

Strengthening media freedom in the EU

The EU is actively engaged in protecting the independence and safety of journalists as crucial components of the proper democratic functioning of its institutions and Member States. Media freedom, however, has been deteriorating in recent years. Threats, harassment, public shaming and even assassinations of media actors are on the rise. At its November II plenary session, the European Parliament is due to vote on an own-initiative report concerned with strengthening media freedom. The report emphasises that combating media capture, hate speech and misinformation is fundamental when it comes to defending the rule of law and democracy in the EU.

Background

According to the 2020 [World Press Freedom Index](#), Europe continues to be the continent that scores best on media freedom. In recent years, however, media freedom and pluralism in the European region have deteriorated, with the coronavirus pandemic exacerbating this process. Journalists and other media professionals are facing increasingly hostile environments in a number of EU Member States, with cases of violence, threats and harassment growing at an alarming rate (with [women journalists](#) particularly vulnerable to these offences).

Meanwhile, the digital transformation of the media landscape has contributed to a sharp decline in the revenues of traditional media outlets. The spread, on a massive scale, of social media, messaging platforms and online news sources has made information more accessible to broader audiences. Yet online sources are difficult to verify. With the widespread dissemination of misinformation, overall [trust](#) in traditional media is on the wane.

Media freedom is of active concern to the EU institutions. In 2013, the European Parliament [called](#) on the Commission to propose concrete legally binding procedures and mechanisms to safeguard media pluralism. It reiterated this call in 2018, noting in a [resolution](#) that political developments in various Member States were leading to increased pressure on journalists. In 2019, a [new EU directive](#) was adopted to protect whistle-blowers. Finally, the proposed [2021-2027 multiannual financial framework](#) mentions media pluralism among the measures concerning digital content, audiovisual and other media industries.

The LIBE report on strengthening media freedom

The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) of the European Parliament adopted an own-initiative [report](#) supporting the process of strengthening media freedom in Europe on 27 October 2020. The report, drafted by rapporteur Magdalena Adamowicz (EPP, Poland), stresses that combating media capture, hate speech and disinformation is not only relevant to human rights, it is also a fundamental factor in the defence of the rule of law and democracy in the EU.

The report addresses six main issues: media freedom and pluralism, political independence of the media, the protection of journalists, financial issues, hate speech and disinformation. It also makes a number of recommendations for action: addition of a specific chapter on monitoring of media freedom in the annual report on the rule of law; stronger checks on public financing of media outlets; the establishment of a permanent fund to sustain media independence; and a more robust regulatory framework to combat misinformation.

Own-initiative report: [2020/2009\(INI\)](#); Committee responsible: LIBE; Rapporteur: Magdalena Adamowicz (EPP, Poland). For further information see the Parliament's [Legislative Train Schedule](#) website.

