

# Brussels's media machine

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EU media funding and the shaping of public discourse

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## **Executive summary**

This report exposes the European Union's vast, under-scrutinised system of media funding – a sprawling ecosystem in which the European Commission and the European Parliament collectively disburse close to €80million annually to media projects across Europe and beyond. While often framed as support for media freedom and pluralism, this funding frequently advances explicitly pro-EU narratives, raising serious concerns about editorial independence, political influence and democratic integrity.

## Key funding channels and instruments

**The European Commission** is the primary funder, disbursing grants through programmes such as:

- **IMREG (Information Measures for the EU Cohesion policy):** over € 40million since 2017 for pro-EU media campaigns, often via public broadcasters and news agencies.
- **Journalism Partnerships:** nearly € 50million since 2021, much of it to media organisations that produce content aligned with EU policies or geopolitical priorities (for example, in relation to the Russia-Ukraine conflict).
- **Multimedia Actions:** over € 20million annually, supporting projects like the **European Newsroom**, a Brussels-based consortium of 24 press agencies, and the Euronews channel.
- **European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO):** at least € 27million for so-called ‘anti-disinformation’ networks, many of which overlap with promotional media partnerships.
- **Pilot projects and preparatory actions:** funding for experimental or politically targeted media initiatives.

**European Parliament media funding:** through its Directorate-General for Communication, the EP has allocated nearly **€ 30million since 2020** to media outlets, largely for campaigns related to the 2024 elections and other promotional initiatives.

### **Stated vs actual objectives**

Many projects are presented as supporting **media freedom**, **pluralism** or **European values**. In practice, they frequently serve to:

- promote pro-EU narratives
- marginalise dissent and critical perspectives
- construct a top-down '**European public sphere**'.

### **Buzzwords as tools of influence**

Terms like 'fighting disinformation', 'supporting factual programming' and 'promoting European integration' are used to justify strategic media-shaping efforts.

### **Semi-structural relationships with major media**

The EU maintains ongoing partnerships with **public broadcasters** and **news agencies**, blurring the lines between journalism and institutional communication. News agencies and outlets involved in EU-sponsored anti-disinformation networks often also receive promotional funding.



**Concerns over editorial independence**

Even without direct interference, reliance on EU funding:

- creates a **structural incentive** to produce friendly coverage
- risks undermining **critical journalism**
- raises questions about the media's ability to hold EU institutions accountable.

**EU media activities beyond its borders**

The EU funds media outlets in **Ukraine**, the **Western Balkans**, the **South Caucasus** and **Russian/Belarusian exile media**.

These efforts, under the guise of 'supporting democracy', often reflect **geopolitical and strategic goals**, mirroring methods associated with **USAID-style influence campaigns**.

## Introduction

Have you ever read or heard a report about the EU that felt more like a press release or advertisement than real journalism? As it turns out, that impression might not be far from the truth.

For the first time ever, this report blows the lid open on Brussels's media machine: how the EU channels vast sums of public money into media projects across Europe and beyond – to the tune of nearly € 80million per year (at least) or close to € 1billion over the past decade – often with the explicit aim of promoting pro-EU narratives.

This is likely a conservative estimate: on top the money allocated to EU media by the Commission (€ 50million per year, plus around € 5million through DG REGIO) and the Parliament (nearly € 10million per year), one has to take into account the media projects funded in non-EU countries, for which the EU allocated € 10million to Ukraine in 2025 alone. Moreover, this report has focused exclusively on EU schemes formally dedicated to media support; it does not include indirect funding streams – for example, advertising or communication contracts awarded to marketing firms who then redistribute funds to major media outlets (see Conclusions).

Strangely, this issue has received relatively little attention over the years, despite clearly undermining the supposed independence and neutrality of the media – and arguably going a long way in explaining the strong pro-EU slant of Europe's mainstream press.

The EU channels money to the media through both the European Commission and the European Parliament, with the former accounting for the lion's share of the funding – around €50million per year, according to the Commission.<sup>1</sup> The Commission's media support is mainly managed by the following departments:

- The Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO), primarily through the Information Measures for the EU Cohesion policy (IMREG) programme
- The Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CNECT), primarily through the Creative Europe and Digital Europe programmes
- The Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM)
- Funding instruments also include pilot projects and preparatory actions – new initiatives that might turn into standing EU funding programmes. EU Commission grants for the news media sector generally fall under three main categories: 'media freedom and pluralism', 'collaboration and innovation' and 'citizen engagement and public sphere'.

Meanwhile, the European Parliament's media projects are funded through its own Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM) – to the tune of almost €10million per year (see the relevant section below). On top of this, the EU also funds media projects in non-EU countries – allocating €10million just to Ukraine in 2025 alone (see the relevant section below).

At the heart of this sprawling operation lies a vast ecosystem of EU media 'collaborations'. Over the years, the Commission has funded hundreds of initiatives, ranging from straightforward promotional campaigns to questionable 'investigative journalism' projects and sweeping 'anti-disinformation' efforts – all designed, explicitly or otherwise, to foster a media environment

favourable to the EU's political agenda. One striking example is the Information Measures for the EU Cohesion policy (IMREG) programme, through which € 40million have been spent since 2017 to finance advertorial campaigns promoting the EU's Cohesion Policy – often through public broadcasters and major news agencies.

Many EU-funded media projects, even those ostensibly aimed at supporting pluralism and independent journalism, serve to elevate explicitly pro-EU platforms and amplify official narratives. Programmes often claim to 'promote European rights and values' or 'combat disinformation', but behind these lofty buzzwords lies a clear strategic objective: to shape the public debate, marginalise dissenting voices and promote European integration. Euphemisms such as the creation of 'a European public sphere' mask what is, in effect, a top-down attempt to manufacture a European demos – a unified political consciousness that, under current political and cultural conditions, remains more an ideological aspiration than a democratic reality.

Indeed, it is likely no coincidence that funding allocated by the EU for media and journalism projects has risen steeply in recent years,<sup>2</sup> at a time when concerns have been mounting within elite circles about the rise of 'populist' and eurosceptic movements. It has also coincided with the rise in EU funding for NGOs and think tanks to promote explicitly pro-EU narratives under the guise of civic engagement and rights advocacy, as the author exposed in a previous report.<sup>3</sup>

Especially worrying is the EU's semi-structural relationship with major public broadcasters and news agencies, which are systematically involved both in overt promotional campaigns and in so-called 'anti-disinformation' initiatives. This is not merely a case of occasional collaboration, but an entrenched system of partnerships. News agencies, in particular, occupy a pivotal role: they not only produce original news content, but also act

as central nodes in the media ecosystem, allowing narratives crafted at the agency level to cascade verbatim across hundreds of mainstream outlets. Many of these agencies simultaneously accept EU funding for projects aimed at promoting the Commission's agenda and participate in EU-backed networks to 'combat disinformation', further blurring the lines between journalism and political messaging.

Another example of the semi-structural relationship between the EU and the media is Euronews. Since the channel's creation, the European Commission has provided significant funding to Euronews – to the tune of more than €20million per year (nearly a quarter of a billion euros over the past decade alone).

This situation raises serious questions: to what extent can media initiatives that involve close cooperation with political institutions – and depend on them for future funding – truly serve as neutral arbiters of truth? Even in the absence of direct editorial interference, the structural dependence on EU grants fosters a dynamic that incentivises self-censorship and narrative alignment. It weakens the media's critical function, particularly when it comes to scrutinising the very institutions providing the funding.

Many projects funded under the Journalism Partnerships programme, for example, explicitly promote pro-EU narratives, including the 'promotion of European integration', 'demystification of the EU' and the 'combatting of extremist national movements'. On geopolitically sensitive issues – most notably the Russia-Ukraine conflict – these projects foster an environment where media outlets are financially incentivised to echo official EU-NATO positions, further narrowing the space for independent journalism.

Crucially, the EU's media-funding strategies extend far beyond its own borders. While its campaigns within member states already verge on self-promotion, the EU's media activities in neighbouring regions – notably

Ukraine, the Western Balkans and the South Caucasus – are even more overtly propagandistic. Under the guise of ‘promoting independent journalism’ and ‘fighting disinformation’, the EU has funnelled tens of millions of euros into media outlets abroad, often with the clear objective of advancing EU-NATO geopolitical interests. These initiatives mirror the foreign-influence strategies historically associated with agencies like USAID, but are cloaked in the language of democratic support and media pluralism.

In sum, the evidence presented in this report points to an uncomfortable reality: rather than simply supporting a free and pluralistic media landscape, the EU is systematically investing in shaping a ‘friendly’ media environment that reinforces its own legitimacy and political goals. This phenomenon calls into question the very notion of media independence in Europe today – particularly when the line between journalism and institutional propaganda becomes so thin as to be almost imperceptible.

### **Summary of EU media support: main programmes**

- ‘Information Measures for the EU Cohesion policy (IMREG)’:  
€ 40million since 2017 (around € 5million per year)
- Budget line: ‘Creative Europe’ programmes:
  - ‘Journalism Partnerships’: nearly € 50million (2021–25)
  - A European public sphere: a new online media offer for young Europeans’: € 30.5million (2020–24)
  - ‘Cross-border Media Literacy projects’: € 9million (2022–24)
- Budget line: ‘Multimedia Actions’ programmes:
  - ‘Pan-EU audiovisual reporting’: € 11million (2024)
  - ‘EU audio reporting’: € 4.5million (2024)
  - ‘Coverage of EU affairs through radio’: € 6.6million (2021–22)

- ‘EU digital reporting’: €5million (2024)
- ‘European media hubs’: €8million (2023)
- ‘European media platforms’: €18million (2021–23)
- EU-Euronews partnership agreement Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA): more than €20million per year in the past decade alone
- Budget line: ‘Digital Europe’ programme:
  - ‘European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)’:  
at least €27million (2020–25)
- Budget line: ‘Horizon 2020’ programmes
  - Various media projects, mostly focused on anti-disinformation, several million euros per project
- Foreign media programmes funded through the European Commission’s Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI): specific allocation to media undisclosed.
- European Parliament media funding: €30million since 2020 (almost €10million per year)
- Pilot projects and preparatory actions: typically funded through dedicated budget lines
  - One example is the media project: ‘Citizen facing European TV and Video News Portal for Streaming, Search and Translation of European TV and video news and political documentaries produced or transmitted by accredited public and private media in Member States’, for which €5.5million were allocated in 2025 alone.

## 1 Paying the media to promote the EU's Cohesion Policy

It seems apt to begin by focusing on the Information Measures for the EU Cohesion policy (IMREG) programme, financed by the Commission's DG REGIO, because this is the programme that more than any other bears the hallmarks of an official promotional, or propaganda, campaign. The Cohesion Policy is the EU's main investment policy, through which it aims to reduce economic, social and territorial disparities within the EU through investments in specific regions and sectors.

Since 2017, the Commission has channelled around € 40million<sup>4</sup> to media outlets (especially public broadcasters), news agencies and communication firms across Europe in order to produce thousands of articles, radio features and TV broadcasts aimed at 'increasing awareness of the benefits of Cohesion Policy among people' and 'promoting and fostering a better understanding of the role of Cohesion Policy in supporting all EU's regions'. The EU spent on average between € 100,000 and € 300,000 for each project.

Information Measures for the EU Cohesion policy (IMREG)
<b>EU contribution</b> € 40million since 2017
The programme is aimed at 'increasing awareness of the benefits of Cohesion Policy among people' and 'promoting and fostering a better understanding of the role of Cohesion Policy in supporting all EU's regions.'



In its various calls for proposals, the Commission routinely claims it will ‘respect the complete editorial independence of the actors involved’. But this is disingenuous: if the projects are expected to highlight the ‘benefits’ of EU policy, how can true editorial independence be ensured? Direct interference from the Commission isn’t necessary; beneficiaries will be well aware of the narrative expected of their ‘reporting’, particularly if they wish to secure future funding. Indeed, few would be surprised to learn that many of the projects paint the EU Cohesion Policy in a glowing light.

Even worse, the author of the report found several examples of ‘news features’ funded through the project that failed to disclose their connection to EU funding – effectively amounting to a form of stealth marketing or, given the political nature of the topic and funder, covert propaganda.

One such example is the project titled ‘La politica di coesione in numeri’ (‘The Cohesion Policy in numbers’), for which the Commission in 2018 awarded €290,000 to *Il Sole 24 Ore*, Italy’s leading financial newspaper.<sup>5</sup> Nowhere on the website<sup>6</sup> – which, as one would imagine, features several articles describing the positive impact of EU funds – is it disclosed that the project was funded by the EU. The reason is clear: in that case, who would have reasonably interpreted those articles as objective journalism? Similarly, the website of the ‘Europa, Italia’ project<sup>7</sup> – a campaign run by *La Repubblica*, one of Italy’s largest daily newspapers, aimed at ‘increasing awareness of the benefits of cohesion policy across Italy’ – offers no clear disclosure of EU funding aside from a tiny logo of the European Commission under the banner (see over):

Visualizza questa mail nel browser



**24<sup>th</sup> ORE**

**La Politica di Coesione in numeri**

**maggio 2019**

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**POST 2020**

## Fondi Ue 2021-2027, al via il negoziato tra l'Italia e la Commissione europea



(ANSA)

Ad aprile è partito il negoziato tra l'Italia e la Commissione europea per definire l'accordo di partenariato per la **gestione dei fondi strutturali 2021-2027, 38 miliardi per l'Italia tra Fesr e Fse, a cui si aggiungono anche le risorse del Fesr**. Nell'ultima seduta della legislatura il Parlamento europeo ha approvato in prima lettura il regolamento comune che fissa le regole per la spesa dei fondi. Al nuovo Parlamento il compito di approvare in via definitiva le regole che dovranno avere anche il via libera del Consiglio, cioè degli Stati membri. Intanto, l'Italia, come gli altri Stati membri, dovrebbe definire una prima bozza dell'accordo di partenariato **entro la fine di quest'anno, in cui saranno decisi i programmi operativi e i relativi importi assegnati**. Su queste basi, nel corso del 2020, saranno scritti i programmi per poter iniziare – si spera senza i ritardi della scorsa programmazione – l'attuazione vera e propria nel 2021.

*Per approfondire:*

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Le sette aziende hanno partecipato al programma di Accelerazione del Centro di Innovazione Italiana a San Francisco presso l'evento, gestito da Fondazione Brindisi come capofila di European Innovation

di Sara Fianelli  
9 ottobre 2018

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### Other examples of Cohesion Policy promotional projects include:<sup>8</sup>

<b>A Brave New Europe<sup>9</sup></b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 133,000	<b>Country</b> Italy
<b>Media partner</b> Internazionale (among others)	
‘The project was designed to promote Cohesion Policy through 30 stories about the main themes of the EU Cohesion Policy, designed to reach different targets through the <i>Slow News</i> website and newsletter, student publication Zai.net and the magazine and website of <i>Internazionale</i> .’	

<b>Cohesion Weekly<sup>10</sup></b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 200,000	<b>Countries</b> France and Romania
<b>Media partners</b> France Médias Monde and RFI România	
‘Cohesion Weekly aims to contribute to a better understanding of the EU Cohesion Policy by European citizens thanks to a verified, neutral and popularised information campaign that will contribute to strengthening their sense of belonging to the EU. This information campaign will demonstrate how the European cohesion policy implements the EU’s political priorities by being one of the main drivers of European integration, and how its operations contribute to addressing the challenges faced by the EU at national, regional and local level.’	

<b>Europe Close Up: A Pan-European TV and Online Series on EU Cohesion Policy's Regional Impact<sup>11</sup></b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 200,000	<b>Countries</b> Germany, Austria & the Netherlands
<b>Media partner</b> STUDIO 47 (among others)	
<p>‘Europe Close Up is a collaborative media project developed by STUDIO 47, alongside regional broadcasters in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands. This innovative TV and online media series is dedicated to elucidating the EU Cohesion Policy, employing a dynamic blend of compelling storytelling, insightful interviews, and vivid cinematography. The primary goal of Europe Close Up is to deepen public comprehension and engagement with the EU Cohesion Policy.’</p>	
<b>European Solidarity<sup>12</sup></b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 300,000	<b>Country</b> Italy
<b>Media partner</b> Rete Blu (among others)	
<p>‘The EU solidarity project will provide comprehensive coverage of Cohesion Policy. The reports will cover the priority areas of cohesion-fund spending, as well as their use in specific regions, and examples of good practices. The project involves a multi-media strategy. Outputs will include a weekly service of about five minutes on Cohesion Policy for about 42 services over the course of the project.’</p>	

<b>Pulse of Europe – Weekly Supplement in Lithuanian Newspapers<sup>13</sup></b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 285,000	<b>Country</b> Lithuania
<b>Media partners</b> several Lithuanian media outlets	
‘Pulse of Europe – Weekly Supplement in Lithuanian Newspapers and a parallel online publication on the websites of various regional newspapers. Pulse of Europe will present a range of articles, success stories, interviews and analyses that showcase the tangible outcomes of the EU Cohesion Policy in local communities across Lithuania.’	

<b>EU in Bulgaria<sup>14</sup></b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 300,000	<b>Country</b> Bulgaria
<b>Media partner</b> Bulgarian News Agency (BTA)	
The project, managed by the Bulgarian News Agency (BTA), entailed the organisation of several events, which were promoted through national radio and social media. According to the European Commission, 652 press articles were produced in-house by BTA.	

<b>Italy: Cohesion Goes Local<sup>15</sup></b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 265,000	<b>Country</b> Italy
<b>Media partner</b> ANSA ( news agency )	
<p>‘The campaign involved the production and delivery of a large amount of information in a high variety of formats: multimedia news coverage, social media and surveys, podcasts, animated informative videos, video interviews with high representatives of the EU, and livestreams of major EU debates on the future of Cohesion Policy. ANSA produced updated facts and figures of Cohesion Policy in Italy and its regions, with specific focus on the regional level (in collaboration with Sant’Anna University of Pisa), and organised webinars and forums to debate, raise awareness, involve stakeholders and, where possible, citizens. Topics covered included the Green Deal and environmental challenges, digital innovation, social and economic recovery and growth. ANSA’s news items on Cohesion Policy were republished on the websites of more than 20 local newspapers and other media outlets.’ The project was managed by ANSA, Italy’s leading news agency. According to the European Commission, 216 news items were published.</p>	

<b>Time4Results: Cohesion and the new funding opportunities<sup>16</sup></b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 270,000	<b>Country</b> Italy
<b>Media partner</b> ANSA ( news agency )	
<p>‘Time4Results is an information measure to produce and disseminate information on the overall EU Cohesion policy in Italy, with a special attention to the new instruments of 2021-27 programming and the synergies between regional funds and the National Recovery Plan.’</p>	

The cohesion policy today and tomorrow – Italy <sup>17</sup>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 270,000	<b>Country</b> Italy
<b>Media partner</b> ANSA ( news agency )	
<p>‘The project aimed to make people in Italy realise how EU Cohesion Policy improves their personal lives and the environment in which they live. A “Your Europe” section of the ANSA website was regularly fed with content relating to EU funding opportunities and describing successful projects.’ According to the European Commission, more than 2,400 news items were published as part of the campaign.</p>	

Green Cohesion for Youth <sup>18</sup>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 280,000	<b>Country</b> Slovenia
<b>Media partner</b> RTV	
<p>The project, managed in partnership with RTV, Slovenia’s national public broadcasting organisation, was aimed at ‘increasing the awareness of the general public about the importance of EU Cohesion policy for environmental protection and green growth of all EU regions’, and comprised, among other things, 15 TV reports broadcast by RTV.</p>	

<b>Vivi l'Europa<sup>19</sup></b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 85,000	<b>Country</b> Italy
<b>Media partner</b> Controradio	
<p>‘The campaign involved the organisation of training webinars, addressed to public administration, small and medium-sized enterprises and communication professionals (journalists, stakeholders and press offices), aimed at better communication of EU Cohesion Policies and its impact on the Tuscany Region. According to the European Commission, more than two million people were reached by the radio campaign.’</p>	

<b>Europa al día<sup>20</sup></b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 300,000	<b>Country</b> Spain
<b>Media partner</b> RTVE	
<p>The project, managed by RTVE, Spain's public broadcasting corporation, entailed the creation of ‘over 50 hours of content related to Cohesion Policy through different RTVE media and channels in order to achieve maximum coverage and news impact on the population’. According to the European Commission, a total of 608 actions were broadcast on television and radio programmes and more than 40million viewers were reached across the whole campaign.</p>	



European Funds: We Will All Benefit <sup>21</sup>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 220,000	<b>Country</b> Poland
<b>Media partner</b> Bonnier Business Poland	
The campaign covered 16 NUTS2 basic regions and presented EU-funded projects through articles, videos, webinars, podcasts, online quizzes and polls.	

Europa, Italia <sup>22</sup>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 260,000	<b>Country</b> Italy
<b>Media partner</b> La Repubblica ( GEDI Gruppo Editoriale )	
‘How to increase awareness of the benefits of cohesion policy across Italy, reaching a maximum number of people through various media? This was the challenge met by the “Europa, Italia” project. As part of the project, a special section was created on the website of <i>La Repubblica</i> , one of Italy’s largest and most respected newspapers. It was then fed with a set of tailored integrated communication products and services, including short news, in-depth articles, infographics, podcasts, and videos.’ According to the European Commission, 200 short news items published were created as part of the campaign.	

<b>InForMe – Information Measures for Cohesion Policy Promotion by Local Media in Poland<sup>23</sup></b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 270,000	<b>Country</b> Poland
<b>Media partners</b> several Polish outlets	
<p>The action addressed 50 local independent, private, paid weekly reviews (newspapers and websites) and 300 media workers as well as 1,270,000 readers and 2,086,000 online users living in small cities and rural areas in Poland. The project aimed to make Cohesion Policy more visible and closer to the citizens of Poland through support for production and dissemination of information and professional content to be published by local media.’</p> <p>According to the European Commission, more than 100,000 informational sheets on Cohesion Policy were disseminated by 50 publishers throughout Poland.</p>	
<b>Iberian Stories of European Cohesion<sup>24</sup></b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 270,000	<b>Country</b> Spain and Portugal
<b>Media partners</b> EFE and Lusa (news agencies)	
<p>‘The project, managed by EFE and Lusa, the largest news agencies in Spain and Portugal, respectively, ‘aimed to inform inhabitants of the Spanish-Portuguese border area about the concrete achievements of Cohesion Policy through the Interreg VA Spain-Portugal cooperation program (POCTEP)’.</p> <p>According to the European Commission, the project had a volume of 2,445 impacts (republishing of the content by other media outlets) and reached 1.3million readers through the press.</p>	

From Lisbon to Stockholm <sup>25</sup>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 300,000	<b>Country</b> Portugal
<b>Media partners</b> RTP (Portugal's public service broadcaster)	
'RTP Portugal produced 30 broadcasts over a period of 30 weeks in the regions and cities of all 27 EU Member States, as well as the UK and Norway. The reports consisted of interviews and green project profiles of 15–20 minutes, aired on the seven channels of RTP Portugal as well as their radio station. By filming 58 EU projects funded by the EU cohesion policy in 58 regions, a wide, diverse and international audience was able to view the series. According to the European Commission, the campaign reached an estimated total audience of 10 million viewers.'	

As the examples provided above make clear, the European Commission puts a lot of effort (and money) into promoting positive narratives in the media about its Cohesion Policy by effectively sponsoring news content that is often presented as regular journalism – a classic example of covert advertising or propaganda.

The objective is clear: to promote the idea that the EU is a key engine of economic growth and development across Europe. However, notwithstanding the evidence suggesting that the EU – and particularly the euro – has had a negligible or negative impact on several countries,<sup>26</sup> the reality is that this funding doesn't come from 'the EU' per se, but from member states via their contributions to the EU budget.

Moreover, some of the countries most heavily targeted by the Commission's promotional efforts – such as Italy – are actually net contributors to the EU budget. In other words, they pay more into the EU than they receive. In these cases, the idea that 'the EU' is funding Cohesion Policy investment projects borders on the absurd, as these countries are merely reclaiming a portion of their own contributions. In other words, these promotional campaigns are akin to the 'Funded by the European Union' signs dotted around the EU – a way to boost a positive perception of Brussels among citizens.

The widespread presence of EU-sponsored content casts doubt on the credibility of much of the EU-related coverage in the European mainstream press. Even when the reporting isn't directly tied to an EU-funded project, media outlets have little incentive to adopt a critical stance toward the EU, as doing so could jeopardise their access to future funding.<sup>27</sup>

A key feature of the EU's Cohesion Policy promotional campaigns isn't just their heavy reliance on public broadcasters, as one might expect, but also their strategic use of news agencies. Indeed, the EU's relationship with news agencies is so deeply embedded that it could be described as structural, raising troubling questions about the objectivity of EU-related reporting both within Europe and internationally.

## 2 The EU's 'special relationship' with news agencies

News agencies have historically played a critical yet overlooked role in setting the media agenda. Though largely invisible to the average news consumer, news agencies hold extraordinary influence over the information we see, hear and ultimately believe. They are the hidden hand that shapes the global media narrative – the ultimate gatekeepers.

Often called wire services, these agencies operate behind the scenes, supplying raw news content to newspapers, broadcasters and digital platforms around the world. Their role is foundational, and their power to shape media narratives is both immense and underexamined. Agencies such as Reuters, Agence France-Presse (AFP), the Associated Press (AP), Deutsche Presse-Agentur (dpa) and ANSA are responsible for producing much of the original reporting that forms the basis of national and international news coverage. Their clients – ranging from national newspapers to regional broadcasters and online startups – depend on this steady stream of ‘verified’, standardised and timely news.

This is one of the reasons why the mainstream media narrative often feels so uniform across different outlets and platforms: not only do news agencies largely set the agenda – if a wire service covers a story, it’s far more likely to receive broad media attention – but they also provide the framing that is then adopted across the media landscape. In other words, as central intermediaries or ‘nodes’, they hold a unique power to determine not just what stories are covered, but how those stories are framed, with the initial framing and fact selection from agencies cascading instantly through thousands of news sites and broadcasts worldwide. In this way, they have long played a significant agenda-setting role, influencing public discourse across nations and cultures.

The news agencies' role has been largely overlooked by the public, though they haven't escaped criticism from experts. One of the most persistent accusations has been that of bias – both in what they choose to report and how they frame it.<sup>28</sup> Critics have long argued that agencies tend to prioritise stories and viewpoints that align with governments and official institutions. A significant contributing factor to this bias is the agencies' reliance on official sources. Government statements, press briefings and institutional reports often form the backbone of agency reporting. While these sources are typically considered credible and are easy to access, they also reflect the perspectives of those in power. But, as this report emphasises, official state funding is not the only source of institutional funding that news agencies receive.

Furthermore, the funding structures of some agencies raise additional concerns. Publicly funded agencies like AFP and EFE (Spain) receive government subsidies intended to ensure their survival and editorial independence. However, critics have argued that this financial dependence can create subtle pressures to align coverage with national policy or avoid topics that could provoke political controversy.<sup>29</sup>

The internet has had a dual impact on news agencies: while it has eroded their monopoly over public discourse – thanks to the rise of social media and independent online outlets that allow audiences to bypass traditional gatekeepers – it has simultaneously reinforced their dominance within the mainstream media, where online newsrooms have become more reliant than ever on agency content. One Dutch study, for example, found that 75 per cent of online news in the country was based on agency copy – and, even more worryingly, that a large part of online news consisted in verbatim copies of agency articles.<sup>30</sup>

In other words, news agencies continue to play a determining role in shaping the global news agenda – arguably more so than ever in certain respects. It's no surprise, then, that the European Commission would target these centralised hubs for its narrative management efforts: securing 'friendly' coverage at the agency level is by far the most efficient way to ensure that its messaging cascades through the wider media ecosystem – often replicated verbatim, as we have seen. The Commission itself boasts in the follow-up to one of its projects that the agency's articles 'were republished on the websites of more than 20 local newspapers and other media outlets'.

As the selected projects above illustrate, the Commission regularly partners with some of Europe's largest news agencies – including ANSA (Italy), EFE (Spain) and Lusa (Portugal) – to 'increase awareness of the benefits of Cohesion Policy among people' and 'promote and foster a better understanding of the role of Cohesion Policy in supporting all EU's regions', through its Information Measures for the EU Cohesion policy (IMREG) programme. This means that millions of citizens across Europe are regularly exposed to what are, in effect, pro-EU advertorials masquerading as journalism – simply as a result of the Information Measures for the EU Cohesion policy initiative.

However, the structural cooperation between news agencies and the Commission goes well beyond just this initiative and encompasses several other projects across multiple budgetary headings and programmes – including 'anti-disinformation' projects, informational websites for migrants, and media campaigns aimed at 'forg[ing] a better understanding between Europeans'. ANSA alone, for example, has participated in at least two dozen EU-funded media campaigns<sup>31</sup> (see image over).

## Clients and Funding Sources

ANSA revenues originate mainly from MEDIA Clients, Public Administration, and Businesses (Companies, Banks and Financial Institutions, Web). In 2023 ANSA recorded operating revenues of over 64.5 million euros.

For more information, see the document [by clicking here](#)

## Some European Projects

- **ENR - European Newsroom**

Pan-European cooperation project between 18 news agencies from across Europe - dpa (project leader), AFP, AGERPRES, ANSA, APA, ATA, Belga, BTA, EFE, Europa Press, FENA, HINA, MIA, PAP, STA, Tanjug, TASR and UKRINFORM; to share information and training opportunities, update and jointly develop journalistic standards, as well as fact-checking tools and verification methods, to counter disinformation and propaganda.

- **The European Data News Hub**

Launched in June 2017 by AFP (project leader), ANSA and DPA, later joined by: AGERPRES, ANP, TT; to inform the media and subscribers on EU issues, to promote exchanges on global issues such as environmental protection, migration and employment. Impartiality is a core value of the project.

- **Infomigrants**

Since 2017, a multilingual website (French, Arabic, English, Dari, Pashto and Bengali) to ensure information for migrants (including asylum seekers) from the Middle East; Maghreb; Sub-Saharan Africa; Western Balkans; Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

- **SOLARIS - Strengthening democratic engagement through value-based generative adversarial networks**

In 2022, ANSA joined a team led by the University of Amsterdam, composed of 12 organizations (8 universities/research organizations, Dexal Artificial Ethics, ANSA, Brand Media Bulgaria, Ministry of Internal Affairs of Albania), that received an EU grant to analyze the political risks associated with the circulation of audio and video content made with GANs (generative adversarial networks), commonly known as "deep-fakes". The aim is to establish regulatory innovations to detect and mitigate the risks of deep-fakes that threaten our democracies. The study will also explore how value-based GANs content can be used to improve democratic engagement (on issues such as climate change, gender inequality, migration etc.)

- **Media Partnership – Committee of the Regions**

Media partnership agreement through the provision of ANSA services to the Committee of the Regions (CoR). To this end, ANSA freely produces articles and content to be delivered to its audience, according to its editorial line, its internal organization and its news services and distribution network currently available to customers and users. The editorial approach will be focused on the national and regional agenda and will take into account the internal political debate, its priorities and the specific impact of European regional policies.

- **EU Parliament Media 23-24**

The objectives addressed by the project are the following: to educate citizens on the importance of the European Parliament elections and encourage them to exercise their right to vote; to inform the widest possible potential audience on the importance of voting in the 2024 European Parliament elections; to raise awareness about the activities and issues of the European Parliament; to reach out to new voters to underline the relevance of the elections for future generations. The activities carried out by ANSA include a wide range of journalistic products, from multimedia news to text and video interviews with MEPs, young voters and political leaders. The contents are published on the ANSA Europa website, where a section is dedicated to the European Parliament, and on the ANSA Europa social media profiles.

- **Time4Results - DG REGIO**

Information and engagement campaign, "Time4Results" produces and disseminates information on EU cohesion policy in Italy, with a focus on the new tools of the 2021-27 programming period and on the synergies between regional funds and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. The project leverages different levels of action to inform, raise awareness and promote the participation of stakeholders, academics, media professionals and citizens, especially young people. It includes: a dedicated two-level news stream, sent to local and national media, and directly to citizens; academic reports; online and in-person forums with stakeholder participation; multimedia tools to make complex information more accessible; field activities to mobilize young citizens.

- **IDMO – Italian Digital Media Observatory**

It is a national hub that supports and implements the work of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO). IDMO is part of a multidisciplinary community that brings together researchers, fact-checkers and experts in social media and digital narratives. The project partners, TIM, Rai, Ansa, Cy4Gate, NewsGuard, Pagella Politica, T6 Ecosystem, will join forces and expertise to fight disinformation. The coordination role of the entire hub is entrusted to the Luiss Data Lab, a research center of the Luiss Guido Carli University

- **Med-IREN - Mediterranean Critical Infrastructure Resilience Engineering with Nature Based Solutions**

The Med-IREN project aims to provide practical demonstrations of how to make critical infrastructures in the Mediterranean climate resilient. The project will be showcased in five Mediterranean lighthouse regions, each corresponding to a current challenge, aligned with regional policies and able to establish the EU as a global leader in the field. In parallel, the interventions and solutions will be replicated in four other EU regions, covering the Mediterranean, Black Sea and Boreal regions. ANSA will be responsible for dissemination and communication activities related to the project.

- **PAMT2 – Training in Tunisia**

Technical assistance project led by the EU Delegation to Tunisia and including the French Agency for Media Development (CFI), ANSA, Article 19, Deutsche Welle Akademie, France Médias Monde, INA and Thomson Media. It aims to strengthen the capacity of Tunisian media to develop pluralistic content and debates on reforms and socio-economic issues, through different types of activities such as peer learning, studies/research, specific consultancy/specialization, online/on-site training, professional conferences/forums, innovation labs, participatory round tables/workshops and study visits.

- **CAPCOM – CAP Communication in Italy**

The project aims to raise awareness among Italian farmers and the general public – especially young people – on the CAP. It will focus on the implementation of the CAP National Strategic Plan (PSN), the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Biodiversity 2030 Strategy and the Organic Action Plan as crucial drivers for the EU economic, social and environmental objectives in agriculture. CAPCOM activities include news articles, multimedia tools, online forums, surveys, in-person events, influencer content and interviews with the young generation



Indeed, the Commission has also spent almost € 2million<sup>32</sup> through its Multimedia Actions programme (which was allocated more than € 20million in 2024 alone)<sup>33</sup> on the creation of a European Newsroom (enr) of press agencies – ‘a space for correspondents to work and train together in Brussels with a view to producing and disseminating news on EU affairs’.<sup>34</sup>

<b>European Newsroom (enr) of press agencies</b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 1.7million	<b>Countries</b> pan-European
<b>Media partners</b> news agencies from 24 countries, coordinated by Deutsche Presse-Agentur (dpa)	
The creation of a physical news production hub in Brussels bringing together news agencies from 24 different countries – both member states as well as candidate or potential candidate countries – in order to disseminate news on EU affairs.	

The project is run by a consortium of 24 national news agencies coordinated by the German press agency, Deutsche Presse-Agentur (dpa), covering several member states as well as candidate or potential candidate countries: AFP (France), AGERPRESS (Romania), ANA-MPA (Greece), ANSA (Italy), ANP (Netherlands), Belga (Belgium), BTA (Bulgaria), ČTK (Czechia), EFE (Spain), Europa Press (Spain), HINA (Croatia), Lusa (Portugal), PAP (Poland), Ritzau (Denmark), STA (Slovenia), TASR (Slovakia), TT (Sweden), ATA (Albania), MIA (North Macedonia), FENA (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Tanjug (Serbia) and APA (Azerbaijan).<sup>35</sup>

Launched in 2022, the project involved the setting up of a physical news production hub in Brussels where ‘agencies’ correspondents jointly produce news digests twice a week, feeding one another’s news wires and dissemination channels, and therefore offering a pan-European perspective on EU affairs to audiences across the continent’. Meanwhile, the correspondents

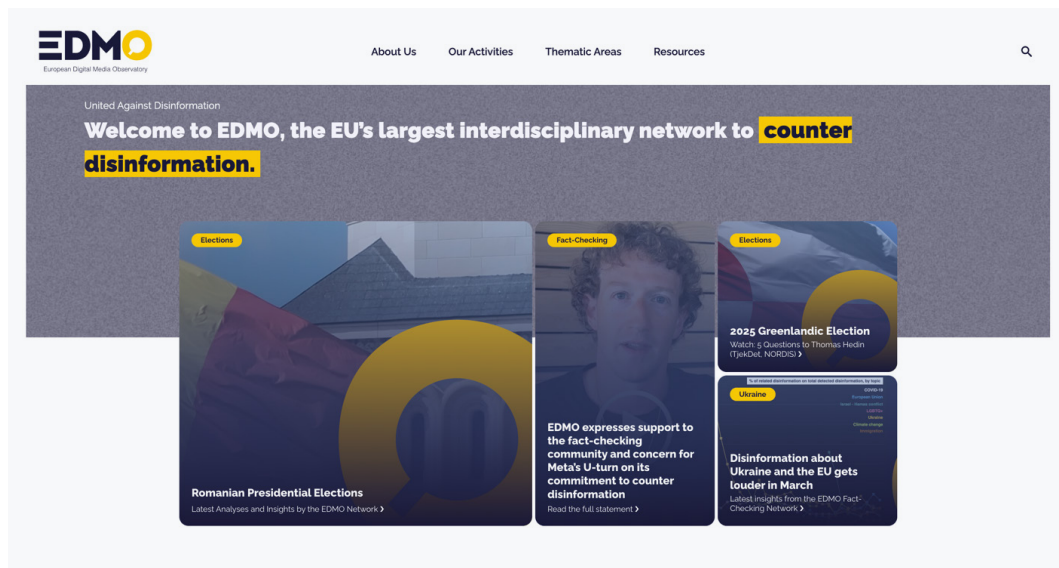
also receive training from EU bodies on issues such as cybersecurity and fact-checking. According to the project's website, its aim is to develop common journalistic standards by using 'tools such as fact checks and verification [...] to uphold quality journalism by counteracting the growing dissemination of disinformation and propaganda', thus 'inform[ing] people in their respective countries in an unbiased and independent way'.<sup>36</sup>

A quick glance at the website, however, reveals an approach that is far from 'unbiased', with sections about 'the dangers of disinformation and the role of journalists and fact-checkers in combating it', the rise of 'anti-EU and eurosceptic movements and sentiments', and the achievements of the European Commission – usually involving commentary from pro-EU (and EU-funded) think tanks such as Carnegie Europe, the European Policy Centre (EPC) and the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS),<sup>37</sup> and even EU officials themselves. A consistent pro-EU bias is evident throughout.

Overall, it's difficult to interpret this as anything other than an effort to further standardise and align the agencies' messaging on EU matters – and, by extension, to shape the broader media narrative even more than is already the case, given the extent to which news outlets rely on agencies for their own 'reporting'.

Another major EU project involving European news agencies is the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)<sup>38</sup> – an initiative established to 'fight against disinformation across Europe' by bringing together fact-checkers, academic researchers, media organisations and news agencies themselves to create a network capable of:

- detecting and analysing disinformation campaigns, as well as producing content to support mainstream and local media and public authorities in exposing harmful disinformation campaigns;
- organising media-literacy activities at national or multinational level;
- designing a framework to ensure secure and privacy-protected access to platforms' data for academic researchers working to better understand disinformation;
- and supporting public authorities in the monitoring of the policies put in place by online platforms to limit the spread and the impact of disinformation.



Launched in 2020, the EDMO today comprises 14 national and multinational hubs.<sup>39</sup> Since its inception, the European Commission has allocated at least €27million to the project through the Digital Europe Programme (DEP) and the Connecting Europe Facility<sup>40</sup> – originally intended to support investments in digital-connectivity infrastructures across Europe.

<b>European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)</b>	
<b>EU contribution</b>	at least € 27million ( 2020-25)
<b>Countries</b>	pan-European
<b>Media partners</b>	media organisations and news agencies from across Europe
The creation of a network to ‘fight against disinformation across Europe’ bringing together fact-checkers, academic researchers, media organisations and news agencies.	

**News agencies involved in EDMO hubs include:**

- Agence France-Presse (AFP) is a prominent partner, participating in multiple EDMO hubs, including:
  - DE FACTO (France)
  - CEDMO (Central Europe: Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland)
  - EDMO BELUX (Belgium and Luxembourg)
  - GADMO (Germany and Austria)
  - BROD (Bulgaria and Romania)
  - ADMO (Croatia and Slovenia)
  - HDMO-Lakmusz (Hungary)
  - MedDMO (Greece, Cyprus, Malta)
- Agência Lusa, Portugal’s national news agency, is a partner in the IBERIFIER hub, which covers Spain and Portugal.
- Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau (ANP), the Dutch news agency, is involved in the BENEDMO hub, serving Belgium and the Netherlands.
- Austria Presse Agentur (APA) is a participant in the GADMO hub, focusing on German-speaking countries
- Deutsche Presse-Agentur (dpa), Germany’s national news agency, contributes to the GADMO hub alongside other German-speaking partners.

Beyond news agencies, the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) collaborates with a diverse array of media organisations, including:<sup>41</sup>

- RTBF, RTL Luxembourg and Flemish public broadcaster VRT, as part of the EDMO BELUX hub, serving Belgium and Luxembourg
- Libération, 20 Minutes and MediaConnect, as part of the DE FACTO hub, serving France
- Times of Malta, as part of the Mediterranean Digital Media Observatory (MedDMO), serving Malta, Cyprus and Greece
- Magyar Jeti (444.hu), as part of the LAKMUSZ-HDMO hub, serving Hungary
- CORRECTIV, as part of the GADMO hub, serving German-speaking countries
- GEDI Gruppo Editoriale, owner of *La Repubblica*, and Italian public broadcaster RAI, as part of IDMO hub, serving Italy

The European Digital Media Observatory is only one of several EU ‘anti-disinformation’ projects involving news agencies and other media outlets (see below) – which, in turn, represent a tiny fraction of the countless disinformation-focused projects financed by the Commission. For example, the Italian news agency ANSA was also involved in another project called FANDANGO (FAke News discovery and propagation from big Data ANalysis and artificial intelliGence Operations), established ‘to detect fake news and provide a more efficient and verified communication for all European citizens’, almost entirely funded by the European Commission (through the Horizon 2020 programme) to the tune of almost € 3million.<sup>42</sup>

These initiatives raise serious and legitimate concerns. While disinformation is unquestionably a real and pressing challenge in contemporary societies, the question is who determines what constitutes disinformation, and whether

EU-funded projects such as the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) are truly about safeguarding the truth – or simply about controlling the narrative.

Of particular concern is the overlapping role of media actors – especially news agencies – within this infrastructure. Many of these agencies are simultaneously involved in EU-funded ‘anti-disinformation’ projects and in contractual partnerships to promote EU policies and messaging, often under programmes such as those supporting coverage of the EU’s Cohesion Policy. This dual role raises unavoidable questions about editorial independence, objectivity and the true purpose of these initiatives.

When media organisations receive funding from the European Commission to disseminate pro-EU content, while also participating in mechanisms designed to flag and counter disinformation, the potential for conflict of interest is glaring. In such a context, the authority to label certain viewpoints as disinformation – especially when exercised by entities closely tied to political institutions – risks becoming a mechanism for further homogenising the narrative and even for outright censorship, rather than truth-seeking.

This leads to deeper, unresolved questions: to what extent can initiatives that involve close cooperation with political institutions – and depend on those institutions for funding – truly serve as neutral arbiters of truth? What happens when so-called ‘harmful narratives’ are, in fact, factually correct criticisms of EU institutions or policies? Where is the boundary between ‘disinformation’ and legitimate political dissent? Ultimately, it’s difficult to interpret these projects, and the EU-media complex underpinning them, as anything other than an effort to centralise control over public discourse – all under the virtuous cover of protecting democracy.

### 3 The Commission's 'Journalism Partnerships' programme

The projects and programmes outlined so far represent only the tip of the iceberg of the EU's funding to the media, which occurs across several budgetary headings and programmes managed by different departments of the European Commission. Among these, the main funding branch is the Journalism Partnerships initiative, created in 2021 with the stated aim of 'support[ing] cross-border collaboration among news media professionals in Europe', including through 'the development of common technical standards, new types of newsrooms, the testing of new business models, original reporting and innovative production formats'.<sup>43</sup>

Upon its launch, Věra Jourová, then the vice-president for values and transparency, said:

*It is the first time that the EU supports such journalism partnerships.*

*It is a clear message to journalists and media actors that we stand by their side to help them address the challenges they face. Increasing and diversifying funding support goes hand in hand with our work for democracy, the rule of law and for a fairer online environment.*

Thierry Breton, then the commissioner for internal market, also grounded the programme in the need to bolster democracy: 'Media freedom and pluralism are key values on which our democracies stand and cannot be taken for granted.' The programme received substantial funding, with an allocated budget of at least € 75million by 2027.<sup>44</sup> As of 2025, nearly € 50million has been allocated to the programme through the Creative Europe fund<sup>45</sup> – another glaring case of diversion of funds, given that Creative Europe was originally created to support 'the cultural, creative and audiovisual sectors across Europe', not the media.

**Journalism Partnerships****EU contribution** nearly €50million (2021–25)

The programme is officially aimed at ‘support[ing] cross-border collaboration among news media professionals in Europe’ – often with the aim of promoting pro-EU narratives.

While presented as support for media and pluralism, in practice, the funding often serves to elevate pro-EU platforms and promote official narratives. This includes projects aimed at ‘promoting European integration’, ‘demystifying the European Union’ and fighting ‘extremist national movement’.

One of its flagship sub-programmes is the Stars4Media initiative, which relies on a consortium formed by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Europe’s MediaLab (Fondation EURACTIV), the World Association of News Publishers and the European Journalism Centre (EJC).<sup>46</sup> It has received more than €8million in EU funding since 2019.<sup>47</sup> Some of the projects financed under Stars4Media include:

**Wounds of Europe<sup>48</sup>****Country** Italy**Media partners** Linkiesta and Bulle Media

Project managed by the online Italian news outlet *Linkiesta* and by the podcasts production agency Bulle Media, specialised in journalistic production. The purpose of the project was to produce a podcast series on European integration, based on data journalism and thorough historical research.



### Connecto: towards European values through digital media

**Country** Romania

**Media partners** PressHub.ro, EURACTIV Romania, Știrile Transilvaniei and Occidentul Românesc

The project, which included four Romanian media partners, was aimed at 'strengthen[ing] European solidarity as opposed to extremist national movements'.

### Future is Blue

**Countries** Spain and Greece

**Media partners** Agenda Pública (Spain) and Macropolis (Greece)

The initiative was aimed at further developing the tellingly titled 'Future is Blue' newsletter, which started in 2019.

### LucidAREurope

**Countries** Netherlands

**Media partner** EURACTIV (Netherlands)

The initiative's goal was to 'create a citizen engagement tool to debunk and demystify the European Union and its institutions' via WebAR, or Augmented Web, a web technology that allows for augmented-reality functionality within a web browser.

Other projects financed under the Journalism Partnerships programme also display an inherent pro-EU (and pro-NATO) bias. One such example is the Eastern Frontier Initiative.

The Eastern Frontier Initiative (TEFI)	
<b>EU contribution</b>	€ 1 million
<b>Countries</b>	Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania
<b>Media partners</b>	Bellingcat (Netherlands), Gazeta Wyborcza (Poland), SME (Slovakia), 444.hu (Hungary) and PressOne (Romania)
The project was focused on producing 'fact-based information on European defence and security' and also included journalist training by Bellingcat.	

Bellingcat, a Netherlands-based 'investigative journalism group', is funded by organisations like the Open Society Foundations (George Soros) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and is known for being tightly aligned with US geopolitical interests. Thus, given its role in the project, it is reasonable to infer that 'fact-based information on European defence and security' in this context largely referred to producing content consistent with the official EU-NATO narrative on the Russia-Ukraine conflict in frontline European states.

Another example is the MediaResilience project, managed by the Bulgarian branch of Soros's Open Society Foundations, created in 1990 to 'support the integration of the country to the European Union'.<sup>49</sup>

<b>MediaResilience</b> <sup>50</sup>	
<b>EU contribution</b>	€ 2million
<b>Countries</b>	Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary and Slovenia
<b>Implementing media partner</b>	Open Society Institute, Sofia
<p>The project ‘aims at strengthening a free, diverse and pluralistic news media landscape and promoting quality journalism, notably to the most vulnerable groups in society susceptible to disinformation. The proposal focuses on the following EU countries, which have been threatened by multiple vulnerabilities as relates to media freedom, quality of democracy, and potential resilience to disinformation – Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary and Slovenia.’</p>	

How can the EU claim to be supporting unbiased journalism when it is partnering with an organisation such as Soros’s Open Society Foundations – which has collectively received almost € 10million from the European Commission between 2014 and 2023<sup>51</sup> – that is explicitly committed to the goal of European integration, and which has pumped millions of dollars into opposition movements and so-called ‘independent’ media, especially in Eastern Europe, to align countries with Euro-Atlantic interests?<sup>52</sup>

### **How the Commission supports investigative journalism – so long as it doesn’t target the EU itself**

The examples above raise doubts about the integrity of other projects funded under the Journalism Partnerships initiative – including those purportedly designed to support investigative journalism, often regarded as the gold standard of media independence. Examples of such projects include:

<b>Collaborative and Investigative Journalism Initiative<sup>53</sup></b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 2.4million	<b>Countries</b> pan-European
<b>Media partners</b> Tactical Tech and Free Press Unlimited (Netherlands), Reporters Without Borders (France), Fundacja Reporterow (Poland), OBC Transeuropa (Italy) and Delfi (Estonia)	
The project 'equips media outlets and professionals with resources in at least 15 languages, training activities, standard-based methods and a networking structure consisting of six media hubs across Europe'.	
<b>Collaborative Journalism Europe in a Global Context<sup>54</sup></b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 2million	<b>Countries</b> international
<b>Media partners</b> International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), Context Romania, MANS (Montenegro) and Siena (Lithuania)	
The project, proposed by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) and three partners from across Europe, aimed to 'support cross-border investigations with digital tools for data use and professional collaboration'.	
<b>IJ4EU - Investigative Journalism 4 EU<sup>55</sup></b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 3million	<b>Countries</b> pan-European
<b>Media partners</b> International Press Institute (Austria), Stichting European Journalism Centre (Netherlands), European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (Germany) and Arena for Journalism in Europe (Netherlands)	
'IJ4EU supports cross-border investigative projects. Along with grants, the project offers training, mentoring, digital tools for remote collabor- ation and legal support, and presentations at various fora.'	

<b>NEXT-IJ – Next-level Data and Tools for Investigative Journalism</b> <sup>56</sup>	
<b>EU contribution</b> €1 million	<b>Countries</b> pan-European
<b>Media partners</b> OCCRP (Netherlands), Università del Sacro Cuore (Italy) and Global Forum for Media Development (Belgium)	
‘NEXT-IJ (Next-level Data and Tools for Investigative Journalism) aims to increase trust in the media by empowering European journalists, newsrooms and media outlets with a combination of advanced tools (including AI), data, training, legal and ethical discernment, and hands-on investigation opportunities to uncover and investigate corruption, organised and financial crime, in multilateral cooperation and partnerships.’	

Supporting investigative journalism may appear to be a commendable objective. However, a closer examination of several EU-funded projects – including those involving prominent organisations such as the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) – reveals a striking pattern: much of the investigative focus is directed outward, toward non-EU countries such as Russia, Kazakhstan, various African states and offshore tax havens. In contrast, there is scant scrutiny of the EU itself, despite the well-documented scandals involving fraud, corruption and institutional misconduct within the Union over the years.<sup>57</sup>

The same trend is evident in projects like Investigative Journalism for Europe (IJ4EU), which claims to support independent investigative journalism. Yet a review of its output reveals very few investigations into EU governments or institutions. On the contrary, some of the funded projects appear to reiterate mainstream narratives, particularly when it comes to topics like Russia or security policy.<sup>58</sup>

In effect, EU-funded investigative journalism platforms such as ICIJ and IJ4EU seem largely aligned with the priorities of Brussels: focusing on official adversaries and foreign regimes, while showing little appetite for holding EU institutions to account – and, in some cases, seemingly reinforcing the EU's geopolitical messaging. This may sound conspiratorial, but it's not without precedent. One of the world's most renowned investigative journalism groups, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) – a partner in the EU-backed NEXT-IJ initiative – has itself been exposed for cooperating closely with the US government in targeting foreign governments.<sup>59</sup>

## 4 The EU-media fact-checking complex

The European Commission's collaboration with news agencies and media outlets to delineate the boundaries of acceptable discourse is increasingly taking place under the broad and often ill-defined banner of 'countering disinformation' – as demonstrated by the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO). In recent years, this term has become a convenient tool for governments and institutions to suppress legitimate criticism and marginalise dissenting viewpoints – particularly when such dissent is directed at the EU itself.

Against this backdrop, it is hardly surprising that many projects funded under the Journalism Partnerships programme fall under the umbrella of 'fact-checking' or 'anti-disinformation' initiatives, raising concerns about whether these efforts are genuinely aimed at promoting truth, or rather at reinforcing institutional narratives and limiting the scope of democratic debate.

For instance, one such project, titled 'Factchecking: Strategy for Eastern European Media Resilience', is framed as a necessary response to 'the Kremlin's hybrid warfare' and its alleged 'disinformation' campaigns, said to have 'helped destabilise a number of rational public spheres'. This framing reflects a familiar narrative that, in recent years, has increasingly been used to discredit or delegitimise criticism of the EU-NATO stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, reducing dissenting perspectives to little more than pro-Kremlin propaganda.

### **Factchecking: Strategy for Eastern European Media Resilience<sup>60</sup>**

**Countries** Slovakia, Poland, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Belarus

**Media partners** I-Europa (EURACTIV Slovakia), Free Media Bulgaria (EURACTIV Bulgaria), Europejskie Media (Poland), Ligamedia (Ukraine), MediaIQ and the Belarusian Investigative Centre (Belarus)

‘As application-oriented research, the project aims at turning fact-checking into a sustainable activity for media in Eastern Europe, also in terms of business model, extending from short-term journalism work.’

### **Other similar projects include:**

#### **European Network of Factcheckers<sup>61</sup>**

**Countries** pan-European

The aim of the project – launched in 2025, hence the media partners haven’t been announced yet – is ‘to contribute to the fight against disinformation, to gain further insight on disinformation, monitoring of the disinformation space, debunking disinformation through the network of fact-checkers, and increasing the resilience of media professionals and citizens to disinformation’.

#### **TRIMEDIA – Trustworthy Reporting, Impactful Media, Engaged Communities<sup>62</sup>**

**Countries** Bulgaria

**Media partners** DW Akademie (Germany) and Association of Independent Press (Moldova)

The aim of the project is ‘to empower media outlets and media consumers to produce quality and trustworthy information, thereby contributing to community resilience against disinformation in Bulgaria’.



### Providing access to factchecked images/videos for professionals and citizens

**Countries** Norway and France

**Media partners** Faktisk.no (Norway) and France Télévision

‘In order to fight against misinformation by image, we intend to build a search engine that allow users to make a visual investigation on each fact-checkers data storage.’

### Boosting Community Engagement Models for European Fact-Checkers

**Countries** Spain and Italy

**Media partners** Maldita.es (Spain) and Facta-news (Italy)

‘Bringing together two leading European fact-checkers, Maldita.es and Facta-news, this project will create and test a cross-border community engagement model for fact-checking organizations that will transform the reach and impact of their work, and enhance the sustainability of their business models.’

The EU’s close partnerships with media outlets and fact-checking organisations fundamentally undermine the credibility of its entire approach to disinformation. When the same institutions that fund ‘anti-disinformation’ initiatives are also actively engaged in promoting their own narratives, often through publicly funded propaganda, a clear conflict of interest emerges.

How can fact-checking efforts claim neutrality or independence when they are bankrolled by political bodies like the European Commission – institutions with a vested interest in shaping public opinion? In such a framework, ‘disinformation’ becomes a convenient label for dissent, and ‘fact-checking’ risks functioning not as a safeguard for truth, but as a tool to police the boundaries of acceptable discourse.

## 5 Weakening the divide between media and institutional power

Many of the projects funded under the Journalism Partnerships programme are framed in neutral, even commendable terms – aiming to ‘add new perspectives to current debates’, ‘promote best practices’ or ‘enhance the capacity and viability of independent professional journalism’. While such objectives may appear innocuous, even laudable, we have chosen to highlight some of these projects precisely because they underscore the depth of collaboration between the European Commission and media outlets – a relationship that inevitably raises questions about editorial independence and objectivity, particularly when it comes to coverage of EU affairs.

European Focus <sup>63</sup>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 470,000	<b>Countries</b> pan-European
<b>Media partners</b> n-ost and Tagesspiegel (Germany), Gazeta Wyborcza (Poland), Balkan Insight (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Delfi (Estonia), El Confidencial (Spain), Domani (Italy), HVG (Hungary) and Libération (France)	
‘European Focus (working title) proposes a multilingual newsletter that is co-produced and jointly curated by nine media outlets. The common goal is to strengthen European reporting by adding new perspectives to current debates.’	

<b>MIE – Media Innovation Europe: Independence Through Sustainability</b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 1.7 million	<b>Countries</b> Austria, Germany, Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina
<b>Media partners</b> International Press Institute (Austria), Thomson Foundation (Germany), the Media Development Foundation (Ukraine) and the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (Bosnia and Herzegovina)	
‘This project aims to build up support infrastructure for media innovation through an accelerator for media, an incubator for promising start-ups, advice to media on their transition, dissemination of best practices, grants for audience-engaging journalism, a mentorship programme and several events (media business and editorial hackathons, networking events, etc).’	
<b>EthProMedE – Ethical and Professional Media Environment for Central and Eastern Europe</b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 800,000	<b>Countries</b> Latvia, Georgia, Czechia, Poland and Hungary
<b>Media partners</b> Latvijas Mediji (Latvia), Fortuna (Georgia), Ustav nezavisle zurnalistiky (Czechia), Fundacja Ośrodek Kontroli Obywatelskiej Oko (Poland), UpGrade Media (Poland) and the Association of Hungarian Journalists (Hungary)	
‘This project aims to enhance the capacity and viability of independent professional journalism in Eastern and Central Europe. It will strengthen the skills and tools of journalists, editors and other media professionals. It will also stimulate regional collaboration and the co-creation of media content that reflects, analyses and investigates issues of common interest.’	

<b>MOST – Media Organisations for Stronger Transnational journalism</b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 1.2million	<b>Countries</b> Italy, France, Poland, Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Spain, Netherlands
<b>Media partners</b> OBC Transeuropa (Italy), Le Courrier des Balkans (France), College of Europe (Poland), European Pravda (Ukraine), Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (Bosnia and Herzegovina), El Orden Mundial (Spain) and Tactical Tech (Netherlands)	
‘MOST (Media Organisations for Stronger Transnational journalism) intends to build a collaborative platform to exchange knowledge, resources and content among the participating media and to offer resources, opportunities and know-how to other media working on foreign reporting or European issues.’	

While the Journalism Partnerships programme is publicly framed as a support mechanism for independent media and cross-border collaboration, a closer look at the projects it funds suggests a different reality. In practice, the programme appears to function as a strategic instrument for aligning media narratives with the goals of the European Commission.

Whether through the funding of explicitly pro-EU projects, the promotion of ‘European values’ or the privileging of content that echoes official policy stances – particularly on geopolitically sensitive issues like the Russia-Ukraine conflict – the programme fosters a media environment that is incentivised to produce friendly coverage. Even absent direct editorial interference, the prospect of future grants creates a structural dynamic that blurs the line between support and influence, raising serious questions about the independence of EU-funded journalism in holding power to account – especially when that power lies in Brussels itself.

Indeed, it is likely no coincidence that the Journalism Partnerships programme was launched in 2021, at a time when concerns were mounting within elite circles about the rise of ‘populist’ and eurosceptic movements. That same year also saw the creation of the EU’s Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme – a funding vehicle for NGOs and think tanks that, as the author exposed in a previous report, is designed to promote explicitly pro-EU narratives under the guise of civic engagement and rights advocacy.<sup>64</sup>

## 6 The sprawling EU-media complex

As outlined in the previous section, the European Commission – through its Journalism Partnerships programme alone, with a cumulative budget approaching € 50million to date – oversees a vast ecosystem of EU media ‘collaborations’. Over the years, these have included hundreds of projects, ranging from pro-EU promotional campaigns to questionable ‘investigative journalism’ initiatives and sweeping ‘anti-fake news’ efforts. And that’s on top of the advertorial campaigns funded through the Information Measures for the EU Cohesion policy (IMREG) programme, to the tune of € 40million so far.

However, these programmes represent only the tip of the iceberg – just two among many EU-funded ‘media support’ initiatives across multiple budgetary headings. Other major media programmes include the following:

European media platforms
<b>EU contribution</b> € 18million ( 2021-2023 ) <sup>65</sup>
The project aims to ‘set up European media platforms projects, aiming to improve Union citizens’ access to trusted information across the Union. Projects should stimulate ways to develop technical systems to enhance and expand a quality news content and/or programming offer based on high-quality standards and European rights and values’.

**A European public sphere: a new online media offer for young Europeans****EU contribution** € 30.5million ( 2020-2024 )<sup>66</sup>

The programme aims to ‘set up European media platforms projects, aiming to improve Union citizens’ access to trusted information across the Union. Projects should stimulate ways to develop technical systems to enhance and expand a quality news content and/or programming offer based on high-quality standards and European rights and values.’

**Cross-border Media Literacy projects****EU contribution** € 9million ( 2022-2024 )<sup>67</sup>

The programme aims to ‘fund innovative solutions to enhance the media literacy skills of all European citizens, support effective cross-border cooperation, and limit the detrimental impact of disinformation’.

**EU digital reporting****EU contribution** € 5million ( 2024 )<sup>68</sup>

The programme aims to ‘support the production and distribution of reliable information, in particular on EU affairs, through digital formats in as many languages and member states as possible’.

**EU audio reporting****EU contribution** € 4.5million ( 2024 )<sup>69</sup>

The programme aims to ‘support the production of innovative audio formats and their distribution across Europe’ and ‘to increase independent reporting on European issues mainly through audio formats and to increase the reach of such content via broadcasting and/or digital platforms across the EU to as many EU citizens as possible and especially in countries where there is limited information on EU affairs’.

<b>Pan-EU audiovisual reporting</b>
<b>EU contribution</b> €11million (2024) <sup>70</sup>
The programme aims to ‘produce and distribute audiovisual news and factual programming on European affairs and to set up international audiovisual services in countries where such an offer is scarce’.
<b>European media hubs</b>
<b>EU contribution</b> €8million (2023) <sup>71</sup>
The programme aims to ‘produce and distribute audiovisual news and factual programming on European affairs and to set up international audiovisual services in countries where such an offer is scarce’.
<b>Coverage of EU affairs through radio</b>
<b>EU contribution</b> €6.6million (2021-2022) <sup>72</sup>
The programme aims to ‘support coverage of EU affairs in radio programmes across Europe’.

Despite the relatively neutral language in which these programmes are framed, certain recurring buzzwords stand out – terms we’ve already encountered elsewhere: an emphasis on ‘European rights and values’ (a vague phrase often conflated with promoting the EU project itself), as well as references to ‘factual’ programming and ‘disinformation’. This suggests that these initiatives, as other media programmes we have analysed so far, have a not-so-hidden agenda: to manufacture consent for the European Union and drown out dissenting narratives. A number of projects financed under these various programmes illustrate this point clearly:



### A multilingual affairs offer for all Europeans

**EU contribution** € 2.5million

**Media partners** ARTE (France, Germany), ARD and ZDF (Germany), France Télévisions (France), El País (Spain), Gazeta Wyborcza (Poland), Internazionale (Italy), Kathimerines (Greece), Le Soir (Belgium), Telex (Hungary), SRG SSR (Switzerland)

The project, coordinated by the French broadcaster ARTE in partnership with several media outlets and broadcasters from across Europe, set out to ‘develop a cooperative project on current affairs’, including a multilingual weekly European news show.

### A European Perspective

**EU contribution** € 2.2million

**Media partners** EBU-UER and RTBF (Belgium), Agence France-Presse and France Télévisions (France), Constructive Institute (Denmark), Eurovision Italy (Italy), RTE (Ireland), RTVE (Spain), ERR (Estonia), Yle (Finland), ARTE (France, Germany), BR (Germany), RAI (Italy), RTP (Portugal), SR (Sweden) and SWI swissinfo.ch (Switzerland)

A joint project by several European leading public broadcasters and media outlets to ‘forge a better understanding between Europeans’.

### Display: one Europe, endless stories

**EU contribution** € 2.3million

**Media partners** European Cultural Foundation, PublicSpaces and HUMAN (Netherlands), Cultural Broadcasting Archive and Eurozine (Austria), Voxeurop (France), Hostwriter (Germany), Krytyka Polityczna (Poland), The Schuman Show and Community Media Forum Europe (Belgium), elDiario.es (Spain), Fanzingo (Sweden), YEPP Italia (IT) and Kolegium Europy Wschodniej (Poland)

The project proposed to ‘develop the platform [displayeurope.eu](http://displayeurope.eu), grounded in public values and supporting a European public sphere’, by drawing together dozens of media organisations from all EU member states in at least 15 EU languages.

### PULSE<sup>73</sup>

**EU contribution** € 1.8million

**Media partners** OBC Transeuropa and Il Sole 24 Ore (Italy), n-ost (Germany), Voxeurop (France), Delfi (Lithuania), Deník Referendum (Czechia), Der Standard (Austria), Efsyn (Greece), Gazeta Wyborcza (Poland), Hotnews (Romania), HVG (Hungary), El Confidencial (Spain) and Mediapool (Bulgaria)

The project brings together several media organisations from across Europe as a collaborative hub to ‘foster a vibrant European public sphere’ by producing and distributing 2,000+ journalistic pieces covering European affairs on a daily basis across multiple platforms.

At first glance, these projects – many of which are framed in seemingly benign terms like ‘fostering a European public sphere’ or ‘forging a better understanding between Europeans’ – may appear as well-meaning efforts to support media pluralism and informed debate. However, beneath this carefully neutral language lies a more strategic and ideologically charged agenda: namely, the engineering of public support for the EU and the broader European integration project.

The use of euphemisms such as ‘a European public sphere’ masks a top-down attempt to construct a European demos – a unified public consciousness that, in reality, does not and arguably cannot exist under current political and cultural conditions. This becomes especially problematic when the notion of ‘Europe’ is conflated with the European Union, as is often the case, marginalising long-standing concepts like national sovereignty and identity, and suppressing the diversity of perspectives that characterise the continent.

Even more concerning is the central role played by major European public broadcasters in this process. These projects show that this is not a matter of one-off collaborations, but rather an evolving semi-structural relationship between EU institutions and public media networks. By encouraging ‘cross-border reporting’ and shared editorial frameworks, the EU is effectively promoting the harmonisation – or uniformisation – of European public discourse, reducing space for national specificities and critical voices. This echoes a similar trend already seen with the systemic collaboration between the EU and news agencies, which has also arguably contributed to homogenised narratives across the media landscape.

Ultimately, when public broadcasters – institutions entrusted with informing the public in a balanced and independent manner – begin to function as de facto partners in the EU’s communication strategy,

the line between journalism and institutional messaging becomes dangerously blurred. It is this convergence of power and narrative control that raises the most pressing questions about the editorial independence and democratic legitimacy of EU-funded media projects.

### **Euronews: the EU's very own 'public broadcaster'**

Speaking of public broadcasters, it is impossible not to mention Euronews. Though technically not a public broadcaster – meaning that European governments aren't required to carry it on all networks – it's the closest thing the EU has to one. The multilingual 24-hour news channel was launched in 1993 by a group of 10 European public broadcasters belonging to the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), with the aim of reinforcing European identity and integration. Today, the channel broadcasts in 13 core languages through its main editions and extends its reach to 19 languages via partnerships and branded affiliates.

The European Commission has provided significant funding to Euronews since the channel's creation – to the tune of more than €20million per year (nearly a quarter of a billion euros over the past decade alone).<sup>74</sup> Historically, EU contributions have constituted a substantial portion of Euronews's revenue, amounting to a third of its annual turnover.<sup>75</sup> The Commission's funding of Euronews is directly tied to the production of EU-sponsored content, especially about European affairs and EU policies and initiatives.<sup>76</sup>

The funding is not supposed to dictate editorial positions – officially, it's framed as supporting 'independent and objective' reporting on European topics. Indeed, Euronews's contract with the EU clearly states that the channel 'shall be independent of any instruction, pressure or request' from any EU institution.<sup>77</sup> However, that contract comes with specific deliverables,

such as: regular production of stories about EU institutions and reporting on EU legislation, projects and ‘values’.

More importantly, Euronews’s core mission is to be a ‘voice of Europe’ and to promote a unified European perspective – a ‘genuine European public arena’, as the company puts it. This mission inherently aligns with promoting European integration and unity. This means that, even without direct pressure from EU institutions, Euronews’s pan-European perspective – and its emphasis on EU initiatives, policies and institutions – inevitably fosters a deeply ingrained pro-EU stance, often reflecting the narratives and priorities of the European Commission and other EU bodies.

For instance, the channel frequently highlights the benefits of EU expansion, particularly concerning Ukraine’s accession,<sup>78</sup> and reported negatively about Brexit.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, by relying heavily on interviews with EU officials, the channel tends to present EU policies in a favourable light, while warning about the threat to the EU agenda represented by ‘populist’ and eurosceptic parties.<sup>80</sup> Euronews also actively ‘debunks misinformation’ that could undermine EU initiatives, such as Bulgaria’s plans to adopt the euro, thereby supporting the EU’s efforts to expand the eurozone.<sup>81</sup>

The channel often underscores the EU’s position as a global power. In an opinion piece, it discussed the need for a new ‘Big Bang’ enlargement to strengthen the EU’s global influence, arguing that integrating countries like Ukraine and those in the Western Balkans is essential for the EU to assert itself on the world stage.<sup>82</sup> These examples demonstrate Euronews’s tendency to present the EU and its policies in a positive light, aligning with its mission to provide a pan-European perspective, raising questions about editorial independence and alignment with EU priorities.

## **7 The European Parliament's own propaganda branch**

Until now, this report has primarily focused on the European Commission's media campaigns, which account for the bulk of EU funding to the media. However, the Commission is not the only EU institution engaged in such activities. The European Parliament, through its Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM), also runs its own media-related initiatives. Since 2020, it has provided nearly €30million in grants to media organisations as part of its broader communications strategy.<sup>83</sup>

A quick review of some of the European Parliament's calls for proposals reveals that it makes little effort to conceal the self-promotional nature of its media funding. Even though it states that 'complete editorial freedom will be given to the grant beneficiaries', in fact, the Parliament spells out in explicit terms the type of coverage it expects in return – namely, content that highlights its role, activities and 'added value' in a positive light.

For example, the 2020-2021 calls for proposals states that '[t]he EP communication strategy aims notably to emphasise how decisions taken by the European Parliament have a strong impact on the lives of citizens; and even more importantly, that they are legitimate because they are the result of a fully democratic process'.<sup>84</sup> The principal objective of the grants programme is defined as follows:

*To contribute to raise citizens' awareness of the role and democratic values of the EP by promoting strategic engagement with media and other key public and private stakeholders. The expected result of the programme is to increase the reach towards targeted audiences more effectively with messages related to the work of the European Parliament, to add legitimacy to EP campaigns and reinforce the importance of citizen involvement and representation in European decision-making.*

Unsurprisingly, 'projects that contribute to fact-checking and to counter disinformation' are viewed by the Parliament as particularly noteworthy.

Moreover, during European elections, the Parliament also runs election communication campaigns to increase turnout by 'providing regular, reliable, pluralistic and non-partisan information on the forthcoming 2024 European Elections, as well as on the political and legislative work of the European Parliament (inter alia: recovery plan Next Generation EU, European Green Deal, European Digital Economy, Europe in the world, Future of Europe, rule of law, etc), emphasising its implications in the European citizen's daily lives',<sup>85</sup> as well as highlighting 'the role and democratic values of the European Union'.<sup>86</sup>

During the 2024 EP elections, it allocated € 8million<sup>87</sup> to 'educate citizens about the importance of the European Parliament elections and encourage them to exercise their right to vote; inform the widest possible audience about the importance of voting in the 2024 European Parliament elections; raise awareness of the activities and issues of the European Parliament; and target new voters to emphasise the relevance of the elections for future generations'.<sup>88</sup>

Some of the communication campaigns funded by the Parliament include:<sup>89</sup>

Youth and the European Elections		
EU contribution	€ 175,000	Country France
Media partner	20 minutes	
The Europe you want to live in is up to you		
EU contribution	€ 100,000	Country Spain
Media partner	20minutos.es	
Are you EU?		
EU contribution	€ 100,000	Country Greece
Media partner	24MEDIA	
BE EU		
EU contribution	€ 140,000	Country Romania
Media partner	Antena 3	
Europe votes: the road to the 2024 European Parliament election		
EU contribution	€ 150,000	Country Italy
Media partner	ANSA	
ROD24 – Reporting on Democracy: EU Election 2024		
EU contribution	€ 67,500	Country Austria
Media partner	APA – Austria Press Agency	



Europe – New generation	
EU contribution € 98,000	Country Bulgaria
Media partner Bulgarian National Radio	
Have your say in the European Parliament elections (HEAR)	
EU contribution € 150,000	Country Italy
Media partner Ciaopeople Media Group	
2024 European elections: EBRA, a regional media group against disinformation and for citizen engagement in the European Union	
EU contribution € 150,000	Country France
Media partner Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace	
What we know about the European Parliament?	
EU contribution € 175,000	Country Spain
Media partner El Periódico de Catalunya	
Special EP election 2024 information campaign	
EU contribution € 190,000	Country France
Media partner France Télévisions	
Multiplatform media actions in Hungary for the 2024 European Elections	
EU contribution € 170,000	Country Hungary
Media partner Magyar RTL Televízió	

<b>Vote4EU</b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 150,000	<b>Country</b> Italy
<b>Media partner</b> RCS MediaGroup	
<b>Eurodyssée</b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 175,000	<b>Country</b> Belgium
<b>Media partner</b> RTBF	
<b>I know EU 2024</b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 80,000	<b>Country</b> Slovenia
<b>Media partner</b> RTV	
<b>Europaratswahl 2024</b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 175,000	<b>Country</b> Austria
<b>Media partner</b> Der Standard	

These are just a few examples of the communication – or more accurately, propaganda – campaigns funded by the European Parliament in the span of a single year, in addition to the many others carried out in collaboration with pro-EU NGOs and think tanks.

The European Parliament's multi-million euro investment in communications campaigns, especially during European elections, speaks volumes about the EU's ongoing struggle to generate genuine public enthusiasm for its political project. That such extensive funding is required simply to encourage voter turnout and promote awareness of the elections reflects a fundamental lack of organic support for the EU among its citizens. Rather than an expression of democratic vitality, these efforts appear to be yet another attempt to manufacture democratic legitimacy, using taxpayer money to artificially inflate both interest and perceived public endorsement.

What's more, these campaigns consistently involve the usual institutional allies: national news agencies (like ANSA and APA) and major public broadcasters (such as RTBF, France Télévisions and RTV). Once again, this pattern suggests not just sporadic collaboration, but a semi-structural relationship between EU institutions and major media actors. By incentivising friendly coverage through grants tied to electoral messaging, the Parliament, just like the Commission, is effectively blurring the line between public information and political advertising, raising further concerns about the role of media in EU-funded narratives.

## **8 Funding EU propaganda abroad: the Commission as a ‘European USAID’**

So far, we have focused on EU-sponsored media programmes targeting member states – unsurprisingly, these account for the majority of the EU’s media funding. However, the EU also actively supports a variety of media projects in non-EU countries, with a particular focus on Ukraine and other post-Soviet and Balkan states. These initiatives are mostly funded through the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), under the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR).

The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe is the European Union’s primary financial tool for external action, with a total budget of € 79.5 billion allocated for the 2021-2027 period.<sup>90</sup> This instrument supports a wide range of initiatives, including those aimed at ‘strengthening media freedom and pluralism’ in partner countries. While the NDICI encompasses various thematic and geographic programmes, specific allocations for media-related projects are not distinctly itemised in publicly available budget documents, so it’s impossible to know exactly how much money is allocated specifically to such projects.

These nominally aim to promote independent journalism, enhance media literacy and align media regulations with European standards –

though, as one might expect, their real purpose is to interfere in the domestic politics of third countries and promote policies that align with Euro-Atlantic (EU-NATO) economic and geopolitical interests, usually under the guise of 'fighting Russian disinformation'. In some cases, this intent is stated quite openly – as the brief of one project clearly illustrates:



**Boosting and integrating correspondents: a Brussels infrastructure for democracy**

EU and NATO are essential hopes for Eastern Europeans. But coverage "on the ground" is limited, leaving room for both ignorance and disinformation. Eastern European media are eager to send more reporters: they need practical help, not only money but introductions. The goal is to triple that number of Brussels correspondents, in five years.

The Maison du MédiaLab residence will host Eastern European Brussels correspondents, offering them not only accommodation in the heart of the EU policy making for 6 months (on a rotation basis) but also professional development with networking and training opportunities.

Source: [stars4media.eu](http://stars4media.eu)

In this sense, these projects play a role very similar to the one played for years by USAID, through which the US government has channelled funding to 'independent' NGOs and media outlets worldwide to advance its geopolitical interests – a practice that has garnered significant attention in the wake of Trump's foreign-aid freeze. Unsurprisingly, the biggest non-EU recipient of media support in recent years has been Ukraine, where the EU is an indirect participant in the conflict.

According to the EU ambassador to Ukraine, Katarina Maternova, since 2017, the EU has provided over €100million to independent media through

various initiatives, contracts, sub-grants and partners.<sup>91</sup> Notably, since February 2022, the EU has allocated €37million, including over €16million to Suspilne, Ukraine’s public broadcaster. In March 2025, the EU announced an additional €10million to support independent media in Ukraine.<sup>92</sup> This funding is purportedly aimed at ‘ensur[ing] the sustainability of independent journalism, which is crucial for democracy, especially in the context of countering disinformation’<sup>93</sup> – buzzwords that the reader will be familiar with by now. This was most likely a response to the freezing of the USAID funding.

A notable example of EU-funded projects in Ukraine is the MediaFit project:

<b>MediaFit</b> <sup>94</sup>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 4million	<b>Country</b> Ukraine
<b>Media partners</b> Suspilne (Ukraine’s public broadcaster) and another 25 Ukrainian media outlets, DW Akademie (Germany) and Lithuanian Radio and Television.	
The project, implemented by DW Akademie, in partnership with Lithuanian Radio and Television (LRT), aims to ‘improve access to reliable information, restore trust in the media and combat misinformation’ in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine.	

It’s worth noting, as seen in the previous sections, that Ukraine is also included in several EU-focused projects, yet another reminder that the EU in many respects treats Ukraine as a de facto member state. Other media projects and programmes in non-EU countries beyond (though sometimes including) Ukraine are:

<b>EU4 Independent Media (EU4IM) <sup>95</sup></b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> while specific details about the overall budget of the EU4IM programme are not publicly disclosed, individual grants under the programme can be up to € 100,000 per project	<b>Countries</b> Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Belarus
The aim of the programme is to 'support independent media outlets ... in fending off Russian-led misinformation'.	
<b>Quality Media and Conscious Media Consumption for Resilient Society (ConMeCo) <sup>96</sup></b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 800,000	<b>Country</b> Georgia
<b>Media partners</b> DW Akademie ( Germany ) and Media Development Foundation ( Georgia )	
The projects 'aim to strengthen democracy and support human rights in Georgia by increasing public awareness and understanding of media freedom, media and information literacy, and the harmful effects of disinformation'.	
<b>Media Freedom Hub</b>	
<b>EU contribution</b> € 6million ( 2023-25 ) <sup>97</sup>	<b>Countries</b> Russia and Belarus
The aim of the project is to 'support and preserve a diverse media environment and focuses on supporting existing independent Russian and Belarusian media established and working in the EU'.	

<b>Maison du MédiaLab<sup>98</sup></b>	
<b>Countries</b>	non-EU Eastern European countries
As its website makes clear, the programme is explicitly aimed at boosting support for the EU and NATO in non-EU Eastern European countries by offering residencies in Brussels to European Brussels correspondents.	
<b>Innovation. Media. Minds – Support to Public Service Journalism in the Western Balkans<sup>99</sup></b>	
<b>EU contribution</b>	while specific details about the overall budget of the EU4IM programme are not publicly disclosed, individual grants under the programme can be up to € 90,000 per project
<b>Countries</b>	Western Balkans
<b>Implementing media partner</b>	DW Akademie (Germany)
The aim of the programme is allegedly to ‘support independent media outlets/media organisations in the Western Balkans region promoting pluralism of expression’.	

While the EU’s media campaigns within member states stand out for their self-promotional nature, its activities beyond EU borders are even more overtly propagandistic. Under the pretext of ‘promoting independent journalism’ or ‘fighting disinformation’, the EU has channelled tens of millions of euros into media operations across Ukraine, the Western Balkans, the South Caucasus and even into Russian and Belarusian exile media. These projects frequently mirror the foreign-influence strategies historically associated with USAID, serving to advance EU-NATO geopolitical interests under the guise of democratic support.



What's particularly revealing is the prominent role of DW Akademie – linked to Germany's public broadcaster Deutsche Welle, which has received €35million from the European Commission over the past decade alone<sup>100</sup> – which appears as a recurring implementing partner across multiple non-EU initiatives. This consistent involvement further underscores the semi-structural collaboration between public media institutions and the European Commission.

Such arrangements challenge the notion that these are merely efforts to bolster 'media resilience'. Instead, they illustrate the EU's commitment to shaping public discourse abroad in ways that align with its strategic aims, often through projects that would likely be decried as foreign interference were the roles reversed. Far from simply supporting free media, these campaigns are clearly designed to manufacture pro-EU sentiment, especially in regions viewed as geopolitically sensitive – reinforcing the idea that the EU's information strategy is not just defensive, but increasingly interventionist.

## 9 Funding to individual media outlets

As shown throughout this report, the European Commission allocates substantial funding to the media – to the tune of at least € 70 million per year (a conservative estimate), excluding the significant sums directed toward media initiatives in non-EU countries. But how much funding have individual news agencies outlets received over the years? Below is a non-exhaustive overview:<sup>101</sup>

Media outlets	
Euronews (pan-European)	€ 230 million
ARTE (France)	€ 26 million
Euractiv (pan-European)	€ 6 million
Il Sole 24 Ore	€ 1.5 million
Eurozine	€ 1.5 million
Gazeta Wyborcza (Poland)	€ 105,000
444.hu (Hungary)	€ 1.1 million
France TV (France)	€ 400,000
GEDI Gruppo Editoriale (Italy)	€ 190,000
ZDF (Germany)	€ 500,000
Bayerischer Rundfunk (Germany)	€ 600,000
Kathimerines (Greece)	€ 150,000
Internazionale (Italy)	€ 180,000
Domani (Italy)	€ 100,000
Voxeurop (France)	€ 290,000
PressOne (Romania)	€ 111,000
Economia (Czechia)	€ 1.1 million
Chora Media (Italy)	€ 180,000

Media organisations	
n-ost (Germany)	€ 1.5million
Bellingcat (Netherlands)	€ 440,000
Reporters Without Borders (France)	€ 5.7million
Journalismfund Europe (Belgium)	€ 2.6million
Public broadcasters	
Deutsche Welle (Germany)	€ 35million
France Médias Monde	€ 16.5million
France Télévisions	€ 1million
RAI Radiotelevisione italiana (Italy)	€ 2million
RTBF (Belgium)	€ 675,000
RTP (Portugal)	€ 1.5million
Estonian Public Broadcasting, ERR	€ 1million
RTVE (Spain)	€ 770,000
ERR (Estonia)	€ 1million
TV2 (Denmark)	€ 900,000
News agencies	
Agence France-Presse	€ 7million
ANSA (Italy)	€ 5.6million
Deutsche Presse-Agentur, dpa (Germany)	€ 3.2million
Agencia EFE (Spain)	€ 2million
Associated Press (AP) Television News	€ 1million
Lusa News Agency (Portugal)	€ 200,000
Polish Press Agency	€ 500,000
Athens News Agency	€ 600,000

## Conclusions

This report has uncovered the contours of a sprawling and largely hidden complex of EU funding to the media – a system that, far from merely supporting pluralism and independence, systematically seeks to shape public narratives and foster a media environment aligned with EU institutional interests. Yet even the extensive evidence assembled here likely underestimates the true scale of EU involvement.

Despite its frequent rhetoric about transparency, the EU's financial support to media outlets is extraordinarily difficult to trace in full. Funding occurs across multiple, often overlapping budget lines and programmes, and is disseminated through a labyrinth of websites and platforms, each presenting information in different formats, with inconsistent terminology and incomplete datasets. Compiling a comprehensive map of all EU-supported media activities thus proves a formidable challenge – and one that calls into question the Union's self-proclaimed commitment to openness.

Moreover, this report has focused exclusively on EU schemes formally dedicated to media support. It does not include indirect funding streams – for example, advertising or communication contracts awarded to marketing firms who then redistribute funds to major media outlets. A striking case in point: in October 2023, the Havas Media Group, a leading global communications firm, was awarded € 132.82million by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Communication, just ahead of the 2024 EU election campaign. Some of these funds were subsequently channelled to Havas's

extensive network of media clients across Europe – including many of the continent’s largest TV stations and newspapers.<sup>102</sup> This practice further blurs the already faint line between public information and political promotion.

The findings outlined in this report make clear that Europe’s democratic health faces a serious and growing threat. Democracy depends fundamentally on a genuinely free, independent and pluralistic media – a media that holds power to account, scrutinises official narratives and reflects a broad spectrum of societal views. Yet the EU’s ever-expanding system of media financing actively undermines these conditions. It creates financial dependencies, incentivises narrative conformity and fosters an ecosystem in which dissenting voices are marginalised – all under the virtuous banners of ‘fighting disinformation’, ‘promoting European values’ and ‘building a European public sphere’.

The extent of institutional entanglement between EU bodies and major media actors – from public broadcasters to news agencies to online outlets – cannot be brushed aside as harmless or incidental. It constitutes a systemic conflict of interest that compromises the media’s ability to function as an independent pillar of democracy. Even absent direct editorial interference, the structural dependency on EU grants and contracts is enough to exert a chilling effect on critical reporting and encourage a reflexive alignment with official EU positions.

A public reckoning with the EU’s role in funding and shaping media narratives is urgently needed. Institutional links between political power and journalism must be scrutinised – and, ultimately, severed. EU institutions should not be in the business of funding journalism. Only by restoring a clear and uncompromised separation between political institutions and the media can Europe hope to rebuild genuine trust in public discourse – and with it, the democratic vitality it claims to defend.

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## CONCLUSIONS

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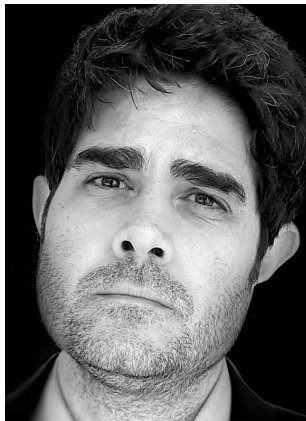
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Is the EU funding media freedom, or just pro-EU narratives?

This report unveils Brussels's vast, under-scrutinised system of media funding, disbursing nearly €80million annually. Often framed as supporting independent journalism, this money frequently promotes explicitly pro-EU narratives, marginalising critical voices.

This extensive funding, often presented as support for media freedom, in fact, frequently serves to promote explicitly pro-EU narratives and marginalise critical voices, raising serious concerns about editorial independence and democratic integrity.

Discover how the EU's 'special relationship' with major media blurs the lines between journalism and institutional communication, creating a structural incentive for friendly coverage. From promoting Cohesion Policy as 'benefits' to funding 'fact-checking', the evidence points to a strategic effort to shape public discourse. The report exposes an increasingly dependent relationship by many major media outlets and press agencies towards EU money, subtly influencing public opinion and threatening journalistic integrity.

Uncover the truth behind Brussels's media machine and the threat to democratic accountability.