REGIONAL PLATFORM:

MEDIA FREEDOM REFLECTS FREEDOM OF SOCIETY

Marking of May 3rd - the International Press Freedom, we remind the citizens of our region that freedom of media reflects the freedom of society, and governments that each country must respect own commitment to press freedom and enable environment in which journalists can perform their duties without fear of censorship, loss of job, intimidation and without fear for life.

Regional Platform for advocating media freedom and journalists’ safety – SafeJournalists.net - has noted an increase in different types of pressures and intimidation in the some of the Western Balkans countries, especially Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the last years. In 2019 our database recorded 134 incidents in the region - 30 actual attacks on journalists, 42 threats against the lives and limbs of journalists, 40 other types threats to journalists, 17 attacks on media outlets and organisations and 5 threats against them. As in previous years, the infamous 2019 champion when it comes to intimidation of journalists and media is Serbia, with a total of 67 recorded incidents, followed by BH – 36 and Kosovo with 20 recorded incidents. Unfortunately, the worrying trends noted by our network and other media freedom organisations in 2019 seems to accelerate during the Covid-19 pandemic – the first four months of 2020 were marked by 56 incidents - 19 actual attacks on journalists (including arbitrary detentions), 10 threats against the lives and limbs of journalists, 19 other types threats to journalists, 5 attacks on media outlets and organisations and 3 threats against them. However, when assessing levels of media freedom these numbers are just part of the context since they don’t include the increase of variety of political, financial, institutional and judicial pressures (including SLAPP cases) media outlets and journalists reporting in public interest in the region face. This is why, in 2020 our network will start recording this kind of negative practices as well.

We will continue to monitor and record limitations of media freedoms and endangering journalists’ safety and react publicly to hold authorities accountable for the hostile environment journalists are working in. We encourage judicial institutions to resist pressures and to uphold the law hence securing freedom of media and safety of journalists. We call upon journalists to respect the ethical code and standards, support colleagues, resist pressures and contact us if they are intimidated or attacked. We also remind our colleagues that they should be cautious by keeping distance and wearing protective masks and other means when they are reporting from the field given the ongoing health crisis caused by COVID-19.

Lastly, we urge citizens to stand by the professional media that reports in their interest and show much needed support and solidarity. This is especially important during the Covid-19 pandemic as, on daily basis, journalists face different risks to bring timely, correct and objective information that can save lives. Only a country with free media can be a country with free citizens and a democratic society.

Skopje – Belgrade – Podgorica – Pristina – Sarajevo – Zagreb, 02.05.2020

BH Journalists Association

Trade Union of Media of Montenegro

Croatian Journalists’ Association

Association of Journalists of Kosovo

Association of Journalists of Macedonia

Independent Journalists Association of Serbia