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Negative signal

Investigative journalist receives threats from EU Kosovo mission

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Vehbi Kajtazi, an investigative journalist with the Kosovan newspaper *Koha Ditore*, says he was directly threatened by members of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (Eulex) over his reports that senior mission officials were suspected of corruption.

Earlier this week *Koha Ditore* began running a series of articles on suspected corruption on the part of senior Eulex officials in the country. The mission's head, Gabriele Meucci, told a press conference yesterday that the allegations would be "pursued vigorously".

Before publishing his stories, Kajtazi sought the mission's views on the information in his possession. In response, he was summoned to an interview with Kate Fearon, special adviser to the head of mission, who asked him to hand over the documents to Eulex if he wanted a response. Legitimately, he refused the request.

Kajtazi says that, after the interview, he received threats originating from the higher echelons of Eulex. *"The main advisor to the head of EULEX warned me that if I write about the case in question (about the allegations of corruption in the mission), that I could be prosecuted."*

Such behaviour is a serious matter within an EU mission whose goal is to help restore the rule of law in Kosovo and establish respect for European democratic values.

"By putting pressure on an investigative journalist, the Eulex mission is acting contrary to all fundamental principles of the European Union regarding freedom of information," said Reporters Without Borders secretary general Christophe Deloire.

"Eulex has lost a great deal of credibility and the mission has sent a highly negative signal to the local authorities. Why would they think twice about putting pressure on journalists from now on if the EU, which is supposed to be leading Kosovo along the path to democratic norms, thinks it can threaten them with prosecution?"

The editor of *Koha Ditore*, **Agron Bajrami**, said his newspaper had previously received such threats, but this was the first time in its history that they have been made by members of an international mission.

"We do experience these kind of threats from local politicians and institutions frequently," he told Reporters Without Borders. *"In few instances, there were also attempts from internationals to 'negotiate' publications which they didn't like. But, I don't recall seeing an organized attempt from an international institution, an EU mission, to pressurize journalists to prevent publication go this far!"*

Eulex spokeswoman Dragana Nikolic gave Reporters Without Borders a different version of events. She said she was present during the interview and did not witness threats of any kind being made against the journalist.

"The mission met Vehbi Kajtazi in good faith in order to give more specific answers to his questions... His allegations of threats are incorrect. He was asked to hand over the documents in his possession so that [Eulex] could respond to his questions more appropriately," she said.

She spoke of a "a little bit of misunderstanding", insisting that Eulex had no interest in preventing the publication of any articles and stressing that the mission's deep commitment to press freedom. At yesterday's press conference, the Eulex representatives gave assurances that no proceedings had been launched against the journalist.

The Eulex mission was launched in 2008 to support the efforts of the authorities' to restore the rule

of law in Kosovo. Based in its capital, Pristina, it employs 1,500 local and international staff and has a budget of 111 million euros.

Kosovo is ranked 80th of 180 countries in the [2014 World Press Freedom Index](#) published by Reporters Without Borders.

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