R1 Media freedom and independence under attack

Proposer:	Young Greens South Tyrol, Joves Ecosocialistes, Swiss Young Greens
Agenda item:	8. Resolutions

Motion text

The Federation of Young European Greens (FYEG) recognises threats to media freedom and independence.

Organisations such as "Reporters without borders" (RSF) have detected an increased number of threats against journalists and pressure to interfere in political reporting. Examples of this influence, especially from national governments, can be found in the Italian broadcaster Rai and the Hungarian Duna Média, who tend to provide biased coverage favouring the leading party.

As it is clear that European institutions cannot and should not interfere with reporting in the single member states, the EU should guarantee the independence of public broadcasters, which should be reporting neutrally and not for the single governments.

The EU should impose on public broadcasters of all member states to fulfill certain criteria to guarantee independent and balanced reporting. Governments should guarantee editorial independence from the Supervisory board and establish transparent and objective access mechanisms for journalists who work in public broadcasters.

Quality journalism is often buried behind advertisements and bot-driven trends in search engines. Public service media must have the right to findability to be shown under the top search results. In addition, search engines and social media platforms should be obligated to ensure algorithmic neutrality towards democratic content to prevent preferential treatment towards certain media.

Furthermore, the EU should work to build and maintain independent European digital infrastructures to reduce reliance on US companies. TV-networks like “arte” should be expanded to other European countries and be supported to reach a bigger audience and contribute to European integration through common media platforms.

It is important to not just look at the public media but also to media plurality

in the private sector. In some territories, the media landscape is dominated almost exclusively by large media groups. In South Tyrol, for instance, Athesia covers more than 80% of the media landscape and is the media outlet receiving most public funds in Italy. These conditions make it very hard for independent media to work properly and reach an audience. In addition, public discussions are primarily conducted by these large media groups, influencing the political climate in the region.

In the last few years, the quantity of misinformation and fake news has seen a considerable increase. A major deterioration happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, fuelled by the spreading of conspiracy "theories". Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine is another area that has given rise to disinformation in Europe. Also concerning is that the Kremlin has used bot-farms and corruption to influence European elections, such as in Moldova or Hungary. FYEG acknowledges the European Digital Media Observatory’s critical work, as it shows that the EU has started to fight misinformation. Nevertheless, disinformation campaigns continue to evade accountability, particularly on social media platforms that fail to act on EDMO’s findings.

Another problem is that many media outlets have lost trust as they are accused of pro-government reporting, especially those receiving public financing. These critics can be justified, as public financing guided by the government may impair independent journalism. It is fundamental that everyone has accessible information about public financing to media outlets.

In countries like Italy, so-called SLAPP suits are used to censor, intimidate and silence critics. Even if the plaintiff does not expect to win the lawsuit, this burdens journalists with time and costs for a legal defence. This is a serious limitation of press freedom, as these lawsuits lead to intimidation, exhaustion and often to self-censorship.

Journalists working in war zones and conflict areas face unprecedented risks, including targeted killings, arbitrary detention, digital surveillance, and psychological warfare. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, conflicts in Southwest Asia, and authoritarian crackdowns in regions like Belarus and Turkey have made journalism one of the most dangerous professions in the world. Beyond physical threats, journalists are increasingly targeted by spyware (e.g., Pegasus), legal persecution, and economic precarity, and the prohibition of access to war zones, forcing many into self-censorship or exile. The impunity for crimes against journalists - around 85% of murders remaining unpunished according to UNESCO - further emboldens perpetrators. While many examples arise, Israel is one of the worst, having killed 86 journalists in 2025 from a total of 129 globally according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). Without robust protections, independent reporting from conflict zones will disappear, leaving war crimes and human rights abuses uncovered and unchallenged.

FYEG also acknowledges the importance of media literacy for a functioning democratic society. Education is the best way to help young people grow into well-informed citizens that can distinguish fake news from good information and populism from well-researched social-media content. Digital and media literacy also includes the identification of bots, the verification of sources and the understanding of algorithmic bias.

With all this in mind, we, the Federation of Young European Greens demand that:

- The EU should obligate member states to guarantee an independent financing of public broadcasters through licence fees.

- Public broadcasters are owned by an independent foundation, which is overseen by a supervisory board. The number of politically nominated representatives should not exceed a third and should represent both the voted-in majority and the opposition as equally as possible. To fully represent the diversity of the country, the rest should be filled with representatives of civil society, such as trade unions, religious communities, universities, young people, minorities such as migrants and representatives of economic and cultural groups. The foundation’s supervisory board should not interfere in editorial decisions.

- The Supervisory boards of the public broadcasters themselves should not have any politically nominated members but should be elected among the broadcasters’ staff and civil society representatives.

- Public service media create independent ombudspeople with binding powers to investigate censorship, block political interference, and enforce editorial independence.

- Public broadcasters should build and maintain independent European digital infrastructures such as a European streaming platform to reduce dependence from US tech-companies.

- A 'Right to Findability' for Public Service Media is established on all digital interfaces and that Algorithmic Neutrality is ensured for democratic content.

- Social media companies must be legally required to label AI-generated content and prioritize verified public service media in algorithms during elections and crises.

- Social media platforms should be obligated to rigorously delete messages spreading hate and racism through content moderators.

- The EU and member states establish mandatory transparency rules for online

platforms to expose and dismantle bot farms and disinformation networks, particularly those linked to foreign interference in elections.

- The EU should empower the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) with enforcement tools, including mandatory platform cooperation and fines for non-compliance. Funding for EDMO’s local hubs must be increased and social media companies must be legally required to act on its findings.

- European funding that supports independent journalism should be allocated. The size of the funding should be in proportion to media quality ranking assessments, guaranteeing a stronger support for media in countries with a more critical situation.

- Journalists should be protected from SLAPP suits through the full implementation of the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive by 2027. The EU should put pressure on countries like Italy and Hungary, which are delaying transposition into national law.

- The protection for journalists who work in warzones or critical situations should be strengthened. The EU Magnitsky Act should be used to sanction states and actors that target journalists. Governments should push for ICC investigations into attacks on media workers as war crimes.

- Governments should allow digital and media literacy to become a core component of public education from primary school level through university.

- The European Commission should launch a sector inquiry into regional media markets, similar to the EU Digital Markets Act inquiry into tech monopolies.

- The EU and national governments should develop criteria for “media diversity”. Companies holding more than a certain percentage of regional media control in terms of audience and advertising revenue should be required to sell off parts of its business.

Media freedom is under pressure. Journalists face bullets in Gaza, censorship in Russia, SLAPP suits in Italy. FYEG refuses to accept this as the new normal. We demand a Europe where public broadcasters serve the public, where truth outweighs propaganda, and where no journalist risks their life for doing their job. Our fight for media freedom is a fight for democracy.

Supporters

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