

# PROTECTING Freedom of the Press



## European Union

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**A**s a reporter on Azerbaijan's first independent daily newspaper Azadliq, Agil Khalil survived two murder attempts as a result of attempting to cover a story. He had to leave the country to save his life. His editor has spent time in prison and several of his former colleagues are still detained. Khalil is one of numerous journalists in exile helped by Reporters Without Borders, an organisation dedicated to defending freedom of the press, assisting journalists threatened, repressed or attacked by authorities solely because of the kind of information they provide.

EU aid through EIDHR worth 616,000 euros over a period of three years has helped Reporters Without Borders fund a help desk in Paris which coordinates a rapid response to calls for assistance from all media at risk, under threat or in difficulty. The organisation provides legal aid to journalists in prison or on trial and financial aid to their dependants and to the families of murdered journalists. It funds medical expenses where necessary, helps obtain visas for media forced to flee their countries and subsidises accommodation for displaced journalists.

They include journalists like Amanuel Ghirmai who fled his job in Eritrea to avoid prison for not supporting the government line. A Somali journalist who recently escaped over the border to Kenya is still in fear of his life following death threats from Islamist militias; Reporters Without Borders will help him with his application for asylum. Burmese and Rwandan journalists are among those living in exile in France.

The work of Reporters Without Borders is not solely concerned with helping journalists in countries where repressive regimes attempt to silence media outlets that question them. EU financial assistance has also enabled Reporters Without Borders help keep the presses going on three independent newspapers hit by the recent flooding in Pakistan's Swat Valley.

As well as being able to supply computer equipment and broadcast material to struggling media, RSF is also been able to provide bullet-proof vests, helmets and first-aid kits for journalists working in hostile regions and can arrange for war zone insurance at preferential rates.