



## **Briefing: Latest Media Freedom Violations in Europe**

As lockdowns lift and Covid-related violations drop, spike in arrests and physical attacks on journalists covering protests in European states

22 June 2020

### **Purpose**

This briefing note provides an update of press freedom violations documented in Europe since mid-May. It follows previous briefings published in April and May, which focused solely on the emerging Covid-19 crisis<sup>1</sup>. With documented cases linked to the pandemic dropping in Europe in the last few weeks, this latest briefing expands to focus on all forms of violations. It also highlights key trends observed by members of the [Media Freedom Rapid Response](#) (MFRR) and presents key documents and reports from consortium members. It covers EU Members States, Candidate Countries and other European states<sup>2</sup>.

### **Summary**

- As lockdowns have slowly lifted and restrictions have eased, MFRR partners have documented a steadily decline in the number of media freedom violations in Europe linked to Covid-19 in the last month.
- The International Press Institutes' [Covid19 Tracker](#) has recorded six separate media freedom violations linked to the pandemic during this time: one case of *restrictions on*

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<sup>1</sup> *Media freedom violations in the EU under COVID-19*, IPI, 20 April 2020, <https://ipi.media/media-freedom-violations-in-the-eu-under-covid-19/>

<sup>2</sup> This briefing was co-ordinated by IPI as part of the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) project and produced in cooperation with other press freedom partners. MFRR is supported by the European Commission.

*access to information, one case of criminal investigation / charges, two cases of physical attack by public, and one case of verbal attack by authorities*<sup>3</sup>.

- While this is a positive sign, the slowdown may be short lived and numerous other kinds of serious issues and incidents have been observed in the past month.
- Several disturbing cases documented of journalists covering different kinds of protests and demonstrations being physically attacked, insulted or arrested, often resulting in injuries.
- In the background, several states still have Freedom of Information (FOI) deadlines suspended or extended and disproportionate restrictions on access to information remain in place in many countries.
- With the coming economic crisis and the threat of a second wave of infections, press freedom will face overlapping challenges in the coming months, requiring observant monitoring and strong action from EU institutions.

### **Press freedom violations by country**

#### **France**

- On 16 June, Stephanie Roy, a freelance journalist, was filming a demonstration in Paris when she was injured by a grenade fired into her legs. While Roy was covering healthcare workers' demonstrations, some protesters dressed in black clothes mingled with the crowd and threw projectiles at police officers. The situation escalated and the police responded by tear gas. In these clashes. She was hit by a tear gas canister, while she was filming for the press agency Line Presse. Stéphanie Roy was taken to the hospital<sup>4</sup>.
- On 15 June, three journalists working for France 3 Bourgogne were violently attacked by a group of fifteen people in the city of Dijon, while preparing a live broadcast. two hooded men on scooters arrived with a weapon that, in their description, "looks like a kalashnikov". Around fifteen men surrounded the car, wielding baseball bats and demanding that the three journalists must identify themselves. After they identified themselves as journalists, the men lashed out, the hitting the with their baseball bats, throwing stones and glass bottles<sup>5</sup>.
- On 26 May, Deputy Eric Ciotti (Les Républicains) tabled a proposed bill at the French National Assembly aimed at "making law enforcement agency personnel unidentifiable when broadcasting or publishing images in the media." The text tabled provides for a maximum fine of 15,000 euros and a one-year prison sentence for anyone disseminating "by whatever means and on whatever medium" the image of police

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<sup>3</sup> The tag [Covid-19] on the alerts below indicates that the press freedom violation is connected to coverage of the pandemic.

<sup>4</sup> France: *Journalist injured by a grenade while filming a demonstration*, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23359>

<sup>5</sup> France: *TV crew violently attacked while preparing live broadcast*, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23356>

officers, gendarmes, soldiers or customs officials in action. The French journalists' unions note that this is the second time this year that public authorities "seek to prevent journalists and other citizens from testifying and reporting on the work of law enforcement agencies."<sup>6</sup>

- On 17 May, freelance journalist Ysis Pecq was working for Agence France Presse (AFP), covering a demonstration organised by La Ligue du Midi, a right-wing extremist group in Montpellier, when she was bullied and physically intimidated by protestors. Describing the events on Twitter, Ysis Pecq explained that La Ligue du Midi's president, Richard Roudier first instructed her to leave the street, telling her: "It's a private event here, get out!". However, when she replied that the street was a public place, some demonstrators started pushing and bullying her. Meanwhile, someone stole her phone and ran away with it<sup>7</sup>.
- Independent French journalist Inès Léraud is being prosecuted for defamation by business tycoon Jean Chéritel, CEO of the Chéritel group, following the publication, in March 2019, of her investigation entitled: "Hidden work, label fraud: the multiple abuses of a Breton agro-industrial group". The trial is due to take place on the 20th and 21st of January 2021<sup>8</sup>.

## United Kingdom

- On 17 June, whilst covering a far-right demonstration in Leeds, Yorkshire Live reporter Ben Abbiss was threatened by a group of counter-demonstrators opposing a Black Lives Matter protest. As he was taking photographs of the demonstration, Abbiss was "hounded out" and given a police escort after being accused of being a member of anti-fascist organisation, Antifa by a group of protesters. The group poured beer on him and when he presented his journalistic ID, protesters threatened to kick him down steps<sup>9</sup>.
- On 13 June, journalists were attacked and threatened while covering a far-right rally in London. Throughout the rally, journalists and media workers were threatened and attacked. An Italian journalist and photographer, Corrado Amitrano had his nose broken and was verbally attacked as police brought him to safety. He was treated for his injuries at hospital. Another photographer was hit as protestors hurled barricades at the police, and three reporters had their mobile phones knocked out of their hand whilst they were filming<sup>10</sup>.
- On 10 June, Patricia Devlin, journalist at Sunday World, revealed she had received ongoing and "real threats" over the past year-and-a-half year to her safety and the safety of her children, including one of rape against her newborn son. Devlin said the threats are part of an intimidation campaign by members of at least one criminal gang operating under the name of a loyalist paramilitary group<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> France: draft bill proposes to sanction journalists who publish images of police officers, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23344>

<sup>7</sup> France: Journalist intimidated and robbed of her mobile phone during a demonstration, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23327>

<sup>8</sup> France: journalist Inès Léraud targeted by vexatious lawsuit, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23335>

<sup>9</sup> United Kingdom: Journalist threatened and drenched in beer at far-right demonstration, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23357>

<sup>10</sup> United Kingdom: Photojournalist's nose broken as media workers attacked at violent far-right rally in London, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23352>

<sup>11</sup> United Kingdom: Journalist abused and threatened online, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23347>

- On 3 June, two Australian journalists were attacked live on air while covering the Black Lives Matter protest in London, following the killing of George Floyd in Minnesota, USA on 25 May. Sophie Walsh, one of Nine News's Europe correspondents, was live on air in Hyde Park when a man yelled "Allahu Akhbar", made stabbing motions and grabbed her, she reported. The man was caught and held by her colleague and some protesters until the police arrested him. The alleged perpetrator was charged with threats to kill and possessing an offensive weapon<sup>12</sup>.
- On 25 May, Chief reporter at The Mail in Barrow, Amy Fenton tweeted that she has been put "under police protection" due to the abuse she has received as a result of her coverage of an ongoing criminal case. Threats of physical and sexual violence were shared online, as well as alleged threats against her daughter. Newsquest Cumbria group editor Vanessa Sims has also claimed a gang of 12 men gathered outside The Mail's offices in Barrow "shouting intimidating slurs and demands upon my reporters". She said defamatory comments and threats of violence had been made on social media and sent directly to a Mail reporter "simply for doing her job"<sup>13</sup>.

## Slovenia

- On 8 June, Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša launched an attack on the country's public broadcaster RTVS, accusing it of trying to "overthrow" his government. In comments made during an interview with Nova24TV, a right-wing media outlet linked to Janša's ruling SDS party, he said: "RTV is amply financed by the public through licence fees, and is engaged in setting up one government and overthrowing the other. That is not what the people are paying €12.75 a month for." After the interview, the unfounded allegation against RTVS was then tweeted out with an accompanying graphic by the official Twitter account of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia. It included the caption: "We are observing general dissatisfaction among people about having to pay RTV fees. There will be changes here, regardless of the government."<sup>14</sup>
- On 1 June, Eugenija Carl, a journalist at Slovenia's public television RTV, received an envelope addressed to her containing a threatening handwritten note and a mysterious white powder. According to local media, police and firefighters were called to the building of TV Koper-Capodistria, a Slovene television channel which is part of RTV, at around 10.30am to investigate the incident. According to Carl, both her and another colleague felt they had a sore throat after opening the envelope. Carl said on social media that she suffered some kind of allergic reaction to the substance. Initial investigations concluded that the substance was not life threatening. The note itself contained several insults and threats against the journalist<sup>15</sup>.

## Germany

- On 4 June, a ZDF TV crew was attacked in Berlin while reporting on the trial of a right-wing extremist, Sven Liebich. Around 15 people verbally and physically attacked the award-winning reporter Arndt Ginzel and his camera operator. They repeatedly pushed the camera away and tried to pull cables out of it, preventing them from filming outside

<sup>12</sup> *United Kingdom: Two Australian journalists attacked live on air while covering demonstrations*, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23339>

<sup>13</sup> *United Kingdom: Journalist placed under police protection after receiving death threats and threats of sexual violence*, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23332>

<sup>14</sup> *Slovenia: PM Janez Janša accuses public broadcaster of trying to "overthrow" his government*, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23355>

<sup>15</sup> *Slovenia: RTV journalist receives threatening letter containing white powder*, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23337>

the district court. A court official also tried to prevent the filming by pushing the camera away<sup>16</sup>.

- On 3 June, two journalists working for the news channel Welt were assaulted while preparing a live broadcast on the Coronavirus outbreak in the city of Göttingen, in Lower Saxony. The reporter Daniel Koop and his cameraman Festim Beqiri were setting up their equipment when residents attacked them, throwing potatoes, tomatoes and eggs from their balconies, insulting and threatening them to destroy their equipment<sup>17</sup> [Covid-19].
- The German Police trade union (Gewerkschaft der Polizei - GdP) filed a complaint against journalist Hengameh Yaghoobifarah for incitement. They wrote an article the left-wing, daily newspaper "taz" named "Abolition of the police - All cops are incapable of working" A complaint was also filed with the German Press Council. A complaint has also been filed against the newspaper<sup>18</sup>.
- Freelance reporter Annett Selle and another freelancer are currently fighting a legal battle against their three-month police ban on reporting from the scene of anti-climate change protests against the opening of Germany's new coal-fired power station in North Rhine Westphalia. Selle received a letter informing her that the ban was based on an earlier incident. That happened in February 2020 when she was reporting from the scene of a peaceful anti-climate change demonstration. The letter explaining the police ban accuses her of "endangering public safety"<sup>19</sup>.

## Belgium

- On 7 June, journalist Jeremy Audouard was shoved around and intimidated by police as he was attempting to film an arrest at 20.30 in the evening at Prince Royal street in the Ixelles district of Brussels, on the fringe of the "Black Lives Matter" demonstration. The police officer tried several times to prevent the journalist, who showed his press card, from filming the arrest by six police officers of a demonstrator who was lying on the ground<sup>20</sup>.

## Italy

- On 6 June, journalists were verbally attacked while covering a protest organised in Rome by extreme far right movements. The protesters were demonstrating their discontent about the measures adopted by the Italian government to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic. The confrontations started while a protester was being interviewed by some journalist crews, which sparked unrest amongst a group of the demonstrators. Then the protestors turned on the journalists who were covering the rally and the police. The protesters were chanting slogans comparing journalists to "terrorists" and launched

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<sup>16</sup> Germany: TV camera crew attacked outside court room, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23342>

<sup>17</sup> Germany: Two journalists assaulted while preparing live broadcast, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23340>

<sup>18</sup> Germany: Police trade union filing charges against journalist, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23361>

<sup>19</sup> Germany: Journalist and photographer contest the police ban on coverage from the area around the country's newest coal-fired power station, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23348>

<sup>20</sup> Belgium: Journalist Jeremy Audouard intimidated by Brussels police while filming an arrest, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23343>

rocks, bottles and firecrackers against the TV crews; a video-maker was injured after being hit on the head with a flagpole<sup>21</sup>.

## Spain

- On 23 May, a photojournalist for Spanish daily newspaper La Razón was threatened and physically attacked as he was covering a demonstration in Madrid organised by far-right party Vox against the government's handling of the coronavirus crisis. His employer said that as the photographer was documenting the protest, he was attacked from behind by two people who threw his camera on the ground and roughly pushed him, tearing part of his shirt. During the incident they also shouted anti-media slogans at him.<sup>22</sup> [Covid-19].
- On 19 May, a journalist and cameraman from Madrid Directo, a current affairs TV and radio program broadcast on public station Telemadrid, were attacked in the street after filming a fight between a group of young men. The team were on their way to interview residents about the poor condition of their pavements. On the way they saw a fight break out between a group of young men. The cameraman began to take photos of it. After the fight broke up, video footage shows one of the young men approach the TV crew and headbutt the Madrid Directo cameraman in the face, breaking his nose. He required medical assistance<sup>23</sup>.

## Turkey

- A Turkish court ruled to ban access to the news article including Dokuz8 News reporting 26 Covid-19 positive cases among workers of a private company's factory in city of Gaziantep. The company filed complaint accusing news to be damaging the company image<sup>24</sup>. [Covid-19].
- Journalist Lezgin Akdeniz was questioned over a report published three months ago on that churches and Alevi sanctuaries were not disinfected while mosques did in south-eastern city of Diyarbakır. According to local news, minority sanctuaries were disinfected after the report was published. Akdeniz was released after interrogation<sup>25</sup>. [Covid-19].

## Serbia

- On 10 June, journalist Bojana Pavlovic took photos of Danilo Vucic, son of Aleksandar Vucic, President of Serbia, sitting in a café with Aleksandar Vidojevic, identified by the police as a member of an organised crime group. As Pavlovic was leaving, three men stopped her stating they were police officer. She produced a journalist ID card, explaining that she was on duty, but was told to wait for the police patrol as she was likely to be detained. Two men approached them, one of whom forcefully took her

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<sup>21</sup> Italy: Journalists attacked and labelled as "terrorists" during far right protests in Rome, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23350>

<sup>22</sup> Spain: La Razón photojournalist physically attacked while covering demonstration, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23331>

<sup>23</sup> Spain: Madrid Directo cameraman's headbutted after documenting street fight, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23333>

<sup>24</sup> Access to case news from Oba Makarna factory brought disabled people, <https://dokuz8haber.net/>, 11 June 2020, <https://dokuz8haber.net/medya/basinozgurlugu/oba-makarna-fabrikasinda-cikan-vaka-haberlerine-erisim-engelli-getirtti/>

<sup>25</sup> Investigation against journalist for "Discrimination did not listen to virus" news, Gazetekarınca, 5 June 2020, <https://gazetekarınca.com/2020/06/ayrimcilik-virus-dinlemedi-haberi-nedeniyle-gazeteciye-sorusturma/>

mobile phone out of her hands. The police didn't react. Pavlovic said that at one point she was surrounded by five men and she'd asked them to move away as she felt endangered and unsafe<sup>26</sup>.

## Romania

- The Black Sea, a magazine set up by the Romanian Centre for Investigative Journalism (CRJI), has been threatened with ongoing legal action due to stories published between 2016 and 2018, as part of the European Investigative Collaborations (EIC) network's "Football Leaks" project. In 2019, a judge fined CRJI, RON 1000 (€200) for each day the stories remain online. To date this has resulted in a fine of over RON 300,000 (over €60,000). As the stories have not been removed this fine is expected to grow. According to the Romania Ministry of Justice website, the last court hearing scheduled for 10 June was postponed, and the next hearing is scheduled for 23 June 2020<sup>27</sup>.

## Albania

- On 17 May, police in the Albanian capital Tirana arrested journalist Alfred Lela, editor of Politiko.al, during protests over a decision to bulldoze the country's National Theatre. Lela, a board member of the Albanian Media Council and a well-known television personality, was at the protest in his capacity as a journalist at the time. The journalist was roughly detained and handcuffed. Lela said he was taken to Police Station No-1 in Tirana and held for more than two hours. During this time, he claims he was assaulted and insulted by police<sup>28</sup>.
- On 14 May, RTV ORA was formally notified that it had been fined €8000 by the National Health Inspectorate for violating Albania's draconian COVID-19 measures. The reason: TV anchor and journalist Artur Zheji had three guests in his studio instead of the one guest that is allowed under the COVID rules during Monday evening's primetime current affairs programme 360°. On 15 May, 2020, RTV ORA was formally notified that it had been fined a further €8000 because another TV anchor and journalist Sonila Meco had two guests in her studio during Tuesday night's primetime current affairs programme<sup>29</sup>. [Covid-19].

## Bosnia and Herzegovina

- On 5 June, a politician was charged with endangering public safety after a public service TV presenter was beaten up and verbally abused. Sulejman Spahić of the A-SDA party is accused of verbally and physically assaulting RTV Zenica journalist Sinan Gluhić. A report was submitted to the local prosecutor's office in Zenica. The incident followed days of verbal insults in social media and has been condemned by the Bosnian journalists' associations<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Serbia: Journalist harassed in front of the police who confiscated her phone, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23351>

<sup>27</sup> Romania: lawsuits filed against the Romanian Centre for Investigative Journalism, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23349>

<sup>28</sup> Albania: News editor Alfred Lela roughly detained during protest in Tirana, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23322>

<sup>29</sup> Albania: Health authorities attempted to close down TV station, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23317>

<sup>30</sup> Bosnia and Herzegovina: TV journalist attacked by politician, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23345>

- On 26 May, Nikola Vucic, journalist at N1 television in Bosnia and Herzegovina, received death threats via social media after posting a comment on his Twitter account. Details of his personal life were also published. The comment was followed by threats and calls for violence against him, including statements that Vucic should end up “in the Neretva river or impaled”. He was labelled a “halal Serb”, and received numerous other insulting messages against him and his family. Vucic has since closed his Twitter account while some media reported details of his life that bear no public interest<sup>31</sup>.
- On 22 May, Vanja Stokic, editor-in-chief of the E-trafika news portal received a message on her Facebook profile stating that the sender would "decapitate" not only migrants, but also “all you soul caregivers who welcome them.” The person's name is Goran Zivanovic on Facebook. Stokic received the message after publishing a photograph depicting her with two migrants on her profile. She tried to report the threats to the Banja Luka police straight away but was told to come back on Monday - three days after the threats were made<sup>32</sup>.

## Croatia

- On 26 May, the Croatian Minister for Environment and Energy, Tomislav Čorić, attempted to intimidate and discredit N1 TV reporter Hrvoje Krešić during a press conference. The Minister said Krešić was a "person who is marginally involved in the oil business" and implied that the reporter was asking the questions with a political or economic motive. Krešić later accused Čorić of trying to discredit and defame him. The Croatian Journalists' Association (HND) and his employer, N1, condemned the Minister's comments. As evidence for his claims about political motivation, Čorić had hinted during the press conference that he had knowledge of Krešić's communications<sup>33</sup>.

## Kosovo

- On 13 June, at around 22.30 in Evlia Qelebia street, in Mitrovica, an unknown person attempted to set a journalist' car on fire. The car is owned by Shkumbin Kajtazi, journalist at the reporteri.net portal. The attack was prevented by the neighbours who notified the Kosovo Police. The forensics team found a gasoline bottle next to the car while security camera footage showing the perpetrator was provided to the authorities. Kosovo Police opened a case and initiated an investigation and classified the attack as attempted arson<sup>34</sup>.
- On 16 May, a journalist with Voice of America (VOA) in Kosovo, Budimir Nicic, was personally accused by the Srpska Lista (Serbian List) political party in Kosovo of trying to undermine trust in Serbia in an article he wrote about the plight of a single mother being evicted from her house during the pandemic. In response to the story, Srpska Lista issued a statement on its Facebook page claiming the article was part of "a

<sup>31</sup> *Bosnia and Herzegovina: Death threats against N1 journalist Nikola Vucic*, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23338>

<sup>32</sup> *Bosnia and Herzegovina: Journalist received death threat on Facebook*, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23330>

<sup>33</sup> *Croatia: Minister attempts to discredit N1 TV journalist during press conference*, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23334>

<sup>34</sup> *Kosovo: Arson attempt on journalist's car*, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23354>

broader hellish plan to shake the people's trust in Serbia, but also in the Srpska Lista". No complaints were made about the accuracy of the story<sup>35</sup>. [Covid-19].

## Malta

- On May 24, the car belonging to veteran Maltese journalist Dione Borg was set on fire in an arson attack outside his home in Attard. Borg is a well-known journalist who works for the Maltese TV channel NET. The channel is owned by Medialink Communications, the media arm of the opposition Nationalist Party. A suspect was captured on CCTV dousing the car with fuel and then fleeing the scene on an electric scooter. Press freedom groups called on authorities to conduct an investigation to establish whether the motive of the attack was linked to Borg's work in the media, politics or football<sup>36</sup>.

### Joint Statements by MFRR partners

#### ***Journalists and media workers need to be protected when covering demonstrations and protests***<sup>37</sup>

Last month, the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) led a joint statement signed by MFRR partners highlighting the increase in arrests, detentions and violent attacks on journalists and media professionals covering anti-government demonstrations in EU member states and candidate countries during the pandemic. MFRR partners called for greater protections for those reporting from the front line.

#### ***Italy: Abolish prison sentences for criminal defamation as part of wider reform***<sup>38</sup>

The organisations of the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) called for the abolition of prison sentences for criminal defamation as part of necessary and overdue legislative reform. After the decision, MFRR partners welcomed the decision by the Italian Constitutional Court to refer a decision on whether to abolish prison sentences for criminal defamation in relation to journalists and media workers to the Italian Parliament<sup>39</sup>.

#### ***Press Cartoonists in Europe must be protected***<sup>40</sup>

Across the European Union and Candidate Countries, cartoonists have been targeted for their work by state and non-state actors from within and outside Europe. This includes online harassment and threats, attempted censorship and legal prosecution.

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<sup>35</sup> Kosovo: Voice of America correspondent accused of 'propaganda' by political party, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23323>

<sup>36</sup> Malta: Arson attack on car of well-known journalist Dione Borg, Mapping Media Freedom, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/23329>

<sup>37</sup> Journalists and media workers need to be protected when covering demonstrations and protests, ECPMF, 11 May 2020, [www.ecpmf.eu/media-workers-protection-covering-demonstrations-protestsmfrr-statement/](http://www.ecpmf.eu/media-workers-protection-covering-demonstrations-protestsmfrr-statement/)

<sup>38</sup> Italy: Abolish prison sentences for criminal defamation as part of wider reform, www.mfrr.eu/, 5 June 2020, <https://www.mfrr.eu/italy-criminal-defamation-as-part-of-wider-legislative-reform/>

<sup>39</sup> Progress in Italy to abolish prison sentences for criminal defamation, MFRR partners, IPI coordinated, 10 June 2020, <https://www.mfrr.eu/mfrr-welcomes-the-step-forward-by-italian-constitutional-court-to-abolish-prison-sentences-for-criminal-defamation/>

<sup>40</sup> Press Cartoonists in Europe must be protected, MFRR partners, ECPMF coordinated, 11 June 2020, <https://www.mfrr.eu/press-cartoonists-in-europe-must-be-protected/>

## ***MFRR partners call on UK Government to act in a transparent manner that respects press and media freedom in the UK***<sup>41</sup>

MFRR partners wrote a letter to UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson raising their concerns regarding the decline in press freedom in the UK and attempts of the UK Government to restrict media scrutiny of its policies and discredit critical reporting.

## ***Threats against journalists in Northern Ireland must stop***<sup>42</sup>

MFRR partners condemned the threats made by the South East Antrim Ulster Defence Association (UDA) against journalists at the Sunday Life and Sunday World in Northern Ireland and called on the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to continue the pressure to bring those behind the threats to justice.

## ***EU must end gag lawsuits to protect press freedom and fundamental rights***<sup>43</sup>

The EU must end gag lawsuits used to silence individuals and organisations that hold those in positions of power to account, particularly Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP).

### **Other key reports/articles**

## ***Hungary's Two Pandemics: COVID-19 and Attacks on Media Freedom***<sup>44</sup>

A legal opinion commissioned by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) finds that the Hungarian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic fails to live up to domestic or European legal standards and entrenches the country's attacks on independent media outlets, journalists and media workers.

## ***Open letter ahead of Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union***<sup>45</sup>

Ahead of Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, several media freedom groups, including MFRR partners, urged German authorities to proactively lead the Member States in the Council towards effective solutions that will bring about real progress and overcome the above-mentioned challenges, to press and media freedom in Europe.

## ***Access Denied: FOI deadlines extended or suspended across Europe***<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Declining media freedom in the UK*, ECPMF coordinated MFRR statement, 29 May 2020, <https://www.mfrr.eu/mfrr-call-on-the-uk-government-to-act-in-a-transparent-manner-that-respects-press-and-media-freedom-in-the-uk/>

<sup>42</sup> *Northern Ireland: Death threats against journalists must stop immediately*, MFRR partners, ECPMF coordinated, 20 May 2020, <https://www.mfrr.eu/threats-against-journalists-in-northern-ireland-must-stop/>

<sup>43</sup> *EU must end gag lawsuits to protect press freedom and fundamental rights*, Joint Statement, 9 June 2020, <https://ipi.media/eu-must-end-gag-lawsuits-to-protect-press-freedom-and-fundamental-rights/>

<sup>44</sup> *Hungary's Two Pandemics: COVID-19 and Attacks on Media Freedom*, [www.mfrr.eu/](http://www.mfrr.eu/), <https://www.mfrr.eu/hungary-legal-opinion-on-covid-19-response/>

<sup>45</sup> *Open letter ahead of Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union*, Joint Statement coordinated by ECPMF, 18 June 2020, <https://www.ecpmf.eu/open-letter-ahead-of-germanys-presidency-of-the-council-of-the-european-union/>

<sup>46</sup> *Access Denied: FOI deadlines extended or suspended across Europe*, International Press Institute (IPI), 2 June 2020, <https://ipi.media/access-denied-foi-deadlines-extended-or-suspended-across-europe/>

As countries across Europe passed state of emergency decrees to tackle the pandemic, several governments took unprecedented steps to amend administrative deadlines rules, including the amount of time ministries and public bodies had to respond to freedom of information (FOI) requests.

### ***Growing hostility leads to attacks on RTV journalists in Slovenia***<sup>47</sup>

In recent months, the national TV and radio broadcaster and its staff have been the target of frequent online smears and gender-based insults by members of the public, right-wing media outlets and on some occasions leading politicians, including the prime minister.

### ***Albania: public information becomes a casualty of COVID-19***<sup>48</sup>

COVID-19 has exposed the weaknesses of Albania's public information. The monopolisation of communication on coronavirus has raised concerns over the government's accountability on pandemic management as well as media freedom

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#### ARTICLE 19

European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)

European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

Free Press Unlimited (FPU)

Index on Censorship

International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)

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part of



<sup>47</sup> *Growing hostility leads to attacks on RTV journalists in Slovenia*, International Press Institute (IPI), 3 June 2020, <https://ipi.media/growing-hostility-leads-to-attacks-on-rtv-journalists-in-slovenia/>

<sup>48</sup> *Albania: public information becomes a casualty of COVID-19*, Gentiola Madhi, OBCT, 11 June, 2020, <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Albania/Albania-public-information-becomes-a-casualty-of-COVID-19-202724>