

FINAL VERSION

Slovenia's EU Presidency must not obstruct efforts to improve media freedom in Europe

Prime Minister Janez Janša and his government have repeatedly shown disregard for media freedom. Organisations defending press freedom and journalists call on the Slovenian government to commit to refraining from attempts to undermine initiatives aimed at improving the situation of press freedom in EU member and candidate countries during the EU Presidency. We ask the other EU member states to remain vigilant.

25 June 2021

While fully respecting Slovenia's role as the chair of the European Union (EU) Council from July 1, 2021, we are concerned by the risk that the six-month Presidency will be abused by the government to obstruct efforts to strengthen media freedom in Europe.

Ever since coming into power in March 2020, the Prime Minister Janez Janša and his government have shown disregard for media freedom. They have frequently attacked the Slovenian and international journalists on social networks, attempted to undermine the editorial and financial independence of the public television *RTV SLO* and arbitrarily suspended the funding of the national press agency *STA*. The critical media are pressured by the discriminatory distribution of government advertising, while Slovenia boasts one of the most egregious examples of abusive lawsuits known as SLAPPs filed, among others, by an individual with close links to Janez Janša. An ally of Viktor Orban, the Slovenian Prime Minister has taken his country down the path of the Hungarian regime. This decline is reflected in Slovenia's falling by 4 places to the 36th spot in the [World Press Freedom Index](#) published by Reporters Without Borders in 2021. A full account of the current situation on the ground will be given by the upcoming report of the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) Press Freedom Mission to Slovenia.

Given its important responsibilities for the whole political bloc, the rotating EU Council Presidency is an opportunity for every EU member state to take a leading role in the management of the Union. Slovenia will chair for six months the meetings of the 27 EU member states and represent them vis-à-vis other EU institutions and non-EU countries. The Presidency should act as an honest and neutral broker, but it also has the right to set the Council's agenda and speak on behalf of the Union.

While acknowledging the country's legitimate right to embrace this opportunity, we are concerned about the risk its government may represent for efforts to improve the media freedom in the EU member states and candidate countries. We strongly call upon the Slovenian authorities to stop verbal attacks on journalists, uphold the right to press freedom, and refrain from any actions that further negatively impact the media landscape in Slovenia, the European Union and its neighborhood. And we call on the governments of the other EU member states to ensure a true continuation of initiatives aimed at improving media freedom in the EU and the Western Balkans under the Slovenian Presidency, including initiatives to

promote the rule of law, trustworthy information online, the protection of journalists in general and against the SLAPPs in particular.

“It is because of respect for the fundamental European values and everyone's persistent efforts for the common good that the European Union rises after every fall and becomes even more cohesive and resilient,” reads the [Slovenian EU Council Presidency](#) website, pledging to “strengthen the rule of law and European values, and increase security and stability in the European neighbourhood.” These words are important, and the Presidency will be judged by how closely they are adhered to.

Signatories:

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)

ARTICLE 19

OBC Transeuropa (OBCT)

International Press Institute (IPI)

Free Press Unlimited (FPU)