The safety of journalists platform publishes its 2023 report

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The safety of journalists platform is an internet-based platform developed in 2015 by the Council of Europe in cooperation with partner organisations. The platform gives member states and organisations of journalists the opportunity to report and exchange on the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists. It is more particularly used to alert the Council of Europe to serious threats or attacks on media freedom (such as violence against journalists), thereby allowing it to take proper and timely action.

On 7th March 2023, the platform published its annual report written by the 15 partner organisations, composed of press freedom NGOs and journalists' associations. The 2023 report, entitled "War in Europe and the Fight for the Right to Report", takes stock of key areas of law, policy and practices affecting media freedom and safety of journalists in Europe and identifies actions required to improve effective protection of journalists.

Among the issues covered, the report examines the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on press freedom. Following the invasion of Ukraine, Russia accelerated the adoption of two laws criminalising independent war reporting, and protesting the war (Federal Law No. 32-FZ and Federal Law No. 31-FZ). In September 2022, dozens of journalists were harassed by the police while reporting on protests following the announcement of a 'partial mobilisation'. In Ukraine, at least twelve media workers were killed in 2022 while covering Russia's invasion and 21 others were injured. On 29th December 2022, the Ukrainian President signed a new media bill into law.

Although Belarus was not yet covered by the platform in 2022, the report also contains a chapter on the country, given the crackdown on media freedom it is facing. As of 2023, the partner organisations will also monitor the state of press freedoms and attacks against journalists in Belarus.

The report goes into detail about attacks, harassment, and intimidation campaigns. In 2022, the platform recorded 13 journalists killed in Europe, the highest death toll among journalists on the continent since its launch in 2015. Only one of these did not occur in relation to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but in Türkiye. Several assassination attempts of journalists were foiled and serious

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security threats were reported. The platform recorded 74 alerts of violent attacks at public events, especially protests and rallies. There were 18 alerts concerning assaults on journalists and other media representatives by members of the public, while nine alerts related to heavy-handed actions by security forces. Nine alerts were also submitted to denounce actions not related to the coverage of public matters and events, resulting in serious injury. Finally, eight cases of criminal arson attacks were recorded which targeted the property of journalists and media organisations, particularly broadcast premises and offices.

As for harassment and intimidation, the highest number of cases were recorded in Russia, Serbia, Italy, Poland, Croatia and Greece. According to the report, fighting fake news is increasingly used as a pretext to initiate legal proceedings against journalists, often in the form of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs).

The report also looks at detention, arrests and criminal prosecution cases and indicates that, as of 31 December 2022, there were a total of 127 imprisoned journalists in Europe. In Belarus, 32 journalists and media

workers were in prison at the end of 2022.

Other concerns for media freedom addressed in the report include restrictive legislation, public service media, media capture, surveillance and spyware.

Overall, the report addresses recommendations to the Council of Europe, the member states of the Council of Europe and the institutions of the European Union.

2023 Parner's report, "War in Europe and the Fight for the Right to Report"

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