



**2022/2057(INI)**

8.3.2023

# OPINION

of the Committee on Culture and Education

for the Committee on Foreign Affairs

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

Rapporteur for opinion: Maria Walsh

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## SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Culture and Education calls on the Committee on Foreign Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Recalls that freedom of expression is a fundamental human right enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and includes the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authorities or commercial entities and regardless of frontiers; deplores, however, that some governments and commercial entities and individuals in positions of power around the globe are systematically threatening this right;
2. Stresses that the rights to freedom of expression and information are indispensable for journalists if they are to support citizens' active participation in democratic society and enable the public to access reliable news, sharpen their insights and hold opinions on issues of public interest; recalls that journalism, including investigative journalism, is considered to be an essential 'watchdog' to ensure checks and balances in democratic systems while ensuring open, pluralistic, public and independent reporting on news;
3. Underlines that ensuring the safety of journalists and media professionals and a safe working environment for them are preconditions for effective media freedom; notes with regret the shrinking public space, including for civil society organisations and human rights defenders, and the rise in violence towards journalists and media professionals<sup>1</sup>, including through transnational repression<sup>2</sup>, which is increasingly happening in countries officially at peace, including in the European Union<sup>3</sup>, and is creating a general sense of insecurity; stresses that these journalists and media professionals are often deliberately obstructed from carrying out their responsibilities in armed conflicts, they may be denied access and they may be subject to censorship, harassment, arbitrary detention or brutal attacks; deplores that in 2022 it was reported that worldwide 58 journalists had been killed, 65 were being held hostage, 49 were missing and 533 were imprisoned (a new record)<sup>4</sup>; demands that all detained journalists be released immediately; furthermore stresses that journalists face online and offline threats and attacks, including through the use of spyware and ransomware; emphasises the need to protect journalists from any type of violence, as set out in the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024;
4. Is particularly concerned about the situation of women journalists and journalists from minorities and other vulnerable groups, who are facing increasing online and offline threats and attacks and are subject to disproportionate and specific threats; underlines that the gender-based violence some journalists are exposed to includes intimidation, stigmatisation, harassment, self-censorship, sexist hate speech, public shaming, trolling, physical assault, rape and murder;

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<sup>1</sup> [Freedom House Report: Defending Democracy in Exile Understanding and Responding to Transnational Repression.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [EU Human Rights Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline, 12 May 2014.](#)

<sup>3</sup> Commission Rule of Law Report 2022.

<sup>4</sup> [Reporters Without Borders, '2022 Round-Up: Journalists detained, killed, held hostage and missing'.](#)

5. Highlights that the freedom of media and media pluralism have increasingly come under threat in recent years with the combined effects of digitalisation and related evolving revenue models, market consolidation and globalisation of media streams, which create ‘news deserts’ and put at risk the economic sustainability of the sector; believes that in this situation special attention should be given to smaller news media operators; stresses that hate speech disinformation and propaganda are growing trends in the media landscape worldwide; notes that this trend has been exemplified by the COVID-19 pandemic and Russian war of aggression against Ukraine; emphasises that such phenomena can also have the effect of reducing trust in public institutions; believes that this situation should be considered a general threat to the values the European Union stands for as a global actor and to democracy as a whole;
6. Encourages the implementation and strengthening of codes of ethics and journalistic standards established by press and media councils and underlines the need to support solidarity and collaboration between journalists and media outlets to improve the safety of journalists;
7. Notes with concern that as an effect of the general digitalisation and globalisation of the media market, a growing number of journalists are forced into freelance non-contract and precarious work and insists on the importance of ensuring decent working conditions for journalists and media professionals; notes the increasing use of freelancers, particularly young journalists and media professionals at the start of their career, to cover high-risk areas and conflict zones;
8. Calls for the EU and its Member States to reaffirm the profound links between media freedom and democracy, including in non-EU countries, and identify pathways to rebuild safe spaces for information and communication, including in the digital sphere, with a particular focus on fact-checking tools for media professionals and the spreading of best practices in the profession and education for information and media literacy for all as a tool to ensure broader understanding and interest in information received, thereby also countering the danger of ‘news fatigue’; reiterates its call for media education to be included in formal and informal settings, including through education curricula in order to foster media literacy, skills and competences and promote and support critical thinking; in this respect, looks forward to the Commission’s mid-term review of the Digital Education Action Plan (2012-2027); notes that the need to ensure media freedom should be included in EU partnership programmes with non-EU countries;
9. Calls therefore on the Commission, the Member States and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to promote programmes and policies aimed at educating journalists, media actors and the general public about their rights and protection mechanisms, including, but not limited to, showcasing real examples and best practices;
10. Believes that in order to improve its external governance, the EU needs to lead by example and deliver on its domestic media policy ambitions in a fully coherent and consistent manner; welcomes, in this context, the adoption of the Digital Services Act<sup>5</sup>, and calls for effective measures to be introduced in the recently published proposals for

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<sup>5</sup> Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act), OJ L 277, 27.10.2022, p. 1.

a directive against ‘strategic lawsuits against public participation’ (the anti-SLAPP directive) (COM(2022)0177) and the European Media Freedom Act (COM(2022)0457), which are signs the EU is taking a more robust approach to media policies; takes the view that these measures could inspire other regions in the world and help set positive global standards; recalls the Council of Europe’s recommendations<sup>6</sup> on defamation, which include guidance on ensuring proportionality of sanctions and respect for human rights; calls on the Commission to look at the effectiveness of the tiered channels reporting system established in the Whistleblower Directive<sup>7</sup> and its effects on reporting conditions for investigative journalism in its monitoring of its application in national law;

11. Believes that EU programmes, funds and initiatives such as Creative Europe, the Media and Audiovisual Action Plan, the Media Pluralism Monitor, the EU Human Rights Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline and the EU Human Rights Defenders mechanism should be fully employed in the EU’s external governance to provide targeted support to media and news organisations in non-EU countries, notwithstanding the fulfilment by media organisations of their duty of care vis-à-vis their journalists, in particular, by complying with paragraph 16 of the Council of Europe’s Recommendations on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors<sup>8</sup> and the 2021 Commission recommendation on the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists;
12. Calls for the creation of the position of Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for the Safety of Journalists, which the aim of preventing crimes against journalists and advocating for harsher penalties for crimes against journalists while providing concrete and rapid assistance in protecting and defending journalists, namely getting journalists released, establishing protective measures and contributing to the administration of independent justice against perpetrators;
13. Calls on the Member States to join and actively participate in intergovernmental partnerships and international activities promoting media pluralism and advocating for and safeguarding media freedom online and offline and the safety of journalists; believes that the EU should encourage measures aimed at ensuring that more women, minorities and other underrepresented groups occupy creative and decision-making positions;
14. Reiterates its repeated calls for the establishment of a permanent news media fund with a cross-border component to support independent editorial coverage, safeguard the independence of journalists, guarantee the freedom of the press and involve associated and partner countries outside the EU by means of a dedicated tool;
15. Calls on the Commission to include suspension mechanisms in the EU’s multilateral and bilateral partnership or trade agreements; calls on the Commission to support, strengthen and monitor media freedom outside the EU and use targeted sanctions or

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<sup>6</sup> [Council of Europe, ‘Decriminalisation of defamation: Council of Europe guidance on proportionality of laws and conformity with human rights’, 13 July 2018.](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Directive \(EU\) 2019/1937 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2019 on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law, OJ L 305, 26.11.2019, p. 17.](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2016\)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors.](#)

suspend agreements in the event of persistent and systematic violation of media freedom; additionally, given the high rate of impunity for crimes and violence against journalists around the world<sup>9</sup>, calls on the newly established Observatory on the Fight Against Impunity<sup>10</sup> to pay special attention to journalists in order to collect evidence and help improve the situation;

16. Recalls that the Russian disinformation campaign indoctrinating the public with language of hatred and historical revisionism before and during the war against Ukraine has triggered urgent sanctions that are partially being evaded by state-controlled media outlets; calls therefore for an appropriate and sustainable legal framework establishing a free information space protection mechanism based on the reciprocity of openness requirements; believes that this mechanism should be built on two pillars: 1) equal treatment – for all audiovisual outlets broadcasting on EU territory; 2) reciprocity – an open public space for EU broadcasters in non-EU countries and territories;
17. Calls for the EU, in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the severe repression in Belarus, to continue to support journalists fleeing state-sponsored censorship and propaganda campaigns by helping them to change territory, continue operating from a safe place or move their independent media outside their country so that they can continue to provide freely reported and reliable information.

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<sup>9</sup> [Reporters Without Borders, 'Protect journalists: For a protector of journalists', 28 April 2016.](#)

<sup>10</sup> [International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists: Joint statement by the High Representative Josep Borrell and Vice-President Věra Jourová, 1 November 2022.](#)

## INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

<b>Date adopted</b>	1.3.2023
<b>Result of final vote</b>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <span>+</span> <span>:</span> <span>27</span> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <span>-</span> <span>:</span> <span>0</span> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <span>0</span> <span>:</span> <span>2</span> </div>
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Asim Ademov, Andrea Bocskor, Ilana Cicurel, Gianantonio Da Re, Laurence Farreng, Tomasz Frankowski, Romeo Franz, Alexis Georgoulis, Catherine Griset, Sylvie Guillaume, Hannes Heide, Irena Joveva, Petra Kammerevert, Niyazi Kizilyürek, Elżbieta Kruk, Niklas Nienaaß, Peter Pollák, Diana Riba i Giner, Marcos Ros Sempere, Monica Semedo, Massimiliano Smeriglio, Michaela Šojdrová, Sabine Verheyen, Maria Walsh, Theodoros Zagorakis, Milan Zver
<b>Substitutes present for the final vote</b>	Ibán García Del Blanco, Chiara Gemma, Domènec Ruiz Devesa

**FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL  
IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION**

<b>27</b>	<b>+</b>
ECR	Gemma Chiara, Kruk Elzbieta
NI	Bocskor Andrea
PPE	Ademov Asim, Frankowski Tomasz, Pollák Peter, Sojdrová Michaela, Verheyen Sabine, Walsh Maria, Zagorakis Theodoros, Zver Milan
Renew	Cicurel Ilana, Farreng Laurence, Joveva Irena, Semedo Monica
S&D	García Del Blanco Ibán, Guillaume Sylvie, Heide Hannes, Kammerevert Petra, Ros Sempere Marcos, Ruiz Devesa Domènec, Smeriglio Massimiliano
The Left	Georgoulis Alexis, Kizilyürek Niyazi
Verts/ALE	Franz Romeo, Nienaaß Niklas, Riba i Giner Diana

<b>0</b>	<b>-</b>
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<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
ID	Da Re Gianantonio, Griset Catherine

Key:

+ : in favour  
 - : against  
 0 : abstentions