

INFOCUS

European protection for journalism

C4EP analysis on the subject – *European protection for journalism – debate of values or of sovereignty?*

“The European Union in general builds its competence to protect journalists and media freedom within its member states based on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. These include respect for media freedom and pluralism and the right to freedom of expression. The problem is, that journalism currently is not threatened by the EU or its institutions, but by practices and sometimes by the legislation of member states – as a result of this, any criticism of this subject immediately takes the form of Union-member states debate, and also attracts elements from ongoing legal-political debates from the member states’ political spheres.

During the past years, the European Union has taken several measures to protect journalists and media freedom...”

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European Commission info page on the European Media Freedom Act

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Euronews: MEPs accuse EU countries of undermining attempts to protect journalists

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Euractiv: EU Council endorses anti-SLAPP directive position, not everyone is convinced

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Transparency International: European Anti-SLAPP Directive under threat

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EU governments plan ‘blank cheque’ to spy on journalists

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C4REPORT

The Scottish First Minister's Visit to Brussels – Strengthening Scotland's Pro-European, Pro-Independence Mission, and Elevating Relations with the EU – 27 June 2023

Since the Brexit referendum in 2016, Scotland has been vocal in its desire to remain part of the EU, as the majority of its citizens voted to remain. However, Scotland's pro-European stance was not reflected in the UK's decision to leave the EU. The Scottish government has consistently advocated for maintaining close ties with the EU, protecting Scotland's interests, and exploring the possibility of holding a second independence referendum.

Humza Yousaf, Scotland's new First Minister's (FM), visited Brussels in his first ever international trip to reiterate Scotland's commitment to the European project – during this visit this event has taken place on 27 June at the EPC...

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C4EP Young Speakers' Corner: The paradox of not voting – The disillusioned youth – 29 June 2023

Looking around in the current political climate in Europe, we wanted to tackle the issue of the participation of young people in voting – or rather the reasons for their non-participation.

Preparing for the event, we posed three questions:

- What do you think prevents young people from participating in the voting process?
- What are your personal experiences when it comes to voting or not voting?
- How could we engage young people to vote in a way that resonates with them?

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C4EPOSITION

Sándor Zsíros, journalist, EU correspondent, Euronews:

Protection of journalism in the EU – too little, too late

Maltese journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia was murdered in October 2017 by a car bomb and shortly after Slovak reporter Jan Kuciak and his fiancé Martina Kušnírová were shot dead in Slovakia in early 2018. The shockwaves sent through Europe by these crimes were considered by many as a wake-up call: Journalists are facing existential threats also in the EU, not only in Russia and Turkey. But looking back to the last decade of media developments in Europe, one has to say murders were only the tip of the iceberg. Physical violence and threats are unforgettable, but they are only one factor behind journalism, as a whole losing ground very quickly across the continent. And it seems that the EU – and especially the European Commission already missed the opportunity to act.

Developments in my own country, Hungary are extreme examples of what is going on lately also in many other member states: political influence of media ownership results in less pluralism and shrinking space of free journalism. It is not a surprise that we see similar tendencies in an illiberal country like Poland, while Greece became the single worst EU country for press freedom because of widespread wiretapping. Generally, journalism suffers even in Western Europe from more pressure and less funding.

Against this backdrop, the European Commission has been silently watching the events until 2019, when Vice President Vera Jourová announced plans for the European Media Freedom Act. This legislation shows at least that the EU executive is intercepting the deep problems of the media sector and is willing to act. Once adopted, it will require member states to increase the transparency of media ownership, regulate state advertisement, forbid the use of spyware like Pegasus or Predator against journalists, and will demand real independence for public broadcasters. While I do agree with all of these aims I remain strongly sceptical whether the EU will be able to deliver.

First of all, we know that EU decision-making usually results in a weak compromise that is acceptable for most member states and MEPs. So it is very likely that the text will be watered down to a level where it won't hurt anyone. Secondly, it will probably not be able to protect the revenues of traditional media companies where they have to compete with big tech like Facebook or Twitter. And last but not least, I have doubts about whether the EU will have the appetite to act. Just one example from the past: Brussels did not use the existing competition tools it had at hand when Hungary's government circles established KESMA, a non-profit foundation of 500 media outlets. When I asked Jourová about this (see the interview below), she said the deal's net value was too small for the Commission to start a competition case. I am afraid that the damage in journalism is already done and it will be hard to undo that. While I remain largely sceptical, I also hope that Jourová and the Commission prove me wrong so the EU might have a real impact on the media landscape, other than just naming the European Parliament's pressroom after Daphne Caruana Galizia.

For the abovementioned interview on the issue with Vera Jourová, open the link below:

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