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DRAFT REPORT

on the protection of journalists around the world and the European Union's
policy on the matter
(2022/2057(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the protection of journalists around the world and the European Union's policy on the matter
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The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
- having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966, and specifically to UN Human Rights Committee General comment No 34 on Article 19 thereof on freedoms of opinion and expression,
- having regard to the UN Convention against Corruption of 2005 and to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions of 2005,
- having regard to the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression of 13 April 2021 on disinformation and freedom of opinion and expression,
- having regard to the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity of 12 April 2012,
- having regard to UN Security Council Resolution 1738 (2006) of 23 December 2006 on protection of civilians in armed conflicts, which condemns attacks against journalists in conflict situations,
- having regard to the joint declaration by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Organization of American States Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information of 20 October 2021 on politicians and public officials and freedom of expression,
- having regard to the outcomes of the 25th OSCE Ministerial Council of 7 December 2018, in particular to Decision No 3/18 on the safety of journalists,
- having regard to the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), in particular to Article 10 TFEU on defining and implementing the EU's policies and activities,
- having regard to the European Convention on Human Rights, in particular to Article 10 thereof on freedom of expression,

- having regard to the EU human rights guidelines on freedom of expression online and offline, adopted by the Council on 12 May 2014,
 - having regard to the Commission’s Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online, launched in May 2016, and to its seventh evaluation of 7 October 2021, out of which came the document entitled ‘Factsheet – 7th evaluation of the Code of Conduct’,
 - having regard to the Commission’s proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2022 on protecting persons who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded or abusive court proceedings (‘Strategic lawsuits against public participation’) (COM(2022)0177),
 - having regard to the Council conclusions of 25 May 2020 on media literacy in an ever-changing world,
 - having regard to the declaration by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 3 May 2022 entitled ‘The safety of journalists is a priority for the European Union’,
 - having regard to the work carried out by the Council of Europe to promote the protection and safety of journalists, in particular to Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states of 13 April 2016 on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors and Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states of 7 March 2018 on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership,
 - having regard to the declaration by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe of 13 February 2019 on the financial sustainability of quality journalism in the digital age and to its 2022 annual report entitled ‘Defending Press Freedom in Times of Tensions and Conflict,
 - having regard to the Addis Ababa declaration for the recognition of cartooning as a fundamental right, presented to UNESCO on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day on 3 May 2019,
 - having regard to the Partnership Agreement between the EU, of the one part, and Members of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), of the other part, initialled by the EU and OACPS chief negotiators on 15 April 2021, in particular to Articles 9 and 11(2) thereof,
 - having regard to its urgency resolutions under Rule 144 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Culture and Education,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0000/2023),
- A. whereas every human being has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; whereas this right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive

and impart information and ideas through any medium and regardless of borders; whereas democracies can only function when citizens have access to independent information; whereas media freedom and pluralism are crucial components of the right to freedom of expression and information; whereas key democratic tasks of the media include strengthening transparency and democratic accountability; whereas journalists play an essential role in promoting democratic values, human rights and fundamental freedoms;

- B. whereas a journalist is an individual who, on a professional basis, observes, describes, documents and analyses events, statements, policies and any proposals that could affect society, with the purpose of systematising such information and gathering and analysing facts to inform segments of society or society as a whole;
- C. whereas states have obligations to safeguard the fundamental rights associated with journalists, such as the right to freedom of expression and opinion, the right to life and the right to personal dignity; whereas international human rights law establishes that the protection of journalists includes preventing all forms of discrimination without distinction of any kind, including race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, and property, birth or other status;
- D. whereas professional journalists have a mission to provide the public with information on general or specialised topics of interest as responsibly and as objectively as possible; whereas it is important to consider the societal role played by all media workers and support staff, as well as community media workers and so-called citizen journalists;
- E. whereas recent years have shown a growing pattern of intimidation aimed at silencing journalists, in particular war correspondents; whereas this is a situation that requires urgent action to uphold the essential role of the independent media in ensuring transparency and accountability;
- F. whereas the challenges that journalists encounter in undertaking their work are manifold, including restrictions on movement, such as deportations and denial of access to a country or a particular area, arbitrary arrests and detention, torture, sexual violence, particularly against female journalists, confiscation of and damage to equipment, information theft, illegal surveillance and office break-ins, intimidation, harassment of family members, death threats, stigmatisation and smear campaigns to discredit journalists, abductions, enforced disappearances, killings and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- G. whereas investigative journalists working to expose corruption are being particularly targeted;
- H. whereas technological innovation has increased the capacity of individuals, governments and other bodies to spy on journalists, compromise their digital security and force censorship upon them; whereas such attacks may include compromising journalists' accounts, locking them out of their accounts, subjecting them to intrusive malware, targeting them with hateful and violent content and gathering and publishing personal information about them online; whereas surveillance and digital threats are having a negative impact on press freedom worldwide and limit journalists' ability to investigate and report;

- I. whereas according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, in 2022, 66 journalists were killed and 64 were reported missing;
- J. whereas the safety of journalists is crucial to guarantee their ability to do their job properly;
- K. whereas the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the essential role played by journalists in providing citizens with reliable and verified information; whereas greater effort must therefore be made to ensure safe and suitable working conditions for journalists and media workers;
- L. whereas fact-checking is a specific journalistic activity that involves verifying facts or challenging official narratives; whereas fact checkers operate in a world in which the circulation of information is extensive and in which algorithms polarise debates, which therefore exposes fact checkers to online attacks, pressure from public authorities and abusive legal proceedings;
- M. whereas the rapid growth of online and social media has amplified mis- and disinformation, as well as the spread of fake news, seeking to discredit credible sources of information and targeting journalists, fact checkers and media workers who are endeavouring to limit this spread;
- N. whereas according to the Commission, political journalism is particularly at risk, as social shocks or crises often serve as instigators for government measures to constrain media freedom, pluralism and independence;
- O. whereas the killing and imprisonment of journalists, cartoonists, bloggers and media workers continue to be a widespread phenomenon, as does impunity for these actions; whereas online spaces are increasingly becoming a hostile environment and violence against female journalists has been intensifying;
- P. whereas in addition to violence against and intimidation and harassment of journalists, impunity and a lack of prosecution lead to self-censorship or have a chilling effect;
- Q. whereas media capture, a lack of institutional transparency, hate speech and disinformation are increasingly being exploited for political purposes to intensify social polarisation;
- R. whereas transparency of media ownership is an absolute precondition for ensuring media pluralism and independent journalism;
- S. whereas female journalists face gender-specific forms of violence, such as sexual and online harassment; whereas online harassment and abuse are often highly sexualised, based not on the content of victims' work, but on their physical traits, cultural backgrounds or private lives; whereas these threats may lead female journalists to self-censor and have a chilling effect on press freedom and freedom of expression; whereas experts have consistently found evidence that women are in the minority across media sectors, particularly in creative roles, and are severely underrepresented at senior decision-making levels;

- T. whereas in several countries, strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) are used by political and financial actors for the purpose of silencing critical voices or scaring journalists into halting investigations into corruption and other matters of public interest; whereas this is especially common in countries with defamation or libel laws that are easier to abuse;
- U. whereas the spread of misinformation, fake news, propaganda and disinformation creates a climate of global scepticism among the population with regard to information in general, which exposes journalists to distrust and poses a threat to freedom of information, democratic debate and the independence of the media, and has increased the need for high-quality media sources;
- V. whereas data analysis and algorithms are having an increasing impact on the information made accessible to citizens; whereas several countries have adopted cybercrime laws that further stifle press freedom by targeting independent and critical journalists; whereas journalists have been imprisoned and tortured for reporting on corruption and other human rights abuses;
1. Underlines that every human being has the right to freedom of opinion and expression and that this right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any medium and regardless of borders; recalls the essential role that journalists play in promoting democratic values, human rights and fundamental freedoms;
 2. Recalls the fact that democracy cannot function without available and accessible trustworthy information; underlines that protecting journalists and securing democratic culture and values means protecting journalists' independence, safeguarding freedom of expression, ensuring media diversity and preserving the fundamental right of any citizen to be informed;
 3. Recalls the essential role played by political and investigative journalists in fighting against human rights violations by performing their role as watchdogs for democracy and the rule of law through the collection of reliable and relevant information, thereby exposing state repression, corruption, criminal networks and all kind of human rights abuses, which ensures the necessary checks and balances to hold persons in power to account; highlights the fact that these activities put journalists at increased personal risk;
 4. Reiterates its continued deep concern about the state of media freedom in the world in the context of the abuses and attacks still being perpetrated against journalists and media workers in many countries, as well as the growing denigration of them in public, which particularly impacts political, investigative and cross-border journalism;
 5. Reiterates its concern about the lack of specific legal or policy frameworks protecting journalists and media workers from violence, threats and intimidation at global scale; calls on public figures and authority representatives to refrain from denigrating journalists in public, as this undermines trust in the media across society; underlines the important role of journalists in reporting on protests and demonstrations and calls for them to be protected so that they can carry out their jobs without fear;

6. Deplores the fact that journalists and media workers often work in precarious conditions, which compromises their ability to work in a safe and enabling environment; stresses that adequate working conditions for journalists and media workers are crucial to fostering high-quality journalism, allowing journalists to fulfil their missions and upholding the right to information and the right to be informed;
7. Recalls the need to pay particular attention to satire and humour, which are used by press cartoonists to promote democratic values, defend human rights and fundamental freedoms and protest against crime, corruption and abuses of power, and which are used in evidencing and combating censorship;
8. Highlights the importance of ensuring the safety and well-being of journalist fact checkers, who are particularly targeted because they constantly reveal mis- and disinformation, and by doing so, often expose facts that people have put a lot of effort into hiding or distorting;
9. Regrets the absence of reliable data on the situation of journalists facing hostile working environments; pays tribute to organisations such as Reporters Without Borders, the Committee to Protect Journalists, Frontline, the International Federation of Journalists and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, to name but a few, for their support for journalists and media workers in situations of danger that could threaten their security and well-being; calls on the Commission to develop holistic and sophisticated methodologies to seek ways of capturing data over longer periods time and for different types of violations against journalists; asks for effective monitoring toolkits to be developed;
10. Condemns, in the strongest possible terms, the attempts by public authorities to silence independent media or undermine their freedom and pluralism; warns against practices that indirectly subdue such media by means of financial patronage and condemns, in particular, attempts to control media public service;
11. Condemns the use of SLAPPs to silence or intimidate journalists and outlets and to create a climate of fear to suppress their reporting; welcomes, in this regard, the Commission proposal for a directive against SLAPPs targeting journalists in the EU, and asks the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to encourage third countries, principally like-minded partners who have not yet done so, to take similar initiative at national level and to engage on this matter at international level;
12. Welcomes actions aiming to raise awareness about the full range of EU and other international protection mechanisms and tools that can be urgently deployed in support of journalists in danger that are already available to EU/UN staff, organisations devoted to the protection of journalists and civil society organisations (CSOs);
13. Invites the EU institutions to promote the use of media literacy as a tool to support citizens' and societies' broader understanding of the societal role of journalism and to promote exchange programmes for journalists; considers that strengthening journalism is essential to prevent disinformation, polarisation and violence;
14. Insists on enhancing collaboration between online platforms and law enforcement authorities so as to effectively address the spread of messages that incite hatred or

instigate violence towards journalists and media workers, taking into account the fact that women are particularly targeted; stresses the importance of promptly removing online comments or reactions that undermine the safety of journalists in order to curb their uncontrolled spread;

15. Calls on the EU delegations to apply the EU human rights guidelines on freedom of expression online and offline in a uniform and consistent manner as they pertain to protecting journalists and defending press freedom; strongly encourage the EEAS to undertake all efforts to promote, harness and share examples of good practices, especially with EU officials prior to assignments in third countries;
16. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS to always weigh the option of voiced public action against silent diplomacy; highlights the importance of building civil society's understanding of the EU delegations' *modus operandi*; encourages, in this regard, the EU delegations to make, to the extent possible, more public statements, both pre-emptively and in response to serious violations of or restrictions on the right to the freedom of opinion and expression;
17. Calls on the EEAS to establish an urgency response plan to be followed by the EU delegations with a range of protective tools, such as the issuing of statements, coordinating trial monitoring, conducting prison visits, visiting the homes or offices of at-risk journalists, raising cases urgently with the authorities, using bilateral dialogues to raise press freedom concerns, facilitating rest and respite opportunities for at-risk or traumatised journalists, supporting temporary relocation and/or evacuation, providing physical accompaniment in extreme situations, and seeking to advocate and build the capacity of local law enforcement, judicial and governmental authorities to protect journalists, including by pushing for full accountability for abuses of press freedom;
18. Urges the EEAS to develop a structured approach to supporting journalists who face digital threats; calls, in this regard, for the EU delegations' capacity to address this issue to be strengthened, including by supporting access to training for journalists to enhance their awareness of preventive digital security and good practices; stresses the need to establish contingency plans for when and if digital security is breached in communications and asks for the psychological impacts of online harassment of journalists to be addressed;
19. Calls on EU delegations, EU Member State diplomatic missions and like-minded partners to engage in proactive outreach to and support for journalist communities in third countries with a view to supporting their work and working conditions, to make regular assessments of the press freedom environment in each respective third country, including ongoing or emerging risks to journalists, and to seek ways to put in place either measures that could prevent abuses from occurring or protection measures, including providing demonstrable and visible moral support to journalists at risk;
20. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote sustainable measures in all their agreements and partnerships with third countries aimed at financing and supporting independent journalism; calls, in this regard, on the Commission and the Member States to allocate funds to that end, including by increasing the allocation for

the human rights and democracy thematic programme of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI);

21. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS to ensure that EU funding programmes are known and accessible to local CSOs active on journalist safety and freedom of expression and, when appropriate, to encourage and support them to apply to such programmes and to play a lead role in shaping and implementing relevant projects; underlines the need to ensure a balance between EU funding for projects to promote journalist safety and to support media development, in line with the NDICI's thematic programme on human rights and democracy and its multiannual indicative programming and related indicators; reiterates its call to simplify the application process in order to making it less bureaucratic;
22. Strongly encourages increasing support for funding programmes, statements and public events aimed at enhancing protection mechanisms of the UN and the Inter-American Court on Human Rights in consultation with journalists and CSOs supporting journalists;
23. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.