

COVID-19: IFJ Urges European Governments Not to Limit and Control Press Conference Questions

07 April 2020

<https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/covid-19-ifj-urges-european-governments-not-to-limit-and-control-press-conference-questions.html>

Some European countries have decided to limit and control journalists' questions during government press conferences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) calls on all governments not to restrain media activity and organise online press conferences in a way which enables journalists to ask questions without prior filtering.



Credit: PIERRE-PHILIPPE MARCOU / AFP

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many European countries to find alternative ways to organise press conferences. Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom and France are using online tools to keep the long-standing protocols to hold regular or daily press conferences. However, in the last few weeks, some countries such as Ireland, Spain and Slovenia have organised press conferences where journalists have been forced to send their questions in advance and were not allowed to ask supplementary questions. There have also been allegations that some questions submitted have not been selected.

On 3 April, the Irish Secretary of National Union Journalists (NUJ) Séamus Dooley, expressed his concern to the Irish Minister for finance and public expenditure, Paschal Donohoe, when he required journalists to submit written questions in advance of the press conference. *“The current crisis should not be used as a pretext for limiting the ability of the media to question ministers directly or to change long-standing protocols”*, Dooley warned.

In Spain, the government used to keep in touch with media professionals by means of a WhatsApp group of 220 enrolled journalists. Spanish IFJ affiliates, Federación Asociaciones Periodistas España (FAPE) and Federación de Sindicatos de Periodistas (FeSP) condemned the government's control over journalists' questions and urged the authorities to ensure at the daily videoconference the right to follow-up questions. On 6 April, the Spanish government accepted the unions' request.

On 20 March, the Slovene Association Of Journalists (SAJ) reacted strongly to new government measures when it banned journalists' participation in press conferences.

IFJ General Secretary, Anthony Bellanger, said: *“We call on all governments to ensure a direct line of communication with journalists and to avoid restrictive and controlling protocols over their work. Journalists must be able to ask their questions without passing through the authorities filter and to ask additional questions when necessary”*.