



European Commission - Speech
[Check Against Delivery]



Press remarks by Vice-President Jourová on the Recommendation on the safety of journalists and other media professionals

Brussels, 16 September 2021

STATE OF THE UNION 2021

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like first to pay tribute to the journalists who have paid the highest price for doing their job, those who risk their life every day to inform people, to scrutinise the action of the governments, to report on crimes.

Talking to the families of murdered journalists Daphne Caruana Galizia and Ján Kuciak were the most difficult moments of my past mandate as the Commissioner for Justice. One of the most difficult of my life.

I promised them that I would work to make things change. The recommendations today are a first step in fulfilling that promise.

The COVID-19 pandemic has showed, more than ever, the essential role of journalists. It has showed, more than ever, as President von der Leyen said yesterday, that information is a public good.

But Covid pandemic has also made the situation for media more complicated, with advertising losses and more difficult access to sources on the ground.

More than 900 journalists and other media professionals were attacked in the EU last year.

Attacks include injuries, insults, harassments – both online and offline, destroying equipment.

This cannot happen. No journalist should die or be harmed for doing their job.

Today we ask Member States to act and we put forward a series of measures they should take.

It is important because, for the first time, we are providing Member States with a comprehensive set of measures compiling good practices at the level of the European Union.

It is the first time that we put media freedom and safety so high on the European agenda.

It is a first step in our actions to strengthen the European response in supporting media freedom and media pluralism.

There will be more to come, as announced by the President yesterday.

We will propose a new legislation – the Media Freedom Act – to protect the independence of media.

We are also working on an initiative to protect journalists and civil society rights defenders against abusive litigation – the so-called strategic lawsuits against public participation or SLAPP. This initiative will include legislation and recommendations.

So, what's in the recommendations today?

We include a specific focus on the safety of female journalists and those belonging to minorities who face particular threats.

73% of female journalists declared that they experienced online violence in the course of their work.

We know too well that online violence can easily result in physical attacks. And they have a similar chilling effect.

Let me be clear on one point: it is unacceptable when violence is coming from the mouth – or the

tweets – of political leaders.

The safety of journalists during demonstrations is also of particular concern. Nearly one in three incidents occur during demonstrations, making demonstrations the most frequent place where journalists were attacked in 2020.

What should Member States do?

We expect Member States to vigorously investigate and prosecute all criminal acts against journalists, making full use of existing national and European legislation. Member States are encouraged to involve European authorities, such as Europol and Eurojust.

Member States should promote better cooperation between law enforcement and media bodies to address the threats faced by journalists more efficiently. They should provide personal protection to journalists whose safety is at risk.

For me, an important practical idea is that Member States should ensure the creation of independent national support services, including helplines, legal advice, psychological support and shelters for journalists and media professionals facing threats.

Also, Member States are encouraged to promote the cooperation between online platforms and organisations with expertise in tackling threats against journalists, for instance by encouraging their potential role as trusted flaggers.

Relevant national cybersecurity bodies should, upon request, assist journalists who seek to determine whether their devices or online accounts have been compromised.

I am convinced all this will make a difference, because we will vigorously monitor and promote actions in the Member States. We will engage with Member States individually and in the Council.

While the biggest share of the job lies at the national level, we will also continue supporting initiatives at EU level, such as the services provided by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom in Germany. Today we make nearly EUR 4 million available for this type of initiative.

Our efforts won't be limited to Europe alone. We want the EU to lead the international efforts as well. The situation of the journalists is critical worldwide. I think about female journalists in Afghanistan, and closer to us, journalists detained in Belarus and in Russia.

Many journalists are making sacrifices for the greater good. They fight for democracy and for society.

It is time for democracy and for society to fight for journalists too.

Thank you

SPEECH/21/4766

Press contacts:

[Christian WIGAND](#) (+32 2 296 22 53)
[Johannes BAHRKE](#) (+32 2 295 86 15)
[Katarzyna KOLANKO](#) (+ 32 2 296 34 44)
[Charles MANOURY](#) (+32 2 291 33 91)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)

Related media

 [EC press conference by Vice-President Věra JOUROVÁ on the Recommendation on ensuring safety of journalists in the European Union](#)