



AN INCREASE OF VERIFIED REPORTS INDICATES A STARK DETERIORATION OF PRESS FREEDOM

Pressure on journalists in Europe increased substantially during the first quarter of 2016, reports submitted to Index on Censorship's Mapping Media Freedom platform show.

Between 1 January and 31 March 2016, Mapping Media Freedom's network of 19 correspondents and other journalists submitted a total of 301 violations of press freedom to the database, a 30 per cent rise over the fourth quarter of 2015.

During the first three months of 2016: Four journalists were killed; 43 incidents of physical assault were confirmed; and there were 87 verified reports of intimidation, which includes psychological abuse, sexual harassment, trolling/cyberbullying and defamation. Media professionals were detained in 27 incidents; 37 criminal charges and civil lawsuits were filed; and media professionals were blocked from covering a story in 62 verified incidents.

"Conflict in **TURKEY** and eastern **UKRAINE** along with the misuse of broad range of legislation—from limiting public broadcasters to prosecuting journalists as terrorists—have had a negative effect on press freedom across the continent," Hannah Machlin, Mapping Media Freedom project officer, said.

MAPPING MEDIA FREEDOM has recorded more than 1,600 violations since the project began in May 2014. From 1 January to 31 March 2016, threats to media freedom have included:

JOURNALISTS KILLED:  4

PHYSICAL ASSAULTS:  43

ARRESTS/DETENTION:  27

INTIMIDATION:  87

LEGAL MEASURES:  22

Incidents can appear in more than one category. Source: mappingmediafreedom.org

Three journalists were killed in **TURKEY** while reporting on the conflict in the country. The body of Rohat Aktas, an editor for the Kurdish-language daily Azadiya Wela, was identified among others in a basement in Cizre—a month after he was shot while covering efforts to help those wounded during clashes between Kurdish separatists and Turkish forces. TV Journalist Gülsen Yıldız was killed during an attack on a convoy of military vehicles in Ankara. Journalist Mohammed Zahir al-Shergat died as a result of gunshot wounds during an attack in Gaziantep, for which IS later claimed responsibility.

In **RUSSIA**, prominent culture journalist Dmitiri Tsilikin died from stab wounds in his St. Petersburg home. Information has recently surfaced that shows the perpetrator planned to blackmail Tsilikin about his concealed homosexuality but allegedly killed him after an argument.

The platform, established in 2014 to document threats to media freedom across Europe and neighbouring countries, has documented 43 assaults against journalists. More than half of these incidents occurred in **UKRAINE, ITALY** and **RUSSIA**. Twelve assaults took place in **UKRAINE** and included a member of parliament breaking the arm of the editor-in-chief for local newspaper Nova Kakhovka. Nine incidents occurred in **ITALY** ranging from unknown assailants beating up journalists in reprisal for their work to violent football fans unhappy with coverage. Six assaults occurred in **RUSSIA**, including an attack on six journalists on a tour organised by activists from the Committee for the Prevention of Torture in the Caucasus republic of Ingushetia. The first quarter also saw no let up of journalists facing antagonism in covering protests organised by far-right groups, with violent incidents recorded in the **NETHERLANDS, LATVIA, GERMANY** and **GREECE**.

“The last outcomes of the platform show clearly that media freedom is still declining in Europe. In the name of security, after the terrorist attacks, many governments are adopting laws that can have a negative impact on press freedom. It’s our duty to raise awareness on this worrying trend”, Mogens Blicher Bjerregård, president of the European Federation of Journalists, a partner in the project, said.

Journalists were arrested and detained at least 27 times for doing their job. Over half of the arrests (15) occurred in **TURKEY** when journalists were reporting on violence or protests in the country. The data indicates a pattern where arrests are launched on terror charges or taking place during anti-terror operations.

The platform has documented a steep rise of intimidation compared to the last quarter of 2015. Journalists investigating corruption scandals have been subjected to intimidating measures. In **SPAIN**,

a politician repeatedly asked a journalist to reveal corruption sources. In **SERBIA**, investigative portal, The Crime and Corruption Reporting Network (KRIK), was monitored and then victim to a smear campaign by the pro-government tabloid, Informer. Twenty-seven incidents occurred in **ITALY**, where a wide range of tactics were used to intimidate journalists, originating from local politicians, crime syndicates and football fans.

A total of 37 criminal charges and civil lawsuits were reported to the map. Eight of the cases occurred in **BELARUS** where seven of which were repeated charges brought against two journalists working for Polish channel, Belstat TV. Two civil lawsuits were brought against freelance journalist Larysa Schyrakova for working for a foreign media outlet (Art. 22.9 of Belarusian Code on Administrative Offence); Kastus Zhukouski was charged six times for the same charges.

MAPPING MEDIA FREEDOM has recorded more than 1,600 violations since the project began in May 2014. From 1 January to 31 March 2016, threats to media freedom have included:

BLOCKED ACCESS:  62

CRIMINAL CHARGES/CIVIL LAWSUITS:  37

LOSS OF EMPLOYMENT:  16 INCIDENTS

ATTACKS TO PROPERTY:  27

PIECES OF WORK CENSORED/ALTERED:  30

Incidents can appear in more than one category. Source: mappingmediafreedom.org

“These developments have a chilling effect on investigative journalism and cannot be justified on the grounds of national security.”

DUNJA MIJATOVIĆ, OSCE representative on freedom of the media

Sixteen incidents of employment loss were reported to the map, totalling to more than 170 jobs. In **POLAND**, 118 jobs were lost at public broadcasters. Eighty journalists were dismissed, had their contracts invalidated or were forced to transfer onto less significant post in different programmes or departments, according to reports from local journalists unions and the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights. The job loss follows legislation passed on 30 December 2015 which gave a government minister exclusive powers to appoint and dismiss all members of the Supervisory and Management Boards of public channels.

A broad range of laws were introduced over the fourth quarter of 2015 that infringe on journalists doing their job. The Hungarian parliament approved an amendment which restricts access to public information about state-run services and the interior ministry put forth legislation that will criminalise the use of encrypted services as a part of a new anti-

terrorism package, though the country’s constitutional court later ruled the measures unconstitutional. In **ROMANIA**, a law passed that would force those found guilty of defamation to pay a fine up to 100,000 RON (approximately €22,000). The French assembly also put forth plans to increase the role of the CSA, the French broadcast watchdog. Short term changes occurred in **TURKEY** where temporary broadcast bans were implemented three times following court orders after explosions in Istanbul and Ankara.

“Governments are applying criminal and national security laws to bypass protections traditionally offered to journalists by conducting searches of editorial offices and journalists’ home to seize unpublished material stored on digital devices. These developments have a chilling effect on investigative journalism and cannot be justified on the grounds of national security,” Dunja Mijatović, OSCE representative on freedom of the media, said.



The map has documented 62 incidents where journalists were prevented from reporting about an event during the first quarter.

TOTAL REPORTS: 301



Journalists have been hindered from reporting via blacklists in **HUNGARY** and travel bans and visa denials in **AZERBAIJAN, RUSSIA, BELARUS** and **TURKEY**. Journalists have been barred from covering public gatherings: Media workers were denied access to meetings on housing refugees twice in the **NETHERLANDS**. In **POLAND**, two different laws were passed that limit journalists' access to reporting in parliamentary buildings.

Each report is fact checked with local sources before becoming available on the interactive map. The platform—a joint undertaking with the European Federation of Journalists and Reporters Without Borders and partially funded by the European Commission—covers 40 countries, including all EU member states, plus **ALBANIA, BELARUS, BOSNIA, ICELAND, KOSOVO, MACEDONIA, MONTENEGRO, NORWAY, RUSSIA, SERBIA, TURKEY, UKRAINE** and **AZERBAIJAN**. In September 2015 the platform expanded to monitor **RUSSIA, UKRAINE** and **BELARUS** and in February 2016 into **AZERBAIJAN**. Since launching in May 2014, the map has recorded over 1,600 violations of media freedom.

Countries with the most verified incidents reported to mappingmediafreedom.org between 1 January and 31 March 2016. Incidents can be labeled by more than one category.

CASE STUDIES



TURKEY

INDEPENDENT ZAMAN NEWSPAPER SEIZED BY AUTHORITIES

On 4 March 2016 an Istanbul court appointed a group of trustees to take over the management of Zaman newspaper. In a statement, the publication said that administrators had been appointed to run the paper. The decision was issued by the Istanbul Sixth Criminal Court of Peace at the request of Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office, state-run Anadolu Agency reports. Zaman is one of the country's highest circulation newspapers. "We are going through the darkest and gloomiest days in terms of freedom of the press," the newspaper said in a statement. The takeover became violent when authorities used water cannon and shot at crowds. Index on Censorship and other freedom of expression groups, quickly put together a campaign, condemning the Turkish government's attack on press freedom.



UKRAINE

HUNDREDS OF UKRAINIAN-LANGUAGE CHANNELS AND SITES BLOCKED BY SELF-DECLARED AUTHORITIES IN EASTERN UKRAINE

The conflict in eastern Ukraine has led to attacks on Ukrainian-language outlets. On 8 January 2016 authorities of the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) passed a decree on "informational destabilisation", which led to approximately 113 sites being blocked within the territory. The websites that have been banned include online news outlets

Ukrainska Pravda, Novoe Vremia, Radio Liberty, Ostrov, TSN, 24 TV, Tyzhden, Segodnia, and Obozrevatel. A month later on 10 February 2016 the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) ordered providers to stop broadcasting the majority of Ukrainian channels throughout territory they controlled. DPR authorities claimed that the Ukrainian channels were broadcasting "information of extremist nature". The DPR ministry of information sent out the letters to providers, asking them to immediately disconnect a long list of Ukrainian channels, including ones that focus on children, education and sport.



GREECE

MEDIA LAW LIMITING NATIONAL TV CHANNELS PASSED IN PARLIAMENT

Controversial legislation regulating TV channels was passed in the Greek parliament late on 11 February 2016 in a narrow vote. The legislation outlines the procedures for granting licenses for TV channels for the first time since the launch of private television in Greece. For 25 years Greece maintained a regime of temporary licenses. The government said that the law is part of the bailout deal with Greece's creditors, which will increase state revenue. The opposition has strongly criticised the bill, objecting to the number of the licenses to be sold. "You are choosing the path of authoritarian practices, which alienate the country from the European principles of justice," New Democracy leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis told MPs. Based on a research conducted by the University Institute of Florence, the new law will only allow for four national TV stations to operate in Greece; there are currently seven national channels.



RUSSIA/РОССИЯ

SEVERAL JOURNALISTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS ATTACKED IN INGUSHETIA

On 9 March 2016 a group of masked men attacked a minibus with six journalists and other activists inside near the border between Russian republics Ingushetia and Chechnya, Kommersant reported. The group assaulted the journalists, activists and set the bus on fire. Egor Skovoroda, one of the victims, claimed that the assailants shouted: "You are protecting terrorists and killers of our fathers." The journalists were taking part in a press tour organised by activists from Russian NGO Committee for the Prevention of Torture. According to a list published by Pavel Chikov, a member of the Kremlin's Presidential Council for Human Rights, the six journalists injured include: Oyestein Winstad (Norway - Ny tid), Lena Maria Persson Loefgren (Sweden), Alexandra Elagina (Russian - New Times), Egor Skovoroda (Russia - Mediazone), blogger Mikhail Solunin and former reporter for Kommersant Anton Prusakov (Russia). Skovoroda said that unknown people had been following the journalists throughout Chechnya for two days, but on the day of the attack they were also followed in Ingushetia. Law enforcement in Ingushetia have confirmed the incident, though the government of Chechnya has denied it occurred. Later, Dmitry Utukin, a member of Committee for the Prevention of Torture, said that armed men also attacked the headquarters of the organisation in Ingushetia. In 2015, the office of Committee for the Prevention of Torture in Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, was attacked twice.



FRANCE

DEFENSE MINISTER LAUNCHES INVESTIGATION INTO LE MONDE FOLLOWING REPORT ON SECRET OPERATIONS IN LIBYA

On 24 February 2016 the French minister of defense, Jean-Yves Le Drian, launched an investigation into French newspaper Le Monde for "compromising a military secret" following the publication of an article on the presence of French special forces in Libya. This offense is punishable by a €45,000 fine and a three-year prison sentence. The Le Monde article claims that "specialised bloggers" had spotted the presence of French security forces in eastern Libya since mid-February.

