

# PRAGUE MEDIA POINT

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## 5 BIG IDEAS

# JOURNALISTS NEED TO (LEARN HOW TO) WORK TOGETHER

1

Journalism is under increasing pressure from all sides and as **Maja Sever, President of the European Federation of Journalists** highlighted, „the fight to defend democracy is growing increasingly difficult, which is why we need to talk, connect, and discuss how to support journalism as a public good, and one another. “But such cooperation is not just a mere “stronger together” phrase. Throughout the conference, panellists agreed that collaboration yields more effective research and investigations, it spurs a more democratic and European identity both on the side of media professionals and the public. It furthermore ensures better peer review and subsequent upholding of standards which are being debated this very moment.

Such collaboration is not without its challenges, of course. The initial idea can be tempting and sweep everyone in enthusiasm until they realize not everybody’s individual interest will prevail. **Tereza Semotamová (JÁDU)**, **Reneta Veselinova (Dir.bg)** and **Dominika Michalak (Onet.pl)** who all work in cross-border based media projects advised on setting the right mind-frame open to diversity and means for a healthy, structural disagreement from the very beginning. In this way all sides can benefit from the new potential of looking at old topics from both different and comparative perspective.





# 2 THE DEVELOPING FRAMEWORK OF MEDIA REGULATIONS NEEDS TO BE AMBITIOUS BOTH IN SCOPE AND IN ACTUAL IMPLEMENTATION

The European Media Freedom Act and other EU and national initiatives of late aim to promote a pluralistic media across Europe, independent public service media, editorial independence, transparency of media ownership, and to safeguard against media concentration. As **Tadeusz Kowalski, Member of the Broadcasting Council in Poland** emphasized, such a broad, ambitious endeavour has its dangers of being too general and nearly impossible to truthfully implement without being repressive. This could be especially so in states with high media capture. There was, however, a consensus that journalists must vigilantly guide and inform these debates and actions on the EU and national levels, as it can „foster a more enabling environment for independent media to sustainably exist in “(**Lucie Sýkorová, ECPMF**). **Theresa Josephine Seipp from the University of Amsterdam** also stressed the need to not pursue these changes in isolation, but to focus on robust mechanisms of countering the imbalance between the big tech or platforms on the one hand, and the media, audience, and their respective services/consumption on the other.

These sentiments were also echoed in the discussion held by **OSCE RFoM** where representatives of **IPI, Article 19 and Panoptikon Foundation** debated the unhealthy online information ecosystem. Such system is unsustainable for a good democracy given its promotion of sponsored or click-bait content as opposed to content based on quality. As **Katarzyna Szymielewicz** explained, the EU missed its chance on unbundling the big platforms from their unhealthy algorithms, which could give more power to users in choosing their content and to the media to have it represented profitably on the platforms as well. Still, outside of Europe such scenarios are being pondered. **Barbora Bukovská** nevertheless pointed out that one of the central problems in these debates is the isolation and focus on single issues as opposed to targeting the root causes and mechanisms of the said ecosystem – with a multi-stakeholder approach combining the state and private sectors, the public and the media themselves.



# THE JOURNALISTIC AND MEDIA SPHERES SHOULD ENCOURAGE MORE SOLIDARITY

It is no secret that the profession of journalists is changing in front of our very eyes. During the conference, panellists called out for the need to stand together more with regards to ensuring better security and the very future of the profession that is so important for a quality democracy. **Dorota Nygren** from the **Poland's Association of Journalists and Authors of the Public Radio**, alluded to many ardent campaigns and petitions which took place in Poland in the last decade, showing a community of professionals willing to publicly protest. However, "there is a lack of more long-term work". **Maja Sever** from **EFJ** commented that "when there is need, there is solidarity," but the problem is the proverbial in-between. She recommended focusing on young journalists, teaching them the power and importance of coming together and fighting for the protection of them and their colleagues. **David Klimeš** from the **Endowment Fund for Independent Journalism** pointed out that while solidarity among journalists will never look the same in CEE as for example in the north of Europe, what journalists can do is to fight against the shrinking space for good standards in the media as the common base of journalism is being eroded. Which goes for content as much as professional ethics and labour rights.

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# THE DIVERSITY OF FUNDING DEMAND NEEDS TO BE MET WITH A DIVERSITY OF FUNDING SUPPLY

# 4

Funding is becoming a hassle for nearly all media outlets. What our panellists emphasized was clear focus on trends (be that in service provision or consumption patterns) and knowing both the outlets' realistic capacities and their audience. Sound strategies focus on specialized areas of coverage and niche topics, services, or formats, but diversification of income is key. The subscription model, so popular today, works well for a selection of media, but it cannot sustain everyone in highly concentrated and competitive markets. More available and flexible public funding on the national and European level for public service media was a recurrent topic throughout the debates. Working extensively and creatively with the core community of readers was also considered vital – from the obvious paths like paywalls and occasional fundraising campaigns to specialized membership, holding events, keeping the readers directly involved in stories and solidary subscription purchases for fellow readers who cannot afford it anymore. In other words, heavy focus on building an active relationship with the community (and its expansion).



# THE IMPORTANCE OF INVESTIGATIVE AND FACT-CHECKING JOURNALISM IS UNWAVERING

A significant part of the conference was dedicated to investigative journalism. Apart from the aforementioned tips for ensuring more funding, examples of investigative collaborations and ways of combating disinformation were shared among the attendees. The importance of such activities which should not only hold power to account but also ensure a more trustworthy information space was reasserted. Be the investigations impactful or not, they are, as **Jovo Martinović from Lupa** in Montenegro stated, “vital in raising noise in an attempt to prevent further illegalities and calling out on hypocrisies in the public space”. By the same token, investigative and fact-checking journalism thus plays an irreplaceable role of clearing the clogged information space from unworthy or false data. Investigative outlets, however, cannot do it alone and need, in the words of **Tomáš Madleňák from Investigatívne Centrum Jána Kuciaka**, to work with other, more mainstream outlets, who can communicate the messages to a broader audience. Subsequent activities of civil society organizations then need to continue raising the awareness, educate the public, and even legally charge those deemed faulty by the investigations.

# 5





# CONCLUSION: SUSTAINABILITY IS NOT JUST A BUZZWORD

Prague Media Point 2023 in its discussions showed that sustainability in the media sphere is a multi-faceted challenge which is inherently related to the idea of a viable democracy. In the words of Peter Erdelyi from the Center for Sustainable Media, "in most environments, people want quality information and will support journalism if it is meaningful for their lives." With the many tests that journalism currently faces, the debates attempted to show a glimmer of hope and possibilities that can move us towards a more enabling, healthy, and secure media environment, with wide implications for the public good in our regions.

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