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PRAGUE MEDIA POINT 23: What's Working
Sustainable Media System for a Viable Democracy
Held on December 1, 2023 in Prague, Czech Republic

In its eighth instalment, the Prague Media Point interdisciplinary conference attracted more than 120 journalists, scholars, media professionals, and students who discussed ways how to enhance the sustainability of the current system within which media work, particularly in Europe. The main thematic areas revolved around the developing framework of media regulations, the investigative and fact-checking journalism, and cross-border collaborations between journalists and media outlets.

The conference commenced with a short address by **Maja Sever**, President of the European Federation of Journalists, urging the journalists to work together and for the governments to ensure their maximum protection, both individually and collectively. As she said, "Journalism is a defence of democratic values and freedom, but it is getting harder – the pressure is stronger and its coming from all sides."

This opening naturally paved the way to the first panel of the day about the media regulations. Big part of the discussion concentrated on the European Media Freedom Act. The panellists commended the ambitious approach of the European Commission but identified the securing of the actual implementation on the ground in all the European countries as the biggest challenge. Particular emphasis was also placed on the need to not regulate media themselves but rather the environment within which they operate. **Theresa Josephine Seipp**, researcher at the University of Amsterdam, also highlighted that media regulation must go hand in hand with adequate regulations in other fields like digital services, AI, and big tech lobbying. **Tadeusz Kowalski**, member of the Broadcasting Council in Poland and **Lucie Sýkorová** from European Centre for Press & Media Freedom both pointed out that EMFA must better reflect the differences between European countries, particularly with regards to public service media. In a similar vein, OSCE RfOM later held a session discussing the possibility of superimposing a public interest framework that would ensure a healthy, democratic, and free online space in Europe.

The conference continued with another thematic focus on investigative and fact-checking journalism, particularly within the Visegrad and Western Balkan countries. A series of three panels was dedicated to the impact of disinformation within these countries and ways of fighting it, to showcasing the examples of replicable cross-border investigations, and to finding sustainable funding for such media organizations. The panellists agreed with **Lutfi Dervishi**, investigative journalism trainer from Albania, who remarked that we need to be wary of the generational divide between news consumers: „Everyone is vulnerable – social media is the main source of information for the young – that's where the disinformation most often takes place. For the older generation, it's TV – and that's where propaganda is.“ Relatedly, **Tomáš Madleňák** from the Investigatívne Centrum Jána Kuciaka recommended to his fellows to „stop looking through your fingers at your colleagues from tabloids“ and encouraged cooperation as „they have the way of getting your investigations accessibly to the voters“.

Peter Erdelyi from Centre for Sustainable Media and 444 added: "If you want sustainable funding based on advertising alone, you need scale, which most investigative outlets do not have. If you want to secure your foothold, putting up paywall notwithstanding your public-serving role is key." In his view, this also bypasses the possibly compromising effect of funding on the independence of content. Finally, a 2-hour workshop on the digital safety when doing investigative or other sensitive journalism was held under the lead of **Aleksa Tešić** from BIRN Serbia.

Furthermore, two sessions were convened with the support of Czech-German Future Fund and in cooperation with Deutsche Welle (DW). Firstly, a presentation of two cross-border based projects – JÁDU, a Czech-Slovak-German online magazine publishing smaller and more community-oriented stories, and secondly ENTR, a pan-European youth-focused collaborative project for social media content. **Patrick Leusch**, Head of European Affairs at DW, remarked that while "it is extremely costly to create content with a truly European perspective" – and therefore almost impossible without some sort of public funding, what helps to operate across borders is "having to stick to a unifying, single language of one platform." Furthermore, **Lukas Hansen**, Editorial Lead of ENTR, also led a quick design sprint session, showcasing the innovative approach used at ENTR for content creation with the involvement of the audience itself.

Among the mixture of academic and project presentations were present the cases such as the transition of the Reportér Magazine from print to digital (**Martina Klárová, Robert Čásenský**), an analysis of using social media platforms such as Twitch during the French Presidential TV Debates (**Nina Barbaroux-Pagonis**), study of supporting quality journalism in the Arab-speaking countries (**Elsayed Bekhit Darwish**), and an analysis of the possible altruistic motives for sharing alternative information about the Covid 19 virus on social media (**Thomas Wold**).

Prague Media Point is an annual international conference, dedicated to discussing the changing media landscape in a professional, political, economic, and social context. The aim is to gather leading scholars, journalists, media executives, and other experts to exchange experiences, establish new relationships and debate the challenges facing both traditional and new media. The issues are presented in an international context.

Prague Media Point is organized by **KEYNOTE**, an organization specializing in organizing conferences and events that lead to inspirational and international encounters, bringing new ideas to life, and facilitating a unique networking experience.

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