



Ethical  
Journalism  
Network

# BUILDING TRUST

A Manifesto for Sustainable Journalism  
in South East Europe and Turkey





## Trust in media and independent journalism are essential prerequisites for building democracy. However, trust in journalism is falling in the face of disinformation and political propaganda and a deep crisis for pluralism threatens Europe and the countries of South East Europe and Turkey.

But change is on the way. Media and journalists' leaders are coming together to break the cycle of corruption and undue political influence on journalism.

They are partners in the Ethical Journalism Network programme – *Building Trust in Media in South East Europe and Turkey* – which is opening the door to fresh ideas on how to reverse the trend of falling public confidence and at the same time to build a viable and realistic future for sustainable ethical journalism.

Already some leading news outlets in Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia have signed up. More media in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania and Turkey will join the process and a regional conference is planned in the year up to July 2019.

This innovative project strengthens journalism and identifies media that are committed to ethics and transparency. These independent newsrooms lead the way in public interest journalism. They

are bulwarks of independent, ethical journalism and must be given support to keep democracy alive in the region.

### Why does ethical journalism need support?

Journalism is in crisis and needs urgent help, not least because of an information revolution that has created a whirlwind of change but has also broken the market models that used to provide revenues from advertising and circulation that paid for independent journalism.

In South East Europe and Turkey the crisis is even more profound given the history of conflict, propaganda and political pressure that has created a fragmented and polarised media environment.

Unless solutions are found that will help identify and support independent news outlets, news media will become increasingly the trophy possessions of oligarchs, political players and self-interested centres of power.

### How do media show they are free and independent?

Media across South East Europe have identified three critical areas which are benchmarks for quality and public trust:

**Ethical News:** Journalists and editors must show they are committed to cardinal principles of reporting, particularly through the adoption of a code of conduct for journalism which embraces the five core values of journalism developed by the Ethical Journalism Network – accuracy, independence, impartiality, humanity and transparency. These values are essential for embedding the ideals of accountable and responsible journalism.

**Good Governance:** The Ethical Journalism Network has launched Ethical Media Audits, a system of self-governance and reporting developed in consultation with regional owners, managers and editors. These help news media define the way they work according to

## ETHICAL NEWS VALUES

News media that are a public good understand why their journalism is not just about free expression. They know that what makes journalism different from free expression is that reporters and editors express themselves through the ethics and values that underpin the profession of journalism.

These core values have been established over the past 100 years in more than 400 editorial codes drawn up by media professionals and they are the rules that define how journalists do their work. The values that underpin these codes have been identified by the Ethical Journalism Network and guide our work.

They are:

1. **Accuracy and fact-based reporting:** No disinformation or malicious lies;
2. **Independence and critical thinking:** No propaganda or bias;
3. **Impartiality:** Fair to all and inclusive of all sides of opinion;
4. **Humanity:** Showing care and sensitivity to all groups;
5. **Transparency:** Being open to the audience and correcting mistakes.



## Media and journalists' leaders are coming together to break the cycle of corruption and undue political influence on journalism.

basic standards of transparency and responsible management. These audits are a way of guaranteeing respect for human rights and preventing secret and corrupt forms of interference or conflicts of interest in the ownership and management of media.

**Self-regulation:** All media must be committed to correcting their mistakes, engaging with their audience, and demonstrating their commitment to serve the public. They do this by having internal and accessible systems of self-regulation and by working with other news media to create national systems of independent media regulation that are free of pressure from political or special interests.

### How will trustworthy media be identified and monitored?

Adopting codes of conduct, signing up to *Ethical Media Audits* and supporting self-regulation principles can be easily done, but that is not enough. Building public trust requires a system of monitoring to ensure that media are keeping their promises.

The Ethical Journalism Network is working at national and European level to help establish new systems – such as the Journalism Trust Initiative led by Reporters Without Borders – that will try to create a trusted cross-border system to support the best of journalism and to identify those media that are leaders in setting standards.

Media in South East Europe and Turkey have an opportunity, through this programme, to become frontline defenders of public interest journalism and to lead the campaign to build public trust in news media across Europe.

With this in mind, the Ethical Journalism Network plans to help establish a regional network of leading media in South East Europe that recognises ethical journalism at national and regional levels. These are the media that democracy needs. They hold political and corporate centres of power to account. They are brands that the public can trust.

### Who will pay for trusted journalism?

The media identified in the programme – *Building Trust in Media and South East Europe and Turkey* – are at the heart of the movement for sustainable and reliable journalism. To survive in an uncertain media environment they need to be protected from political interference.

But that will not be enough. Independent news media will also need access to new forms of revenue and financial support – a mix of funding that includes traditional commercial income as well as public subscription and donations.

A number of different streams of financial support can be identified – both public and private – but what is needed is a mechanism to ensure that streams of funding come without strings attached and that editorial independence is protected.

Using the EJN programme journalists and news media can earn the trust of the public through their commitment to editorial independence, ethical journalism and transparency in the ownership and management of the news industry.

To support this work and to join this campaign contact the EJN South East Europe Programme team. More information is available at [www.ethicaljournalismnetwork.org](http://www.ethicaljournalismnetwork.org)

## Good Governance and Ethical Media Audits

The audit begins with an analysis of a news company's journalism followed by a detailed review of management and working practice. The audit result reveals how the company works, its aims and objectives and its vision for the future. The results of the audit are for internal use. They are not for wider publication unless the company agrees, but the audit will provide answers to crucial questions facing news media today:

### Our Mission and Our Role:

1. Company commitment to good governance and ethical standards
2. How much journalism we have produced
3. How company protects editorial independence
4. How the company deals with complaints and concerns of audience

### Who We Are, How we Work:

5. Management and ownership of the company
6. Information on economic performance
7. Industrial relations, labour standards and training activity
8. Safety and Protection of Journalists and Media Staff

### Our Vision of the Future:

9. Company objectives and targets
10. Industry trends

## SELF-REGULATION AND PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Public interest journalism is accountable to the audience and public it serves. News media ensure this in three ways:

1. They encourage their staff to be responsible and to support ethical behaviour, recognising that **ethical journalism begins at the level of the individual**. Every journalist should have the freedom to report freely, but each must take responsibility for their actions.
2. They create **internal systems** for self-regulation to deal with the complaints and the opinions of the audience about how the company works. Such internal systems may involve special positions, for example the appointment of readers' editors, but they ensure that newsrooms listen to the concerns of the public.
3. Where appropriate they will also be members of a **national media self-regulation process** – usually through a press or media council – that can take up complaints from the public if the internal systems provided by media do not resolve problems.

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