



European Journalists
Association

The Communication Network asbl

30TH World Press Freedom Day - 2021

European Journalists Association (EJ): **Press Freedom Needs Vigilance and Defence Like Never Before**

Media freedom all over the world today is threatened like never before in the last decades. We thought - and hoped - that democracy was going to gain ground in more and more countries and regions but, unfortunately, we have seen ever more disturbing, very worrying facts coming from places long considered to be the pillars of democracy.

Press freedom is threatened by restrictive media laws, rules and even menacing in many countries which put the power over editorial content into the hands of censors and courts or by violence of all kinds, cyber-bullying and internet shutdowns, by a growing concentration of media ownership, lack of transparency about media financial sources, and a media environment in which ethical concerns and quality journalism are sacrificed for profit or political advantage. We have seen this happening even in some EU countries, and also the US.

There can be no democracy without freedom of the press. The media's role is to guarantee access to free and pluralistic information, independent from political and economic powers. This is particularly true in times of elections when the stakes are so important.

Today, however, citizens' trust in media stories is eroding dangerously. Media face a series of challenges which, in the long-term, could undermine their role as a cornerstone of democracy.

Marking this year's World Press Freedom Day, with the very important motto "Information as a Public Good", we have to speak out and share a common concern over the worldwide avalanche of attacks on freedom of the press. Most of these attacks take aim at internet and other networking technologies which have provided people everywhere in the world with a new platform for exercising their right to freedom of opinion and expression. Some governments are increasingly resorting to a variety of measures to restrict such freedoms, contrary to their commitments and to international human rights law. However, what the web is concerned, we need to be aware of the many misleading information undermining democracy and other fundamental values, and we need to counter them and other myths.

It is modern these days to talk about fake news. But these discussions very often are used as a cover for attacks against media freedom and journalists disliked by people in power – a classical example of a situation in which a thief is screaming: 'Catch the thief!'. The real problem is how to give way to professional and quality journalism, to expose the lies of people with power and influence, and to limit the influence of "yellow" journalism which deceives people with sensationalist writing and themes.

Free and pluralistic media and quality journalism are crucial for democracy, and for democracy to function we need well informed citizens. But many governments are pursuing policies of **intentional disinformation**, manipulation and even intimidation of their citizens for gaining political and electoral advantages, for ideological or religious purposes or for big economic and commercial interests of privileged groups.

But even in the EU, which is based on the very fundamental values and rights, media freedom is menaced by political interference, commercial pressures and advertising. We should not close our eyes to such pressures and open our eyes to devious attacks against pluralism and free speech in some new member countries like Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania too.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us of the essential role that journalists and media professionals play by providing reliable information, countering disinformation that may cause panic and keeping decision-makers accountable to the public.

We must take this occasion to pause and express gratitude to journalists and media professionals for their invaluable work for the public good. We must acknowledge their sacrifices, and those of their families, to serve the common interests.

They keep government action under public spotlight. They dig beyond the surface to unearth the truth. They can also bring to our attention hopeful stories that can inspire change in many parts of the world.

Our wonderful colleagues in Turkey are giving brilliant examples of doing that, working in most difficult circumstances of an authoritarian government trying to impose strict control over the media and free speech and to intimidate journalists with repression. We are proud to have our Turkish colleagues as partners and friends in this struggle in most turbulent times worldwide. This is why they have the sympathies and support of the international democratic community and the solidarity of their colleagues from all over the world.

This is why press freedom needs - like never before - vigilance and defence. The European Journalists Association wants to be at the forefront of this crucial struggle.

In this important 3 May, let us pay tribute to all journalists and media professionals who work in defence of truth and justice. Too many of them have paid with their lives or sacrificed their freedoms to allow us to take informed decisions and make our societies more just.