

KOSOVO: REVERSING *THE DECLINE* IN MEDIA FREEDOM

FACT-FINDING MISSION REPORT

July 2026

About the Council of Europe Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists

On 4 December 2014, the Council of Europe and the Platform's Partner Organisations signed a Memorandum of Understanding. Today, 16 international NGOs and associations of journalists are partners to the Platform. In conformity with the Memorandum, the Platform allows the partners to alert the Council of Europe and member states on serious threats with regard to media freedom. The member states are expected to respond to the issues and inform the Platform partners and the Council of Europe on the actions taken in response to the alerts.

Under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Council of Europe member states have positive obligations to ensure an enabling environment conducive to media freedom and pluralism.

The Platform also highlights the work carried out by the Council of Europe in the field of media freedom, such as texts prepared by the Parliamentary Assembly, standards adopted by the Committee of Ministers, relevant case-law of the European Court of Human Rights or the work of the Commissioner for Human Rights.

As Kosovo is not a member of the Council of Europe, it does not fall within the scope of the Platform's alert mechanism, which is limited to Council of Europe member states. The partner organisations have therefore sought to document developments through periodic fact-finding missions aimed at gathering first-hand information on the media environment and the safety of journalists there. The present mission follows a previous visit organised by the Platform partners in 2022.

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Introduction

On 24-26 March 2026, the partners of the Council of Europe Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists organised a fact-finding mission to Prishtina. This report was drafted by members of the delegation and reflects the main findings and offers recommendations.

The mission to Kosovo was conducted by the following organisations: the Association of European Journalists (AEJ), European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), Index on Censorship, International Press Institute (IPI), Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT), European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF). The mission was supported by the Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK). The two-day visit followed up on a similar fact-finding mission to Kosovo organised by the Council of Europe Platform partners in 2022, which had flagged findings of the previous mission can be read [here](#).

The latest mission sought to assess the climate for media freedom, pluralism and the safety of journalists, among other themes. The visit followed monitoring and advocacy work by a number of participating organisations, which had flagged several concerning developments requiring attention.

During the mission, the delegation met with Prime Minister Albin Kurti¹ and also with a range of professional media stakeholders, including leading journalists and editors from online, broadcast and investigative media, as well as media associations, media experts and civil society. Other meetings included journalists and management members of Radio Television Kosovo (RTK), representatives of the Independent Media Commission (IMC), Prishtina Basic Court and the Kosovo Prosecutorial Council. A separate meeting was held with representatives of foreign embassies and international organisations, including the Council of Europe (CoE), the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union. A press conference in Prishtina was held on 26 March.

The mission was held amidst a period of political uncertainty in Kosovo following repeated parliamentary elections and political deadlock over the election of the country's President. Following the visit in late March, another snap election was triggered on 29 April and was held in June 2026. At the time of the writing of this report, the new government has not yet been appointed.

This report and recommendations have been sent to national authorities in Kosovo, and shared with the Council of Europe, European Union, the United Nations and the OSCE. The delegation extends its thanks to all stakeholders who met with them during the mission. The delegation remains open to further discussion with Kosovo authorities and the government formed after June 2026.

¹ In addition, after the meeting, the delegation sent a list of questions to the office of the Prime Minister Albin Kurti before the publication of the report. Their answers are included in the report.

Executive summary

The delegation concludes that, while Kosovo has a pluralistic media landscape, low levels of physical violence against journalists, and broad legislative alignment with European and international standards, media freedom in Kosovo has experienced a clear period of decline. The passing by parliament of a media law – later rejected as unconstitutional – which would have increased political control over the Independent Media Commission (IMC), the insufficient funding and pressures on Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK), as well as a sustained increase in verbal targeting and denigration of journalists by ruling party politicians, are the principal factors behind this assessment.



Representatives of media freedom organisations meet with Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti during the international media freedom mission.
Kosovo Journalists Association (AJK)

Several media freedom standards have been undermined by the ruling Vetëvendosje party. The result is that an otherwise stable level of media freedom in the aspiring European Union accession country has been replaced by a period of deterioration over the past three years, driven primarily by political forces. Ranked 84th out of 180 countries in the 2026 RSF World Press Freedom Index, Kosovo has dropped by 28 places since 2023.

These developments have undermined Kosovo's previously positive trajectory for press freedom and media development since the country's independence in 2008. This has tarnished its status as a regional frontrunner on media freedom in the EU accession process and requires sustained political will to address.

With media freedom a key pillar of Kosovo's EU accession process, significant work needs to be done by the next government to rebuild trust in its democratic credentials and return to the previous path of media freedom progress.

A driving factor in the conclusions of the mission organisations is the deterioration of the climate for the safety of journalists in Kosovo, particularly due to increased levels of verbal denigration and stigmatisation

of media professionals by high-level politicians, often from the ruling party, which is having a toxic effect on both public discourse and the security of the profession.

The number of overall cases documented by the Association of Journalists in Kosovo (AJK) involving the denigration, discrediting and online harassment against journalists, especially by high-ranking political figures, has dramatically increased in the last few years, reaching a peak in 2025. However, during meetings with government officials, the impact of these online and verbal pressures on journalists was not sufficiently recognised. This issue is examined in detail in the next chapter.

Another key concern is the pending issues with funding and independence of the public broadcaster RTK, as well as allegations of political pressures on the broadcaster. RTK is currently operating in challenging economic conditions without solution to its property, while lack of funding disables proper investment. In a meeting, RTK management strongly rejected allegations of pressure on journalists and of threats to editorial independence. However, the delegation remains seriously concerned about the removal of news presenters, the axing of shows, and ongoing testimonies by its journalists about political pressure.

A third core issue remains the independence of the Independent Media Commission (IMC). A controversial law on the IMC passed by parliament in June 2024 was annulled after being declared unconstitutional by the Kosovo Constitutional Court in April 2025. The delegation maintains that the legislative change would have enabled the potential political capture of Kosovo's media regulator. While the Prime Minister expressed hope during a meeting with the delegation that an improved law could be drafted and he committed to this process, the fact that the country's highest court was required to strike down a law threatening the independence of the IMC was an alarming development, reflecting broader pressures affecting the foundations of Kosovo's media system.

The recent process for the selection of board members for both RTK and IMC - conducted in April 2026 after the mission ended - have only deepened the delegation's concerns. During this process, candidates for the governing bodies of both institutions were selected through rushed and opaque procedures marked by irregularities, which ran counter to the principles of merit-based selection. Rather than the willingness to change the approach by the government following the mission, this development has instead highlighted the delegation's concerns over political meddling in the independent oversight of both RTK and IMC.

Finally, while Kosovo has a diverse private media sector across the broadcast and online markets, the mission concludes that the overall climate for independent journalism does face challenges stemming from the influence of both political and business interests within the country. Weak firewalls between media ownership structures, business groups and newsrooms complicate this picture. This is a longstanding issue that continues to undermine public-interest journalism in general and investigative journalism in particular, to erode the conditions for independent reporting and to undermine public trust in media.

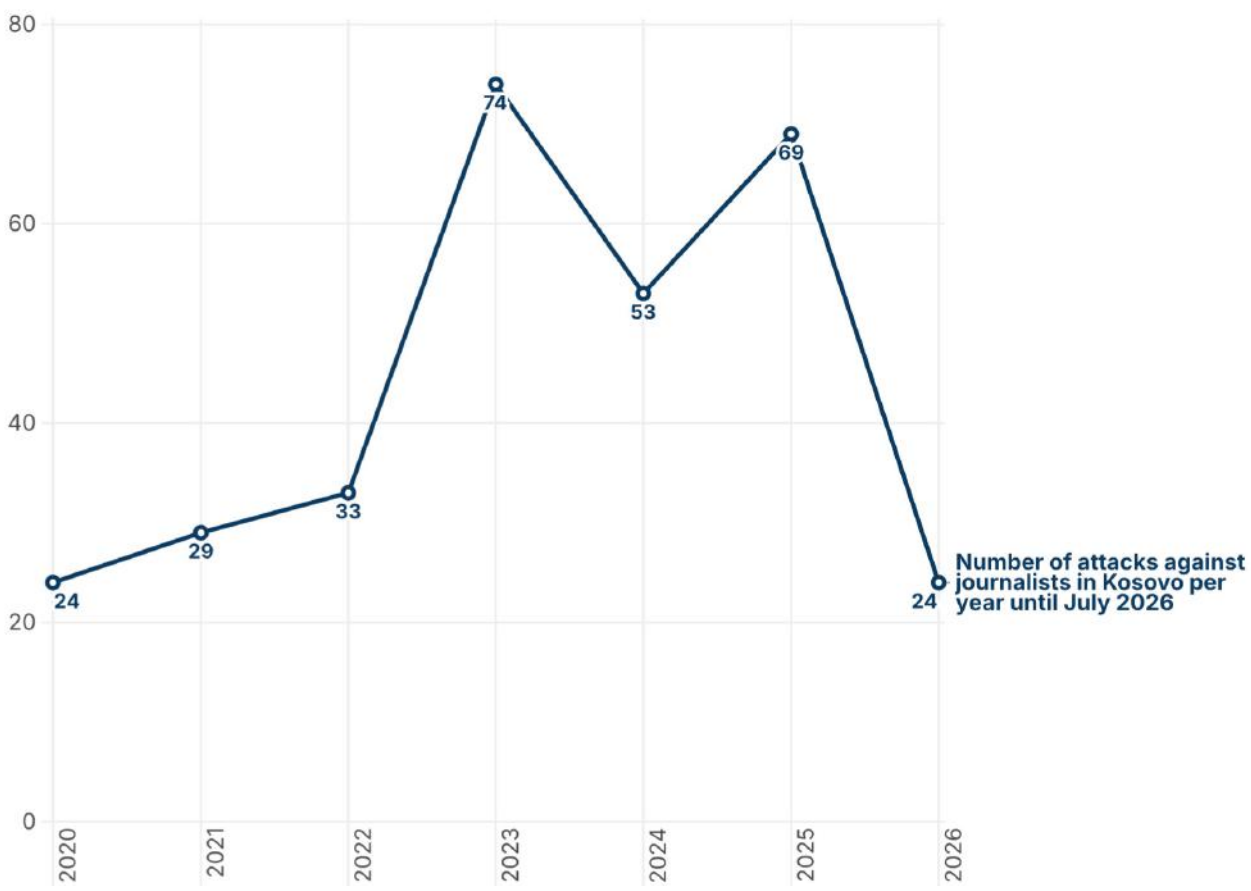
In the following sections, the mission examines the safety of journalists, concerns about the public broadcaster and the media regulatory body, the transparency of public institutions, and legislation related to media freedom. The report then provides conclusions and recommendations to the government aimed at strengthening press and freedom and supporting the exercise of free and independent journalism.

Safety of journalists

Journalists and media professionals in the country work in an increasingly hostile environment. The Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK) and the SafeJournalists Network closely monitor attacks against journalists and media outlets.

While the number of physical attacks dropped after the spike recorded in 2023,² smear campaigns, harassment, and verbal threats are on the rise, often initiated by high-ranking politicians, with serious consequences for journalists' reputation and safety. This was confirmed during a meeting with journalists covering political affairs, the majority of whom stated that they experience verbal attacks and threats because of their work.

In 2025, 69 cases involving journalists, media professionals, and media outlets were registered by AJK, with a significant peak in cases of denigration, discrediting, and online harassment by public figures: 16 cases attributed to public officials, 14 to public persons, and 5 to state officials, including 2 police officers³. In 2024, 53 cases were documented, in 2022, 33 cases, in 2021, 29 cases. In 2026, 24 cases have been recorded so far.⁴ Cyberattacks stand out as emerging threats, with at least two recent cases involving online media outlets, whose presence on social media, which is the primary channel for distributing content and reaching audiences, was severely disrupted.⁵



² Incidents recorded by the Association of Journalists of Kosovo in 2023: <https://agk-ks.org/en/case-search/?keywords=&city=&ngakush=&qjinia=&year=2023&llojiincidentit=&ppublik=&gjygesor=&pligjor=&search=1>

³ Incidents recorded by the Association of Journalists of Kosovo in 2025: <https://agk-ks.org/en/case-search/?keywords=&city=&ngakush=&qjinia=&year=2025&llojiincidentit=&ppublik=&gjygesor=&pligjor=&search=1>

⁴ Incidents recorded by the Association of Journalists of Kosovo in 2026: <https://agk-ks.org/en/case-search/?keywords=&city=&ngakush=&qjinia=&year=2026&llojiincidentit=&ppublik=&gjygesor=&pligjor=&search=1>

⁵ <https://agk-ks.org/rastet/sulme-ndaj-mediave-dhe-organizatave-mediave-vox-kosova-prishtine-01.04.2026/>
<https://agk-ks.org/rastet/sulme-ndaj-mediave-dhe-organizatave-mediave-reporteri-prishtine-01.03.2026/>

Digital threats against journalists are particularly widespread. Since 2020, with all media outlets having shifted online, cases of digital harassment, death threats, intimidation, and smear campaigns have multiplied. As confirmed during a meeting with representatives of the Kosovo Prosecutorial Council, online threats represent the most challenging cases to handle. The existence of a dedicated cybercrime unit within police has, in some cases, made it possible to identify perpetrators. Women journalists are a particularly frequent target: they face risks linked to gender-based discrimination, including internal harassment in newsrooms, sexist comments, and fear of retaliation when speaking out.⁶

Political pressure and smear campaigns remain among the primary threats to free and independent journalism. Insights gathered during the March 2026 mission and monitoring data show that politicians and members of the ruling Vetëvendosje party are among the main perpetrators of verbal threats and intimidation. A prominent and particularly alarming example is the much-criticised decision of the ruling party VV to boycott national television stations T7, TV Dukagjini, and Klan Kosova during the elections at the beginning of 2025. In 2026, VV lifted the boycott and allowed its members to appear on various TV stations.⁷ This climate has also been influenced by statements by the Prime Minister, whose rhetoric has at times been described as delegitimising journalists and portraying them as acting against the interests of Kosovo. In 2025, PM Kurti called on the prosecution to investigate television stations after they presented exit poll results with a large margin of error.⁸ In another case, when a journalist asked him a question, he responded by saying, *"Ask your media owners to return millions to the public budget"* (he was referring to a business matter involving the brother of the owner of the media outlet, not the journalist herself or her work on a matter of public interest).⁹ On another occasion, Prime Minister Kurti offered journalists training after blaming them for the decline in the RSF World Press Freedom index.¹⁰ In yet another instance, he stated that online media are part of a "Bermuda Triangle" that seeks to sink Kosovo.¹¹

The situation of Serbian-language and other non-majority media is particularly complex, as these outlets face challenges on multiple fronts, including pressure linked to external actors and difficulties in accessing public information in their own language. Independent Serbian-language media reported being subject to pressure from both Prishtina and Belgrade, including through exposure to what they characterised as propaganda and competing narratives from both directions. The recurring rhetoric framing journalists as "enemies" of the state systematically undermines the credibility of both outlets and individual professionals.

A further source of concern is the behaviour of the Prime Minister's close protection team, which on several occasions has forcibly pushed journalists away, obstructing their access to information and their ability to do their job. On some occasions, journalists have complained that unnecessary force was used to block and remove reporters from asking questions.¹²

During a meeting with the delegation, the Prime Minister downplayed concerns about journalists' safety and did not acknowledge the gravity of the situation. The delegation explicitly called on the Prime Minister and his party to refrain from using derogatory language against journalists and media professionals, urging them to set a positive example for society as a whole. The Prime Minister did not provide any concrete

6 Report: Kosovo Women Journalists' Safety 2024 Authors Getoarbe Mulliqi Artiola Babuni, Association of Journalists of Kosovo/SafeJournalist Net, <https://safejournalists.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/woman-KOS-ENG-2025.pdf>

7 Open letter to Mr. Albin Kurti, President of Vetëvendosje Movement and Prime Minister of Kosovo, <https://www.ecpmf.eu/open-letter-to-mr-albin-kurti-president-of-vete-vendosje-movement-and-prime-minister-of-kosovo/>

8 <https://agk-ks.org/rastet/kercenime-te-tjera-ndaj-gazetareve-prishtine-13.10.2025/>

9 <https://agk-ks.org/rastet/kercenime-te-tjera-ndaj-gazetareve-arbereshe-uka-prishtine-06.08.2025/>

10 <https://agk-ks.org/rastet/sulme-te-tjera-ndaj-gazetareve-dhe-medieve-prishtine-10.05.2025-1/>

11 <https://agk-ks.org/rastet/sulm-ndaj-medieve-dhe-organizatave-mediale-prishtine-9.2.2025/>

12 <https://agk-ks.org/rastet/pengim-ne-kryerjen-e-detyres-ndaj-gazetares-blerta-dalloshi-berisha-prishtine-28.12.2023/>
<https://agk-ks.org/rastet/pengim-ne-ushttrimin-e-detyres-prishtine-12.05.2023/>

commitments, reinforcing concerns that relations between government institutions and the media have become increasingly strained. In the follow up written questions sent to with the office of the Prime Minister Kurti, the office answered: “He does not support or condone verbal abuse directed at journalists, regardless of its source. The standards of respectful public discourse that he advocates publicly are reflected in his own conduct, and he has never used offensive language toward journalists.” The PM office further referred to the number of voters of VV and said that the Prime Minister cannot be held responsible for the statements made by every individual supporter.

On a positive note, the meetings with members of the Prishtina Basic Court and Kosovo Prosecutorial Council confirmed the judicial and law enforcement authorities’ constructive approach in handling cases related to journalists’ safety. Journalists and editors met during the mission expressed satisfaction with the quality of judicial system responses, with cases being handled relatively swiftly especially by courts.



Delegation met with representatives of Kosovo Prosecutorial Council.
Kosovo Journalists Association (AJK)

Another encouraging development is the 2026–2028 Strategy of the Kosovo Judicial Council for improving access to justice, which prioritises cases involving safety, defamation, and Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPPs). Its positive effects are already visible in the swift adjudication of cases, and the strategy has been welcomed by the Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe (CASE) Europe as a best practice that could serve as a model for other European countries. Media stakeholders appreciated the participatory process that led to its adoption of this strategy, as stressed by the AJK. Another welcoming component is the training programmes dedicated to judges, prosecutors and lawyers delivered by the Academy of Justice in cooperation with PROFREX,¹³ a project financed by Council of Europe and European Union which offers regular trainings for legal professionals on media freedom issues such as defamation, safety of journalists, SLAPPs etc. Such good practices explain why the justice system is the institution the journalist community tends to trust the most.

13 Protecting freedom of expression and of the media (PRO-FREX), <https://www.coe.int/en/web/Prishtina/protecting-freedom-of-expression-and-of-the-media-pro-frex-k->

Overall, journalists in Kosovo face recurring threats to their safety and professional freedom, both online and offline. Verbal threats, harassment, smear campaigns, divisive rhetoric, and political pressure are widespread, affecting investigative journalists and women journalists in particular. The positive role played by judicial institutions and law enforcement offers a glimmer of hope in a broader context of declining press safety in Kosovo.

Public broadcaster and Independent Media Commission

Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK) and the Independent Media Commission (IMC) represent the two central pillars of Kosovo's public media infrastructure. Both institutions have come under sustained pressure in recent years, raising serious concerns about their independence, governance, and long-term viability. The delegation's findings in both areas reflect a pattern of political interference and structural neglect that risks fundamentally undermining the foundations of Kosovo's media system. Concerns expressed by a range of stakeholders regarding reported political influence, governance challenges and structural weaknesses that, if left unaddressed could undermine the foundations of Kosovo's media system.

The public broadcaster

RTK's financial situation has deteriorated to a critical level and remains a matter of concern, according to RTK representatives and other stakeholders interviewed by the delegation. Under the Law on RTK, the broadcaster is entitled to 0.7% of annual state budget revenues, a figure amounting to approximately €20 million per year.¹⁴ In practice, however, parliament approved only €8.96 million for RTK in 2025, representing less than half the legally mandated allocation. Due to the political instability marked by a succession of several parliamentary elections in a short time span and a number of court verdicts obliging RTK to pay various compensations, journalists' salaries were delayed at least three times in the recent period, prompting protests from RTK employees to ask for their salaries.

In its response to the delegation's concerns, the office of the Prime Minister office stated: "We have addressed this issue and clarified that this legal obligation has expired, making any reference to the Law on RTK in relation to the budget inaccurate. The government is committed to investing in the public broadcaster and will put in place the necessary legal framework to support its reform. It is worth noting that €8.9 million per year is a substantial budget for a media organisation. Describing it as 'only' €8.9 million does a disservice to private media companies that operate on budgets seven to nine times smaller. The fact that this funding has gone primarily toward salaries raises legitimate questions that fall within RTK's remit to answer, not the government's." The delegation maintains that the current law on RTK is applicable also regarding the budget until the parliament amends the current law. The delegation notes differing interpretations regarding the applicability of the current Law on RTK to budget allocations. The delegation understands that the law remains in force unless amended by Parliament. Sustainable, adequate, and predictable funding is a fundamental requirement for an independent public service broadcaster. Regardless of differing interpretations of the current legal framework, prolonged uncertainty concerning funding arrangements can adversely affect strategic planning, editorial independence, and RTK's ability to fulfil its public service remit.

14 Law on RTK No. 04/L-046, article 21.4, <https://qzk.rks-qov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2812>

For more than a year, RTK operated in a governance crisis under significant governance constraints, including lack of access to its approved budget without a fully constituted board, and without a legally appointed director general. Employees went unpaid and held repeated protests.¹⁵ The European Broadcasting Union (EBU), together with sixteen partner organisations including the organisations represented in the delegation, addressed an open letter to the prime minister in November 2025, calling for the immediate release of funds and restoration of RTK's governance structures. In a response dated 13 November 2025, the Prime Minister acknowledged RTK's essential role but maintained that the government could not act outside its legal competence while parliamentary committees remained non-functional. Two weeks after the response, PM Kurti's government approved a budget for RTK to cover salaries.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the broader pattern of chronic failure to establish sustainable funding, compounded by a protracted political deadlock in the Assembly, has left the public broadcaster in a state of ongoing precarity. The delegation notes that prolonged uncertainty regarding governance arrangements and funding has created challenges for the broadcaster's long-term stability and operational planning.



The media freedom delegation meets with journalists and editors from Kosovo during the international media freedom mission.
Kosovo Journalists Association (AJK)

One of the most concerning issues regarding the public broadcaster is the political pressure the broadcaster is facing, as raised by a number of journalists, editors and media organisations met by delegation regarding editorial independence. Several journalists and editors told the delegation about disciplinary procedures against them for refusing to prepare TV reports contrary to ethical standards, as well as the cancellation of their shows. Further, it is worth noting that the current TV director of the broadcaster is Rilind Gërvalla, a former member and financial donor of the ruling party VV.¹⁷ Journalists and editors drew attention to this fact in the context of wider discussions regarding the independence. RTK management emphasised that appointments were made in accordance with applicable procedures.

¹⁵ AJK supports the protests of RTK employees, <https://www.agk-ks.org/lajmet/agk-ja-perkrah-protesten-e-tri-sindikatave-te-rtk-se-pas-voneses-se-pagave/>

¹⁶ Government allocates budget for RTK: Kurti says the money comes from savings - <https://www.dukagjini.com/geveria-ndan-buxhetin-per-pagat-e-rtk-se-kurti-mjetet-vijne-nga-kursimet/>

¹⁷ The financier of Vetëvendosje is appointed director of the Albanian-language channels RTK1, RTK3, and RTK4, <https://kallxo.com/lajm/financuesi-i-vetevendosjes-zgjidhet-drejtore-i-kanalit-ne-gjuhen-shqipe-rtk1-3-dhe-4/>

AJK has documented several cases of pressure on RTK staff. In August 2025, six RTK editors were removed from their TV shows, which the journalists' association AJK considered an act of censorship and retaliation, as the editors had criticised the government and parliament for delays in salary payments.¹⁸ RTK management disputed this characterisation. The Ombudsperson has opened an investigation for censorship and political pressure on RTK journalists and at the time of publication the investigation is still to publish its findings.¹⁹ Furthermore, following an interview, a member of the ruling party VV, Fitore Pacolli, who is currently serving as acting Minister of Environment and Spatial Planning, publicly accused journalist Blerta Foniqi in July 2025 of asking questions "ordered from outside" and claimed that during the interview she had a mission directed by external actors.²⁰ A month later, the TV program run by Foniqi and other editors was cancelled and taken off air.²¹ The management of RTK presented to the delegation a different account regarding the reasons for this decision. In February 2026, the contracts of two journalists, Edina Avdiu and Hana Marteti, were not renewed.²² Avdiu had refused to read a pre-written news item handed to her by the editor that praised the newly elected Speaker of Parliament, who at the time came from the ruling party.²³ She considered the text professionally inappropriate.

The delegation raised these concerns during a meeting with RTK management, during which representatives of RTK strongly rejected claims of pressure on journalists and threats to editorial independence. RTK management rejected claims that presenters were removed for disciplinary or political reasons, stating that decisions on presentation and moderation roles fall within the editorial management and that the journalists concerned retained their contracts, remuneration and formal positions.

The delegation's concerns were not resolved by these assurances from RTK's management. While RTK management provided explanations regarding these cases and rejected allegations of political interference, concerns continue to be expressed by journalists, media organisations and other stakeholders. The delegation notes continuing concerns raised by interlocutors regarding programme changes and the handling of internal disputes, and expresses serious concerns regarding the removal of news presenters and the axing of programmes, as well as ongoing concerns of political pressure within the broadcaster. The delegation encourages transparent procedures and effective mechanisms to safeguard editorial independence and address such concerns. Strong governance arrangements, transparent appointment procedures, and safeguards protecting editorial autonomy are essential for maintaining public trust in RTK, and that any future reforms should be guided by European principles relating to public service media governance and independence.

Furthermore, the delegation also notes the ongoing case related to the publication of a report by RTK based in a media outlet from Bosnia and Hercegovina without prior verification, which alleged that two online media outlets, Nacionale and Periskopi, were financed by Serbia. The report sparked a major reaction from the ruling party and its supporters, who called on the prosecution to investigate both outlets. Subsequent investigations by the IMC, the Press Council, and an internal RTK inquiry found that RTK had not verified the information and concluded that the reporting violated professional ethical standards. RTK later published a denial based on the IMC's decision. The online media outlet Nacionale has filed a defamation lawsuit against RTK, with the first hearing held on 5 May 2026. The case is ongoing.²⁴

18 <https://www.agk-ks.org/rastet/pengim-ne-kryerje-te-detyres-ndaj-gjashte-gazetareve-te-rtk-se-prishtine-23.08.2025/>

19 <https://oik-rks.org/2025/09/05/avokati-i-popullit-takoi-redaktoret-e-rtk-se/>

20 <https://agk-ks.org/rastet/sulme-te-tjera-ndaj-gazetares-blerta-foniqi-kabashi-prishtine-28.07.2025/>

21 <https://agk-ks.org/rastet/pengim-ne-kryerje-te-detyres-ndaj-gjashte-gazetareve-te-rtk-se-prishtine-23.08.2025/>

22 <https://agk-ks.org/rastet/sulme-te-tjera-ndaj-gazetareve-hana-marteti-dhe-edina-avdiu-prishtine-15.02.2025/>

23 "Prepared in the offices of the ruling party" — this is the text about Dimal Basha that the RTK journalist said she refused to read, <https://www.gazetaexpress.com/i-perga-titur-ne-zyrat-e-partise-ne-pushtet-ky-eshte-tekshti-per-dimal-bashen-qe-gazetaria-e-rtk-tha-se-ska-pranuar-ta-lexoj/>

24 Lawsuit concerning the 'Slobodna Bosna' article: The national team representative claims RTK published fake news, while the defendant argues it was not the source of

The European Commission's 2025 Progress Report cited RTK's "budget, property and human resources constraints, internal disputes and leadership instability," and warned that without legislative action to secure stable funding and leadership appointments, RTK remains "vulnerable to political pressure and financial uncertainty." The Law on RTK has not been amended since 2012, despite repeated EU recommendations to do so.

The Assembly of Kosovo elected the new board of RTK on 24 April 2026. The Association of Journalists, the Kosovo Law Institute, and Levizja "Fol"²⁵ who monitored the election process (of both RTK board members and IMC members), denounced it as compromised,²⁶ criticised the process and expressed concerns regarding its integrity urging the Parliament not to proceed with the vote on the members and expressed their disappointment after their election.²⁷ The chair of the parliamentary committee in charge of the process stated that it was conducted in a transparent and merit based manner.

The media authority

The delegation's concerns about the independence of the IMC centre on two distinct but related developments: the unconstitutional media law passed by parliament in 2024, and the compromised appointment process for IMC board members that followed the mission.

In December 2024, parliament passed Law No. 08/L-289 on the IMC, largely disregarding a joint legal opinion from the Council of Europe and the European Union, which had flagged concerns about legal clarity, proportionality, and deviations from EU *acquis* and Council of Europe standards.²⁸ The law was approved just before the end-of-year parliamentary recess, with minimal deliberation, and immediately drew criticism from the EU Office in Prishtina and several EU member state embassies. In April 2025, the Constitutional Court annulled the entire law as it found that Article 15 (sub-paragraphs 1.2 and 1.3) on the election of IMC members and Article 18 (sub-paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5) on the dismissal of the chair and members were incompatible with Article 141 of the Constitution, which enshrines the IMC's independence, and with Article 7 on constitutional values.

The ruling was reflected in Kosovo's improved performance in the 2026 RSF World Press Freedom Index, where the rise in the legal indicator was attributed in part to the decision and to the judiciary's increased capacity to protect media freedom.²⁹ During the March 2026 mission in Prishtina, Prime Minister Kurti committed to drafting a revised law on the IMC in full compliance with the Constitutional Court's ruling. In a follow-up meeting between two representatives of the delegation and staff members from the Office of the Prime Minister, they committed to include civil society and independent experts in the drafting process of the IMC law. At the time, the delegation welcomed this pledge.

However, the subsequent process for the selection of new IMC board members, conducted in April 2026 after the mission concluded, deepened the delegation's concerns rather than alleviating them. Candidates were selected through rushed, opaque procedures marked by irregularities, undermining the principle of

the information, <https://betimiperdrejtesi.com/padia-per-artikullin-e-slobodna-bosna-perfaqesuesi-i-nacionales-thote-se-rtk-ja-publikoi-lajm-te-rreme-e-paditura-tha-se-sja-ne-autore-te-informacionit/>

25 Levizja FOL is a non governmental organization based in Kosovo who monitors the work of RTK and IMC, as well as the work of Media Committee of the Parliament.

26 Members of the boards of RTK and KPM are elected through compromised processes, <https://kli-ks.org/procesi-i-perzgjedhjes-se-anetareve-te-bordit-te-rtk-se-esh-te-i-komprometuar/>

27 The selection process for members of the RTK Board is compromised. <https://kli-ks.org/anetaret-e-bordeve-te-rtk-se-dhe-kpm-se-zgjidhen-ne-procese-te-komprometuar/>

28 Council of Europe Provides Legal Support for Kosovo's Draft Law on the Independent Media Commission (IMC), <https://rm.coe.int/legal-opinion-on-the-draft-law-on-the-independent-media-commission-of-/1680afd33b>

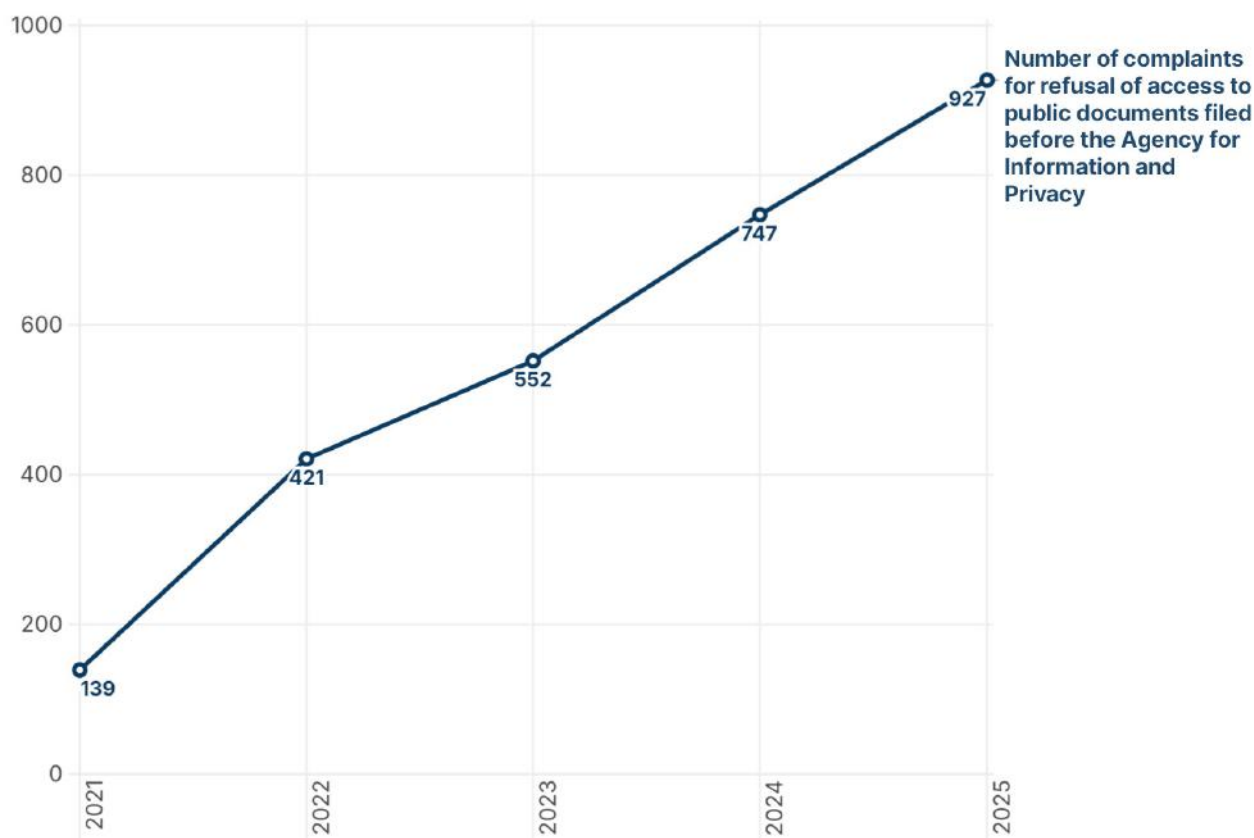
29 Kosovo, country profile 2026, Reporters Without Borders, <https://rsf.org/en/country-kosovo>; Szalai në Pressing: Shfuqizimi i ligjit për KPM që cenonte pavarësinë e mediave ndikoi në rangimin e Kosovës, s'ka arsye për festë, 30 April 2026, <https://www.gazetaexpress.com/szalai-ne-pressing-shfuqizimi-ligjit-per-kpm-qe-cenonte-pavaresi-ne-e-mediave-ndikoi-ne-rangimin-e-kosoves-ska-arsye-per-feste/>

merit-based selection. This development, following so closely after the mission and the Prime Minister's stated commitments, suggests that intentions to respect institutional independence have not translated into practice. Rather than representing a course correction, the April 2026 appointments must be viewed as a continuation of the same approach that led the Constitutional Court to intervene in the first place.

Transparency of public institutions/FoI

Transparency on the part of political authorities and public institutions remains a concern in Kosovo. Similar issues had already been identified during the previous fact-finding mission in 2022, in which the mission had found growing concern over the deteriorating climate for transparency and access to information under the current government.³⁰ Four years later, journalists informed the delegation that there has been no improvement in transparency practices or access to information.

As noted in the preliminary statement in March 2026, the lack of transparency of public authorities continues to undermine watchdog and investigative journalism, weakening the climate for independent reporting and lowering public trust in media.



The journalists interviewed criticised the political authorities for their lack of cooperation and the lack of options for communication with officials. They also pointed out the inability to question ministers and the Prime Minister on a regular basis at press conferences and lack of regular press conferences by the Prime Minister. Editors noted during the meeting with the delegation that the Prime Minister gives relatively few TV interviews and that he, in their view, generally engages with media outlets where questioning is less critical.

³⁰ Political pressure on journalists risks undermining media freedom progress in Kosovo, 2022, <https://www.ecpmf.eu/political-pressure-on-journalists-risks-undermining-media-freedom-progress-in-kosovo/>

According to the latest annual report (2026) from the Kosovo Agency for Information and Privacy (AIP), during the period 2021–2025, the Agency recorded an increase in the number of complaints submitted in relation to FOI. In 2021, a total of 139 complaints were received, representing the lowest number of complaints during this period. In 2022, the number of complaints increased to 421, marking a significant rise compared to the previous year. This upward trend continued in 2023, with 552 complaints registered, while in 2024 the number reached 747 complaints. Compared to previous years, the highest number of complaints was recorded in 2025, with a total of 927 complaints, representing the largest annual increase since 2021.³¹

In a written response, the office of the Prime Minister Kurti has stated: “The Government of the Republic of Kosovo is committed to transparency, accountability, and open access to information as core democratic principles. Regular press conferences following Government meetings are an established practice and have continued in the current mandate. In addition, the Prime Minister has held further press conferences, both individually and together with ministers, where journalists have had the opportunity to ask questions directly. In the first 15 weeks of the mandate alone, ministers participated in more than 20 television interviews and debates. They have also held press conferences and other media briefings within their respective ministries, providing additional opportunities for public scrutiny and engagement with the media.”

As an exception, the delegation welcomes the transparent approach used by the judicial system with regard to cases related to journalists and media. The Kosovo Judicial Council shares regular statistics with the AJK and other NGOs regarding the number of court decisions, which allows trends to be mapped, analysed and understood over the years. Moreover, all court hearing timetables related to journalists’ cases are made public in advance, and hearings are open and regularly monitored by civil society organisations and journalists. Judges regularly attend events with civil society on media freedom topics and engage in ongoing dialogue with civil society. All court decisions are published online and are easily accessible for the public. Requests for access to public documents are handled effectively.

Legislation related to media freedom

During the fact-finding mission, the delegation met a number of stakeholders to analyse the status and impact of legislation, and proposed legal reform that would impact media freedom across the country. This included the law on the Independent Media Commission (IMC), the Law on Public Broadcaster, the law on the Protection of Journalistic Sources, as well as on the informal proposal of ruling party members to re-criminalise defamation. In addition, the delegation explored the status of the transposition of relevant EU directives and regulations such as Digital Service Act (DSA), European Union Directive Against SLAPPS and Council of Europe Recommendation Against SLAPPs and European Media Freedom Act (EMFA).

Law on the Independent Media Commission

In 2023, the Government of Kosovo passed a draft IMC law, referred to as the media law, which is one of the key media laws in Kosovo. The Association of Journalists of Kosovo and other civil society organisations reacted by calling on the government to withdraw the draft law, considering it an attempt to control online media.³² Serious concerns were raised about the lack of transparency during the drafting process, as well as the lack of meaningful consultation.

31 Annual report 2026, Agency for Information and Privacy, <https://aip.rks-gov.net/download/raporti-vjetor-i-performances-se-agjencise-2026-sqarim-raporti-nuk-eshte-aprovuar-akoma-nga-kuvendi-i-republikes-se-kosoves/?wpdmdl=11544&refresh=6a3262fa4b9191781687034>

32 <https://www.agk-ks.org/lajmet/qeveria-duhet-te-terhiqet-nga-tentativa-per-kontroll-shteteror-te-mediave-online/>



The delegation met with representatives of the Basic Court of Prishtina.
Kosovo Journalists Association (AJK)

The Council of Europe and the European Union's legal opinion stated that "overall, the Draft Law aligns with the Audiovisual Media Services Directive. However, concerns were raised about legal clarity, proportionality of measures, and deviations from the EU acquis and European, particularly Council of Europe standards."³³ The opinion further stated that "It is not clear the extent to which the current version of the Draft Law on the IMC has undergone 'a meaningful consultation with key stakeholders,' or the extent to which there has been 'an explanation of the reasoning behind considering or not considering submissions made.'" The parliament largely ignored the legal opinion and approved the law. The approval triggered criticism from several EU member states embassies.³⁴ In April 2025, the Constitutional Court annulled the law due to provisions regulating the work of IMC members that violated the independence of the Commission. During the meeting with Prime Minister Kurti and his team, he stated that the new law on IMC will be drafted in accordance with the decision of the Constitutional Court. He also stated that it will be aligned with EU standards and be drafted by EU experts.

While such a commitment is welcomed, the fact that the country's highest court was required to strike down a law threatening the independence of the IMC was an alarming development that symbolises the increasing pressure on the foundations of Kosovo's media system and the attempt to exercise political control over the IMC.³⁵

The absence of the IMC Law is having significant impacts on the current functioning of the Commission. During a meeting with representatives of the IMC, the delegation heard that because of lack of members of IMC, the executive office was leading on all work. The IMC currently has a staff of approximately 30 employees, although they have submitted a request to double that number. The representatives suggested that this increase of staffing was necessary to respond to their new competency as it relates to regulating

³³ <https://rm.coe.int/opinion-profex-ks/1680afd39e>

³⁴ "The German ambassador reacts after the adoption of two laws: For Kosovo, 'every missed opportunity is too much,' <https://kallxo.com/lajm/ambasadori-gjerman-rea-gon-pas-miratimit-te-dy-ligjeve-per-kosoven-cdo-mundesi-e-humbur-eshte-shume/>

³⁵ <https://api.webgjk-ks.org/Custom/873598ef-0b1a-4fce-aebd-f81a62989dc9.pdf>

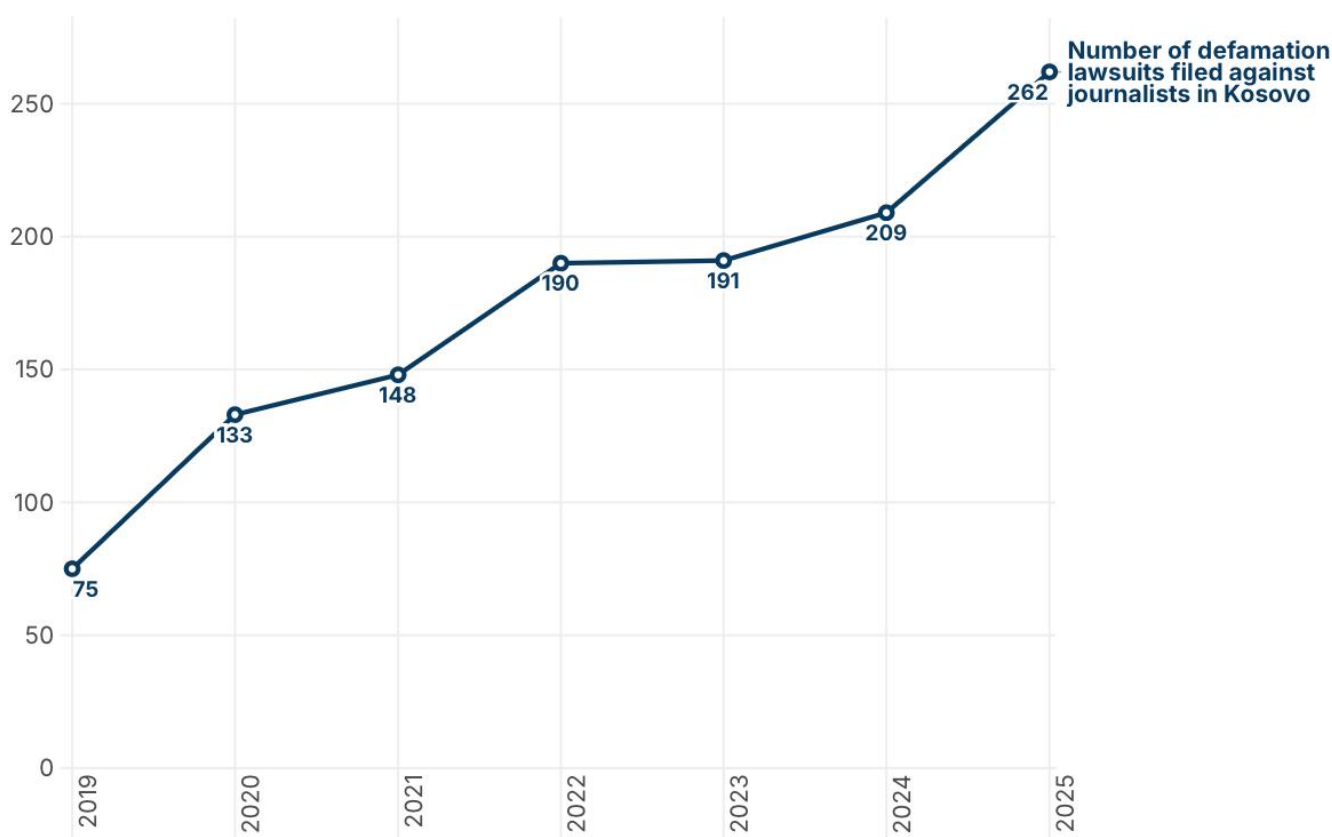
online media. While complaints received by the IMC are being responded to, they cannot be enforced until the body is formally reconstituted. The representatives of the IMC called for the issue related to capacity and staffing to be addressed as a matter of urgency (the meeting took place before the Assembly elected new board members).

Potential recriminalisation of defamation

During 2025, at least two high-level members of the ruling party Vetevendosje, Dimal Basha (former Speaker of the Parliament and currently Minister of Infrastructure) and Hekuran Murati, stated publicly on two different occasions that they would work to re-criminalise defamation. Murati said that he would make it his mission to regulate defamation as a criminal offense.³⁶

Legislation related to defamation in Kosovo has been in place since 2003 when the Provisional Criminal Code of Kosovo entered into force. Insult and defamation were considered criminal offences punishable by fines or a prison term of up to three months.³⁷

The Provisional Criminal Code provisions on defamation were in force until 2008, when the Kosovo Assembly adopted the Civil Law Against Defamation and Insult.³⁸ However, the criminal provisions for defamation were not abrogated, thus defamation was regulated by both civil law and criminal law simultaneously.



After defamation was decriminalised in 2008, difficulties in implementing the new law arose as the Provisional Criminal Code articles on defamation had not been repealed and thus remained in force at the same time as the Civil Law Against Defamation and Insult. Since both criminal and civil provisions regulating

³⁶ Hekuran Murati promotes the criminalization of defamation: "It will be my mission.", 16 September 2025, <https://reporteri.net/lajme/hekuran-murati-promovon-kriminalizimin-e-shpifjes-do-te-jete-mision-i-mi/>

³⁷ Provisional Criminal Code of Kosovo, UNMIK/REG/2003/25 2003 articles 187 and 188

³⁸ Civil Law No. 02/L-65 Against Defamation and Insult, OG 24/2008

defamation were in force, the Supreme Court of Kosovo issued a Guiding Principle in 2012 to clarify that defamation is not a criminal offence.³⁹

During the meeting with the Prime Minister, the delegation asked whether his government intends to reintroduce defamation and insult as criminal offences. The Prime Minister stated that defamation and insult will remain civil offenses and that his government does not plan to re-criminalise these offences. The delegation welcomes this pledge by the Prime Minister.

According to data from the Kosovo Judicial Council database, requested through FOI, in 2025, the number of filed defamation lawsuits was 263, which is nearly three times the 95 lawsuits in 2020. In fact, since 2020, the number of defamation lawsuits has increased every year. Re-criminalizing defamation would represent a major regression in media freedom and free expression, as it creates a chilling effect on journalists and can be easily abused by authorities or those seeking to silence public interest reporting. Regulating defamation and insult through civil law allows individuals to seek financial compensation through damages and demand corrections, which is sufficient to protect reputation.

Transposition of EU and Council of Europe standards on media freedom

During the mission, the delegation raised it with the prime minister and other stakeholders the need to transpose several European directives and regulations that have a direct impact on media freedom, such as the Anti-SLAPP Directive and Council of Europe Recommendation Against SLAPPs, the European Media Freedom Act, and the Digital Services Act.

In a written response, the office of the Prime Minister stated that “Kosova has already taken steps towards aligning its media legislation with the European Union acquis, including the incorporation of elements of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive into the Law on the Independent Media Commission. This process of alignment will continue with the forthcoming amendments and the new Law on the Independent Media Commission, where Kosova intends to further harmonise its legal framework with relevant EU directives and regulations in the field of media and information society.”

Journalists in Residence (Ukrainian journalists)

The Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AGK), the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) and National Union of Journalists of Ukraine (NUJU), in cooperation with the Governments of Kosovo and Germany, are implementing the “Journalists in Residence” programme, through which journalists from Ukraine and Afghanistan have been hosted in Kosovo since April 2022. The project is funded by the Governments of Kosovo and Germany and supported by the Office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. So far, 25 journalists from Ukraine and Afghanistan have benefited from the program, 10 of whom continue to live and work in Kosovo. The “Journalists in Residence” programme, funded by the governments of Kosovo and Germany, is a unique initiative globally and appreciated by NUJU.⁴⁰

³⁹ Guiding Principle K.94/2012 (in albanian Qëndrim Parimor) 2012

⁴⁰ Kosovo continues to support Ukraine, in particular, a programme to protect journalists is in place, <https://nuju.org.ua/kosovo-continues-to-support-ukraine-in-particular-a-program-to-protect-journalists-is-in-place/>

Recommendations

General recommendations

1. The incoming government should improve the media freedom situation as a matter of priority by formally integrating it into the yearly government programme, legislative agenda, and other policies that impact media freedom. In particular, the government should appoint one Ministry or the Office of the Prime Minister to be in charge of proposing legislation related to media freedom and aligning media freedom related policies with European standards. Currently, none of the ministries has media in its portfolio, which makes it difficult to have a responsible authority working on improving policies related to media freedom.

2. As a member of the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC), Kosovo should fully implement the commitments arising from its endorsement of the Global Pledge on Media Freedom, and engage with the High Level Panel of Media Freedom Experts when drafting legislation on media freedom, including on the IMC. It should also actively engage in the Coalition by providing regular updates on relevant developments and initiatives.

Safety of journalists

3. The government of Kosovo should ensure full implementation of Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors and Commission Recommendation of 16.9.2021 on ensuring the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists and other media professionals in the European Union.

4. The acting PM and president of the Vetëvendosje party should refrain from using, endorsing or inciting language or anti media rhetoric. The acting PM should further send a clear message to his members and supporters that verbal abuse against journalists, media, and civil society activists is not acceptable. The delegation believes that such an approach would send a clear signal that negative rhetoric against journalists will no longer be used as a political tool against criticism.

5. Political leaders should recognise journalists' safety as a priority to ensure media freedom in Kosovo and guarantee enabling conditions for journalists and media professionals to do their job safely and freely. They should not use any hostile and delegitimising rhetoric that undermines the credibility and reputation of the profession, and should openly condemn any form of denigration, harassment, or abuse against journalists, with particular attention to the gendered dimension of attacks targeting women journalists.

6. The government should propose, and the parliament should approve, changes to the Criminal Code to strengthen the protection of journalists, including by recognising attacks against journalists in connection with their work as aggravating circumstances in criminal proceedings.

7. The upcoming government should join the "Journalists Matter" campaign of the Council of Europe, adopt a National Strategy on Media Freedom and Safety of Journalists, and appoint a focal point (team) on media freedom and safety of journalists.

Public broadcaster

8. The upcoming Government of Kosovo should include in its legislative agenda the amendment of the Law on the Public Broadcaster and make sure that it is brought into line with EU and CoE standards.
9. RTK should operate freely without political interference. Journalists should be able to report on matters of public interest without interference and should be able to freely ask questions to government representatives without fear of facing consequences.
10. The upcoming government should ensure that Radio Television of Kosovo receives the full funding allocation mandated by law and develop a sustainable, politically independent funding mechanism in line with Council of Europe Recommendation 1878 (2009) and Article 5 of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA).
11. The upcoming government should find a solution to RTK's property issue to enable it to operate in adequate premises. The unresolved issue of property poses a real obstacle to journalists' work, as they currently operate in difficult conditions.
12. The Assembly of Kosovo (media committee) should closely monitor the work of RTK board members to ensure RTK is governed in line with its law and best European standards.

Independent Media Commission

13. The upcoming government should draft a new IMC law in full compliance with the Constitutional Court's ruling and in meaningful consultation with civil society, media stakeholders, and international partners.
14. IMC members should operate freely, independent and professionally and should reject any political or other interference during the exercise of their functions.
15. The Assembly of Kosovo should closely monitor the work of IMC members, especially in light of their appointment through a compromised process, to ensure the media sector is regulated in line with IMC law and best European standards.

Legislation and transposition of EU and CoE standards

16. The delegation strongly recommends maintaining the decriminalised status of defamation and refraining from any legislative steps towards its recriminalisation, while welcoming the commitment expressed by PM Albin Kurti not to pursue such changes.
17. The government should amend the following laws: Law on the Independent Media Commission, Law on the Public Broadcaster, and Law on the Protection of Journalistic Sources, with a view to strengthening media independence and safeguards for journalists.
18. The government should harmonise its legislation with the following directives: European Media Freedom Act, Digital Services Act, EU Directive Against SLAPPs, and the Council of Europe Recommendation on SLAPPs, including by ensuring protection against domestic SLAPP cases.

Judicial system

19. The delegation strongly recommends that the Academy of Justice, Kosovo Judicial Council, and Kosovo Prosecutorial Council continue capacity building for judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and police officers on media freedom, safety of journalists, defamation, SLAPPs, and other related topics.

20. The Council of Europe and EU project “PROFREX” which has trained hundreds of legal professionals in the last decade in Kosovo provides an example of capacity building for legal professionals, which must continue to ensure the judicial system deals with such cases in line with European Court of Human Rights jurisprudence and other European standards. The delegation urges the Council of Europe Office in Prishtina and European Union Office in Prishtina to continue capacity building of judges and legal and media professionals on media freedom standards.



safety of
journalists
platform

