

# **Threats to journalism safety and freedom of expression in Bulgaria**

*Authors:*

**Dr. Lada Trifonova Price**

Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom;

E-mail: [lada.price@shu.ac.uk](mailto:lada.price@shu.ac.uk)

This is a work in progress, prepared to function in the context of the UNESCO WPFC Academic Conference 2020 on the Safety of Journalists.

Please do not circulate or quote from this abstract without the author's permission.

## WPF2020 Academic Conference on Safety of Journalists: Press Freedom and Media Capture

### Abstract

Journalists in many countries are now working in a climate of fear. Bulgaria, a member of the European Union is no exception. This poster is based on qualitative research into safety of journalists in Bulgaria, a country with increasing levels of violence against media workers. It is rated with the lowest score for media freedom among EU states in the latest Press Freedom Index, owing to a widespread corruption and collusion between media, politicians and local oligarchs (RWB, 2020). Interviews with thirty-one Bulgarian journalists were conducted in 2009 and the findings showed that many journalists were facing dangerous challenges and threats to their lives, especially when they conducted in-depth investigations or reported on corruption. The majority of journalists in the sample expressed deep frustration with the inability or unwillingness of the Bulgarian state to: address the issue of impunity; to recognise the attacks against journalists as legitimate and serious threats to media freedom; and to convict the perpetrators of such crimes. Other studies have shown that the ‘politics of impunity’ has become a well-used ‘political tool’ by the state and state sponsored actors to silence independent journalism and encourage self-censorship (Harrison and Pukallus, 2018). The poster will focus on the lessons learnt from the first-hand experience of Bulgarian journalists on safety, violence, threats, and the impact of impunity on their everyday practice. To illustrate more current developments in the field of safety of journalists in Bulgaria, the paper will present three in-depth case studies about the work of three experienced investigative journalists - Rossen Bossev, Genka Shikerova and Ruslan Trad. Research was conducted in 2019 and the case studies will compare and illustrate the challenges that Bulgarian journalists face today, namely judicial persecution, physical and psychological harassment, unfair dismissal and online abuse. The research shows that the threats against journalists have evolved into sophisticated forms of legal and online violence, and intimidation aimed at diminishing Bulgarian journalists’ and the public’s right to freedom of expression.

### References:

Harrison, J. & Pukallus, S. (2018). The politics of impunity: A study of journalists’ experiential accounts of impunity in Bulgaria, Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Mexico and Pakistan. *Journalism*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918778248>

Reporters Without Borders (RWB) (2020) Press Freedom Index: Bulgaria. <https://rsf.org/en/bulgaria>