Targeting the messenger

Investigative journalists under extreme pressure

2014 - 18
SPECIAL REPORT | JANUARY 2019
There is a distinct lack of awareness among decision makers about how bad the situation is for journalists reporting on corruption.

"Mapping Media Freedom is essential to getting to the bottom of the two biggest issues plaguing media today: violence against members of the media and impunity from prosecution by their assailants."

Dunja Mijatovic, Former OSCE representative on freedom of the media, 2016

Acknowledgements

This is part of a series of reports based on data submitted to Mapping Media Freedom, an Index on Censorship project. This report looks at data between May 2014 and December 2018.

Mapping Media Freedom is essential to getting to the bottom of the two biggest issues plaguing media today: violence against members of the media and impunity from prosecution by their assailants.

Dunja Mijatovic, Former OSCE representative on freedom of the media, 2016

There is a distinct lack of awareness among decision makers about how bad the situation is for journalists reporting on corruption.

“Mapping Media Freedom is essential to getting to the bottom of the two biggest issues plaguing media today: violence against members of the media and impunity from prosecution by their assailants.”

Dunja Mijatovic, Former OSCE representative on freedom of the media, 2016

Each report is fact-checked with local sources before becoming publicly available on the Mapping Media Freedom map. The number of reports per country relates to the number of incidents reported to the map. The data should not be taken as representing absolute numbers. For example, the number of reported incidents of censorship appears low given the number of other types of incidents reported on the map. This could be due to an increase in acts of intimidation and pressure that deter media workers from reporting such cases.
Worst offenders

Countries with the most incidents in which investigative journalism was most under pressure based on 283 reports submitted to Mapping Media Freedom between 1 May 2014 and 31 December 2018.

- ITALY: 40
- HUNGARY: 25
- SERBIA: 24
- FRANCE: 19
- POLAND: 13
- SPAIN: 12
- BULGARIA: 11
- TURKEY: 18
- ROMANIA: 11
- SLOVAKIA: 9
From the groundbreaking UK-based Bell- ingcat and the well-regarded multi-national Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, to the uncovering of the Panama and Paradise Papers, the dogged reporting and dedication of investigative journalists is clear. Yet these success stories mask the encroaching pressures that threaten to undermine efforts to expose the corruption eating at the foundations of European democracy.

For their work, investigative reporters have come under threat from multiple sources with the shared aim of stopping information that’s in the public interest from coming to light. Index on Censorship’s Mapping Media Freedom project, which monitors violations against media professionals throughout Europe, recorded 206 cases of investigative journalists in the 35 countries that are in or affiliated with the European Union (EU35) being targeted in their line of work between 1 May 2014 and 31 December 2018. An additional 77 reports from EU35 showed media workers other than investigative journalists being targeted for their role in reporting on corruption.

Under-financing and business models that don’t offer proper support are major problems for investigative journalism in general, but Mapping Media Freedom has also uncovered a litany of methods that have been employed as a direct means to censor journalists, including intimidation (96 instances), defamation (53), laws or court orders curtailing media outlets or workers (48), psychological abuse (35) and blocked access (48). Media workers were also physically attacked on 28 occasions and had their property attacked on 28. Civil lawsuits were taken against journalists on 27 occasions, and criminal charges were brought against journalists on 23.

The country with the largest share of reports was Italy (40), followed by Hungary (25), Serbia (24), France (19) and Turkey (18). “In these five years in Italy, investiga-
tive journalism has become increasingly risky, both for journalists themselves and for the media,” Alberto Spampinato, the director of Ossigeno per l’informazione, an Italian press freedom monitor, told Mapping Media Freedom.


Mapping Media Freedom’s numbers reflect only what has been reported to the platform. We have found that journalists under-report incidents they consider minor, commonplace or part of the job, or where they fear reprisals. In some cases, Mapping Media Freedom correspondents have identified incidents retrospectively as a result of comments on social media or reports appearing only after similar incidents have come to light.

“It is usually independent media or journalism centres that are investigating corruption,” Delic said.

Delic pointed out that most corruption reporting did not take place in the mainstream media, except in France, Germany and Scandinavia, where journalism had a better standing. Independent and non-profit media outlets were among the most vulnerable to financial pressures and the target of frequent threats, whether in terms of staff safety or lawsuits. She warned that more EU member states – Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and, to an extent, Slovakia, Italy and Austria – were failing to live up to democratic standards. Delic said there had been a failure at the European Union level to realise freedom of the press did not actually exist in those nations: “How many journalists have to die before we realise something is wrong?”

After spending 13 years working for Delo, Slovenia’s largest newspaper, Delic said she had to leave her position after a new editor-in-chief, “who wanted only to do PR for the owner”, took charge. This change of editorial direction left Slovenia with a lack of outlets where journalists could report on corruption, and exacerbated the low level of funding for investigative centres such as Oštro, which aims to carry out the investigative role that mainstream media used to fulfil.

Independent media outlets that engage in investigative journalism are also under pressure in Malta, independent political blogger Manuel Delia told Mapping Media Freedom. “A big chunk of the media is owned by political parties. We have a two-
party system and a heavily polarised society,” he said.

Delia said that since 1990, Malta’s two big political parties – the Labour Party and the Nationalist Party – have each owned newspapers and television stations, giving “two contradictory visions of reality”. Maltese people, he said, assumed that journalists in the island nation represented and spoke for political interests. “This makes independent journalism really difficult.”

Bulgaria’s media, according to Bivol investigative journalist Atanas Tchobanov, operates in a toxic environment, with most outlets controlled by the Bulgarian government or business interests closely aligned with the country’s politicians. Mediapool journalist Polina Paunova agrees, saying that the Bulgarian media has either been bought by businessman Delyan Peevski, who is also a National Assembly member, or is “under his covert influence”.

Media concentration has become a growing issue for journalists across EU35, notably in Hungary.

Serbia is one of the worst countries in EU35 for freedom for investigative journalists. “Even if there are good media and investigative journalists, for example BIRN, KRIK, CINS, Insajder and others, the situation is very bad,” Chiara Sighele, project director for the Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa, told Mapping Media Freedom. “You have the big power of the mainstream tabloids and mainstream TV programmes, and it’s hard to challenge this power with investigative stories.”

“We have to consider the cost of investiga-
Caruana Galizia’s death was followed by the murder of Slovakian journalist Ján Kuciak and his partner Martina Kušnírová on 26 February 2018, and the rape and murder of Bulgarian journalist Viktoria Marinova on 6 October 2018. Authorities say Marinova’s death is not connected to her being a journalist, a claim some colleagues have disputed.

There is a marked contrast in the reactions to the deaths of Caruana Galizia and Kuciak in Malta and Slovakia. In Slovakia, Kuciak’s death acted as a tipping point, prompting mass protests and causing politicians to resign. The culture minister stepped down following the murder and later left the ruling party.

Delia said: “Our culture minister had been marching in Paris after the Charlie Hebdo murders but after Caruana Galizia was murdered he went to Dubai to sell passports. The government was intent on demonstrating it was business as usual.”

Delia thinks the country is so polarised that only a small part of the Maltese population has been impacted by the journalist’s death.

Impunity is a major problem in the murder of journalists, and not just for those who carry out the crime. Times of Malta journalist Ivan Camilleri told Mapping Media Freedom: “I think there was a genuine effort to solve [Caruana Galizia’s] murder. I don’t think there was a genuine effort to find who commissioned it.”

Regarding Marinova’s murder, Tchobanov recently told OCCRP that corruption was rife within the police and the judicial system in Bulgaria, pointing at inconsistencies within the current state of the investigation. “If [evidence] disappears, it can also appear to promote a version the authorities like. They have been lying to cover sensitive affairs. Why should we trust their words now?”

The man arrested in relation with Marinova’s murder said he regretted killing her and didn’t remember exactly what had happened. Paunova had a different perspective. “Because of the polarisation of the Bulgarian society at the beginning of Marinova’s case, some of the citizens declared that she was a victim of her work and another part categorically denied that it was possible. That’s why the impression of something hidden was created. Most evidence suggests that the brutal death of Marinova has no connection with her job. But the court will be the judge of this.”

The assassination of independent Maltese investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia in a car bomb on 16 October 2017 marked a dark new trend emerging in the EU35: the murder of three investigative journalists in less than 12 months.

The widespread coverage of the murder, coupled with the public outrage, have created an atmosphere that has encouraged more journalists to dig into allegations of corruption.

“After Kuciak’s killing, the atmosphere was one of co-operation between journalists who published joint investigative reports,” Terenzani added. “They have kept reporting on new scandals linked to the government.”

In Malta, Caruana Galizia’s death was received differently. Delia said: “Our culture minister had been marching in Paris after the Charlie Hebdo murders but after Caruana Galizia was murdered he went to Dubai to sell passports. The government was intent on demonstrating it was business as usual.”

Delia thinks the country is so polarised that only a small part of the Maltese population has been impacted by the journalist’s death.

Impunity is a major problem in the murder of journalists, and not just for those who carry out the crime. Times of Malta journalist Ivan Camilleri told Mapping Media Freedom: “I think there was a genuine effort to solve [Caruana Galizia’s] murder. I don’t think there was a genuine effort to find who commissioned it.”

Regarding Marinova’s murder, Tchobanov recently told OCCRP that corruption was rife within the police and the judicial system in Bulgaria, pointing at inconsistencies within the current state of the investigation. “If [evidence] disappears, it can also appear to promote a version the authorities like. They have been lying to cover sensitive affairs. Why should we trust their words now?”

The man arrested in relation with Marinova’s murder said he regretted killing her and didn’t remember exactly what had happened. Paunova had a different perspective. “Because of the polarisation of the Bulgarian society at the beginning of Marinova’s case, some of the citizens declared that she was a victim of her work and another part categorically denied that it was possible. That’s why the impression of something hidden was created. Most evidence suggests that the brutal death of Marinova has no connection with her job. But the court will be the judge of this.”

The assassination of independent Maltese investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia in a car bomb on 16 October 2017 marked a dark new trend emerging in the EU35: the murder of three investigative journalists in less than 12 months.

Caruana Galizia’s death was followed by the murder of Slovakian journalist Ján Kuciak and his partner Martina Kušnírová on 26 February 2018, and the rape and murder of Bulgarian journalist Viktoria Marinova on 6 October 2018. Authorities say Marinova’s death is not connected to her being a journalist, a claim some colleagues have disputed.

There is a marked contrast in the reactions to the deaths of Caruana Galizia and Kuciak in Malta and Slovakia. In Slovakia, Kuciak’s death acted as a tipping point, prompting mass protests and causing politicians to resign. The culture minister stepped down following the murder and later left the ruling party.

“Kuciak’s death changed everything, and it feels that until the next presidential elections, in March 2019, we’re going to be in limbo,” said Slovak journalist Michaela Terenzani, editor-in-chief of The Slovak Spectator. She added that the widespread coverage of the murder, coupled with the public outrage, have created an atmosphere that has encouraged more journalists to dig into allegations of corruption.

“After Kuciak’s killing, the atmosphere was one of co-operation between journalists who published joint investigative reports,” Terenzani added. “They have kept reporting on new scandals linked to the government.”

In Malta, Caruana Galizia’s death was received differently. Delia said: “Our culture minister had been marching in Paris after the Charlie Hebdo murders but after Caruana Galizia was murdered he went to Dubai to sell passports. The government was intent on demonstrating it was business as usual.”

Delia thinks the country is so polarised that only a small part of the Maltese population has been impacted by the journalist’s death.

Impunity is a major problem in the murder of journalists, and not just for those who carry out the crime. Times of Malta journalist Ivan Camilleri told Mapping Media Freedom: “I think there was a genuine effort to solve [Caruana Galizia’s] murder. I don’t think there was a genuine effort to find who commissioned it.”

Regarding Marinova’s murder, Tchobanov recently told OCCRP that corruption was rife within the police and the judicial system in Bulgaria, pointing at inconsistencies within the current state of the investigation. “If [evidence] disappears, it can also appear to promote a version the authorities like. They have been lying to cover sensitive affairs. Why should we trust their words now?”

The man arrested in relation with Marinova’s murder said he regretted killing her and didn’t remember exactly what had happened. Paunova had a different perspective. “Because of the polarisation of the Bulgarian society at the beginning of Marinova’s case, some of the citizens declared that she was a victim of her work and another part categorically denied that it was possible. That’s why the impression of something hidden was created. Most evidence suggests that the brutal death of Marinova has no connection with her job. But the court will be the judge of this.”
The Council of Europe study on self-censorship among journalists has shown that the main form of pressure is ‘psychological violence’, which is mainly visible by intimidation used by public authorities which has a clear chilling effects on media freedom. We are convinced that many investigative journalists are the target of this type of bullying,” Koksal said.

Such violations are a major problem in Bulgaria. “Pressure we face ranges from calls demanding we change an article to physical threats,” Tchobanov said. He added that staffers had been subjected to death threats, which they reported to authorities, international organisations and local unions, but “nobody is protecting us”.

The threats against Bivol are wide ranging, from when staffers were informed in June 2015 that an attack was being planned against them to December 2016 when journalist Dimitar Stoyanov received threats both in the run-up to and after publishing several major investigative reports about alleged embezzlement of public funds with links between Bulgarian government officials and criminal groups. “The worst is when they threaten to ‘remove you’,” Tchobanov said, referring to implied death threats. Paradoxically, the staff at Bivol have used these incidents to reinvigorate their investigations, engaging in a new strategy that Tchobanov jokingly calls “publish or perish”.

“The future is very uncertain,” Spampinato told Mapping Media Freedom. Although there have been threats to remove protection from Italian investigative journalist Roberto Saviano -- who has received death threats for his reporting of the Italian mafia -- following an argument with Italy’s interior minister, Matteo Salvini, thankfully no such action has been taken so far, Spampinato added. “The Italian protection system remains the best among all the known systems.”

Between 1 May 2014 and 31 December 2018, Mapping Media Freedom recorded 34 instances of psychological abuse, including verbal harassment, offline bullying, and 96 instances of intimidation, where a media worker is menaced as a result of their work.

“Threats of aggression and violent acts against investigative journalists seem to be more and more common,” Mehmet Koksal, project officer for the European Federation of Journalists, the European regional organisation of the International Federation of Journalists, the global union federation of journalists’ trade unions, told Mapping Media Freedom.

On 23 March 2017 freelance journalist Stefano Andreone was beaten by three men in a bar in Cardito, in the province of Naples, Italy. Federazione Nazionale Stampa Italiana, the unitary trade union of the Italian journalists, linked the violence to a website Andreone created and manages, which published allegations of corruption on exhumations in the local cemetery. Andreone had to receive emergency care in the hospital of Frattamaggiore.

“With its continuous monitoring Ossigeno keeps the focus on threats and reprisals against journalists,” Spampinato said. “This attention is already in itself a system of protection for reporters.”

Between 1 May 2014 and 31 December 2018, Mapping Media Freedom recorded 34 instances of psychological abuse, including verbal harassment, offline bullying, and 96 instances of intimidation, where a media worker is menaced as a result of their work.
At 7am on 31 August 2018, armed police in boiler suits arrived at the home of Belfast-based award-winning journalist Barry McCaffrey with a search warrant. McCaffrey is the reporter behind Alex Gibney’s 2017 documentary about the 1994 Loughinisland pub massacre during the Northern Irish Troubles, No Stone Unturned. At the same time, around 30 armed police arrived at the home of Trevor Birney, the producer of No Stone Unturned, and confiscated items, including a broken pink phone.

Both men were arrested. The journalists were told that “on October 4th, 2017, the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland reported the theft of two ‘secret’ documents from their offices”. The arrests, they were told, were in connection with suspicion of theft, the handling of stolen goods, the unlawful disclosure of information and the unlawful obtainment of personal data. It later transpired that the Ombudsman for Northern Ireland had made no such complaint about the work of the journalists.

“The Loughinisland massacre was one of the most traumatic events in the history of the Troubles. The investigative work of Birney, McCaffrey and Fine Point Productions was a textbook example of public interest journalism, raising fundamental investigations into the police investigation, proving police collusion and taking risks within a dangerous environment, legally and otherwise, by naming suspects,” Séamus Dooley, assistant general secretary of the National Union of Journalists, a trade union for journalists in the UK and Ireland, told Mapping Media Freedom. “The arrests, the disproportionate use of police power and the flawed legal process serve to undermine the work of the journalists involved and, importantly as a deterrent to other journalists.”

Given the legacy of the Troubles there are a number of journalists and film production companies who may be deterred by the legal barriers now confronting Barry and Trevor,” Dooley added. “The abuse of process and the use of judicial procedures by the PSNI in these circumstances shows that in Northern Ireland there is a grave lack of respect for journalists or journalism.”

Rubino, who recently worked on the CumEx file investigation into a tax fraud scheme discovered in 2017, said: “There are many things we weren’t able to report because there was no ongoing criminal investigation, only an administrative one, and we didn’t want to be sued because that’s automatically thousands of euros spent in legal fees.”

“Reporting on the use of European funds in Bulgaria is important, and it’s important to do it across borders,” said Tchobanov. “We are trying to find patterns and to push the authorities to investigate. The Bulgarian prosecution office is currently investigating only 0.04 per cent of the €5 billion which has been allocated by the European Commission to Bulgaria.”

Delia spoke of a similar pattern in Malta. “Although there are revelations in the press, they have no effect. This increases the vulnerability of journalists who are then portrayed as obsessive crusaders.” In Malta, repeated defamation lawsuits were filed against Caruana Galizia, who had pursued corrupt businesses and politicians as part of her investigative work, prior to her murder. On 21 February 2017 Maltese government minister Chris Cardona and his policy aide Joseph Gerada posted public messages on Twitter taunting reporter Mario Fredo about court action they planned to take against him.

Malta’s investigative journalists have also been ostracised and vilified. Politicians and businesses use lawsuits, public relations and innuendo to ridicule and sow doubt about reportage, as highlighted in the summer 2018 issue of Index on Censorship magazine.

Tchobanov cited audits by tax authorities, something that repeatedly happened to Serbian newspaper Juzne Vesti, as a tactic employed by politicians to retaliate against news outlets. In Bulgaria, authorities froze the assets of Ivo Prokopiev, who publishes the newspapers Capital and Dnevnik. “All the power of the state is used against free media publishers,” Paunova told Mapping Media Freedom.

For journalists reporting on corruption, the threat of legal action is a very serious one, which impacts what one is able to write, particularly for investigative centres with limited resources.
In Malta, Delia said he had been portrayed “as a traitor by the Labour party press”.

Official willingness to discredit and defame journalists is a Europe-wide phenomenon, but one that is especially acute for independent media outlets that specialise in investigative journalism into official corruption. Politicians at all levels of national and local governments have used their platform to smear journalists and their outlets to undermine often embarrassing revelations. In Bulgaria, this trend has seen journalists, journalist groups and unions labeled foreign agents, manipulators, and, in the case of the Association of European Journalists -- Bulgaria, “scum” and “paid urinals”.

In July 2018 Tchobanov was insulted on Facebook by a Bulgarian MEP Nikolay Barekov, who was under investigation by Bivol. In 2015 Bivol was the target of a smear campaign in mainstream media outlets that appeared to be prompted by investigations into alleged draining of cash from a Bulgarian bank through offshore companies, and abuse of European Union funds, which implicated several bankers and politicians, including the media mogul and lawmaker Peevski.

In Malta, Delia said he had been portrayed “as a traitor by the Labour party press”.

Official willingness to discredit and defame journalists is a Europe-wide phenomenon, but one that is especially acute for independent media outlets that specialise in investigative journalism into official corruption. Politicians at all levels of national and local governments have used their platform to smear journalists and their outlets to undermine often embarrassing revelations. In Bulgaria, this trend has seen journalists, journalist groups and unions labeled foreign agents, manipulators, and, in the case of the Association of European Journalists -- Bulgaria, “scum” and “paid urinals”.

In July 2018 Tchobanov was insulted on Facebook by a Bulgarian MEP Nikolay Barekov, who was under investigation by Bivol. In 2015 Bivol was the target of a smear campaign in mainstream media outlets that appeared to be prompted by investigations into alleged draining of cash from a Bulgarian bank through offshore companies, and abuse of European Union funds, which implicated several bankers and politicians, including the media mogul and lawmaker Peevski.

In Malta, Delia said he had been portrayed “as a traitor by the Labour party press”.

Official willingness to discredit and defame journalists is a Europe-wide phenomenon, but one that is especially acute for independent media outlets that specialise in investigative journalism into official corruption. Politicians at all levels of national and local governments have used their platform to smear journalists and their outlets to undermine often embarrassing revelations. In Bulgaria, this trend has seen journalists, journalist groups and unions labeled foreign agents, manipulators, and, in the case of the Association of European Journalists -- Bulgaria, “scum” and “paid urinals”.

In July 2018 Tchobanov was insulted on Facebook by a Bulgarian MEP Nikolay Barekov, who was under investigation by Bivol. In 2015 Bivol was the target of a smear campaign in mainstream media outlets that appeared to be prompted by investigations into alleged draining of cash from a Bulgarian bank through offshore companies, and abuse of European Union funds, which implicated several bankers and politicians, including the media mogul and lawmaker Peevski.

In Malta, Delia said he had been portrayed “as a traitor by the Labour party press”.

Official willingness to discredit and defame journalists is a Europe-wide phenomenon, but one that is especially acute for independent media outlets that specialise in investigative journalism into official corruption. Politicians at all levels of national and local governments have used their platform to smear journalists and their outlets to undermine often embarrassing revelations. In Bulgaria, this trend has seen journalists, journalist groups and unions labeled foreign agents, manipulators, and, in the case of the Association of European Journalists -- Bulgaria, “scum” and “paid urinals”.

In July 2018 Tchobanov was insulted on Facebook by a Bulgarian MEP Nikolay Barekov, who was under investigation by Bivol. In 2015 Bivol was the target of a smear campaign in mainstream media outlets that appeared to be prompted by investigations into alleged draining of cash from a Bulgarian bank through offshore companies, and abuse of European Union funds, which implicated several bankers and politicians, including the media mogul and lawmaker Peevski.

In Malta, Delia said he had been portrayed “as a traitor by the Labour party press”.

Official willingness to discredit and defame journalists is a Europe-wide phenomenon, but one that is especially acute for independent media outlets that specialise in investigative journalism into official corruption. Politicians at all levels of national and local governments have used their platform to smear journalists and their outlets to undermine often embarrassing revelations. In Bulgaria, this trend has seen journalists, journalist groups and unions labeled foreign agents, manipulators, and, in the case of the Association of European Journalists -- Bulgaria, “scum” and “paid urinals”.

In July 2018 Tchobanov was insulted on Facebook by a Bulgarian MEP Nikolay Barekov, who was under investigation by Bivol. In 2015 Bivol was the target of a smear campaign in mainstream media outlets that appeared to be prompted by investigations into alleged draining of cash from a Bulgarian bank through offshore companies, and abuse of European Union funds, which implicated several bankers and politicians, including the media mogul and lawmaker Peevski.

In Malta, Delia said he had been portrayed “as a traitor by the Labour party press”.

Official willingness to discredit and defame journalists is a Europe-wide phenomenon, but one that is especially acute for independent media outlets that specialise in investigative journalism into official corruption. Politicians at all levels of national and local governments have used their platform to smear journalists and their outlets to undermine often embarrassing revelations. In Bulgaria, this trend has seen journalists, journalist groups and unions labeled foreign agents, manipulators, and, in the case of the Association of European Journalists -- Bulgaria, “scum” and “paid urinals”.

In July 2018 Tchobanov was insulted on Facebook by a Bulgarian MEP Nikolay Barekov, who was under investigation by Bivol. In 2015 Bivol was the target of a smear campaign in mainstream media outlets that appeared to be prompted by investigations into alleged draining of cash from a Bulgarian bank through offshore companies, and abuse of European Union funds, which implicated several bankers and politicians, including the media mogul and lawmaker Peevski.

In Malta, Delia said he had been portrayed “as a traitor by the Labour party press”.

Official willingness to discredit and defame journalists is a Europe-wide phenomenon, but one that is especially acute for independent media outlets that specialise in investigative journalism into official corruption. Politicians at all levels of national and local governments have used their platform to smear journalists and their outlets to undermine often embarrassing revelations. In Bulgaria, this trend has seen journalists, journalist groups and unions labeled foreign agents, manipulators, and, in the case of the Association of European Journalists -- Bulgaria, “scum” and “paid urinals”.

In July 2018 Tchobanov was insulted on Facebook by a Bulgarian MEP Nikolay Barekov, who was under investigation by Bivol. In 2015 Bivol was the target of a smear campaign in mainstream media outlets that appeared to be prompted by investigations into alleged draining of cash from a Bulgarian bank through offshore companies, and abuse of European Union funds, which implicated several bankers and politicians, including the media mogul and lawmaker Peevski.
What should be done?

Mapping Media Freedom’s report into the targeting of investigative journalism highlights issues affecting the accurate reporting of issues that are in the public interest to know.

Index on Censorship first and foremost recommends that all charges against investigative journalists who have been arrested, imprisoned or who are facing legal action must be dropped. Laws designed to impinge on the work of investigative journalists must be reconsidered, and stronger provisions put in place so the right to access to information is respected.

“It is necessary to change some legislation but the political will to do it is lacking,” Spampinato told Mapping Media Freedom. “It is also necessary that journalists and publishers join forces to tackle problems together and reduce the most frequent risks.”

“States should facilitate the work of investigative journalists by strengthening legal protections: decriminalisation of defamation; legal protection of journalistic sources; laws guaranteeing access to public data; transparency laws; legal protection of whistleblowers,” Koksal told Mapping Media Freedom “It is the responsibility of states to guarantee an environment that favours the work of investigative journalists.”

Koksal added that the public, either through public or financial support, can play a big role in improving conditions for investigative journalists. “Journalism is a public good and should be considered as an act on behalf of the public’s right to access information,” he said.

According to the NUJ’s Dooley and Koksal, membership of a trade union or professional association feel better supported when facing pressure. “It is the duty of journalists’ organisations to provide effective support, which starts with the public reporting of threats and the provision of concrete support (legal aid, financial assistance, etc.) to investigative journalists under threat,” Koksal added.

The NUJ has been working alongside investigative journalists who face difficulty in the UK and Ireland, such as Birney and McCaffrey, as well as showing solidarity with journalists facing difficulty elsewhere, including Bulgaria and Turkey, which Dooley said are countries of “profound concern”.

Finally, governments must respect the right of journalists to protect confidential information and sources. This is vital, especially in cases involving whistleblowing in the public interest.