



SUMMARY OF ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Roundtable Discussion on “Strengthening Journalistic Safety through Engaged Stakeholder Collaboration” marking the International Press Freedom Day 2024, organized by the Center Science and Innovation for Development (SCiDEV) in the framework of the project “Strengthening Journalistic Safety through Engaged Stakeholder Collaboration and Journalists’ Capacity Development” implemented by SCiDEV in collaboration with [Citizens Channel](#) and [Free Press Unlimited](#), with the support of the [Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Albania](#).

While physical assaults on journalists in Albania might not be widespread, ongoing systemic pressures, intimidation, and threats—both online and offline—are obstructing journalists' efforts to serve the public interest. To tackle these issues and explore potential solutions, SCiDEV organized a roundtable discussion that gathered approximately 50 representatives from Parliament, government, law enforcement agencies, independent institutions, media, civil society organizations, and international partners.

This roundtable discussion took place on 17 May 2024 in Tirana, building upon the advocacy and research work of SCiDEV regarding media freedom and the safety of journalists in Albania and previous [panel discussions with journalists](#). Under the moderation of **Ms Flutura Kusari**, Senior Legal Advisor at the [European Centre for Press & Media Freedom](#), the event provided a platform for engaging with stakeholders and pushing for their dedicated commitment towards strengthening concrete mechanisms for the protection of journalists and an enabling environment for independent and quality journalism.

In her opening remarks, **Ms Kusari**, raised concerns on the latest negative trends dominating the decrease of media freedom globally and in Europe. She mentioned that the [2023 report from Reporters without Borders](#) particularly mentions the lack of progress in Albania toward strengthening media freedom, while public authorities and governmental representatives often undermine and threaten the safety of journalists in the country. **Ms Kusari** highlighted that while certain initiatives have been taken, such as the “[Roadmap for the Rule of Law](#)” and the “[Roadmap for the Functioning of Democratic Institutions](#)”¹, the establishment of the Commission of Disinformation on which SCiDEV has expressed [its concerns](#), such developments need a better engagement of a diverse array of stakeholders.

¹ To read SCiDEV’s comments on the Roadmaps prepared by the Albanian Government, both addressing media issues and protection of journalists, “Roadmap for the Rule of Law” click [here](#) and the “Roadmap for the Functioning of Democratic Institutions”, click [here](#) for the full document in English language, and [here](#) to access the full document in Albanian language.



The discussions were first addressed by the Executive Director of SCiDEV and Researcher for the [Safe Journalists Network Albania](#), **Ms Blerjana Bino**, who noted that during 2024, SCiDEV, as part of its support for Safe Journalists Network, recorded and reported over 10 cases of violating the safety of journalists, media workers, and media. In 2023, 24 cases were recorded and reported. She added that most cases had to deal with intimidation, threats, and pressure resulting from the network of interrelated interests between politics, business, media, and organized crime. The negotiation process for the European Union offers a space for action and positive pressure on the institutions to undertake reforms to address the recommendations of the screening process for the safety of journalists and freedom of the media, suggested **Ms Bino**. She also noted that the Roadmap on the Rule of Law lays out specific duties for law enforcement bodies, e.g., establishing contact points and special follow-up and investigation protocols for attacks on journalists (Police and Prosecution); systematic collection and publication of data; building a database for lawsuits involving journalists; the decriminalization of defamation. However, she added that there is a stronger need for transparency and inclusiveness because the success of these measures/tasks depends on institutional commitment and willingness to interact and dialogue with journalists, media organizations, and civil society.

Bringing together stakeholders, including representatives from Parliament, government, law enforcement agencies, independent institutions, the media community and international organizations, and civil society, hopefully, will be an indication of shared determination and commitment to improving journalists' safety and media freedom in Albania, concluded **Ms Bino**, calling for collective action, increased awareness and civic but also institutional sensitivity for the importance of free speech, the protection of journalists and media freedom, as well as the building of broad alliances between the media, civil society, academia and citizens.

Executive Director of Balkan Investigative Reporting Network - [BIRN Albania](#), **Ms Kristina Voko**, raised concerns about the recent establishment of a parliamentary commission on disinformation and its repercussions on the wider ecosystem. She brought to awareness that this parliamentary commission needs to remain true to its mission and invited the MPs present in the meeting to review and consider how political interests, political forces, and influences shape the space of media freedom and feed disinformation before we move on to discuss particular recommendations and how to combat disinformation at large. She stressed that politicians and political actors are the ones who put pressure on journalists and pollute the information ecosystem with disinformation, propaganda, and antimedia sentiment.

Emphasizing the [Press Freedom Day](#), **Mr Lorin Kadiu**, Executive Director of [Citizens Albania](#), argued that the interlinked politics and media in the country have been bringing pressure and continuous threats to



media freedom. He highlighted how the online and digital space is vulnerable to threats and political propaganda, underlined the media's cyber vulnerabilities and attacks in the digital space, and recalled the [attacks](#) that Citizens Channel faced in 2024.

Raising public awareness of media freedom and journalists' safety is a mission that should overcome all the challenges ahead. Public institutions must provide concrete feedback and instruments that support media freedom, concluded **Mr Kadiu**.

The National Council for EU Integration Chairwoman, **Ms Jorida Tabaku** opened the high-level panel discussion. **Ms Tabaku**, noted the worrying figures of media freedom decline in Albania, as the RSF report of 2023 indicated, and urged changes to the penal code to be revised to protect the safety of journalists and prevent threats and intimidation posed to them. Despite challenges and confrontations, she congratulated journalists who continue to execute their job professionally and with dignity while also adding that politicians often do not engage and collaborate with what a free and independent media has to say. In her remarks, **Ms Tabaku** also raised concerns about the unethical standards and lack of safety at the workplace for journalists. She indicated that she is following this in her daily work to oversee the legal implications of ensuring the safety of journalists at work, too. Speaking about media censorship, **Ms Tabaku** added that new legal provisions need to be made in this regard as well, as these cases need their own protocols and legal frameworks that guarantee the protection of media freedom and the safety of journalists. Ultimately, she also expressed concern about establishing the Special Parliamentary Committee on Disinformation.

Speaking of collaboration among the prosecutor's office with the state police and other relevant actors involved in the process of the protection and safety of journalists, the [Prosecutor General](#), **Mr Olsian Çela**, noted that during 2023, there were six reported cases of threat against journalists, from which 2 cases have been sent for judgment. **Ms Kusari** addressed a question of whether the Prosecutor's office is proactive in following cases ex officio, to which **Mr Çela** answered by underlining the complexity of the processes as well as the overlapping priorities of the prosecutor's office, adding that while officers and prosecutors need to be more sensitive to the cases and have more self-initiative to follow up on them, they are independent in their role and cannot be directed or guarded on how the investigation of cases is conducted. However, he added that giving certain incentives to prioritize the cases of journalists and encouraging them to start investigations ex officio, alongside joint coordination with other stakeholders and actors relevant to the process, would help in this situation.

Mr Çela also expressed that if the journalists are dissatisfied with the investigations or there are delays caused to their cases, they can use the mechanism of appeal to the general prosecutor's office or the High Inspectorate of Justice. In conclusion, he expressed the need to increase internal capacities to investigate cybercrime. He renewed his commitment to the safety of journalists, noting that media freedom is directly



linked to stronger democratic countries. “We will ensure a proactive engagement and commitment from our side,” concluded **Mr Çela**.

Further on, **Ms Etilda Gjonaj**, Member of the Albanian Parliament and Vice-Chair of the European Affairs Committee emphasized the need for more work to be done regarding cyber violence and cyberbullying against women journalists. She raised awareness of how technological developments have also increased the number of threats in the online space. **Ms Gjonaj** brought her insights as a Representative of Albania in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, where she added that in line with the findings and recommendations from the EU, a working group composed of two external experts to analyze the legal framework on media freedom in Albania is set up. This serious commitment within the parliament will bring evidence-based analysis for potential changes in the audiovisual media law. This research report will be available by July 2024 and will enable the government to intervene in evidence-based analysis to improve the legal frameworks concerning media freedom. **Ms Gjonaj** also mentioned the support that the Parliament receives from other international actors, such as [NDI](#), in implementing EU recommendations, noting that the Parliament of Albania remains committed and dedicated in its undertakings and initiatives to address all the recommendations and concerns from international counterparts while concluding that in the wide legal framework for the improvement on media freedom and safety of journalists is very broad and needs to be adapted to our country's situational needs, and specific laws that need to be revised and adapted before reaching to the final changes in the penal code.

Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, **Ms Romina Kuko**, underlined that journalists' safety is crucial. For journalists to be able to perform their work, we need to address their demands regarding their security. She explained that since February 2024, there is a new contact point at the Ministry of Interior Affairs where journalists can directly report on their cases, whereas 12 points of contact are appointed in the whole territory of Albania as per the police directorates of the ministry in the local administrative units in the country. However, it was unclear if these are contact points for reporting attacks against journalists as envisaged in the Rule of Law Roadmap and recommended by media freedom organizations or the public/media relations personnel in each Police Directory throughout the country. As Ms Kuko left the meeting before the discussions, it was not possible to get a clarification following a question from one of the journalists. SCiDEV has now requested information from the Ministry of Interior to obtain further information. Focusing on cyberattacks and cyberjustice, **Ms Kuko** highlighted that the approximation with the Digital Service Act would improve the issues of online attacks on journalists in Albania. When asked by **Mrs Kusari** if the Government is willing to adopt a National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists, **Ms Kuko** could not confirm the commitment at that point.



Highlighting that media freedom is vital for democratic development and EU Integration, **H.E Reinout Vos**, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Albania, called on institutional actors to include civil society organizations in decision-making processes to strengthen democracy. On the other hand, he added that political will and the wider society's culture are two important factors that need to be considered when addressing mechanisms for strengthening media freedom in the country.

He also underlined the danger posed by the phenomena of disinformation in Albania. He called for more education and awareness-raising initiatives as soft weapons to help fight against the dangers of a captured media and misinformed public.

During the intervention session, **Mr Tedi Dobi**, [Deputy Minister of Justice](#), stressed that the approximation of legislation with the EU provides opportunities to improve further the legal framework on media freedom and the safety of journalists. He added that the ministry is fully engaged in analyzing and reviewing the approximation of legislation, including best practices from other national and international stakeholders, to ensure that the process is fully executed efficiently.

Mr Jean-Baptiste Le Bras, Deputy Head of the Political Section of the [EU Delegation to Albania](#), brought to attention the legal changes implemented at the EU level and their components which relate to media freedom, adding that the screening process will continue to provide reports and recommendations for the country. Albania will be covered for the first time in the rule of law reports, where media pluralism and other topics related to media and democracy will be assessed. He added that the EU accession process should serve as a good opportunity to have all the country's priorities addressed.

Member of the Parliament, **Ms Dhurata Çupi** emphasized the need to improve the access of journalists in the Parliament and strengthen the role of the National Council of European Integration in holding the government accountable regarding media reform in line with the EU accession process. She added her concerns regarding the Commission of Disinformation and questioned whether it is a democratic and transparent mechanism that serves its purpose.

To bring to attention best practices and address the practices and lessons learned in Western Balkans and EU, **Ms Albana Shala**, Senior Programme Coordinator at Free Press Unlimited Netherlands, raised attention to the need for stronger collective action from the media community and collaboration between the police, prosecution, and judiciary to protect journalists. She also stressed the importance of solidarity and trust-building among all individuals and stakeholders involved. Ms Shala noted that political will is crucial to speed up the process of initiating and implementing concrete mechanisms from the government to ensure the safety of journalists and the respect towards media workers. There need to be mechanisms for



punishments in those cases where threats and intimidation are reported. However, this movement cannot be done by the government alone without the support of civil society, the wider public, and the citizenry, Ms Shala concluded.

During the discussions, journalists raised concerns about access to information, labor rights, working conditions, and due process in cases of attacks. They also exchanged information on their challenges with national representatives in the panel. They shared their experiences of threats, intimidation, and disrespect for their journalistic integrity. Journalists added that captured media and disengaged political leaders challenge them in their daily job of seeking the truth and exposing it to the broader public.

In her concluding remarks, **Ms Kusari** urged the institutions to create an action plan for the safety of journalists and join the [Council of Europe Campaign](#) to protect journalists. She invited representatives of the government of Albania and of the civil society to implement EU recommendations and learn from best practices to meet the standards of a democratic society where media freedom thrives and where journalists can execute their work freely and with integrity.

To access the full event held on 17 May 2024, please visit the recording [on this link](#).

The next planned stakeholders gathering and discussion for 2024 will take place in November 2024 to mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, where we hope stakeholders will take stock of the measures and progress and discuss challenges and next steps to improve the safety of journalists.

SCiDEV next steps:

- Establish contact with the [Focal Point](#) of the Government of Albania regarding the [Council of Europe Safety of Journalists Campaign](#) and advocate for the set up of the National Committee in full transparency and inclusivity.
- Initiate communication with the Council of Europe Safety of Journalists Campaign and contribute to its implementation in Albania.
- Obtain further information from the Ministry of Interior regarding the contact point for reporting cases of attacks against journalists, the potential mechanism in place, and how it can contribute to the community of journalists.



- Engage regularly with the public stakeholders regarding implementing measures for the safety of journalists in the Roadmap for Rule of Law and other crucial aspects as identified by the journalists' community.
- Continue monitoring the developments regarding the Special Parliamentary Committee on Disinformation and react accordingly.
- Continue to monitor, document, and raise alerts for violations of journalists' safety and media freedom.
- Publish and disseminate the Indicators on Media Freedom and Index on Journalists' Safety 2023 with the Safe Journalists Network.
- Support the awareness-raising campaign and podcast series "Unheard" by our partner citizens.
- Plan the capacity development component with the FPU.
- Support Police to establish specific protocols and guidelines for handling crimes against journalists in cooperation with the Council of Europe.
- Advocate for full transposition and implementation of European Union package on Anti-SLAPP and Council of Europe recommendation on Anti SLAPP in cooperation with other partners.
- Advocate for complete decriminalization of defamation.
- Advocate for special protection for journalists because of their duty in the public interest.
- Follow up and feedback to engaged stakeholders and the media community.

More Information about SCiDEV and the Project "Strengthening Journalistic Safety through Engaged Stakeholder Collaboration and Journalists' Capacity Development"

SCiDEV is currently implementing [the project](#) "Strengthening Journalistic Safety through Engaged Stakeholder Collaboration and Journalists' Capacity Development" in collaboration with Citizens Channel and Free Press Unlimited, with the support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Albania. The project's key activities encompass engaging stakeholders to create a safety mechanism for journalists, conducting an awareness campaign to advocate for ethical reporting practices, and implementing training and mentoring programs aimed at enhancing digital security, ethical reporting, and safe field reporting skills for local and young journalists.

To learn more about the activities implemented within this project until now, alongside SCiDEV's engagement and advocacy work to support improving media freedom and safety of journalists in Albania, as well as the project plans ahead, please read the project brief [here](#).

To revisit the first event, which was held on 5 March 2024, in a multistakeholder panel titled "[Advancing Safety of Journalists and Media Freedom in Albania: Charting the Course for EU Integration](#)," please check the recording [here](#), and access the event proceedings in [this file](#).



For more information on our work and engagement for media freedom and democracy, please contact us by email at info@scidevcenter.org or visit our website at www.scidevcenter.org



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