



RIGA CONFERENCE

THE PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD?

MEETING TODAY'S CHALLENGES
TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION
AND THE SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

5-6 October 2023



JOURNALISTS MATTER

Council of Europe Campaign for the Safety of Journalists

CONCEPT NOTE



Launch of the **Council of Europe** **Campaign for the Safety of Journalists**

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

The right to freedom of expression and information constitutes one of the essential foundations of democratic society. The role of the media is critical in providing the public with accurate and timely information, essential both for individual choices and informed and effective participation in public life.

In conflict situations and wars, trustworthy news and images can contribute to the protection of civilians and conflict prevention, bring to the attention of the international community the horrors and reality of the conflict and expose violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

As a consequence, the work of journalists in conflict zones is fraught with dangers: denial of access, censorship, harassment, arbitrary detention and attacks are alarmingly frequent. As others who decide to work in conflict areas, journalists take consciously a special risk by working there. However, they are considered civilians and, as such, should not be targeted. Member states should recognise the crucial importance and role of journalism and the media – and ultimately individual journalists – in times of conflict and aggression. Safety of journalists in conflict areas is instrumental to that end.

Council of Europe



At the 7th Council of Europe's Conference of Ministers on Mass Media Policy in Kyiv in 2005, ministers adopted a Resolution on freedom of expression and information in times of crisis. In this resolution, ministers reaffirmed their determination to ensure respect for freedom of expression and information as a basic element of a democratic and pluralist society and their undertaking to respect and implement the Council of Europe standards during times of crisis. The Resolution, followed in 2007 by the Committee of Ministers Guidelines, requires that journalists should be able, without impediment and without threat to their security, to report on crisis situations freely and independently, without any possibility of this right being restricted beyond those limits set by the relevant international instruments. The instruments further specify that the safety and security of media professionals is a matter of continuing concern, particularly in times of crisis, which requires that all cases of violence against journalists or media be fully and independently investigated, and that media professionals and their organisations be assisted in appropriate ways to take measures to reduce the risks facing media personnel.

Less than twenty years later, these principles are tested to the limits by the launch of a full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine by a signatory to the resolution, the Russian Federation.

Launch of the Council of Europe Campaign for the Safety of Journalists

In response to the above and to set up measures against a multitude of connected threats and challenges, the Council of Europe and its member states have taken important steps forward to secure the right to freedom of expression, and better protecting journalism, journalists and their safety.

In 2016 the Committee of Ministers adopted the [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2016\)4](#) on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors, requiring to put in place a comprehensive legislative frameworks for the protection of their physical and moral integrity, to adopt appropriate criminal law provisions to prevent impunity and to afford journalists a broad and effective scope of protection. The Recommendation was shortly followed by the Implementation guide [“How to protect journalists and other media actors?”](#), a practical tool containing concrete suggestions for an effective implementation of the Recommendation so as to cover its four pillars: prevention, protection, prosecution and promotion and awareness raising.

At the [Council of Europe’s Conference of Ministers responsible for Media and Information Society](#), held in 2021, in the light of the increasingly worrying situation in



the field, the Council of Europe was urged-to “carry out a **comprehensive campaign, at European level, to promote the safety of journalists** and support corresponding campaigns at national level.”

Therefore the Council of Europe is preparing to launch a 5-year Campaign for the Safety of Journalists.

The launch of the campaign will introduce the international Conference ***The Pen is Mightier than the Sword? Meeting today’s challenges to freedom of expression and the safety of journalists***, co-organised by the Council of Europe and the Latvian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers.

The campaign will set the path for a safer, independent, pluralistic media environment, by encouraging states to put in place national plans and mechanisms for ensuring the safety of journalists, and consequently the protection of journalism and information.

In addition to the challenges facing freedom of expression and the media in today’s context, the conference comes as a response perfectly in line with the national initiatives expected under the umbrella of the Campaign for the Safety of Journalists.

The common goal is to turn the spotlight on the issue of the protection of public watchdogs - the journalists.

Conference **The Pen is Mightier than the Sword?**

Meeting today’s challenges to freedom of expression and the safety of journalists

The title of the conference is inspired by the historical play Cardinal Richelieu by novelist and playwright Edward Bulwer-Lytton written in 1839. In it, Richelieu, as a priest, is unable to take up arms against his enemies but argues that, “The pen is mightier than the sword... Take away the sword; States can be saved without it!” The question mark has been added to prompt reflection given today’s geopolitical context.

Conference Sessions

Session 1: Threats to the freedom of expression and safety of journalists

This session will explore the challenges and threats faced by journalists in the modern world. Discussions will focus on the safety of journalists, the importance of press freedom, and the role of media in democratic societies. Keynote speakers and



panelists will shed light on the current landscape of journalism, the impact of strategic lawsuits against public participation and self-censorship, and the measures needed to ensure the safety of journalists both online and offline.

Session 2: Journalism in times of war and crisis

In this session, participants will delve into the unique challenges faced by journalists reporting from conflict zones and during crises. Keynote speakers and panelists will discuss the crucial role of journalists in providing accurate information during conflicts, the risks they encounter, and the importance of upholding press freedom even in the most challenging situations. The session will also explore the experiences of journalists reporting from war zones and their contributions to the international community's understanding of conflicts.

Session 3: Legal limitations of Freedom of expression in times of conflict and war

This session will examine the legal and ethical considerations surrounding freedom of expression during times of conflict and war. Participants will discuss the balance between the right to express opinions and the need to prevent hate speech and disinformation that can exacerbate conflicts. The discussions will address the permissible limitations on freedom of expression, the role of international instruments in protecting journalists, and the challenges of addressing hate speech in conflict areas.

Session 4: Resilience to disinformation: What Stronger Independent Media Can Do

The final session will focus on the role of independent media in countering disinformation and strengthening democracy. Keynote speakers and panelists will discuss strategies to promote media pluralism, uphold professional standards of journalism, and combat the spread of false information, particularly in the digital age. The session will also explore the importance of supporting independent media outlets and the challenges they face in an era of information warfare.

The whole event underscores a commitment to defending freedom of expression, journalists' safety, and the vital role of media in democratic societies. By addressing these pressing issues through comprehensive discussions, the aim is to create an environment where journalists can perform their essential role without fear, and the right to freedom of expression remains a cornerstone of our democracies.



RIGA2023CONFERENCE

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The **Council of Europe** is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.



Presidency of Latvia
Council of Europe

Présidence de la Lettonie
Conseil de l'Europe



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