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Protection of journalists around the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter
European Parliament resolution of 11 July 2023 on the protection of journalists around the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter (2022/2057(INI))

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 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, and that of 20 April 2022 entitled ‘Reinforcing media freedom and the safety of journalists in the digital age’,

– 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 Article 4 of the Third Geneva Convention referring to ‘war correspondents’, Article 79 of Additional Protocol I on ‘measures of protection for journalists’ and the other articles protecting such professionals as civilians in times of armed conflict,

– 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, and in particular 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), and in particular Article 10 TFEU on defining and implementing the EU’s policies and activities,

– having regard to the European Convention on Human Rights, and in particular 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 European democracy action plan of 3 December 2020 (COM(2020)0790),

– 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 Commission Recommendation C(2021)6650 of 16 September 2021,

– 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 the awarding of the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize to journalists Maria Ressa and Dmitry Mouratov, from the Philippines and Russia respectively, in recognition of their outstanding efforts to safeguard freedom of journalists,

having regard to the Resolution of the EU-ACP Joint Parliamentary Assembly of 28 November 2019 on the impact of social media on governance, development, democracy and stability (ACP-EU/102.745/19/fin.),

having regard to its resolutions tabled for debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law 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 (A9-0206/2023),

A. whereas every human being has the right to freedom of expression, opinion and information; 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 and reliable information and when public authorities’ action is effectively scrutinised by media and other external observers and by revealing all kinds of human rights abuses; whereas media freedom and pluralism are crucial components of the right to freedom of expression and information, as well as enabling democratic, free and participative societies; whereas key democratic tasks of journalists and independent media include strengthening transparency and democratic accountability; whereas freedom of information is a fundamental right recognised by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU; whereas journalists can play an essential role in promoting democratic values, human rights and fundamental freedoms;

B. whereas a journalist is an individual who observes, describes, documents, investigates 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, both online and offline, segments of society or society as a whole; whereas the UN Human Rights Committee, in its general comment No 34 (2011), defines journalism as 'a function shared by a wide range of actors, including professional full-time reporters and analysts, as well as bloggers and others who engage in forms of self-publication in print, on the Internet or elsewhere';

C. whereas states have obligations to safeguard the fundamental rights associated with journalism and media freedom, such as the right to freedom of expression and opinion, the right to life, the right to personal dignity, and the right to respect journalists’ correspondence in its various forms; whereas international humanitarian law provides for the protection of journalists and war correspondents, giving them specific protections in armed conflict; whereas international human rights law prohibits 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; whereas, in some cases, the inadequate protection offered to journalists and the growing hostility displayed towards them by some public figures are substantially undermining their basic freedoms;

D. whereas journalists and other media workers have a mission to provide the public with information on general or on 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 decline in press freedom and a growing pattern of physical attacks, harassment, including online, and intimidation aimed at silencing and slandering journalists, in particular war correspondents, investigative journalists working to expose corruption, trafficking, corporate abuse, or wrongdoings of political actors, and journalists reporting on situations in certain totalitarian states or dictatorships; whereas an increasing number of journalists are killed outside of armed conflict zones; whereas local journalists covering local stories constitute by far the greatest number of victims; whereas by gathering and disseminating reliable information about armed conflicts, journalists carry out a crucial mission of public interest; 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 some authorities deliberately prohibit journalists' access to conflict zones in order to monopolise outgoing information, silence whistle-blowers, cover up human rights abuses and control public opinion; whereas in numerous cases media correspondents face multiple difficulties and deliberate obstruction in accessing countries or specific areas in which conflicts or dire human rights abuses are taking place; whereas their inability to access these areas erodes the quality of reporting of local developments, which enables greater disinformation campaigns and misinformation in offline and online media;

G. 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, travel bans, arbitrary arrests and detention, torture, sexual violence, particularly against female journalists, violation of due process guarantees, sentencing on trumped-up charges, 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, abusive legal proceedings, abductions, enforced disappearances, killings and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;

H. whereas investigative journalists working to expose corruption and in the fight against organised crime are being particularly targeted; whereas journalists require direct, immediate and unencumbered access to information in order to properly scrutinise decision-makers;

I. whereas journalists need reliable sources for their investigative work; whereas whistle-blowers provide key sources of information for journalists, including in the fight against corruption and organised crime, and can play an essential role in detecting and reporting
irregularities and wrongdoings; whereas, in doing so, they can strengthen democratic accountability and transparency; whereas adequate protection of whistle-blowers is a precondition for ensuring their effectiveness; whereas international human rights law provides strong protection for whistle-blowers, journalistic sources and public interest reporting;

J. whereas technological innovation has increased the capacity of individuals, governments and other actors to spy on journalists, violate their right to privacy and their right to the confidentiality of their sources, compromise their digital security and force censorship upon them; whereas such attacks may include collecting data illegally or against international human rights law and privacy standards, compromising journalists’ accounts, locking them out of their accounts, subjecting them to intrusive malware, targeting them with hateful and violent content, publicly discrediting them and gathering and publishing personal information about them or their families, and even use the information obtained to assassinate them; whereas surveillance and digital threats are having a negative impact on press freedom worldwide and limit journalists’ ability to investigate and report;

K. whereas journalists face increasing harassment and threats to their safety and their lives on online platforms, such as forums, social media websites, e-mail and chat websites, by individuals with malign intents, and by some governments, most notably the governments of countries or regions in which these journalists are active and attempting or succeeding to expose human rights issues, corruption of government or corporate actors or highlight attempts to mislead public opinion through disinformation, intimidation and misinformation campaigns;

L. whereas, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, in 2022, 67 journalists were killed and 64 were reported missing; whereas, according to data published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), 1,668 journalists were killed worldwide between 2003 and 2022 in connection with their work and a total of 533 journalists were being held in 2022 for doing their job according to RSF’s 2022 annual round-up of violence and abuses against journalists; whereas the UNESCO 2021-2022 freedom of expression report released on 17 January 2023 noted the death of 86 journalists in 2022, amounting to one every four days and up from 55 killings in total in 2021;

M. whereas the safety of journalists is crucial to guarantee their ability to do their job properly; whereas countries have to guarantee the protection of all journalists operating on their territory; whereas robust international measures to protect journalists and address impunity for crimes against journalists are lacking; whereas the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has called for the establishment of an international task force on the prevention, investigation and prosecution of attacks on journalists;

N. 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; whereas certain governments have unjustly used COVID-19 restrictions as a method to illegitimately restrict the work of journalists, especially with regard to their reporting on human rights violations;

O. whereas fact-checking is a specific journalistic activity that involves verifying facts or
challenging official narratives with the goal of tackling disinformation or revealing misinformation both off- and online; whereas fact checkers operate in a world in which the circulation of information is extensive and in which algorithms polarise debates; whereas this has the risk of exposing fact checkers to online attacks, threats, harassment, pressure from public authorities and abusive legal proceedings;

P. whereas the rapid growth of online and social media has amplified misinformation and disinformation, as well as the spread of fake news, with the aim of discrediting credible sources of information and targeting journalists, fact checkers and media workers who are endeavouring to limit this spread; whereas an increasing number of people are turning to the internet and social media to keep themselves informed;

Q. whereas disinformation and misinformation can have severe consequences on human rights protection and can present a significant threat to the values of democracy and individual freedoms; whereas fake news often preys on emotions and is created to attract attention, thereby spreading more easily and quickly than non-fake news; whereas activities to fight disinformation are considered a matter of public interest;

R. 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;

S. whereas attacks, intimidation, forced exile, 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 hate speech and violence most notably against female journalists has been intensifying; whereas these crimes limit the ability of the public to receive correct information and ideas and therefore impact their right to information and their ability to exercise their right to freedom of speech, freedom of expression and political participation; whereas adequate working conditions for journalists include avoiding undue internal and external pressure, dependency, vulnerability and instability, and hence the risk of self-censorship;

T. whereas in some countries detained journalists have been denied the right of access to a lawyer and are being are being threatened and mistreated in inhumane conditions; whereas the right to independent and transparent access to justice is a core component of the rule of law and the right to a fair trial must be ensured worldwide;

U. whereas, in addition to violence against journalists, intimidation, harassment, killing, impunity and a lack of prosecution have a chilling effect and lead to self-censorship;

V. whereas media capture, a lack of institutional transparency, hate speech and disinformation are increasingly being exploited by state and in some cases non-state actors for political purposes to intensify social polarisation, most notably by anti-democratic political movements; whereas these practices are notably used by authoritarian regimes to hold on to power;

W. whereas well-funded and strong public service media can be guarantors of democratic societies; whereas, however, public service media and their journalists have been facing a number of growing challenges, including political and market pressure, as well as cuts in public spending for media services, further compounded by the COVID-19
pandemic;

X. whereas transparency of media ownership and funding is highly important for ensuring media pluralism and independent journalism; whereas every effort must be made to ensure the robustness of the media sector, to ensure independence, and to increase media freedom and pluralism; whereas the transparency of media funding is an essential element in promoting trust among citizens;

Y. 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; whereas several countries discourage or even ban women from pursuing careers in journalism; whereas misogynistic behaviour and gender-based violence against women journalists online cannot be tolerated or normalised; whereas sexist hate speech is stigmatising, generates fear and shame, as well as psychological, professional and reputational damage, and raises concerns related to digital privacy and security threats; whereas in extreme cases, online threats that are not criminalised can escalate to physical violence, harassment and abuse of journalists in offline contexts;

Z. whereas discrimination faced by journalists can be manifested in relation to their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, belief, age, class, and sexual orientation or gender identity; whereas LGBTIQ+ journalists are at a higher risk of online attacks; whereas online attacks frequently exacerbate offline safety threats; whereas these threats may lead to self-censorship and have a chilling effect on press freedom and freedom of expression;

AA. whereas in many 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 SLAPPs are a serious threat to freedom of expression and information, as journalists can be prevented from or penalised for speaking up on issues of public interest; whereas this is especially common in countries with defamation or libel laws that are easier to abuse, as well as in countries ruled by authoritarian regimes; whereas non-EU countries and their proxies are currently engaged in SLAPPs against European journalists within EU national jurisdictions;

AB. whereas the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity aims to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers, both in conflict and non-conflict situations, with a view to strengthening peace, democracy and development worldwide; whereas dedicated adequate financial and human resources are needed for a proper implementation of the UN Plan of Action;

AC. 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; whereas not enough effort has been made to
protect journalists and citizens from propaganda, fake news and disinformation online;

AD. whereas data analysis and algorithms are having an increasing impact on the information made accessible to citizens; whereas several countries have adopted laws falsely purporting to combat cybercrime while actually stifling press freedom by targeting independent and critical journalists; whereas journalists have been imprisoned, forcibly exiled and tortured for reporting on corruption and other human rights abuses;

AE. whereas the Partnership on Information and Democracy, which brings together 50 states from around the world, has called for the establishment of democratic safeguards in the communication and information space and has recognised every citizen’s right to reliable information; whereas this partnership has developed a series of recommendations in order to address the issue of the information chaos that the EU could use to support the efforts of democratic countries outside the Union;

AF. whereas a growing number of European journalists are forced to travel to conflict zones without insurance as insurance companies refuse to cover their stay;

AG. whereas the Daphne Caruana Galizia Prize of the European Parliament, established in December 2019 as a tribute to Daphne Caruana Galizia, a Maltese anti-corruption investigative journalist and blogger who was killed in a car bomb attack in 2017, rewards on a yearly basis outstanding journalism that promotes or defends the core principles and values of the European Union such as human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law and human rights;

1. Underlines and insists that every human being has the right to freedom of expression, opinion, and information 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, as set out in the UN Declaration on Human Rights; recalls the essential role that journalists can play in promoting and safeguarding democratic values, human rights and fundamental freedoms; 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;

2. Recalls the fact that democracy cannot function without available and accessible trustworthy information both online and offline; stresses the importance of protecting journalists’ independence, safeguarding freedom of expression, ensuring media diversity and preserving the fundamental right of any citizen to be informed;

3. Recalls that the freedom to practise journalism without malign and deliberate restrictions is testament to the values of democracy and that allowing the unrestricted practice of journalism therefore contributes to democratic values;

4. Condemns all crimes, including physical attacks, kidnapping, torture, intimidation and hate speech, against journalists, media workers and associate personnel around the world, including in the EU; expresses its concern about the high level of impunity worldwide for these crimes and calls for those responsible to be held accountable through independent, timely and effective investigations conducted in line with international obligations and the rule of law; underlines the right of victims and their families to have access to appropriate remedies and legal counsel throughout the proceedings;
5. Strongly condemns all arbitrary detention of journalists and all provisional detention based on political criteria or on abusive law; calls for the immediate and unconditional release of journalists who are being held without proof of individual involvement in committing a crime or without charges being brought against them; calls on the relevant authorities to refrain from also treating family members of suspected journalists as potential suspects and using administrative or other sanctions against them;

6. Deplores the fact that, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 67 journalists were killed worldwide in 2022, in addition to those who were threatened or subjected to violence or arbitrary imprisonment; pays tribute to all those who lost their lives and suffered attacks in the exercise of their freedom of expression both online and offline and stands by all those who have the courage to speak up against injustice, corruption and unlawfulness; stresses that crimes against journalists and media workers should be investigated by the International Criminal Court, when falling under its jurisdiction, and calls for the EU and the Member States to provide the necessary support for the investigation;

7. Recalls the essential role played by journalists, including political and investigative journalists that expose human rights violations by collecting reliable and relevant information, scrutinising the activities of public authorities and elected officials and revealing violations of national and international law, financial and corporate crimes, war crimes and crimes against humanity, state repression, corruption, criminal networks and activities, environmental crimes and all kind of human rights abuses, which contributes to the necessary checks and balances to hold those responsible for violations, including persons in power, to account; highlights the fact that these activities put journalists at increased personal risk;

8. 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 has a negative impact on the practice of journalism, in particular when it comes to political, investigative and cross-border journalism; expresses particular concern about the situation of journalists and media organisations in countries which are considered by Reporters Without Borders to have the worst situations worldwide; regrets the widespread abuses, both online and offline, and censorship faced by journalists, including on the basis of sexual orientation, gender and gender identity in many countries;

9. 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, reprisals or harassment; is concerned about the increased restrictions and reprisals aimed at crushing public protests, which extends to suppressing any reporting of them by journalists and independent monitors;

10. Reiterates its concern about the lack of specific legal or policy frameworks protecting journalists and media workers from violence, threats and intimidation at a global scale and the need to combat impunity for the perpetrators; condemns the fact that some public figures and representatives of authorities denigrate journalists publicly, as this undermines trust in the media across society;

11. Underlines the duty of public authorities to protect freedom of expression and
12. Deplores the fact that journalists and media workers often work in precarious and deteriorating employment and security conditions, which compromises their ability to work in a safe and enabling environment; stresses that special attention should be given to young journalists and freelance journalists and recalls the duty of care that media organisations have towards the journalists and media workers they work with; stresses that adequate working conditions for journalists and media workers are crucial to fostering high-quality journalism, allowing journalists to fulfil their missions and ensuring appropriate investigation and follow-up, including the application of effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions; urges the authorities to do their utmost to prevent such violence, to ensure accountability and to eradicate impunity;

13. Calls for special attention to be paid to ensuring the continuity of the work of journalists and media professionals working in conflict zones, as very often they are financially prevented from continuing their important work as a result of conflicts; is of the opinion that journalists travelling to conflict zones should be provided with adequate insurance;

14. Underlines that journalists should receive the necessary training, particularly regarding safety and first aid, from media organisations; calls on companies, notably in the digital sector, to conduct effective and thorough due diligence to prevent or mitigate any adverse impact on freedom of expression, media pluralism and rights of journalists in non-EU countries;

15. Recalls the obligation to protect freedom of expression, including for satirists and cartoonists as they inform, promote democratic values and defend human rights and fundamental freedoms while protesting against crime, corruption and abuses of power and casting a light on and combating censorship and human rights violations;

16. Deplores the increased attempts by religious and state authorities to restrict freedom of expression and criticism under the guise of religious or blasphemy laws, especially in the case of satire or criticism in the form of journalistic or creative work and expression;

17. Highlights the importance of ensuring the safety and well-being of fact-checking journalists, who are specifically targeted because they reveal misinformation, disinformation and disseminators of propaganda and by doing so often expose facts that people have put a lot of effort into hiding or distorting; ask the Commission to develop tools to address this issue, such as a legal framework for targeted media outlets and effective means for them to operate;

18. Points out that guaranteeing the confidentiality of sources is a prerequisite for investigative journalism and an independent press and that whistle-blowers have proved to be an important source for promoting transparency and accountability; stresses, therefore, the role that whistle-blowers can play in combating corruption from state and
non-state actors and in keeping the public informed; expresses its support for the work of whistle-blowers and their publishers in exposing abuses around the world;

19. 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, in cooperation with journalist organisations, and for the European External Action Service (EEAS) to continue to report regularly to Parliament on the global state of media freedom and violations of journalists’ rights worldwide;

20. Condemns, in the strongest possible terms, any attempt to silence independent media or undermine their freedom and pluralism and to restrict the public’s access to reliable information via internet shutdowns, illegal and/or disproportionate surveillance, blocking or filtering of online content through illegitimate or indiscriminate requests to platforms for content removal or blocking communication websites and social media; warns against practices that indirectly subdue such media by means of financial patronage and condemns, in particular, attempts to control public service media; deplores the adoption by some non-EU countries of so-called foreign agent laws, which are being used to silence and repress journalism; calls on governments to effectively counter abuse and not misuse protective measures to prevent freedom of expression or enable censorship; recommends that governments allow freedom of social and political dialogue and critique; recalls that, as stated by the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, concentration of media ownership is a practice that runs counter to democracy and pluralism, as it impedes the diverse expression of the various sectors of society;

21. Denounces the growing use of surveillance equipment and spyware to monitor, intercept and censor the work of journalists; condemns the involvement of state and private actors in this illicit surveillance, which violates, among other rights, the right to privacy and the protection of journalists’ sources; calls for all allegations of unlawful surveillance of journalists to be independently investigated and prosecuted, and for the perpetrators to be held accountable; underlines the importance of providing redress to journalists who have been unlawfully targeted with spyware; calls for the strict enforcement and monitoring of the EU dual-use goods regulation so that no EU export can be made which enables authoritarian regimes to arbitrarily target or attack journalists;

22. Condemns the use of SLAPPs to silence or intimidate journalists and outlets, including by the authorities of non-EU countries against EU-based journalists and media, 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; calls for this legislation to adequately cover the external dimension of SLAPPs in order to protect EU-based journalists from abusive lawsuits initiated by authorities from non-EU countries or their proxies; asks the Commission and the EEAS, in this respect, to encourage non-EU countries, especially like-minded partners who have not yet done so, to take similar initiatives at national level and to engage on this matter at international
level; calls for the EU to provide legal support and other assistance for journalists targeted by SLAPPs and for it to work with partners to develop comprehensive guidelines for prosecutors tackling SLAPPs and provide them and judges with training on the matter; 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, and calls for effective measures to be introduced in the recently published proposals for 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 on defamation, which include guidance on ensuring proportionality of sanctions and respect for human rights;

23. 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; is of the opinion that the EU can increase its presence when it comes to protecting journalists abroad through the work of its delegations, both by working directly with journalists and through its communication strategies to ensure that they are known and accessible to journalists also in remote areas and through the support and promotion of existing international alert mechanisms for journalists in danger; calls for these protection mechanisms and tools to be strengthened with a gender-sensitive approach and an increase in funding by the EU and the Member States; highlights the need for the EEAS and the EU delegations to have adequate financial and personnel resources in this regard;

24. 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; calls, in particular, for the promotion of programmes and policies aimed at fostering media and news literacy for journalists and media actors; considers that strengthening journalism is essential to prevent disinformation, polarisation and violence and can strengthen democracies by enabling political participation; emphasises that it is essential that journalists are guaranteed the necessary conditions to contribute to an open, free and fair public debate, which is a key aspect of helping society counter disinformation, information manipulation and interference; 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;

25. Insists on enhancing collaboration between online platforms, governments and law

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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; highlights the need to implement measures to protect journalists from online and gender-based violence on social media and other digital platforms; calls on platforms to promptly remove online comments or reactions that harass journalists, incite violence and hatred or undermine the safety of journalists; urges the authorities outside the EU to investigate and prosecute cases of online harassment and abuse so as to hold those responsible accountable;

26. Highlights that in recent years hate speech and discrimination in the media, both online and offline, as well as cyber-violence against journalists, have become increasingly widespread, thus threatening media freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of information and media pluralism; recalls that online hate speech can incite offline violence and online harassment; emphasises that female journalists in particular also face sexual harassment and sexual violence and are much more likely to experience online harassment than their male colleagues; calls for the EU and Member States to exert political and diplomatic pressure to change the policies and practices of non-EU countries that discourage or even ban women from pursuing carriers in journalism;

27. Calls on the EU delegations and EU Member States’ diplomatic missions to apply the EU human rights guidelines on freedom of expression online and offline in a robust, uniform and consistent manner as they pertain to protecting journalists and defending press freedom; strongly encourages the EEAS, its delegations and Member States to undertake all efforts to promote, harness and share examples of good practices, especially with EU officials prior to assignments outside the EU; encourages the EU delegations in non-EU countries to engage in information campaigns to raise awareness of the dangers of fake news and to provide the general public with tools to identify them and to seek trustworthy sources of information;

28. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS to always weigh the option of voiced public action against silent diplomacy in the interest of human rights; highlights the importance of increasing the understanding of civil society of the EU delegations’ modus operandi when it comes to the practice of journalism and freedom of speech and expression; encourages the EU delegations, in this regard, to make more public statements, to the extent possible, both pre-emptively and in response to serious violations of or restrictions on the right to the freedom of opinion and expression in the world, notably in cases of attacks and detention of journalists in non-EU countries;

29. Calls on the EU Special Representative for Human Rights to make it one of his highest priorities to ensure the safety of journalists, media workers and associated personnel in their dealings with the authorities of non-EU countries; believes that more could be done in this regard; firmly insists that the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy should give more attention to specific cases of illegitimate arrests and prosecutions of journalists and the restriction of their rights, and the need to avoid inaction in protecting journalists whose lives are in immediate danger;

30. Calls on the EEAS to establish an emergency response plan to be followed by the EU delegations with a range of protective tools, such as the issuing of statements, reacting to public smear campaigns, 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 concerns about press freedom, facilitating rest and respite opportunities for at-risk or traumatised journalists, providing support for temporary relocation and/or evacuation, providing physical accompaniment in extreme situations, and seeking to advocate for journalists and build the capacity of local law enforcement, judicial and governmental authorities to protect them, including by pushing for full accountability for abuses of press freedom; calls for particular attention to be paid to journalists being held hostage and to the protection of family members of targeted journalists; calls on the Commission and the EEAS to support initiatives which aim to warn media workers of immediate threats in non-EU countries in a targeted and rapid manner and to develop tailor-made guidelines for journalists; reminds the Member States that humanitarian visas can be used as a safety and protection mechanism for journalists in danger; stresses the importance of facilitating and supporting at-risk journalists, including through a resettlement process and supporting their work in exile and to continue to support journalists fleeing state-sponsored censorship and propaganda campaigns by helping them to change territory and 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;

31. Underlines the importance of promoting training and awareness-raising actions on the prevention of violence against journalists in the exercise of their work at all levels of society and within governments; 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 if and when digital security is breached in communications, and calls for the psychological impacts of online harassment of journalists to be addressed; highlights the importance of ensuring that EU support for media development is not limited to training journalists and media workers but also extends to the acquisition of professional technical equipment, a request that is regularly voiced by independent journalists outside the EU;

32. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS to also further strengthen their capacity-building support by assisting non-EU countries in enacting legal frameworks that favour media pluralism, the protection of journalists, freedom of expression and freedom of information online and offline, and in ensuring that all attacks against journalists are investigated and prosecuted and that adequate protection mechanisms are put in place; to that end, calls for EU support to promote the continuous development of competences and skills in all professions relevant to the protection of journalists and other media professionals in partner countries, in particular for law enforcement authorities, judges and prosecutors, as well as all relevant authorities involved in digital safety;

33. Calls on the EEAS to encourage exchange of views between law enforcement forces and journalists to allow for uninhibited reporting and other media activities covering protests or demonstrations in countries with EU delegations and to establish a common understanding of the rights of journalists;

34. Underlines the need for enhanced multilateral engagement and coordination on the safety and effective protection of journalists, media workers and associated personnel, with a view to establishing a comprehensive policy approach that encompasses the pillars of prevention, protection and prosecution; stresses that the EU must lead by
example and uphold and step up its commitment for the protection of journalists and freedom of opinion and expression and to combat impunity for crimes against journalists, media workers and associated personnel as one of its main priorities, and, to this end, lead a pact and work in alliance with other democracies and like-minded partners;

35. Calls on EU delegations, EU Member State diplomatic missions and like-minded partners to engage in proactive outreach to and support for journalist and independent media outlets in non-EU countries with a view to supporting their work and working conditions, to make regular assessments of the press freedom environment in each respective 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 at-risk journalists and independent media; recommends the establishment of a point of contact for journalists to seek protection and support and to monitor violence;

36. Calls on the Council and the EEAS to impose targeted sanctions under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions (the EU Magnitsky Act) against individuals and entities responsible for human rights violations against journalists and media workers;

37. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote sustainable measures in all their agreements and partnerships with non-EU countries aimed at protecting, financing and supporting media pluralism and independent journalism; recalls, to that end, the centrality of the human rights clause in the EU's bilateral agreements and asks for particular attention to be given to serious violations of the rights of journalists in the activation and application of this clause; calls 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);

38. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS to ensure that EU funding programmes are known and accessible to local civil society organisations active on journalist safety and freedom of expression and, when appropriate, to encourage and support them in applying such programmes and in playing 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 make it less bureaucratic;

39. Recalls that advances in media freedom and freedom of expression are a crucial part of the EU's accession process; recalls that candidate countries with solid and competitive media environments are more prone to move swiftly in EU accession negotiations; in this respect, welcomes the support channelled through the European Endowment for Democracy but believes more action needs to be taken to support independent journalism in areas influenced by malign foreign actors; reiterates its call, therefore, to establish a specific European Democratic Media Fund to support independent journalism in enlargement and European neighbourhood and candidate countries;

40. Calls for an adequate and sustainable legal framework establishing a free information space protection mechanism based on the reciprocity of openness requirements;
believes that this system for the protection of democratic information spaces should be built on two pillars: 1) equal treatment – for all audio-visual outlets broadcasting in the EU; 2) reciprocity – openness of public space for EU broadcasters in non-EU countries;

41. 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\(^1\) and the 2021 Commission recommendation on the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists;

42. Strongly encourages increasing support for funding programmes, statements and public events aimed at enhancing monitoring and protection mechanisms at UN level and those of regional human rights mechanisms, including the Inter-American Court on Human Rights, in consultation with journalists and civil society organisations supporting journalists; welcomes the work of the UN special procedures in addressing threats against journalists, including the recommendation of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression to create an international task force on the prevention, investigation and prosecution of attacks on journalists and to actively consider the possibility of having a dedicated UN Special Representative for the Protection of Journalists Worldwide, among other measures;

43. Welcomes the work of the Partnership on Information and Democracy, which brings together 50 states from around the world and which has called for the establishment of democratic safeguards in the communication and information space and recognised the right to reliable information; supports the implementation of the recommendations of the Partnership on Information and Democracy;

44. 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.

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\(^1\) 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.