**Committee:** Council of the European Union (EU)

**Issue:** Safeguarding Press Freedom and Protecting Journalists Amidst Growing Threats to Media Independence in Europe

**Student Officer:** Miltiadis Stoltidis

**Position:** Deputy President

**PERSONAL INTRODUCTION**

Dear Delegates,

My name is Miltiadis Stoltidis, I am an 11th grader from the German School of Thessaloniki and I will be serving as the Deputy President of the Council of the European Union. It is a great honor to welcome you to this year’s 8th Deutsche Schule Thessaloniki Model United Nations conference.

First and foremost, I would like to congratulate you on choosing to attend this conference. Based on previous experiences, I am confident that such events are immensely beneficial, as they not only provide an excellent opportunity to broaden your horizons and improve your English skills but also allow you to gain insights into current events and explore the captivating world of politics and diplomacy.

This year’s agenda consists of three very significant and highly debatable issues that need to be resolved for the European Union to move into an era of political stability and prosperity. The topic covered in this study guide is “Safeguarding Press Freedom and Protecting Journalists Amidst Growing Threats to Media Independence in Europe”. This study guide should provide you with the fundamental information on this topic. Nevertheless, you are highly encouraged to carry out your research to get a better and more profound understanding of the topic. The bibliography can be beneficial to the research process. Because of the significance of the topic that you will have to address in the Council of the European Union I expect all of you to be prepared and to be keen to participate in a fruitful debate.

Should you have any questions regarding the topic, do not hesitate to contact me via my email address: m.stoltidis@gmail.com .

Sincerely,

Miltiadis Stoltidis

**TOPIC INTRODUCTION**

Freedom of press is one of the most important fundamental rights, as it is highly connected to the freedom of expression and the freedom of opinion and information. Moreover freedom of press serves as one of the cornerstones of democracy. Thus, any attempts to silence the opinions of others, undermine the freedom of press, control the media, or even to threaten journalists, in a political, legal or physical manner, is a direct threat to democratic values, thereby to democracy.

Unfortunately, in recent years, many nations within the European Union (EU) have experienced a dramatic decline in press freedom as well as media independence. Nowadays the European Union, once regarded as a stronghold of democratic values and free expression, faces a political crisis, threatening the integrity and safety of its journalists, the independence of the media and most importantly the freedom of press, which are essential elements for a working democracy. From legal intimidation and political interference to physical attacks and economic pressures, these threats to media and journalists undermine the ability of the media to operate freely and independently.

Furthermore, the progressing authoritarian tendencies and ideologies of multiple governments within the European Union, the surveillance of reporters, as well as the concentration of media ownership has led to the creation of an extremely hostile environment for journalists and press freedom.These trends form part of an overall climate of democratic decline, disinformation, and public distrust in the media. Thus, investigative journalism is discouraged, and thereby the role of the press as a watchdog for democracy is eroded.

Although the European Union and the European Council have implemented measures aimed at safeguarding media freedom, notable deficiencies still persist in both the enforcement of policies and their practical application.

All in all, the protection of journalists and media independence is necessary for a safer, more prosperous and democratic future in Europe. Tackling such a complex issue of the European Union, a socio-economic and multicultural union of different nations, requires concerted effort involving European governments, bodies of the EU, civil society, and the private sector working together in a coordinated manner. Additionally, resolving this crisis necessitates cooperation of governments, inclusive legislation, which is applicable to all EU member states and most importantly that all the countries have specific shared goals.

**DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

**Authoritarianism**

“The belief that people must obey completely and not be allowed freedom to act as they wish”[[1]](#footnote-0)

**Chilling Effect**

“Refers to a situation where certain actions or policies discourage people from expressing themselves or taking specific actions due to fear of negative consequences. “[[2]](#footnote-1)

**Digital Surveillance**

**“**Digital surveillance involves the use of technology to monitor, track, and analyse activities within the virtual space. This can include observing online communications, tracking financial transactions, monitoring social media platforms, or investigating breaches of data security. Unlike traditional surveillance, which focuses on physical environments, digital surveillance delves into the virtual world, where much of today’s personal and professional life unfolds.”[[3]](#footnote-2)

**Disinformation**

“false information spread in order to deceive people”[[4]](#footnote-3)

**European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)**

“The European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) is a new legislation that regulates the media environment in the European Union (EU) and ensures the protection of media freedom and pluralism. The European Commission included the EMFA in its 2022 work program.”[[5]](#footnote-4)

 **Freedom of Expression**

“Freedom of expression is the freedom for us all to express ourselves. It is the right to speak, to be heard, and to participate in political, artistic, and social life. It also includes the right to seek, receive, and share information through any media.”[[6]](#footnote-5)

**Journalist Safety**

“Journalism is fundamental for sustainable development, human rights protection and democratic consolidation, but remains a dangerous and too often deadly profession - and nine times out of ten, the murder of a journalist is unresolved, thereby they should be protected from physical threats, legal intimidation, political interference and economic pressure.” [[7]](#footnote-6)

**Media Capture**

“Media capture is a situation where the media are controlled directly by governments, vested interests or, most often, a combination of both. These partisan interests pursue media for political influence rather than profit, and it creates a situation in which an unaccountable regime can flourish.”[[8]](#footnote-7)

**Media Independence**

“Media Independence means editorial independence, whereby editorial policy and decisions are made by the media without interference”[[9]](#footnote-8)

**Media Pluralism**

“Media pluralism can either mean a plurality of voices, of analyses, of expressed opinions and issues (internal pluralism), or a plurality of media outlets, of types of media (print, radio, TV or digital) and coexistence of privately owned media and public service media (external pluralism)”[[10]](#footnote-9)

**Misinformation**

“wrong information, or the fact that people are misinformed”[[11]](#footnote-10)

**Press Freedom**

“the right of newspapers to publish news and opinions without being controlled by the government”[[12]](#footnote-11)

**Public Service Media (PSM)**

“Public Service Media (PSM) are publicly owned multi-platform media organisations that provide relevant, credible and impartial news, entertainment, and education to their audiences. PSM are essential for informed and effective democracies to survive and thrive, and should be accessible and accountable to all citizens. “[[13]](#footnote-12)

**Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP)**

“Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP suit) refers to lawsuits brought by individuals and entities to dissuade their critics from continuing to produce negative publicity. By definition, SLAPP suits do not have any true legal claims against the critics.”[[14]](#footnote-13)

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**Causes of the ongoing media independence crisis**

Strengthening press freedom and journalist protection amid escalating challenges to media independence in Europe is one of the most significant threats that the European Union has to face. Rising authoritarianism, disinformation, journalist harassment, and government interference are only some of the causes of this ongoing crisis.

As authoritarianism becomes increasingly more popular within the European Union, numerous independent media corporations face tremendous political interference, governmental restrictions, financial penalties and legal intimidations, behind which business interests and high-ranking politicians are hiding. Often journalists and reporters are threatened in order to not investigate any governmental scandals, corrupt members of the government, or even to expose the inefficiency of public services. These illegal practices contribute to an environment of misinformation, disinformation and to a hostile environment for the independent media. These unconstitutional practices also pose a threat to media plurality and the freedom of expression, pillars of a democratic society.

Moreover the concentration of media ownership seriously harms media plurality, as it often results in the same opinions being heard and presented over and over again , in contrast to other perspectives, thus reducing diversity in media representation. The media are often influenced by their owners’ beliefs and agenda and often tend to prioritize getting this specific agenda heard, over informing the public about the reality. Due to the concentration of media ownership to a specified interest group, the independent media often struggle to keep up, as they are not economically backed by any big corporations, or do not enjoy governmental benefits.

Furthermore, many reporters and investigative journalists have been killed or seriously injured, while investigating governmental scandals, exposing illegal business activities, or even criticizing practices of business corporations and politicians.In cases of more authoritarian regimes, many journalists have also been imprisoned, isolated or denied basic human rights. In addition to that, a concerning percentage of cases about murders of journalists has not been resolved or even taken care of by the judicial system in a right manner.

**Historical context and challenges**

The independent operation of the media in Europe and the safety of journalists and the protection of the freedom of press have been heavily influenced by the political situations within the European region, the cultural, economical and social shifts of every EU member state, and the events that shaped the current geopolitical table. The end of the second World War (WWII), the civil wars of some nations, the dictatorships in European countries such as Spain and Greece, the Cold War and the creation of the Western and Eastern blocks, as well as the fall of Yugoslavia and the USSR are only some of the manifold significant political events that determined the independence of media and the freedom of press in Europe. Many of these events continue having a strong impact on the freedom of press and the aftermath of them is still present in the European media sector.

For instance the creation of the European Union enhanced the freedom of press, as the new economic, social and cultural alliance of many European nations aimed to increase transparency and to facilitate the implementation of laws that protect freedom of press, the independence of media and ensure that journalists are not threatened by economic and political interests. Some of the measures that the EU took are the following: European Media Freedom Act (acronym: EMFA, passed in 2022), the Anti-SLAPP Directive Proposal (passed in 2022), the eleventh article of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and Audiovisual Media Services Directive (acronym: AVMSD, passed in 2007, updated in 2010 and 2018). Although such measures and pieces of legislation are binding, they are not always implemented by the governments and economical, as well as political, interests tend to undermine them. Recent authoritarian tendencies in Europe have also fueled the crisis of independent media and freedom of press.Unfortunately, numerous indicators point to this ongoing crisis, such as Reporters Without Borders’ Press Freedom Index, which reveals a significant decline in press freedom across Europe. This trend is particularly evident in countries like Serbia, Hungary, and Greece, where misinformation is on the rise and media independence faces serious threats. The situation is further underscored by the recent murders of journalists investigating governmental scandals and illegal operations, including Giorgos Karaivaz in Greece and Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta, which highlight the dangers faced by those seeking to hold power to account. Moreover, the overall deterioration reflected in the latest RSF Press Freedom Index report serves as a stark warning sign of the continuing backsliding of press freedom in Europe.

Additionally, many member states of the European Union have passed individual legislation that applies only to their countries, such as the 7th article of the Dutch constitution, the “Act on the Exercise of Freedom of Expression in Mass Media” (passed in 2003, in Finland) and the still relevant “Freedom of the Press Law” (“*Loi sur la liberté de la presse”* in french, passed in 1881).

In conclusion, the independence of the media and the protection of the freedom of press in the EU, have been heavily influenced by historical events, cultural, economical and social changes, as well as by national politics. Due to the multiculturality of the European Union, the different policies of each country and the difficulties, concerning the implementation of legislation, across the EU, this crisis is difficult to resolve and necessitates cooperation between governments, many compromises and adjustments

**MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED**

**Greece**

According to the Reporters Without Borders, Greece takes the 89th place in the global press freedom index table, with the situation in Greece being described as problematic. The concentration of media ownership by only a few large corporations and high net worth individuals has eliminated the media plurality in the country. It is also mentioned that the freedom of press in Greece has been suffering a systematic crisis since 2021. SLAPPs in Greece happen often and the unresolved murder of a veteran greek crime reporter, Giorgos Karaivaz, in 2021 still remains unresolved. Moreover, the scandal of wiretapping journalists by the National Intelligence Service (EYP) has not been cleared out yet. The citizens’ trust in the media is also one of the lowest in Europe, which indicates that Greek society, such as many other European ones, no longer trusts the media for their information and no longer thinks of the media as independent, informative and unbiased. Furthermore, the friendly ties between the country’s political elite and the few entrepreneurs, who own large media corporations, is also affecting the hostile environment for independent journalism in Greece. Furthermore, the National Council for Radio and Television (NCRTV) is regarded as inefficient and slow. All in all the freedom of press in Greece has faced a significant and systemic decline the past few years,since the majority of the popular media in Greece is controlled by the economic elite of the country, governmental agencies often keep journalists under digital surveillance illegally and many times journalists face legal, physical and political threats.

**Finland**

Finland ranks fifth in the 2025 press freedom index of the Reporters Without Borders, being one of the countries where the majority of media is not influenced by political parties or economic interests and there is equal representation of diverse opinions. Broadcasting in Finland does not face any major threats and journalists in the country do not receive any physical threats or economic pressures. Additionally, press freedom receives great protection by the constitution and the majority of media are privately owned, but not controlled by any major media corporations with political affiliations or friendly ties with important businessmen. Overall, the media in Finland are independent, the government and the political parties do not influence journalists and reporters do not face any threats. In conclusion, the situation in Finland is exemplary for other nations within the European Union and abroad as well.

**Norway**

Norway is regarded by multiple Non-Governmental-Organizations (NGOs) as the country enjoying the highest freedom of press in the world. The favourable climate for investigative journalism, the strict and protective legislation protecting freedom of expression and information, and the non-existent political interference, in combination to the high trust of citizens to the media are only some of the factors adding to the high ranking of the country. Norway has been receiving this position for many years, a fact showcasing its stability. Since it is the highest-ranked nation in press freedom worldwide, it is also the highest-ranking in the EU, posing as an example for any other MEDC and all European countries, especially within the European Union.

**Serbia**

Serbia is the country with the lowest press freedom index within the European Union, although possessing a solid legal framework protecting the freedom of press in the country. The media of the country often spread fake news and disinformation, often misleading the public and influencing the people. Apart from that, the media in Serbia are also heavily polarized and the current fragile political situation in the country further contributes to this phenomenon. The recent political scandals, the massive anti-governmental protests the past three years and the attacks of far-right groups to journalists who support the LGBTQIA movement and cover migration and human rights topics only worsen the situation, by increasing the polarization in Serbian society. The fact that the national intelligence service is hacking journalists’ electronic devices is also extremely concerning. This climate exists, while efforts are made to counter this problem and although investigative journalists have won several international awards for unveiling scandals.

**Reporters Without Borders**

The Reporters without Borders (RWB) is a Non-Governmental-Organization (NGO) Founded in 1985 in Montpellier, which defends the right of every human being to have access to free and reliable information. The RWB defends the freedom of press, expression, information and stands for media plurality and independence. Moreover the RWB is constantly advocating for the safety of journalists. This organization often consulates public interest organizations such as the Council of Europe and the United Nations (UN).[[15]](#footnote-14)

 **BLOCS EXPECTED**

**Bloc A**

Bloc A consists of EU member states who have more liberal governments, a higher ranking in the press freedom index and less problems with media independence, such as Norway and Finland. The countries of the first bloc are not facing any major or systematic decline in press freedom and journalists there are not often legally intimidated and less physically threatened, in comparison with reporters from countries with lower press freedom rankings. The main goal of this bloc is to push for more radical changes.

**Bloc B**

Block B consists of countries with major press freedom issues, where political interference is usual and SLAPPs happen regularly, such as Serbia and Greece. The journalists working in these nations often receive physical and legal threats. Media independence is problematic in these EU member states and media plurality is not dominant in the media landscape. In addition to that, investigative journalism is undermined in the countries making up this bloc. The main goal of this bloc is to pass more moderate legislation.

**TIMELINE OF EVENTS**

| **Date** | **Description of event** |
| --- | --- |
| 29 July 1881 | In France, on the 29th of July 1881 The Law on the Freedom of Press was passed. It is one of the first pieces of legislation protecting the freedom of press and expression. Due to this law authorities no longer had the power to suppress newspapers. This law massively liberalized publications. This law is regarded as a cornerstone of legislation upon the freedom of press.[[16]](#footnote-15) |
| 13 June 2003 | The Finnish “Act on the Exercise of Freedom of Expression in Mass Media”, which is in effect since 2004, sets out the rules for how freedom of speech works in newspapers, TV, radio, and online media. It protects free expression but also makes sure media outlets take responsibility for what they publish. Each outlet must have a named editor who is legally accountable. The law also defends the right to correct false information, keeps sources anonymous, and protects journalists' confidentiality. [[17]](#footnote-16) |
| 16 October 2017 | The assasination of the investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta on the 16th of October 2017 with a car bomb caused massive outrage about the safety of journalists in Europe. As an investigative journalist, Daphne Caruana Galizia reported on government corruption, nepotism, money laundering, organized crime, online gambling, and the Panama papers.Daphne Caruana Galizia remains a symbol of journalist protection and media independence. [[18]](#footnote-17) |
| 21 February 2018 | Just a few months after the assasination of the Maltese reporter Daphne Caruana Galizia, on February 21, 2018, investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová were fatally shot at their home. Kuciak, known for his reporting on corruption for Aktuality.sk, had uncovered alleged corruption and tax fraud schemes involving prominent business figures with suspected ties to Prime Minister Robert Fico's party Smer-SSD and organised crime. However, seven years later, justice remains elusive for the victims' families.[[19]](#footnote-18) |
| 2 October 2018 | The Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD), an EU directive passed by the European Parliament on October 2, 2018, is a legislative framework in the European Union that governs the coordination of national legislation on all audiovisual media, including both traditional TV broadcasts and on-demand services. [[20]](#footnote-19) |
| 9 April 2021 | In Greece, Giorgos Karaivaz, a journalist known for his investigative crime reporting, met his untimely demise in an assassination right outside his home. The government, in response, assured the public that the police would promptly unravel the case and bring the perpetrators to justice. However, the investigation into Karaivaz’s murder remains markedly slow or seemingly stagnant.[[21]](#footnote-20) It is believed that Karaivaz was a victim of organized crime. [[22]](#footnote-21) |
| 2022 | In 2022 it was revealed that the national secret intelligence service of Greece (EYP), which is under the control of the prime minister, was illegally surveilling high-ranking Greek ministers, independent journalists, public servants (mostly judges) and high-profile political figures, such as the leader of the opposition. These actions raised serious concerns about press freedom in Greece, and the protection of privacy and free expression.[[23]](#footnote-22) |
| 10 March 2022 | On the 10 March 2022 the “Committee to investigate the use of Pegasus surveillance spyware” (PEGA Committee) was founded by the European Parliament “following the alleged use of the Pegasus surveillance spyware against journalists, politicians, law enforcement officials, diplomats, lawyers, business people, civil society actors and other citizens “ as it is stated in the official website of the committee.  |
| 11 July 2023 | The resolution “European Parliament resolution of 11 July 2023 on the protection of journalists around the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter (2022/2057(INI))” on the protection of journalists around the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter, passed on July 11 2023 is a paper through which the European Parliament calls for stronger laws, better protection, and international cooperation to ensure journalists can work freely and safely, as this is essential for democracy, human rights, and free expression. |
| 11 October 2023  | The resolution 2513, which was adopted by the European Parliament on October 11 2023 and was written by the parliamentary assembly, deals with pegasus and similar spyware and secret state surveillance. The resolution called for strict EU-wide spyware regulation and oversight.  |

**RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS**

**Resolution 2513 (2023)**

The resolution 2513, which was adopted by the European Parliament on October 11 2023 and was written by the parliamentary assembly, deals with pegasus and similar spyware and secret state surveillance. The resolution called for strict EU-wide spyware regulation and oversight. Moreover, it condemns the surveillance of journalists and politicians in countries such as Greece, Spain, and Hungary. [[24]](#footnote-23)

**European Parliament resolution of 11 July 2023 on the protection of journalists around the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter (2022/2057(INI))**

The resolution on the protection of journalists around the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter, passed on July 11 2023 is a paper through which the European Parliament calls for stronger laws, better protection, and international cooperation to ensure journalists can work freely and safely, as this is essential for democracy, human rights, and free expression. Furthermore, the European Parliament acknowledges through this resolution the need for media plurality, the importance of media independence and the significance of safety for journalists. In addition, the EU shows via this passed resolution that it fully agrees with the United Nations (UN) bill of rights once more.[[25]](#footnote-24)

**Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD)**

The Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) is a legislative framework in the European Union that governs the coordination of national legislation on all audiovisual media, including both traditional TV broadcasts and on-demand services. The directive aims to create a regulatory framework that is fit for the digital age, ensuring a safer, fairer, and more diverse audiovisual landscape. The latest review of the AVMSD was carried out in 2018, reflecting changing market realities and the need for updated regulations. [[26]](#footnote-25)

**PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE**

**A/HRC/50/29: Reinforcing media freedom and the safety of journalists in the digital age – Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression**

According to the UN “In the present report, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression examines the opportunities, challenges and threats to media in the digital age. She highlights the societal relevance of independent, free and pluralistic news media and underscores the importance of journalism as a public good. She finds that violent attacks on journalists with impunity, including online gender-based violence, legal harassment and targeted surveillance of journalists, censorship of content and manipulation of regulatory authorities have at times been entrenched, aggravated and augmented by digital technology. Noting that this year marks the tenth anniversary of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, the Special Rapporteur makes specific recommendations to States and the international community to strengthen multi-stakeholder cooperation to protect and promote media freedom and the safety of journalists in the digital age.”[[27]](#footnote-26)

**JOINT DECLARATION ON MEDIA FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY**

On May 2 2023 the specialised mandates tasked with promoting and protecting freedom of expression at the United Nations (UN), Organization of American States (OAS), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and African Commission publicized their annual Joint Declaration which was about Media Freedom and Democracy. The Joint Declaration, which was drafted with the assistance of the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD), outlines the significant role of free, independent and pluralistic media in supporting democracy, human rights and other important social values, and then sets out the obligations and responsibilities of States, online platforms and the media themselves to ensure that the media can fulfil these important roles.[[28]](#footnote-27)

**POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

**Strengthening data protection laws**

Strengthening data protection laws and updating them is crucial for the protection of media independence, press freedom and the security of journalists, since this new digital era poses new threats to these concepts and old laws may be outdated, problematic or contain many flaws and unclarities. Such an action would not only enhance the already existing laws, but also provide governments with the opportunity to safely lead the media sector into an era of press freedom and a safe environment for investigative journalism.

**Establish independent oversight bodies**

A realistic approach to tackle this issue is by establishing independent oversight bodies to protect journalists’ rights, ensure their safety, and investigate threats to media independence. These bodies would operate free from political or corporate influence, allowing them to function fairly and effectively.

**Creating a parliamentary commission**

One of the many possible solutions to the problem of surveillance of journalists is the creation of parliamentary commissions, which will oversee a specific part of the actions of the secret intelligence services. Such actions would create a need for transparency and could possibly prevent the national intelligence agencies from violating basic human rights due to political interference. Moreover, these parliamentary organs could possibly examine the flaws of current data protection laws and push for an update on them.

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