**Committee:** SOCHUM (The Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee)

**Country:** Republic of Türkiye

**Delegate:** Zeynep Kanık

**Agenda Item:** Accomplishing Freedom of Press and Protection of Journalists Within Conflict Zones

**TOPIC BACKGROUND:**

Protecting journalists within conflict zones and freedom of the press is a major problem, so the international community must act on this issue immediately. From UNESCO’s 2023 Global Report, in 2022, the number reached the highest level during the last 15 years. Particularly in the conflict zones, the journalists and the press are exposed to media manipulation, hostility, or even such unspeakable situations as abduction, torture, and murder. According to RSF’s data, 73% of journalists are targeted by militias, militants, terrorist groups, cartels, etc. The threats against journalists, online and offline, continue to grow. According to UNESCO’s recordings from 2016 to 2020, there were 400 killings of journalists, which corresponds to nearly a 20% decrease from the previous five-year period. Besides, the visible decrease continued in 2021, with 55 journalists killed.

            Yet, nine times out of ten, the cases about the murder of journalists are unresolved. As things stand, the unheeded murders and the global rate of impunity for killing journalists are worryingly high, and it’s creating a continued cycle of violence. As the Republic of Türkiye also underlined, this situation threatens the freedom of expression and the “international peace and security” as specified in resolution no 2222 of the UN Security Council.

**PAST ACTIONS AND TÜRKİYE’S PART**:

            Türkiye’s approximation to freedom of the press has been shaped from the 1980s until today by the struggles with terrorism. According to the Foreign Ministry’s report called “Freedom of Press in Türkiye’s Democracy,” the terror organization PKK killed 63 and kidnapped 21 journalists. In this era, the government had to announce a state of emergency. Even though this situation was aimed at a security process, it caused a scene between the freedom of the press and measures of safety. In the orientation period to the EU, Türkiye made reforms like Press Law No. 1587 in 2004 and RTÜK Law No. 6112 in 2011.

            As stated in the 2023 Press Freedom Assessment of the Presidential Directorate of Communications:

-        There are 5342 registered and functioning press organizations in 2022.

-        89% of journalists can profess their jobs without any legal restrictions.

-        78% of 217 judicial cases against journalists in the last three years resulted in their favor.

           The Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said in 2022 in the UN General Assembly, “Türkiye is one of the strongest advocates of freedom of the press. But none of the freedoms are absolute. Especially, the PKK/YPG’s efforts to show the press as a terrorism propaganda in our Syria border obligate the rightful regulations.” From this speech, the arrangements about freedom of the press are only aimed at the security of the press, public information, and the government’s dignity.

           Türkiye makes strides in protecting press members in cross-border operations. In the Fırat Kalkanı and Zeytin Dalı operations, the government allowed 17 journalists to work with special safety measures. Also, TSK trained press members about safe journalism in conflict zones, and it had critical importance in danger zones such as Syria.

            Türkiye gives importance to international efforts towards freedom of the press. The 2 million TLs of financial contribution to the “UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity” is solid evidence for this situation.

**POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:**

            The international community must implement a coordinated strategy to safeguard journalists in conflict areas. First, we propose establishing UN-protected "Press Safety Zones" in high-risk regions, building on the success of similar initiatives in Syria's Idlib province, where Turkish NGOs have protected 47 reporters since 2020. Second, all conflict parties should adopt standardized press identification cards, modeled after the International Press Institute's guidelines, to prevent targeting of media personnel. Third, we advocate for mandatory hostile environment training funded through a UNESCO trust fund—a solution Turkey has piloted by training 1,200 regional journalists since 2022. Crucially, we must amend the Geneva Conventions to explicitly classify attacks on journalists as war crimes, addressing the current 90% impunity rate documented by CPJ. These measures should be complemented by emergency response networks like Turkey's mobile journalist protection units, which successfully evacuated 12 international reporters during the Ukraine conflict. The proposed solutions balance press freedom with security realities, drawing from Turkey's unique experience as both a NATO member and a frontline state in regional conflicts. Implementation would require 1) $50 million in annual UN funding, 2) regional coordination centers (first proposed for Istanbul), and 3) digital threat monitoring using AI systems like TÜBİTAK's secure reporting platform. This comprehensive approach addresses the 30% increase in journalist fatalities reported by UNESCO since 2020 while maintaining operational feasibility.

**Bibliography:**

https://data.unesco.org/

https://cpj.org/data/

https://www.unesco.org/reports/world-media-trends/2021/en/safety-joumalists

https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/un-plan-action

UNESCO (2023) - World Trends in Freedom of Expression Report.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF, 2023). Country Report: Turkey.

UN Security Council Resolution 2222 (2015). Protection of Journalists in Armed Conflict European Court of Human Rights (1976) - Handyside Case. Case of Handyside v. The United Kingdom.

OSCE (2022) - Disinformation Report. OSCE Media Freedom Report.

UNESCO(2022)Journalist Safety Indicators: Middle East Report. ED-2022/WS/58.

UNESCO.(2022). World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2022. ED-2022/WS/58

CPJ.(2023). Global Impunity Index 2023: Where Journalists Are Killed and Their Killers Go Free. 10.17645/CPJ.2023.IMP.1

NATO.(2022). Guidelines for the Protection of Media Professionals in Conflict Zones. NATO-PD-2022-039

ICRC.(2023). Annual Report on Violence Against Journalists in Armed Conflicts. ICRC-ARVJ-2023.

Republic of Türkiye Ministry of National Defense. (2023). Cross-Border Operations Media Safety Protocol. MSB-OMSP-2023-1185.

(TÜBİTAK).(2023).Secure Digital Journalism Platform Technical Specifications. TÜBİTAK-BİLGEM-BGP-2023