Resolution on violations of media freedom and the safety of journalists in Georgia

2022/2702(RSP) - 09/06/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on violations of media freedom and the safety of journalists in Georgia.

The text adopted in plenary was tabled by the EPP, S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA and ECR groups.

The media environment in Georgia, after several years of improvement, has rapidly deteriorated over the past few years and an unprecedentedly high number of violent physical attacks against journalists have occurred since the mass violence against the Tbilisi Pride march on 5 July 2021, leading to the significant downgrading of Georgia in the World Press Freedom Index.

Parliament expressed its concern over the significant deterioration of the media situation and the safety of journalists in Georgia in recent years, despite Georgia's solid legal framework for guaranteeing freedom of expression and freedom of the media.

It called on the Georgian authorities to:

- thoroughly investigate any case of violence and prosecute those responsible for inciting and carrying out violent attacks against journalists and other media workers, which would thereby remedy the impression of impunity for such crimes;

- restrict the use of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) that target human rights defenders and media representatives, which serve to inhibit their critical and independent work;

- ensure media freedom, which should entail editorial independence, transparent media ownership and pluralistic, impartial and non-discriminatory coverage of political views in programming by private and, in particular, public broadcasters, especially during electoral campaigns;

- guarantee unhindered access to information that is supposed to be publicly available and to ensure the safety, protection and empowerment of journalists and other media professionals;

- conduct effective investigations into the wiretapping scandal and to put in place proper mechanisms for democratic oversight of surveillance and data collection by state institutions;

- release former president Mikhail Saakashvili from prison on humanitarian grounds in order to allow him to undergo proper medical treatment abroad;

- refrain from interfering in media freedom or pursuing politically motivated judicial cases against media owners or representatives;

- develop media literacy education programmes for its citizens, take active steps to prevent disinformation campaigns by foreign or domestic actors against the country.

Parliament condemned the sentencing of Nika Gvaramia, the director of the main pro-opposition TV channel Mtavari, on 16 May 2022, which has highlighted the persistent mistrust in Georgia's judiciary system. Moreover, it expressed concern over the destructive role played by the sole oligarch, Bidzina

Ivanishvili, in Georgia's politics and economy, and the level of control he exerts over the government and its decisions, including those on the politically motivated persecution of journalists and political opponents. Members called on the Council to consider imposing personal sanctions on Ivanishvili for his role in the deterioration of the political process in Georgia.

Lastly, the resolution called on the Georgian authorities should uphold the highest standards of democracy, rule of law and fundamental freedoms, such as media freedom. If Georgia fulfils these conditions, Parliament will call on the EU institutions to work towards granting EU candidate status to Georgia.