

Today, 17 February 2023, marks one year since journalist Emilia Șercan [filed a police complaint](#) about cybercrime and violation of privacy after she discovered five stolen personal pictures taken about twenty years ago had been published on 34 porn websites. The next day, Șercan found that a Moldovan website had published an article containing the five stolen pictures and a Facebook Messenger screenshot she had provided to the Romanian police. One year and multiple criminal complaints later, investigations have failed to identify either the perpetrator or the source of the alleged leak from within the police force, despite repeated [calls for accountability from press freedom organizations](#) and European bodies.

Accordingly, our organizations today [our call on the Romanian authorities](#) to designate the investigation a priority and dedicate sufficient resources to it. We also ask that the prosecutorial services merge the cases to improve efficiency and speed up the investigations and urge the Prosecutor General to receive Emilia Șercan, as she has requested on multiple occasions. We continue to have serious concerns about the implications of the case for media freedom in Romania more broadly, especially given the context. In January 2022, Șercan had revealed that Prime Minister Nicolae Ciucă plagiarized his doctoral dissertation, after which she received several threats to her safety.

Not only have the Romanian authorities yet to respond meaningfully to concerns about the investigation's lack of progress, including after [local](#) and [international](#) experts disproved the police's claim that the leak must have taken place before the journalist reached the police station, but Șercan now faces [another coordinated smear campaign](#) aimed at discrediting her public interest journalism, which appears to have been directed by the governing National Liberal Party (PNL). It follows the publication of two articles, in September and November 2022, in which Șercan revealed that former Minister of Education Sorin Cîmpeanu and Home Affairs Minister Lucian Bode, a member and the general secretary of the PNL respectively, also plagiarized.

On 9 January, online outlet Hotnews published information it obtained showing that PNL leadership instructed the party's politicians to discredit Șercan if they were asked about the issue in media interviews. At the same time, two ghost media websites with opaque ownership, dezvaluiri.net and oradestiri.net, published anonymous articles attempting to discredit Șercan that also appeared as sponsored posts on Facebook. Misreport, a Romanian platform specialized in tackling misinformation, conducted an analysis showing that the promotion was paid for by Green Pixel Interactive, an advertising agency registered as having contracts with PNL in the campaigns for the parliamentary and local elections in 2020. After Misreport called Green Pixel Interactive, the two ghost websites were deactivated, and their Facebook pages were deleted. Green Pixel Interactive did not answer questions about whether it was operating on behalf of PNL or its representatives.

This renewed harassment of Șercan is unacceptable and, given the prominent players apparently involved in its coordination, has a chilling effect beyond the case at hand. Accordingly, the undersigned organizations call on the leadership and members of the PNL to

immediately condemn the smear campaign and to issue clear instructions not to discredit Şercan any further.

Meanwhile, we also call on the EU institutions to continue to follow the case closely and to consider its implications for media freedom and the rule of law in Romania in relevant regional-level processes. Specifically, the European Commission's 2022 Rule of Law report [considers](#) intimidation of journalists as a press freedom concern in Romania. Considering no progress appears to have been achieved in the investigations, and in light of the new smear campaign against her, we call on the European Commission to ensure that this is reflected in the forthcoming publication of the 2023 Rule of Law report chapter on Romania, as it is testament to the lack of adequate commitment to press freedom by Romanian public officials.

We call on the authorities and politicians to show they respect Romania's European commitments and obligations to press freedom by effectively prosecuting the harassment of Emilia Şercan and condemning any politically sponsored smear campaign.

Signed by:
ActiveWatch

ARTICLE 19 Europe

Coalition For Women In Journalism (CFWIJ)

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)

European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

Free Press Unlimited

International Press Institute (IPI)

OBC Transeuropa (OBCT)

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)