



**MEDIA FREEDOM  
RAPID RESPONSE**

# ***MAPPING MEDIA FREEDOM***

*MONITORING REPORT*

*January to June*

# **2023**

*by EFJ – IPI – ECPMF*



The Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) tracks, monitors and reacts to violations of press and media freedom in EU Member States and Candidate Countries. This project provides legal and practical support, public advocacy and information to protect journalists and media workers. The MFRR is organised by an alliance led by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) including ARTICLE 19 Europe, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), Free Press Unlimited (FPU), International Press Institute (IPI) and CCI/Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa (OBC Transeuropa). The project commenced in 2020 and is funded by the European Commission. [www.mfrr.eu](http://www.mfrr.eu)

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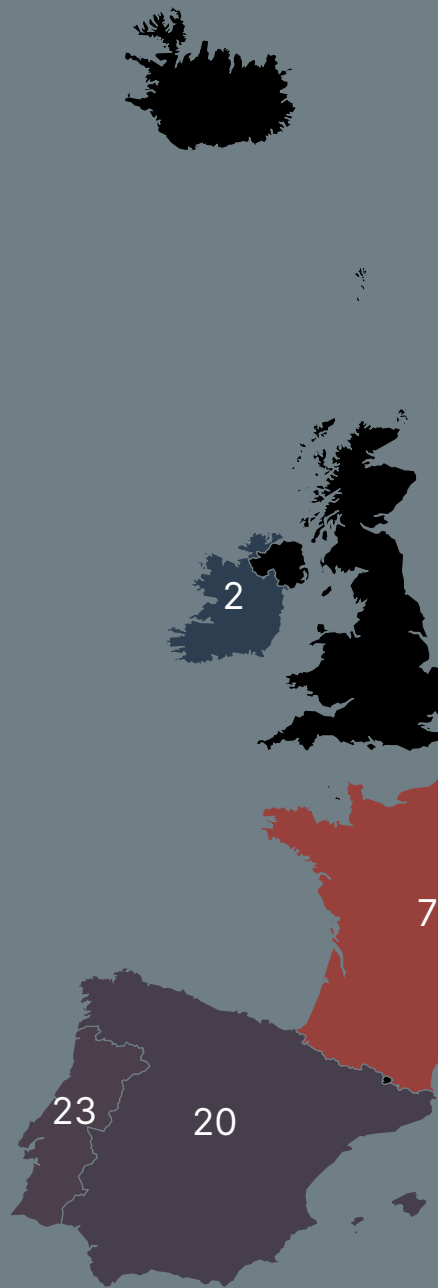


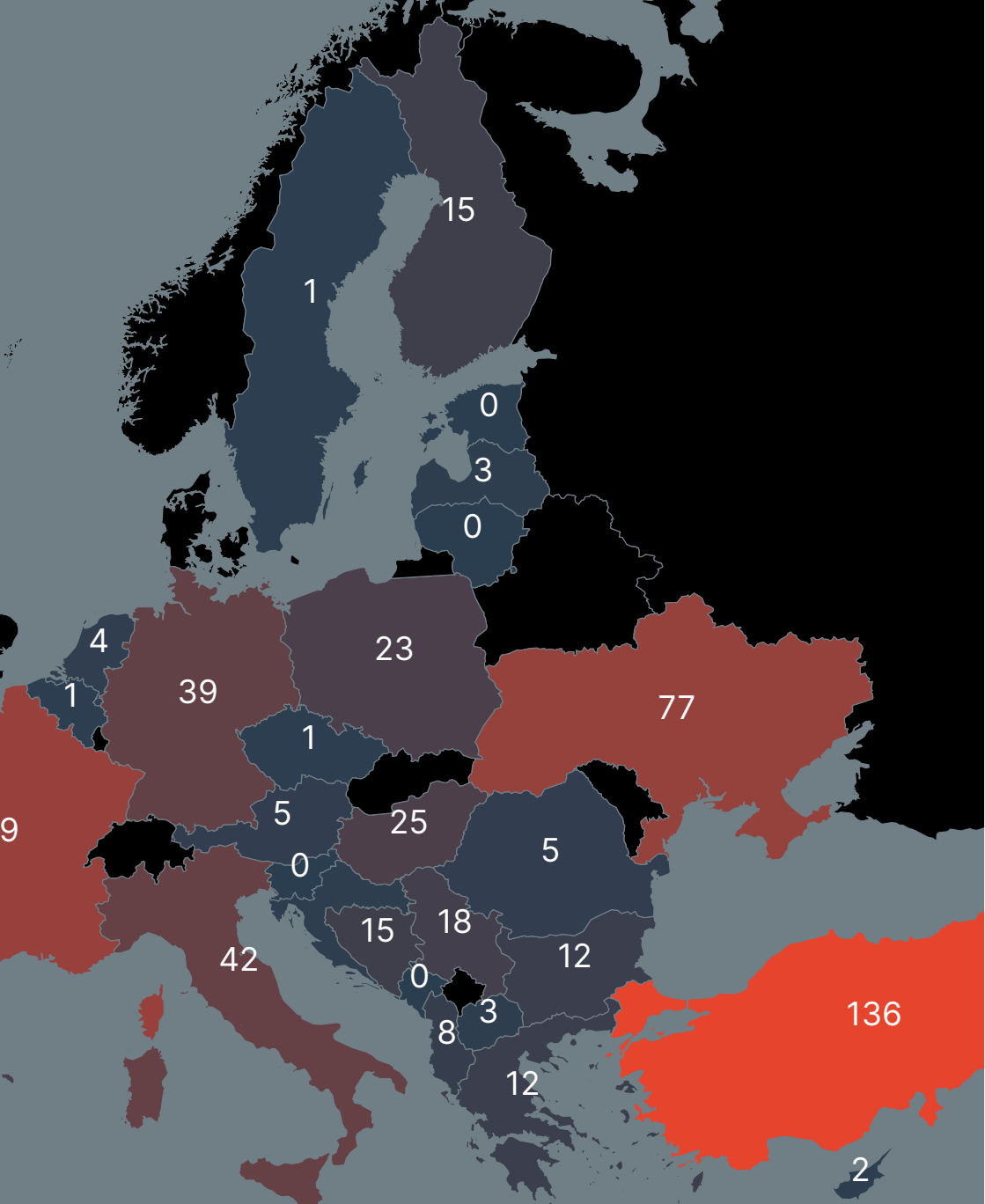
## MAPPING MEDIA FREEDOM ALERTS

### *Introduction*

Journalists attacked by police officers while covering protests, reporters insulted by politicians and public authorities to discredit their work, and vexatious lawsuits for publishing investigative pieces. These are just some of the threats that journalists and media workers have faced in Europe during the first half of 2023.

From January until June 2023, the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) recorded 575 media freedom violations in European Union Member States and candidate countries, involving 844 individuals or media outlets. 307 of those took place in EU





[Map with alerts in all countries](#) (EU MS + CC including Ukraine and Moldova)

Member States, while 268 occurred in candidate countries.

In the EU the most common type of attacks were verbal attacks (35.8%) such as insults and discrediting of journalists, to which this report dedicates one of its thematic chapters. Legal attacks were the second most prominent category (24.8%), followed by physical attacks (21.2%), attacks on property (16.9%), and censorship (14.3%).

The current monitoring report offers an overview of the media freedom situation across the EU and candidate countries in the first half of 2023 and it starts with a thematic chapter on the crackdown on independent media in Turkey amidst devastating earthquakes and national elections that took place at the beginning of the year, followed by a chapter on the war in Ukraine and its repercussions on media freedom.

The report also covers the rise in attacks on journalists and media workers by police officers and security forces and, as mentioned earlier, the rise in the discrediting of journalists and reputational attacks against them to hinder their work.

The report is divided into the following chapters: an overview offering data and graphics about the press freedom situation in the EU and in candidate countries in 2023, four thematic sections with quantitative and qualitative analysis regarding the aforementioned topics, and country reports offering a summary of the most relevant threats in the following EU countries: Italy, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Greece, Germany, and France; and in the following candidate countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.

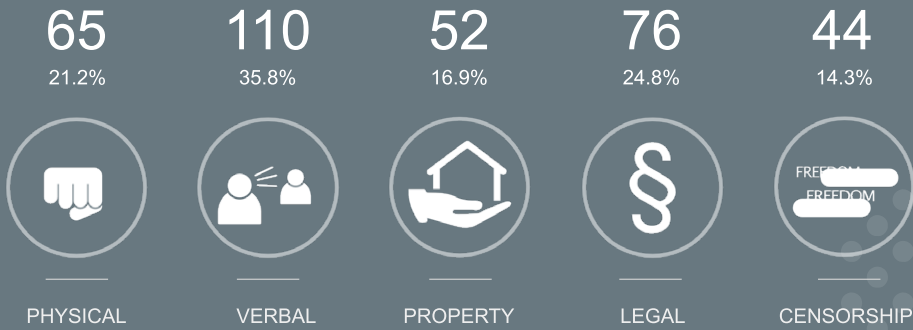
The report has been compiled by the International Press Institute (IPI), the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), and the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), as part of the joint Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) project which monitors and supports journalists, media workers, and platforms that have been threatened. The project is funded by the European Commission. Past reports can be downloaded on the [Mapping Media Freedom website](#), and the alerts for this report can be accessed through the Alert Explorer [here](#), which is constantly updated and collects and visualises all alerts documented by the monitoring partners.



A journalist documenting Russian war crimes in Ukraine.  
picture alliance / abaca | Yaghoobzadeh Alfred/ABACA

# Overview

## Main types of attacks in EU Member States



## Spotlight on the European Union

Journalists and media actors in European Union Member States face several different types of attacks. Sometimes they even face several types of attacks at the same time, such as a verbal and a physical attack performed within the same incident by the same aggressor. This section shows how many alerts involved a certain type of attack.

The types of attacks are grouped into five main categories with detailed information provided below.

**Physical:** In more than 1 out of 5 incidents (21.2%, 65 alerts), media actors were physically attacked. In 27 incidents (8.8%) media actors were injured.

**Verbal:** In more than 1 out of 3 incidents (35.8%, 110 alerts), media actors were verbally abused. This includes intimidation/threats (17.9%, 55 alerts), discrediting (13.0%, 40 alerts), insult/abuse (27 alerts), harassment (9), sexual verbal harassment (3), and bullying/trolling (2) targeting media actors.

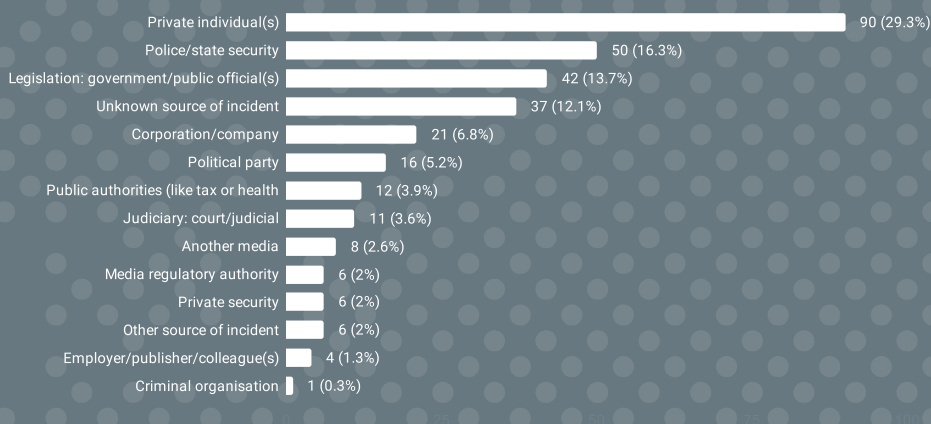
**Property:** In more than 1 out of 6 incidents (16.9%, 52 alerts), property was attacked. This includes equipment (21 alerts), hacking/DDoS attacks (16), attacks to general property like cars or houses (14), or personal belongings (1).

**Legal:** In 1 out of 4 incidents (24.8%, 76 alerts), media actors faced legal consequences. This includes, amongst others, defamation (15), civil lawsuits (14), legal measures like laws restricting press and media freedom (9), arrest/detention/imprisonment (9), and criminal charges (8).

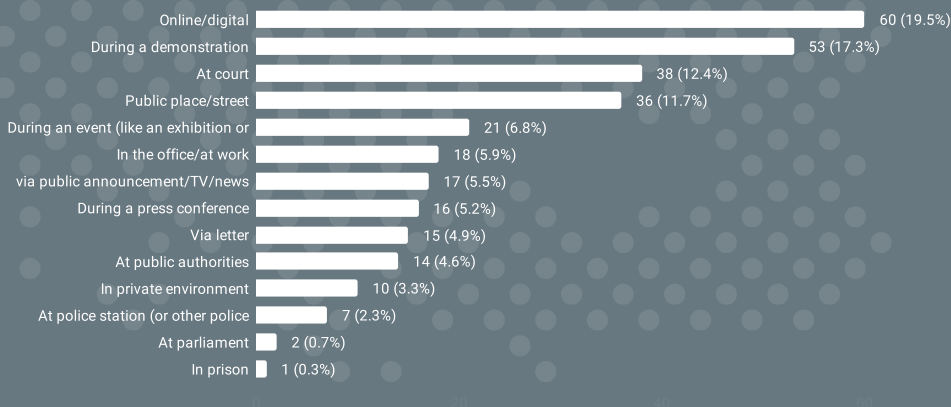
**Censorship:** In 1 out of 7 incidents (14.3%, 44 alerts), media actors faced censorship. This includes, amongst others, arbitrary denial of accreditation or registration (including blocked access to events or press conferences) (16 alerts), blocked access to information (e.g. blocked websites or no answers to enquiries) (16 alerts), and commercial interference (7).



## Sources of attacks in EU Member States



## Contexts of attacks in EU Member States

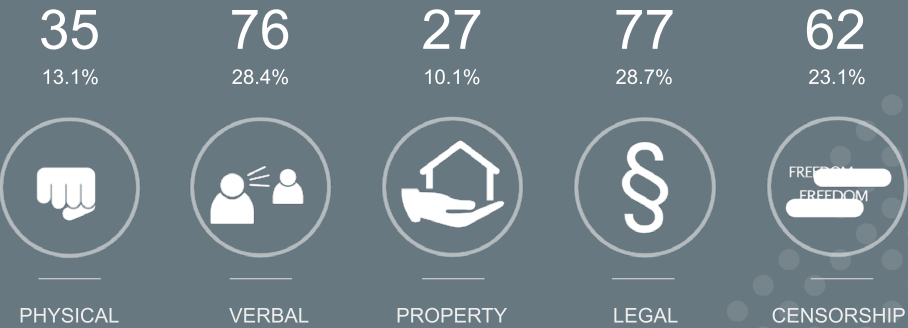


Source: [mappingmediafreedom.org](https://mappingmediafreedom.org)

The data comprises documented Mapping Media Freedom alerts between 01/01/2023 and 30/06/2023 for European Union member states, based on the documentation status of 11/10/2023. One incident and thus alert can include multiple types of attacks (e.g. verbal and physical attack performed within the same incident) affecting more than one journalist or media actor and being performed by more than one type of actor. Especially legal incidents where journalists or outlets receive multiple related or similar legal threats, are currently recorded as one alert.

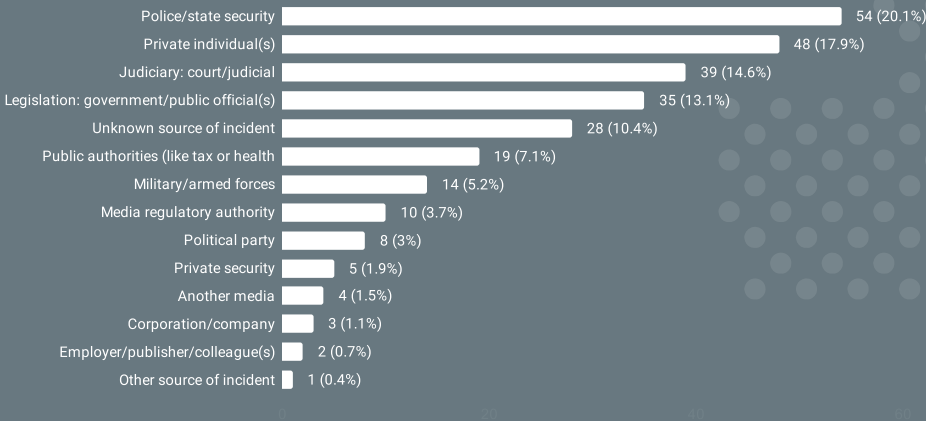
# Spotlight on Candidate Countries

## Main types of attacks in EU candidate countries\*

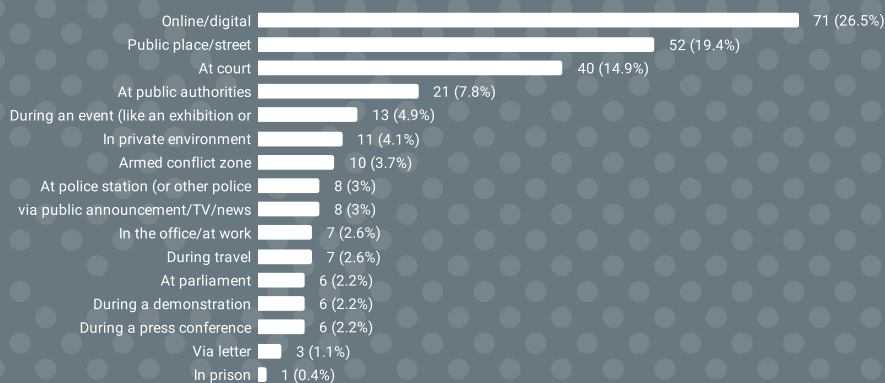


\* Excluding Ukraine and Moldova

## Sources of attacks in EU candidate countries



## Contexts of attacks in EU candidate countries



Source: [mappingmediafreedom.org](https://mappingmediafreedom.org)

The data comprises documented Mapping Media Freedom alerts between 01/01/2023 and 30/06/2023 for European Union candidate countries, based on the documentation status of 11/10/2023. One incident and thus alert alert can include multiple types of attacks (e.g. verbal and physical attack performed within the same incident) affecting more than one journalist or media actor and being performed by more than one type of actor. Especially legal incidents where journalists or outlets receive multiple related or similar legal threats, are currently recorded as one alert.



Destroyed by an earthquake building, in Hatay, Turkey.  
picture alliance / abaca | Demiroren Visual Media/ABACA

## **Crackdown on independent media in Turkey intensifies amidst devastating earthquakes and national elections**

The large-scale crackdown on press freedom and systemic repression of independent media in Turkey continued in the aftermath of the devastating February earthquakes and in the run-up to the presidential and parliamentary elections in May.

Within the reporting period, the MFRR documented a record number of press and media freedom violations in the country – 136 cases involving 172 persons or media entities.

### ***Arbitrary arrests and imprisonment as tools of oppression***

Legal incidents remained the most common threat to press freedom in Turkey, making up nearly half (44.9%) of the recorded cases. [Arbitrary arrests](#), [criminal charges](#), and [convictions](#) were continuously used to in-

timidate journalists and silence critical and independent reporting.

Accusations of [terrorism](#), [“insulting public officials”](#), [“insulting the president”](#) and [“openly inciting people to hatred and enmity”](#) were often used in the trumped-up charges against journalists. Turkey remained one of the biggest jailers of journalists in the world. At the time of publishing, [21 journalists](#) were imprisoned.

Reporter Sinan Aygöl became the first journalist to [be sentenced](#) under the new “disinformation law” passed by the parliament in late 2022. In the aftermath of the earthquakes, many journalists [were detained](#) while reporting in the disaster areas, and several journalists who criticised the state’s response to the earthquakes were arrested

under the disinformation law for “spreading false news”.

In April, at least 10 Kurdish journalists [were arrested](#) during coordinated dawn raids across Turkey, targeted at homes and offices of 126 people including journalists, lawyers, rights defenders, political activists, and artists in 21 provinces in relation to anti-terror investigations led by the Diyarbakır Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office.

The raids took place in the run-up to the parliamentary and presidential elections in Turkey, which were held on 14 May, and represented another step in the systematic harassment and intimidation of journalists reporting on issues of public interest, in particular those of Kurdish descent.

On several occasions, journalists, including foreign reporters, [were blocked](#) from entering Turkey, or detained while attempting to leave the country.

### ***Journalists covering earthquakes and elections subjected to physical violence***

Journalists in Turkey were often subjected to [physical violence](#), especially by [private individuals](#), while covering the elections and earthquake-hit areas. [Public officials](#) and their security guards were also behind several physical assaults on journalists.

In February, Halk TV correspondent Ferit Demir [was subjected](#) to physical violence by an anti-terror police officer while covering the search-and-rescue efforts in the earthquake zone in Battalgazi district of Malatya.

Journalist Rabia Çetin [was attacked](#) by village guards in the city of Adıyaman. She

was faced with a lynching attempt after she told the crowd that she was a journalist, and she narrowly escaped from the situation with the help of a group of earthquake victims. In another incident, Tele1 reporter Hazal Güven and cameraman Umutcan Yitük [barely escaped](#) from armed looters while reporting in the earthquake disaster area in Hatay.

In addition, police [physically attacked](#) journalist Emre Orman and İleri Haber reporter İzel Sezer during a demonstration in Kadıköy, Istanbul. Police detained and attacked several journalists covering the protest organised by the Workers’ Party of Turkey (TİP) against the Red Crescent’s sale of tents to an earthquake relief charity.

### ***Instead of protecting press freedom, RTÜK continues targeting free media***

Turkey’s government-controlled media regulator, the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), [continued sanctioning](#) media outlets in a discriminatory manner due to their critical reporting, especially on the earthquakes and elections. The sanctions consisted of monetary fines and temporary bans on TV programmes.

Turkish courts issued [access blocking orders](#) on hundreds of news articles and social media posts, and due to the large volume of these violations, not all of them could be recorded on MapMF.

In March, the Ministry of Industry and Technology [did not renew](#) the operating licence of German broadcaster Deutsche Welle’s (DW) Turkish service after it was blocked in June 2022 at the request of RTÜK. DW is no longer able to operate in Turkey as a legal entity, forcing its reporters and editors to

continue working as freelancers, deprived of stable work contracts and social security benefits.

### ***Verbal harassment of reporters covering earthquake aftermath***

In the aftermath of the devastating February earthquakes, reporters were [repeatedly obstructed](#) from carrying out their work in the disaster areas, most often by the police, but also by private individuals and public authorities. Journalists also [faced severe verbal harassment](#) and threats from citizens while reporting from the earthquake zone.

Politicians, pro-government media, and RTÜK [publicly discredited](#), threatened, and intimidated independent news outlets and journalists, especially over their critical reporting of the earthquake aftermath. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan [threatened widespread retaliation](#) for spreading “disinformation” about the earthquakes, and RTÜK chairperson Ebubekir Şahin [intimidated and targeted](#) journalists and

broadcasters covering the disaster on several occasions.

### ***Access to Twitter (X) limited during critical times***

Soon after the earthquakes, local sources reported that access to X, formerly known as Twitter, [was temporarily blocked](#) by the government. Turkish authorities also [arbitrarily denied](#) journalists’ accreditation to the earthquake areas, and later on, multiple reporters were prevented from covering the voting processes in different cities.

Ahead of the national elections in May, X announced that, in compliance with legal requests from Turkey, the platform [would limit access](#) to certain content within the country. The specific accounts affected and the specific details of the legal request were not disclosed to the public. Twitter CEO Elon Musk defended the restriction by stating that “the choice is [to] have Twitter throttled in its entirety or limit access to some tweets”.

## **Ukraine**

### ***1.5 years into war, Ukrainian journalists still work in dangerous conditions***

While journalists in Ukraine work in somewhat more stable and safer conditions than in the first months of Russia’s full-scale invasion, media workers are still being killed and injured in a country carrying the greatest physical risks to journalists in Europe. In fact, Russia’s unprovoked war on Ukraine remains the most immediate and real risk

facing journalists in Ukraine. However, far away from the front lines, media workers also face numerous other challenges, even if incomparable to those existing in the zone of armed conflict.

In the first six months of 2023, the MFRR partners [registered](#) 77 alerts related to media freedom violations in Ukraine, with 115 persons or entities related to media





*Destruction after airstrikes in Izyum, Kharkiv Oblast, Ukraine.  
picture alliance / AA | Ozge Elif Kizil*

attacked in total in the country throughout this period.

### ***A media sector under attack by Russia***

Ukraine is the only European Union Member State or candidate country to have [registered deaths of journalists](#) in the first six months of 2023. On 26 April, Ukrainian reporter [Bohdan Bitik](#) was killed near Khereson, while Corrado Zunino, the Italian journalist for whom he was working as a fixer, [was wounded](#) in the same incident. Two weeks later, AFP reporter [Arman Soldin](#) was killed near Chasiv Yar, in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region. Non-lethal physical attacks were also not uncommon in Ukraine, with media workers coming under Russian fire in no less than [five other incidents](#). In two of these, the journalists who came under attack [were injured](#). The tragic deaths and the recurring wounding of journalists in Ukraine illustrate the continued danger faced by media workers reporting on armed conflict and the courage of those who continue to

report from front lines in Ukraine despite these risks. Russia is also likely responsible for most of the continued hacking and Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) cyber attacks directed at Ukrainian media outlets, of which [no less than 11](#) were registered by the MFRR partners. These included not only DDoS and related attacks, but also spoof websites, imitating pages managed by legitimate outlets, which were created to disseminate pro-Russian disinformation and discredit legitimate news websites.

### ***Russia – and Russians – still a common source of incidents***

MFRR data clearly shows that while Ukraine struggles with media freedom issues of its own, the country also finds itself in the exceptional situation of not being responsible for a large share of violations committed on its own territory. In fact, [unknown perpetrators](#) were behind 23.4% of incidents: the majority of these were cyber attacks, most of which were carried out to discredit-

it or intimidate Ukrainian news websites as part of Russia's [operations of psychological warfare](#). Another 16.9% of violations were [committed by the military](#), with Russia being responsible for most cases – of the thirteen incidents registered over the past six months in this category, ten were perpetrated by the Russian military, while the Ukrainian army was responsible for three. Nine out of the ten violations committed by Russia were armed attacks on journalists and media infrastructure, while one was a case of censorship. All three incidents for which the Ukrainian military was responsible for were cases of limitations on access to information due to martial law regulations.

### ***Restrictions on journalists' activities behind the frontlines***

While risks to the physical safety, and other challenges linked to Russia's invasion, remained of prime concern in Ukraine, in parallel journalists faced challenges created by domestic actors. In some cases, these were also indirectly caused by the war, especially with regards to martial law, which remains in place in Ukraine. In the first six months of 2023, attacks against journalists working away from the frontlines were most often linked to [censorship](#), with 23 such cases registered in Ukraine. This mainly included cases in which access to press conferences and other events was blocked, and in which authorities denied accreditation or did not respond to journalists' enquiries. An almost equally worrying tendency was the use of verbal attacks on journalists: in the first six months of 2023, 22 cases of [verbal attacks](#) were registered

in Ukraine, mainly consisting of intimidation, threatening, and discrediting. Attacks related to media [property](#) also took a toll, with eleven [hacking or DDoS attacks](#), and [four attacks on equipment](#). Lastly, MFRR partners registered four [legal incidents](#), representing 5.2% of all attacks in Ukraine over the past six months.

### ***Attacks increasingly taking place online***

The physical dangers facing journalists in Ukraine are the greatest concern not only of journalists within the country, they are also the most immediate concern to the safety of media workers across Europe. With 13% of attacks on journalists in Ukraine having taken place in the [zone of armed conflict](#), MFRR monitoring data underlines how serious this issue remains. However, in parallel to issues of physical safety, nearly half (46.8%) of registered media freedom incidents in Ukraine [took place online](#). On one hand, this is the direct result of the digitalisation of Ukrainian society as, for example, refusals of accreditation and of access to publicly available information were virtually all issued online. Additionally, smear campaigns and verbal threats have increasingly moved to the internet. While seemingly less serious than those occurring in the physical world, online incidents can also be less visible to the public and carry a greater risk of being ignored, thus increasing the risk that they could be repeated in the future. The MFRR partners continue to stand in solidarity before the immense challenges faced by all journalists in Ukraine and express their full support in their resistance to Russian aggression.



## Attacks against journalists and media workers by law enforcement officials

In the European Union, compared to last year, the number of attacks by the police against journalists appears to be on the rise. A total of [50 attacks by police](#) were recorded by the MFRR in the first half of 2023: a higher number of attacks in six months than in the whole year 2022. Many of these attacks were recorded in France and Germany, with a respective number of 27 and 12 cases registered. Other cases occurred in Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, Greece, Italy, Poland, and Spain. In total, 77 persons or entities related to the media were targeted.

Numbers show that nearly half of the incidents caused by the police are [physical assaults](#) (24 out of 50), half of them resulting in [injuries](#). That doubles the figure of 2022, where both values ranged only at 25%. Many of these physical attacks took place during protests and demonstrations, especially in [France](#) (17 alerts) and [Germany](#) (5 alerts).

In France, numerous protests against the reform of the pension system were organised across the country in the first months of 2023. The police were widely criticised for violence and repression, and media professionals were not spared. During these protests at least [15 journalists](#) were victims of physical assaults, verbal attacks, or taken into custody by police. The intervention of the Brav-M brigade, a special mobile anti-riot police unit, prompted discussions. The brigade

used excessive force, intimidating methods, and threatened media professionals covering the news. The most severe physical attack targeted freelance journalist [Paul Boyer](#), who was hit in the head by officers. Boyer suffered a head trauma and a fractured hand, and had to undergo emergency surgery.

Switching to Germany, protests in solidarity with the left-wing extremist Lina E., found guilty of carrying violent attacks against neo-nazis in 2019, took place all over the country in May and June. The protests were in reaction to the judicial decision to convict Lina E. to a term of five years and three months. The main request to release her pending the appeal – she had been in custody since 2020 – sparked reaction from left-wing supporters who demonstrated in several cities against the verdicts. In Hamburg, Leipzig, Berlin and other cities, the “[Free Lina](#)” demonstrations became at times violent. In Cologne, a police officer forced [a journalist](#) to leave the premises, and left him with damaged clothing and injuries. In Leipzig, a journalist working for LZO Media was taking pictures of the events when he was [chased by several police officers](#). Pushed against a wall, colleagues came to his rescue and a female journalist was hurt by members of the police in the process. It was noticed that policemen were [not trying to hide their violent behaviour](#).

Legal incidents made up nearly one third (32.0%) of all incidents performed by po-



Police oversee Lena E. demonstration in Leipzig.  
picture alliance / dpa | Hendrik Schmidt

lice. They covered [detention and imprisonment](#) (9), [interrogation](#) (3), [criminal charges](#) (1), [civil cases](#) (1), and [surveillance and interception of journalistic data](#) (2). In most cases, police custody was carried out on unclear grounds and ended without formal charges, while seriously preventing the journalistic work.

This was what four media professionals in Greece experienced who [were detained and taken to a police station](#) after covering the public apology of a stationmaster allegedly responsible for the deadly train disaster in Tempi. As tensions started between the journalists reporting from outside the court and the lawyers representing the families of the victims, two police cars arrived to transport the journalists to the police station and questioned them. It should be added that the four media workers were released later that evening.

In Finland, [police briefly detained](#) freelance photojournalist Miro Johansson on suspicion of defamation and confiscated the memory card of his camera while he was covering a protest in front of the Turkish embassy in Helsinki. The charges were dropped soon after, but the memory card was not returned to Johansson until a week later.

In France, photojournalist Yoan Jäger-Sthul was arrested by the counter-terrorism faction of the police of Tours on the grounds that he had “taken part” in an activists’ action carried out by the French political ecology and protest group *Soulèvements de la Terre* in December 2022, at the Lafarge concrete plant in Bouc-Bel-Air (13). He was [detained](#) in custody for 55 hours.

Beyond physical attacks and legal incidents, four cases of [censorship](#) were recorded in the period in four countries. In Bulgaria, for

instance, the police forced Deutsche Welle journalist Emilia Milcheva to [delete photos](#) she had taken of the pro-Russian and anti-EU party Vazrazhdane which was collecting signatures for a referendum aiming to block the country's Eurozone membership. The police issued her with a warning for "violation of public order".

In candidate countries, the MFRR documented a high number of [violations](#) perpetrated by the police (54). While only two [physical assaults](#) were recorded (both in Turkey), [legal incidents](#) and cases of [censorship](#) were the most prevalent violations with 34 and 14 alerts respectively. More than 80% of the legal incidents monitored were arrests and imprisonment. Further explanation of this can be found in the chapter about Turkey, where [most of the arrests, detentions, or imprisonments](#) took place.

## ***The rise of reputational attacks against journalists***

Discrediting journalists and media outlets is a common practice that has detrimental effects on media professionals and their journalistic work. Discrediting can take many forms such as smear campaigns, false and misleading accusations, or media lynching. It pursues two main objectives: to harm journalists' credibility and to create a distraction from their work. In the EU Member States, the number of attacks has drastically increased over the last reporting period, from 33 in 2022 to 40 already in the first half of 2023 (from 7.3% to 13.0%). Discrediting became the second most frequent type of verbal attack after direct intimidation and threats; it was the 5th in 2022. It is a general trend visible across the Union where cases were monitored in 13 out of the 27 EU Mem-

Besides [Turkey](#) (41), media freedom violations from the police were recorded in [Ukraine](#) (7), [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) (4), and [Moldova](#) (2). In Ukraine, at least 9 journalists had [trouble with their journalists' accreditation](#): some were revoked, denied, or approved but after many questions or attempts to intimidate, such as taking a lie detector test – which the journalists refused to do. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, three journalists were [questioned by the police](#) in relation to articles they published. In Moldova, the MFRR documented a [FOI case](#) involving the Moldovan Information and Security Service (SIS), which refused to provide media NGO Media Azi with information on the effective beneficiary of Primul in Moldova and Accent TV, two channels allegedly recently sold to exiled Moldovan businessman and politician Ilan Șor.

ber States, including Spain (6), Poland (5), and Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, and Italy (4 each). Over 70 persons and entities were targeted.

Nearly one in two (47.5%) reputational attacks monitored came from governments or public officials – followed by political parties, private individuals, and other media outlets. In [Poland](#) for instance, the ruling party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) was the source of three incidents, all directed against the TVN Group, a public limited company with no links to the government. By coming from governments themselves or individuals linked to governments, these threats contribute to creating a toxic environment that is ingrained in everyday life.

Female journalists are more likely to be the targets of discrediting comments than their male counterparts. 21.5% of attacks against women journalists involve discrediting, while it only makes up 7.1% of the attacks against men journalists. However, such verbal assaults were also largely directed at [media companies](#) with 20 cases recorded. Accused of spreading “[fake news](#)”, “[betraying the nation](#)”, or “[working against the interests of the country](#)”, independent and critical media outlets are under pressure from public officials (10), other competing media (5), political parties (3), or private individuals (2).

It is noteworthy that the media themselves are sometimes used as communication channels to criticise other media outlets and their employees in [comments or articles broadcasted on TV or published in the press](#). In Croatia, all members of staff of the weeklies Novosti and Vida TV were [mentioned by name](#) in the newspaper Hrvatski tjednik. The article openly said they were “in a special war with Croatia” and spreading “Chetnikism”, a twist on the word “Chetniks”, which represented a Serb national movement on the right end of the political spectrum. The campaign against the Novosti newspaper further escalated and moved to the Parliament. During a parliamentary debate on the Report on the Implementation of the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities for 2021, party members started attacking the newspaper’s editorial policy, reiterated some of the statements quoted above, and called for the cancellation of its financing.

When sent [online](#), the denigrating comments often came with insults or threats. In Spain, journalist [María Morán](#) was harassed, and received rape and death threats online after asking a question about a football player during a press conference she was covering for the media outlet GoITV. In Italy, Domani journalist [Francesca De Benedetti](#) was insulted and discredited after a Twitter thread she published on legal actions against the Italian press by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Undersecretary of State, Claudio Durigon. Twitter users commented saying she was a “pseudo-journalist” and insulting her. Half of discrediting comments online in the period monitored came from [public officials](#) (7). For example, in February, the Commissioner for Environment, Oceans,

and Fisheries Virginijus Sinkevičius [criticised a Euractiv article](#), writing on Twitter that the article was “misleading”. The editors did not agree to change the headline, and wrote an open letter to the European Commission, denouncing an interference attempt by one of its officials.

Seven attacks from private individuals were [recorded](#), targeting nine persons and media entities, in [Finland](#), [Slovakia](#), [Spain](#), [Italy](#), [Bulgaria](#), [the Netherlands](#), and [Ireland](#). The most striking one concerned the Dutch public broadcaster NOS, whose headquarters were [covered with more than 14,000 posts-its](#), supposed to represent the number of deaths allegedly linked to COVID-19 vaccines. Some citizens also gathered around the building with the following placards: “NOS = fake news”, “Sudden Death”, “Me-

dia = Virus”, “Media Stop Lying”, “Stop The Censorship”, and “NOS, RTL, SBS, NRC, AD, Telegraaf, Trouw: we are tired of your lies”.

In candidate countries, journalists and media outlets experienced the same trend, with 29 alerts targeting 43 persons and entities, which is twice as many alerts recorded in the first six months of the year than in the entire 2022. Reputational attacks were recorded in all candidate countries, with the most in Ukraine (9 alerts), Serbia (6), Turkey (5), and Moldova (4), often sent via digital means.

In Ukraine, [Politerno](#), [Ukrinform](#), [Obozrevatel](#), [Ukrainska Pravda](#), and [RBC Ukraine](#) were targeted with fake content. Mirror websites imitating their own branding to spread wrong information were also created.

[Public figures](#), such as mayors, ministers, members of Parliament, or even Serbia’s Prime Minister Ana Brnabić, were again very active in discrediting the media sector in their countries. In Serbia, on two occasions, Ana Brnabić accused investigative media outlets of intentionally harming the government’s reputation by spreading [fake](#)

information and by [endangering the safety](#) of Danilo Vučić, the President’s son.

In Turkey, reporters covering the aftermath of the earthquake were [accused by the Minister of Interior](#) Süleyman Soylu of “[lying](#)” and “[slandering](#)” for having reported that there was a lack of coordination of relief efforts. A pro-government journalist also [wrote a tweet accusing Etkin News Agency \(ETHA\) reporter Elif Bayburt of “propaganda”](#). Similar cases were documented in [Moldova](#) where the mayor of Chisinau [targeted media outlets](#) in general, claiming that they were publishing “lies”, “half-measures”, “nonsense”, and “crass manipulation”. He also insinuated that media were “employed” by his political opponents to write about problems in the capital. In Comrat, the capital of Moldova’s autonomous Gagauzia region, the mayor’s office released a [video](#) accusing the media outlet Nokta.md of being “on-order, sold-off, and dishonest”.

The significant increase in reputational attacks is a cause for concern, as studies show that those targeted are more likely to experience violence and threats afterwards, or to self-censor to avoid further attacks.

# Country Reports

## European Union

### Italy

Between January and June 2023, the MFRR recorded an alarming number of press freedom violations in Italy. From the total of 42 documented cases involving 60 persons or other media entities, nearly half (42.9%) were verbal attacks and nearly a third (31.0%) were vexatious lawsuits or legal threats against journalists and news outlets.

Since the far-right coalition government led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni came to power in October 2022, verbal attacks, censorship attempts, and legal proceedings against journalists and media outlets [by politicians](#) became more frequent. However, [private individuals](#) were still the most common perpetrators, making up nearly half (42.9%) of the recorded cases.

A worrying trend in Italy was [physical attacks by private individuals](#) against journalists, photojournalists, and camera operators reporting in public places and covering demonstrations. These incidents made up all of the seven recorded cases of physical violence in the country.

Two cases of arson were also documented on MapMF. In April, the family car of Italian journalist Rossella Puccio [was set on fire](#) during the night by an unidentified man. In

May, the car belonging to Ettore Paris, director of the monthly magazine Questotrentino, [was set on fire](#) in a suspected arson attack. The magazine had recently published investigative articles about a trial involving alleged members of the 'Ndrangheta, a prominent criminal organisation based in Calabria, and the lawyers representing them.

Defamation is still a crime under the Italian Penal Code and “defamation through the press” is an aggravated offence (Article 596 of the Penal Code), which can be punished with prison sentences from six months to three years. The MFRR recorded multiple vexatious [defamation lawsuits](#), or threats of legal action, against journalists and news outlets initiated by government politicians and ministers, authorities, companies and private individuals.

[Verbal attacks](#) against journalists and news outlets both online and in person were common, and included three cases of death threats. Freelance journalist Ciro Pisano [received an anonymous death threat](#) in his mailbox, Casteddu Online news portal's editorial team [received death threats](#) via phone call, and a [letter including a bullet](#) was sent to the director of Tirreno newspaper.

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## Poland

Ahead of the parliamentary elections, the first six months of 2023 were marked with escalating pressure on critical and independent journalism by the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party and its allies. The build up to the election was marked by increased regulatory pressure on media, most notably by the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT). MapMF recorded a total of 23 press freedom violations in Poland between January and June, with 30 attacked persons or entities related to media. [Legal incidents](#) made up nearly half (47.8%) of the cases.

Maciej Świrski, KRRiT's chairperson and PiS ally, was repeatedly criticised for using his position to put pressure on news reporting which clashed with PiS' ideology. Under his management, KRRiT [initiated investigations and regulatory proceedings](#) against multiple media outlets.

In April, KRRiT [imposed a fine](#) of PLN 80,000 (€17,680) on the parent company of independent radio station TOK FM for allegedly violating broadcast law and "inciting hatred". The fine was strongly criticised by leading media figures, newspapers, and press freedom groups, who said Świrski was putting pressure on TOK FM as it awaited a decision from KRRiT on the renewal of its ten-year broadcast licence.

In addition, state-controlled public broadcaster TVP and other pro-government news outlets attempted to discredit independent Polish media on several occasions. [Verbal](#)

[attacks](#) were connected to over a quarter (26.1%) of the recorded cases.

A heated debate started in Poland on 6 March, when independent news broadcaster TVN aired a documentary alleging that the late Pope John Paul II had been aware of cases of paedophilia in the Polish Catholic Church. In the following months, [supporters of the late pope](#) as well as [PiS](#) and [its allies](#) continuously targeted TVN and journalists Marcin Gutowski and Ekke Overbeek over their reporting on John Paul II.

The foreign ministry of Poland stated that the documentary was part of a "hybrid war aimed at creating divisions and tensions in the Polish society", and [summoned the US ambassador](#) Marek Brzezinski to "inform him about the situation and its consequences". Poland has repeatedly been at odds with the United States over Discovery-owned TVN, which is critical of the Polish government.

The MFRR also recorded three serious cases of [commercial interference](#). In June, news outlets Wirtualna Polska and Onet reported alleged government pressure aimed at influencing their editorial independence.



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## Hungary

The situation of press freedom and media pluralism in Hungary remains one of the worst in the European Union, and the 25 press freedom violations involving 58 persons or other media entities documented on Mapping Media Freedom cannot fully reflect the systemic problems in the media ecosystem. However, a major new threat to press freedom in Hungary emerged during this monitoring period, as dozens of media outlets were targeted with Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS) attacks.

Over half (52.0%) of the recorded press freedom violations were attacks on property. The MFRR documented 11 waves of [DDoS attacks](#) against 36 different Hungarian media outlets. The series of large-scale cyber attacks started in April, paralysing media outlets' websites often for several hours at a time, preventing readers from accessing their content and causing financial losses for media companies due to diminished advertising revenue. The majority of portals targeted in the DDoS attacks include the country's leading online independent media.

While no one has claimed responsibility, in July attackers began to leave coded messages in Hungarian during attacks, indicating that they are being coordinated domestically rather than by foreign actors. The costs associated with this scale and duration of DDoS attacks, continuing over several months, also indicates that those responsible are relatively well-funded.

Hungarian news platform Media1, which focuses on media related topics and reported

extensively on the cyberattacks, was targeted multiple times with powerful DDoS attacks. Based on Media1's server logs, the perpetrator left behind direct threats and insults against the news platform's editor-in-chief Dániel Szalay.

While some of the media involved have filed police reports, either no meaningful action was taken or investigations have so far yielded no discernible progress. The perpetrators of DDoS attacks are notoriously challenging to identify due to the variety of tools available to attackers to remain anonymous.

[Verbal attacks](#) against journalists and news outlets made up nearly a quarter (24.0%) of the recorded violations, including smear campaigns by pro-government media and politicians. In February, a reporter from left-wing news portal Mércé received several threatening phone calls, which included death threats, after covering the Day of Honour counter-demonstration in Budapest.

In March, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán [accused](#) what he called the "leftist" media in Hungary of being pro-war because they are "financed from abroad". Independent media in Hungary critical of the Fidesz government came under increasing pressure and smears linked to their funding in an attempt to label foreign-funded media as being untrustworthy. Under successive Fidesz governments, critical and independent media outlets have been systematically drained of state advertising funding, forcing some to seek project grants financed from abroad to stay afloat



while also retaining their editorial independence. Journalists and news outlets were also [repeatedly denied](#) access or accredita-

tion to different events, underlining the continued challenges that independent media face in accessing information.

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## **[Bulgaria](#)**

During the reporting period, journalists in Bulgaria were [arbitrarily denied accreditation](#) to press conferences of political parties and the government, and politicians [repeatedly refused](#) to answer their questions. Censorship made up half (50.0%) of the 12 recorded cases on Mapping Media Freedom. Politicians also publicly [discredited journalists](#) on several occasions.

Journalists and news outlets were targeted with vexatious lawsuits aimed at silencing their critical reporting. In March, Bulgarian news outlet Mediapool [was sued](#) for BGN 1 million (€500,000) by insurance company Lev Ins, claiming reputational damage. Legal experts said the claim may be the highest ever compensation demanded from a media outlet in Bulgaria.

The civil lawsuit stemmed from an article published in September 2022 titled “Bulgaria is again threatened with exclusion from the ‘Green Card’ system”. The article reviewed the history of Bulgaria’s issues with the Green Pass, an international certificate of insurance for motorists abroad. It also noted the concerns expressed by Minister of Finance Rositsa Velkovain that the country, and its motorists, could lose rights under the ‘Green Card’ system. The report included quotes by Velkova about the track record of Lev Ins, a leader in the “limited liability” car insurance market in Bulgaria,

on the matter. Mediapool offered Lev Ins a right of reply, but the company declined to comment. The requested damages of nearly half a million euros would bankrupt the independent media outlet.

Meanwhile, three journalists from two leading Bulgarian investigative media outlets were targeted in a barrage of [vexatious lawsuits](#) in relation to their reporting on alleged corruption at the border between Bulgaria and Turkey and the alleged cover-up of the murder of a wanted “crypto queen”. The lawsuits were filed against Dimitar Stoyanov and Atanas Tchobanov from the Bureau for Investigative Reporting and Data (BIRD), and against Nikolay Marchenko from Bivol.bg. All lawsuits were initiated by the same individual, Razmig Chakaryan, who is a close associate of a suspected organised crime leader Christophoros Amanatidis.

In addition, the Sofia City Prosecutor’s Office (SGP) and Bulgaria’s Attorney General Ivan Geshev [targeted BIRD journalist](#) Stoyanov due to his investigative reporting. SGP published photos of chat conversations between Stoyanov and one of his sources. In February, BIRD published a story alleging that a document found in the safe of a murdered police chief revealed that Amanatidis had bribed the head of the homicide department of the Bulgarian National Police and others to leak sensitive information to him

and to cover up his criminal activities. This included his alleged involvement in the high profile murder of so-called “crypto queen” Ruja Ignatova, known for the notorious OneCoin fraud. Stoyanov’s source, suspected of drug possession, was arrested shortly before he was supposed to give an interview to Stoyanov about the role of a person

named in the document, who was close to Amanatidis.

After the publication of the article, the Attorney General launched a discrediting campaign against Stoyanov, claiming that the reporter was plotting against him and the high-ranking police officers exposed in the story.

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## **Spain**

In the wake of the parliamentary elections in July 2023, public authorities, including politicians of right-wing VOX, People’s Party (PP), and Democracia Ourensana (DO), as well as left-wing Podemos, targeted media and journalists [on several occasions](#). Political parties also [prohibited certain news outlets](#) from covering their events and [refused to take questions](#) from independent media during press conferences.

[Verbal attacks](#) were related to half (50.0%) of the 20 recorded press freedom violations on Mapping Media Freedom. Especially alarming were gender-based attacks against women journalists. In April, María Tikas, a sports journalist at the daily newspaper Diario Sport, was targeted with a wave of [sexist insults](#) on Twitter after she posted a tweet criticising a Real Madrid video. In May, GoITV sports journalist María Morán was targeted with [serious rape and death threats](#) on social media due to a question she asked Carlo Ancelotti, a Real Madrid football coach, during a press conference.

[Legal incidents](#) made up over a third (35.0%) of the recorded cases. Spanish news outlets

were targeted with vexatious lawsuits on multiple occasions. In January, the mayor of Marbella, Ángeles Muñoz, [filed a defamation lawsuit](#) against online media outlet El Diario and three of its journalists, claiming damages of €50,000. The mayor claimed that the news outlet’s investigative reporting on her affairs was an attack on her “honour, dignity, and personal image”.

In addition, satirical magazine, Mongolia, was targeted in two separate [lawsuits](#) by Christian groups for “offending religious sentiments” in relation to its 2022 Christmas front page. The crime of “offending religious sentiments” is still covered under article 525 Spanish criminal code, and it is used to target journalists and news outlets. Press freedom and freedom of expression advocates in Spain have long called for the repeal of such articles.

In May, two plain-clothes National Police officers [violently detained](#) El Salto photo-journalist Rodrigo Mínguez for recording the president of VOX, Santiago Abascal, with his mobile phone, when they were both going to vote at the Pinar del Rey public school in

Madrid. Another case of physical violence occurred in March, when photojournalist Emilio Morenatti [was attacked](#) by a group of women while covering a feminist demonstration in Barcelona.

In Galicia, Mapping Media Freedom recorded two alarming cases of [employers forcing](#) journalists to transfer departments in alleged

retaliation to their reporting. The committee of the representatives of Corporación Radio e Televisión de Galicia (CRTVG) employees denounced various transfers of employees it considered as reprisals for their refusal to manipulate news in favour of the PP and the Xunta de Galicia. This was one of the main reasons for the mobilisations of CRTVG employees, which began with a strike in March.

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## France

In France, a total number of 79 alerts were recorded by the MFRR, for a total of 96 attacked persons and entities related to media. Nearly half of the recorded incidents (44.3%, 35 alerts) involved [physical attacks](#), 22 of them resulting in injuries. The first half of 2023 was marked again by numerous demonstrations and protests, some of which turned violent.

In the first months of 2023, the debate around the reform of the pension system led to strikes and protests throughout the country. Between January and April, the MFRR monitored 14 alerts as part of the [reform clashes](#) alone, mainly by police officers, and in one case by protesters.

In March, an illegal demonstration against a massive water reservoir project turned into violent clashes with the police. A journalist covering the news on the spot was [injured](#) by a molotov cocktail and had his hands burned by the explosion. Another journalist was [taken into custody for 28 hours](#) as he had been allegedly hit by a new police weapon, whose projectiles are intended to mark demonstrators who cannot be arrested

immediately at a distance. The police found traces on the journalist's hand. He was then detained "for participation in a group with a view to commit violence against people or damage to property". A similar story was experienced by a photojournalist who was [arrested](#) by the counter-terrorism faction of the police on the grounds that he had taken part in an action carried out by the ecological movement "Soulèvements de la terre".

At least [13 attacks on journalists](#) were reported during the riots that broke out across the country in June, following the death of 17-year-old Nahel, who was shot dead by a police officer in the Paris region. Rioters [physically assaulted 11 journalists, includ-](#)

[ing 8 who were injured](#). In Tours, a journal-

ist working for the local television station TV Tours-Val de Loire was filming a tourist bus set on fire when she was surrounded by around fifteen people who [insulted her, threatened her with death, and then pushed her around](#). In Paris, a photographer working for Getty Images [was hit in the face](#)

[three times](#) by several teenagers, resulting in a broken nose. Other journalists had their equipment stolen or damaged (7 cases).

Five [vexatious lawsuits](#) against media outlets were reported, including 2 Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP). Four leading media outlets were [accused of defamation](#) by a waste collection company following publications related to the employees' strike to obtain regularisation of their paperworks and respect of their rights. Local investigative media outlet Mediacités received [two summons](#) to appear in court for defamation filed by the social housing property developer Alila and its CEO. The case follows the publication of an article detailing the CEO's management methods, the complaints of former staff, the non-compliance with COVID-19 rules during lockdowns, and his luxurious lifestyle. Damages claimed are €30,000 for each procedure.

In June, French watchdog VIGINUM (the French Service for Vigilance and Protec-

tion against Foreign Digital Interference) revealed that a "typosquatting" (also called URL hijacking) digital campaign from Russia was imitating French newspapers to spread pro-Russian content linked to the war in Ukraine. [Le Monde](#), [20 Minutes](#), [Le Parisien](#), and [Le Figaro](#) were targeted with fake articles published on spoof websites very similar to the real one, except for the URL.

Three cases of direct threats against journalists and media outlets were highly concerning. In February, a bomb threat targeted the newsroom of the media outlet Le Poher, with an anonymous person calling to say that a bomb was ready to [detonate](#) in their editorial office. In March, radio journalist and co-founder of investigative media Splann!, Morgan Large, discovered that her car had been [sabotaged](#). In June, the far-right and openly Islamophobic online website Riposte Laique [attacked](#) BFM TV journalist Bruce Toussaint, after an interview with Eric Zemmour.

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## **[Germany](#)**

In Germany, 39 incidents were recorded by the MFRR, and 62 journalists and media entities were targeted. The first part of the year was characterised by a strong incidence of [physical assaults](#), with 18 (46.2% of all incidents) recorded, with 4 cases resulting in [injuries](#). Attacks targeting [property](#) were involved in nearly every fourth incident (23.1%), mainly targeting journalistic equipment, but also [private homes](#) of journalists, and IT infrastructure during one [hacker attack](#). Journalists faced [verbal attacks](#) in 11 cases

(28.2%) including threatening and harassment, [legal incidents](#) in 6 cases including surveillance, interrogation, or investigation, and [censorship](#) in 5 cases, mainly through being prevented or obstructed from reporting.

Most press freedom violations in Germany were perpetrated by [private individuals](#) (35.9%) and members of the [police](#) (30.8%). More than half of all incidents took place during [protests](#) (51.3%), and 12.8% happened [online](#).

Climate protests, as shown with Lützerath, continued to be the scene of clashes between the police and the activists, and journalists often found themselves in the middle of the disturbances. In April, a journalist working for IPPEN.MEDIA was filming an action from the climate group “Last Generation” when police officers [obstructed his work by questioning him for approximately 30 minutes](#). The policemen wanted to know “which journalists were associated with Last Generation”. After 10 minutes, the journalist was told that he was listed as a suspect following instructions of the criminal police. Later on, during the same protest, a policeman stood in front of him and tried to stop him from filming, putting his hand in front of the camera.

In May and June, the Free Lina demonstrations occurred in several cities. The protesters gathered in support of the 28-year-old activist Lina E., found guilty of setting up an extremist left-wing criminal organisation and committing attacks on neo-Nazis. In [Leipzig](#), a journalist from LZO Media was chased down the street by the police, and a female colleague was pushed to the ground when she and other journalists came to help. In [Berlin](#), a journalist from nd.Aktuell had his camera hit by a policeman. In [Cologne](#), one journalist was injured by a policeman, and finally in [Dresden](#), a journalist from vue.critique had an altercation with a policeman, who tried to push his camera away to stop the journalist from filming.

Further up in the police hierarchy, the police were also involved in violations of press freedom. The most striking case that the MFRR monitored in Germany involved Julius Geiler,

who was [interrogated by the State Police](#). Geiler, who works as a reporter and permanent editor for the magazine Der Tagesspiegel, had written about the Berlin Chief Inspector who was convicted of misusing the 110 emergency number after a disagreement about wearing a mask in a hotel. The police, more specifically the department for left-wing extremism at the State Police Office (LKA), interrogated Geiler as a suspect of a politically motivated crime. Police officials also harassed journalist Armilla Brandt, and [charged her with “resisting law enforcement officials”](#) because she refused to give her press card to policemen who stopped her during a demonstration she was covering. She was wearing a hat and a scarf so they said she was wearing a “disguise”. They kept her in custody for three hours and released her when the demonstration was over, after asking her to either send them a video she had taken and to delete it, or to give them her phone.

Journalist David Janzen received death threats twice in the first half of 2023. In April, he received [the following threat](#) on Instagram: “Janzen, one day we’ll kill you!”. A month before, [death threats were left in front of his house and in his mailbox](#). The inscription “Bündnis gegen Antideutsche!” (“Alliance against anti-Germans!”) was painted in red on his front door. He found several pieces of meat in his mailbox and a candle on the doorstep, with the code “1488” on it. The culprits also wrote his name with a red painted cross next to it. Janzen is a journalist with a focus on the extreme-right in Germany, a political inclination that has gained power over the past year, with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

## Candidate countries

### **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Bosnia and Herzegovina was granted candidacy status to the EU in December 2022, which led the MFRR partners to start monitoring media freedom violations in the country. The first six months gave rise to serious concerns following the publication of 15 alerts against 24 persons or entities related to media

The period was marked by the presentation of two bills that media freedom organisations considered to be in contradiction with freedom of expression international standards. The attempt to [re-criminalise defamation](#), in particular, has been strongly opposed by the MFRR partners in Republika Srpska, the Serb entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. These amendments to the criminal code, introduced by the government of President Milorad Dodik, were eventually passed in the National Assembly on 20 July 2023, making defamation a criminal offence with a penalty including fines up to €3,000. In addition, Sarajevo's cantonal government [introduced a new draft law](#) "on Public Order and Peace" that would empower police and courts to punish purveyors of what they would consider 'fake news', including online. Under this draft law, the fines range from €7,500 for media outlets or other legal entities and €900 for anyone "who spreads or disseminates false news or claims that provoke panic or seriously disrupt public order and peace".

The safety of journalists has also been an important issue in Republika Srpska following the [severe assault](#) on four journalists by a group of hooligans in Banja Luka. The attack, which also injured three activists, took place

after police banned a planned LGBTQ event there, citing security concerns. A group of 20-30 people, equipped with metal bats and glass bottles, became physically aggressive towards the journalists, who had to be evacuated.

One of the three verbal attacks recorded was carried out by the President of Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik, who frequently criticised the work of the media outlets N1, Capital, BN, and Buka. This time, he publicly mentioned crime journalist Nikola Morača and editor Aleksandar Trifunovic by name during a speech discrediting those who criticised the proposed defamation law, calling them "scoundrels" and "marked targets". The following day, while the two journalists found their cars damaged, Dodik suggested that Morača and Trifunovic might have [damaged their cars themselves](#). Morača was also interrogated on suspicion of violating the confidentiality of a police investigation, and asked to reveal his sources. After three hours of interrogation, the journalist's phone was confiscated by the officers. Several of Morača's colleagues were also [questioned by the police](#) in relation to the case, and [newsrooms were searched](#).

[DDoS attacks](#) (Distributed Denial of Service), which make websites unreachable by overloading servers and systems, targeting 4 media portals were recorded at the end of April. These attacks were against Nezavisne novine, Face.tv, and the BUKA and BN portals. It is not known if the cybercrimes were connected.

## Serbia

There is continued concern over the state of media pluralism and media freedom in the country, with the government blocking freedom of speech and using pro-government media outlets for propaganda purposes. The polarised political and media landscape, fuelled by the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), provides a fertile ground for media freedom issues.

In six months, Mapping Media Freedom documented 18 press freedom violations with 31 attacked persons or entities related to the media. These press freedom violations involved verbal attacks (14), attacks to property (2), [physical assaults](#) (2), and [legal incidents](#) (2).

Journalists and media outlets investigating politics and government activities are often targeted by the political power. For example, the SNS described the local web portal Info-Vranjske as [“terrorist” and “treasonous”](#). In another instance, Nebojsa Bakarec, Member of Parliament with the SNS, publicly said that N1 and Nova S, amongst other media outlets belonging to the United Media groups, were responsible for “the sick atmosphere in society that is conducive to tragedies”. He added that they were spreading “hatred, violence, stereotypes, and prejudices”.

Prime Minister Ana Brnabić, in power since 2017, also took a strong stance in her defence of the President. She has attempted to discredit two media outlets since the beginning of 2023. In January, she [accused the independent media outlet “Investigation”](#) for putting Danilo Vučić’s life at risk with their

reporting. A few weeks later, in February, Brnabić [supported the accusations](#) directed at the channel TV Prva that the network was helping the Janjicari criminal clan, and that its reporting was putting Vučić’s safety at risk

The tension and conflicts between Croats and Serbs persist and shape the media sector. Between January and June 2023, two media outlets were attacked for being “anti-Serbs”. Novosti was targeted twice by two different sources. The newspaper Hrvatski tjednik started an [argument](#) that went up to the Parliament, not only against Novosti but also against Vida TV. Members of the Parliament used the article in a [debate](#), saying that Serbs in Croatia destroy the country’s unity, a heated topic.

Journalists subjected to hate speech, threatened with violence, or in some instances with death, are not an uncommon situation in Serbia. Journalists from certain independent media outlets such as Nova.rs, Danas daily, Nova S, and N1 TV are regularly attacked by political figures or private individuals. In February, Nova.rs journalist Pero Jovovic [received death threats](#) via Twitter when a user told him that he should “put a gun to [his] forehead and fire a bullet

without a shred of conscience”. In April, [the media Pink TV showed a video](#) calling for journalists of those four media outlets to be arrested. Pink TV named two journalists in particular, because they had criticised the President, Aleksandar Vučić.

## Conclusion

The current report has analysed media freedom violations in the European Union and candidate countries during the first 6 months of 2023. From January until June 2023, the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) recorded 575 media freedom violations in the European Union and candidate countries, involving 844 individuals or media outlets. 307 of those took place in EU Member States, while 268 occurred in candidate countries.

The report has focused on the press freedom situation in two of the countries with the most severe violations in the continent: Turkey and Ukraine. In the first thematic chapter, MFRR partners focused on Turkey and the consequences of the earthquake and elections for media freedom. Regarding

Ukraine, the report has analysed the situation a year after the war started.

The report has also focused on the rise of attacks by police officers and security forces on journalists in the European Union and the rise in reputational attacks against reporters and media workers in the continent. Both threats have shown a worrying marked increase during the first 6 months of 2023, which affects the ability of journalists to carry out their work.

The MFRR will publish an annual report compiling all alerts of 2023 in early 2024, which will analyse yearly trends regarding safety of journalists and media freedom in the European Union and candidate countries. Previous reports can be accessed [here](#).



## Disclaimer

The respective alerts for this Monitoring Report can be viewed directly in the Alert Explorer [here](#). This report includes all incidents from 1 January until 30 June 2023. If cases are reported and published after the publication of this report, they will still appear in the data available under the link of the Alert Explorer above as well as under the individual links provided within the report to give an up-to-date view at any time.

One incident and thus alert alert can include multiple types of attacks (e.g. verbal and physical attack performed within the same incident) affecting more than one journalist or media actor and performed by more than one type of actor. In particular, legal incidents where journalists or outlets receive multiple related or similar legal threats, are currently recorded as one alert. This means, when showing e.g. how many alerts included a certain type of attack, the sum of all shown numbers can be more than the total number of alerts and thus more than 100%.



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*How to cite the report: Media Freedom Rapid Response. Mapping Media Freedom Monitoring Report 2022. Leipzig, 2023*