee/pressinoukogu/>
17. Source : joint EFJ-ECPMF mission to the Baltics, 2018:
<https://europeanjournalists.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/FFM-Report-EFJ.pdf>
18. <https://www.basinkonseyi.org.tr/>
19. <http://korrektor.hu/>
20. <https://foszerkesztokforuma.wordpress.com/>
21. <http://www.cje.org.ua/en/code>
22. <https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/hands-off-our-bbc.html>
23. <https://www.cpbef.org.uk/>
24. <http://medianorth.org.uk/>
25. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/860486494060469/>
26. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qhr6ljCFYD0>
27. <https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/foi-defending-the-right-to-know.html>

28. <https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/nuj-calls-on-journalists-to-back-foi-campaign-with-subject-access-requests.html>
29. <https://teledetodos.es/>
30. Example: <https://teledetodos.es/index.php/manifiestos-y-declaraciones/declaracion-rtve-2019>
31. Example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXzVE3yrk2k> †
32. Legge “Gentiloni”: <https://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/DF/195356.pdf>
33. <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2019/12/02/new-possibilities-for-media-freedom-joint-call-to-austrias-new-government/>
34. <https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/nuj-condemns-online-and-offline-abuse-of-nadine-white.html>
35. <https://tgs.org.tr/arrested-jailed-journalists-turkey/>
36. <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2020/10/15/compromised-independence-of-turkeys-institutions-chokes-press-freedom/>
37. <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2021/02/18/european-journalists-in-solidarity-with-their-belarusian-colleagues/>
38. <https://baj.by/be/content/zhurnalisty-v-sizo-napishite-im-pismo-podderzhki>
39. <https://www.voanews.com/press-freedom/down-not-out-hungarys-journalists-react-shrinking-freedoms>
40. <https://telex.hu/dokumentum/a-telex-etikai-es-magatartasi-kodexe>
41. <https://www.direkt36.hu/en/>
42. journocom.tr
43. <https://nowyswiat.online>
44. <https://patronite.pl/radio357>

Conclusions & recommendations

Given the broad variety of countries covered by the survey, it is in no way surprising that the expectations of journalists' organisations concerning pro-active measures from public authorities and the efficiency of self-regulation are quite different from each other.

There is, however, common ground in the **expectations for the workshop and for this project**. In general: journalists' organisations want to exchange experiences; compare these and better understand the problems faced by colleagues in other countries; to gather new ideas; and to feel that they are not alone in standing against political interference. Not only knowledge, but also solidarity and support, are important for journalists' organisations in confronting political pressure.

There are also high expectations of European institutions and states: these must *enforce* the standards and values to which they are officially committed.

These expectations extend to the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). Journalists ask it to react more firmly in cases of blatant violation of the independence of public service media, especially in EU member states such as Hungary and Poland.

The question of public funding is also at the heart of the discussion. How can we strike a balance between the need for public support to media and the risk of political interference?

In order to avoid abuses, it seems important to make a clear distinction between three main types of funding: political advertising directly paid for by the government (an issue in Austria for example); advertising paid for by state companies (an issue in Hungary and Turkey for example); and general public funding schemes supporting the media sector according to professional criteria (as implemented in countries such as France and Belgium, for example).

When asked what they expect concerning the defence of independent journalism in general, respondents agreed on the following points according to the four different targets proposed. (See the full summary of replies to these questions in Annex 2).

Journalists' unions and organisations should:

- unite and cooperate at the national level

- follow strictly professional goals, and avoid being influenced or politically biased themselves
- be really outspoken and express more public positions in case of political interference, either structurally or in individual cases
- campaign not only for independent media but also against disinformation, which is often triggered by political parties (either ruling or not ruling the country in question)
- launch campaigns with other civil society groups and stakeholders, in particular for the defence of public service media
- raise public awareness of the value of journalism
- use all technological means to campaign and raise awareness – webinars, podcasts, online conferences, social media, *etc*
- support members against structural threats and support new initiatives by individual or groups of journalists to confront political interference

Journalists and individual members of professional organisations are called to:

- Seek support of their union or association when they are victim of political interference, either systemically or individually
- Speak out against political pressure, harassment and censorship
- Respect professional, editorial and ethical guidelines in order to be considered as independent journalists and not activists

Self-regulatory bodies need to:

- be fully representative of the profession
- have a clear and mandatory competence
- be ruled by professional criteria only
- cooperate or, ideally, establish a single body in each country
- additionally develop their work at company level, with the enforcement of clear editorial statutes

National authorities are called to

- create a favourable media environment, following the principle of “positive obligations” of states to guarantee the existence of independent journalism, giving priority to taking action against SLAPPs and other threats that have a chilling effect on journalists

- defend and guarantee public service media outlets, both in terms of financing and in terms of structure and governance, ensuring that their ownership is formally independent from the state and that there is no political interference in governing bodies
- avoid using public support to media as a way to interfere in editorial content; priority should be given to general support to information media according to professional criteria rather than *ad hoc* political advertising
- recognise and accept journalism as a key component of democracy, in line with European standards (Council of Europe and European Union) on independence and pluralism
- fully involve unions and professional organisations in the decision-making process in the media field
- carry out and develop programmes of training for judges on freedom of the media, with a particular focus on protection of journalists in the broad sense, including protection against political pressures and electronic safety

European/international organisations and civil society organisations

The European Union's institutions, in particular the Commission, are asked

- to follow a more long-term perspective and a political approach to support independent journalism rather than short-term projects: European needs to have a plan!
- to tackle media independence more seriously, with a strong legal approach, in particular where the rule of law and independence of media is heavily put at risk
- to take action, with a formal legal instrument, against SLAPPs at European level, following the demands of European groups supporting press freedom and the proposal for a draft anti-SLAPP Directive^[1] to be fully implemented and enforced by member states

European professional and civil society organisations need to

- strengthen their solidarity and support to journalists' organisations, in particular for local campaigning, with joint declarations
- continue the exchange of experience and information
- reinforce their cooperation with other professional organisations such as the EBU, to face situations where the independence of public service media is put at risk or violated

- develop capacity-building for journalists' and media organisations, in particular in the field of organising and campaigning lobby to make sure that search engines also refer to critical and independent journalism[2]

1. <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2020/12/02/coalition-published-a-proposal-for-an-eu-anti-slapp-law/>
2. <https://freeturkeyjournalists.ipi.media/googles-outrageous-support-to-partisan-media-puts-turkeys-fragile-communities-at-risk>

Annexes

Annex 1: Questionnaire sent to member organisations

1. In your country, which threat would you consider as most important for journalists and for the media community (please provide examples in the open field box)
 1. Political pressure and interference, in particular on public service media
 2. Targeted pressure (defamation, strategic litigation lawsuits against public participation – SLAPP) and physical threats (harassment, assaults, etc)
 3. Legal environment, such as excessive or arbitrary anti-terrorist and anti-crime legislation
 2. What legal framework/protection exist in your country to ensure media freedom and independence and to protect the rule of law?
 1. If yes, please provide more information and describe in which extent is it effective
 2. If no, for what reason?
 3. Do editorial boards exist in media to ensure editorial independence? If yes, please identify best practices by quoting the media company and the context/result.
 4. Do self-regulatory mechanisms exist to ensure media independence?
 1. If yes, please provide more information
 2. If no, could you please provide reasons/explanations?
 5. What did trade union/journalists' organisations representatives do for journalists to advocate and campaign for media independence? Please provide more information and good practices in the open field box. (For example, did you build alliances with civil society organisations/political groups/academia? Or did you develop digital safety strategies or ways to circumvent surveillance of journalists?)
 6. In which extent do/did individual journalists carry out activist or lobby work for the rights of the profession, in particular for the defence of independent journalism? If possible, please provide good practice and examples, including general outcome and/or individual consequences for the journalists
 7. What are your expectations for the defence of independent journalism from
 1. Journalists' unions/organisations
 2. Self-regulatory bodies (if any)
 3. National authorities
 4. European/international organisations and CSOs
 8. If there is anything else you would like to add, please use the open field box below.
-

Annex 2: Summary of expectations by respondents and EFJ members

Journalists' unions/organisations:

Unity, representativity and activism are the key ideas put forward. Unions should *"unite or at least cooperate, to throw aside the political differences, the divisions and to show that they are in favour of professional interests, for the professional solidarity"*, as put very clearly by the Hungarian Press Union. *"Unions are key actors"* for FAPE (Spain), but they have to take *"decisive actions and [be] more outspoken [...] against the political field"*, added the Estonian union of journalists. The FNSI (Italy) also expects unions to put *"a constant pressure on politicians"*. The *"fight against fake news"* is also a high expectation from Unions according to the Society of Journalists in Poland. In Turkey, unions are expected to *"raise public awareness on the value of journalism"*.

Self-regulatory bodies (if any):

The need for a *"national and mandatory self-regulatory body"* was expressed by the FSC-CCOO in Spain, where press councils exist only at regional level. FAPE added that they should be *"governed by professional criteria"* only. This priority is shared in Estonia: *"it would be better, if [...] there was (only) one, more representative and, hence, even more powerful"* body. This comment is shared by the Society of Journalists in Poland: *"the two self-regulatory bodies in Poland [should] speak with one voice and built the united system"*. The Hungarian Press Union also wished that self-regulatory bodies could *"prove that they are potential partners of the ruling forces, capable to cooperate, provide a multicolour, high quality media environment"*. In Turkey, the expectation is simply that members of the existing media council *"engage more actively in self-regulation"*.

National authorities

The acceptance of journalism as an independent *"cultural field, without which the democracy does not exist"* (Estonia), is obviously a top priority for journalists. Authorities should *"listen to the journalists' representative organisations"*.

It is the role of public authorities to create a favourable media environment, following the principle of “positive obligations” of states to guarantee for the existence of independent journalism. This is particularly important for public service media. In Italy for example, the USIGRAI proposes that RAI should be “*governed by a foundation independent from the State as an ‘owner’ of public media*” and that the mandate of members of its governing body should not all be renewed at the same time, in order to avoid a political bias at the moment of the nomination.

European/international organisations and CSOs

The EU is clearly asked to take “*the media independence more seriously*”, in particular in the case of Hungary: “*the European Commission should formally examine complains made by Hungarian media*” (MÚOSZ). The TGS in Turkey expects international organisations to bring “*a long-term perspective to support the independent journalism ecosystem*”, which brings an interesting perspective as such: international support should be more structured and maybe less short-term projects oriented.

Solidarity and support of European CSOs are expected by most respondents: “*Show solidarity and support exchange of experience*” (FAPE, Spain), “*support the activities of local journalists’ organisations*” (Estonia). Concerning particularly public media, the Society of Journalists in Poland “*would like the EBU to face the situation in Poland with public media and help to improve it*”. The Association of Journalists of Macedonia considers that “*building the capacities of media associations, promoting cooperation, sharing good practices, and joint responses in the interest of promoting the journalistic profession*” should also be priority of European organisations.

Finally, the **expectations for this project** in general are to “*get ideas*” (Hungary), “*discuss problems with different approaches and examples for a better understanding of the topic*” (Estonia), “*discover new ways to defend freedom of expression and journalists’ rights*” (Spain), “*exchange experiences*” (FNSI, Italy). The Hungarian press union summed it up by expecting not “*to feel that they are alone*” and to find support.

Annex 3: List of responding organisations

