

Annual Report 2021 by AEJ Media Freedom Representative William Horsley

5 November 2021

In 2021 the freedom of the press in Europe suffered severe attacks and damage from Covid-related and other politically-motivated barriers and restrictions on movement and access to information; political pressures to 'capture' the media and criminalise, jail or exclude critical journalists; and intense harassment and smear campaigns online and in traditional media.

These issues are of high concern to AEJ Sections and members and are prominently reported on www.aej.org, managed by SG Ed Steen, and on sections' websites. Sections contribute in vital ways to information-gathering and providing related materials including published media reports on incidents and issues. AEJ is active in the growing media and civil society efforts to roll back the excessive restrictions and oppression by advocacy and engagement with key institutions and national governments; and by monitoring, reporting and making public statements challenging governments' actions and calling for protection and justice for journalists. Sharing topical reports and advocacy work can be of practical help to AEJ members and other journalists' efforts to hold national governments to account and protect free and independent journalism.

The AEJ has an influential voice as an active non-government organisations with Observer status at the **Council of Europe** <https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/cdmsi>. Thanks to multiple joint actions and engagement the Council of Europe, made up of 47 member states, has declared the protection of journalism and safety of journalism one of its top priorities for action in the coming 4-year period. The **Final Declaration and four resolutions** adopted by states at the 10-11 June Ministerial Conference on media issues in Nicosia promised effective action to protect independent journalism in the fields of regulating digital technologies, safety of journalists, the changing media environment, and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on freedom of expression.

As MF Representative I jointly presented the **Annual report of the 14 partner organisations of the Council of Europe's Platform for the safety of journalists** with CPJ, IPI and others at two online or hybrid public events, both open to AEJ members. The hard-hitting Report *Wanted! Real action for media freedom in Europe*, is published in English <https://aej.org/2021/05/03/coe-platform-report/> and French <https://rm.coe.int/rapport-annuel-fra-liberte-des-medias-en-europe-web/1680a2489f>. It assessed and analysed key trends from about 200 documented cases of attacks, detentions, harassment and impunity; and called for effective, urgent actions to enforce protections and stop government misuses of law to stifle free, independent journalism.

The **Platform website** <https://fom.coe.int/accueil> has recently been upgraded to act as a Europe-wide notice-board for news, initiatives, policies and special events of interest to journalists and civil society. See the new **Safety of Journalists Platform special page** with alerts and details about 26 still unsolved murders of journalists in Council of Europe States.

And these Thematic Factsheets on the existing legal standards that European states should uphold with respect to journalists' rights and media freedom in all important areas such as terrorism and defamation laws, the protection of sources, election reporting and online safety <https://fom.coe.int/fichesthematique>.

Sign up to receive the Council of Europe's informative **Safety of Journalists Weekly**: <https://f.mailing.coe.int/o/?s=A48-eba4-2C53-d5440ea5-a13>.

The **European Commission** announced a new Recommendation on the safety of journalists https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_4632. And the Commission President also promised in her State of the Union address that the EU would have a Media Freedom Act within the next year <https://aej.org/2021/09/16/aej-eu-needs-more-competency-to-protect-free-media/>

Through the EU Media Advocacy Group, the AEJ Media Freedom Rep and other association members contributed to work led by the European Partnership for Democracy to make specific recommendations regarding the EU's Rule of Law Mechanism in order to address the urgent concerns of media and civil society groups. The recommendations called for the Commission's annual Rule of Law Reports to publicly expose and seek to redress serious failings by EU states in the areas of media freedom and upholding the independence of public broadcasting. The joint recommendations were sent to the Commission, European Parliament and others and the dialogue continues <https://epd.eu/2021/09/22/cso-statement-eu-ruleoflaw/> .

Selected AEJ articles, reports, events and Statements in 2021:

January – William Horsley article in Turkish paper BirGün on anniversary of 1993 murder of Turkish journalist Ugur Mumcu

January - AEJ Statement demands freedom for Andrei Aliaksandrou and other jailed Belarus journalists, signed by William Horsley and AEJ President Otmar Lahodynsky <https://aej.org/2021/01/18/aej-statement-demands-freedom-for-andrei-aliaksandrou-and-other-detained-belarus-journalists/> ; AEJ Media Freedom Rep letter to OSCE Media Freedom Representative asked for strong condemnation of Belarus detentions and criminalisation of journalists.

April – Council of Europe takes up attack on Hungarian state-controlled TV against Austrian journalist Franziska Tschindele
<https://aej.org/2021/04/15/mobile-marketing-is-said-to-be-the-future-of-e-commerce/>..

April – Murder of journalist Gioigios Karaivaz in Athens shocks Europe <https://hetq.am/en/article/129588>

May 21: World Press Freedom Day reports from around Europe by William Horsley
<https://aej.org/2021/05/06/news-and-news-suppression-of-media-freedom-day/>

May: Belarus crackdown comment by SG Ed Steen and W Horsley <https://aej.org/2021/05/24/belarus-comments-by-s-g-and-mfsr-horsley/>

June 2021 Council of Europe ministerial conference puts pressure on enemies of press freedom
<https://aej.org/2021/06/16/coe-and-allies-call-out-enemies-of-press-freedom/>

June: Russia objects to parts of Council of Europe policy commitments on media freedom & journalists' protection – William Horsley article
<https://aej.org/2021/06/11/russian-nyet-to-decision-on-media-freedom/>]

July 2021: Dutch crime reporter P. de Vries shot in Amsterdam <https://aej.org/2021/07/07/william-horsley-comments-on-de-vries-shooting/>

July: **AEJ warns of Belarus government attempt to eradicate freedom of expression**
<https://aej.org/2021/07/25/belarus-lukashenko-dictatorship-gets-worse/>

July 2021: AEJ co-signs Open Letter to EU Commission President after Pegasus scandal revelations
<https://aej.org/2021/07/21/aej-open-letter-to-eu-on-pegasus-scandal/>

July: William Horsley article on **Massive power of “criminal services industry”** :
<https://aej.org/2021/07/21/massive-power-of-criminal-services-industry/>

July: AEJ: Never again!” on state role in Daphne's murder, William Horsley, Media Freedom Representative

<https://aej.org/2021/07/30/aej-never-again-on-state-role-in-daphne-murder/>

July; Armenian journalist threatened by armed soldier on Azerbaijani border

<https://aej.org/2021/07/12/spanish-journalist-threatened-on-armenian-border/>

August 20: William Horsley writes on desperate plight of Afghan journalists:

<https://aej.org/2021/08/20/kabul-dark-new-normal-for-journalists-and-free-speech/>

23 August – AEJ signs Media and NGOs message to G7 leaders for protection & evacuation of Afghan journalists

<https://ifex.org/civil-society-and-media-organisations-call-on-the-g7-to-protect-and-evacuate-journalists-and-media-workers-in-afghanistan/>

August: [AEJ joins](#) international demand for Malta to implement Daphne murder Inquiry report

October 16: AEJ joins public Vigil and demonstration in London on 4th anniversary of Daphne killing

<https://aej-uk.org/London%20Daphne%20vigil%202021.pdf>

October: Does Nobel Prize to two journalists really help us? Yes

<https://aej.org/2021/10/10/does-nobel-prize-for-two-journalists-really-help-us-yes/>

PUBLICATIONS: AEJ Media Freedom Rep 2020 Report ATTACHED for reference

William Horsley and Meera Selva: UNESCO Issue Brief on Freedom of Expression and the Safety of Foreign Correspondents (July 2021) <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-brief-calls-attention-safety-foreign-correspondents>

+ *A Mission to inform: Journalists at risk speak out* – Council of Europe, 2020

<https://rm.coe.int/prems-021220-gbr-2018-a-mission-to-inform-journalists-at-risk-speak-ou/16809ff1e2>

Daphne Caruana Galizia speaks out – Council of Europe, 2020

<https://rm.coe.int/prems-092120-gbr-2018-daphne-caruana-galizia-16x24-web/16809ff1e3>

OSCE 3rd Safety of Journalists Guidebook (2020)

<https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/469758>