

## North Macedonia: Media freedom groups urge authorities to cease harassment of journalist Furkan Saliu

08 May 2024

Dear Minister for Internal Affairs Mr. Pance Toskovski,  
Dear President of VMRO DPMNE Mr. Hristijan Mickoski,

The undersigned media freedom and freedom of expression organisations are writing to express our grave concern at the harassment of prominent North Macedonian journalist Furkan Saliu and his colleagues, including his detention<sup>1</sup> on 07 April in Sredno Konjare, in the municipality of Petrovec. The police involved in this particular incident claim they were attacked by Saliu and another man while they attempted to stop a fight between football fans. Saliu denies this claim. In a statement<sup>2</sup>, the journalist explained that he was filming the police at a football match when they started to beat an innocent boy. The police tried to confiscate the journalist's phone before detaining him. Footage from the incident<sup>3</sup> shows Saliu saying that he cannot breathe while being held on the ground by riot police.

The journalist has also been informed that three minutes of CCTV footage of the incident have allegedly been deleted. If confirmed, this would represent a worrying case of interference with evidence of an attack against the journalist.

We view his detainment as a serious attack on press freedom and a blatant attempt to intimidate and pressure a journalist working entirely within his rights. While we welcome his subsequent release, we remain concerned by the incident and will continue monitoring the situation closely.

We regret that a complaint against police officers filed by The Association of Journalists of Macedonia (ZNM) and the Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers (SSNM) was dismissed by the Department for Internal Control, Criminal Investigations, and Professional Standards of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The MFRR has offered legal support to cover the journalist's lawyer's fees.

The decision to detain Saliu and subsequent accusations of assault represent a deeply concerning targeting of the journalist. A press freedom fact-finding mission to North Macedonia<sup>4</sup> in 2023 noted fragile progress made in the country in recent years with regards to press freedom, but nevertheless underscored several systemic threats facing independent journalism. In particular, the mission delegation noted a worrying recent trend of politicians using denigrating and hostile language towards journalists with little to no accountability. This

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<sup>1</sup> <https://fom.coe.int/en/alerte/detail/107640828>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/PortalixX/posts/pfbid0gpug72VyfuJBWUrzC2emHTDUQPozVBjMkyhMT2L1sDkw8fc2vB2irxhJrHXyktMJl>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otUC4g9TAdo&t=8s>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ecpmf.eu/report-fragile-progress-on-media-freedom-in-north-macedonia/>

finding is particularly prescient given comments made about the case by Minister for Internal Affairs Mr. Pance Toskovski. On 7 April, Minister Toskovski called on political parties, associations, unions, and all other relevant groups to refrain from making statements on the case. However, in the same Facebook post<sup>5</sup>, the Minister publicly commented on the case, claiming that Saliu attacked a police officer, which ultimately led to his arrest. One day later, during a press conference held on 08 April<sup>6</sup>, Minister Toskovski claimed that he had seen a video recording of Saliu obstructing or potentially attacking a police officer. When Saliu asked Minister Toskovski for more information about this, he refused to engage, instead he deflected the question and probed Saliu about the firearm found in his car – which he has a licence to carry.

We find this public singling out of the journalist by a high-ranking political figure to be extremely problematic. The comments made by Minister Toskovski about Saliu and the case – before an official investigation has been conducted – may put undue pressure on police investigating the case. The comments will additionally place a target on the journalist's back by further circulating claims that he attacked a police officer, which Saliu firmly denies.

We urge Minister for Internal Affairs Mr. Pance Toskovski to cease publicly commenting on the case and singling out the journalist. It is vital that journalists are able to work freely and safely, without intimidation from authorities.

Sincerely,

European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)  
European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)  
International Press Institute (IPI)  
OBC Transeuropa (OBCT)  
Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

**SafeJournalists Network**

*Association of Journalists of Kosovo*  
*Association of Journalists of Macedonia*  
*BH Journalists Association*  
*Croatian Journalists' Association*  
*Independent Journalists Association of Serbia*  
*Trade Union of Media of Montenegro*

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=409101221855857&rdid=9c3fLXkNY55aCgqw>