The protection of journalists around the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter

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The European Parliament adopted by 583 votes to 7, with 48 abstentions, a resolution on the protection of journalists worldwide and EU policy in this area.

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.

According to figures published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), 1 668 journalists were murdered worldwide in connection with their work between 2003 and 2022. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 67 journalists were killed worldwide in 2022.

Protecting journalists against violence and intimidation

Recalling the essential role that journalists can play in promoting and safeguarding democratic values, human rights and fundamental freedoms, Parliament stressed the need to protect journalists from all types of violence. It stressed the importance of **protecting the independence of journalists**, safeguarding freedom of expression, ensuring media diversity and preserving the fundamental right of every citizen to be informed.

Members condemned all crimes, including physical attacks, kidnappings, torture, intimidation and hate speech, committed against journalists and media professionals worldwide, including within the EU. They also condemned all arbitrary detentions of journalists as well as all pre-trial detentions based on political motives or abusive laws.

Parliament recalled the essential role played by journalists, particularly **political journalists and investigative reporters**. It reaffirmed its concern about the state of media freedom in the world, given the abuses and attacks suffered by journalists and media professionals in many countries.

Expressing concern about the lack of specific policy or legal frameworks to protect journalists from violence and threats worldwide, Members called on countries around the world to **adopt legislation and measures** to create a legal environment to prevent and prosecute acts of repression against journalists and to ensure proper investigation and follow-up, including effective, proportionate and dissuasive **sanctions**. They called on the authorities to do their utmost to ensure that those responsible are held to account and to put an end to impunity.

Parliament deplored the fact that journalists and media professionals often work in **precarious and deteriorating employment and security conditions**. It called on the authorities to draw up national action plans, in close cooperation with journalists' organisations, to improve the working conditions of journalists. Journalists travelling to conflict zones should be adequately insured.

Recalling the obligation to **protect freedom of expression**, including for satirists and press cartoonists, Members deplored the increasing attempts by religious and state authorities to restrict freedom of expression and criticism by invoking religious or blasphemy laws. They also expressed their support for the work of **whistleblowers** and their editors, who expose abuses around the world.

Media independence, strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs)

The report condemned, 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. In particular, Members condemned attempts to control public service media and deplored the adoption by some non-EU countries of so-called foreign agent laws. They called on governments to effectively counter abuse and not misuse protective measures to prevent freedom of expression or enable censorship. They also condemned the growing use of surveillance equipment and spyware to monitor, intercept and censor the work of journalists.

The report condemned the **use of SLAPPs** and called for the Commission's proposal for a directive against SLAPPs against journalists in the EU to cover the external dimension of SLAPPs, in order to protect journalists based in the EU from abusive prosecutions by authorities in non-EU countries. It called for the EU to provide **legal support and other assistance** for journalists targeted by SLAPPs and to step up its action to protect journalists abroad through the activities of its delegations.

Members also made the following recommendations:

- the EU should encourage the use of **media education** to improve citizens' and societies' understanding of the societal role played by journalism and promote exchange programmes for journalists. Members reiterated their call for media literacy to be integrated into formal and informal settings, including school curricula;

- measures should be implemented to protect journalists from online and gender-based violence on social media and other digital platforms. Members stressed that women journalists are much more likely to be victims of online harassment than their male colleagues;

- EU delegations should make more **public statements**, either preventively or in response to serious violations or restrictions of the right to freedom of opinion and expression around the world, including attacks on journalists or their detention in countries outside the EU;

- the EU Special Representative for Human Rights should make the safety of journalists, media professionals and associated staff one of his main priorities in his relations with the authorities of third countries;

- the EEAS should: (i) put in place an emergency response plan to be implemented by EU delegations, based on a range of protective measures; (ii) develop a structured approach to support journalists facing digital threats;

- EU delegations, diplomatic missions of EU Member States and like-minded partners should take initiatives to communicate with and support journalists and independent media in countries outside the EU in order to facilitate their work and working conditions.

The Council is invited to impose targeted sanctions under the EU's global human rights sanctions regime ('EU Magnitsky Act') on individuals and entities committing human rights violations against journalists and media professionals.

Lastly, the Commission and Member States are invited to (i) promote sustainable measures to protect, fund and support media pluralism and independent journalism in all their agreements and partnerships with third countries; (ii) ensure that EU funding programmes are known and accessible to local civil society organisations working for the safety of journalists and their freedom of expression.