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Advancing Media Freedom and Journalist Safety in Romania: Strengthening Independent Journalism, Advocacy, and Developing a National Action Plan

Venue: Goethe Institut, Calea Dorobanți 32, Bucharest, Romania

Date: October 4-5, 2024

Organised by: Centro per la Cooperazione Internazionale/Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT), European Federation of Journalists, in cooperation with Median Research Centre (MRC) and Council of Europe National Focal Point Romania

The Centro per la Cooperazione Internazionale/[Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa](#) (OBCT) and the [European Federation of Journalists](#) (EFJ) are working together under the [Media Freedom Rapid Response](#) (MFRR), a consortium committed to tracking, monitoring, and addressing violations of press and media freedom across EU Member States and Candidate Countries. This initiative offers legal assistance, practical support, public advocacy, and vital information to safeguard journalists and media professionals.

Following MFRR's [online fact-finding](#) and [advocacy](#) missions to Romania, OBCT and EFJ are launching *Advancing Media Freedom and Journalist Safety in Romania: Strengthening Independent Journalism, Advocacy, and Developing a National Action Plan*, joint effort to strengthen media freedom in the country. OBCT will partner with the [Median Research Centre](#) (MRC) to organise a workshop focused on advocacy opportunities through the implementation of European anti-SLAPP provisions, the European Media Freedom Act, and the Digital Services Act. At the same time, EFJ will collaborate with the [Council of Europe National Focal Point](#) to host a workshop aimed at enforcing the Council of Europe's Recommendation on the Safety of Journalists. This initiative seeks to guide national actions that align with the advocacy goals of EU mechanisms.

Session I: Advancing Media Freedom in Romania: Strengthening Independent Journalism through European Initiatives

Safeguarding media freedom and pluralism is crucial for the effective functioning of democratic societies. A free, independent, and diverse media landscape empowers citizens to participate in democratic processes and make those in power more accountable and responsive. This is why the European Commission's annual rule of law reports prioritise media freedom and pluralism as one of four essential pillars.

In line with the [2020 European Democracy Action Plan](#), the European institutions have worked over the past five years to bolster media freedom. These efforts have led to a number of tools aimed at [enhancing journalists' safety](#), [countering legal threats](#), and [promoting media pluralism and independence](#).

The workshop seeks to engage Romanian stakeholders in a dialogue on how the Europeanization of media freedom can strengthen Romania's independent journalism community. By bringing together journalists, academics, legal experts, and civil society representatives, the workshop aims to foster an open discussion on how recent media developments can drive media freedom advocacy in the country. The event will specifically explore how the [European Media Freedom Act](#), the [Digital Services Act](#), the [EU Anti-SLAPP Recommendation](#) and [Directive](#), along with the [Council of Europe's Anti-SLAPP Recommendation](#), can support journalists and advocates in promoting an independent and pluralistic media environment.

The workshop is organised into two thematic sessions, each followed by two breakout discussions to facilitate an interactive dialogue with participants on the topics covered during the plenaries. The closing remarks will provide an opportunity to summarise the key outcomes, leading to a draft of actionable steps aimed at advancing the Europeanization of media freedom protection in Romania.

Programme:

DAY 1 – Friday 4 October

8:30 - 9:00

Registration and welcome coffee

9:00 - 9:15

Opening remarks

9:15 - 9:45

Threats to reporting on matters of public concern: countering SLAPPs and protecting journalists' sources

Sielke Kelner (OBCT) & Adrien Collins (EFJ)

9:45 - 10:30

Breakout sessions 1 & 2

10:30 - 11:00

Coffee Break

11:00 - 11:30

Free exercise of the journalistic profession: anti-surveillance measures, funding and regulatory mechanisms

Marina Popescu (MRC) & Dimitri Bettoni (OBCT)

11:30 - 12:45

Breakout sessions 3 & 4

12:45 - 13:30

Closing remarks: Challenges and opportunities to support the Europeanisation of media freedom in the local context

13:30 - 14:30

Light lunch

Session II: Towards Establishing a National Action Plan on the Safety of Journalists in Romania

While the EU is considered one of the safest places for journalists, the number of threats and attacks against them has increased in past years, with the most tragic cases being assassinations of journalists. Intimidation and pressure are damaging the environment in which journalists work.

Adopted in September 2021, the European Commission Recommendation on the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists aims to ensure safer working conditions for all media professionals, free from fear and intimidation, whether online or offline. It sets out concrete actions for Member States to take as public authorities have a duty to protect freedom of expression and journalists' safety.

Smooth, effective and appropriate cooperation between journalists, other media professionals and authorities must ensure better prevention against threats and attacks. Member States must put in place frameworks for cooperation between stakeholders and actively encourage dialogue between them by establishing points of support, contact and rapid response and early warning mechanisms.

The EC Recommendation on the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists follows the 2016 Council of Europe's Recommendation on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors. The Recommendation includes wide-ranging guidelines on prevention, protection, prosecution, and promotion of information, education and awareness raising.

This workshop will aim to discuss the way forward for Romanian stakeholders establishing a long-term and cross-stakeholder approach, reaching out to media outlets, journalists' organisations as well as individual journalists, managers and public institutions. The programme will facilitate the development of a national safety plan or strategy as well as the establishment of a coordination body to coordinate national actions.

Programme:

DAY 1 – Friday 4 October

14:30 - 14:45

Opening remarks

14:45 - 16:00

Public authorities in dialogue with journalists (Recommendation 6)

Establishing procedures to access public events and public interest information (Recommendation 11 and 13)

Adopting measures to protect journalists during demonstration (Recommendation 19 and 20).

Effective cooperation between law enforcement authorities and journalists during protests and demonstrations (Recommendations 21 and 23)

16:00 – 16:30

Coffee break

16:30- 18:00

Overview of measures adopted by Member States to promote investigation and prosecution of criminal acts against journalists (Recommendation 4)

Overview of main stakeholders involved in training (training with authorities' representatives) (Recommendation 15)

DAY 2: Saturday 5 October

9:00 - 10:30

Cooperation to prevent online attacks and threats (Recommendations 24 and 25)

Measures to empower female journalists, journalists belonging to minority groups and those reporting on equality issues (Recommendation 27)

10:30 - 11:00

Coffee break

11:00 - 12:00

Economic and social protection for journalists across the European Union (Recommendation 18)

12:00 - 13:00

Closing session

Initiative's organisers

Established in 2000, **Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa** (OBCT) is a think-tank based in Italy that focuses on European affairs, particularly South-East Europe, through empirical research and journalism. It supports independent journalism and media freedom in Europe by leading the European Data Journalism Network, and coordinating collaborative journalism projects. As part of the MFRR, OBCT provides information and knowledge support with its [Resource Centre on Media Freedom](#). Additionally, OBCT coordinates CASE Italia, the Italian anti-SLAPP working group part of the broader Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe.

The **European Federation of Journalists** (EFJ) is the largest organisation of journalists in Europe, representing over 320,000 journalists in 77 journalists' organisations across 45 countries. The EFJ represents the interests of journalists' unions and associations and their journalists. The EFJ fights for social and professional rights of journalists working in all sectors of the media across Europe through strong trade unions and associations. The EFJ supports its affiliates to foster trade union development, to recruit new members, and to maintain or create environments in which quality, journalistic independence, pluralism, public service values, and decent work in the media exist. The EFJ's work on media freedom is carried out through the [Media Freedom Rapid Response](#) (MFRR).

Median Research Centre (MRC) is a research-driven non-profit organisation dedicated to enhancing the quality of democracy and governance, with a focus on elections and the role of the information environment. MRC designs online tools to make available and accessible state-of-the-art research-based knowledge on Romanian politics, media and society, including portals on legislative representation, policy debates, and election related information. MRC is involved in the European Media Systems Survey, has deployed innovative collaborations with news media and journalists and is the Romanian partner of the Media Pluralism Monitor, which informs the EU Rule of Law Reports.

The **Council of Europe National Focal Point Romania** is placed at the level of the National Council for Audiovisual and is part of the Council of Europe Campaign for the Safety of Journalists - Journalists Matter. The National Council for Audiovisual of Romania is an autonomous public authority under parliamentary control and guarantor of the public interest in the field of audiovisual communication. The National Focal Point acts as the interface between Romanian stakeholders entrusted with the 'national chapter' of the Campaign and the Council of Europe Secretariat of the Campaign. The NFP's role is to facilitate and to share information about concrete initiatives undertaken at national level to the achievement of the Campaign's goals and, at the same time, to inform corresponding national committees about the outcomes of the exchanges held at European level under the Campaign and facilitate the sharing of good practices.

The organisers wish to thank the Goethe Institut in Bucharest for offering their space to host this initiative.