



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**  
**The Representative on Freedom of the Media**  
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**2 July 2020**

**Regular Report to the Permanent Council**  
*for the period from 21 November 2019 to 2 July 2020*

# 1. Introduction

Mr. Chair,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to present to you my latest report to the Permanent Council covering the period from November 2019 until today.

This has been an exceptional period marked by the COVID-19 crisis and its impact on the media, and this report will be different from previous ones. And it will also be different as it comes at the end of a three-year mandate.

During this reporting period, since November last year, I intervened on many legislations or situations related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the health crisis has not suppressed the other pre-existing problems of media freedom. Rather, it has amplified existing trends and added a new layer of problems to those we were already facing before.

Regrettably, journalists continued to be attacked, harassed or prosecuted for just doing their work during this period.

Many of my interventions were again related to the safety of journalists, to cases of violence against journalists covering public gatherings, demonstrations, election rallies, or those reporting on migration issues. Some were assaulted by law enforcement officials, some by demonstrators or extremists groups, and others by private security guards of companies. Several journalists were threatened because of their reporting on political issues, corruption cases or environmental issues.

Among the more than 270 interventions I made in this reporting period, 132 individual cases were related to the physical safety of journalists, among them eight arson attacks against the premises of media outlets, cars or houses of journalists, one bomb explosion, and shots fired at a media outlet.

I made interventions on safety issues concerning very diverse situations in our region, in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Spain, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, the US and Uzbekistan.

This diversity in itself shows how concerning and unacceptable the safety situation of journalists remains in our region, and demonstrates the importance and urgency of the full implementation of the Ministerial Council Decision on safety of journalists that you adopted in 2018, which remains my first priority.

In this reporting period, I also had to intervene on over 200 individual cases related to the legal situation of journalists, their legal safety, including 104 detentions and 20 new court proceedings or developments in trials against journalists.

The fact that so many journalists are facing prosecution, condemnation and detention for just reporting on issues of public interest, expressing critical views, or ensuring a plurality of opinions remains one of the greatest challenges for the OSCE region.

As can be seen from my report, I issued interventions on situations related to the detention or prosecution of journalists, ranging from short-term detentions, to sometimes long prison sentences, here again in very different contexts, in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Canada, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkey and the US.

However, we have here very different situations, and I want to underline the gravity of the long prison sentences or pre-trial detentions that we are still facing in some participating States, and most of these situations are concentrated in a few, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Belarus.

Whenever possible, I continued to assist participating States in shaping their policies and legislation in line with international standards and OSCE commitments. Several of the legal reviews that I provided to the participating States were partially, or entirely, taken into account by the authorities.

In Albania, my Office provided updated legal reviews on the amendments to the Law on Audiovisual Media and the Law on Electronic Communications.

In Ukraine, we provided two legal reviews, one on the Draft Law on Media and one on the draft law on countering disinformation.

In Kyrgyzstan, we have just commissioned a legal review on the new law on Manipulation of Information.

In addition, I also had to intervene on several new legislations specifically linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, to State of Emergency laws, or other regulation, which included provisions directly affecting freedom of the media and freedom of expression. I made such interventions regarding legislations in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Tajikistan and Ukraine.

Most of these legislations sought to tackle the dissemination of false information, which might pose a risk to public health, or create panic or public disorder during the pandemic.

As in all those cases, let me repeat that I fully share the need to combat false information, such as on false cures, which can have dramatic consequences for public health. However, this cannot be achieved by limiting media freedom. Rumours are best tackled by ensuring access to pluralistic and independent sources of information, debunking false information, fact-checking initiatives, and media literacy, than by censorship.

It was for this reason that, on 19 March, at an early stage of the crisis, together with the mandate holders on freedom of expression of the United Nations, David Kaye, and of the Organization of the American States, Edison Lanza, I issued a joint statement calling on governments to promote and protect the free flow of information during the pandemic. We also underlined the need to preserve the right of journalists to report freely on the pandemic and to ensure that any restrictions to freedom of expression linked to the protection of public health respect the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality, and are temporary.

Let me add that I do not think that authorities will gain much trust with the public if they are perceived as trying to hide information or curtail the media.

Instead of more restrictions, we need more transparency. Instead of silencing journalists, authorities should let them do their job unhindered, allowing them to find and use all sources that the media themselves deem necessary.

Governments should facilitate access to information, provide the media with reliable information, and hold open and interactive press conferences without discrimination of independent media, ensuring that all media outlets have access to useful information, materials and facilities.

Since last March, I intervened on twelve COVID-19 related legislations in participating States. Several participating States took my recommendations into account and modified provisions or repealed the concerned legislation.

All these issues were publicly discussed with international experts, media representatives and civil society from across the OSCE region, and representatives of the participating States during the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting that we held online, jointly with ODIHR and the Chair-in-Office, on 22 and 23 June.

Two more aspects of the impact of the pandemic were highlighted in this meeting.

Firstly, the working conditions of journalists have further deteriorated during this period.

Journalists and media have suffered from broader containment measures restricting their freedom of movement when reporting in confined areas, or while covering banned public gatherings. In addition, journalists reporting on the virus have oftentimes become victims of insults, threats or attacks, especially when covering instances of disrespect towards confinement measures.

Given the essential role of media workers, Governments should enable them to continue their work, including, where appropriate, by categorizing media as essential or by providing them with the necessary accreditation. Several participating States served as positive examples in this regard.

The second impact I want to highlight is the tremendous economic crisis of the media sector.

Across the OSCE region, media are suffering major economic losses, which are mainly happening through drastic drops in their advertising revenues. In addition, print media have faced additional income losses whenever the various degrees of lockdown have hindered their sales and postal distribution. Media that were already financially struggling prior to the pandemic are reaching the edge, some of them facing liquidation and closure.

Thousands of journalists and media workers have already lost their jobs, and many media outlets across the OSCE region have temporarily suspended their activities, decreased their periodicity, reduced their circulation or cut their airtime.

This crisis is a direct threat to media pluralism and will restrict the sources of information for the public, exactly at a time when the public needs accurate, local, relevant and reliable information the most.

This is a democratic emergency. There is an urgent need for a strong economic support plan to the media, to save this sector that is vital for the life of our societies.

In this context, supporting public service media is more necessary than ever, as they can play a key role in providing quality and relevant information to the population, at all times. Wherever they are strong and independent, they have proven to be a reliable source of information, education and culture, and have been a crucial social link during the pandemic.

Based on our ongoing assessment and evaluation, we will be sharing a report on the impact of COVID-19 related measures on freedom of expression and media freedom, in which we will be offering a first set of findings and recommendations.

Even if, during this reporting period, the COVID-19 pandemic had a strong impact on our work and posed a lot of restrictions to the organization of our conferences and visits, we were able to ensure the continuity of the implementation of the mandate, the observation of the media freedom situation in the participating States, the interventions, the legal assistance, and the organization of several events which had to take place online from mid-March.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank my entire staff for their professionalism and dedication that has enabled our Institution to fully implement its mandate in this time of crisis.

Before the lockdowns and travel restrictions started, we were able to organize several physical meetings and visits.

I visited Armenia on the occasion of the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Armenian Human Rights Defender's Institution, I participated in meetings in the Parliament, met with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and encouraged the authorities to continue promoting a safe and enabling environment for media freedom.

I met, in Bratislava, with the family and colleagues of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak, killed in February 2018 in Slovakia.

I paid an official visit to Ukraine, where I held discussions with the authorities, the media community and international organizations, focusing on two new draft laws, one on Media and one on Countering Disinformation.

In March, we organized the second Central Asia Judicial Dialogue, which took place in Samarkand, with representatives of the supreme Courts and judges from five Central Asian participating States, and experts from the OSCE region, on the protection of freedom of expression while combating terrorism, violent extremism, and hate speech. I would like to thank Uzbekistan for hosting us.

We organized an expert meeting in Vienna, on "Free Speech in the Age of Algorithms and AI", in the framework of our project on the impact of Artificial Intelligence on freedom of expression. Tomorrow, we will be publishing, together with independent experts, a Strategy

Paper with preliminary recommendations on safeguards for free speech. This Paper will be the basis of discussions in the upcoming AI event that we are organizing on 8 July.

We also organized, online and with the support of ARTICLE 19, an event for the presentation of our 21st Joint Declaration on freedom of expression, together with the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, David Kaye, and the Organization of American States Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, Edison Lanza. This year's Joint Declaration focuses on freedom of expression and elections in the digital age, and offers recommendations to State and non-State actors.

On the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, we published an online declaration on the role of a free media during this pandemic.

In June, I spoke at this year's second OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, which I already mentioned, and, I participated, together with experts from the US and Europe, in an online event on the presentation of the final Report of the Transatlantic High-Level Working Group on Online Content Moderation and Freedom of Expression.

During this reporting period, we have also continued to further develop our Safety of Female Journalists Online (SOFJO) project. The documentary "A Dark Place" was included in various journalism curricula and training activities for students and practicing journalists, and in the upcoming weeks, we will publish a SOFJO Resource Guide. This new publication will provide guidance on how best to implement key recommendations developed throughout the SOFJO project and beyond.

Let me add that most of these projects and conferences were made possible thanks to the continued support of several participating States through extra-budgetary contributions to my Office.

If I summarize developments during this period, I can only say that the situation for the press and media freedom is alarming. Threats to media freedom and the work of journalists are on the rise. Not all of them are attributable to States. But it is the responsibility of States to ensure better protection for journalistic work, to combat impunity of crimes committed against journalists, to respect the independence of the press and freedom of expression, and to support pluralism and not to stifle it.

The press is in danger in too many places in the OSCE region and we see many attempts to restrict freedom of expression online and offline and to limit media pluralism including through economic pressure. The COVID-19 related economic crisis is aggravating this situation. One can try to hide or deny it. One can point fingers to protest anywhere but our own places. Everyone can choose between denial or co-operation with the other participating States and the institutions in the OSCE, including the Representative on Freedom of the Media, to improve the situation and respect the commitments on media freedom.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Three years ago, you gave me this mandate, which I implemented, based on an "*independent and objective assessment*" of each situation caused by an "*obstruction of media activities and unfavourable working conditions for journalists*"; this is the mandate in its own words.

I continually “*advocate and promote full compliance with OSCE principles and commitments regarding freedom of expression and free media*”; this is, again, what the mandate says.

When deciding on an intervention, I carry out my work in full respect of the mandate, not based on any pressure. That is my interpretation of the mandate and, I think, the very essence of it.

The mandate further foresees that, and I quote: “*The participating States confirm that they will co-operate fully with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. He or she will assist the participating States, in a spirit of co-operation, in their continuing commitment to the furthering of free, independent and pluralistic media.*”

Co-operate, this worked well with most of the participating States, and this does not mean that there were no problems in these participating States or that my interventions were welcome, but they made good use of the mandate and the Institution to improve the respect for their own commitments on media freedom.

Since 2017, I have made over 1,150 interventions on incidents and cases related to safety of journalists or other media freedom and freedom of expression situations in more than 40 participating States.

No part of the OSCE region is immune when it comes to risks for journalists or violations of media freedom commitments. And I looked at the region in 360 degrees.

This has been a period during which we have faced particularly difficult times for safety of journalists, with many attacks, acts of violence and threats against them. The names of Daphne Caruana Galizia, Ján Kuciak, Lyra Mckee and Pavel Sheremet will remain symbols of the harsh threats to journalists’ safety in recent years. They were added to a long list of journalists killed in the past years in our region. Let me mention, among many others, Slavko Ćuruvija, Duško Jovanović, and Anna Politkovskaya. I will always remember my visit to their colleagues and in particular to the office of Politkovskaya, in Novaya Gazeta in Moscow. I think, also for personal reasons, of the cartoonists and journalists of Charlie Hebdo, Cabu, Elsa Cayat, Charb, Honoré, Bernard Maris, Tignous, Wolinski. It was very important to have Riss, the Director of Charlie Hebdo, who was wounded in the attack in 2015, with us at the conference on Safety of Journalists, which we organized in Vienna last year.

During these three years, I have provided all together 27 legal reviews for 15 participating States, from laws on defamation, to laws on audiovisual media services, and the regulation of social media, online media or hate speech. Several participating States have made the best use of these legal reviews to strengthen their legal framework and improve the protection of media freedom.

We worked on new issues, such as internet regulation or the role of Artificial Intelligence, which will shape the future of freedom of expression and media pluralism. With the aim of demonstrating that security and freedom of the media are not opposing concepts, we worked with civil society, international experts, and the participating States on ways to combat violent extremism, racism and hate speech while respecting freedom of expression.

I made 81 trips to 31 participating States, presenting our work, and speaking with journalists and media freedom experts, and, among them, I undertook 28 official country visits to meet with your authorities, the media community, and civil society organizations. I want to praise

these organizations for their tremendous work in defence of press freedom, Reporters Without Borders, ARTICLE 19, IPI, CPJ, ECPMF, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, EFJ, Media Policy Institute, Adil Soz, Institute of Mass Information, Access Now, Share Foundation, and so many others.

Each year, we organized regional media conferences for South East Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia, bringing together the media community and representatives of the participating States. On all of these occasions, we adopted and sent to the governments a set of recommendations. I would like to thank all those countries that have hosted us on these occasions: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, and Uzbekistan.

We organized the first two Central Asia Judicial Dialogues in Bishkek and Samarkand.

We continued to support, in Cyprus, a dialogue between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot journalists' associations, and an exchange programme of journalists from both communities with the aim of enhancing co-operation and advancing accountable, quality journalism.

The adoption of the Ministerial Council Decision on Safety of Journalists in December 2018 was a landmark for the OSCE and for our Institution. This issue was at the heart of many of the events we have organized before its adoption, and even more so since then.

The conference on "Strengthening media freedom and pluralism in Ukraine during times of conflict in and around the country", held in 2018 in Kyiv; the Conference on "Increasing Opportunities for Freedom of Expression and Media Pluralism" which was part of our Safety of Female Journalists Online project (SOFJO) in 2019 in Vienna; the conference "Journalists Under Attack: A Threat to Media Freedom" in 2019; the conference on "Freedom of the Media and Safety of Journalists in the Russian Federation and in the OSCE Region: Challenges and Opportunities in the Digital Age" in 2019 in Moscow, which was the first one organized by the OSCE on this issue in Russia in 20 years; all provided important forums for journalists to discuss with the participating States how we can improve journalists' safety.

We organized a total of 35 major events and conferences in 12 participating States, where we discussed media pluralism and sustainability of the media, online regulation and professional standards of journalism, disinformation, support to fact-checking initiatives, media literacy, and the role of public service media.

We raised cases of journalists in danger, and I intervened for the release of detained journalists in my meetings with your authorities.

It has been an honour to serve this Institution, to defend the rights of courageous journalists, some of them facing harsh harassment for their activities, throughout the OSCE region.

You have made a very strong commitment by creating this Institution. This organization, the OSCE, can be proud of it, and this Institution, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, with its strong mandate, is unique worldwide. That is also why civil society and media freedom organizations are attached so much to its existence and its interventions. It is true that these commitments are demanding for the participating States, but they have themselves decided to abide by them.



It is the respect of these commitments that I have been looking to, your commitments as stated in the mandate, which says that the participating States, “*recall in particular*”, and I quote, “*that freedom of expression is a fundamental and internationally recognised human right and a basic component of a democratic society and that free, independent and pluralistic media are essential to a free and open society and accountable systems of government.*”

Looking to the respect of these principles that you decided was the mandate that you entrusted to me and I have tried to assist you in fulfilling it.

Thank you.

## 2. Issues raised with participating States

### Albania

On **2 December 2019**, I wrote to the Prime Minister, Edi Rama, and on **9 December** issued a public statement, presenting an updated legal review on the amendments to the “**Law on Audiovisual Media**” and the “**Law on Electronic Communications**”. This legal analysis was part of a long consultation process, started in December 2018, between my Office and the government on the drafting of the legislation.

I welcomed the addition of a strong safeguard in the law, stating that no provisions shall be interpreted in such a way as to accord the right to censor or restrict freedom of expression, or the right to speak out; and that the law shall be interpreted in accordance with the principles of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. I also welcomed other positive elements, such as: a new wording of the provisions which define the object and scope of the law; that electronic media providers will not be submitted to a compulsory registration mechanism to perform their activities in Albania; the decision to suppress an article which would have granted the regulator extensive new powers; and that the possibility of blocking access to online content will now be limited to three grave criminal offences: child pornography, promotion of terrorist acts, and breaches to national security.

However, I recommended incorporating several additional modifications in the current draft to clarify safeguards to freedom of expression and avoid any risk of undue restrictions or sanctions on electronic media providers. In particular, I recommended the introduction of an appeal mechanism for the decisions of the regulator, the revision of the level of fines, and the removal of the references to “political belief” and “union membership”. (*For more details, see Legal Reviews.*)

On **17 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I announced that my Office had been working with Prime Minister Edi Rama and the Government of Albania, to improve the draft laws on media and bring them in line with international standards and OSCE commitments. I emphasized the improvements of the latest published version compared to the previous draft laws: the elimination of the registration obligations; the introduction of the general safeguards regarding international standards; the introduction of strict limitation to content takedowns; and the adaptation of the regulation of the right to reply to the needs of electronic publications. However, I also stressed that the level of the fines need to be reduced, and that a future sub-legal instrument needs to be adopted to guarantee that no disproportionate fines can be imposed on electronic publication service providers. I concluded that my Office will monitor closely the application of the law, which must, in no way, impede freedom of expression and media freedom, and that the regulator should apply the law in a truly independent manner.

On **13 January 2020**, I issued a public statement regarding the explanatory documents that I received from the Office of the President of Albania, Ilir Meta, on the reasons for the return to parliament of the “**Law on Audiovisual Media**” and the “**Law on Electronic Communications**”. I confirmed my readiness to continue working with Albania’s authorities to improve the laws, in particular on the issue of the level of the fines and the respect for the principle of proportionality as enshrined in international law.

I recalled that nothing in the new legislation should impede freedom of expression and media freedom. I also expressed my hope that the new reading would allow for further clarification and improvement of the laws, to ensure their full compliance with international standards and OSCE commitments.

On **15 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the establishment, by 19 media outlets, of the Alliance for Ethical Media, a self-regulatory mechanism for journalism in Albania. I stated that this would help promote and ensure ethical journalism, copyright rules and self-regulation mechanisms based on international standards.

On **16 May**, I wrote to the Acting Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Gent Cakaj, regarding the situation of **RTV Ora**, which received warnings and a fine and was at risk of having its signal cut by the Audiovisual Media Authority. The TV channel was presented with the fines and warning after receiving more than two people in its studio, which went against a normative Act adopted by the National Assembly on 15 March, in relation with the **COVID-19** pandemic. I noted that other media outlets had only received a warning and no fine in similar situations. While I stated that I understood the need to take measures aimed at protecting public health and limiting the spread of the pandemic, including by social distancing, I called on the authorities to maintain the signal of the TV channel.

### **Armenia**

On **25 – 26 November 2019**, I paid an official visit to Armenia, on the occasion of the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Armenian Human Rights Defender's Institution. On this occasion, I met with the Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, and encouraged the authorities to continue promoting a safe and enabling environment for media freedom. (*For more details, see Visits.*)

On **20 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the assault on the editorial offices of the **Zhoghovurd newspaper** and **ArmLur.am**. I expressed my hope that the perpetrators would be found and brought to justice. I stressed that any attack on journalists is unacceptable, and that the media should be free to do their work without intimidation.

On **10 January 2020**, I wrote to the authorities requesting information on the arrest of a Facebook user, by the National Security Service, on charges of inciting hatred in a post. I was particularly interested to learn more about the details of the legal framework on which the decision was based. I also underlined the importance of the principle of proportionality.

On 4 February, I received a reply from the authorities informing me that the National Security Service had identified and detained the Facebook user on charges of committing publicly dangerous actions, by illegally accessing the private page of another Facebook user and posting an article aimed at inciting national enmity and disseminating hatred.

On **10 March**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern at, and requesting information on, a provision of the draft Criminal Code developed by the Ministry of Justice, which, inter alia, introduced criminal liability on charges of “false denunciation” (Article 450), which could affect the work of the media. The provision would introduce a penalty of up to seven years in prison, if untrue information about crimes committed by an individual is reported to the authorities or published in the mass media. I called on the authorities to scrutinize the proposed

provision and its implications for freedom of expression and freedom of the media, and to ensure that the legislation complies with relevant international standards.

On 25 March, I received a reply from the authorities informing me that the Ministry of Justice had withdrawn the media-related regulation in question from the draft Criminal Code.

On **24 March**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at a package of amendments to the criminal and administrative codes, introduced on 23 March, in the context of the fight against disinformation related to the **COVID-19** pandemic. The amendments specified that, during the state of emergency, any “organization that carries out journalistic activities” would only be allowed to publish information about the **coronavirus** crisis that has been released by official sources. I stressed that the law should not impede the work of journalists and their ability to report on the pandemic, and that publishing only information provided by the authorities is a very restrictive measure that would limit freedom of the media and access to information disproportionately.

On 27 March, I received a letter from the authorities providing an Explanatory Memorandum on measures taken by the Government of Armenia, in response to my public statement of 24 March. The Memorandum stated that “the Decree of the Government regulates only the publication of information of a medical and epidemiological nature, thus ensuring safeguards for the genuine freedom of media outside this narrow topical framework.” In addition, the authorities informed me that the government had decided to amend the Decree on the State of Emergency concerning the regulations of media activity, to address my concerns as well as those of media advocacy NGOs and of editors in Armenia.

On **27 March**, I issued a public statement, and on **30 March** wrote to the authorities, welcoming the Explanatory Memorandum on measures taken by the Government of Armenia, sent to me on 27 March in response to my public statement of 24 March.

On 23 April, I received a letter from the authorities, in response to my letter of 6 February 2019, providing me with additional information on the criminal cases initiated on the arson attack on, and damage inflicted to, a car belonging to the regional newspaper **Syuniats Yerkir** on 5 February 2019 (*see also PC Report of 4 July 2019*). The letter provided details on the investigative activities that were carried out, and informed me that, as a result, the criminal case was suspended.

On **29 June**, I wrote to the authorities requesting more information on, and offering an expert assessment of, the new law “**On Audiovisual Media**”, which was approved in the first reading by the National Assembly on 18 June. I expressed my hope that the new law would help enhance media pluralism in the country, including through a liberalization of the audiovisual sector.

## **Austria**

On **26 May 2020**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the decision of the prosecutor’s office in Vienna to drop the charges against two journalists of the **Süddeutsche Zeitung**, **Frederik Obermaier** and **Bastian Obermayer**, who revealed the so-called Ibiza-videos. I reiterated that media workers must not be prosecuted for publishing information of public interest.

## Azerbaijan

On **20 December 2019**, I wrote to the authorities to convey my concern over the arrest of blogger **Elvin Isaev**, who was placed in a pre-trial holding cell after he was deported from Ukraine on 12 December on grounds of “violating immigration laws”. I requested additional information regarding the charges against him and other relevant details on the matter. I also called on the authorities to, instead, place **Isaev** under house arrest pending trial and to grant him all procedural privileges in accordance with the law.

On **28 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at reports that the police had detained and beaten the blogger **Mehman Huseynov**, in Baku. I called on the authorities to conduct a swift and thorough investigation into this matter and to bring those responsible to justice.

On **16 January 2020**, I wrote to the authorities conveying my concern at, and requesting additional information on, the situation of several journalists. In particular, I urged the authorities to conduct a thorough investigation into reports of fake messages spread on social networks against the editor of the online platform **Criminalaz.com**, **Anar Mammadov**. I also called on the authorities to lift the travel ban of the freelance journalist, **Shahvad Chobanoglu**, and raised the case of the investigative journalist, **Khadija Ismayilova**, who has also been facing similar travel restrictions for several years.

On 1 May, I received a reply from the authorities informing me that, in connection with the fake messages regarding the alleged attack against him, **Mammadov** was received at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, upon the journalist’s request for an investigation into the incident. The letter also indicated that **Mammadov** participated in, or is still involved in, several lawsuits as a defendant. On **Chobanoglu**, the authorities informed me that the criminal probe in his case continues. In **Ismayilvoa**’s case, the authorities said that she abandoned the appeal procedure that she had started to request a temporary lifting of her travel ban.

On 17 June, I learned that the Agdam district court found **Mammadov** guilty of insult charges, while ruling to acquit him of slander charges. **Mammadov** received a one-year sentence of corrective labour, as a result of which he is obliged to pay 20% of his income throughout the year to a state budget.

On **12 February**, I issued a public statement deploring the violent incidents against, and mistreatment and detention of, journalists during an election-related protest in Baku, on 11 February. At least eight journalists, who work as freelancers or contribute to various media outlets, including **Amerikann Səsi** (Azerbaijani service of **Voice of America**), **Radio Azadliq** (Azerbaijani service of **RFE/RL**), and **Meydan TV**, were mistreated, detained or attacked by law enforcement representatives during the dispersal of the protest. I also noted reports that the editor of the **Bastainfo.com** online platform, **Mustafa Hajibeyli**, was beaten, that the journalist **Aynur Elgunesh** was hit on the head, and that the journalist **Sevinc Vaqifqizi** suffered bruises on his face and arm. I called on the authorities to investigate these incidents swiftly, bring all those responsible to account, and provide appropriate remedies for the victims.

On 3 March, I received a letter from the authorities, in response to my public statement of 12 February, indicating that the police’s actions were taken to restore public order. The letter

further informed me that the police did not use any violence against the media representatives who were present and did not create any obstacles for media to carry out their duties.

On **28 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the judgement of the European Court of Human Rights, which concluded that the arrest and detention of journalist **Khadija Ismayilova** in 2014 violated her rights (*see also PC Report of 18 June 2015*).

On **17 March**, I issued a public statement, in addition to a statement from my official Twitter account, welcoming the release of independent investigative journalist **Afgan Mukhtarli**, who was abducted in Tbilisi in May 2017 and brought to Baku. He was convicted of “smuggling”, “illegal crossing of the border” and “resisting an official representative” and sentenced to six years of imprisonment.

On **25 March**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the amendments to the Law “**On Information**”, adopted by the national parliament on 17 March, in the context of the fight against disinformation related to the **COVID-19** pandemic. Based on the amendments, the owner of any internet information resource would be under the obligation to prevent the publication of false information online. I stressed that the law should not impede the work of journalists and their ability to report on the pandemic.

On **23 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at reports of several journalists being detained, including **Ibrahim Vazirov** and **Mirsahib Rahiloglu** on 13 April, and **Natig Izbatov** on 9 April, who reported on **COVID-19** related developments. I called on the authorities to ensure journalists’ safety and that they not be impeded from doing their work.

On 20 May, I received a letter from the authorities, in response to my statement of 23 April, indicating that the government had imposed no restrictions on the work of journalists, particularly during the **COVID-19** pandemic. I was informed that all three journalists in question were detained and imprisoned on charges of breaching quarantine regime regulations and/or deliberately resisting lawful requests of police officers related to the quarantine.

On **24 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the decision of the Supreme Court to acquit free expression advocate and human rights defender **Rasul Jafarov**, who was sentenced to prison on various criminal charges in 2015 (*see also PC Reports of 27 November 2014 and 18 June 2015*).

On **7 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I noted an important decision by the European Court of Human Rights in the case of investigative journalist **Khadija Ismayilova**. The court ruled that Azerbaijan should have provided her with a proper legal remedy to protect her privacy and her reputation against an article about her private and sexual life.

On **8 May**, I wrote to the authorities, and issued a statement from my official Twitter account, expressing my concern at the attack on journalist **Zaur Gambarov**, from the **Anews.az** news website. Reportedly, on 4 May, the head of the regional social security office of the Gadabay district and his driver attacked and insulted **Gambarov** when he visited that office’s premises on a work-related matter. As a result, **Gambarov** suffered injuries and his mobile phone was broken. I urged the authorities to investigate this incident and bring those responsible to justice.

On **19 May**, I wrote to the authorities conveying my concern, and requesting information, about the arrest of journalist **Afgan Sadiqov**, founder and editor of the **Azel.tv** news website and **Azel TV** YouTube channel. On 13 May, law enforcement authorities detained **Sadiqov**, reportedly on suspicion of extorting money from public officials in the city of Sumqayit, in exchange for not publishing information that would expose these officials. I called on the authorities to conduct an investigation into the matter in a transparent manner and in full compliance with the principles of the rule of law.

## **Belarus**

On **4 December 2019**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern at, and requesting additional information on, the arrest of the journalist and editor of the **by24.org** website, **Vladimir Chudentsov**, on 21 November. Belarusian customs officers arrested the journalist after they allegedly found drugs in his bag while he was attempting to cross the state border into Poland by train. The police also reportedly searched his apartment in Minsk, later the same day, where they claimed to have also found drugs. I urged the authorities to conduct a thorough and transparent investigation, and to ensure that his arrest is not related to his professional activities as a journalist.

On **26 March 2020**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the detention of **Serguey Satsouk**, director and editor of the news website **Ezhednevnik** (ej.by), in Minsk. Police arrested him reportedly under suspicion that he had accepted a bribe, in August 2019, while investigating a story on corruption related to the import of medical drugs to Belarus. Prior to his arrest, **Satsouk** was reporting on healthcare corruption during the **COVID-19** pandemic. I underlined that journalists should not be intimidated, prosecuted or detained for reporting on issues of public interest and on the **COVID-19** situation.

On **31 March**, following my public statement of 26 March on the detention of **Serguey Satsouk**, I further wrote to the authorities to bring his case directly to their attention. I expressed my concern at the fact that he had been detained and subsequently arrested without being presented with any official charges. I recalled that journalists should not be prosecuted or detained for reporting on issues of public interest, including the **COVID-19** situation, and reiterated my call on the authorities to release him. I also expressed my readiness to support them in all efforts aimed at establishing a safe, diverse and pluralistic media landscape in the country.

On **4 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the release of **Serguey Satsouk** and stated that journalists must be able to report freely on the **COVID-19** pandemic.

On **10 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at a new court summons of **Larissa Shiryakova**, of **Belsat TV**, following the broadcast of interviews with residents of Gomel city on 1 March. I said that the practice of sanctions based on the Administrative Code bans journalists from reporting on matters of public interest.

On **15 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my dismay at a court sentence imposing a fine of 945 Belarusian rubles (approximately 350 euros) on **Larissa Shiryakova**, for a report she wrote about life during the **COVID-19** pandemic in Belarus. I said that journalism has a crucial function at this moment of public health emergency.

On **7 May**, I wrote to the authorities conveying my concern at, and requesting information on, the revocation of accreditation of a crew from the Russian television channel **Perviy Kanal**. According to reports, on 6 May, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus revoked the accreditation of correspondent **Aleksei Kruchinin** and camera operator **Sergei Panasyuk**. The reason for revoking their accreditation was not provided. Reportedly, the journalists had been covering the **coronavirus** pandemic in Belarus. According to **Perviy Kanal**, the authorities also ordered the journalists to leave the country.

On 15 May, I received a reply from the authorities indicating that the decision regarding the revocation of accreditation was made in connection with the journalists' repeated use of rude manipulative techniques, the dissemination of fake, one-sided information, and information that is not true in relation to **COVID-19**. The authorities did not deport journalist **Aleksei Kruchinin** (a citizen of Russia) and he is able to visit the country as a private person. The letter also indicated that the office of **Perviy Kanal** continues to function and that the channel can appoint a new journalist to work in the country.

On **12 May**, I issued a public statement, in addition to a statement from my official Twitter account, and on **14 May** wrote to the authorities, expressing my concern at, and denouncing, the detention and imprisonment of journalists and freelance reporters **Mikhail Arshynski**, **Dzmitryy Lupach**, **Ales Asiptsov** and **Alexander Burakou**, for "participating in unauthorized events". On 11 and 12 May, the Mahilyow and Hlybokaye district courts sentenced these reporters to 10 days of administrative arrest on charges of participating in unauthorized events while they were reportedly observing and covering public gatherings in support of the detained video blogger **Syarhey Tsikhanowski**. I called for their immediate release.

On **18 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the detention of freelance journalist **Ales Burakow (Sasha Raykon)**, for allegedly participating in an unauthorized gathering. I reiterated that the media must be free to report on events of public interest.

On **6 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the police's detention and seizure of equipment of the freelance journalists and camera operators **Alena Dubovik**, **Halina Abakunchyk**, **Ales Barazenska** and **Syarhei Kavaliou**, contributors to the channel **Belsat**, on 4 and 5 June in Babruysk and Zhodino. I called on the authorities to ensure that journalists can report freely on public events.

On **17 June**, I wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vladimir Makei, conveying my concern at, and requesting more information on, the detention and imprisonment of several journalists and bloggers over the past several weeks. In particular, I raised the cases of three bloggers, **Eduard Palchis**, **Nikolai Maslovsky** and **Vladimir Tsyganovich**, sentenced on 15 June to 15 days of administrative arrest on charges of "participating in unauthorized events" on 31 May in Minsk. I also reiterated my concern regarding the imprisonment and detention of several journalists, whose cases I had already raised in my statements of 12 May, 18 May and 6 June. I called on the authorities to ensure that all media actors can work unhindered, and to avoid any undue restrictions on media activities.

On **20 June**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern over a series of detentions of journalists who were covering public gatherings, on the last day for citizens to collect signatures in support of the nomination of presidential candidates. According to reports, on 19



June, law enforcement representatives detained at least 10 media workers, including from **Radio Svaboda** (part of RFE/RL), **Reuters**, **Euroradio.fm**, **Tut.by**, **Onliner.by**, **Belsat TV** and **Bobr.by**, in Minsk, Gomel and Bobruisk. Reportedly, the detained media workers were released later. I called on the authorities to ensure that journalists can cover and report on public gatherings, without fear of detention.

On **1 July**, I wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vladimir Makei, and issued a statement from my official Twitter account, conveying my concern over, and requesting information on, the detention of several media actors, including the bloggers and Telegram channel authors and moderators **Ihar Losik**, **Siarhei Piatrukhin**, **Aliaksandr Kabanau**, **Aliaksandr Andreyeu**, **Uladzimir Niaronski**, **Uladzimir Tsyhanovich** and **Siarhei Sparysh**. They were reportedly charged with organizing group activities that breach public order, in relation to public events taking place in the country ahead of presidential elections. I asked the authorities to conduct a transparent investigation with due consideration for international standards and OSCE commitments on freedom of expression.

### **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

On **24 February 2020**, I issued a public statement expressing my dismay at the insults and threats by the Head of the Representative Office of the Republika Srpska in the Russian Federation against journalists and the editor-in-chief of the web portal **Capital**. The insults and threats, made on 21 February, followed an investigative article into the business affairs of a foreign company in Republika Srpska, an entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I condemned the threats, and stated that such pressure against journalists is unacceptable. I urged the authorities to investigate the case in a swift and fully transparent manner.

On **27 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I denounced the statement made by Milorad Dodik, a member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which he referred to the **Klix.ba** online portal as an enemy media of the Republika Srpska entity. I stated that such allegations are unacceptable and can pose a serious threat to journalists' safety.

On **23 March**, together with the Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kathleen Kavalec, I issued a joint public statement expressing our concern at the introduction of new measures against spreading panic and "fake news" in the country regarding the **coronavirus**.

On **10 April**, together with the Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kathleen Kavalec, I sent a joint letter to the President of Republika Srpska, Željka Cvijanović, and on **14 April** issued a joint public statement, expressing our concern at a decree law which prohibits the spreading of false news that incites to panic, and which prescribes significant fines for those who do so. We noted that such measures could restrict the ability of the media and of journalists to report freely on the **COVID-19** pandemic, and lead to arbitrary and disproportionate penalties. We called on the authorities to withdraw the decree.

On 17 April, I received a letter from the authorities, in response to my letter of 10 April and my public statement of 14 April, informing me that the emergency decree on incitement to panic and disorder during the state of emergency was withdrawn.

On **15 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I denounced the threats and insults against **Faktor** journalists, after they published an article about a shooting and a car

being set on fire in Sarajevo. I commended the swift reaction by police and called for those responsible for the threats to be brought to justice.

On **17 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, together with the Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kathleen Kavalec, I welcomed the decision by the authorities of Republika Srpska to revoke the emergency decree on incitement to panic and disorder, which could have been detrimental to media freedom.

On **22 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern after police stopped **RTV Slon** journalists in Tuzla. The police briefly confiscated one of the journalists' phones and deleted photos. I underlined that the police should protect journalists and not harass them or prevent them from working.

On **25 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I denounced the death threats on Facebook against the editor-in-chief of the **E-trafika** portal, **Vanja Stokić**. I welcomed the police's swift intervention, whereby they detained a suspect. I stressed that such threats against journalists are unacceptable and must not be tolerated.

On **29 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the online targeting, insults and death threats against **N1** journalist **Nikola Vučić**, in relation to one of his posts on Twitter. I called on the authorities to investigate and ensure his safety and that of his family.

I later learned that an investigation was launched into the death threats on social networks against **N1** reporter **Nikola Vučić**.

On **8 June**, together with the Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kathleen Kavalec, I issued a joint public statement condemning the physical attack against **RTV Zenica** journalist **Sinan Gluhić**, on 5 June, in Zenica. The attack took place after a high-level politician had threatened the journalist over the phone. These incidents are believed to be connected to **Gluhić**'s posts on social media, on 31 May, about delayed construction work on a local road. I called on the authorities to swiftly investigate the incident, bring the perpetrators to justice, and protect the journalist.

On **18 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the verbal attacks by police officers and their threat to fine journalist **Nidžara Ahmetašević**, while she was filming the treatment of migrants by police. I underlined that this incident needs to be investigated, and stressed that police should protect the media; not obstruct them.

## **Bulgaria**

On **14 February 2020**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I deplored the accusations of corruption made by Valeri Simeonov, a deputy speaker of parliament, against the **bTV** TV channel journalists **Venelin Petkov** and **Anton Hekimyan**. I recalled the OSCE commitment that political leaders, public officials and authorities should refrain from intimidating journalists.

On **18 March**, I issued a public statement condemning a brutal attack on the journalist and editor of the weekly newspaper and related website "**168 chasa**", **Slavi Angelov**, in Sofia. Three masked individuals attacked **Angelov** near his home and beat him with iron rods until

he lost consciousness. Reportedly, the attack was linked to his work. I urged the authorities to swiftly identify those responsible and to bring them to justice.

On 10 April, I received a letter from the authorities, in response to my public statement of 18 March, informing me that the national competent authorities had initiated pre-trial proceedings into the case of **Slavi Angelov**. The authorities also informed me that the Prosecutor General, the Minister of Interior and Bulgarian politicians had condemned the attack.

On 20 May, I received a letter from the authorities providing a further update on the investigation of the attack on journalist **Slavi Angelov**. The authorities informed me that three individuals accused in the attack had been arrested and charged.

On **15 April**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the draft legislation that would criminalize the spread of “internet misinformation” in response to the **COVID-19** pandemic. A new bill, with amendments to the Radio and Television Act and the Criminal Code, would include fines of up to 1,000 euros and imprisonment of up to three years.

On 10 May, I received a letter from the authorities, in response to my public statement of 15 April, informing me that the issues I raised concerning the amendments to the Radio and Television Act, in the context of the **COVID-19** pandemic, are being taken seriously and are being examined by the National Assembly of Bulgaria, its Committee on Culture and Media, and the Committee on Legal Affairs.

On **24 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the news that three individuals had been charged in connection with the assault on journalist **Slavi Angelov**. I expressed my hope that this was the first step in untangling this attack and in bringing the masterminds to justice.

On **25 May**, I wrote to the authorities and issued a statement from my official Twitter account, expressing my condolences over the tragic death of Bulgarian journalist **Georgi Alexandrov**, and requesting any additional information available to them concerning the investigation carried out by the Prosecutor’s Office into his death.

On 29 May, I received a reply the authorities about the investigation into the tragic death of Bulgarian journalist **Georgi Alexandrov**. The letter informed me that the investigation found that there were “no medical findings of injuries or traumas caused by violence against **Georgi Alexandrov**” and that “the pre-trial proceedings work on two main hypotheses - an accident or a suicide.”

On **26 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I said that I was closely following the criminal procedures against **Ivo Prokopiev**, media owner of the **Economedia** group, which publishes **Capital.bg** and **Dnevnik Online**, known as sources of independent and quality journalism in the country. I stressed that pluralism and freedom of the media must be preserved and respected.

On 28 June, I learned that the court acquitted **Ivo Prokopiev**.

## Canada

On **27 February 2020**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the arrest of journalist **Melissa Cox** while she was reporting on protests against a gas pipeline construction in British Columbia. I called on the authorities to ensure that journalists can cover issues of public interest unhindered.

On 5 March, I received a letter from the authorities, in response to my letter of 12 November 2019, informing me that the Six Nations Police Service had opened an investigation into the targeted attack against the **Turtle Island News** media outlet in Southern Ontario (*see also PC Report of 21 November 2019*).

## Croatia

On **25 January 2020**, I issued a public statement denouncing the verbal attacks against, and intimidation of, **Andrea Topić**, a journalist of **Slobodna Dalmacija**. On 23 January, four individuals verbally attacked **Topić** and surrounded her car while she was working on an investigative story related to the property of a member of the Government of Croatia. I welcomed the very swift action by local police, who opened an investigation and detained the perpetrators.

On **29 January**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the court decision sentencing the deputy mayor of Požega, in relation to his physical attacks and threats against journalist **Mladen Mirković** in 2017. I stressed that such acts are unacceptable, especially from a public official, and must be dealt with in full compliance with the law.

On **12 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I deplored the physical and verbal attacks against a **Dalmatinski portal** journalist and an **N1** camera operator, during an Easter Mass in Split. I welcomed the intervention by police, who reportedly detained two suspects.

On **15 April**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern, and requesting additional information, about the attack against journalist **Domagoj Margetić**, when, on the night of 12 April, an unidentified individual attempted to break into his apartment in Zagreb and threatened to kill him. **Margetić** reported the incident to the police, who launched an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the case. I recalled that **Margetić** had been the victim of numerous threats and attacks in the past, some of which my Office had publicly reacted on.

On 18 May, I received a reply from the authorities informing me that, on 13 April, **Domagoj Margetić** had filed criminal charges, that the competent authorities are currently conducting a criminal investigation, and that they are regularly informing the Municipal State Attorney's Office about the undertaken actions. Moreover, I was informed that the Republic of Croatia condemns all attacks on journalists as well as all actions that in any way threaten media freedom and freedom of expression in the country.

## Cyprus

On **4 March 2020**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the bomb explosion outside the **MC Digital Media** news agency building, which houses a number of media outlets, including **The Cyprus Times**. I also welcomed the strong condemnation by the Government, and recalled that nothing can justify such an attack against the media.

On **4 May**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern after the Turkey Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) decided to stop the broadcasting of the Turkish-Cypriot **Diyalog TV** channel, which affected areas not under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus. I noted that such a decision negatively impacts the free flow of information and access to a plurality of views and opinions.

### **Estonia**

On **20 December 2019**, I wrote to the authorities, and on **21 December** issued a statement from my official Twitter account, expressing my concern over measures targeting journalists of **Sputnik Estonia**. I encouraged the authorities to refrain from unnecessary limitations on the work of foreign media which can affect the free flow of information.

On 27 December, I received a reply from the authorities informing me that Estonia had not blocked the content of **Sputnik Estonia**. They further informed me that the case represented a legal matter of implementing EU sanctions, including financial sanctions, against **Dmitry Kiselyov**, the Director General of Rossiya Segodnya – the international news agency that established **Sputnik Estonia**.

### **France**

On **6 December 2019**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the situation of Turkish **Anadolu Agency** photojournalist **Mustafa Yalgin**, who was wounded while covering protests the previous day in Paris. I noted that other journalists, including **Gaspard Glanz** and **Taha Bouhafs**, were also injured, and that there must be investigations into these incidents.

On **11 December**, I wrote to the authorities raising my concern after several journalists were wounded by sting-ball grenades, during protests on 5 December. In particular, in Paris, the Turkish **Anadolu Agency**'s photojournalist **Mustafa Yalgin** suffered an eye injury, while **Gaspard Glanz**, from **Taranis NEWS**, and **Taha Bouhafs**, from **La-bas si j'y suis**, suffered injuries to their legs. In Nantes, journalists from **Ouest France** and **France Bleu Loire Ocean** were also wounded. I also raised an incident that occurred on 9 December, during which two journalists from **La Voix du Nord** were, according to the National Union of Journalists, attacked by a police commissioner while covering a high-school blockade.

On 4 February 2020, I received a reply from the authorities, which reiterated France's strong attachment to defending freedom of expression and to its international commitments on the matter. They informed me about the judicial framework in place that allows journalists to bring their cases to justice, would the journalists consider themselves victims of violence or restrictions, and that the Ministry of Interior recalled that such complaints and flagging of incidents are processed quickly. They also stated that the French justice system is fully independent and impartial, so as to ensure that fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression and media freedom, are respected.

- Regarding the cases of **Mustafa Yalgin** and **Gaspard Glanz**, the authorities informed me that investigations had been opened to shed light on the causes of their wounds.
- The authorities also informed me that the prosecution services in Nantes had not received any information regarding the incidents involving journalists from **Ouest France** and **France Bleu Loire Ocean**, that the journalists and the media had not filed any complaints and that, as a result, there was currently no ongoing investigation.

- Regarding the case of the two journalists in Lille, the authorities informed me that one of them immediately pressed charges for “aggravated voluntary violence” and stated that he had not been wounded, but instead had been restricted by pepper spray while covering the incident. The complaint is currently under examination.

On **18 December 2019**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the six-month suspended sentence and the fine of 5,000 euros handed down to a man responsible for harassing the journalist **Julie Hainaut**. I recalled that online threats against female journalists are unbearable and have no place in society.

On **10 January 2020**, I wrote to the authorities raising several incidents involving journalists who were covering protests in several cities, on 9 January. In particular, I raised the case of **Rémy Buisine**, from **Brut**, who was apprehended by the police while covering protests in Paris, reportedly because he was wearing a gas mask to protect himself from pepper spray. I also mentioned several other incidents in Paris and Toulouse against photojournalists, which were raised by media associations and journalists’ unions.

On 24 February, I received a reply from the authorities, which reiterated France’s strong attachment to defending freedom of expression and to its international commitments on the matter. They informed me about the judicial framework in place to allow journalists to bring their cases to justice, would the journalists consider themselves victims of violence or restrictions, and that the Ministry of Interior recalled that such complaints and flagging of incidents are processed quickly. The authorities also stated that the French justice system is fully independent and impartial, to ensure that fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression and media freedom, are respected.

Regarding **Rémy Buisine**, the authorities informed me that, although he was apprehended and brought to a police station due to him wearing a cartridge mask, no judicial proceedings were opened against him. The authorities further informed me that they had not received any information on potential incidents against journalists in Paris or Toulouse on 9 January.

On **13 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the launch of an investigation, in France, into the businessperson suspected of ordering the murder of the Maltese investigative journalist **Daphne Caruana Galizia**, assassinated on 16 October 2017 in Malta. I stated that this investigation, which followed complaints by the journalist’s family and Reporters Without Borders, would help shed light on all the circumstances surrounding her assassination.

On **1 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the aggression against the journalist **Eric Zemmour** in Paris, and called for a full investigation so that the aggressor is identified and prosecuted. The aggressor filmed himself spitting on the journalist and threatening him in the street.

I later learned that the Paris prosecutor had opened an investigation into this attack.

On **27 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my worries after **Mediapart** journalist **Pascale Pascariello** was summoned by the police the previous day, in relation to the Legay affair. I reiterated that journalists should be able to report freely on affairs of public interest, and that the protection of sources is essential to media freedom.

On **16 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the attack against a crew of **France 3 Bourgogne** while they were reporting on incidents in Dijon, on 15 June. I stressed that attacks against journalists covering events of public interest are unacceptable, and that those responsible must be prosecuted.

## Georgia

On 25 November 2019, I received a letter from the authorities, in response to my letter of 15 October, about the cases of **Yuri Manvelyan**, **Tigran Khachatryan** and **Tigran Hakobyan**, Armenian journalists from the independent news agency **Epress.am**, who were reportedly denied entry into Georgia. The authorities informed me that the journalists did not encounter any problems while crossing the state border of Georgia. However, as they were entering the Customs territory of Georgia in possession of technical equipment designated for press without any information and/or documents confirming this designation, the equipment in question was not allowed into the country (*see also PC Report of 21 November 2019*).

On **20 February 2020**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern at the reported interference in the independent editorial policy of the Batumi-based Public Broadcaster **Adjara TV and Radio**, as well as intimidation of the editorial staff, following changes in its management. I expressed my hope that these developments would not negatively affect the independence or viability of the broadcaster.

On **10 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my worries at the dismissals and resignations of some key staff at the Public Broadcaster **Adjara TV and Radio**. I reiterated that an independent public service broadcaster plays a vital societal role and is key to media freedom.

On **19 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at reports indicating a murder threat against journalist **Georgi Gabunia**, from the **Mtavari Arkhi** television channel. I stated that I was following the investigation, and praised the authorities for their readiness to provide **Gabunia** with police protection.

## Germany

On **27 January 2020**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the threats and abuse by demonstrators against journalists reporting on a march in Leipzig, following a ban on **Linksunten Indymedia**. I stressed that journalists must be able to work safely and without pressure or intimidation during demonstrations.

On **1 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I deplored the attack against a camera team of the German broadcaster **ZDF**, in which several of the crew members, reporting on a demonstration in Berlin, were injured. I welcomed the fact that the police had apprehended several suspects, and expressed my hope that justice would soon be done.

On **5 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the mistreatment by a police officer of a journalist, who was part of a TV crew reporting on a demonstration in Berlin on 1 May. The journalist suffered broken teeth and needed to go to hospital. I welcomed the police investigation into this incident, and expressed my hope that justice would be done.

On **11 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the attack by a right-wing extremist against journalists and **WDR** crew members reporting on a demonstration in Dortmund, on 9 May. I welcomed the quick apprehension of the suspect, and expressed my hope that justice would soon be done.

On **19 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court, following a complaint by **Reporters Without Borders Germany**, that the foreign intelligence law must be modified to ensure that the security service BND complies with fundamental rights, including foreign journalists abroad.

## Greece

On **29 November 2019**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern after the police physically struck journalist **Marios Aravantinos**, from the online magazine **Newsit.gr**, while he was filming demonstrations marking the 46<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Athens Polytechnic uprising, in Athens, despite identifying himself as a member of the press. I stressed the importance of ensuring safe working conditions for journalists while reporting on public demonstrations.

On **20 January 2020**, I issued a public statement condemning the violent attack against journalist **Thomas Jacobi**, correspondent for the German broadcaster **Deutsche Welle** and the French newspaper **La Croix**. **Jacobi** was assaulted while covering a demonstration of right-wing extremists in Athens. I welcomed the government's condemnation of the attack, and urged the authorities to bring the perpetrators to justice.

On **5 February**, I wrote to the authorities, and issued a statement from my official Twitter account, condemning the arson attack on the car of **Nikos Karamanlis**, publisher of the **Paraskinio** newspaper, in Athens. I stated that such an act of intimidation is unacceptable, and called for a thorough investigation so that the perpetrators are brought to justice.

On 6 March, I received a reply from the authorities informing me that the authorities had opened an investigation into the incident. The authorities also reiterated that Greece ascribes utmost importance to the freedom of the media and the safety of journalists.

On **2 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the attack, allegedly by members of Golden Dawn, on several journalists, including from **Der Spiegel** and **France Télévisions**, reporting on the refugee crisis.

On **17 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I decried the online threats made by anti-immigrant extremists against **ARTE** journalist **Mortaza Behboudi**. I stressed that journalists must be able to report freely on the migration crisis and refugee camps on Lesbos without being threatened or accused of "monstrous lies".

On **18 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the arson attack against the offices of **Kathimerini** and **SKAI TV** in Athens. I stated that it is paramount to bring the perpetrators to justice, and that any attempt to silence freedom of the media is unacceptable. I welcomed the government's condemnation of the attack.



## Hungary

On **23 March 2020**, I issued a public statement, and on **26 March** wrote to the authorities, expressing my concern at provisions of the **coronavirus** response draft bill that could negatively impact the work of the media reporting on the pandemic. The bill would make the distribution of false facts that would obstruct or frustrate the effectiveness of the government's response to the pandemic punishable by a term of imprisonment of between one to five years. I underlined that any emergency response to the **coronavirus** must be proportionate, necessary and non-discriminatory, and that the media should not fear the possibility of facing prosecution for reporting on issues of public interest related to the **COVID-19** pandemic.

On **30 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the newly adopted law introducing five-year jail terms for spreading falsehoods about the **COVID-19** pandemic and the government's response to the health crisis. I stressed that the law risks penalizing independent journalists rather than disseminators of disinformation.

## Italy

On **11 March 2020**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the threats made by a member of the Camorra mafia group against the editor of **Cronaca Flegrea**, **Gennaro Del Giudice**, while he was reporting on a shooting in Naples. I urged the authorities to guarantee his safety as well as that of his family and colleagues. The local authorities condemned the threats.

On **18 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the repeated death threats made by neo-Nazi groups against **La Repubblica** Director **Carlo Verdelli**. I praised the authorities for guaranteeing the safety of the journalist, who now lives under police protection, and urged them to bring those responsible for the threats to justice.

On **25 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the threats and robbery targeting a photographer working for **La Stampa**, on 24 March, while reporting on a market in Turin. I welcomed the investigation launched by the law enforcement agency DIGOS.

On **21 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the arson attack on the house of journalist **Valentino Sucato**, of **Giornale di Sicilia**, whereby a fire was set alight outside his house in Palermo. I welcomed the fact that the authorities had launched an investigation.

On **22 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the arson attack on the car of journalist **Fabio Buonofiglio**, Director of the online newspaper **Altre Pagine**, in Corigliano-Rossano. I noted that the police were investigating the incident.

On **4 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the shooting at the house of the journalist **Mario De Michele**, editor of the **Campania Notizie** news website, in Caserta. He and his family were uninjured. I urged the authorities to find those responsible. The journalist had previously been targeted in another shooting in November 2019, and had been under police protection since (*see also PC Report of 21 November 2019*).

I later learned that **De Michele** may have faked the attack, and that his police protection had been withdrawn.

### **Kazakhstan**

On **23 December 2019**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the important pledge by the President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, to decriminalize defamation and to narrow the definition of “incitement to inter-ethnic enmity”. I noted that I would follow and support future legislative initiatives in the country.

On **10 January 2020**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the important decision by the Turkestan oblast court to acquit editor and blogger **Armangeldy Batyrbekov**. I stated that defamation should be decriminalized in the entire OSCE area.

On **23 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the arbitrary detentions of journalists **Akmaral Fedorova** and **Aleksey Vorobyev**, of **Uralskaya Nedelya**, and of **Inga Imanbay**, of **Zhas Alash**, in Uralsk and Almaty. I stressed that journalists must be free to cover public demonstrations and to perform their duties unhindered.

On **1 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the police manhandling of journalist **Inga Imanbay**, near her home in Almaty, as well as at the reported detention of **Asel’ Dzhanabayeva**, who was covering a rally in Almaty. I stressed that journalists must be able to work freely and without fear of violence.

On **17 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the attack by private security staff against journalist **Botagoz Omarova**, of **Public Internet Television 1101tv.kz**, while she was reporting on a construction company in Karagandy. I called on the authorities to investigate the case thoroughly.

On **6 May**, I wrote to the authorities regarding several cases of administrative and criminal investigations against journalists and activists who made statements to the media, or wrote on social networks, on matters of social or political importance. In particular, they were investigated or prosecuted under Article 274 paragraph 4 of the Criminal Code (“Distribution of knowingly false information in an emergency situation”); Article 478 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (“Actions provoking a violation of law and order in a state of emergency”); and Article 373 of the Criminal Code (“Protection of Honour and Dignity of the First President”). I stressed that journalists, bloggers and active media users should not face criminal investigations or administrative sanctions for their reporting on the **COVID-19** pandemic. I also asked the authorities to reconsider the situation of those detained, and to release them and drop the investigations.

On **7 May**, I issued a public statement welcoming the decision of the lower chamber of the parliament to decriminalize defamation. I stressed that this was an important step forward, which I had been calling for and expecting. I also called on the authorities to move further and repeal other tools in the Criminal Code that refer to defamation, and recalled that defamation should be dealt with according to civil law and not through administrative law.

On **6 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the sentencing of **Arman Khasenov** to three years of restrictions on his movement and/or his

freedom of expression, in addition to forced labour and a fine, for posting a video commentary on YouTube and breaching Article 373 on the protection of the honour and dignity of the First President. I called on the authorities to repeal this article.

### **Kyrgyzstan**

On **13 December 2019**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the disproportionate damages, of more than 320,000 US dollars, demanded in a defamation suit against the Kyrgyzstan media organizations **Azattyk** (the Kyrgyz-language service of the international broadcaster **RFE/RL**), **Kloop.kg** and **24.kg**. This suit followed the publication of investigative reports in those media outlets on money-laundering schemes involving senior officials in the Kyrgyz customs service. Additionally, journalist **Ali Toktakunov**, of **Azattyk**, was sued in person for around 14,000 US dollars. I stressed that disproportionate damages may bring about the closure of outlets and endanger media pluralism. I called for respect for the journalists who reported on this case.

On **10 January 2020**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the attack on **Bolot Temirov**, the editor-in-chief of **Factcheck.kg**, on 9 January. I welcomed President Sooronbay Jeenbekov's reaction, and called on the authorities to investigate this violent incident thoroughly. I stressed that no intimidation of journalists should be tolerated.

On **23 January**, I wrote to the authorities requesting additional information on the assault against the editor-in-chief of **Factcheck.kg**, **Bolot Temirov**, in Bishkek, on 9 January. I also requested information on the questioning and detention, on 20 January, of the editor of the **Chyndyk** newspaper, **Tursunbek Beishenbekov**, after he published documents related to a member of the government.

On 10 February, I received a letter from the authorities, in response to my public statement of 13 December and to my letter of 23 January.

- Regarding the defamation suit against **Azattyk**, **Kloop.kg** and **24.kg**, the authorities informed me that the case was currently at the trial stage, and provided more details on the judicial proceedings developments.
- They also informed me about the status of the investigation into the assault against the editor-in-chief of **Factcheck.kg**, **Bolot Temirov**, and the status of the case of the **Azattyk** camera operator **Aibek Kulchumanov** as well as the case of **Syrgak Kenzhebaev**. According to the information provided, as at 4 February, the pre-trial investigation continues.

On **1 April**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern at the decision by the Bishkek Centre for the Management of Emergency Operations not to issue accreditation to journalists, during the **COVID-19** pandemic. I called on the authorities to issue the necessary accreditation, and stressed that the media has a crucial role to play in providing important information to the public and in countering “fake news” on the pandemic.

On **17 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the continued accreditation problem faced by journalists, despite a clear instruction by the President's Office to rectify it.

I later learned that some media obtained accreditations and could continue their work.

On **24 April**, I wrote to the authorities raising my concern at restrictions on the work of the media, linked to the fight against “fake news” in the context of the **COVID-19** pandemic. This concerned, in particular, the introduction of fines and potential criminal prosecution under Article 344 of “Knowingly false report of a crime”. I also expressed my concern at recurring reports stating that law enforcement authorities might have coerced Kyrgyz citizens to apologize in online videos, disclosing at times their full identity and addresses, for sharing allegedly false information. While fully understanding the need to counter false news around the pandemic, I stressed that promoting access to timely information and quality reporting would have a greater impact in countering false, and potentially dangerous, information.

On 24 April, I received a letter from the Department of information of the Government informing me of the regular online press conferences and briefings for media representatives, providing the population with reliable and up-to-date information for the period of the state of emergency. According to the authorities, online press conferences and briefings are taking place on a daily basis, in various cities and districts, providing information on the transmission of the **coronavirus** in the country. In addition, briefings and press conferences of representatives of the Republican Operational Headquarters for the Prevention of the Spread of **COVID-19** were held daily in the press centre of the House of Government, and broadcast live on leading television channels and radio stations, on YouTube channels, and on a Facebook page.

On **6 May**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at new legal amendments and changes to counter-terrorism legislation that could negatively impact the media’s activities and freedom of expression. In particular, the draft amendments stipulate that the media may be sanctioned and closed down, for publishing information about a supposedly extremist or terrorist organization, even without prior knowledge of the organization being considered extremist or terrorist. According to the draft amendments, journalists would also be obliged to pass on materials or information relating to terrorist activities to the authorities. I recalled the importance of respecting the principles of necessity and proportionality in any restriction to the fundamental right of freedom of expression. I also called on the authorities to reconsider the amendments and to bring them in line with international standards on freedom of expression and media freedom.

On **28 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the decision to drop the charges against blogger **Avtandil Jorobekov**, administrator of the Facebook page **BespredelKG**, and to uphold the right of active social media users to comment on matters of public interest.

On **8 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the Molotov cocktail arson attack, the previous day, on the premises of the private TV company **3 kanal-Talas** in Talas. I welcomed the swift reaction by the authorities and expressed my hope that the perpetrators would soon be brought to justice.

On 18 June, I received a reply from the Ministry of Interior informing me that a criminal investigation into the arson attack on the TV company **3 kanal-Talas** was ongoing, under the auspices of the Investigative Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

On **29 June**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern that the law on “**Manipulation of Information**”, adopted by the parliament on 25 June, may result in undue restrictions on freedom of the media. I stated that I shared the need to combat the dissemination of false

information related to the current **COVID-19** health crisis, but also stressed that vague definitions will not provide the media and social media users the necessary legal certainty to foresee the consequences of their activities. I also noted that my Office was preparing a legal review of this law, which I will make available to the authorities.

### **Latvia**

On **27 November 2019**, I wrote to the authorities asking for information and clarification regarding the legal framework of the decision of the national media authority to suspend temporarily the cable and IPTV broadcasting of nine television channels belonging to the Russian **National Media Group**. The decision was reportedly made because an individual, who is a beneficiary of the media company, is under EU sanctions for active support to “the Russian government’s policies of destabilisation of Ukraine”.

On 14 January, I received a reply from the authorities, informing me that the suspension of the rebroadcasting of the programmes in question would remain in force until the Council of the European Union revokes the sanctions against the beneficiary, or until said person loses the status of one benefiting from the relevant economic resource.

On **3 March 2020**, I wrote to the authorities conveying my concern at, and requesting additional information on, the denial of entry into Latvia of **Andrey Zakharov**, a Russian correspondent with the **Izvestia Information Center**, on 24 February, at Riga airport. The journalist was denied entry after his Schengen visa was reportedly annulled upon the request of Estonia.

On 11 March, I received a reply from the authorities informing me that the actions taken by the Latvian authorities were not related to **Zakharov**’s professional journalistic activities.

### **Malta**

On **29 November 2019**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern after journalists were blocked for several minutes in a government building the previous night. I reiterated that, more than ever, the investigation into the murder of investigative journalist **Daphne Caruana Galizia** must be transparent, independent, and free of any political interference, and that all those involved must face justice.

On **1 December**, I issued a public statement welcoming the indictment of the businessperson Yorgen Fenech, one of the alleged masterminds behind the murder of the investigative journalist **Daphne Caruana Galizia** on 16 October 2017. I recalled that it is high time to shed full light on all the circumstances surrounding the assassination of the journalist, and to ensure that all those involved face justice. I reiterated my call for an investigation that would be fully transparent, independent and free from any political interference.

On **16 April 2020**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, two-and-a-half years after the assassination of journalist **Daphne Caruana Galizia**, I reiterated that no effort should be spared in bringing all those involved to justice, and that all facts and circumstances surrounding her death have yet to be fully uncovered.

On **7 May**, I issued a statement from my official Twitter account, and on **8 May** wrote to the Minister for Justice, Dr. Edward Zammit Lewis, expressing my surprise that a prosecutor, who

had resigned on 5 May, returned to court the next day to represent the alleged mastermind in the assassination of **Daphne Caruana Galizia**. I called on the authorities to ensure that the case's integrity is duly preserved and protected in judicial proceedings.

On 18 May, I received a reply from the Minister for Justice informing me that an inquiry had been opened to investigate the case, and that its findings will be presented to the Ministry for Justice no later than 16 June.

On 25 June, I received an update from the authorities providing me with an overview of the findings and recommendations of the Board of Inquiry. In particular, they informed me that the former prosecutor had not been involved in the case against the alleged mastermind in the assassination of **Daphne Caruana Galizia**, and that it did not appear he had access to the prosecution files. The authorities also informed me that the Board of Inquiry nevertheless recommended new safeguards to protect the image of correctness of both the Office of the Attorney General and lawyers transitioning into private practice, which led to changes in the employment contracts of future recruits.

On **25 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the previous night's arson attack on the car of journalist **Dione Borg**, from **Net News**. I called for all the circumstances behind this attack to be brought to light. I also welcomed the investigation launched by the authorities, and expressed my hope that the perpetrator would be brought to justice.

### **Mongolia**

On **24 April 2020**, I wrote to the authorities, and on **27 April** issued a statement from my official Twitter account, raising the case of journalist **Naran Unurtsetseg**, editor-in-chief of the **zarig.mn** news website. In particular, I called for an impartial investigation into a confrontation between the journalist and the police, which resulted in threats and a physical assault against the journalist.

On 25 May, I received a reply from the authorities informing me of an investigation into the incident, and assuring me that the journalist can freely perform her duties. The General Department of Police reiterated their adherence to the principle of freedom of the media and their support to the freedom of journalists to report without intimidation. They also provided a version of events, which diverged from those provided by **Naran Unurtsetseg**, and informed me of the results of the internal investigation, which exonerated the police officer involved in the incident from charges of assault.

### **Montenegro**

On **4 December 2019**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I denounced the physical attack on, and insults to, the journalist **Vladimir Otašević**, which took place on 3 December while he was doing his job. I urged the authorities to investigate the incident and bring the attacker to justice.

On **13 January 2020**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the brief detention of three Montenegrin journalists, **Andela Đikanović**, **Gojko Raičević** and **Dražan Živković**, for publications that, according to the authorities, caused panic and

disorder. I stressed that the fight against “fake news” should not lead to the detention of journalists.

On 16 January, I received a letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Srđan Darmanović, in which he informed me that Montenegro unreservedly seeks to create a safe and supportive environment for free and professional media as a key component of the policy of strengthening the rule of law. He stated that they are achieving this political commitment, including through the creation of a legislative framework, in line with the highest European standards and the creation of a zero-tolerance environment for violence against journalists. The Minister further informed me that, according to the findings of the competent authorities, **Gojko Raičević**, and **Dražan Živković**, committed the crime of causing panic and disorder by posting false information on 12 January. Both individuals were invited to an interview at the security centre of Podgorica on the same day.

On **13 March**, I wrote to the Minister of Culture, Aleksandar Bogdanović, to express my concern at the alleged internal disciplinary measures at the Radio Television of Montenegro (RTCG) against the editor **Zoran Leković** and journalist **Nevenka Ćirović**, for expressing their critical views on social media, related to certain content produced by RTCG. I expressed my hope that the disciplinary measures would be withdrawn, and that a solution in the interest of the public service broadcaster would be found.

On 30 April, I received a reply from the Minister of Culture, Aleksandar Bogdanović, informing me that the disciplinary procedure against the two RTCG journalists were not initiated by the public service broadcaster, but by the co-authors of the film “Witness of God love”, which the journalists had criticized, on the grounds that the journalists tried to publicly question the co-authors’ professional and moral integrity. The co-authors further informed RTCG’s Management that they will start private legal proceedings against the two journalists.

On **2 April**, I wrote to the Minister of Public Administration, Suzana Pribilović, informing her that my Office is following with great interest the public consultation process on the proposed amendments to the “**Law on Free Access to Information**” in Montenegro. Noting that dozens of local and international non-governmental organizations and journalists had suggested postponing the consultation due to the ongoing **COVID-19** health crisis, I urged the authorities to consider rescheduling the consultations for the time being, stressing that the “**Law on Free Access to Information**” is one of the most important laws for media professionals.

On 14 April, I received a reply from the Minister of Public Administration, Suzana Pribilović, informing me that the current public consultation process would be organized when the right conditions are met.

On **22 April**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern at the detention of two individuals in relation to their posts on social media. On 26 March, the police arrested an individual in Bijelo Polje, for “causing panic and disorder” after she posted, and then quickly deleted, a comment related to the **coronavirus** on her Instagram account. In addition, on 9 April, police arrested **Radovan Rakočević**, also in Bijelo Polje, under the same suspicion for sharing an article which said that the President had reportedly contracted the **coronavirus**. According to available information, the Basic Court rejected the prosecutor’s demand for **Rakočević**’s detention, and released him.

On **14 May**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern following the brief detention on 13 May of **Veliša Kadić**, a Serbian **Večernje Novosti** correspondent, while he was covering protests in the city of Nikšić. According to media reports, police sprayed pepper spray in his eyes and deleted footage from his phone. I highlighted that there must be no restriction or obstruction on the work of the media reporting on events of public interest, and called on the authorities in Montenegro to investigate the case.

On **27 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I paid tribute to the editor-in-chief of **Dan**, **Duško Jovanović**, who was killed on that day 16 years ago. I urged the authorities to increase their efforts to bring all those involved to justice.

On 12 June, I received a letter from the Minister of Culture, Aleksandar Bogdanović, providing detailed information on the current state of affairs of the media sector in Montenegro caused by the **COVID-19** pandemic. Moreover, he informed me of State measures that were implemented to support timely and professional media reporting.

On **23 June**, I wrote to the Minister of Culture, Aleksandar Bogdanović, in reply of his letter dated 12 June, welcoming the measures taken by the authorities to provide financial assistance to the media affected by the **COVID-19** pandemic.

### **Netherlands**

On **31 December 2019**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the arrest of a man suspected of mistreating two photojournalists in The Hague. According to reports, the man punched one of the journalists during New Year's Eve riots in the city.

### **North Macedonia**

On **18 December 2019**, I issued a public statement expressing my support for the registry on self-regulation of online media in North Macedonia, which was announced that day by the Council of Media Ethics together with the Association of Journalists of Macedonia and the Economic Chamber. I stressed that media self-regulation is a useful mechanism for promoting quality information, safeguarding editorial freedom, and strengthening media credibility.

On **31 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I denounced the threats against, and harassment of, **Investigative Reporting Lab Macedonia** journalist **Maja Jovanovska**, in relation to her investigative work on the "Taftalidze" construction project in Skopje. I underlined that journalists must be able to work without pressure, and called on the authorities to thoroughly investigate the case.

On **13 January 2020**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the online threats made against journalists **Meri Jordanovska** and **Iskra Koroveshovska**. I stressed that the safety of all journalists online and offline is paramount for media freedom. I welcomed the fact that investigations were underway.

On **6 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the threats and insults against **TV 24** journalist **Misko Ivanov** on Facebook, after he interviewed two politicians. I urged the authorities to investigate this incident as well as the threats against female journalists reported in the comments below his post.



## Norway

On **20 May 2020**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the new Media Liability Act which was unanimously adopted by the parliament. I emphasized that this law bolsters media freedom as it guarantees editorial independence and clear accountability for content published in media outlets managed by editors.

## Poland

On **21 February 2020**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern at, and requesting additional information on, the investigation launched into **Duży Format** journalist **Katarzyna Włodkowska**, for “unauthorized distribution of messages from a public trial before they were disclosed in court proceedings”, in relation to the death of the Mayor of Gdańsk, Paweł Adamowicz. I expressed my concern that the journalist could face criminal prosecution for a publication on an issue of public interest, and stressed that the confidentiality of journalists’ sources and investigative journalism must be protected as cornerstones of media freedom.

On 28 February, I received a reply from the authorities informing me that, by a decision of 21 February, an investigation was initiated, but no charges yet filed, into the public dissemination, without permission, of news from the preparatory proceedings of the District Prosecutor’s Office regarding the assassination of the Mayor of Gdańsk, Paweł Adamowicz.

On **27 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my alarm at the reported attempt to assassinate Chechen blogger **Tumso Abdurakhmanov**. It was reported at the time that the blogger was residing in Poland when the alleged attack took place. I later learned that the reported assassination attempt took place in Sweden.

On **6 May**, I wrote to the authorities, and issued a statement from my official Twitter account, expressing my concern at the court case submitted by the Warsaw police against **Gazeta Wyborcza** photojournalist **Wojciech Jakub Atys**. The journalist allegedly infringed on **coronavirus** pandemic-related movement restrictions, while covering a street protest on 29 March. I stressed that journalists must be able to carry out their work and report unhindered on issues of public interest.

On 29 June, I received a reply from the authorities informing me that the police requested a penalty for **Wojciech Jakub Atys** for not respecting the regulations on minimal social distancing required during the **COVID-19** pandemic. They further informed me that, on 28 May, the court refused to initiate legal proceedings on the matter, but that this decision was not yet final.

On **11 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I deplored the arrest and brief detention of **Gazeta Wyborcza** journalist **Paweł Rutkiewicz**, on 8 May, while reporting on a demonstration in Warsaw. I stressed that journalists must be able to cover public protests unhindered.

## Romania

On **30 March 2020**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the Romanian **coronavirus** response decree, which granted special powers to the government to curb freedom of information in the country. The emergency decree, signed by the President on 16 March,

allows for the removal of reports and entire websites, without providing appeal or redress mechanisms, in order to counter the spread of disinformation online related to the **COVID-19** pandemic. I called for the respect of media freedom in the context of the current crisis, and for the authorities to respect the principles of necessity and proportionality in any decision related to the emergency situation.

On 3 April, I received a letter from the authorities, in response to my public statement of 30 March, providing me with additional information on the **coronavirus** response decree. The authorities emphasized that the actions of the authorities were entirely conducted in good faith, to limit the effects of the pandemic and protect the life and health of the population on the territory of Romania. The authorities further noted that, to attain this objective, they make use of the means employed by many other EU Member States confronted with similar challenges, and try to maintain a fair balance between various fundamental human rights. I was informed that the measures adopted by the authorities remain under judicial scrutiny.

On 24 April, I received updated information from the authorities on the state of emergency on the territory of Romania.

On 22 May, I received a letter from the authorities informing me that the **COVID-19** related exceptional measures were lifted on 14 May. I was also informed that new “state of alert” measures are in place since 15 May and are valid for 30 days. I was further informed that the provisions of the presidential decree aimed at combating disinformation have not been replaced in the normative acts which govern the measures during the “state of alert”.

### **Russian Federation**

On **2 December 2019**, I wrote to the Head of the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor), Alexander Zharov, inquiring about the purpose of a list, published on the website of Roskomnadzor, of web sources that distributed false news considered to be sources of disinformation. I expressed my concern that the labelling of online resources and official public pages on social networks of media outlets may lead to discrimination among the media and negatively impact pluralism of information in the country.

On **3 December**, I wrote to the authorities bringing to their attention, and expressing my concern at, the blocking of the **Fergana information agency**’s website by Roskomnadzor, starting from 10 October. This decision was reportedly due to the website’s failure to remove unspecified materials containing information on how to commit suicide, and thereby breaching the Federal Law “On Information, Information Technologies and Protection of Information”. I called on the authorities to restore access to **Fergana**’s website.

On 14 January 2020, I received a reply from the authorities to my letters of 2 and 3 December, informing me that the practice of compiling the list of web sources of disinformation was being brought into line with national media legislation. The authorities also informed me that the **Fergana information agency**’s website was blocked, in accordance with the law, for failing to remove information about how to commit suicide or calls to commit suicide. Reportedly, Roskomnadzor duly informed Fergana about this decision.

On **3 December 2019**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the enactment of the law extending the status of a “foreign agent” to private individuals when they publish

information, such as written text or audiovisual material, for a broader public. The law also introduced new restrictions on the distribution of information from media outlets categorized as “foreign agents” (known as “media outlets–foreign agents”). I stressed that this represents a dangerous regulatory practice, which narrows the space for freedom of expression, freedom of the media and the free flow of information, and that there should be no discrimination based on the origin of the source of information.

On 9 December, I received a reply from the Director of the Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Maria Zakharova, in which she explained that the Russian lawmakers developed such a law to mirror the unfavourable actions of Euro-Atlantic governments in regards to Russian media forced to register as foreign agents in the United States of America.

On 18 December, I received a letter from the authorities informing me about the detention of several journalists from the Russian TV Channel **Zvezda** at Kyiv airport, on 13 December, as well as the imposition of a fine and a ban on the journalists from entering Ukraine for three years. The authorities also raised the issue of the Russian TV Channel **NTV**'s correspondents, who were denied entry into Ukraine, as well as the pressure, in Estonia, on the information agency **Sputnik Estonia** and its journalists.

On 19 December, I received a letter from the Chairman of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights Russian Federation, Valery Fadeev, regarding developments around the information agency **Sputnik Estonia** and its journalists in Estonia.

On 25 December, I received a letter from the Chairman of the Commission on Information Policy and Cooperation with the Media of the Council of Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Alexei Pushkov, regarding developments around the information agency **Sputnik Estonia** and its journalists in Estonia.

On **27 December**, I replied to the letter of 18 December from the authorities informing them that I had conveyed my concern to the Ukrainian authorities, on 18 December, about the cases of denial of entry to Ukraine for Russian journalists from the **NTV** and **Zvezda TV** channels. I also informed them that, on 20 December, I had conveyed my concern to the Estonian authorities about the developments around **Sputnik Estonia**, and that I had encouraged the authorities to refrain from imposing unnecessary limitations on the work of foreign journalists or media.

On **30 December**, I replied to the letter of 25 December from the Chairman of the Commission on Information Policy and Cooperation with the Media of the Council of Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Alexei Pushkov, informing him that, on 20 December, I had conveyed my concern to the Estonian authorities about the developments around **Sputnik Estonia**, and that I had encouraged the authorities to refrain from imposing unnecessary limitations on the work of foreign journalists or media.

On 31 December, I received a letter from the authorities expressing their concern at the draft law of Ukraine “**On Media**” that was submitted to the Ukrainian parliament.

On **3 January 2020**, I replied to the letter of 19 December from the Chairman of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights Russian Federation, Valery Fadeev, informing him that, on 20 December, I had conveyed my concern to the Estonian authorities

about the developments around **Sputnik Estonia**, and that I had encouraged the authorities to refrain from imposing unnecessary limitations on the work of foreign journalists or media.

On **14 January**, I issued a statement from my official Twitter account, and on **15 January** wrote to the authorities, asking for more information regarding the death of the Spanish journalist of **Sputnik Mundo**, **Manuel Antonio Sanchez Regaldo**, after he fell out the window of his apartment in Moscow, on 13 January.

On 7 February, I received a reply from the authorities informing me that the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation is conducting an investigation into the incident, and that it was in possession of information that the Spanish journalist of **Sputnik Mundo**, **Manuel Antonio Sanchez Regaldo**, had psychological problems.

On **16 January**, I issued a statement from my official Twitter account, and on **17 January** wrote to the authorities, expressing my concern at, and requesting additional information on, the attack against the former camera operator of the public TV channel **Rossiya-24**, **Leonid Krivenkov**, in a park in Moscow, on 11 January. **Krivenkov** linked the attack to an interview he gave to **RFE/RL**'s Russian Service criticizing his former employer. I called on the authorities to conduct a thorough investigation into the incident.

On 12 March, I received a reply from the authorities informing me that, following the attack on **Leonid Krivenkov**, a criminal case was opened and that the necessary measures had been taken to identify and arrest the perpetrators.

On **21 January**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I denounced the dangerous statement by the Governor of the Chuvash Republic, on 18 January, who called to “wipe out” journalists. I underlined that such a declaration from a public official is unacceptable and that it may endanger journalists’ safety.

On **27 January**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my worries at the extension of the arrest of the journalist **Abdulmumin Gadzhiev**, from the **Chernovik** news portal in Dagestan, on terrorism charges. I called on the authorities to drop the charges against him and to release him, and noted that he should not be prosecuted for his professional activities.

On **29 January**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my interest in the progress achieved by the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation in the case of **Ivan Golunov**, from **Meduza**, after five former drug enforcement officers were detained for falsely accusing **Golunov** of “illegal production or sale of drugs” and arresting him on this charge in June 2019 (*see also PC Report of 4 July 2019*).

On **30 January**, I wrote to the authorities reiterating my concern at the continued detention of the journalist, and one of the editors of the independent online newspaper **Chernovik**, **Abdulmumin Gadzhiev**, in Makhachkala, the Republic of Dagestan. The police arrested him on 18 June on suspicion of “participating in a terrorist organisation” and “assisting terrorist activity”. His pre-trial detention has been extended several times. I called on the authorities to drop the charges and to release the journalist as soon as possible (*see also PC Reports of 4 July 2019 and 21 November 2019*).

On 3 March, I received a reply from the authorities informing me that, according to the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, **Gadzhiiev**, together with a group of people, contributed to the activities of a terrorist organization by publishing an interview with one of the suspects in a terrorism-related case.

On **7 February**, I issued a public statement, in addition to a statement from my official Twitter account, to condemn the attack on **Novaya Gazeta**'s investigative journalist **Elena Milashina** and lawyer **Marina Dubrovina** by a group of 15 individuals in Grozny, the capital of the Chechen Republic. **Milashina** suffered bruises to her head as well as cuts to her shoulder and neck. I urged the authorities to investigate this attack thoroughly and fully in order to bring those responsible to justice.

On 27 March, I received a letter from the authorities, in response to my public statement of 7 February, informing me that the respective plea from **Novaya Gazeta**'s investigative journalist **Elena Milashina** and the lawyer **Marina Dubrovina** had been filed with the branch of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the Chechen Republic, and that the case was considered under Article 144-145 of the Code of Criminal Procedure in the regional department of Russia's Investigative Committee.

On **21 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the Samara district court's decision, of 19 February, to fine the founder and director of the online news outlet **Park Gagarina** for 500,000 rubles (6,320 euros) under the "foreign agent" law. I said that this decision underscores the danger of such regulatory practices for freedom of expression and freedom of the media.

On 2 March, I received a letter from the Chairman of the Commission on Information Policy and Cooperation with the Media of the Council of Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Alexei Pushkov, expressing his concern at the detention, on 1 March, of the editor-in-chief of **Sputnik Turkey**, **Mahir Boztepe**, and three other **Sputnik** journalists working in Turkey.

On 5 March, I received a letter from the authorities, in which they raised their concern at the decision of the National Council of Television and Radio of Ukraine to ban the broadcasting of several Russian television programmes, namely **Eurokino**, **TOPSHOP** and **Zoopark** within Ukraine.

On **10 March**, I replied to the letter of 2 March from the Chairman of the Commission on Information Policy and Cooperation with the Media of the Council of Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Alexei Pushkov, informing him about the public statement I had issued on 1 March, and in which I condemned the detention and questioning of **Sputnik** journalists in Ankara and Istanbul.

On **12 March**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern at the detention of citizen journalist **Amet Suleymanov**, and at the home searches of **ATR** TV channel journalist **Seytumer Seytumerov**, and of citizen journalist **Seidamet Mustafayev**, in Crimea. The three of them have reported in the past on cases of prosecution, searches and court hearings of residents of Crimea. **Mustafayev** is also a correspondent with the **Grani.org** news platform. I encouraged those responsible to respect the role of all affected media actors as well as their right to express views and opinions freely, and to release **Suleymanov**.

On **13 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the blocking of the **Net2020.ru** website, after it published critical views on constitutional changes in the country. I noted that this infringed on freedom of expression on an issue of public interest, and called on the authorities to review this decision.

On **16 March**, I wrote to the authorities welcoming the lifting of the house arrest of the artist, blogger and former theatre director **Yulia Tsvetkova**, in Komsomolsk-on-Amur. I expressed my concern, however, at the criminal investigation that continues against her on charges of disseminating illegal pornography. I stressed that the artistic expression and sexual education promoted by **Tsvetkova** should not be considered as pornography, and called on the authorities to lift all charges against her. I also called on the authorities to protect her from any kind of harassment, in light of the death threats she had received from homophobic groups.

On **17 March**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the indictment on terrorism charges of **Svetlana Prokopyeva**, a journalist with **Radio Ekho Moskvyy (Echo of Moscow)** in Pskov and a contributor to various other media, including **Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Russian Service**. The charges, punishable by a prison sentence of up to seven years, stem from **Prokopyeva's** comments on the radio following a terrorist attack in the Russian city of Arkhangelsk, in October 2018. I reiterated my call on the authorities to drop the charges brought against **Prokopyeva**, who, I said, had no involvement in any terrorist activity or any intention of condoning terrorism (*see also PC Report of 4 July 2019*).

On **24 March**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the recent interferences by the media regulatory agency Roskomnadzor regarding media content, in the context of the fight against disinformation related to the **COVID-19** pandemic. Roskomnadzor demanded that the **Echo of Moscow** radio station delete their material about the **coronavirus**, and that the hosting provider of the online newspaper "**Govorit Magadan**" block access to a story on the **coronavirus**. I stressed the key role of the media in providing important information to the public and in countering "fake news" on the pandemic, and expressed my concern at undue restrictions on the activities of several media in this context.

On **31 March**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the amendments to Russian legislation, approved by the State Duma and by the Federation Council of the Russian Federation, imposing up to five years imprisonment for spreading false information about the **COVID-19** pandemic. I stated that the amendments to the Code of Administrative offense and to the Criminal Code, as envisaged, pose a risk of undue restriction on the work of journalists and of self-censorship for media actors trying to inform the public.

On 20 April, I received a letter from the authorities, in response to my public statement of 31 March, providing me with an extract of a briefing of the Director of the Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Maria Zakharova, related to the amendments to the Russian legislation on the spread of false information about the **COVID-19** pandemic.

On 22 April, I wrote to the authorities, in response to their letter of 20 April, recalling that, as stated in my public statement of 31 March, I share the need to combat false information related to the current **COVID-19** health crisis. I stressed, however, that this should be done with great consideration for the principles of necessity and proportionality. I also stated that it is important to ensure that the new legislation would not impose undue restrictions, either on the work of the media or on the ability of journalists to inform the public and to report on the pandemic.

On **3 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the intimidating tone used by a spokesperson of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, in response to an article by Italian journalist **Jacopo Iacoboni**, from **La Stampa**, related to Russia's provision of aid to Italy to tackle the **coronavirus**. I recalled that freedom of expression and the right of journalists to publish critical opinions are paramount for democracy.

On **14 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the death threats against **Novaya Gazeta** journalist **Elena Milashina**, made by the Head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, on Instagram. I said that this was worrying and should stop immediately, and that journalists must have the right to report on **COVID-19** without intimidation.

On **16 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the decision of the media regulatory agency Roskomnadzor to remove an article by **Novaya Gazeta** journalist **Elena Milashina**, related to the **COVID-19** pandemic in Chechnya. I reiterated that the media must be able to report on the pandemic and that citizens must have access to information.

On 27 May, I received a reply from the authorities indicating that an article by **Novaya Gazeta**, related to the **COVID-19** pandemic in Chechnya, contained false information and that, thereby, on 15 April, the Deputy Prosecutor General ordered the media regulatory agency Roskomnadzor to block it.

On **29 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my worries at the demands by law enforcement officials to force **Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty** Saint Petersburg-based journalist, **Tatyana Voltskaya**, to reveal her source for an article related to the **COVID-19** pandemic. I called on the authorities to stop intimidating the journalist and to respect the confidentiality of her sources.

On **2 May**, I issued a public statement reiterating my call on the authorities to take into greater consideration the principles of necessity and proportionality when regulating the media and journalists' activities. The statement followed several incidents affecting the media and journalists, in different regions of the country, who reported on the **COVID-19** pandemic.

In particular, I stressed that blocking a website is an extreme measure which may unduly restrict freedom of expression and impede the public's right to access information. I therefore called on the authorities to re-establish access to the website **Vademecum**, a media outlet which reports on various aspects related to healthcare, state health policy, and the pharmaceutical and medical industries. The blocking took place after **Vademecum** published an article about the procedure for settling payments for the provision of medical care to patients affected by **COVID-19** and other diseases.

I also noted other incidents affecting journalists and media outlets reporting on **COVID-19** or related matters, in different regions of the country:

- In Pskov, police questioned journalist **Lyudmila Savitskaya** over her article, which she published on the **Severo-Zapad MBH Media** website.
- In Saint Petersburg, journalist **Tatyana Voltskaya**, who writes for the **Sever.Realii** website (affiliated with **RFE/RL**), was questioned by law enforcement representatives and asked to reveal her confidential source, after she published an interview with an anonymous doctor.

- In Krasnoyarsk, at the request of the Prosecutor General's Office, the media regulatory agency Roskomnadzor ordered the private TV channel **TVK** to delete a reposted satirical YouTube video that was deemed to be false news.

On 18 May and 27 May, I received letters from the authorities, in response to my public statement of 2 May. The letters indicated that:

- In **Vademecum**'s case, the Prosecutor General's Office demanded that Roskomnadzor limit access to false and socially important information, after the Healthcare Department of Moscow refuted information reflected in the article. Reportedly, access to the website was restored a day later, following a proactive removal of the article in question.
- The Prosecutor General's Office demanded that Roskomnadzor limit access to a video alleging that there is no **coronavirus** in Russia, including on websites that copied this video material. This eventually affected a Krasnoyarsk-based TV channel **TVK**, and Roskomnadzor is looking into a possible violation of the law.
- After studying the materials related to the case of journalist **Lyudmila Savitskaya**, the prosecutor's office of the Pskov region found no administrative offence in her actions and, therefore, related proceedings were suspended on 14 May.
- The investigative authorities continue the preliminary verification related to the article by **Tatyana Voltskaya**, published on the **Sever.Realii** website.

On **4 May**, I replied to the letter of the authorities of 5 March, informing them that I had conveyed my concerns to the Ukrainian authorities at the decision of the National Council of Television and Radio of Ukraine to ban the broadcasting of several Russian television programs in Ukraine.

On **6 May**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern, and requesting information, regarding the situation around the newspaper "**Communists of Russia**", a newspaper of the political party of the same name. According to information I had received, Moscow police had been blocking access to the editorial office of the media since 1 May, after the newspaper's staff and party members launched balloons into the sky on the occasion of International Workers' Day. They were, reportedly, violating quarantine measures related to preventing the spread of **COVID-19**. I called on the authorities to look into this matter and undertake the necessary measures to ensure that the media outlet can continue its activities unhindered.

On **14 May**, I issued a public statement reiterating my call on the authorities to drop the charges brought against **Abdulmumin Gadzhiev** and to release him, following a new extension of his pre-trial detention. **Gadzhiev**, a journalist and editor with the independent newspaper **Chernovik**, in Makhachkala, Republic of Dagestan, has been under arrest since June 2019, on suspicion of "participation in a terrorist organization" and "assisting terrorist activity". If convicted, **Gadzhiev** may face up to 20 years in jail. I also expressed my concern at reports that, in April 2020, law enforcement authorities instituted a new criminal case against the journalist on charges of extremism.

On **28 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my alarm at the detention of several journalists, in particular **Sergey Smirnov**, with the **Media Zona** portal, and **Tatyana Felgengauer** and **Alexandr Plyushchev**, of **Radio Ekho Moskv**, while picketing in solidarity with journalist **Ilya Azar**, of the **Novaya Gazeta** newspaper, in Moscow. I called for their immediate release.



On 4 June, I received a letter from Alexei Pushkov, Chairman of the Commission on Information Policy and Cooperation with the Media of the Council of Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, expressing his concern at the use of force by US police against Russian journalists **Mikhail Turgiyev**, of **RIA Novosti**, and **Nicole Roussel**, of the **Sputnik** news agency, in Minneapolis and Washington, D.C., on 30 May and 1 June respectively.

On **16 June**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern at, and requesting information on, an arson attack on a car belonging to the Director of the **Galo** television channel, **Gennady Knyazev**, in Vorkuta, on 1 June. **Knyazev** alleges that the arson attack was likely related to the channel's reporting on the non-payment of premiums to emergency medical teams working on **COVID-19**, and he suspects that the local authorities could be behind the attack. I noted that law enforcement authorities had launched an investigation into the incident.

Separately, I called on the authorities to review the case of **Timur Almaev**, the editor of the **ProUfu** online news outlet, in the southern city of Ufa, with full respect for the principles of necessity and proportionality, and to lift the fine imposed on him for spreading "fake news" over a **COVID-19** related story. I noted that the court ruling was imposed despite the fact that the publication in question was promptly deleted upon Roskomnadzor's request.

On 16 June, I received a letter from the authorities expressing their concern at the limitations to media freedom in Latvia, following the Latvian Parliament's approval of amendments to the "Electronic Mass Media Law", on 11 June.

On **18 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed Roskomnadzor's announcement to unblock the **Telegram** messenger application. I stated that the blocking of the social network for more than two years had been an issue of concern for freedom of expression (*see also PC Report of 5 July 2018*).

On **1 July**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the ill-treatment of journalist **David Frenkel**, from the **MediaZona** media portal, by police at a polling station in Saint Petersburg, on 30 June. I said that such police violence against a journalist is unacceptable, and called for a swift and thorough investigation into the incident.

## **Serbia**

On 25 November 2019, I received a letter from the authorities informing me about the measures taken by the relevant authorities in relation to a number of incidents against several journalists and the media in 2019, in response to my letter of 11 November and to my latest Report to the Permanent Council (*see also PC Report of 21 November 2019*). In particular:

- The authorities informed me that an investigation into the scattering of leaflets in the courtyard of **TV N1**, with the message "Goodbye Republic of Serbia, N1 welcome to Luxembourg" on 14 October, was ongoing and that the police was working to identify and locate the culprits.
- The authorities informed me that the culprit responsible for the threatening phone calls against **Večernje Novosti** journalist **Jelena Stojković**, on 5 November, was identified and that the authorities had requested a detailed examination into the case and further investigation.
- Regarding the insults and threats by the Serbian politician Vojislav Šešelj against **Danas** journalist **Snežana Čongradin**, as well as the alleged physical attacks and

threats against **N1** and **Federalna TV** journalists by football fans in Belgrade, the authorities informed me that no official complaints were submitted to the Ministry of Interior.

- Regarding the break-in of the family home of the **Krik** journalist **Milica Vojinović**, the authorities informed me that the police had taken all necessary steps to identify the perpetrators and that this was still an ongoing process.

On **28 January 2020**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the cyberattack against the **N1** webpage and its mobile application. I stated that such Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS) attacks against a media outlet are unacceptable and detrimental to media freedom. I called for a swift investigation into this incident.

On **31 January**, together with the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, Andrea Orizio, I issued a joint public statement welcoming the adoption of the new Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System in Serbia. Both of our Offices had provided substantial assistance to the authorities, over the last couple of years, to ensure that the Strategy would lead to a climate that is conducive to media freedom. I noted that the adoption of the Strategy was a step towards a media environment rooted in media freedom, ethics, and professionalism, and that its full implementation would be crucial for the Strategy's success and sustainability.

On **7 February**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the absence of the independent media outlet **N1** among the channels offered by cable operators affiliated with the Telekom Serbia network. The decision of the cable operators to cease its transmission was reportedly justified by legal and economic disagreements with the group owning the channel. I highlighted that it is essential to preserve media plurality in the country through safeguarding the role of independent and critical media outlets.

On **1 April**, together with the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, Andrea Orizio, I issued a joint public statement expressing our concern at a new governmental decision on public information, adopted on 28 March. We highlighted that this Decision, which regulates and centralizes all of the information shared with the public on the **COVID-19** pandemic, seems to exclude media and journalists from getting information from other sources than the ones mentioned in the Decision. I stressed that access to information is key for the media, which plays an important role in providing vital information to the public and in the fight against the spread of false information on the pandemic.

On **2 April**, together with the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, Andrea Orizio, I issued a joint public statement welcoming the government's reversal of the Decision on public information during the current **COVID-19** health emergency, and their willingness to take into account our remarks and those of the media community.

On **2 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my alarm at the arrest of **Nova.rs** journalist **Ana Lalić**, in relation to her reporting on **COVID-19**. I stressed that, despite her being released later that day, it was very problematic that police seized her laptop and mobile phones. I underlined that journalists need to be able to do their job freely.

On 27 April, I learned that the criminal charges against **Ana Lalić** had been dropped.

On **8 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I paid tribute to journalist **Dada Vujasinović**, who was found dead 26 years ago in Serbia. I called on the authorities to increase their efforts and to shed full light on this case, which remains unsolved.

On **12 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I marked the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the murder of prominent journalist **Slavko Ćuruvija**. I stated that he paid the highest price for his professional and courageous work.

On **16 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the online smear campaign and harassment against journalist **Ana Lalić**, who was briefly detained for an article she wrote earlier that month. I called on the authorities to investigate these threats and to do their utmost to ensure her safety.

On **20 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the death threats against **Nova.rs** journalists **Ivan Ivanović** and **Zoran Kesić**. I called for an investigation and for the protection of the two journalists against such unacceptable intimidation.

On **18 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the death threats against journalists **Slobodan Georgiev** and **Ivan Ivanović**, and commended the police's swift detention of the culprit. I stressed that journalists must be able to work without such pressure and threats, and expressed my hope that all the incidents would be swiftly resolved.

On **11 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, on the occasion of the 19<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the murder of **Večernje Novosti** journalist **Milan Pantić**, I called on the authorities to spare no effort in bringing those responsible to justice. I also highlighted that there should be no impunity for such heinous crimes that undermine freedom of expression and society as a whole.

On **25 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I denounced the beating of journalist **Saša Mikić** by three people on election day, on 21 June. I urged the authorities to swiftly investigate the incident and bring the attackers to justice.

## **Slovakia**

On **13 January 2020**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, on the occasion of the start of the trial in the case of the murder of **Ján Kuciak** and his fiancée **Martina Kušnírová**. I reiterated that justice must be served and full light shed on this horrendous crime. **Kuciak** and **Kušnírová** were killed in 2018 in connection with **Kuciak**'s investigative journalism.

On **11 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the criminal defamation lawsuit filed against columnist **Michal Havran**, after he wrote a critical column in the **SME** newspaper. I stated that criticism of a priest or a religion should not be considered a crime, and that the authorities should drop the charges.

On **20 February**, I issued a public statement on the second anniversary of the murder of **Ján Kuciak** and his fiancée **Martina Kušnírová**, underlining that I was following the public hearings of the trial with considerable interest.

On **26 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern that an investigative journalist of **Aktuality.sk**, **Peter Sabo**, received a pistol bullet in his mailbox. I

welcomed the fact that the police launched an investigation and urged them to shed full light on this case. I recalled that **Ján Kuciak**, who was murdered in 2018, also worked for **Aktuality.sk**.

## Slovenia

On **17 March 2020**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the smear campaign and threats against investigative journalist and **Reporters Without Borders** correspondent **Blaž Zgaga**, following a Freedom of Information request related to the **COVID-19** crisis. I called on the authorities to investigate the threats and ensure his safety.

On **27 March**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the accusations against, and pressure on, the public service broadcaster **Radiotelevizija Slovenija (RTV SLO)**, by the Prime Minister of Slovenia, Janez Janša. On 20 March, following a report by **RTV SLO** on the recent decision of the government to increase the salaries of ministers and secretaries of state, the Prime Minister accused the broadcaster in a tweet, of spreading “lies”, stating it “mislead the public” and that “obviously there are too many of you and you are paid too well”. I stressed that journalists must be free to operate without intimidation and that an independent public broadcaster is key to provide reliable information on the pandemic.

On 8 April, I received a letter from the authorities, in response to my public statement of 27 March, informing me that the Slovenian Government resolutely opposes any type of communication that could be understood as a threat to the work of journalists and will continue to ensure the necessary conditions for the free and independent work of journalists. I was further informed that the authorities would continue to respect the highest professional standards and code of ethics in journalism, including objective media reporting. I also received additional information about several issues, including a historical background of the development of media ownership in Slovenia.

On **3 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my worries about a threatening letter containing white powder, which **RTV SLO** journalist **Eugenia Carl** received. I also expressed my hope that the police investigation would quickly identify the perpetrator, and stressed that safety of journalists is key to media freedom and needs to be ensured.

## Spain

On **24 February 2020**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the sexual assault against the **RTVC** journalist **Raquel Guillan** while she was reporting live on air. I emphasized that women journalists, who face distinct risks in relation to their work, should feel safe while reporting online and offline.

On **27 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the conviction of, and fine on, the man responsible for sexually harassing **Raquel Guillan**. I noted that there must be no impunity for gender-specific harassment of journalists.

On **24 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the assault on a journalist from **La Razón** and at the harassment against **RTVE** journalist **Gabriel López** while they were reporting on a demonstration in Madrid. I stated that these attacks by

demonstrators are unacceptable and that journalists must be able to report safely and unhindered.

### **Sweden**

On **21 February 2020**, I wrote to the authorities requesting additional information regarding a new regulation adopted by the parliament, on 19 February, on secret data interception. The regulation aims at expanding the access of law enforcement authorities to data and content held on mobile phones, computers and the internet, by bypassing encryption tools. I underlined the necessity to ensure the confidentiality of journalists' communications and sources.

On 25 February, I received a reply from the authorities informing me that certain professions, including journalists, are generally excluded from the obligation to testify before a court, if the information that they are asked for is linked to their profession. The authorities also informed me that it is prohibited to use secret coercive measures towards a journalist if the interception endangers the protection of the journalist's sources. As such, the new law cannot be exercised towards any device used by a journalist in his or her profession, given that the device is used, or intended to be used, for a journalistic purpose in a non-temporary way.

On **1 April**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern at the disappearance of **Sajid Hussain** (Pakistan), editor-in-chief of **The Balochistan Times**, who was last seen in early March in Sweden where he held a political asylum status.

On **6 May**, after **Sajid Hussain** was found dead on 23 April in the river Fyrisån north of Uppsala, I wrote to the authorities conveying my concern at, and requesting additional information on, his death.

On 24 June, I received a reply from the authorities regarding **Sajid Hussain**. They informed me that a preliminary investigation had been initiated and that the handling of the case was now a responsibility of the independent law enforcement authorities. They further stressed that the right to freedom of expression, freedom of the media and the safety of journalists are of great importance to Sweden.

On **9 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the death threats against Swedish cartoonist **Mahmoud Abbas**, after his cartoon on the oil price crisis, which was viewed as mocking Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia. I urged the authorities to investigate the threats and ensure his safety.

### **Tajikistan**

On **23 January 2020**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I noted the granting of accreditation to four journalists of **Radioi Ozodi** (RFE/RL service in Tajikistan) as a first step. I expressed my hope that accreditation would be granted to the media's entire team, and stressed that journalists must be able to work freely without undue restrictions.

On **3 February**, I wrote to the authorities, and issued a statement from my official Twitter account, expressing my concern at the detention of journalist **Daler Sharipov**, on charges of ethnic, racial, regional or religious enmity, reportedly based on **Sharipov's** journalistic activities. I called on the authorities to investigate the case fully and to release him immediately, and stressed that the media must be able to investigate and publish without fear of reprisal.

On **12 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the violent attack by two men against the journalist **Abdulloh Ghurbati**, of **Asia Plus**, in Dushanbe, on 11 May. I called on the authorities to search for, and bring to justice, the perpetrators.

On **29 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my alarm at the attack against journalist **Abdulloh Ghurbati**, of **Asia Plus**, who was beaten up while covering a natural disaster. I appealed to the authorities to carry out a quick and thorough investigation to bring the culprits to justice, and stated that journalists must be safe to report on matters of public interest. This was the second assault on **Ghurbati** within a month.

On **29 May**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the ruling of the Supreme Court to block the news website **Akhbor.com**, based in the Czech Republic, on the grounds that it provides a platform to “terrorist and extremist organizations”. I noted that blocking an entire website is a severe restriction on freedom of expression, as opposed to taking down specific content. I recalled the importance of taking into account the principle of proportionality in any decision affecting media freedom.

On **25 June**, I wrote to the authorities about the imminent adoption of amendments to the Criminal and Administrative Codes, which would punish media for publishing inaccurate and false information related to the current **COVID-19** pandemic. In particular, I expressed my concern that the new regulation will not so much penalize the disseminators of harmful disinformation, but instead make the work of journalists, who want to report on the pandemic and inform the public, more difficult.

## Turkey

On **4 December 2019**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the arrest of **Mezopotamya Agency** reporters **Sadiye Eser** and **Sadık Topaloğlu** on alleged terrorism charges, and called for their immediate release.

I later learned that the Istanbul 22<sup>nd</sup> Heavy Penal Court ruled to release the journalists on 26 March.

On **11 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my worries at reports that journalist **Idris Özyol** was found unconscious on the street in Antalya, on 2 December, and was subsequently hospitalized. I wished him a speedy recovery and expressed my hope that the investigation would determine the cause of the accident. I also recalled that he was previously attacked in May 2019.

On **27 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the Constitutional Court ruling stating that the blocking of **Wikipedia** by the authorities since 2017 was a violation of freedom of expression. I urged the authorities to implement this decision and ensure free access to information online for all.

On **27 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the decision by a court in Istanbul to hand down jail terms of up to three-and-a-half years to seven staff members of **Sözcü Gazetesi**. I stressed that journalists should be free to do their work, and that freedom of expression and media freedom are vital preconditions to the foundations of democratic societies.

On **16 January 2020**, I issued a public statement welcoming the lifting of the ban on **Wikipedia** in Turkey by a court, on 15 January, more than two-and-half-years after the authorities had blocked the website. I underlined that this was a victory for access to information and freedom of expression in the country, for all citizens of Turkey who were deprived of access to the worldwide encyclopaedia, and for all those who pleaded for restoring access to the website over the past two years. I further expressed my hope that other steps would follow, as, despite this positive news, many websites remain blocked in the country.

On **25 January**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the revocation of several journalists' press cards, including of **Evrensel Daily** journalists. I stressed that this form of pressure against the media was unacceptable, and urged the authorities to grant all press credentials to journalists and to allow them to work without any hindrance.

On **6 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the Constitutional Court ruling, which found that the rights of **Mehmet Altan** had been violated and that he receive compensation. I recalled that his detention was unjust and that journalists must not be imprisoned for their work.

On **14 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the acquittal by a court of the **Özgür Gündem** newspaper board members **Aslı Erdoğan**, **Necmiye Alpay** and **Bilge Aykut** on charges of membership of a terrorist organization. I stated that I await with concern the pending cases of **Eren Keskin**, **Zana Kaya**, **İnan Kızılkaya** and **Kemal Sancılı**.

On **27 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the suspended prison sentence of one year, two months, and 17 days that was handed to **Faruk Arhan** for allegedly insulting the President of Turkey on social media. I underlined that Criminal Code Article 299 should be removed and not be used in any way to silence journalists.

On **27 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my dismay at the one year and three months suspended prison sentence that was handed to Danish freelance journalist **Sultan Çoban** for "terrorism propaganda" in relation to one of her Facebook posts. I underscored that such decisions harm media freedom and encourage self-censorship in the country.

On **1 March**, I issued a public statement, in addition to a statement from my official Twitter account, condemning the detentions of the editor-in-chief of **Sputnik Turkey**, **Mahir Boztepe**, in Istanbul, and of three other **Sputnik** journalists in Ankara in relation to an article they wrote. The three journalists had also been threatened in front of their homes by a group of protesters during the night of 29 February. All four journalists were subsequently released after being questioned by the authorities. I highlighted that it is paramount that the authorities ensure the safety of foreign correspondents at all times, including during conflicts.

On **2 March**, I wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, referring to my public statement issued the previous day on the **Sputnik** journalists. I appealed to the relevant Turkish authorities to enable favourable working conditions for all journalists, including foreign correspondents. Furthermore, I informed the Minister about the cases of the **Mesopotamia News Agency** journalists **İdris Sayılğan** and **Naci Kaya** as well as the **Rudaw** reporter **Rawin Sterk** and camera operator **Mehmet Şirin Akgün**, who were detained while covering the refugee crisis along the border between Turkey and Greece.

On **2 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my worries at the detention of reporters **İdris Sayılğan**, **Naci Kaya**, and **Rawin Sterk**, and of camera operator **Mehmet Şirin Akgünm**. I urged the authorities to release them.

On **9 March**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the detention of six journalists accused of disclosing the identity of an intelligence officer killed in Libya. On 4 March, police detained the journalist and director of the **Odatv** news website, **Barış Terkoğlu**, along with the reporter **Hülya Kılınç**. The editor-in-chief of the **Odatv** news website, **Barış Pehlivan**, was also arrested, supposedly for the same reason. According to media reports, **Yeniçağ** journalist **Murat Ağirel** as well as **Yeni Yaşam** managing editor **Aydın Keser** and editor-in-chief **Ferhat Çelik**, were re-arrested, after a prosecutor overturned their earlier release. They were also detained on the same charges. I urged the Turkish authorities to release them immediately, adding that, even in times of conflict and on issues related to a conflict situation, journalists must be able to report freely on issues of public interest without censorship, pressure or intimidation.

On **18 March**, I published a statement on my official Twitter account, and on **20 March** wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, expressing my concern at new measures, linked to the **COVID-19** pandemic, limiting contact between imprisoned journalists and their families to weekly ten-minute phone calls. I later learned that the number of phone calls for detainees was increased. I called on the authorities to allow these journalists, who should never have been detained, to reunite with families in this period, and stressed that, in the current circumstances, a humanitarian decision should be taken to reunite detained journalists with their families.

On **23 March**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the detention of several journalists after they published reports on the **coronavirus** crisis. According to media reports, seven journalists, including **Mustafa Ahmet Oktay**, owner of the **Halk** and **Pusula** newspapers; **Eren Sarıkaya**, managing editor at the **Pusula** newspaper; and **İsmet Çiğit**, editor-in-chief of the **SES Kocaeli** newspaper, were briefly detained the previous week. All of the journalists were subsequently released. I stated that, in this time of crisis, the media plays an important role in providing important information to the public, countering “fake news”, and reporting on issues of public interest related to the pandemic.

On **24 March**, I issued a public statement urging the authorities to lift the indefinite state-advertising ban on the **Evrensel Daily** newspaper, reportedly because the newspaper had broken rules against bulk purchasing. I stressed that such a ban poses a threat to the existence of the newspaper, and expressed my hope that the authorities would not use any economic measures to silence critical media.

On **26 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern after the police summoned **İz Gazete** journalist **Tugay Can** in Izmir to answer questions regarding his reports on **COVID-19** cases in the country. I called on the authorities not to prevent the media from reporting on issues of public interest.

On **31 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my worries at the investigation launched against journalist **Nurcan Baysal** related to her articles and social media posts on **COVID-19**. I stated that I would closely follow her case, and urged the authorities to respect journalists’ right to work and report on the pandemic.



On **4 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my worries at the detention of **Hakan Aygün**, after he posted a tweet related to a governmental **COVID-19** donation campaign and which allegedly insulted religious values. I called for his immediate release.

On **9 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the criminal complaints filed by the President of Turkey and by the Banking Regulation Agency against **Fox TV** news anchor **Fatih Portakal**, for allegedly “spreading lies on social media” and “harming the reputation of banks”. I called for the lawsuits to be dropped.

On **17 April**, I issued a public statement expressing my worries about the fact that journalists did not benefit from a new law releasing inmates from prison, amid public health concerns related to the **COVID-19** pandemic. In the current circumstances, and faced with the health emergency in prisons, I urged the Turkish authorities to include journalists in this new measure and to release them.

On **20 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the shooting on the premises of the **Ses Kocaeli** newspaper in Kocaeli. I stated that this attack against a local critical media is very worrying, and called on the authorities to swiftly investigate this incident, bring those responsible to justice and protect journalists.

On **5 May**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the decisions taken by the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) to fine and sanction **Fox TV**, **Halk TV** and **Tele 1**. I stated that these restrictions on media, and this pressure on journalists, harm media pluralism, freedom of expression and journalists’ ability to report on issues of public interest. I stressed that it is of utmost importance to ensure that RTÜK, as a regulatory agency, is independent, impartial and works free from any kind of political influence in line with the best international practices. I also reiterated my call for the lawsuits against journalist **Fatih Portakal** to be dropped, adding that my Office would be following the case closely.

On **6 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the release of journalist **Hakan Aygün**, and expressed my hope that this would be a prelude to his full acquittal. With his next court hearing scheduled for 14 July, I reiterated that journalists should never be prosecuted in relation to their work and views published online or offline.

On **15 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I stated I was appalled by the beating of the editor-in-chief of **Oda TV**, **Barış Pehlivan**, in the Silivri prison where he is detained. I called on the authorities to swiftly investigate this incident, and added that journalists should not be in prison.

On **8 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the detention of **TELE 1** Ankara Representative **İsmail Dükel**, and **Odatv** Ankara news co-ordinator **Müeyesser Yıldız**. I urged the authorities to release them, and underlined that journalists should not be detained for reporting on issues of public interest.

On **8 June**, I issued a public statement expressing my dismay over the prison sentences handed down to the news director of the **Gerger Fırat** newspaper, **Özgür Boğatekin**, and to journalist **Metin Uca**, in two unrelated cases, for their critical writing and for expressing their opinions. I underlined that such sentences undermine media freedom and can lead to self-censorship, and urged the authorities to refrain from punishing journalists for their professional activities.

On **17 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed two court rulings: one acquitted journalist **Semiha Alankuş**, and the other overturned the prison sentences of journalists **Ahmet Memiş**, **Cemal Kalyoncu**, **Gökçe Fırat Çulhaoğlu**, **Tanık Ünal**, **Yakup Çetin** and **Yetkin Yıldız**. I stressed that journalists need to be free do to their job.

On **17 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my alarm at the sentencing of **Jin News** website journalist **Beritan Canözer** to 22 months and 15 days in prison, on charges of “terror propaganda” for her social media posts. I highlighted that journalists should not be prosecuted for their work, and called on the authorities to release her.

### **Turkmenistan**

On **1 April 2020**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern at, and requesting additional information on, reported restrictions on information in the context of the **COVID-19** pandemic. According to available information, several people in the country may have been detained for talking about the pandemic. While sharing the concerns of the authorities concerning the dissemination of false information related to the current health crisis, I stated that I found such measures would prove counterproductive.

On 3 April, I received a reply from the authorities informing me that the Ministry of Interior had registered no detentions, and that the authorities duly disseminated information, compiled by national and international organizations, about the prevention of the pandemic.

### **Ukraine**

On **28 November 2019**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I deplored the break-in at the office of the National Union of Journalists in Kyiv. I also welcomed the swift reaction by the police, and said that I trust that the investigation would identify those responsible.

On **9 December**, I wrote to the authorities asking for information about the laws drafted by the Verkhovna Rada and the Government of Ukraine, to regulate media activities in the country, including on the issue of disinformation. The laws were drafted in line with the decree signed by the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, on 8 November “On urgent measures for implementation of reforms and strengthening of the state” (*see also PC Report of 21 November 2019*). I noted that I hoped that the draft laws would be carefully scrutinized to avoid any negative implications for media freedom and media pluralism.

On **12 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I stated that I was following the developments in the investigation into the murder of **Pavlo Sheremet**, who was killed in a car explosion on 20 July 2016, in Kyiv. I also expressed my hope that the investigation would bring the killers and perpetrators to justice.

On **13 December**, I issued a public statement expressing my hope that the perpetrators of, and masterminds behind, the murder of the journalist **Pavlo Sheremet** would soon be identified and brought to justice, after the Ukrainian authorities declared having detained five suspects in the case. I called for an end to impunity in this murder.

On **18 December**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern at several cases of denial of entry to Ukraine of journalists from the Russian **NTV TV** channel **Alexey Chebotaryov**, **Alexandra Tonkikh**, as well as **Sergey Savin** and his film crew. I also raised the case of **Diana**

**Sirazi** and her camera operator, from the Russian channel **Zvezda TV**, who were fined and issued bans on re-entering Ukraine for three years upon their departure from Kyiv. I called on the authorities to refrain from imposing unnecessary limitations on the work of foreign journalists.

On **19 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the violence against several journalists during a protest in Kyiv, in particular against **Sergiy Nuzhnenko**, from **Radio Svoboda**; and **Victoria Roshchina** and **Alexei Nikulin**, from **Hromadske**. I also expressed my concern at the arson attack on the editorial office of the newspaper **Voice of Samborschina** in Sambor. I urged the authorities to investigate the cases and ensure journalists' safety.

On **29 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the news, and expressed my relief, that **Stanislav Asev** and **Oleh Halaziuk**, both contributors to **Radio Svoboda** (RFE/RL), were released from their long illegal custody in Donetsk, as a result of an exchange of prisoners.

On **13 January 2020**, I wrote to the authorities to ask that they carefully scrutinize the case of **Zhanar Akhmetova**, a blogger who fled Kazakhstan to seek asylum in Ukraine in 2017 over alleged safety concerns, and to examine all circumstances regarding the request of her extradition (*see also PC Report of 21 November 2019*). I noted that, if extradited, she might face unfair treatment in Kazakhstan.

On 25 February, I learned that the Court of Appeal in Kyiv ordered the State Migration Service of Ukraine to reconsider the request of **Akhmetova**, in relation to granting asylum status to her and her young son.

On **15 January**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the decision by the Simferopol District Court to end the probationary ban on public activities of the Crimean journalist **Mykola Semena** and to expunge his criminal record. I recalled that I had previously called for all the charges against him to be dropped, and expressed my hope that he would be free to travel again.

On **21 January**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I deplored the entry ban into Crimea for Ukrainian journalist **Taras Ibragimov**. I called on those responsible to respect the role of media actors, and to allow journalists to travel without restrictions in order for them to carry out their work.

On **23 January**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at several provisions of the new draft law “**On Amendments to Some Legislative Acts of Ukraine Concerning National Information Security and the Right to Access Reliable Information**”, which aims to combat disinformation. I stressed that the fight against disinformation should not be done at the expense of media freedom, or through state interference in the content of the media and in the organization of journalism activities in the country.

On **3 February**, I issued a public statement expressing my relief at the news that the suspended sentence and probationary ban of Ukrainian **RFE/RL** journalist **Mykola Semena** came to an end. In 2017, a court handed **Semena** a two-and-a-half-years suspended prison sentence for “public calls for actions violating the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation”, with an additional ban on “public activities” for a period of three years. I stressed that I had long

campaigning for his release, and that it was unacceptable that he was persecuted in the first place for expressing his views.

On **6 February**, I issued a public statement, and on **10 February** wrote to the authorities, expressing my concern at the search of the editorial office of the **1+1** TV channel, in Kyiv, by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) on 5 February. The search was reportedly conducted on charges of “illegal use of special technology for secret obtaining of information”, and in relation to specific persons in locations where they could create and store audio files obtained illegally. I called on the authorities to ensure that the inquiry does not obstruct the work of the media and to respect the principle of confidentiality of journalistic sources.

On **3 – 7 February**, I paid an official visit to Ukraine, where I held discussions with the authorities, the media community and international organizations, focusing particularly on two new draft laws “**On Media**” and on countering disinformation.

During my visit, I met with **Volodymyr Borodianskyi**, Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport of Ukraine; **Oleksandr Tkachenko**, Chairperson of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine’s Committee on Humanitarian and Information Policy; **Oleg Nalyvaiko**, Head of the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting; and **Yevhenia Filipenko**, Director General for International Organizations at the Foreign Ministry of Ukraine.

In my discussions with **Zurab Alasania**, Chair of the Managing Board of the public service company **UA:PBC**, and members of Parliament, I underlined the importance of a well-funded independent public broadcasting service, which can also contribute to combating disinformation. In addition, I also met with journalists and representatives of civil society organizations, including the **Institute of Mass Information**, the **National Journalists’ Union of Ukraine**, the **Platform for Human Rights**, the **Donbass News** website, **Detector Media**, the Ukrainian Service of **Radio Free Europe**, **Hromadske TV**, **AFP** and the **Commission on Journalistic Ethics**. I also had meetings with the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine; as well as with **Verena Taylor**, Director of the Office Directorate General of Programmes of the Council of Europe (CoE); and **Olena Litvinenko**, Deputy Head of the CoE Office in Ukraine.

During the visit, I called on the authorities to undertake more consultations on media law reforms to strengthen guarantees of media freedom in line with the best international standards and OSCE commitments on freedom of the media.

On **12 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed a declaration by the new Chief of Staff of the Presidential Office, Andriy Yermak, stating that President Zelensky is a “guarantor of freedom of speech and free media” and that “there will be no laws that would restrict free speech in Ukraine.”

On **20 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the news that journalist **Mykola Semena**, from Crimea, was finally able to travel freely and had arrived in Kyiv. He had previously been unfairly convicted and had a travel ban imposed on him.

On **24 February**, I issued a statement from my official Twitter account, and on **26 February** wrote to the authorities, expressing my concern at the questioning of journalist **Mariya Zemlyanska** and two other staff members with the investigative media project **Bihus.info**, as part of the criminal proceedings involving a high-level police official. I underlined that such

action might have a chilling effect on the media, as it could thwart reporting on issues of public interest.

On **26 February**, I wrote to the authorities, and on **2 March** issued a public statement, presenting a legal review, commissioned by my Office, following the registration of the draft law “**On Media**” in the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament). The legal review stressed that this draft law needs to be brought in line with applicable international standards, OSCE commitments, and best practices on freedom of expression and freedom of information, in order to avoid any negative impact on media freedom in the country. (*For more details, see Legal Reviews.*)

On **28 February**, I issued a public statement calling on the authorities to urgently find an effective solution to unblock the bank accounts of the public broadcasting company of Ukraine, **UA:PBC**. On 18 February, the Ministry of Justice opened enforcement proceedings against **UA:PBC**, which resulted in the immediate blocking of its bank accounts, in order to recover over 10 million euros owed to the television channel **Euronews**. The debt was inherited by **UA:PBC** from its predecessor, the National Television Company of Ukraine. I underlined that it is particularly important to ensure that the public broadcaster, created in 2014, does not bear such a burden from its predecessor, and that the blocking of accounts is detrimental to the company’s mission and development today.

On **13 March**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern at, and requesting information on, a recent decision of the National Council of Television and Radio of Ukraine (the Council) to ban the broadcasting of three Russian channels – **Eurokino**, **Top Shop** and **Zoopark** – from Ukrainian cable networks.

On **16 March**, I sent a legal analysis to the authorities on the proposed amendments to Ukraine’s 2011 Law “**On Information**”. These amendments aim to combat disinformation and regulate media activity, and are part of the draft law “**On Amendments to Some Legislative Acts of Ukraine Concerning National Information Security and the Right to Access Reliable Information**”, presented by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport of Ukraine in January 2020. The legal analysis found that the draft amendments would create worrying precedents, with the potential to have a significant chilling effect on freedom of the media and the broader rights of freedom of expression and access to information. The review recommended abandoning the proposed set of amendments, and highlighted that new solutions, that would take a human rights based approach to address this issue, could be found, preferably with the input of Ukrainian civil society and international media experts. (*For more details, see Legal Reviews.*)

On **27 March**, I wrote to the Ukrainian authorities appealing to them not to deport, on humanitarian grounds, the Tajik journalist and editor of the online news portal **Payom.net**, **Abdulmannon Sheraliev**, and his family. I noted that the European Court of Human Rights had accepted his case to consider a temporary ban on his deportation. I also expressed my support for his application for political asylum. **Sheraliev** had left Tajikistan following the failed coup there in 2015.

On **27 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the attack on a journalist group of the **News One TV channel**, while they were carrying out a journalistic investigation in the city of Krasiyiv of the Khmelnytsky region. At least one of the journalists was injured and sought hospital treatment. I called on the authorities to promptly investigate the incident and bring the perpetrators to justice.

On **31 March**, I issued a public statement, and on **1 April** wrote to the authorities, calling on them not to cut the budget of the public broadcasting company of Ukraine, **UA:PBC**, by 178 million Hryvnas (5.6 million euros), which would be reallocated to funds aimed at counteracting **COVID-19** in Ukraine. I called on the authorities to urgently explore and find effective solutions to preserve the budget of **UA:PBC**, highlighting that the public service broadcaster has an indispensable role to play in providing reliable information to the population, reporting on the pandemic and combating false information. I noted that this was not the time to risk the economic sustainability of public service media.

On **9 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at a reported drone attack, on 7 April, against the car of a crew of **TV Channel Ukraine**, near the village of Krasnohorivka. I called for a thorough investigation.

On **29 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my worries at the police violence against **Hromadske** journalists **Bohdan Kutieпов** and **Nikita Mekenzin**, and at the police's obstruction of their work outside of the Cabinet of Ministers in Kyiv. I urged the authorities to investigate the incident and ensure that journalists can report freely on public protests.

On **4 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account on the first anniversary of the horrendous attack which eventually killed the journalist **Vadim Komarov** in Cherkasy, I reiterated my call on the authorities to complete the investigation into the attack and to bring all those responsible to justice (*see also PC Report of 4 July 2019*).

On **6 May**, together with the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Lamberto Zannier, I wrote a joint letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dmytro Kuleba, bringing to his attention, and requesting additional information on, developments around the Crimean Tatar television channel **ATR**. The letter followed reports that the channel had been experiencing serious financial difficulties due to the suspension of state support, which may eventually result in its closure. In light of restrictions to freedom of expression and limitations on media pluralism in Crimea, as well as the difficulties faced by its residents in accessing Ukrainian media, we asked the competent authorities to look into this matter and explore mechanisms that would enable the government to provide financial support to **ATR**.

### **United Kingdom**

On **13 December 2019**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the preliminary ruling in the libel action against investigative journalist **Carole Cadwalladr**, and stressed that strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP) should not be used to limit the media from doing their work.

On **10 January 2020**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the news that **BBC** journalist **Samira Ahmed** won a gender discrimination case, and emphasized that a fair working environment for all journalists, with equal pay for women journalists, is essential for diversity and equality in the media.

On **20 January**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern, and requesting more information, regarding the Government's plans to relocate the press briefings and Lobby meetings outside of the Houses of Parliament, in Westminster. In particular, I noted concerns by several journalism organizations that this would make it more difficult for journalists to

carry out their work, to have access to the Prime Minister's official spokesperson and, for those from smaller media outlets, to attend the daily press briefings. I expressed my hope that consultations with journalists could help maintain the exemplary conditions of access to information previously enjoyed by journalists covering Westminster and the Prime Minister's office.

On **5 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I deplored the threats and dangerous accusations made against reporter **Leona O'Neill** in Northern Ireland, in relation to her reporting on a commemoration event to mark the 1972 Bloody Sunday massacre. I stated that this attempt to silence her was unacceptable, and called for a thorough investigation.

On **5 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern after journalists of diverse media outlets, including the **Daily Mirror**, **The Huffington Post UK**, **Politics Home**, and **The Independent**, among others, were denied entry to a press briefing at the Prime Minister's office. I expressed my hope that media would continue to have equal access to information.

On **12 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the news that a man was charged with the murder of journalist **Lyra McKee**, who was killed on 18 April 2019 in Northern Ireland. I recognized the development as an important step in ensuring that there is no impunity for crimes committed against journalists and that her killer faces justice.

On **20 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I deplored an incident against **BBC South East** political editor **Lauren Moss**, who suffered abuse before going live on air in Brighton. I stressed that hostility and abuse towards journalists and the media cannot be tolerated and must be addressed.

On **23 February**, I issued a public statement calling on the authorities not to extradite **WikiLeaks** editor **Julian Assange** to the United States, ahead of his hearing on 24 February, in relation to the publication of classified documents in 2010. I expressed my concern at the numerous charges and the disproportionate prison sentence of up to 175 years that he could face if he is extradited and convicted.

I later learned that his extradition hearing, which was due to resume on 18 May, was rescheduled to 7 September due to the **coronavirus**.

On 9 March, I received a letter from the authorities, in response to several of my statements, in which they recalled the UK Government's commitment to being open in dealings with the press and to the principles of media freedom. They also recalled the Government's strong track record in providing access to information for journalists covering Government business in Westminster, including the work of the Prime Minister's office. In particular:

- Regarding my letter dated 20 January, the authorities informed me that Lobby briefings continue to be held for all journalists with a Press Gallery pass and take place twice a day, with the Prime Minister's official spokesperson.
- Regarding the statement of 5 February on the press briefing, the authorities informed me that this press briefing was an additional technical, specialist briefing, and that it is a standard practice for the government to host smaller specialist briefings.
- Regarding the second statement of 5 February, the authorities were also concerned by the threats and accusations against **Leona O'Neill** and that they take all threats against journalists very seriously.

- The authorities welcomed the statement of 12 February, following the news that the Police Service of Northern Ireland had charged a 52 year-old-man in connection with the murder of **Lyra McKee**, which they confirmed.
- Regarding the statement of 23 February, the authorities provided an overview of the judicial proceedings in the extradition case of **Julian Assange**, and recalled that the United Kingdom has a long tradition of ensuring that rights and liberties are protected, and of fulfilling its human rights obligations.

On **8 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the reported death threat made by dissident republicans against an **Irish News** journalist based in Belfast. I stressed that this threat was unacceptable and dangerous. I also welcomed the condemnation by local authorities and urged them to investigate the threat thoroughly.

On **18 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I paid tribute to journalist **Lyra McKee**, on the one-year anniversary of her murder. I stressed that, despite progress in the investigation into her death, alarming threats remain for journalists covering paramilitary activities in Northern Ireland.

On **9 May**, I issued a public statement condemning the threats made against journalists of the **Sunday World** and **Sunday Life** newspapers, in Northern Ireland, by a dissident loyalist group. Police warned the journalists that they were at risk of immediate attack, which included a plot to bomb a car belonging to one of them. I stressed that such threats have no place in a democratic society and underlined the risks that journalists covering paramilitary activities continue to face in Northern Ireland. I commended the work of the authorities in warning the journalists of the threats and in carrying out the necessary investigations. I expressed my hope that those responsible for the threats would be brought to justice swiftly.

On **11 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the racist and abusive language used by a bystander against **BBC** journalist **Sima Kotecha** and her crew in Leicester, which prevented them from broadcasting. I stated that such racist attacks and abuse against journalists and media staff are unacceptable.

I learned the next day that a man had been charged with public order offences in relation to the incident.

On **27 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the death and rape threats against **The Mail** journalist **Amy Fenton**. I praised the authorities for providing the journalist with police protection, and expressed my hope that they would find those responsible for the threats.

On **16 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the physical assault by far-right demonstrators on Italian journalist **Corrado Amitrano**, which resulted in his nose being broken, while he was covering protests on 13 June in London. I welcomed the police's swift intervention and expressed my hope that those responsible would be prosecuted.

### **United States of America**

On **24 January 2020**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my support with the call made by the UN Special Rapporteurs, Agnès Callamard and David Kaye, for investigations into the hacking of **Jeff Bezos'** phone and the attempted pressure on him. Bezos



owns the **Washington Post** for which the journalist **Jamal Khashoggi**, murdered in 2018, worked.

On **14 February**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern at, and requesting additional information on, the arrest of the photojournalist **Amr Alfiky**, briefly detained on 11 February, in New York. According to reports, police arrested **Alfiky**, a photo editor at **ABC** news and a contributor to **Reuters** and **The New York Times**, while he was filming the arrest of another individual. **Alfiky** reportedly identified himself as a journalist with a press card. I urged the relevant authorities to undertake a thorough investigation into this incident and to drop all charges against the photojournalist in connection with his arrest.

On 15 June, I received a reply from the authorities, informing me that **Alfiky**'s press credentials were returned to him on 14 February and that he continues to work freely as a photojournalist. They underlined that, the fact that **Alfiky**'s arrest was reported by several United States-based media and non-governmental organizations highlighted a robust media environment in the country. They also noted that the United States strongly supports freedom of expression, including for members of the media.

On **24 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the decision to force the Turkish public broadcaster, **TRT**, to register as a foreign agent, under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. I stated that such registration has a restrictive and negative impact on media freedom and should not apply to media from another OSCE participating State.

On **31 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the court ruling in favour of the American Civil Liberties Union, stating that studies by researchers and journalists on the impact of algorithms on discrimination must not be considered a crime.

On **29 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the brief arrest of **CNN** reporter **Omar Jimenez** and his crew while reporting on protests in Minneapolis. I noted the apology by the Governor of Minnesota Tim Walz, who said that "it was totally unacceptable". I also stated that journalists must be able to report on public protests unhindered.

On **30 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the attack against the **CNN Center** during protests in Atlanta. I emphasized that nothing can justify such violence against the press and that, in this difficult time more than ever, the press must be able to report free from any intimidation or violence.

On **31 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my worries about the increase of violent incidents against journalists covering protests, by the police and by demonstrators. I called on the authorities to exercise restraint and to ensure that journalists can report safely on public protests.

On **1 June**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the violence, by the police and demonstrators, against journalists covering the protests that had erupted and spread across the country, following the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis on 25 May. I noted that many of these incidents involved arrests and the use of force by police, including rubber bullets, tear gas, and pepper spray, as well as acts of violence by protesters. In particular, I recalled over 20 incidents where journalists had been victims of violence, or arrested and detained,

while covering these protests. I called on the authorities to exercise restraint and to ensure that journalists can work safely while reporting on public protests.

### **Uzbekistan**

On **4 December 2019**, I issued a public statement presenting a legal review on the draft law “**On Television and Radio Broadcasting**”, which had been shared with the authorities of Uzbekistan on 21 October (*see also PC Report of 21 November 2019*).

On **18 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the pledge by the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, to end the imprisonment of journalists for libel and slander, to ensure supremacy of the rule of law and new steps for media development and media freedom. I noted that I would closely follow, and support, efforts for law reforms in the country in favour of media freedom.

On **6 May 2020**, I wrote to the authorities requesting additional information on an incident involving journalists from the outlet **Human.uz**, in particular **Mavjuda Mirzaeva**, in the Syrdaryo province, on 3 May. Reportedly, law enforcement officers obstructed the activities of the journalists and deleted their video material; and a member of the crew was put in a car and taken away. I noted that an internal investigation was launched following the incident, and expressed my hope that those responsible would swiftly be identified.

On **14 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the violent attack against journalist and camera operator **Giyosbek Eshov**, of the online platform **Effect.uz**, who was assaulted and, as a result, hospitalized, in the Fergana province, on 13 May. I called on the authorities to search for the perpetrators and to bring them to justice.

### **International Organizations**

On **31 January 2020**, I wrote to the **Venice Commission** to share my Office’s legal reviews on the Albanian “**Law on Audiovisual Media**” and “**Law on Electronic Communications**”, after the Albanian Parliament had decided to suspend the vote on these drafts whilst waiting for the Commission’s advice.

### 3. Projects and activities since the last report

#### Legal reviews

##### Albania

On **2 December**, I wrote to the Prime Minister, Edi Rama, and on **9 December** issued a public statement, **presenting an updated legal review** on the amendments to the “**Law on Audiovisual Media**” and the “**Law on Electronic Communications**”. This legal analysis was part of a long consultation process, started in December 2018, between my Office and the government on the drafting of the legislation.

I welcomed several positive elements, such as: the addition of a strong safeguard in the law; new wording of the provisions which define the object and scope of the law; that electronic media providers will not be submitted to a compulsory registration mechanism to perform their activities in Albania; the decision to suppress an article which would have granted the regulator extensive new powers; and that the possibility of blocking access to online content will now be limited to three grave criminal offences: child pornography, promotion of terrorist acts, and breaches to national security.

In addition, the legal review further offered the following recommendations:

- “Supporting services” (article 2) shall not be included in the scope of the audiovisual media law, as they are already defined and regulated under the legislation on electronic communications.
- References to “political belief” and “union membership” included in paragraph 4 of article 33/1 shall be eliminated.
- A general provision regarding the right to appeal before the competent court any decision taken by the regulator shall be introduced.
- Considering the general role and responsibilities of the regulator, particularly with regards to the protection of the right to freedom of expression in Albania, it is recommended to change the wording of paragraph 132 as follows:
  - a) In paragraph 1.a). i, it is recommended to replace “correction formula according to the form and content determined by (the regulator)” with “the correction or reply according to the provisions included in article 53/1 of this Law”.
  - b) In paragraph 5.a) it is recommended to replace “block access to the Internet” with “order the take down of a specific piece of content”.
  - c) In paragraph 5.a) as well, it is recommended to replace “suspected of inciting” with “suspected, according to specific criminal legislation in force, to constitute one of the following criminal offenses”.
- Provisions on sanctions for administrative contraventions shall enshrine additional application criteria in order to properly protect the principles of proportionality and necessity, as well as to guarantee that any sanction is adopted after proper consideration of the size and economic capacity of the media outlet in question.
- The new competence granted to AKEP in the draft amendment to the “**Law on Electronic Communications**” – letter rr) of article 8 – shall be completely eliminated.

## Ukraine

On **26 February**, I wrote to the authorities, and on **2 March** issued a public statement, **presenting a legal review**, following the registration of the draft law “**On Media**” in the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament). The legal review was commissioned by my Office and prepared by Dr. Joan Barata Mir, an independent media freedom expert.

The legal review stressed that this draft law needs to be brought in line with applicable international standards, OSCE commitments, and best practices on freedom of expression and freedom of information, in order to avoid any negative impact on media freedom in the country.

The legal analysis further stressed that, while specific situations affecting national security may justify the imposition of certain limits to the right to freedom of expression, these restrictions need to be clearly specified on a case-by-case basis. The legal analysis further raised concerns over the possibility of imposing a penalty on certain media outlets, by banning their dissemination based on a very widely formulated justification. It also addressed the framework applicable to the appointment of the members, functioning and powers of the National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting (the Council).

On **16 March**, I sent a legal analysis to the authorities on the proposed amendments to Ukraine’s 2011 “**Law on Information**”. These amendments aim to combat disinformation and regulate media activity, and are part of the draft law “**On Amendments to Some Legislative Acts of Ukraine Concerning National Information Security and the Right to Access Reliable Information**”, presented by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport of Ukraine in January 2020. The analysis was commissioned by my Office to Dr. David Goldberg from the United Kingdom, a renowned expert on freedom of information, media law, journalism, and media regulation.

The legal analysis reviewed the proposed amendments through the lens of international and regional human rights standards to which Ukraine is party. The review found that the draft amendments would create worrying precedents, with the potential to have a significant chilling effect on freedom of the media and the broader rights of freedom of expression and access to information in Ukraine. The review recommended abandoning the proposed set of amendments, and highlighted that new solutions, that would take a human rights based approach to address this issue, could be found, preferably with the input of Ukrainian civil society and international media experts.

## Visits, meetings and participation in events

On **25 – 26 November 2019**, I paid an official visit to **Armenia**, on the occasion of the 15th Anniversary of the Armenian Human Rights Defender’s Institution. On this occasion, I met with the Prime Minister, **Nikol Pashinyan**, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, **Zohrab Mnatsakanyan**, and encouraged the authorities to continue promoting a safe and enabling environment for media freedom. In particular, the discussions with the authorities focused on the initiatives needed to promote media diversity and independence; address hate speech and disinformation in line with international principles; and enhance access to information, and the protection of journalist’s sources. The completion of the digital switchover process, including

through a review of the broadcast regulation, to ensure a better diversity at the local level was also discussed. During my meetings, I also welcomed the visits and exchange of journalists between Armenia and Azerbaijan as an important confidence-building measure.

On **1 December**, our SOFJO documentary “A Dark Place” was screened at the Pakistan Human Rights Film Festival, in **Islamabad**.

On **4 December**, ahead of the 2019 OSCE Ministerial Council in **Bratislava**, I participated in the Civic Solidarity Conference, during which I raised my concern at the many instances of journalists being attacked while covering public gatherings. I stressed that the media play an important watchdog role and that journalists must be able to report freely on public events.

On **5 – 6 December**, on the margins of the 2019 OSCE Ministerial Council in **Bratislava**, I had several meetings with Ministers to discuss media freedom issues in the OSCE participating States and co-operation with my Office. I met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, **Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu**; the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, **Chingiz Aidarbekov**; the Acting Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, **Gent Cakaj**; the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, **Josip Brkić**; the Assistant Deputy Minister of International Security of Canada, **Dan Costello**; the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Spain, **Fernando Martin Valenzuela Marzo**; and the US Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, **Robert Destro**.

On **5 December**, on the margins of the 2019 OSCE Ministerial Council, I attended, and took the floor at, a side-event on “Ukrainians – Political Prisoners: Way to Freedom”, with the participation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, **Vadym Prystaiko**; film director and writer **Oleg Sentsov**, from Crimea; and correspondent of the Ukrainian National News Agency, **Ukrinform**, **Roman Sushchenko**.

On **6 December**, my Office spoke on a panel titled “#Journalisttoo” at a conference about press freedom across Europe, organized by the Association of European Journalists (AEJ) at the UNESCO premises in **Paris**, France.

On **9 December**, on the occasion of the international day of human rights defenders, my Office introduced a screening, and participated in a panel discussion, of our SOFJO documentary “A Dark Place” at an event on online harassment of female journalists, organized by the Permanent Representation of the Netherlands to the European Union, in **Brussels**, Belgium.

On **11 December**, I met with **the parents of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kusnirova**, as well as with **Ján Kuciak**’s colleagues and a representative from **ECPMF** in **Bratislava**, Slovakia. We spoke of the life and passion of **Ján Kuciak** and his fiancée as well as the investigation into their murders.

On **8 January 2020**, I met with a group of Albanian journalists in **Vienna**, with whom I discussed media developments in the OSCE region, safety of journalists, and new draft media laws in Albania.

On **30 January**, I met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia and the then-Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, **David Zalkaliani**, in **Vienna**, to discuss media freedom issues.

On **3 – 7 February**, I paid an official visit to **Ukraine**, where I held discussions with the authorities, the media community and international organizations, focusing particularly on two new draft laws “**On Media**” and on countering disinformation.

During my visit, I met with **Volodymyr Borodianskyi**, Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport of Ukraine; **Oleksandr Tkachenko**, Chairperson of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine’s Committee on Humanitarian and Information Policy; **Oleg Nalyvaiko**, Head of the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting; and **Yevhenia Filipenko**, Director General for International Organizations at the Foreign Ministry of Ukraine.

In my discussions with **Zurab Alasania**, Chair of the Managing Board of the public service company **UA:PBC**, and members of Parliament, I underlined the importance of a well-funded independent public broadcasting service, which can also contribute to combating disinformation.

In addition, I also met with journalists and representatives of civil society organizations, including the **Institute of Mass Information**, the **National Journalists’ Union of Ukraine**, the **Platform for Human Rights**, the **Donbass News** website, **Detector Media**, the Ukrainian Service of **Radio Free Europe**, **Hromadske TV**, **AFP** and the **Commission on Journalistic Ethics**. I also had meetings with the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine; as well as with **Verena Taylor**, Director of the Office Directorate General of Programmes of the Council of Europe (CoE); and **Olena Litvinenko**, Deputy Head of the CoE Office in Ukraine.

During the visit, I called on the authorities to undertake more consultations on media law reforms to strengthen guarantees of media freedom in line with the best international standards and OSCE commitments on freedom of the media.

On **20 February**, I met in **Vienna** with the Chairman of the US Helsinki Commission, **Alcee Hastings**; Congressman **Joe Wilson**; and representatives from the US Delegation to the **OSCE Parliamentary Assembly** to discuss the state of media freedom in the OSCE region.

On **5 – 7 March**, I travelled to Samarkand, **Uzbekistan**, to hold the second Central Asia Judicial Dialogue organized by my Office. (*For more details, see Projects.*) On this occasion, I met with **Komil Allamjonov**, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the **Public Fund for Support and Development of National Mass Media**; **Saida Mirziyoyeva**, Deputy Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the **Public Fund for Support and Development of National Mass Media**; **Bakhtiyor Isakov**, Deputy Chairman of the **Supreme Court of Uzbekistan**; and **Dilshod Saidzhanov**, First Deputy Director of **Information and Mass Communication Agency under Presidential Administration**. The discussions focussed on how to protect freedom of expression while combating violent extremism, terrorism or hate speech, the decriminalization of defamation, and support to media projects, journalists and bloggers in the country.

On **10 March**, my Office organized, and I spoke at, a **roundtable on “Free Speech in the Age of Algorithms and AI,”** in **Vienna**. Following the publication of our non-paper on the issue, the event offered States the opportunity to discuss with experts the impact that algorithms and Artificial Intelligence (AI) have in shaping and arbitrating information online, and promoted a clearer understanding of the profound impact that the use of AI can have on the realization of freedom of expression and freedom of the media online. The roundtable also provided States

with the opportunity to share their concerns regarding the consequential infringements on free speech. On the same day, following the roundtable, my Office organized the first expert meeting on the impact of AI on freedom of expression.

On **28 April**, I participated in an online meeting with Russian investigative journalist **Elena Milashina**, of the **Novaya Gazeta** newspaper, organized by the OSCE Group of Friends on Safety of Journalists. The meeting was organized following an attack on, and death threats against, the journalist.

On **30 April**, I spoke at a **webinar** to mark the launch of the **21<sup>st</sup> Joint Declaration on freedom of expression**, which I published with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, David Kaye, and the Organization of American States Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, Edison Lanza. This year's Joint Declaration focuses on freedom of expression and elections in the digital age. Up to 200 participants, including David Kaye and Edison Lanza, attended the online event. (*For more details, see Publications.*)

On **22 – 23 June**, together with the Albanian OSCE Chair-in-Office and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), my Office organized online, and I spoke at, this year's second **OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Vienna**. The event addressed “Freedom of Expression, Media and Information” through three sessions: “freedom of expression and its relation to other fundamental freedoms”; “access to information as an essential condition for accountability and citizen participation in public life”; and “freedom of the media”. The event particularly underlined the importance of a free flow of information, unhindered by threats, intimidation or penalties, which can protect life and health, and also enables and promotes critical social, economic, political and other policy discussions and decision-making. The event provided a platform for an exchange among OSCE participating States, institutions, executive structures, and a variety of international organizations, civil society, media and other stakeholders on the implementation of commitments related to addressing the promotion freedom of expression, media and information.

On **23 June**, I participated in, and spoke at, an **online event** of the Transatlantic High-Level Working Group on Content Moderation Online and Freedom of Expression on the launch of the new Report on “Freedom & Accountability”, during which we discussed a framework for moderating speech online while protecting free speech.

## **Publications**

### **AI Non-Paper**

On **4 March**, I published a **non-paper on the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on freedom of expression**, with a particular focus on four main areas of concern: (a) security threats, (b) “hate speech”, (c) media pluralism and (d) surveillance, including surveillance capitalism. My Office promoted the non-paper via our new project webpage as well as on social media. The non-paper provided a clearer understanding of the key challenges to freedom of expression and media freedom when machine-learning technologies, such as AI, are deployed.

## **Joint Statement on COVID-19**

On **19 March**, I published a **joint statement**, together with the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, David Kaye, and the Organization of American States Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, Edison Lanza, calling on States to promote and protect access to, and the free flow of, information during the **coronavirus** pandemic.

## **Joint Declaration**

On **30 April**, I published the **21<sup>st</sup> Joint Declaration on freedom of expression**, together with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, David Kaye, and the Organization of American States Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, Edison Lanza. This year's Joint Declaration focuses on freedom of expression and elections in the digital age, and offers recommendations to State and non-State actors. The full text was published in English, French and Russian.

## **Conferences and Projects**

### **Second Central Asia Judicial Dialogue**

On **5 – 6 March**, my Office organized, and I spoke at, the second edition of the **Central Asia Judicial Dialogue**, in **Samarkand**, Uzbekistan, which focused on the protection of freedom of expression while combating violent extremism, terrorism and hate speech. More than 40 judges from all five Central Asian participating States, together with five international experts, participated in this expert meeting. The topics of this year's edition included the latest trends in legislation countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism in the OSCE area; legal measures against incitement to inter-ethnic and religious enmity in the region; as well as defamation and insult. The event offered a platform to compare and evaluate national approaches to these issues in all of the Central Asian States, as well as in other OSCE participating States. It contributed to strengthening the capacity of the judiciary to protect freedom of expression and media freedom while taking into account the security context, and encouraged the exchange of best practices in the OSCE region.

### **Artificial intelligence (AI)**

Over the last months, my Office has increasingly focused on the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on freedom of expression and new challenges that come with the use of machine-learning technologies. In addition to the non-paper on the issue, my Office developed and published a project webpage and a logo, with a strong focus on the need to put a spotlight on AI and free speech. Together with independent experts, my Office developed a roadmap towards an event on the issue and expert meetings, in view of developing policy recommendations how best to safeguard freedom of expression and media pluralism in the age of algorithms and AI.

On **10 March**, my Office organized, and I spoke at, a **roundtable on “Free Speech in the Age of Algorithms and AI”**. Following the publication of our non-paper on the issue, the event



provided a platform to discuss the key challenges to freedom of expression and media freedom when machine-learning technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), are deployed. The event offered States the opportunity to discuss with experts the impact that algorithms and AI have in shaping and arbitrating information online. Thus, the roundtable promoted a clearer understanding of the profound impact that the use of AI can have on the realization of human rights, particularly freedom of expression and freedom of the media online. The roundtable also provided States with the opportunity to share their concerns regarding the consequential infringements on free speech. Thereby, the discussions shaped the future work of the project and development of a strategy paper.

On the same day, following the roundtable, my Office organized the **first expert meeting on the impact of AI on freedom of expression**. This expert meeting provided a platform to develop a roadmap towards an event on AI and free speech and the subsequent expert meetings on the four thematic areas: (a) security threats, (b) “hate speech”, (c) media pluralism and (d) surveillance, including surveillance capitalism. In these expert meetings, policy recommendations will be developed on the most effective ways to safeguard freedom of expression and media pluralism when using AI and other advanced machine-learning technologies.

Following the publication of the AI non-paper, as well as the roundtable and the first expert meeting on 10 March, my Office published a series of **“Lightning Talk” presentations by AI experts** to further promote a clearer understanding of the key challenges to free speech and media pluralism stemming from the use of AI. We also placed a special focus on the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the use of AI and automation, and how this affects freedom of expression online. Together with independent experts, my Office has developed a **Strategy Paper** with preliminary recommendations on safeguards for free speech, including in the context of both surveillance and surveillance capitalism of AI-powered content moderation (e.g., security threats or “hate speech”), and the challenges to media pluralism and diversity. This Paper will be the foundation for the AI event on 8 July and a consultation phase over the summer as well as subsequent expert meetings.

### **Safety of Female Journalists Online (SOFJO)**

During this reporting period, the **video documentary “A Dark Place”** was included in various journalism curricula and training activities for students and practicing journalists, at, inter alia, the Central European University, in Hungary; the Columbia University Tow Center for Digital Journalism, in New York; the Southern Federal University, in the Russian Federation; the Franklin University, in Switzerland; and the University of Vienna, in Austria. Some universities also included my Communiqué on Media Pluralism, Safety of Female Journalists and Safeguarding Marginalized Voices Online (No. 1/2019).

## 4. Planned activities for the next reporting period

### Visits and participation in events

On **15 – 16 September**, my Office intends to participate in the Council of Europe Expert Committee on Freedom of Expression and Digital Technologies, in **Strasbourg**, France.

On **9 – 10 December**, my Office intends to organize, and I intend to speak at, a session on the online safety of female journalists, at the World Press Freedom Day Conference in **The Hague**, the Netherlands. The session will include a screening of our SOFJO documentary “A Dark Place”.

### Publications

#### AI Strategy Paper

On **3 July**, I will publish a **Strategy Paper on the Impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on Freedom of Expression**, which presents suggestions on how to effectively safeguard free speech when AI is deployed. Integrating the previously published non-paper, which provided a first introduction into the topic and main challenges, this Paper will not only reflect the discussions that took place so far, but will also deliberate on the current COVID-19 health crisis, the impact it has on the use of AI and automation, and will provide a set of preliminary recommendations in the four main areas of concern. Thereby, it will be the basis for both the AI event on 8 July as well as a consultation phase over the summer, which will feed into a series of AI events starting in autumn.

#### Guidebook on Safety of Journalists

In the coming months, my Office will publish the **third edition of the OSCE Guidebook on Safety of Journalists**, to better assist participating States in their efforts to ensure safe working conditions for journalists in the OSCE region. The Guidebook, to be published in English and Russian, will provide a framework of the current situation of safety of journalists and any developments since the publication of the previous edition in 2014, including gender-based violence, and harassment and intimidation of journalists online.

#### Resource Guide on Safety of Female Journalists Online

In the coming months, my Office will publish a **SOFJO Resource Guide** to better assist participating States in their efforts to ensure the safety of female journalists. This guide will provide guidance on how best to implement key recommendations developed throughout the SOFJO project and beyond. It will include proposed actions and implementation measures for all relevant stakeholders, including governments, the judiciary, media outlets, internet intermediaries, civil society and individual journalists, illustrated with good practices from across the OSCE region, and providing additional resources.

## Conferences and Projects

### Artificial Intelligence

On **8 July**, my Office will organize an inclusive **event on “The Rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and How it will Reshape the Future of Free Speech”**. During this online event, my Office will present a Strategy Paper and preliminary recommendations in order to start discussions on how to safeguard freedom of expression when artificial intelligence is deployed. This event will also initiate an online consultation phase, during which all stakeholders, representatives from States, civil society, the media, as well as the tech sector can provide feedback to the project, our Strategy Paper and preliminary recommendations. Subsequent to this consultation phase over the summer, my Office will organize additional events followed by expert meetings. In these expert meetings, policy recommendations will be developed on the most effective ways to safeguard freedom of expression and media pluralism when using AI and other advanced machine-learning technologies.

### Safety of Female Journalists Online (SOFJO)

Over the last months, several screenings of our SOFJO **video documentary “A Dark Place”** had to be postponed, including at the 64<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women at the UN headquarters in New York, the United States of America; and screenings in Helsinki, Finland; London, the United Kingdom; and Moscow, the Russian Federation; as well as at the Internet Freedom Festival in Valencia, Spain. The postponed screenings in Helsinki, London and Moscow are currently planned for the second half of this year. My Office will continue to offer the film to universities with journalism curricula and training activities for students and practicing journalists.

In the coming months, my Office will publish a **Resource Guide on Safety of Female Journalists Online** to better assist participating States in their efforts to ensure the safety of female journalists. (*For more details, see Publications.*)

### South East Europe Media Conference

On **17 – 18 September**, in co-operation with the OSCE Mission to Serbia and other field operations in the region, my Office intends to organize the **7<sup>th</sup> South East Europe Media Conference** titled **“The New Frontline: Working Together to Foster Media Freedom”**. Its format will depend on various considerations relating to travel and event restrictions linked to COVID-19.

### Central Asia Media Conference

In **October**, my Office intends to organize its **22<sup>nd</sup> Central Asia Media Conference**. Its format will depend on various considerations relating to travel and event restrictions linked to COVID-19.

## **South Caucasus Media Conference**

On **18 – 19 November**, my Office intends to organize its **17<sup>th</sup> South Caucasus Media Conference**. Its format will depend on various considerations relating to travel and event restrictions linked to COVID-19.

## **Cyprus Media Dialogue project**

In **November**, my Office intends to organize an expert meeting, under the auspices of the “**Cyprus Media Dialogue**” project, to mark the end of the **second exchange opportunity for journalists**, which took place in the second half of 2019. On this occasion, the articles that the participating journalists produced during their exchange will be presented in English, Greek and Turkish, and lessons learned will be discussed. Due to travel restrictions and health measures imposed as a consequence of the COVID-19 outbreak, the implementation of the planned event in May was not feasible. In total, 15 journalists took part in the exchange programme in 2019. The selected Greek-Cypriot journalists worked in a Turkish-Cypriot media, and the selected Turkish-Cypriot journalists worked in a Greek-Cypriot media. Having reported on local stories, the journalistic content was subsequently published in the journalists’ home media.

## **5. Extra-budgetary donors**

My thanks go to the Governments of Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America for their generous contributions to the work of my Office during this reporting period.

I encourage all participating States to consider supporting my Office’s efforts to provide expertise, support and the most up-to-date resources for the promotion and protection of freedom of the media and freedom of expression throughout the OSCE region.