



RIGA CONFERENCE

THE PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD?

5-6 October 2023

MEETING TODAY'S CHALLENGES TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION



JOURNALISTS MATTER

Council of Europe Campaign for the Safety of Journalists



Presidency of Latvia
Council of Europe
MAY – NOVEMBER 2023

Présidence de la Lettonie
Conseil de l'Europe
MAY – NOVEMBRE 2023

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COUNCIL OF EUROPE



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KEY MESSAGES



Conference

"The Pen is Mightier than the Sword? Meeting today's challenges to freedom of expression and the safety of journalists"

Key Messages

The conference, "The Pen is Mightier than the Sword? Meeting today's challenges to freedom of expression and the safety of journalists," held in Riga on 5th and 6th October 2023, was a forum for in-depth exchanges and renewed commitment to freedom of expression and media freedom in Council of Europe member states.

The event, jointly organized with the Council of Europe, hosted the official launch of the Council of Europe's Campaign for the Safety of Journalists, a resolute response to the mounting threats faced by journalists online and offline.

The conference, an initiative of the Latvian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, aligned seamlessly with national activities envisaged under the Campaign umbrella, emphasizing the importance of journalist protection.

Key messages from the conference discussions are aimed at all stakeholders with the power to contribute to meaningful change:

- **Upholding freedom of expression and information is fundamental for robust democracies, wholeheartedly endorsed by the Council of Europe and its member states.**
- **Independent, pluralist, responsible journalism plays a pivotal role in informed participation, rights enjoyment, and public accountability. By enabling people's access to quality information, it contributes to fostering trust and combating polarisation and division within society.**
- **Empowering users through media and information literacy measures is essential for developing resilience to disinformation and countering manipulation of information. It becomes even more difficult with the rapid development of artificial intelligence, which compels us to adapt to emerging realities.**
- **The persistent harassment of journalists, coupled with the absence of effective deterrent mechanisms, often results in self-censorship, premature departure from the profession, and mental stress. Journalists frequently find themselves grappling with these issues in isolation, as there is a conspicuous silence in the public sphere regarding these matters.**



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- Professional solidarity is instrumental in safeguarding the independence of media and ensuring the safety of journalists.
- Adequate guarantees and support for free and safe journalism - both in the public and private sector, at central and local levels - offline and online, in times of peace, but also during crisis, conflict, and/or war, are instrumental for providing the public with timely and trustful information and countering disinformation and manipulation.
- Investing in investigative journalism is crucial as it serves as a powerful tool for unearthing actions that could potentially undermine public interests and democratic principles.
- Firm, comprehensive, and inclusive measures are necessary to fight more effectively against threats and attacks on journalists, bring authors of such acts to justice and counter a culture of impunity. An independent and impartial judiciary is a precondition for establishing accountability and adequate sanctioning.
- Specific protection measures need to be developed to counter new, more insidious forms of pressure and attacks, as well as increased recourse to SLAPPs, aimed at silencing journalists and other public watchdogs.
- Awareness raising, and public discourse, have a critical role in shaping public understanding of journalism - with its watchdog function - as a democratic value. State officials and public figures should publicly and firmly condemn threats and violence against journalists and other media actors.
- The safety of journalists is integral to democratic security. Indeed, media can play a significant role in safeguarding and influencing a nation's security interests and overall stability.
- Freedom of expression holds paramount importance, yet it does not extend to the realms of clearly unlawful speech, hate speech, and speech inciting violence. Such speech can have far-reaching and dangerous consequences in democratic societies, affecting both the dignity and human rights of those targeted, their participation in the public debate, and the cohesion of society.
- Justification and even glorification of Russia's aggression against Ukraine on certain publicly accessible platforms, coupled with state-driven constant disinformation from Moscow, is a matter of serious concern and must be denounced.
- The Council of Europe Campaign on the safety of journalists is both timely and urgent; it offers a comprehensive framework, guidance, and support for member states to translate into practice their commitment to move from standards creation to practical implementation with concrete responses to concrete and urgent needs.



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- **Genuine ownership by member states and coordinated action, with concrete engagement of all concerned actors, as well as increased international cooperation, are decisive for meaningful progress and long-term impact of the campaign. National action plans or strategies, coupled with tailored protection measures and mechanisms, should contribute to a sensible improvement in the conditions in which journalists carry out their information mission to society and to protecting their safety more effectively.**