The Trust Story: Pathways to quality journalism in South East Europe and Türkiye in the digital age
Regional Conference, 2-3 December 2024, Press Club Brussels Europe

Final statement and recommendations

This meeting of news media, journalism support groups and international partners, having considered and discussed the current news crisis in South East Europe and Turkey,

Believing that urgent action is needed at all levels to restore public confidence in the social role of news media as the providers of accurate, reliable and independent information which is essential for democratic life,

Recognising that the [European Media Freedom Act](#) and the [Digital Services Act](#), and other international declarations including the [Paris Charter on Information and Democracy](#) and UNESCO's 2021 [Windhoek +30 Declaration on Information as a Public Good](#), all underpin the importance of free, pluralistic and transparent media,

Noting the collapse in business models that support public interest journalism, alongside continuing political interference, create unique conditions in South East Europe and Turkey that weaken quality journalism and undermine public trust,

Aware of the crisis of media sustainability and the need for new streams of funding to support public interest journalism and news media,

Insisting that governments should recognise the social role of media in building public trust and confidence in democratic and open societies and the need to create an enabling environment for the exercise of free and independent media, including safe and transparent use of technology and artificial intelligence,

Trusting that the EU accession process provides opportunities for countries in South East Europe and Turkey to upgrade laws and to enforce a regulatory framework in support of a free, independent and pluralistic media landscape,

Convinced of the importance of media self-reflection and the need to strengthen the commitment of journalists and news media to fundamental principles of ethical behaviour and transparency,

Welcomes the development of self-assessment programmes, such as the Journalism Trust Initiative, which are based upon transparency, engagement with the public and the commitment of news media to the ethical mission of journalism,

Agrees:

That further action is needed to build upon the valuable work of the Ethical Journalism Network on self-assessment and independent certification carried out in the context of the project *Building Trust in Media in South East Europe and Turkey*, supported by the EU and UNESCO. In pursuit of that objective, the meeting makes the following recommendations:

1. That media organisations in the region be further encouraged to support transparency, ethics and credible self-regulation through self-assessment and independent certification through widely-recognised programmes, such as the Journalism Trust Initiative;

2. That self-assessment and self-certification should apply also across the landscape of public service media;

3. That this form of assessment and certification of quality journalism, transparency and standards should be adopted as a criterion by international bodies, donors and national authorities in allocating support to news media, both public and private;

4. That additional assistance should be provided to assist media, including small news outlets, to meet the structural costs of independent verification of their public interest journalism and public accountability system;

5. That self-assessment processes should be updated, where appropriate, to include verification of editorial responsibility and independence in the use, management and disclosure of digital tools in journalism, particularly related to use of generative Artificial Intelligence, in line with the suggestions in the appendix to this declaration;

6. That advertisers and commercial sponsors of news media and fact-checking agencies should be encouraged to support self-assessment and should be incentivised to support news media that adopt this form of transparency and self-regulation;

7. That the use of self-assessment and independent certification, through programmes such as the Journalism Trust Initiative, be established as a criterion for the transparent allocation by donors, public bodies and international organisations of public funding to news media engaged in public interest journalism;

8. That digital platforms and technology companies should themselves recognise self-assessment and independent certification as an indicator of quality journalism and public interest information and potential partners in confronting disinformation and abusive communications;

9. That digital platforms, technology companies and social media should be obliged to give due prominence and preferential treatment by algorithms of search engines to news media which self-regulate in this way;

10. That digital platforms and technology companies should, in good faith, engage with media that demonstrate compliance with the requirements of widely-recognised self-regulatory programmes, such as the Journalism Trust Initiative, to avoid abusive suspensions or unjustified restrictions on their content and to avoid such actions in the future;

11. That transparency in news media and journalism through self-assessments and independent certification, should be recognised and supported by the national media support community, including media self-regulatory bodies such as press councils, which should encourage all public interest media to adopt such accountability mechanisms.

APPENDIX:

Additional statement on Artificial Intelligence integration in newsrooms of South East Europe and Turkey

- We fully endorse the UNESCO *Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms: Safeguarding freedom of expression and access to information*; The UNESCO Recommendations on the *Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*; the Paris Charter on AI; the European Media Freedom Act, DSA, and AIA; and call on platforms to commit to transparency, institutionalized checks and balances, open and accessible governance and adherence to human rights standards.

- We welcome the use of AI in newsrooms, provided that clear guidelines and training for its use are established; that transparency with the public is ensured; that human oversight is maintained over AI-generated content; and that risks associated with AI are acknowledged and addressed.

- We seek to have constructive engagement with technology companies and we urge digital platforms to foster constructive relationships with the media community in our countries by establishing direct contact points or local offices and by giving priority to user content moderation in local languages, and supporting media literacy and ethical journalism initiatives.

- We call for respect for media content and demand that use of media content by AI engines is conditional upon permission from the media that produce it, attribution to original source and safeguards against misuse of content.

- We also demand fair revenue sharing and safeguards for the use of trusted content by AI models including equitable sharing of revenues generated from such content and robust safeguards to prevent exploitation, desinformation or misrepresentation.