Media-Democracy Nexus in the European Space

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Overview of media ecosystem

Media freedom and the safety of journalists in Albania are facing ongoing challenges, with a significant impact on the ability of journalists to work independently, without fear of retribution, intimidation, pressures, and harassment. Despite constitutional guarantees of media freedom and freedom of expression, structural challenges continue to impede the ability of the media to operate freely and independently.

Current situation: Safety of journalists

The Safe Journalists Annual Report on Indicators of Media Freedom and Safety of Journalists in Albania assesses that despite general awareness, law enforcement agencies are not fully equipped with the knowledge, capacities, and resources to investigate attacks and violence fully, comprehensively and objectively against journalists. Investigations are often slow, with a tremendous length undermining their efficiency, with limited transparency on the investigation process due to the secrecy of the investigation. The lack of a special legal protection in the criminal code for victims, media workers, who are hit or threatened because of their duty, seems to create comfort zone for the authorities not to investigate the motives of these crimes, which also brings their impunity Albania's legislation does not provide a comprehensive definition of harassment, including online harassment, and state authorities have limited knowledge, competences, resources, and procedures on the protection of journalists from online harassment.

EU integration and safety of journalists

The European Screening Report on Albania for Cluster 1 – Fundamentals also assesses that Albania's legislation reflects certain provisions of the EU and International recommendations/instruments regarding safety of the journalists. However, its current legal framework has shortcomings, particularly in regards to guaranteeing specific personal protection to journalists and other media professionals, whose safety is under risk of physical attack linked to their work. Albania's legislation also does not contain provisions on journalists' protection from cyber-attacks and journalists' protection during protests and demonstrations.

The European Screening Report on Albania for Cluster 1 – Fundamentals recommends that "The Albania needs to take measures to protect the safety of journalists and

media workers against intimidation, threats and attacks and demonstrate full and effective investigation of past instances of violence".

It is precisely in this moment where it is expected for Albania to open the negotiations with EU for Cluster 1 – Fundamentals, that media freedom organisations are pushing for increased protection of journalists at risk and strengthening an enabling environment for quality, independent and professional journalism.

Recommendations

  • Criminal Code shall be revised in order to provide special legal protection for media workers, who are hit or threatened because of their duty.

  • Ensure that law enforcement agencies are adequately and systematically trained to investigate cases of media blackmailing and have the resources necessary to conduct thorough and impartial investigations.

  • Provide legal and financial support to whistleblowers who are targeted for retaliation by their employers or other powerful actors within the media industry.

  • Ensure a zero tolerance policy for intimidation and attacks against journalists, as well as for threats against the media, including in political discourse.

  • Ensure protection and safe space for journalists.

  • Create proper and reliable mechanisms in the relevant institutions for collecting and publish of regular and unified data on journalists' safety, working conditions, and other related issues.

  • Development of special curricula for the safety of journalists, as part of the initial and ongoing training that the School of Magistrates must carry out with judges and prosecutors, when cooperation with international and local organizations for journalism issues is encouraged.

  • Tackle the issue of digital safety of journalists and increase public institutions' capacities to address digital safety issues for journalists and media professionals.