

Resilient Voices

A stylized illustration in shades of red, orange, and purple. A large hand emerges from the center, holding a megaphone. Below the hand, a dense crowd of people is depicted, many with their arms raised in protest or celebration. The background is filled with smoke or steam, suggesting a scene of intense activity or conflict. The overall tone is one of resilience and defiance.

Defending Free Expression
Amid Raising Pressures

ARTICLE 19

Annual Report 2024

EUROPE

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About ARTICLE 19 Europe

WARNING:

In January 2024, Russian authorities designated ARTICLE 19 as an “undesirable organisation” under the country’s repressive legislation targeting foreign NGOs and rights groups. This move effectively outlawed our activities in Russia, making it a criminal offense for anyone in Russia to cooperate with us, distribute or even access information produced by ARTICLE 19. Individuals found engaging with our organisation risk up to six years in prison and significant administrative fines.

This designation is a clear attempt by Russian authorities to censor us and our advocacy on freedom of expression and further isolate Russian society from international human rights standards.

However, this means that sharing, liking, quoting, or reposting this report, may be considered illegal and result in administrative or criminal liability under Russian law.

About ARTICLE 19 Europe

ARTICLE 19 Europe is a leading voice in the defence of freedom of expression and access to information across Europe and Central Asia. As a regional office of the globally recognised organisation ARTICLE 19, we shape the conversation and develop pioneering responses to both emerging and longstanding human rights threats. We work at the intersection of human rights, technology, and policies to drive systemic change, push back against censorship, and safeguard independent media, freedom of expression online and offline and civic space, while promoting the power of community resistance against abuses of power.

At a time when authoritarianism is rising, when disinformation is weaponised to fuel hostility and downplay critical threats, and when both online and offline spaces – as well as human rights narratives – are increasingly distorted and taken over by monopolistic actors, ARTICLE 19 Europe plays a vital role in promoting information integrity, protecting at-risk communities, and strengthening the resilience of independent media and local grassroots organisations through capacity building initiatives. We work toward reclaiming free speech from those who use the freedom of speech principles to entrench inequality and discrimination.

Through cutting-edge research and advocacy at regional and international levels, strategic partnerships at local and regional level, and legal interventions, we work closely with individuals and organisations driving change from the ground to push back against digital authoritarianism, political repression, and the erosion of civic freedoms.

From the Director

ARTICLE19

EUROPE

When I stepped into the role of Regional Director in August 2024, I joined ARTICLE 19 Europe at a time of profound transformation – both globally and within our own organisation. The year had already been marked by political upheaval, escalating repression, and the growing misuse of digital technologies to suppress dissent and control information. But it was also a year of renewed democratic energy and solidarity – one where civil society, journalists, and communities across our region refused to stay silent.

ARTICLE 19 Europe operates at the intersection of these forces. We are a bridge between grassroots struggles and institutional power, between local realities and European international human rights mechanisms. In a space that is often chaotic and high-stakes, we strive to bring coherence, credibility, and courage to our work. And above all, we seek to centre the needs and voices of those most affected – not only as beneficiaries, but as strategic partners shaping our agenda.

Since joining, my priority has been to strengthen our foundation while amplifying our impact. That means ensuring we are visible and grounded in the Netherlands and across Europe. It means defining a sharper identity for ARTICLE 19 Europe – one that reflects our unique role as a high-level policy actor with deep local roots.

It means investing in internal governance, financial clarity, and team support, so that our people and systems are resilient. And it means protecting time and space for strategic thinking, reflection, and care – because the work we do is hard, urgent, and often personal.

Looking ahead, we are entering 2025 with clear priorities. We will sharpen our focus on information integrity, fight back against digital authoritarianism, and build stronger, more connected civic spaces.

“

We will continue to push for people-centred policies, especially as AI and other technologies reshape the terrain of rights and power. And we will keep creating spaces where civil society can thrive – not just survive.

I am honoured to lead this work alongside such a committed team, and deeply grateful to our allies and supporters. Together, we are building not only defences – but futures.



Antanina Maslyka

Regional Director for Europe

The ARTICLE 19 Europe Annual Report for 2024 summarizes our impact and the major achievements of the team in the last year. It is a testimony to the efforts of not only the Europe office staff, but also our partners, allies and supporters.

In a year which has seen huge challenges presented to the freedom of expression community, ARTICLE 19 Europe has proved to be up to the task. The critical nature of those challenges, has been met with solid, informed and committed responses, all in close collaboration with our partners, allies and supporters.

One of the key moments for ARTICLE 19 Europe Board in the last year, was the appointment of Antanina Maslyka as the new Regional Director. Her arrival, in August 2024, has reinvigorated the team and its networks. Antanina's decisive leadership, deep expertise and drive to build a resilient team and expand ARTICLE 19 Europe's local network, is vital for the organisation and the wider ecosystem of which we are part.

We are confident that through our internal strengthening, and growing presence in The Netherlands and across the countries we operate, we will be better prepared to respond to and influence the challenges facing our region. Part of this vital strengthening work includes improvements in governance and accountability. We look forward to not only approving new Articles of Association to improve how we work but also to expand and strengthen the expertise on the Board.

There is little doubt that 2025 will see an increase in threats to human rights and freedom of expression in Europe and Central Asia. We are confident that ARTICLE 19 will, through its vision, its leadership and strong network of partners, continue to drive the agenda for the protection and promotion of freedom of expression in the region.

The Europe Board remains grateful for the dedication of our activists, our staff, our Board members who hold a vision for freedom of expression in their hearts and fight so hard for others to experience the rights we all have.

Thank you.



David Diaz-Jogeix

The Chair of the Board

Executive Summary

In 2024, ARTICLE 19 Europe stood at the forefront of some of the region's most defining struggles for freedom of expression. As war, repression, and democratic backsliding continued to reshape Europe and Central Asia, we worked to ensure that the right to speak, to know, and to dissent remained protected, visible, and strategically defended.

This year marked two years since the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine – a war that has laid bare the role of information as a battlefield and underscored the urgency of our work. From Crimea to Central Asia, from Brussels to Bishkek, we used every tool available to challenge repression, advocate for digital rights, protect public watchdogs, and champion a people-centred information ecosystem.

2024 was also a year of institutional renewal in the EU. We seized the momentum to influence the direction of the new Commission and Parliament, positioning freedom of expression and information integrity as pillars of democratic resilience. At the same time, we strengthened our presence in the Netherlands and European policy circles, reaffirming ARTICLE 19 Europe's role as both a high-level influencer and a trusted ally to grassroots actors.

Our response was grounded in a firm belief: **freedom of expression and information is the foundation of all other rights.**

We continued our pushback against digital authoritarianism, expanded our advocacy around AI and platform accountability, and helped civil society resist state capture and tech monopolies alike. Our legal interventions before the European Court of Human Rights contributed to key wins, while our work on the ground supported those most at risk – from jailed journalists and exiled activists to communities facing censorship, surveillance, and smear campaigns.

This report tells the story of our impact - from legal victories to strategic advocacy, from protest protection to anti-SLAPP reforms. It also reflects the direction of our strategic priorities: to promote information integrity, combat digital authoritarianism, and protect civic space in all its forms. These priorities are not abstract; they are rooted in real struggles, and in the lived experiences of those who refuse to be silenced.

As we look ahead to 2025, we remain guided by the same imperative: to build a future where freedom of expression is not a privilege for the few, but a guarantee for all.

Stand with Ukraine



Two years into the Russia full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the toll on human lives and infrastructure remains devastating. Thousands have been killed, many more injured, and entire homes and cultural heritage left in ruins.



People march during an anti-war protest, after Russia launched a massive military operation against Ukraine, in Warsaw, Poland, 27 February, 2022. Kuba Atys/Agencja Wyborcza.pl via REUTERS

Repeated violations of international humanitarian law such as bombing of civilian areas have been compounded by attacks on the right to freedom of expression and information – rights increasingly recognised as essential for survival in armed conflicts

Through the year, we intensified our efforts to expose Russia's crimes in Ukraine, recognising that thorough investigation and documentation are crucial for redress, accountability, and justice for the invaded nation. At the United Nations, we actively advocated for **the renewal of the mandate** of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, a vital mechanism for investigating war crimes and human rights abuses.

On numerous occasions in 2024, we highlighted violations against journalists and civil society in Crimea. We also welcomed an important decision by the European Court of Human Rights in the case brought by Ukraine against Russia's systemic human rights violations in the occupied Crimea. The Court **unanimously found** Russia guilty of breaching several provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights including the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly.

We hope that the verdict will help break the information vacuum surrounding human rights violations in Crimea.

Our vision for free and open EU

The 2024 European Parliament election and the formation of a new EU Commission presented a crucial moment for reaffirming the European Union's role in protecting freedom of expression.

We seized this opportunity, and developed and launched a comprehensive manifesto detailing four key priorities for the incoming Commission:



We developed a manifesto detailing four key priorities for the incoming Commission:

The EU fosters an open, fair, and pluralistic communication environment.

The EU integrates human rights into the technology stack and infrastructure.

The EU advances transparency and public access to EU institutional information.

The EU promotes these principles globally, supporting a resilient information ecosystem.

Our vision for free and open EU



Throughout the year, we organised high-level roundtables and public forums, bringing together Members of the European Parliament, digital rights experts, and grassroots activists to discuss threats to freedom of expression, the impact of disinformation, and the urgent need for stronger legal safeguards. Our experts provided briefings and recommendations to parliamentary committees and contributed to public consultations, amplifying the call for an open, rights-respecting digital environment.

In addition, we advocate for a stronger mandate for the new Commission to strengthen the rule of law reporting mechanism and take decisive action against systematic human rights violations in the EU Member States.



Head of UN team Anna Oosterlinck and Senior EU Advocacy Officer Mark Dempsey at the CPDP.ai (Computers, Privacy and Data Protection) Conference.



Challenging digital censorship in the region

Fighting against digital authoritarianism



Governments across the region are increasingly using digital technologies to exert control over citizens, whether through heightened surveillance, breaches of privacy, disinformation campaigns, or restricting access to social media and messaging platforms.

Online repression is often used under the pretext of national security or combating 'hate speech' and 'fake news.'

As digital repression surged, we stood at the forefront of the fight against censorship and repressive internet laws at local and regional levels, urging states and technology companies to uphold their human rights obligations

In May 2024, we welcomed an **important verdict** delivered by the European Court of Human Rights in the case we had closely monitored and supported, involving mass surveillance and Polish human rights activists.

The Court found violations of the European Convention on Human Rights related to the operational-control regime, retention of communications data, and secret surveillance under the Anti-Terrorism Act.

We also continued to expose and challenge the use of spyware in the region. In Poland, we **urged** the government to end mass surveillance and ensure transparency and oversight of the work of the secret services and law enforcement agencies.

We reiterate that unchecked surveillance enables abuse of power, undermines privacy, and chills free expression.

In Slovakia, where democratic backsliding has accelerated, we **raised the alarm** about the chilling effect of spyware on journalists and activists.

At the EU level, ahead of Poland's EU presidency, we joined **an open letter** calling on the delegation to prioritise action against spyware misuse by the member states during its term.

Ahead of Türkiye's municipal elections, we renewed **our call** on big tech to jointly resist political pressure targeting expression protected under international human rights law and adopt heightened transparency in the face of increasing online censorship.

Taming Big Tech

Social media networks are crucial for connecting, sharing, and accessing information. However, big tech has become dominated by a handful of companies. Their business models thrive on capturing our attention and selling it to advertisers, with algorithms designed to keep us engaged – often at the cost of promoting harmful content like hate speech and disinformation. This makes online spheres – often the only platform for expressing dissenting voices – more hostile and ultimately abusive.

We led a coalition of civil society organisations in responding to the European Commission's consultation on draft antitrust Guidelines for exclusionary abuses of dominance. We examined the main shortcomings in the enforcement of Article 102 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which prohibits dominant companies from engaging in abusive behaviour, including behaviour that excludes competitors from the market or takes exploitative advantage of consumers' lack of choice.



Mariana Coan for ARTICLE 19

We are committed to creating a digital environment that is just, safe, open, sustainable, and inclusive. We advocate for people-centric policies, meaningful civil society participation, and accountability to communities affected by technological harm.

In recognition of the significant responsibility that social media platforms have during elections, together with the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), we submitted a **response to a consultation** process by the European Commission for input to their 'Guidelines for Providers of Very Large Online Platforms and Very Large Online Search Engines on the Mitigation of Systemic Risks for Electoral Processes.'

In the submission, we made several key recommendations that promote a human-rights-based approach, including transparent cooperation with authorities and addressing disinformation without censorship. We also emphasised the need to focus on the risks stemming from the platforms' own systems and processes.

Taming Big Tech



We co-hosted Tech & Society Summit – gathering more than 350 representatives from a wide range of NGOs, EU decision-makers, regulators and journalists. Given that 2024 was the EU election year and a new College of European Commissioners was put into place, we joined our partners in **calling for the prioritisation of public interest in EU technology policies and practices.**

These include: rights-based implementation and enforcement of digital laws and policies passed in recent years, such as the GDPR, the DSA, the DMA, and the EU AI Act; and centring the safety of online platforms, products, and services for all, while refraining from legislation that introduces mass surveillance in any form or undermines cybersecurity protections.



Senior EU Advocacy Officer Mark Dempsey at a panel 'Breaking open Big Tech', credits: Omar Havana



Senior EU Advocacy Officer Mark Dempsey at a panel 'Breaking open Big Tech', credits: Omar Havana



DMA

The first year of the Digital Markets Act (DMA) has marked the beginning of a new era in digital regulation.

On 21-22 November 2024, we held **the DMA symposium in Brussels**, bringing together academics, European Commission representatives, technologists, and key stakeholders to examine the DMA's implementation, enforcement improvements, and its beneficiaries. The event highlighted the crucial role independent scholars play in enforcing the DMA and underscored its significance as a key tool for curbing Big Tech's power.

We also joined a coalition of organisations and stakeholders in **a submission of additional information** to the European Commission regarding Apple's proposed compliance measures with the DMA. In the analysis, we highlight how Apple's compliance plans are insufficient and urge the Commission to adopt non-compliance decisions against Apple and to impose the relevant fines.

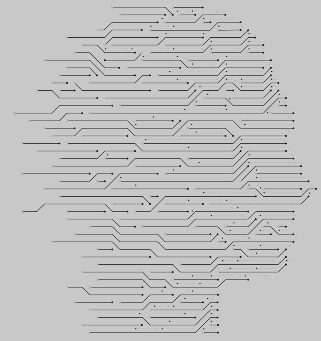


DMA Enforcement: Trends and gaps in the first year of application

21-22 November 2024
Sparks, Rue Ravenstein 60, 1000 Brussels

ARTICLE19

Advocating for algorithmic accountability



Over the last three years, as part of the European Digital Rights (EDRi) coalition, we have advocated for **the EU AI Act** that prioritises human rights. We urged EU lawmakers to limit harmful and discriminatory surveillance as well as to push back on Big Tech lobbying. We call for a human-centric approach to AI regulation, emphasising dignity for people on the move and urging lawmakers to establish clear boundaries against harmful AI uses.

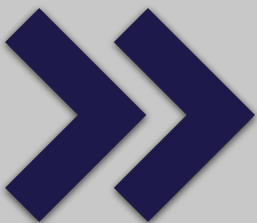
In this spirit, we also joined a coalition of civil society organisations calling for **the Council of Europe's Convention on AI**, to equally cover the public and private sectors and to reject blanket exemptions regarding national security.

Together with partners, we **responded to the European Commission's call for contributions** on competition in virtual worlds and generative AI, specifically regarding Microsoft's investment in OpenAI. We urged the European Commission to review Microsoft's investment to prevent Big Tech from monopolising AI development.

The year of 2025 will be crucial for the EU's AI Act, as various institutions, lawmakers, and companies work on setting standards and driving its implementation. It is essential that civil society groups have a voice in the process and that decisions are made transparently.

In July, we welcomed a statement by on AI Policy by leaders of the European Commission's Competition Directorate General (DG COMP), the UK's Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), the US Department of Justice (DoJ) and the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC). Promoting open, fair, decentralised and diverse digital markets is a core theme of our work in the EU. Addressing the concentration of power that distorts the information environment is one of **our key asks**.

We have been vocal about the threats coming from a power concentration in the AI stack and advocates for more pluralism and fair competition in the market. Together with a group of civil society organisations, we developed **a submission on the merger of Nvidia and Run:ai**, in which we requested the European Commission to open an in-depth investigation. We view this transaction as a means for Nvidia to reinforce its dominant position in the supply of advanced graphics processing units (GPUs) by integrating Run:ai software to build an additional barrier around its chip empire. The ensuing bottleneck poses a serious risk for the entire AI sector – weakening the supply chain and undermining Europe's AI companies to remain competitive in global markets.



Championing fair enforcement of the DSA

The Digital Services Act (DSA) presents an important opportunity to open Big Tech to scrutiny, increase content moderation transparency, and protect human rights online.

We maintain a firm stance that its enforcement should be based on evidence and uphold users' fundamental rights, including freedom of expression.

Together with our partners we have written to European Commissioner Thierry Breton in response to his letter to X regarding his concerns about the spread of 'harmful content,' which could become part of the infringement process under the DSA. We underscored that the DSA must not become a tool for politically-driven interventions.

We consistently advocated that platforms must not only be effective in addressing illegal content but must also ensure that their actions are necessary and proportionate, in strict adherence to international freedom of expression standards. A precise, rights-based interpretation of the DSA is crucial, particularly during times of conflict, to prevent the wrongful removal of lawful content.



Senior Legal Officer Officer Chantal Joris discussed how enforcement of the DSA, requires transparency to ensure that legitimate online content - especially political expression, documentation of rights abuses - is not over-removed. CPDP.ai 2024



Information Integrity



Pushing back on 'foreign agents' laws

When Russia adopted its infamous 'foreign agent' law in 2012, it was initially presented as a simple registry of entities receiving funding from abroad. However, over the years, the legislation evolved into a tool for targeting journalists, media outlets, and human rights organisations. A tool ultimately used to repress anyone advocating for human rights, reporting on violations, exposing corruption, or challenging abuses of power.

In recent years, the concept of 'foreign agents' has gained traction among several governments in the region – including [Georgia](#), [Kyrgyzstan](#), [Türkiye](#) and [Uzbekistan](#) – with proposed laws bearing an alarming resemblance to the Kremlin's playbook.



Protest against a draft law on 'foreign agents' in Tbilisi, Georgia, 9 April 2024. credits: Irakli Gedenidze/ Reuters

At the EU level, we raised serious concerns about [the proposed EU 'Foreign Interference' Directive](#). While presented as a measure to counter malign foreign influence and improve transparency of interest representation on behalf of third countries, its vague and overbroad provisions would inevitably restrict media freedom and freedoms of expression and association. We underscored that the EU should withdraw the proposed Directive and ensure a thorough human rights impact assessment of any future proposals that may adversely affect the media and civic space.

Through the year, we challenged foreign agent-like legislative proposals, providing legal expertise to highlight their clear violations of human rights and international standards, demonstrating their detrimental effects on civil society, and advocating for their repeal.

A beacon of hope came from the European Court of Human Rights, which [ruled](#) that the 'foreign agent' law in Russia violated the rights to freedom of expression and privacy of NGOs and individuals. We hope this landmark decision will provide an effective legal tool for NGOs, media outlets, and activists to challenge similar restrictive measures in other countries.

Claiming the right to information

Following our [EU Manifesto](#), which outlined key priorities for the incoming Commission and Parliament – including enhancing information integrity – we continued our international engagement to increase the transparency of EU mechanisms and promote broad public access to information.

We contributed to [a report outlining recommendations](#) for the European Union institutions, bodies, and agencies on how to improve the effective implementation of the public's right to access EU documents. In the same spirit, we joined partners in submitting [an amicus brief](#) concerning access to information about proceedings related to immunity of members of the EU Parliament.

At the international level, we celebrated a victory for the right to truth about historical human rights atrocities. The European Court of Human Rights [ruled](#) that the Russian government's restrictions on accessing archival documents and information violated individuals' and researchers' rights to freedom of expression and access to information. We submitted [a third-party intervention](#) in one of the cases included in the Court's decision.

At the country level, we joined a coalition of international civil society organisations in [calling on the Slovak Parliament](#) to reject proposed changes to the Whistleblower Protection Act. The proposed changes would severely limit whistleblower protections and significantly hinder the detection of corruption crimes and the sharing of information in the public interest. We also commented on [the concerning proposals](#) to charge fees for responding to some access to information requests and introducing the concept of 'limited information' which would create significant barriers for individuals, journalists, and civil society to hold the government accountable and participate in public life.

We [analysed](#) amendments to the Criminal Code that introduce criminal sanctions for the disclosure of 'non-public' information about pending criminal cases. We argued that this proposal would impede journalists' ability to gather information, affect whistleblowers and severely limit access to information

We also conducted [a legal analysis](#) of the Hungarian Act on the Defence of National Sovereignty, which exacerbates the chilling effect on media and civil society. We also intervened in [an ECtHR case on Hungary](#) which concerns an element of STOP Soros Anti-NGO legislation.

Media freedom



From covering war zones to resisting political and economic pressure, journalists and media outlets across Europe and Central Asia have faced institutional, legal and physical threats, as well as crippling disinformation, making it through another challenging year.

*Journalist covering the Russian's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.
Credit: Shutterstock*

As part of the Media Freedom Rapid Response ([MFRR](#)) mechanism and [the Council of Europe's Platform on Safety of Journalists](#), we remained at the forefront of advocating for resilient, pluralistic and independent media ecosystem. We continued to monitor, document and react to threats against journalists and to address legislative proposals aimed at weakening media freedom.

Once again, we co-authored an annual report of the Council of Europe's Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists.

The '[Press Freedom in Europe: Time to turn the Tide](#)' report assesses the major issues undermining press freedom – including threats and intimidation, detention, restrictive legislation, abusive lawsuits, media capture, and attacks on public service media – and puts forward recommendations to address them.

Media freedom

In 2024, we saw various attempts to meddle in the composition of regulatory bodies, instances of political interference in public media broadcasters, and threats to the broadcasting licenses of independent media outlets, which are often critical of the government.

We engaged in advocacy and issued public statements reminding stakeholders of the core human rights standards that protect resilient media ecosystem, as well as the minimum safeguards required to ensure the independence of public broadcasters and regulatory bodies – including those outlined in the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) and the Council of Europe's recommendations.

In Italy, we called for **a comprehensive reform of the legislation regulating Italian public broadcasters** in line with Article 5 of the EMFA.

In Kyrgyzstan, we **urged the government** to end its campaign of intimidation and legal persecution against journalists and media outlets, overturn a highly concerning decision to liquidate the award-winning investigative outlet Kloop, and ensure independent media can operate freely.

Similarly, we **called on RTÜK**, Türkiye's broadcast regulator, to uphold media pluralism and freedom of expression by reversing its decision to revoke Açık Radyo's broadcasting license and ending censorship of critical and independent outlets.

In Poland, we wrote to Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski, **urging him to reconsider** the decision to slash the budget of Belsat TV, a leading independent broadcaster for Belarus.

We also addressed **growing political pressure** on Slovakia's leading commercial broadcaster, TV Markíza. We also provided comments on the **legislative proposal** concerning public service media, aiming to establish the new Slovak Television and Radio (STaR), which would be subjected to government political control.

In addition, **we wrote to Roberta Metsola and Ursula von der Leyen**, raising serious concerns about the erosion of media freedom in Italy. The letter outlined key findings from our advocacy mission to Rome and called on the new Commission and Parliament to take urgent action.

Media freedom



Head of Programmes and Strategy Joanna Szymańska and Communications Officer Katia Mierzejewska during a meeting with Adam Bodnar, the Polish Minister of Justice. Warsaw, October 2024

In 2024, we participated in press freedom missions in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, **Croatia**, **Georgia**, **Greece**, **Italy**, **Poland**, and **Slovakia**. During these delegations, we met with politicians, government representatives, law enforcement, journalists, journalistic unions, media experts, lawyers, and civil society organizations.



Regional Director for Europe Antanina Maslyka and Head of Programmes and Strategy Joanna Szymańska during a mission to Georgia of the Partner Organisations of the Council of Europe's Platform for the Safety of Journalists and of the MFRR. Tbilisi, October 2024

Each mission concluded with **key takeaways** assessing the state of the media ecosystem and threats to media independence and journalists. These reflections formed the basis of **comprehensive reports**, which outlined **recommendations for necessary reforms**. We continue to monitor situations in these countries.

Addressing deepening erosion of media freedom in Italy



Senior Director of Programmes David Díaz-Jogeix representing ARTICLE 19 Europe during a MFRR mission to Italy, Rome, May 2024

While political pressure on the media and threats against journalists have long characterised the **press freedom landscape in Italy**, rising threats to media independence prompted us to organise an urgent advocacy mission in May. During the mission, we **addressed at length** the growing political interference in public service media, legal harassment of journalists by members of the government, the ongoing reform of criminal defamation, and the potential acquisition of the AGI news agency by an MP.

In addition, we continued our vital work to address legal threats such as SLAPPs against journalists, including by publishing **an analysis of defamation reform** which fails to adequately reflect freedom of expression standards. As part of the CASE Italy working group on SLAPPs composed of leading civil society organisations in Italy, we also published a joint position paper on much needed reforms to counter SLAPPs and better protect public watchdogs from legal intimidation.



Věra Jourová and Thierry Breton, during the press conference, Credits: EU

The EMFA sets common principles for EU Member States to address key threats to media freedom, including media capture, surveillance, political interference, and declining pluralism

In March 2024, we welcomed **the adoption of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)** by the European Parliament. **This is as an important step towards protecting and promoting media freedom and pluralism in the EU.**

With the EMFA now law, we are ramping up our advocacy to ensure it delivers real change on the ground, we are focusing on advocacy to call for an effective implementation of the regulation. We are actively pushing **EU Member States** to take a more ambitious approach, going beyond the EU's minimum standards. In particular, we urge stronger safeguards against intrusive surveillance and spyware to better protect media freedom and journalists' rights.

Towards stronger, more resilient civil societies



Restoring the protection for free expression in Poland

Following a major political shift in Poland enabled by a historic electoral turnout, we outlined **five key priorities** for the new government to restore protections for freedom of expression after eight years of Law and Justice (PiS) rule, marked by an intensified crackdown on the rule of law.



Warsaw, Poland. 1 October 2023. Photo: Grand Warszawski / Shutterstock

While the government led by Civic Platform has strongly reaffirmed that restoring the rule of law is a top priority, its promising declarations have proven more difficult to implement than initially expected. Members of the ruling coalition cite the complexity of the reforms and the risk of a presidential veto. We believe in actions, not words, and will continue to push the government to deliver on its commitments and take concrete steps to strengthen civic space.

We will closely monitor the government's actions and stands ready to lend our expertise and support reforms that strengthen freedom of expression and the rule of law, including through direct advocacy with decision makers and participation in public consultations with civil society.

We call on the government to:

- Decriminalise blasphemy, defamation and insult and **adopt a comprehensive anti-SLAPP law**
- Reform public service media
- Improve protection for the LGBTQ+ community
- Protect **the right to protest**
- End surveillance

Backing Belarusians in their fight



People attend an opposition demonstration to protest against police violence and to reject the presidential election results near the Government House in Independence Square in Minsk, Belarus August 14, 2020. REUTERS/Vasily Fedosenko

On 9 August 2024, Belarus marked the **fourth anniversary** of the fraudulent elections that triggered months of mass pro-democracy protests and an unprecedented crackdown on human rights and civic space. Today, Belarusians continue to face extreme repression, often overlooked by the media.

We remain steadfast in supporting the fight for a free and democratic Belarus. We advocate for the unconditional release of **all political prisoners** and demand their humane treatment while incarcerated. In particular, we amplify cases of judicial harassment through solidarity actions, including those in support of our former colleague **Andrei Aliaksandrau** and rights defenders **Nasta Lojka** and **Ales Bialiatski**. We urge a stronger international response, calling on **the UN** and EU mechanisms to pressure the regime in Minsk to end its systematic human rights violations.

Defending dissent in Russia

In February 2024, our organisation **was deemed 'undesirable' in Russia**. While this reflects our impact in defending free expression, it also poses risks for those engaging with our work. We stand with dissidents, exiles, and protesters who reject a silenced civil society.



*Protest in Petersburg in response to Russia's war in Ukraine.
Photo: Konstantin Lenkov/ Shutterstock*

Over the past two years, we have been at the forefront of exposing and challenging Russia's repression inside its borders. As Russia's full-scale invasion brought devastation to Ukraine, it also served as a pretext for the Kremlin to tighten its grip on civic space at home.

In March 2024, Vladimir Putin secured a fifth term in **a sham election**, with all serious opposition either jailed or in exile. The election was also held in Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories which was a flagrant violation of the international law.

We have consistently advocated against this oppression. At **the 57th session of the UN Human Rights Council**, we welcomed the Special Rapporteur's report and called for renewing their mandate, given Russia's worsening repression. We have shown how draconian censorship laws, 'war censorship,' and the criminalisation of dissent have erased political choice and silenced independent voices. Even referencing the full-scale invasion can now result in imprisonment, and the right to protest faces its harshest suppression since the Soviet era.

Nevertheless, in February 2024, we welcomed an important verdict for the right to information in the context of historical memory, in **Dupuy and Others v. Russia**, in which we intervened. The European Court of Human Rights ruled that Russia's restrictions on accessing historical archives violated freedom of expression and information rights.

Addressing threats against journalists and activists

2024 underscored the growing variety of threats against **journalists** and human rights defenders continue to face for doing their vital public interest reporting. ARTICLE 19 Europe, along with its partners, responded to numerous cases of political pressure, physical violence, surveillance, and judicial harassment against public watchdogs across the region. We expressed solidarity, debunked disinformation and smear campaigns, supported sued journalists – including through trial monitoring – and engaged in national and regional advocacy to keep the erosion of press freedom at the heart of public debate in the EU and targeted countries.



Ukrainian journalist Viktoriia Roshchyna was tortured and died in Russian captivity.

- Death of an Ukrainian journalist **Viktoriia Roshchyna** in Russian detention
- **Physical assault** on **journalists** in Croatia
- **Ongoing crackdown** on civil society in Georgia
- **Jailing journalists** under 'false information laws' in Kazakhstan, which must be repealed
- **Criminal prosecution and detention** of journalists and rights defenders in Kyrgyzstan
- Growing **attacks** and **threats** against journalists in Serbia
- **Political attacks and smears** against a satirical outlet in Slovakia
- **Political attacks, detention**, and legal harassment including terrorism and '**disinformation**' charges against journalists in Türkiye
- Escalating death threats against journalists in **Serbia** and **Türkiye**
- **Online harassment** of women journalists

These cases highlight the urgent need for continued advocacy and action to protect journalists and human rights defenders, ensuring their safety and the preservation of press freedom across the region. We are committed to leading these efforts and standing in solidarity with public watchdogs who face mounting threats.

Against impunity



Giorgos Karaivaz, Daphne Caruana Galizia, Ján Kuciak

Impunity for crimes against journalists erodes press freedom, hinders the public's right to know, as reporting on critical issues carries unaddressed risks, encourages further violence, and ultimately undermines democracy. Slavko Ćuruvija, Ján Kuciak, Daphne Caruana Galizia, Giorgos Karaivaz and others were killed for investigating and exposing crime, corruption and reporting on other vital public interest issues.

That's why we continue to engage in awareness-raising campaigns and advocacy efforts to work towards full justice for the assassinated journalists. Daphne who lost their lives due to their critical public interest reporting. We won't stop demanding full accountability and keep amplifying the late reporters' legacy.

Securing acquittals in cases against journalists in Türkiye



Protest against the 'disinformation censorship' law which is weaponised against journalists. Credits: Shutterstock

ARTICLE 19 Europe stands with journalists in Türkiye who persist in delivering public interest journalism despite growing threats and intimidation.

Journalists in Türkiye continue to face relentless legal harassment for their vital reporting. Even when simply citing third-party social media posts or news articles, and particularly when referring to public figures such as judges or politicians, they risk being dragged into court. Their work – especially when it exposes abuse of power or inconvenient truths – can lead to serious charges.

In 2024, we submitted four expert opinions to Turkish courts in support of journalists **Sinan Aygül**, **Cengiz Erdinç**, **Furkan Karabay** and **Mansur Çelik**. Aygül and Erdinç stood trial for 'spreading disinformation' – a charge criminalised in October 2022, which by November 2024 had led to investigations against more than 4,500 individuals. Karabay and Çelik (whose trials we monitored), faced charges of 'identifying officials on anti-terrorist duties as targets' – an article of the Anti-Terrorism Law frequently used to silence reporting on government officials and members of the judiciary. Three of the cases resulted in acquittals, while the case against Çelik remains pending before the court of appeal.

Our legal interventions can and do make a difference.

Countering SLAPPs



Věra Jourová, former Vice President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency
Credits: Christophe Licoppe (European Parliament)

In February 2024, we welcomed **the European Parliament's adoption of the Anti-SLAPP Directive**, which sets minimum standards for protecting public watchdogs from legal harassment through abusive lawsuits. This pivotal moment was made possible by years of consistent and dedicated work on the ground, carried out in collaboration with the Coalition against SLAPPs in Europe (CASE) and grassroot civil society groups.

As the network grew stronger, we actively participated in public consultations, conducted a comprehensive mapping of SLAPP cases, launched awareness-raising campaigns, provided in-depth legal analyses of key protections needed in the Directive, and engaged in regular advocacy with key EU stakeholders to keep the issue high on the agenda in Brussels. We continued highlighting SLAPP cases against journalists for their critical reporting including **another lawsuit against Serbian investigative media outlet KRIK**.

Now, all eyes are on Member States to build on the foundation set by the EU directive and draft anti-SLAPP laws that effectively tackle the problem. ARTICLE 19 Europe is committed to ensuring that the transposition phase is not a missed opportunity.



Joanna Szymańska and Katia Mierzejewska of ARTICLE 19 Europe with the other organisers of the Anti-SLAPP Conference, Warsaw, April 2024
Credits: Kuba Atys/Agencja Gazeta

Together with partners from AGORA SA, the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, the Prague Civil Society Centre, and Citizen Network Watchdog Poland, we organised a two-day **International Conference on SLAPPs in Warsaw** – the first event of such kind in Poland. The event featured interventions key international and domestic experts including David Kaye, Former UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression; Adam Bodnar, Poland's Minister of Justice; Irena Guidikova, Head of the Democratic Institutions and Freedoms Department at the Council of Europe; and MEP Viola von Crammon.

We welcomed promising declarations made by the Polish Minister of Justice about setting up robust safeguards to counter SLAPPs, which must include decriminalising defamation.

As part of the Polish Anti-SLAPP Working Group, we developed **a legal analysis** outlining crucial reforms needed to ensure robust protections for civil society in Poland against abusive litigation. This publication was accompanied by **an open letter** – signed by over 40 national and local non-governmental organisations and media outlets – calling for a strong anti-SLAPP law.



Poland's Minister of Justice Adam Bodnar, at the anti-SLAPP Conference, Warsaw, April 2024 Credits: Kuba Atys/Agencja Gazeta

We stand ready to share our expertise and to be part of further consultations.

Pushing criminal defamation to the past



We have long argued that any law criminalising defamation violates the right to freedom of expression. Legal trends should move away from such provisions, as criminal defamation laws impose unduly harsh and disproportionate restrictions under the pretext of protecting reputations.

Defamation laws are routinely exploited by powerful figures – such as politicians and businesspeople – to silence journalists and activists through legal threats and proceedings, often under the pretext of protecting their reputation.

In 2024, ARTICLE 19 Europe developed legal analyses that examines defamation and insult laws in several countries including **Croatia** and **Italy**. We set out recommendations on how to better protect freedom of expression. Authorities should implement a comprehensive defamation reform, prioritising the decriminalisation of defamation and thoroughly revising their legal frameworks.

Advocating against the abuse of anti-terrorism and extremist laws

While measures intended to counter terrorism and extremism may have a legitimate aim to address concrete threats to national security, there is a growing trend to instrumentalise such provisions – which are often overbroad – to curtail civil rights and hinder public participation.

We developed a comprehensive report on the implementation of such laws in Eastern Europe and Central, their compatibility with the international standards on freedom of expression as well as put forward recommendations for needed reforms. Major concerns about the examined laws in the region include the excessive and sometimes unjustified prosecution of individuals for ‘incitement to violence’, overbroad criminalisation or ‘discreditation’ in retaliation for criticising authorities. In 2024, we also welcomed the European Court of Human Rights’ **ruling in a Russian ‘extremism’ case**, which found that prosecuting the applicant for critical videos on religion violated his freedom of expression. We co-submitted a third-party intervention.



Turkish journalist Furkan Karabay is facing terrorism charges for criticising a judge

We have long been documenting and advocating against the misuse of the criminal provisions such as ‘being a member of a terrorist organisation’, ‘insulting a public official in relation to their duty’, and ‘disclosing the identity of officials on anti-terrorist duties and identifying such persons as targets’. We will continue to closely monitor cases of judicial harassment for critical reporting.

In addition, we **monitored trials** of several journalists facing terrorism-related and other criminal charges such as **insult or calumny** in Türkiye. In our view, all these cases demonstrate undue interference with the right to freedom of expression.

Supporting freedom to protest

The right to protest is fundamental to an informed and resilient civil society, enabling people to voice concerns, express discontent with political leaders and push for change. The power behind grassroots civil movements to challenge the status quo makes many governments uneasy. That's why, instead of protecting the right to protest, they seek ways to restrict it.



Demonstrations in support of prisoners of conscience in Tbilisi
Credits: Wikimedia

Towards the end of the year, we witnessed a surge of **mass anti-government protests in Georgia**, with no end in sight. As more people took to the streets to oppose the decision to halt EU accession talks, the authorities responded with increasing violence. We stand in solidarity with the people of Georgia and call on the government to uphold the constitution, adhere to international human rights standards, and reject the path of authoritarianism.

In 2024, we continued efforts to improve the protections of the right to protest through legal analyses, awareness-raising activities and advocacy.

Supporting freedom to protest

As part of the global [#FreeToProtest](#) campaign, we continued our work in Poland.

We submitted **an amicus brief** to the Polish Supreme Court in a criminal case against three activists accused of 'offending religious feelings' in response to an activist action. The activists displayed posters showing Holy Mary adorned with a rainbow halo to protest increasing smear campaigns against and discrimination of LGBTQIA+ people. The activists were ultimately acquitted.



Our Joanna Szymańska attended a meeting with the Ministry of Interior alongside partners from Amnesty International, Warsaw, September 2024.

We also developed **a legal briefing** that highlights the critical reforms needed to protect the right to protest. This briefing draws on our report '[Poland in Peril: Democracy or Authoritarianism?](#)'.

We presented our analysis to the Ministry of the Interior and the police at a meeting organised in collaboration with Amnesty International Poland, initiating a constructive dialogue. Following the meeting, we and our local partners sent **a joint letter** to the Prime Minister regarding the law on assemblies. In response, his office acknowledged our concerns and confirmed that discussions would continue.

Subsequently, the Ministry of the Interior reaffirmed the urgent need to reform the law on assemblies including the controversial provisions on 'cyclical assemblies'. They also encouraged our participation in the upcoming consultations.

#CheckitFirst



For our [#CheckitFirst](#) campaign, run the Western Balkans, we asked journalists to embrace ethical journalism and lead by example. The campaign aimed to improve the accuracy of news in the region through capacity building and educational materials. It encourages journalists to resist biased reporting and follow ethical standards.

This campaign aimed to rebuild trust in journalism by promoting ethical standards and countering disinformation.

Our key objectives were to:

- **Strengthen journalists' adherence to ethical journalism as a tool to combat disinformation;**
- **Foster a commitment to the core principles that underpin the journalism profession;**
- **Promote credible and reliable news sources that contribute to a healthier media landscape;**
- **Empower the public to demand fair and accurate reporting, helping to reduce the spread of disinformation in the four target countries.**

The campaign featured an ethical journalism competition, with winners visiting Brussels and London to meet fellow journalists, EU policymakers, and activists. They were later commissioned to write op-eds on disinformation in their countries. The campaign also showcased interviews with renowned regional journalists promoting ethical journalism, and encouraged others to sign a pledge affirming their commitment to ethical standards and combating disinformation.

Enhancing advocacy impact



In 2024 we continued to deliver well-attended capacity building workshops for civil society actors, equipping them to engage more effectively with the international human rights mechanisms – such as the Council of Europe and the UN – to advocate for a better protection of freedom of expression in their countries.

At the UN level, ARTICLE 19 Europe together with partners:



Delivered an oral submission to the UN Human Rights Council on restrictions to **freedom of expression online in Türkiye** and the throttling of social media platforms in the country



Issued a statement on the report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on **the ongoing repression in Belarus**



Met with **the Group of Experts and made a statement** during the interactive dialogue on their oral update to raise awareness of violations of the right to freedom of expression that continue in Belarus



Contributed to reports by UN Special Rapporteurs on:

- The situation of human rights defenders operating in remote and rural areas;
- Freedom of expression and elections in the digital age **authored by Irene Khan** which included specific references to **our submission regarding Türkiye**



Co-signed a **civil society letter** addressed to Permanent Representatives of Member and Observer States of the UN Human Rights Council, calling for the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Russia



Governance and organisational update

In 2024, ARTICLE 19 Europe continued its path towards becoming a fully independent affiliate regional office of ARTICLE 19, with stronger institutional presence in the Netherlands and clearer internal structures. A new Regional Director joined in August 2024 to lead this transition and build on the foundations laid in previous years.

One of the key developments was the start of the process to revise the Articles of Association. The aim is to bring the governance structure more in line with how civil society organisations typically operate in the Netherlands. This includes introducing a two-tier model with an Executive Board and a Supervisory Board, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and strengthening oversight and accountability mechanisms.

Work also began on adjusting internal systems and policies to reflect this governance shift and to support the team in operating more independently within the wider ARTICLE 19 network.

In 2024, we also finalised preparations for joining The Hague Humanity Hub, with formal membership starting in 2025. Becoming part of this community is an important step in our efforts to connect more actively with other civil society actors in the Netherlands and strengthen our visibility and networks locally.

These developments reflect a broader goal of ensuring ARTICLE 19 Europe is well-positioned – both legally and operationally – to act as an effective and independent voice for freedom of expression in the region.

Supporting partners of ARTICLE 19 Europe

Our work in 2024 would not have been possible without the continued support of our partners and donors. We are grateful for their trust and collaboration, and we look forward to continuing to work together to protect freedom of expression and strengthen civic space across Europe and Central Asia.

- Adessium Foundation
- The European Union
- Open Society Foundations
- U.S. Department of State
- Global Climate Legal Defence
- German Federal Foreign Office (via Austausch e. V.)

