

## Media freedom on the wane in Europe, report says

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News

The environment for media freedom has worsened significantly in Europe, according to a damning new report published on Wednesday.



Italian journalists demonstrate in Rome | **Photo Credit: Press Association**

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The report “Democracy at Risk: threats and attacks against media freedom in Europe” assesses the situation of media freedom in Europe based on the 140 serious media freedom violations reported in 2018.

The report was published by Council of Europe’s Platform which was set up to promote the protection of journalism around the world.

According to the report, the number of attacks on journalists has grown continuously.

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The number of threats reported, including death threats, doubled last year and there has been no progress in a number of long-standing cases of impunity for murder of journalists.

In addition, journalists continue to be arbitrarily detained while a number of new legislative initiatives have weakened media freedom, it is claimed.

The report comes after Parliament’s president Antonio Tajani this week opened a plaque at the Parliament in Strasbourg in memory of murdered journalists.

In a meeting in Strasbourg on Tuesday, the report was presented to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Thorbjorn Jagland, who said that “strong and concerted political action” from Member States is needed to reverse the trend of “eroding conditions for media freedom and to improve protections for journalists.”

“Freedom of expression is crucial for the realisation of all other human rights and it deserves the highest attention of our Member States” **Thorbjorn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe**

“Freedom of expression is crucial for the realisation of all other human rights and it deserves the highest attention of our Member States. The report can serve as a basis for dialogue with the member states on the ways to improve the media freedom environment,” Jagland said.

The Council of Europe Platform was set up by the Council of Europe in 2015, in co-operation with prominent international NGOs active in the field of the freedom of expression and associations of journalists.

Based on the group’s 140 alerts to the platform in 2018, the report says that impunity routinely protects those responsible for violent crimes who deliberately target journalists for their work; legal protections have been progressively weakened and denied, and the space for the press to hold government authorities and the powerful to account has been diminished.

## ITALY: A CAUSE FOR CONCERN

The report also highlights a number of specific issues of concern, including the situation in Italy, the state which saw the sharpest increase in the number of media freedom alerts reported in 2018, as well as Hungary, in light of the very high concentration of media in the hands of pro-government oligarchs.

Concern is raised also about Turkey which, says the report, remains the world's biggest jailer of journalists, and the Russian Federation "where state actions and policies continue to severely restrict the space for free expression."

It also assesses disturbing new trends, including impunity for journalists' murders inside the European Union as well as elsewhere, attacks on freelance journalists and efforts to undermine the independence of public service media, including in countries once considered "safe harbours", such as Denmark, Luxembourg and Switzerland.

The 12 platform partners are the European Federation of Journalists, the International Federation of Journalists, the Association of European Journalists, Article 19, Reporters without Borders, the Committee to Protect Journalists, Index on Censorship, the International Press Institute, the International News Safety Institute, Rory Peck Trust, the European Broadcasting Union and PEN International.

Meanwhile, GUE/NGL will run its second annual Award for 'Journalists, Whistleblowers and Defenders of the Right to Information'.

The award was established in 2018 in honour of the assassinated Maltese journalist, Daphne Caruana Galizia, and last year it was jointly awarded to the murdered Slovak journalist, Ján Kuciak and LuxLeaks whistleblower, Raphaël Halet.

This year's award will again honour individuals or groups who have been intimidated and/or persecuted for uncovering the truth and exposing it to the public.

A jury of journalists, whistleblowers and GUE/NGL MEPs will deliberate over the nominations and announce the shortlist on 15 March. The awards ceremony will take place the following day.

## About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine

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