

Conference Discussions Report

Opening and Keynote speech - Has AI Really Been the Earthquake it Seemed? (09:00 - 09:30, Conference Room)

-Pierre Romera Zhang, Chief Technology Officer, ICIJ, France

SUMMARY:

Pierre Romera Zhang introduced the organization ICIJ, which deals with cross-border investigations such as the Panama Papers, UberFiles, CasbianCabals, etc., which are usually based on data leaks. AI has changed the way investigative journalists work, but the question remains whether this is a true transformation, or whether the AI craze will subside after a few years have passed. AI has been presented as technology capable of automating big tasks that we could not do alone, and which can work much faster, competing with humans who are not able to complete tasks as quickly.

“AI” is used as an umbrella term for many things including such applications as Google Translate. Particularly useful for journalists is “supervised learning”, where an AI is trained to carry out a task that was previously completed by humans. This type of AI has a lot of possibilities and allows for new uses of data that would not be possible without technology, such as using an algorithm to identify job adverts from a set of 600,000 Facebook ads. One of the critical problems with AI is that it creates a lot of mistakes or “hallucinations” that are not true.

It has been two years since the release of ChatGPT and it has not yet replaced journalists. As Zhang explained, “*While AI is capable of tremendous accomplishments, it’s not able to work without human intervention*”. AI has been an “earthquake”, but it did not destroy the job of journalists, just transformed it: journalists are still fact-checking and looking for stories and sources. AI can create content, find connections, and identify things that you cannot see with your eyes, but it’s more like amplifying skills: “*AI is not replacing us, but giving us the tools to do what we already do but at a much, much broader scale*”. These tools are increasingly able to generate hypotheses, predict fraud, and identify patterns in large datasets.

We must address new questions relating to the ethics of AI such as how to have transparency, how to prevent bias (which is often inherited from data), and how to use these tools responsibly. In some applications, AI is in conflict with the main principle of journalism: “do no harm”. Yet, these tools are not magic – they rely on massive datasets and a supply chain of humans who scrub and clean the data. ChatGPT also takes a massive amount of electricity (at least 10x more than using Google Search). Just as it would not make much sense for a reporter covering climate change to take a plane every week, journalists must face the same dilemma when it comes to AI.

Zhang concluded that it is difficult to predict what the future of these technologies will be. Already journalists can delegate a lot of work to AI tools, but do they really need to? He cautioned that it might be better to avoid AI applications where it is not really necessary.

AUDIENCE QUESTIONS:

An audience member questioned whether these tools really provide for a faster analysis, given that humans often need to fact-check every output by the AI programmes. **Zhang** replied that it does not make sense in many situations, but for things that do not need to be verified (for example, to identify possible leads), it can still be very helpful. He pointed to two applications, (1) using AI to find stories that then must be verified; and (2) using AI to publish new data, which must be checked by hand, but which may still speed up the process.

The AI – Resources – Independence Conundrum (09:30 - 10:30, Conference Room)

Moderator: Graham Griffith, Media Strategist and Senior Fellow, Center for the Study of Democracy, USA (GG)

- *Marius Drago*

mir, Director, Media and Journalism Research Center, Spain/Austria (MD)

- *Asya Metodieva, Media Support Coordinator for CEE, Thompson Foundation, Bulgaria/Czechia (AM)*
- *Damir Agovic, Strategic Partnerships Manager, News Partnerships, Google, Czechia (DA)*

SUMMARY:

Marius Dragomir introduced his background in journalism in Central and Eastern Europe and his project, "The AI Market Project", which seeks to: (1) identify key players and create a database of companies and individuals at the forefront of AI applications in journalism; (2) map financial links including investments, ownership structures, and the economic landscape surrounding AI tools; (3) assess the impact of AI uses (how it's used? Effectiveness? Enhancing practices?); and (4) promote transparency (e.g., through open-access databases for journalists and researchers).

In terms of how AI is changing the media landscape in CEE, Dragomir mentioned benefits for efficiency and data management; ethical considerations such as human oversight requirements; varying national perspectives; transparency (V4 countries so far more hesitant to disclose use of AI in

creating content); and local differences in the media ecosystem (for example, journalism in Prague is very different than in Budapest).

With regard to the broader picture of the current information landscape, the ecosystem is increasingly complex, with a shrinking space for traditional news media/journalism. We now also see a “clash of propaganda narratives” coming from Russia, China, the USA, and the EU as well as user-produced content on social media and private narrative exchanges that occur within groups/communities/professions. Propaganda narratives and disinformation sources can be politicians, governing parties, various social media platforms, and even foreign governments that operate to varying degrees depending on the country.

He finally returned to the question of whether this is bringing a transformative shift or widening existing imbalances, pointing to issues such as media capture (which exacerbates differences between small vs. large, or government-affiliated vs. independent outlets), transparency, and the role of tech companies (whose dominance is further cemented by AI).

Asya Metodieva turned to the issue of ethics, stating that we have not yet conducted a detailed conversation about ethics and are rushing to implement and support AI projects before resolving important dilemmas. It is increasingly important to clarify with partners about what uses are acceptable and have more discussions with media actors about their ideas, especially with regard to funding. But what is “ethical” when it comes to the use of AI? In her project that examined five countries in CEE, only 15% of surveyed media outlets actually integrated some AI tools into their work. Sometimes newsrooms simply do not have the human resources or the knowledge to go after AI production and make sure everything is correct. Smaller newsrooms that would benefit often do not have the resources to pay for more subscriptions and to train staff to use AI tools in an efficient way that will actually help their newsrooms.

Metodieva stated that *“in countries with disinformation on the rise, pro-governmental agents weren't making significant use of AI earlier this year. I expect this is changing very fast”*. If the study were repeated next year, it might have a very different outcome as they are using more and more AI tools for misinformation and propaganda.

She also mentioned the environmental aspect and that this is something organizations need to discuss. One of the primary goals should be training employees and journalists, and questions to consider are: what are the risks? What are the limitations? How to improve organisational content moderation? Effectiveness? Efficiency? People across the CEE region often have better IT skills than AI skills and training needs to target not only decision makers, but people at the operational level as well. Her organization offers mentorship programmes with teams of mentors who support media organizations throughout the process and masterclasses for decision-makers together with operational-level colleagues who would benefit from AI training.

Damir Agovic, from the news partnerships team at Google, works with news publishers across central Europe. He was asked by the moderator about what drives the surge in interest and what drives these organizations, as well as what trends he sees and how to elevate what is working despite

challenges. Agovic first turned to the question of balance and imbalance. Looking back 1-2 years, tools for solutions such as hate speech moderation were only available to the top platforms. Now, they are far more accessible to smaller platforms, so the imbalance is decreasing in that respect. He stated that Google's approach is to use AI to enhance journalism, not to replace it and that they try to play a responsible role, offering tools and trainings to those who need it.

On the theme of cost, he noted that as such a large company, they have the advantage of being able to offer tools free of charge. With the tools available now, even the smallest newsrooms can think about how to make a podcast. Agovic stated that *"the mission we try to play is to enhance and support, not replace"*, adding that editorial oversight is even more important than before because of the ease of producing.

In terms of what is working, he pointed to an initiative that is seeing some success by an Estonian publisher who created a solution to moderate hate speech based on promoting constructive interaction and flagging unconstructive content. A Czech Forbes case study also worked on an AI solution for newsrooms that looked to identify ways to keep readers on the site longer and made journalist's lives easier by suggesting things like tags and headlines and which saw a significant ROI. These days, it is possible to invest into solutions with less resources and sometimes with the free resources that are out there.

Agovic concluded with a demonstration of NotebookLM, a tool for understanding information. He had uploaded a 20-page document to the application, and it provided a summary. You can also ask it a question and it will find the answer for you in the text can be used to create podcast outlines and other things.

Overall, the panel opened an important discussion regarding ethics in AI with the key issues being access to tools and knowledge of how to use them. Media outlets are facing a crisis in the newsroom as well a crisis of the business model and AI offers both challenges and opportunities looking to the future.

First Academic Presentations Slot (10:50 – 11:15, Conference Room)

(a) Envisioning the Societal Future of AI Journalism through Public Scholarship

In cooperation with the Czech-German Future Fund

- Alexis von Mirbach, LMU Munich, Germany

Alexis von Mirbach presented his project, Mundus Media Dreams: Envisioning the societal future of AI journalism through public scholarship. He began by discussing the "polycrisis" in the world and the

need for public scholarship to address issues like climate change, war, migration, populism, and mistrust. The guiding question is: how can AI make journalism and society better? The internet has changed from its 1990-2010 phase of “internet euphoria” and garage founders where everyone can be a journalist to a more dystopic present with AI.

This project is transdisciplinary in nature, spanning academia, civil society, and industry practitioners and based on “future workshops” which follow a triad of *criticism* → *utopia* → *solutions*. The “criticism” stage focuses on identifying problems, while the “utopia” phase envisions what the ideal future would look like, and the “solutions” step returns to concrete solutions. In this Mundus Media Dreams project, participants were 21 students from 16 countries who conducted 140 interviews asking the question: How would GenZ use AI to improve journalism and society? The framework identified six “spheres” of problems: (1) Individual (precarity, violence, legal restrictions); Newsroom (quality, clickbait, access, hierarchy); Social (mistrust, lack of representation, fake news, bias); Economic (oligopoly, lack of finances); Institutional (authoritarian regimes, state control); and Global (wars, inequality, climate change).

They considered technology’s potential to reinforce problems such as journalists’ replacement by automation and concerns about quality and ethical considerations. AI also has potentials for journalism such as traditional predictive AI for classification, prediction, and decision-making and generative AI for new content, often in response to prompts.

Results:

In the individual sphere, the participants identified a “precarious” situation for journalists, with the “utopia” of a world where journalists are secure, sustainable, fairly remunerated, and safe. AI would be applied to reduce the workload and protect people’s time. In covering authoritarian regimes, drones would facilitate going to dangerous regions, but there is no solution for the precarity of journalism and they identified “low/no potential for improvement” from AI on this particular issue.

In the newsroom, AI can be used for detecting things in footage, but it offers no solution against clickbait or against strong hierarchies. In the social sphere, AI can help hiring practices to increase diversity and could personalize consumption to prevent echo chambers. The “potential for improvement” here was identified as “medium”, as applications such as the “Myth Detector” can help to assist with things like fact checking.

In the economic sphere, AI can be used to reduce costs associated with, for example, editing, translating, and optimizing searches. It can also assist with resource allocation, but overall, the “potential for improvement” is low. Regarding the institutional sphere, AI can provide shortcuts against censorship, improve transparency, and lead to a more democratic media landscape. Finally, in the global sphere, we have projects such as Denmark’s algorithm to detect constructive journalism and machine learning to predict things like where aid is most urgently needed. The last question is, which sphere has the most potential?

(b) AI Tools Usage in Communication and Marketing Promotion. Romanian Digital Agencies Approaches to AI

- *Catalina Niculescu, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Romania*

Catalina Niculescu presented her research, “AI tools usage in communication and marketing promotion, Romanian digital agencies approach to AI”. In Romania, a recent political campaign based on TikTok saw rapid and unexpected success. This study focused on AI tools in communications and marketing with the objectives of identifying the tools used, investigating the digital skills required, and exploring cultural differences in AI adoption. It relied on professional perceptions with in-depth interviews with 14 professionals with 5-10 years’ experience in the field. Interviews were collected via WhatsApp between January and March of 2024.

The results showed that Romanian agencies’ use of AI was primarily Canva, ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Ahrefs for SEO. Seniors do not use ChatGPT as much as it is “full of cliché” and generates only predictable text. Many are reluctant to use AI tools, although those working for American clients tend to have a more open/relaxed approach. Customer feedback has generally been positive due to improved efficiency. In terms of digital skills, juniors highlighted analytical skills, a strategic approach, creativity, data analysis, and human psychology. Seniors focused on content writing, content management, adaptability, capacity to understand human needs, digital research, performance marketing, and maintaining brand authenticity. The capacity to understand human needs and passion for psychology seem to be meeting point between seniors and juniors, though seniors seem to prefer a mix of more complex AI and SEO compared to juniors.

Overall, AI has had a transformative effect, streamlining content, engaging clients, and improving cost-effectiveness. Novel insights are in local perceptions to AI adoption such as hesitance and divisions, especially the generational divide in tool preference. The cultural insights are specific to Romania.

(c) AI everywhere: a practice-based research study on the use of generative AI in Scandinavian newsrooms

- *Steffen Moestrup, Danish School of Media and Journalism, Denmark*

Steffen Moestrup introduced his project on newsroom practices in Scandinavia, “AI Everywhere: practice-based research study on use of generative AI in Scandinavian newsrooms”. Moestrup collaborated with two colleagues from the Danish School of Media and Journalism, a practice-based school that collaborates with the industry. The study relied on qualitative interviews with journalists and editors with findings reported along the way via podcasts and lectures. The goal is to enrich industry understanding of AI uses and challenges and, perhaps more importantly, to strengthen journalism education when it comes to AI. They found common uses of AI in photo analysis and fact-checking and for generating illustrations, drafting formal letters, and enhancing language.

Moestrup pointed out that AI bias does exist—but so does human bias. AI can be a transformative tool, but it requires careful management and critical expertise. He brought up the common quote that “AI will not replace journalists – but journalists capable of using AI will replace those who can’t”. AI has a bias based on US values and way of thinking, but human journalists have biases as well.

However, AI can also help to reduce bias such as the use of AI to understand news coverage of Eid by an outlet that is unfamiliar and wishes to improve its own reporting.

Use of AI can vary depending on the type of news outlet. In one tabloid newspaper, for example, AI was used to enhance data collection, conduct analysis, and automate processes. AI can also offer services such as summary assistance, database assistance (which can find stories through identifying patterns), and legal assistance. However, AI needs context and solid data so having reliable sources is critical. It can also be used for writing follow-up stories, filling out information requests, and mapping relationships which involves asking the AI *“to map different articles and the actors or agents in that article and find patterns”* to find stories. The emphasis is on training younger journalists in foundational journalism skills to critically assess AI-generated outputs, as human oversight is essential. He stressed that *“you need the basic journalism skills”* to be able to turn things over to an AI.

On the benefits of industry partners, they have the advantage of new, real-life data; benefits from data from early adopters; important context for understanding empirical data; access to high-impact use cases; valuable critical perspectives; and a richer understanding of ethical and social implications. In terms of its challenges, issues are limited generalizability; limited time and availability; potential biases in responses (e.g., respondents more likely to be AI-enthusiasts); navigating organizational sensitivities; varied technical knowledge; and the fact that rapidly evolving tech means that data quickly becomes outdated.

Leading a niche media outlet in the age of AI (12:00 - 12:50, Conference Room)

In cooperation with the International Visegrad Fund and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea

Moderator: Filip Rožánek, Editor, Digizone.cz, Czechia (FR)

- *Dragana Obradović, Country Director, BIRN, Serbia (DO)*
- *Bojan Stojkovski, Editor in Chief, IT Logs, North Macedonia (BS)*
- *Krzysztof Chojnowski, Editor in Chief, Moja Ostrołęka, Poland (KC)*

SUMMARY:

Moderator **Filip Rožánek** opened with the increasingly important role of niche media. **Bojan Stojkovski**, a tech journalist and editor based in Macedonia, introduced his outlet in the IT/tech ecosystem. Like most small newsrooms in the Balkans, they have embraced AI and use it in the newsroom on a daily basis. They have a team of five people (including Stojkovski as editor) and some of their staff are IT professionals that love journalism, so they rely on their expertise as well. Turning

to Serbia, **Dragana Obradović**, an investigative journalist, introduced her network which includes eight people on the team. They also have experience with AI and have used it even before the “hype” of AI started. What is new is Language Models which are used by many in the industry. What do you use? How do you use it? People connect “AI” with “ChatGPT” and that just shows that people don’t know about the possibilities out there. **Krzysztof Chojnowski** runs a small website in Poland with around ten people that has been operating for over 20 years. They began as a digital platform, so they did not transition from paper. He is also a member of the local media association and conducts trainings for chief editors. He focuses on uses of AI to save time and as a programmer, on practical ways of implementing new technologies.

Stojkovski was asked by the moderator about databases and datasets: what have you used? How do you use them in daily work? Stojkovski responded that they use LLM in their newsroom but in a more “restrained” way such as to improve stylistics and offer copies for social media. They rely on the skills of IT professionals, so they take those topics to them and use AI tools to make it look better. Most business models require us to “do more with less”, and such tools are a blessing when you need to write more articles and publish pieces on a daily basis. Using Canva for illustrations, for example, takes time off the work we do during the week. Asked to clarify what “more” articles means, Stojkovski explained that if before each journalist needed to focus on just one piece throughout the day, now it is possible to do two quality pieces. If you just want to produce more and more, it would be possible even up to 3-4 but if you want to keep the quality, “two is the number”.

Obradović stated that in the Balkans, independent media is in a very bad financial situation with restrictions on finances, so they are mostly using tools that are free or affordable. Unlike Scandinavian media who are basically developing their own AI agents and models and have many more possibilities at hand, they have IT professionals with a programming background that help to programme analytical tools where ready-made solutions were not available. Some uses include analysis of pictures (recognizing people from all databases on the internet) and chatbots such as Llama. Obradović highlighted the importance of *“how you incorporate AI into your working process and decide which one to pick. I think that is the most important discussion we had internally in our organization.”*

Initially, AI were primarily technical tools, then ChatGPT, and now, AI agents collect a lot of data and are not transparent about their practices. This has “opened pandora’s box” and in their organization., they started considering, what are we going to use? How are we going to use it? How transparent should we be? Do we need to say that we used this tool, or it’s only technical support? Before this point, it was not strategic but then they began to create guidelines for the organization. They do not use everything and are quite sensitive about what they choose to use. She stated that they would never use a chatbot that is not internalized on their computers because otherwise your information can be used elsewhere such as training algorithms. Although, they deal with sensitive, private information of critical importance so the situation may differ from more mainstream media. But overall, they are very cautious about what they use and how they use it. What was important in making this approach different from an ad-hoc, intuitive approach is that they send editors to trainings not only on use of AI, but on ethics and to really understanding how it works. What happens with the information that we feed into AI?

Chojnowski explained that for journalists, there are a lot of tasks every day—not only publishing articles, but things like moderating comments, replying to emails and calls, rewriting text from posters, and creating graphics. Journalists would like to meet and discuss but are overwhelmed by daily tasks, especially local media where the budget is always tight. It is difficult to expand the audience and, for example, begin covering the next city over when your time is occupied with daily tasks. The questions are how to save time, how to automate daily tasks, and how to make things faster. His biggest problem has been moderating comments. In a city of 50,000 people plus 100,000 in the surrounding area, and readers so engaged they publish 15,000 comments a month and after the invasion of Ukraine and Russian propaganda, it doubled. How do we handle this? Either work 24-hours, or implement ChatGPT to moderate comments for us. It's been one year now, and it works: *"I have never been happier"*, he said.

Other things they use AI for are converting images to text, doing speech to text, and trying to avoid typos but issues came up when they tried to use AI for other applications. The AI has its own style, and they found that ChatGPT is more "Western" in how it communicates, which is not what they are looking for in Poland. If you take a journalist who will only focus on using ChatGPT to create content for a local newspaper, it goes nowhere because it's great for general news but doesn't know much about local small cities in Europe. Chojnowski stated that *"we see a lot of help from AI and AI empowers our portal and I'm sure it's not something that will destroy journalism. I think it will make local journalism great again"*.

On the specifics of the AI use for content moderation, he explained that there are around 20-30 rules they apply in the prompt such as "please check this comment using Google community standards". It also checks for hate speech and vulgarity as those lead to adverts being disabled. They aim to stop hate speech, vulgarity, and political propaganda and without hate speech, more users want to join in a constructive conversation. The AI does have some issues such as analysing long comments where it cannot compute an intelligent, 10-15 sentence comment and even a small criticism can be treated as hate speech. So, they need to find a way to let those valuable longer comments be published and not treated as general hate speech. Every few weeks they check which kind of comments are being deleted, which are published, and how they are scored (each comment is scored) and update the rules accordingly.

Stojkovski was asked by the moderator about the use of LLMs with Slavic languages as it's easily recognizable that content is not created in the proper Slavic style. How do you train it for your outlet so that it's not generating new problems? He responded that you must have a human touch, citing an example where they asked ChatGPT to give a proposal based on a piece about defence technology, but it misread "SEA" as "CIA" ... So, you always have a journalist or an editor that is checking. It provides lots of help, but these LLMs are not 100% foolproof so you need to have this human input, this human touch. You can make these errors that lead to problems, *"but we are journalists and fact-checking is our main job"*.

The moderator asked whether they have compared different AI tools or LLMs and commented that he has had a bad experience with Google Gemini because it stops answering in the middle or changes topics in the middle of a chat. Stojkovski replied that when it comes to local languages, ChatGPT does the best job and that they have also had problems with Gemini but that in the future, he hopes to see improvement on models that work in the Balkans. Moderator Rožánek also brought up the issue of AI

“hallucinations” and that while AI should be a helpful tool to accomplish things more quickly, in the end, it takes time to verify what the AI has done.

Obradović emphasized that they are not using AI to generate text, but strictly as a tool for other parts of the job and fact-check all the information that they get through that process. Programming is mostly handled by the IT/programming team but things like transcribing, voice to text, and translations have made their job much easier, for example, when dealing with information in a foreign language and while you're not going to publish it, you need to understand it. AI is also used routinely for photo analysis and geolocation analysis, sometimes with fairly advanced tools.

Adapting Media/Journalism Education and Upskilling for the New Paradigm (12:00 – 13:10, Lecture room 6)

-Moderator: Christian Christensen, Professor of Journalism, Stockholm University/Prague Media Point Steering Committee Member, Sweden

-Ioanna Georgia Eskiadi, PhD Candidate, Researcher, School of Journalism and Mass Media Communication, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

-Zdeněk Veit, Deputy Editor in Chief, Czech News Agency, Czechia

-Borislav Vukojević, Senior Teaching Assistant and AI Consultant, University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina

-Pavel Kasík, Science Journalist, Seznam Zprávy, Czechia

SUMMARY:

This panel discussion, moderated by Christian Christensen, Professor of Journalism at the Stockholm University, explored the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) and journalism education, focusing on its integration, ethical considerations, and the gap in current curricula. Together, the panellists highlighted both the potential and the pitfalls of AI in journalism, advocating for informed, ethical engagement with the technology.

Eskiadi emphasized in her academic presentation the rapid integration of AI into journalism but pointed out that curricula often lag behind, leaving students with limited knowledge, particularly on AI ethics. She also alluded to the divide between experience with handling AI both on the side of students and their educators, which at times hinder progress. Even now, universities in and among themselves are disputing how to approach this, whether to teach AI at all and in what ways exactly. The big question within universities is how to build educational systems that allows for flexibility that account for technological change in a situation where we have to tell students what they will be taught in the next 3+ years. She further called for better collaboration between journalism schools and news

organizations to bridge this gap, saying: "Students should be allowed and encouraged to experiment with AI" to foster practical understanding. She stressed that AI is constantly reshaping both journalism and education and these should see eye to eye when possible.

Veit highlighted the hunger for AI-related knowledge among students but warned about the risks of over-reliance on technology: "If we let technology to outsource our brains, this is a big problem." He was nevertheless in favour of students getting experience with AI at schools and advocated for universities to try to limit financial barriers students may face in acquiring AI tools. With that in mind, he expressed concern about AI's imprecision when he remarked, "Generative AI is not perfect and is not precise," urging professionals to verify AI-generated content as journalism is primarily a factually precise job, upon which both legitimacy and readers' trust stand. Which is something students also need to learn first-hand. He thus stressed the continuous importance of the traditional, core abilities acquired in journalism education – like critical thinking, handling sources, personal and societal responsibility and self-regulation – which will guide everyone safely when handling AI. This point resonated with both the other speakers and the audience.

Vukojević raised a key point on AI's ethical use, which many, particularly the younger generations, lack. He called for more personal responsibility and looking ahead, as "If you're ready to misuse AI for letting it do your work for you, not just help you out, you can't then criticize society in the future for not needing you on the labour market. Because you helped the system to be able to work without you". Another problem he sees is that universities expect that AI will have to be taught by IT specialists. But Generative AI is not a technical issue really (such as about coding etc.), it's more to do with social sciences. People need to treat AI like a person, not a software, expecting a standardized output based on a given input. That's why Gen AI has so much potential for changing many things societywise, especially as it is publicly available. Therefore, as we need to adapt school curricula or newsroom guidelines, it shouldn't be focused on the technical use and coding primarily, but on the implications, ethics, navigating the tools and understanding the framework behind AI when using it. But this must be taught also by social scientists and relevant educators as well.

Kasík followed with the argument that every newsroom should develop guidelines for AI use, noting, "In your organization, you need to build on what other people build, you should be allowed to experiment and collectively finetune using AI tools to your particular needs, but you need guidelines to follow." He advocated against broad bans on using AI in newsrooms as in reality people will continue to use it personally but won't share what they've learnt with the others for fear of punishment. He also emphasized the importance of critical thinking, advising against relying solely on AI for information. Proper journalist still needs to know his sources and know what data they rely on, but AI can then help with the analysis, synthesis, or looking for leads and patterns among that data. Building onto what Vukojevic said about journalist being replaced, Kasík believes that if one uses AI as suggested and one continues to be the actual mind behind the task performed, journalism will prevail – and more than just to fact-check AI generated content. He further echoed shared sentiments with Veit about the necessity of the core journalism skills to safeguard both quality journalism and the profession as a whole.

Ethics and AI in Journalism: An Uneasy Relationship? (14:00 - 14:45, Conference Room)

In cooperation with the French Institute and the French Embassy in Prague

- *Eugenia Stamboliev, Media scholar and Philosopher of Technology, University of Vienna, Austria*
- *Vincent Berthier, Head of Technology Desk, Reporters without Borders, France*

SUMMARY:

Overall, this panel raised an array of ethical considerations, questioning whether many of these issues are really “new” or just modern iterations of old problems. Key themes were publisher responsibility and the need for regulations to govern the AI space as well as trust and whether AI really saves time when every output needs to be carefully checked by a human. Economic concerns about the AI “bubble” and its future profitability were also raised and speakers pointed out the “boring” nature of content created by publicly available tools such as ChatGPT. Audience questions wondered about the potential role of Europe in the regulatory landscape, especially now that the United States is unlikely to take the lead in regulation.

This session followed a discussion-style format. Stamboliev introduced some guiding questions: what is generative AI and how do we deal with it in journalistic practice? What are ethical standards, in AI and in journalism? Do they overlap? What is new and what is old? **Berthier** discussed how RSF use AI systems to select and curate content and spread it via social media and social networks. These systems impact how journalism is done and determine how content is curated which brings forward important ethical questions. Generative AI raises some issues, but we are also using old techniques with old problems.

Stamboliev recalled the atmosphere in 2016, when Trump had also just won the election. In that year's PMP, one panel on journalism and ethics touched on the question of why Facebook doesn't want to have publisher responsibility, avoiding it by claiming to be “just a channel”. Now with AI, you cannot say that you “aren't a publisher”. Users may still try to claim that it's just a suggestion, or it never promised accuracy and overall, the question of responsibility becomes increasingly complex.

Berthier turned to the question of what is really “new” and what is not new. ChatGPT broke a taboo in that the machine is now able to “speak” and produce content. Some might think that means it's going to produce journalism, but journalism is not only about creating content. At the same time, there can be a big temptation to use AI/ChatGPT to produce more and to produce faster than before.

Stamboliev brought up the question of authorship and accountability. With AI, who is really the author? Me or the machine? Is it really integrating the work of those who came before, or only copying it? This becomes a problem when someone has to take accountability for the “output”.

Berthier believes that when it comes to AI-generated content, “*you are the author before the court and the judge*”. If, for example, your content is insulting someone, it is not just ChatGPT because it

does not know who these people are and at the end of the day, you chose to put your name on it. You must take responsibility and be cautious—do not use ChatGPT to write unless you have checked everything first.

There has been a change in ethics and in the workflow as a journalist. Berthier pointed out that *“obviously, ChatGPT can be used to gain time in writing, in shaping information, in working with data... but what will you do with the time you have earned?”* Stamboliev asserted that she does not believe AI actually saves time as you always need to check every output. You have to know your sources very well and it's a big risk to use AI if you have something on the line. She pointed to a contradiction in perceptions, as we have this crisis of “trust” where people need factual information but then they rely on ChatGPT, and it doesn't add up. Everyone uses ChatGPT, but then there is major fallout when someone uses it and makes a mistake.

Berthier raised two other questions: is the text good? Is it relevant? There is a difference between using ChatGPT, designed for broad public use, and designing your own tools. For journalists, when they want to use a more sophisticated approach, they will not rely on ChatGPT. AI tools can be designed for a variety of needs from analysing climate change to synthesizing reports and articles but the first step in AI and ethical issues is how you invest in and design the tools. **Stamboliev** brought up the “Spinoza Project” and the idea that ethically, it's seen as just one thing rather than a collective responsibility in decision making. The scene is still very individual, with every newspaper wanting to create its own LLM. **Berthier** answered that they are not making their own LLM as they do not have the money. They work mostly with French media and mostly local news who have agreed to share their database of articles. They also host workshops to discuss: what do we want to do with AI? What don't we want to do? They do not produce any articles or “journalistic content” with AI but do produce things that could be helpful such as access to information. They are working on creating something open and transparent that works with ChatGPT or other models and document everything to make sure every journalist with even a small IT background can personalise it very quickly, including changing the database.

Stamboliev pivoted to the theme of trust, stating that she is interested in distrust and wondered, if there can be a productive side to it? One “side effect” she has noticed is that people are preoccupied looking at whether things are “real”, seemingly attaching truthfulness to “AI or not AI” even when something being non-AI does not mean that it is true and correct. The focus is on AI with the idea that once we control AI, we can come back to the question of truth and trust. **Berthier** followed up on this theme, touching on trust in the digital world and what is happening with the platforms “X” and Bluesky. AI providers have been using the “Uber strategy” of pushing down costs very low and ultimately, the winner takes all in the market. In the questions on generative AI, ethics in journalism, and broader digital ethics, a lot of things are missing from the discussion because people are focused primarily on the information and financial topics. What about the carbon footprint of AI? Is it ethical to use AI when covering climate change? **Stamboliev** turned to policy issues, noting that often, though not always, labour is missing from ethical frameworks. We have this debate about “consciousness” but there is still so much labour behind it that it's not possible to be considered as “consciousness” in this way. We are thinking less about the people and the environment and focusing instead on these abstract things.

Finally, **Berthier** observed that the AI economy is a “bubble” and maybe it will collapse, and maybe not but certainly, it is not currently sustainable for businesses. He voiced scepticism about self-regulation, stating that “*self-regulation works when everyone is equal around the table and that is not the case today*”.

Media and Diversity in the Age of Algorithm (14:50 - 15:55, Conference Room)

In cooperation with the Media Diversity Institute

Moderator: Milica Pesić, Executive Director, Media Diversity Institute, UK (MP)

- *Verica Rupar, Professor of journalism, School of Communication Studies, AUT, New Zealand (VR)*
- *Yazan Abu Al Rous, Salam Online Project Manager/Community Strategist, Media Diversity Institute, Jordan (YAAR)*
- *Hana Kojaković, Get the Trolls Out! Project Manager, Media Diversity Institute, UK (HK)*

SUMMARY:

Moderator **Milica Pesić** opened with a discussion on her 25 years of experience working with different stakeholders. MDI eventually realized that moving to the next stage would require working on an equal level with policy makers and starting using research as a base to produce different policy papers. They are working on a project called the Media Diversity Index with the aim of applying it globally. They first began using AI in 2019 on a project called “Detect and Act” which used a simple dashboard produced by TextGain to assess how media covers certain diversity issues. The initial definition of “diversity” that they used is outdated now (the old definition was based on sociodemographic determiners: if XX% of a population is from a certain region or is disabled, then XX% of the employees should be of that demographic).

Nowadays, our understanding of “diversity” is as a communication policy principle. It must also address things like who is involved in decision-making, who is interviewed, and who is in the newsroom. While they have been shifting from the old to the new definition, the world of media has also changed with big media companies that used to claim to be only a platform now considered publishers.

Verica Rupar referred back to a previous discussion by Marius Dragomir, highlighting his points that (1) the space for traditional journalism in the new information ecosystem is shrinking; and (2) we should start thinking about whether AI has brought a transformation or is just expanding already existing imbalances. What was in the past a domain of legacy media and professional journalism has become dominated by social media where misrepresentation of social groups has exploded. This is

the setting for our discussion: we are talking about challenges in the realm of media and the monopoly of legacy media on public discourse. Along with the diversification of the media space and the new information ecosystem, there is a lot of “communication noise” and solutions are still hanging in the air.

Rupar described their investigation into the spread of conspiracy theories on Twitter which found that 75% of tweets spreading conspiracies originated in the USA and a project in New Zealand that looked into news algorithms and journalists’ understanding of algorithms to support their own information gathering. She highlighted that the common thread between these projects is collaboration—not only between academics but also with civil society actors, policy makers, and computer scientists. We must mix journalism and computer science—not only teaching students new tech skills but expanding and exporting the teaching of journalism toward other professions, one of which is computer scientists.

Their upcoming research looks at funded projects that touch on media and diversity that were funded between about 2021 and 2023 and filtered for certain parameters. In all 30 projects they examined, civil society organizations were present, and the tendency was to support projects that link various aspects of identity and/or intersectionality. They focused on “source diversity” and “content diversity” with questions such as: who is talking? Whose voices are heard? What are they saying and how diverse are the perspectives?

The main recommendations were to take a holistic approach; that supporting media for social change must include all actors in the media landscape; the need to raise algorithm awareness and understanding of how they work; and prioritizing the public.

Hana Kojaković with *Get the Trolls Out!* works to counter anti-religious discrimination. They are integrating AI with monitors in each country that monitor for hate speech and things like islamophobia. They also reach out to editors and news outlets to highlight problematic content and look for ways to address it. They use keywords to identify and locate relevant content but then it is necessary to see what context it’s in. Their organization has observed a lot of problems like deepfakes, holocaust distortion, and disinformation campaigns like the one involved in the UK riots over the summer. It is necessary to collaborate with tech companies to see how they can prevent such hate.

Yazan Abu Al Rous works on countering hate speech against marginalized groups in the MENA region—a job which became a lot more difficult after October 7 and the rise in polarization and hate speech. They adopted a “social listening tool” which uses AI to detect incidents and when before they used to detect 300-400 incidents manually, now it’s hundreds of thousands. He said that with this information, they can see the big picture: “with big data, we can see the size of the problem”. For example, we can see if there is a spike in anti-Shia incidents in Egypt. What caused the spike? We also usually see a spike around religious holidays and it’s good to know what caused this trend and what is happening. We don’t have enough people to go through 200000 posts on a topic so an AI tool is very useful here. But AI are tools that can be used for good or for bad and they have limitations. We should be aware of these limitations.

They have fewer results from Facebook compared to “X” because the access is more limited though this does not mean that there is more hate speech on “X”, only that the posts are more publicly available. There are still issues with the AI filter, for example, it is not advanced in determining satire. Platforms reward engagement and so the more people engage with something, the more other people will see it. Content creators appeal to emotions such as hate and love—but hate is a more powerful tool than love. Generally, if you like a post, you just “like” it and move on, but are more likely to comment and reply to things on a post you disagree with. This extends the reach and ultimately rewards hate. It is *“based on engagement and people engage when they disagree”*. Algorithms create social bubbles. If you engage with two posts in a day about Israel or kittens, that becomes your feed for the next week and *“their sole purpose is to keep you engaged on their platform”*. He stated that something needs to change, and his recommendation is to have the larger conversation about fixing the biases that reward hate and controversy.

AUDIENCE QUESTIONS:

Moderator **Milica Pesić** asked whether Elon Musk has revolutionized the media by using “X” to promote a candidate and impose a certain discourse. Is this something new, what Elon Musk is doing? **Verica Rupar** responded that what he is doing is “a disaster”, but that it is not anything new—we have often seen media used for political gain before. She stated that *“the history of journalism tells us that has been happening from the very beginning”* and the first newspapers were established for making a political career.

An American audience member who lives in Sweden also asked about this “muskification” of media, describing how the situation in the USA as: *increasing distrust + purchase of “X” + Trump = perfect storm*. In Sweden, there is a relatively high level of media consumption and people are fairly “vaccinated” against conspiracy relative to the United States, but still there has been an extremely rapid deterioration of public discourse and politicians are saying things that would have been unthinkable five years ago. But again, this is not new—Rupert Murdoch was very involved in politics. What Musk did was export the US’s collapsing trust in journalism and spread it to other places. Tech determinism forgets the role of journalism in amplifying the things it claims to be against, and Swedish media have been avoiding fundamental questions. What is new about Musk is that he has shifted public discourse and opened a door that people thought was shut and now, people see that it was opened in the USA, so why not here?

Another audience member presented the topic of “AI whiteness” and how AI tech can be considered as a technology of whiteness because it is organized on the logic of privilege and whiteness. If AI is a technology of whiteness, shouldn’t we deal with that first? **Pesić** added that algorithms are *“just as biased as the people who trained them”*. **Kojaković** described a test they conducted on different AI programmes, feeding them key prompts (e.g., “show me a typical Jewish family”) and the results were very stereotypical and problematic. It’s a reflection of the people behind it just as much as the AI itself. **AI Rous** replied that AI is tool based on the person who coded it in the beginning, and it reflects their opinions and biases—even if they aren’t aware of them. On a global scale, AI is based in the USA, in Silicone Valley. Can we make it better? Yes, but it takes *“time, energy, and the will to make that change”*. With the changes that are happening, we will be able to develop our own AI, but it will

hold our own biases and stereotypes. Before social media, the journalist was the influencer: they write an article and people read and engage but in the post-social media world, journalists did not keep up and did not adapt quickly enough. Content creators filled that gap and now there are people with no training but millions of people listening to their podcasts and viewing their reels. We need to work with journalists to understand content creators and use that to gain audience but stay objective. We work with influencers and social media as they have the listeners. We did a test and with just five people posting all on the same day, you can reach all of Jordan—more than 9 million views. Big media outlets are more likely to hire a figure with a large following as it expands their audience. When it comes to storytelling and appealing to new generations, people are fed up with traditional media. They don't want to be just informed, they want to be entertained: *"people are tired, fatigued, and just fed up and they want something that is entertaining"*.

Case studies of AI-supported Investigations from the V4, Western Balkans, and beyond (16:00 - 16:50, Conference Room)

In cooperation with the International Visegrad Fund and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea

Moderator: Gyula Csák, Media Specialist, Editor, Bellingcat, Hungary/Czechia

- *Teodora Ćurčić, Data and Investigative Journalist, CINS, Serbia*
- *Anastasiia Morozova, Data and Investigative Journalist, Frontstory.pl, Ukraine/Poland*
- *Pierre Romera Zhang, Chief Technology Officer, ICIJ, France*

SUMMARY:

Overall, this panel introduced a variety of applications for AI use in journalism from small local newsrooms to larger ICIJ investigations. All tools have their benefits and drawbacks and key themes that emerged are the need for fact-checking; the utility of AI in sorting through massive datasets; and the availability and potential of these tools to aid the work of journalists. Programmes such as ML and specific tools such as Datashare and Prophecies allow journalists at all levels access to free tools that can save them time and allow for new approaches to investigations that would not have been possible before.

Moderator **Gyula Csák**, a Hungarian journalist living in Prague with experience working in the Balkans and Central Europe introduced this panel discussing the use of AI in investigations. **Teodora Ćurčić**, who works on open-source databases on public spending and corruption, introduced her case study "From Data Chaos to Clarity" which looked into party funds. The project used AI as a tool to save time and do more with limited resources, money, and knowledge. She has no background in coding and used AI as an assistant to get the coding and work with the database. They investigated political

parties in Serbia including all incomes and expenses over nine years. Forty parties were examined starting with around 150 xlsx files with data and incomes across 14 categories, complemented by the first edition of the database featuring over 15,000 entries. The final product was one xlsx comprising over 30,000 entries detailing incomes and expenses for 40 parties over nine years. The first step was to merge the files, then clean and analyse the data. AI simplified this task by checking totals and looking for mistakes and writing a script to compare the summary and main files and look for discrepancies. You can ask the AI to write a script in Python and an even ask the AI what information it needs first. The data can then be prepared for further analysis and visualizations after you check for mistakes. She concluded that while it is not as complex as the next two presentations, for an understaffed and under-resourced newsroom, it can be a very useful tool.

Anastasiia Morozova who works on drug trafficking in Poland examined how journalists can test hypotheses with AI by using it to efficiently analyse large datasets. They used AI to identify hundreds of thousands of drug advertisements on Telegram in Poland, inspired by a NOS.NL investigation. Their process was (1) creating a training dataset for the AI with a back-and-forth to generate sample messages; (2) creating an ML algorithm or “fine-tuning” a similar model; and (3) training the algorithm to identify drug-related content. Why train this model that already knows so much? To remove irrelevant information and teach it to label things according to how you want them. We analysed twelve telegram groups where drug dealers might advertise and among 5,000 messages, 2,000 were flagged with unique drug-related messages.

One participant inquired about verification and whether they could actually verify that it was true. From their own experience with ChatGPT, even some attempts to identify answers with a simple “yes” response were incorrect. Morozova explained that this is why she had to re-train the algorithm starting with classifying things manually. Beginning with the first set of 100 sample messages, they first made sure that was correct before moving to the real-world data, and then they fact-checked the results but did not have to do it all manually which saved time.

Pierre Romera Zhang from ICIJ stated that they do not use ChatGPT or LLMs but use more old-fashioned AI. At ICIJ, there are three groups: staff (~40 people); the founding group (290 investigative journalists across 105 countries who collaborate on in-depth investigations); and partners (media outlets who collaborate with ICIJ). He discussed three ICIJ investigations, the first was the Implant Files (2018) which looked into cases where patients with medical implants had died due to an incident, but the death was misclassified as a device malfunction or injury. They used AI to identify 2,100 cases of misclassification. The second case was the Pandora Papers (2021) which exposed a shadow financial system that benefits the worlds’ most rich and powerful. They used AI to sort 11.9 million records that arrived from 14 offshore services in a jumble of different formats. The AI created clusters of documents, and they used an ML to classify them by category which made it much easier to explore the documents. Only 4% of the files had a structure with organized data and they needed to identify files that contained beneficial ownership details and structure the data accordingly so they solution was to use ML to detect patterns and extract structured data from the unstructured documents and then use the “Prophecies” tool for fact-checking. The final investigation was the Cyprus Confidential (2023) case, where more than 300,000 documents in Greek and Russian were categorized in the wrong language. The problem was how to translate the documents when the tool

identified the wrong language. The solution was to use ML to perform OCR in several languages and compare the result.

Overall, Zhang stated that “every tool we build should be something that other investigative journalists can use” and tools like Datashare and Prophecies are available to all. They also have the offline translator “ES Translator” that they use since confidential documents cannot be sent to DeepL or other publicly available tools and translating needs to be fast.

AUDIENCE QUESTIONS:

Csák asked **Ćurčić**: what was the most important thing you learned with this investigation? She answered that it helped her save a lot of time and gave her the courage to explore other possibilities in terms of resources.

Csák also asked **Morozova** about coded language in the messages and whether she was able to decode the language. How can you be confident that the results are accurate? She confirmed that the question referred to “slang” words for drugs and said that the “*good thing about all these technologies and data and training is that it doesn't try to understand a word. It just understands what you want from it and the pattern*”. So, the trick is in teaching it how to classify according to your schema.

SECOND ACADEMIC PRESENTATIONS SLOT (16:00-17:00, LECTURE ROOM 6)

Moderator: Christian Christensen, Professor of Journalism, Stockholm University/Prague Media Point Steering Committee Member, Sweden

Speakers:

- Marisa Porto, Knight Chair in Local News and Sustainability, University of North Carolina, USA*
- Nivea Heluey, PhD Candidate, Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona, Spain/UAE*
- Mohamed Benabid, Professor of New media and public opinions, University Mohammed VI Polytechnic, Morocco*

The panel on AI's impact on journalism covered key challenges related to media disruption, ethics, and regulation.

In the first presentation, Marisa Porto discussed the problem AI poses for **copyright** and subsequently how it is disrupting the scene of both legacy and small local media. In the last 15 years, there has been an unprecedented decrease in journalist jobs. She pointed out that Currently, one of the most common practices for AI use is aggregating news articles. This type of aggregation undercuts the work of the news creators and their news outlets, the most costly part of news creation.

At present, various countries are looking into legislation which tackles the problem with AI and copyright. EU with its first purely AI focused legislation is ahead of the curve. Broadly speaking, the closest global copyright treaty was the Berne Convention, adopted in 1886. It established that authors possess exclusive rights in the reproduction of their work. Signatory countries to the convention agree to follow the copyright laws of the content creators' host country. However, the Berne Convention, which has been amended multiple times, does not protect against aggregation or summarization of copyrighted work or currently address AI. Nor does the law apply to the news of the day or to "miscellaneous facts having the character of mere items of press information."

Porto's and Bien-Aimé's study showed that AI represented some hope for the industry (particularly mass media content creators) – through experimentation in marketing, advertising and content creation, but there was fear about job loss. However, it also represented conflict for the industry, particularly because the polices are not well defined or regulated. All researched outlets articulated that artificial intelligence's expansion requires modification to existing copyright laws and regulations, primarily from a domestic setting. The study thus postulated that if the challenge is global, then why shouldn't we consider a global solution? First, mass media should use their agenda setting functions to bring the issue to the public. The discussions on AI and copyright should then extend beyond the domestic sphere. Ideally, an international effort would take place to devise global copyright modifications to address AI.

The second presentation of **Nivea Heluey** focused on the ethical AI governance, trust and deepfake regulation following the examples of UAE. Heluey's research identified strong vision for becoming a global AI hub on the side of UAE and some basic ethical framework therein (more guidelines than any binding legislation). However, there was a lack of detailed enforcement guidance and absence of specifically deepfake regulation. Heluey proposed that the country could use their AI strategy to also, drawing on the examples from particularly the EU, pioneer ethical and deepfake AI regulation globally. Her research proposes a benchmark model based on a collaboration between governments, academia, and media organizations which could safeguard sufficient basic levels of trust in AI use.

This benchmark model would be based on:

- Core ethical principles
- Stakeholder engagement
- Regulatory framework
- Technology adaptation
- Education and awareness

In the final presentation, **Mohamed Benabid** explored the complex relationships within AI legitimization in French media discourse. His research demonstrated the multifaceted and interconnected nature of the discourse, spanning technological, data-driven, and economic dimensions. Benabid introduced three pillars of AI adoption in journalism deduced from his research: "Coercive," "Normative," and "Cognitive." Within the Coercive, the outcome shows that for companies facing external pressures, the need for adopting artificial intelligence is framed as an inevitable reality, often emphasized with a focus on reputational risk and competitive advantage. Within the Normative, AI is framed as an essential, almost inevitable force driving future progress, positioning it as a key instrument for scientific, economic, and political transformation, and as a critical factor in global power struggles. Lastly, within the Cognitive, the adoption of AI is framed as a collective belief in its necessity for future progress, which shapes institutional actions and decisions, driven by the shared understanding that it is an essential component of technological and economic competitiveness.

In conclusion, Benabid's research called for a broad representation of diverse perspectives in the media coverage of AI, for highlighting media coverage that delves into the ethical implications of AI, such as concerns around privacy, algorithmic bias, and the societal impact of AI-driven decision-making, and lastly for encouraging media outlets to be transparent about the methodologies, data sources, and potential biases underlying their reporting on AI advancements.

Safety of Journalists and SLAPPs in Europe: Where We Stand (17:20 – 18:30, Lecture Room 6)

Moderator: Lucie Sýkorová, Supervisory Board Chair/Reporter, ECPMF/HlídacíPes.org, Czechia

Speakers:

-Lukáš Diko, Director, Investigatívne Centrum Jána Kuciaka, Slovakia

-Konrad Siemaszko, Lawyer and Head of the Freedom of Expression Programme, Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland

-Tamara Filipović, Coordinator, SafeJournalists Network, Serbia

-Vinzenc Wyss, Professor of Journalism, and Louis Schäfer, Research Assistant, Institute for Applied Media Studies (IAM), Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), Switzerland

SUMMARY:

The panel on the safety of journalists and SLAPPs in Europe highlighted the growing threats against press freedom and the need for stronger protections.

Lukáš Diko, Director of the Investigatívne Centrum Jána Kuciaka, emphasized the organization's mission to honor the legacy of Jan Kuciak by protecting journalism and press freedom. He highlighted the growing threats to journalists, noting, "In 2024, we saw a big growth in online harassment," with over 64 new cases by October 2024. Diko also discussed how state-directed attacks, such as those by Fico, have fueled online harassment.

Konrad Siemaszko, a lawyer at the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, highlighted the ongoing challenge of SLAPP lawsuits in Poland. He called for stronger legal measures, stating, "We need stronger measures," and criticized the slow response from Polish courts, which often fail to dismiss unfounded claims. He also noted that over 40 NGOs have called for comprehensive anti-SLAPP laws, urging, "We're trying to gather data to know what we're dealing with."

Tamara Filipović, Coordinator of the SafeJournalists Network, discussed the alarming state of press freedom in Serbia, noting it has the highest number of attacks and threats in the Balkans. She emphasized, "Politicians, especially high-ranking ones, pressure the media," and criticized the lack of progress in investigations, with many cases remaining in the "pre-investigative state."

Vinzenz Wyss and Louis Schäfer from the Institute for Applied Media Studies (Zurich) discussed the lack of awareness of SLAPP lawsuits in Switzerland. Wyss pointed out, "If you cannot identify SLAPP, then you can't talk about it," highlighting how such lawsuits create a chilling effect, leading to self-censorship and undermining media freedom. Schäfer added a touch of humor, recalling how Swiss editors, when questioned about SLAPPs, responded, "Why are you asking us such questions about SLAPPs here in Switzerland? We don't have any problems!" Schäfer jokingly replied, "We did it for science." The panel concluded that even in countries like Switzerland, where SLAPPs are not yet widely recognized, there is a critical need to raise awareness and take action. Wyss emphasized, "Even in Switzerland, we first need to create a problem" in order to initiate meaningful change.

Protecting the European Information and Media Space from AI's Potential Harms (17:20 – 18:30, Conference Room)

In cooperation with the Czech-German Future Fund, the French Institute, and the French Embassy in Prague

Moderator:

-Christian Christensen, Professor of Journalism, Stockholm University/Prague Media Steering Point Committee Member, Sweden

Speakers:

-Matthias Pfeffer, Founding Director, Council for European Public Space, Germany

-Adriana Dergam, Projects Director, Prague Centre for Media Skills, Czechia

-Vincent Berthier, Head of Technology Desk, Reporters without Borders, France

SUMMARY:

Matthias Pfeffer thought the session title provocative - the assumption that they are purely negative is problematic. Of course, AI poses many negatives. He identified that populism and technology can align to takeover power in a state – as shown by the U.S. This gives tech companies an economic and knowledge power advantage over the public and government. Crucially, the levels of LLMs will climb to is frightening, given their already significant evolution in such a short span of time. We do not reflect enough on what is new in generative AI; we have built actors who can develop by themselves. It is a problem of control, particularly in their development. We need to look at these technologies not through the lens that they will destroy the world, but what they are already doing – which is threatening democracy and the autonomy of humanity. AI is as big a risk as atomic energy, whereas we do not have the regulatory frameworks for it.

But there are also some positives to AI. If we use it in a regulated and controlled way, for the purpose of autonomy and democracy, these technologies can be a positive force. This is particularly since the basis of our society is an informed citizen. Europe has a history of tradition – the starting place of democracy. We had the first regulation for AI and so can lead and develop it for good. However, we need to be careful about regulating "science fiction" (imposing ex-ante legislation).

Adriana Dergam believed that digitalization is good so far as it fulfils and advances human rights; therefore, we should be looking at AI in terms of human rights and its societal impact. We do not need to frame this debate at the European, continental level – as we cannot expect these higher levels to regulate AI. We can and should go lower in order to influence public debate; let's look at how these technologies affect journalists and their lives. Research at the Prague Centre for Media Skills shows there are three levels of how they understand these technologies – 1. Some level of understanding in terms of cyber security; 2. Low level of understanding regarding digital self-management (e.g., gender-specific threats to a journalist's safety); 3. Low level of understanding regarding responsibility, accessibility, and accountability of AI. This third area is where we can focus – on increasing education regarding the societal impact of such technologies. Essentially, media literacy for journalists. One other major problematic area is the way public services speak of digitalization; in terms of monetization, not what is best for the public.

Vincent Berthier postulated that sovereignty over technology is the true question we should be asking. Europe is not a digital power, and continuously frames the topic as a debate between innovation and regulation. However, the two are interlinked. With regulation and investment, we could build something strong. The fear now is that we are doing neither. Europe needs to establish what kind of tech it wants, rather than what it does not want. Europe is 27 – not 1 – and it acts as such. Each country wants to be its own champion with regards to AI; yet we need to have a truly European champion present. We need to field a model that goes beyond national interests.

Additionally, he highlighted X has become a political interference platform – and there is nothing in place to have prevented it from happening. Silicon Valley's "tech-led" solution to the problems of AI is completely wrong; it will only make a few rich. Regulation is one way, but we need to speak about it as an innovation. We ought to take precautionary actions.