

Press release – Media freedom: EP warns of attempts to silence critics and undermine pluralism



In a resolution adopted with 553 votes to 54 and 89 abstentions, Parliament points to “attempts by governments of some member states to silence critical and independent media and undermine media freedom and pluralism”. MEPs are particularly concerned about the state of public service media in some EU countries, where they have become an “example of pro-government propaganda”.

They stress that media freedom, pluralism, independence and the safety of journalists are crucial components of the right to freedom of expression and information, and are essential to the democratic functioning of the EU. “Freedom of the media has been deteriorating in recent years”, warns the text, and the COVID-19 outbreak has exacerbated this deterioration.

Protect journalists better, particularly women

MEPs see a “growing pattern of intimidation aimed at silencing journalists”,

citing the murders of Daphne Caruana Galizia and Ján Kuciak and his fiancée as examples of the risks faced by investigative journalists. They call on public figures to refrain from denigrating journalists, and insist on the legal obligation to investigate all attacks, highlighting that female journalists are especially vulnerable and should be given additional protection.

Excessive media concentration threatens pluralism

The resolution notes that when media ownership is concentrated in the hands of too few people, pluralism is put at risk, making it more difficult to challenge the spread of disinformation. MEPs demand that EU countries take action to avoid excessive concentration and guarantee transparency. They criticise governments for invasive interference in public advertising, and make clear that EU funds must not be spent on government-controlled media or political propaganda.

In this respect, Parliament also calls on the European Commission to assess in each member state how transparent the ownership of media outlets is, as well as private and government interference in the sector, in its annual rule of law assessment. MEPs insist that attempts to damage media freedom and pluralism should be considered a serious and systematic abuse of power that goes against fundamental EU values.

Online hate speech and disinformation

MEPs want a more robust legal framework to prevent and combat increasing online hate speech and call for more collaboration between online platforms and law enforcement authorities. They stress that platforms' voluntary actions are "necessary yet still insufficient" in tackling disinformation, illegal content and foreign interference. Nonetheless, they "must not become private censors" and the removal of illegal content must be subject to safeguards.

Finally, the adopted text highlights concerns about foreign democratic interference seeking to polarise and nullify pluralism and warns of the potentially harmful consequences of manipulating information relating to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Quote

[Magdalena Adamowicz \(EPP, PL\)](#), rapporteur, stated: "Today we witness democracy being withdrawn, power taken with lies. There is no freedom without media independence, no democracy without media pluralism. Media should serve the truth, not lies. It should serve voters, not those in power, and should be a check on power. Media should protect democracy, but media can also kill it. That is why it must be independent".