Resolution on protection of investigative journalists in Europe: the case of Slovak journalist Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová

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The European Parliament adopted by 573 votes to 27 with 47 abstentions, a resolution on the protection of investigative journalists in Europe: the case of Slovak journalist Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová.

The resolution was tabled by the EPP, ALDE, S&D, ECR and Greens/EFA groups.

Parliament strongly **condemned the murder of Slovak investigative journalist** Jan Kuciak and his partner Martina Kušnírová in February 2018, and was appalled by the fact that this is the second fatal attack on a journalist in the EU in the past six months, after journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia was assassinated in Malta on 16 October 2017. It noted that Jan Kuciak specialised in investigating large-scale tax evasion scandals, tax fraud, corruption and money laundering. His last article, published posthumously, explored the **potential extortion of EU agricultural subsidies** by the Italian mafia group ‘Ndrangheta, which may have also involved government officials close to high-level politicians.

Members called on the Slovak authorities to deploy all necessary resources to ensure a full, thorough and independent **investigation** into the murders, strongly recommending the creation of a joint investigation team to be co-led by Europol.

Acknowledging the crucial role that investigative journalists can play as watchdogs for democracy and the rule of law, Parliament noted that the highest level of protection of investigative journalists and whistle-blowers is in the vital interests of society as a whole. It called on the Commission to:

- propose an effective, comprehensive and **horizontal EU directive** on the protection of whistle-blowers, by fully endorsing the Council of Europe’s recommendations and Parliament’s resolutions of 14 February 2017 and 24 October 2017;
- present legislative or non-legislative **proposals for the protection of journalists** in the EU who are regularly subject to lawsuits intended to censor their work, including pan-European anti-SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation);
- create a **permanent financial support scheme** including a dedicated budget, by reallocating existing resources in support of independent investigative journalism;
- monitor and address challenges to **media freedom and pluralism** across the EU, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity and to keep Parliament closely informed of actions taken;
- resume its annual **anti-corruption monitoring** in all Member States without delay, and develop a system of strict indicators and uniform criteria to measure the level of corruption in Member States.

Members condemned insulting comments made by some EU politicians towards journalists and insisted that all EU states must protect the personal safety and livelihoods of investigative journalists and whistle-blowers.

Parliament’s Conference of Presidents was asked to present a proposal on how Parliament could honour the work of Daphne Caruana Galizia and Ján Kuciak, and to consider renaming **Parliament’s traineeship for journalists** after Ján Kuciak.

The resolution noted the allegations of corruption, misuse of EU funds, abuse of power and conflicts of interest in Slovakia, as well as the **possible involvement of organised crime** in the murder. It also noted that the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and its Committee on Budgetary Control following their fact-finding mission to Slovakia, stated that the selection of top prosecutors is believed to be highly politicised and that there have been a number of allegations of corruption against top officials which did not lead to a proper investigation.

It urged the Slovak authorities to:

- ensure the **protection** of investigative journalists from any form of intimidation, defamation charges, threats or physical attacks;
- **investigate all alleged irregularities and frauds,** including VAT carousel frauds and those relating to the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFDR) and other structural funds, in cooperation with the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF);
- ensure a thorough investigation of the f**indings of the Slovakia's Supreme Audit Office,** which, in its exercise covering all EU fund managing and intermediate authorities, found the role of the the Slovak Agriculture Paying Agency (APA) problematic and has issued three critical reports on the APA;
- strengthen the **impartiality of law enforcement** and to address the key findings and recommendations of the report on Parliament's fact-finding mission.

Lastly, Parliament called on the Council to work with participating Member States in setting up the **European Public Prosecutor's Office** as soon as possible, in the interests of coordinated action against fraud in the EU and other crimes affecting the Union's financial interests.