

## **Professional media need both press freedom and financial guarantees to play their democratic role at a time of geopolitical challenges**

On World Press Freedom Day, EMMA and ENPA reaffirm their commitment to upholding press and media freedom every day.

This year's theme, "Shaping a Future at Peace", highlights the strategic role of editorial media at a time of geopolitical instability and information wars and the importance of reliable and professional reporting. At the same time, it sheds light on the growing risks to journalism, including the physical and legal attacks against journalists, the attempts to limit freedom of expression, restricted access to sources or threats to journalistic confidentiality.

Editorial media enable and enrich an informed public debate while providing guarantees of professionalism and taking risks and responsibility for their content, aware of their critical democratic role. When governments fail to recognise the media as democratic allies that help holding them accountable towards their citizens and provide constructive criticism, and instead prevent or discourage journalists from doing their job or erode public trust, it poses a fundamental threat to democracy.

As EMMA and ENPA advocated in the context of the EMFA and the EUDS, the EU should recognise the media's indispensable role to support democracy and information sovereignty. As such, media freedom and pluralism must be proactively protected and enabled and be a central consideration when assessing new policy initiatives. Furthermore, given their role and editorial standards, professional media should not be subject to anti-disinformation measures that could restrict freedom of expression or erode their audiences' trust on their content.

While digital platforms and AI can support journalism by facilitating distribution and editorial processes, they also come with substantial risks for press freedom. In fact, platforms can arbitrarily remove or demote legal editorial content. Likewise, their algorithms are based on engagement and revenues rather than on responsibility and professionalism. At the same time, AI companies unfairly and unlawfully take advantage of editorial content to train and continuously feed on AI-driven solutions, including services directly competing with editorial media, without providing remuneration and without being subject to editorial responsibility, increasing the risk of information manipulation and inaccuracy.

For these reasons, it is vital to ensure that the professional editorial media landscape remains pluralistic, independent and able to play its rightful role for democracy. Policy initiatives to promote press and media freedom are indispensable and must be complemented by concrete support. Indeed, financial sustainability is a precondition for the media to be able to fulfil its democratic role. Such support can be more direct, as with the AgoraEU financing programme, or come from structural policies that address unfair competition, copyright circumvention, and restrictions on freedom of expression online, or that consider media needs when developing data and consumer protection rules affecting the sector's long term resilience.