



# MAPPING MEDIA FREEDOM

## Q1 2017



Journalists continue to face unprecedented pressure in Europe as reports submitted to Index on Censorship's Mapping Media Freedom platform in the first quarter of 2017 demonstrate. Media professionals—primarily in Turkey, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine—were arrested at an alarming rate, more than a fourfold increase over the fourth quarter of 2016.

“During the first quarter of 2017, the MMF database registered several trends that we find to be acute challenges to media freedom. Some European governments have clearly interfered with media pluralism. Others have harassed, detained and intimidated journalists. All of these actions debase and devalue the work of the press and undermine a basic foundation of democracy,” Hannah Machlin, project manager at Mapping Media Freedom, said.

During Q1, authorities in multiple countries shut down critical and independent media outlets and intimidated reporters who asked challenging questions. Turkey continues to be the largest jailer of journalists in the world with a total of 148 journalists in prison by the end of March according the Platform for Independent Journalists P24, a Turkey-based MMF partner, which monitors the number of arrests in the country.

Even reporters in countries often thought to respect freedom of the press, such as Sweden, France and Germany, faced obstacles to performing their professional duties. They were abused by the leaders of extreme populist movements and their supporters, who encouraged a distrust of “mainstream media”;

and blocked by nervous politicians who were seeing, particularly in France, the old political certainties swept away.

Between 1 January and 31 March 2017, Mapping Media Freedom's network of correspondents and other journalists submitted a total of 299 violations of press freedom to the database.

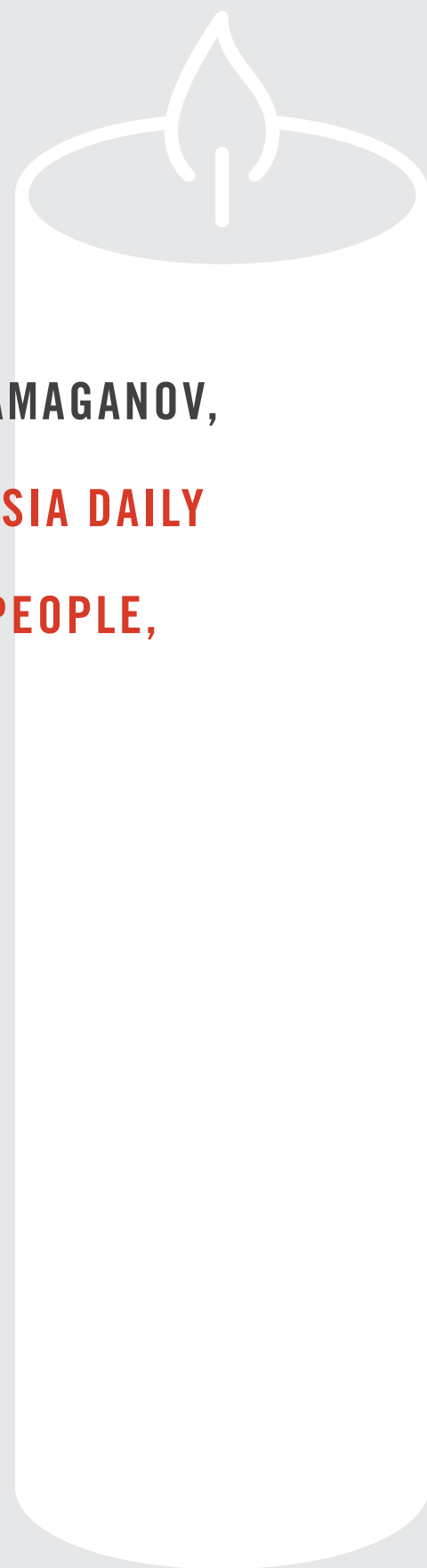
Throughout the first three months of 2017: one journalist was murdered; 42 incidents of physical assault were confirmed; and there were 89 verified reports of intimidation, which includes psychological abuse, sexual harassment, trolling/cyberbullying and defamation. Media professionals were detained in 69 incidents; 38 criminal charges and civil lawsuits were filed; and journalists were blocked from covering a story in 54 verified incidents.

“The spike in arrests and detainments during this period caused by the persecution of journalists in Turkey and Belarus is particularly worrying,” Melody Patry, head of advocacy at Index on Censorship, said. “Journalists are being targeted by government officials, confronting polarised political environments and being undermined by propaganda and accusations of fake news.”

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**ONE JOURNALIST, YEVGENY KHAMAGANOV,  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF ASIA-RUSSIA DAILY  
AND THE SITE OF THE BURYAT PEOPLE,  
WAS KILLED DURING Q1 2017.**

#### DEATHS

One Russian journalist was killed in the first quarter of 2017. In March, Yevgeny Khamaganov, editor-in-chief of Asia-Russia Daily and The Site of the Buryat People, died under unexplained circumstances. The editor lived in the Siberian republic of Buryatia and had been back in its capital Ulan-Ude for only two weeks when he was, according to friends, violently assaulted by unknown assailants. Khamaganov, who was known for articles critical of the Russian federal government's policies, had left Ulan-Ude for his native village in 2015, after a previous assault in which his neck was broken.

**42 INCIDENTS OF  
PHYSICAL ASSAULT WERE  
CONFIRMED IN Q1 2017.**



#### PHYSICAL ASSAULTS AND INJURY

There were 42 incidents of physical assault on journalists who were pursuing their professional duties in Q1. In Russia, there were seven reported incidents in which media professionals were assaulted. In St Petersburg, the 73-year-old founder of Novyi Petersburg, Nikolay Andruschenko, was beaten on two separate occasions resulting in brain damage. The assaults took place in March and Andruschenko died in April. He was investigating corruption, abuse of power and torture by St Petersburg police.

In Azerbaijan, blogger and human rights activist Mehman Huseynov was detained and tortured by police before being fined 105 euros for "disobeying police". Huseynov frequently posts videos exposing corruption and criticising the lavish lifestyles of Azerbaijani government officials. He was later sentenced to two years in prison on defamation charges.

It continues to be physically dangerous to be a journalist in Belarus, where in March a Belsat cameraperson and TV journalist were dragged out of their car by traffic police as they drove to a protest. Both were severely beaten and their equipment was damaged. In France, three journalists were targeted by the police and protesters while covering demonstrations that turned violent.

In Italy, there were seven cases of journalists being physically assaulted during Q1. There were five assaults on journalists investigating corruption in the Naples area. In one instance in March, a reporter was beaten and needed emergency care. Two Italian journalists were also hurt during demonstrations: one in Rome, who was recording a protest by taxi drivers, and the other in the southern town of Melendugno near Lecce, who was covering the construction of micro-tunnels for the Trans Adriatic pipeline.

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**IN Q1 2017, 171 MEDIA PROFESSIONALS WERE ARRESTED OR DETAINED IN EUROPE AND RUSSIA, MORE THAN FOUR TIMES AS MANY AS IN Q4 2016.**

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### ARREST / DETENTION

There were 171 journalists arrested or detained in the 42 nations MMF monitors in the first three months of 2017, more than four times as many than the previous quarter. Belarus was the country with the highest number of journalists detained in Q1, with 96 media workers including TV journalists, video bloggers, reporters and radio journalists held by police. All, bar one, were detained in March 2017 while trying to cover mass demonstrations in the country's cities against a tax on the unemployed. Many were from the independent TV company Belsat. The biggest mass arrest came on 25 March, when 30 journalists, including a handful of foreign correspondents, were detained in Minsk while attempting to cover Freedom Day demonstrations. Eleven others were held on the same day across the country. Meanwhile, at least 19 journalists in Russia were held on 26 March for reporting on anti-corruption protests. A total of 11 others were held in March, most of whom were covering demonstrations, including a feminist protest marking International Women's Day in Moscow. A reporter and photographer were also arrested by security services for

covering gay culture in Svetogorsk, a city where the mayor said homosexuality did not exist.

Many arrests continued to take place in Turkey, where there were a total of 29 journalists and publishers detained during Q1. Some were held for their Kurdish connections, others for standing in solidarity with colleagues, and

still others for just doing their job. Journalists for foreign newspapers were also targeted. Aylina Kılıç, who reports on Turkish/Kurdish relations and lives in London, was taken into custody in January while entering Turkey at the Sabiha Gökçen Airport in Istanbul. She was later released. The following month, a reporter for German newspaper Die Welt was also detained and remains in custody. By early March 2017, there were 148 journalists in prison in

Turkey. In France there were two incidents of journalists being detained while trying to tell the story of migrants: one in Menton, on the border with Italy in January; and the other in February when a journalist following an NGO worker was detained while she was in a van carrying migrant children.

**“The spike in arrests and detainments during this period caused by the persecution of journalists in Turkey and Belarus is particularly worrying.”**

**MELODY PATRY,**

Head of Advocacy,  
Index on Censorship

**INTIMIDATION**

Intimidation, including trolling/cyberbullying, psychological abuse, sexual harassment, defamation and discrediting, was widespread across Europe with 89 incidents this quarter. Particularly striking are those countries which have previously had good records on press freedom. France, for instance, had six cases which were primarily related to the French presidential election campaign with supporters and politicians intimidating journalists. Sweden also had seven incidents with far-right groups targeting journalists and media organisations. One journalist received death threats and threats of sexual violence after questioning a far-right blogger's claims about the extent of violent crime committed by immigrants. Macedonia has also seen a spike in threats against journalists in this quarter. The president of the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (ZNM), Naser Selmani, said that public officials, including representatives of state institutions, participated in these coordinated attacks: "It is sad that violence against journalists is coordinated by parties. These attacks have increased during a period when the political crisis in Macedonia has escalated. The violence against journalists is connected with recent heated political confrontations in Macedonia." In Ukraine, a public website leaked the travel routes and car number plates of a large number of foreign correspondents reporting in the "anti-terrorist operation zone" (ATO). In Bosnia, a journalist was threatened by the brother of the head of the social services department in Banja Luka for investigating illegal adoptions.

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**HANNAH MACHLIN,**

Project Manager,  
Mapping Media Freedom

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**89 REPORTS OF  
INTIMIDATION,  
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PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ABUSE, SEXUAL  
HARASSMENT,  
TROLLING,  
CYBERBULLYING,  
DEFAMATION AND  
DISCREDITING,  
WERE RECORDED  
IN Q1 2017.**

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## 35 LEGAL MEASURES WERE TAKEN AGAINST JOURNALISTS IN Q1 2017.

### LEGAL MEASURES

Legislative measures and court decisions continued to curb media freedom. Russia used legal measures the most frequently in Q1, with 10 out of the 35 cases reported to MMF occurring in Moscow. The most egregious case took place in February when the Russian government stripped Demyan Kudryavtsev, the owner of two independent newspapers, of his Russian citizenship to prevent him from owning media outlets Vedmosti and the Moscow Times. Other Russian cases in the period also involved attempts to close or curtail the activities of television and radio channels by forcing an American company to withdraw from funding Echo of Moscow radio station. In

Ukraine, there were four cases of legal measures which successfully shut down two independent Russian-language TV stations. In January, Dozhd TV was prevented from broadcasting in the country and the Hunting and Fishing Channel, Ohota i Rybalka, was closed in February. The Ukrainian authorities also did not renew the licence of one of the country's most popular radio stations, Vesti radio (see case study below). In March, legal measures were introduced to stop reporters from covering the troops and security services deployed against Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine.



## THERE WERE 54 INSTANCES OF BLOCKED ACCESS IN Q1 2017.

### BLOCKED ACCESS

There were 54 cases of blocked access across Europe during Q1, many of which were associated with more serious violations against journalists. Populist parties on the right and left continued to ban journalists from attending their events. In the Netherlands, Denk, the new pro-immigrant party, banned two journalists from attending a campaign event – one journalist because she had asked a critical question earlier that day, and the other because she had questioned the endorsement of the party by a controversial imam. The far-right alliance of European populist parties, Europe of Nations and

Freedom, also denied Germany's leading media organisations accreditation for their conference in Koblenz. The ENF was formed as an alliance at the European Parliament in summer 2015, and the French nationalist party, Front National, represents its largest faction.





**114 INCIDENTS OF  
EMPLOYMENT LOSS  
WERE REPORTED  
IN Q1 2017.**

#### CRIMINAL CHARGES / CIVIL LAWSUITS

Belarus is the European country most likely to try to criminally prosecute journalists and accounted for 11 out of the 48 cases in Q1. Almost all of the detained Belarusian journalists were prosecuted for covering protests around Freedom Day on 25 March. In Malta, a property developer filed 19 libel cases against a journalist who had reported that the developer was cutting a deal with the government to build a hotel and two tower blocks on a large and valuable tract of public land. The previous month, the same journalist had her assets frozen through precautionary warrants filed by the economics minister and an EU presidency policy officer. This took place after she claimed they had visited a brothel while on a trip to Germany. Two civil libel suits were also filed against her by the pair.



**48 CRIMINAL CHARGES  
AND CIVIL LAWSUITS  
WERE REPORTED  
IN Q1 2017.**

#### LOSS OF EMPLOYMENT

At least 114 media professionals lost their jobs across Europe due to political decisions during the first quarter of 2017. Some 100 staff at the Vesti radio station were left unemployed after the Ukrainian authorities refused to renew their licence. Meanwhile, in eastern Russia, the head of the Information Policy Department in Omsk dismissed the editors-in-chief of five state-funded district newspapers because of their critical and independent stance towards the regional government. In Turkey, the satirical magazine *Girgir* was closed down by its publishers after it published a cartoon which the company thought was “unpleasant”. The Doğan media group in Turkey also fired a television anchor and a columnist in February because they had announced they were going to vote against the amendments to the Turkish constitution. In Romania, a newspaper columnist resigned after being told her op-eds were too critical of the newly elected social democratic government. In Poland, the host of a popular talk show, broadcast by the state-controlled Radio Merkur, was terminated after a critical interview with MP Ryszard Czarnecki. In Albania, the director of TV channel ABC did not have his contract renewed after the owner changed the “editorial orientation” of the station to be more pro-government in January. In a separate case, the director of the Albanian newspaper *Mapo* said his contract had not been renewed because the newspaper’s owner decided to support the government and he refused to accept the new editorial line.

**ATTACKS TO PROPERTY**

There were 28 cases of attacks to property during Q1, with vehicles being repeatedly damaged. In Ukraine, cars belonging to three senior media workers were vandalised: in February a TV channel director reported having his tyres slashed. He said this happened because he had been too critical of local politicians in the city of Chernivtsi. In the city of Kamianske, unidentified assailants set fire to a car belonging to the editor-in-chief of two local news websites. The editor said he was targeted because local influential people did not like how his news sites reported on the city council. Two weeks later, the editor of the local newspaper in the same city had his car set on fire too. In Italy, a journalist in Brindisi also had their tyres slashed twice, allegedly because she was investigating local corruption. And a journalist in the southern German state of Bavaria had his car windscreen shattered in January. He had previously received threats of violence from a far-right group, the ultra-nationalist NPD, for his reports on the group.

**PIECES OF WORK CENSORED OR ALTERED**

In Q1, Mapping Media Freedom documented 24 cases where work was censored or altered. In Turkey, the government shut down two religious TV stations, bringing the number of media outlets closed to 181. Meanwhile, the Kremlin allegedly told Russian broadcasters to end their “fawning coverage” of US president Donald Trump.

Western democracies were not immune from censorship, with nervous TV bosses worried about causing too much political or religious offence. In March, two French comedians did not have their sketches about France’s presidential election and police violence aired on a national TV channel because, according to the French newspaper Libération, the president of the channel considered them “too violent”. In Spain, public broadcaster TVE removed footage of a drag queen – dressed as the Virgin Mary and Christ – from its website. The video, which disappeared without explanation, had been filmed during the 2017 edition of Las Palmas Drag Queen Gala.

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██████████ WERE ██████████,  
██████████ CENSORED OR ██████████  
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# About Mapping Media Freedom

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Each report is fact-checked with local sources before becoming available on the interactive map. The platform—a joint undertaking with the European Federation of Journalists and Reporters Without Borders, partially funded by the European Commission—covers 42 countries, including all EU member states, plus Albania, Belarus, Bosnia, Iceland, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Norway, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine and Azerbaijan. In September 2015, the platform expanded to monitor Russia, Ukraine and Belarus and in February 2016, it included Azerbaijan. Since launching in May 2014, the map has recorded more than 3,200 violations of media freedom, with 1,393 reports documented last year alone.

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## *CASE STUDIES: Q1 2017*

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### CASE STUDY: BELARUS

Mass detentions of journalists took place in three Belarusian cities during Freedom Day marches on 25 March, according to the Belorussian Association of Journalists. Freedom Day is an unofficial holiday in Belarus, which is celebrated to commemorate the proclamation of the Belarusian People's Republic in 1918. The current regime does not recognise Freedom Day and often prevents opposition forces from celebrating it. This year the holiday events included a protest against a tax on the unemployed, the so-called "parasite tax", that authorities intended to introduce.

In Minsk, 30 journalists were detained. There were also detentions in Babruysk, Homel, Vitebsk, Orsha and Brest. Seven reporters, including one British journalist and one French journalist, reported they had been beaten by the police. Many detainees were subsequently released, but others were prosecuted for disorderly conduct, using profane language, disobeying the police and participating in an unsanctioned mass event. Across the country there were reports of TV crews and reporters being detained and intimidated, including some who were brought to police stations and held there while the protests were taking place. Various incidents happened in the major cities of Vitebsk and Homel. One journalist was fined for disorderly conduct in Polatsk. On 26 March, 16 more journalists were arrested to prevent them from reporting on people demonstrating in solidarity with protesters who had been beaten and arrested the day before.



### CASE STUDY: SWEDEN

An ongoing campaign to discredit and undermine journalists was uncovered by the Eskilstuna-Kuriren newspaper in Sweden in February 2017. Journalists at the paper reported on a project, orchestrated by an organisation called Granskning Sverige, where journalists from Eskilstuna-Kuriren and other news outlets were secretly recorded. Granskning Sverige claimed that by doing so it was holding the media accountable. Granskning Sverige reportedly pays individuals to call journalists and then ask certain questions to get specific words and phrases on tape. The recordings were then heavily edited and posted online, often via YouTube, to make it seem as if the journalists were partisan in their coverage. The enterprise was run through the servers of Fria Tider, a far-right Swedish language newspaper based in Estonia, according to research by Eskilstuna-Kuriren. Granskning Sverige is still active and continues to call journalists to secure audio recordings.



### CASE STUDY: UKRAINE

One of the country's largest and most popular local radio stations, Radio Vesti, was taken off the air in Ukraine. The National Radio and TV Council did not renew Radio Vesti's license for broadcasting in the Kharkiv area on 23 February and failed to renew its licence in the Kiev area the following month.

Detector Media reported that representatives of the nationalist movement Vidsich and the Sich volunteer battalion attended the National Radio and TV Council meeting and reportedly demanded Vesti's Kiev license be revoked. There were concerns expressed earlier in the process that the ultimate beneficiary of the radio station was the former Minister of Revenue and Fees, Oleksandr Klymenko. According to the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine, as a result of the licences being revoked, 90% of staff (almost 100 employees) will lose their jobs at the radio station which has the largest audience in Ukraine. "We support transparency of media ownership but the elimination of authoritative media because of disputes with the regulator is unacceptable," said Sergiy Tomilenko, acting President of NUJU. "Today a hundred skilled journalists and media workers have lost their jobs and their right to communicate with a large national audience."



### CASE STUDY: ROMANIA

The government in Romania has been carrying out a campaign of intimidation against journalists who have been covering the recent protests in the capital. In an alarming development, Minister of Internal Affairs Carmen-Daniela Dan issued a list of journalists at a press conference in February whom she said promoted the recent protests on social media. She named and condemned nine people as "public personalities, opinion leaders or members of political parties", who had supported the protests. All, bar one, were journalists.

ActiveWatch and the Centre for Independent Journalism, two Romanian NGOs advocating for freedom of speech, condemned the gesture of the minister, saying that it showed a totalitarian way of thinking. "The list is an attempt by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to intimidate and to put pressure on critical voices within society, with possible threats to their safety," their joint press release said.

Please note these numbers relate to the number of verified incidents reported to the map. Because of the nature of crowdsourced reporting, they should not be taken as representing absolute numbers. Some countries with well-documented and repressive environments for journalists and media outlets appear to have a lower number of reports because journalists may fear reprisals for speaking out or independent reporting on an incident is not available.

[mappingmediafreedom.org](https://mappingmediafreedom.org)

