[NL] New government measures to protect media freedom and safety

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On 29 June 2022, the State Secretary for Culture and Media (*Staatssecretaris Cultuur en Media*) and Minister for Justice and Security (*Minister van Justitie en Veiligheid*) announced a series of new measures to protect press freedom and safety in the Netherlands. The new measures are contained in a Letter to Parliament, and follow the publication of three reports on press freedom and safety of journalists in the Netherlands by Reporters Without Borders, Media Freedom Rapid Response, and the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights (*College voor de Rechten van de Mens*), which are referenced in the Letter. The Letter first notes that threats against journalists, cameramen, photographers and other media professionals have increased in recent years in the Netherlands, and the rapid increase in threats and intimidation of journalists is "part of a broader and worrying social development of lack of trust and polarisation in society". This is putting pressure on press freedom in the Netherlands, and there is a need to "further strengthen press freedom and safety". As such, the Letter sets out new government actions to further strengthen press freedom and safety.

First, the government will extend financial support to the PersVeilig initiative until at least 2024. PersVeilig is a joint initiative of the Dutch Association of Journalists, the Dutch Association of Editors in Chief, the Police and the Public Prosecution Service, and aims to strengthen the position of journalists against violence and aggression, including for reporting threats, and to provide training; and has been in existence since November 2019. Further, for freelance journalists, the government announced that the Freelancers Flexible Protection Package will run until at least 2023, where freelancers can be provided with protective equipment for both work and home environments in the event of a threat or risk.

Second, in terms of media literacy, the State Secretary and the Dutch Media Literacy Network (*Netwerk Mediawijsheid*) will develop an approach to increase citizens' awareness of the role of journalism, to ensure people understand the watchdog role journalism fulfills and that a democracy cannot exist without a free, critical and independent press. In this regard, programmes will include awareness-raising, public campaigns and public debate on this theme.

Third, the government wants to ensure a properly functioning system to combat online intimidation of journalists. The State Secretary for Culture and Media, and

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the State Secretary of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, will organise a roundtable with the Dutch Association of Journalists (NVJ), the Association of Editors in Chief, the Police, the Public Prosecution Service, and relevant social media platforms, to discuss which interventions can be effective here. One option may be to establish a so-called “trusted flaggers” that can report harassment to online platforms, so that they are dealt with in a timely manner and with priority, especially with the EU’s Digital Services Act, coming into force in 2024.

Finally, research will be conducted into specific aspects and target groups of harassment against journalists, such as online intimidation, aggression against female journalists and against journalists with a non-Western background; with the results providing insight for better policy.

Staatssecretaris Cultuur en Media, “Extra maatregelen voor meer persveiligheid”, 29 juni 2022

https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/regering/bewindspersonen/gunay-uslu/nieuws/2022/06/29/extra-maatregelen-voor-meer-persveiligheid

State Secretary for Culture and Media, Extra measures for additional press safety”, 29 June 2022

Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, Plan van aanpak persvrijheid en persveiligheid, 29 juni 2022

https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/regering/bewindspersonen/gunay-uslu/documenten/kamerstukken/2022/06/29/plan-van-aanpak-persvrijheid-en-persveiligheid

Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Plan for press freedom and press safety, 29 June 2022

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