

NEWS MEDIA

1. Objectives

Europe's news media sector, already facing difficulties in view of the digital transition, risks being severely impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

The crisis is causing a major drop of the advertising revenues for news publishers. News Media Europe estimates that this fall may range from 30% to 70% of industry-wide revenues depending on the country. In some Member States, declines in revenues could also be influenced by the disruption in postal delivery or varying success rates of online subscription.

While news consumption during the COVID crisis has increased, it does not compensate for the losses in advertising revenue, and many news outlets provide news on COVID-19 for free, which does not lead to an increase in the number of subscriptions.

This is likely to accentuate the economic hardship in the sector, and many (especially smaller and/or local) news media outlets risk disappearing or reducing the number of journalists they employ or contract. In terms of job losses, freelance journalists are likely to be particularly impacted.

The crisis also affects the business continuity, limiting journalists' work "on the ground" or making access to information from governmental sources problematic.

Private actors in the news media ecosystem (as opposed to public service media) will obviously suffer the most from the shortfall in advertising revenues. Newspapers with business models based on subscription will have less difficulties in the immediate future than those depending heavily on advertising and newsstand sales.

Some Member States have launched support schemes in relation to the Covid-19 crisis. However, journalists and publishers have expressed concerns that not all of them would cover news media.

The purpose of the meeting is to better understand (i) the impact of COVID-19 on the news media ecosystem, (ii) the nature and scale of measures taken by Member States and (iii) how the EU and the Commission could contribute to the rescue effort and to ensuring the long-term sustainability of news media.

2. Running order/ Choreography

(i) Initial remarks by Commissioner Thierry Breton

Suggested speaking points

- *The COVID-19 outbreak has further highlighted the importance of reliable news media for our societies. I am well aware that the economic downturn ensuing from this crisis is putting the news media ecosystem at risk.*
- *In the current situation, many news media outlets – especially smaller or local ones - risk disappearing or reducing the number of journalists they employ or contract.*
- *I have convened this meeting to understand better your perspectives on the current COVID-19 crisis and its impacts on the news media sector.*
- *I am interested in views of the entire news media ecosystem in its variety.*
- *I propose to start this meeting by listening to the perspective of journalists, followed by those by news media publishers and, finally, by the representative of commercial radios.*

(ii) The perspective of journalists

Suggested speaking points

- *I would like start from the perspective of journalists, who are at the forefront of the information supply chain.*
- *The ongoing crisis has highlighted the extraordinary role that they play in our societies and has showed how important it is for the citizens to obtain trustworthy information.*
- *Unfortunately, the crisis risks bringing economic hardship for journalists, with many news outlets, especially regional and local ones, facing closure or staff reductions. Freelance journalists are likely to be especially impacted.*
- *I would like to ask [REDACTED] how [REDACTED] sees the current situation of journalists across Europe. In particular, I am interested in any suggestion on the type of support that is most needed?*

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[REDACTED] the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

The European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) is the largest organisation of journalists in Europe representing over 320,000 journalists in 72 journalists' organisations across 45 countries.

(iii) The perspective of regional news media publishers

Suggested speaking points

- *Undoubtedly, the crisis is particularly severe for the most vulnerable actors in the news media ecosystem. The regional and local publishers are facing a significant drop in advertising revenues, which might, in worst cases, force them to close.*
- *In this context, I would like to ask [REDACTED] how regional news media publishers are coping with the situation.*
- *Again, I am particularly interested to understand what is the biggest threat for your business in these circumstances, and where the support is most urgent?*

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[REDACTED] Henneo, [REDACTED] News Media Europe, [REDACTED] WAN IFRA (Spain)

HENNEO is made up of a large group of companies, employs more than 1,300 people and has a turnover of over 120 million euros per year. In the press sector the group owns headlines such as Heraldo de Aragón (regional daily newspaper), 20minutos, Diario del AltoAragón and La Información. With more than 330,000 copies printed every day that attract more than 1,200,000 daily readers, HENNEO emerges as one of the main publishers in Spain.

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(iv) The perspective of news media publishers present in several EU Member States

- *I would like to move now to a more horizontal perspective and ask views of the news publishers that operate in multiple European markets and – as I understand – are particularly active in digital.*
- *Could I ask you, [REDACTED], to share with us your insights on the impacts of the crisis on the news media sector and ways in which the EU could help?*

[REDACTED] DPG Media (Belgium)

DPG Media is a Belgian publishing company that owns media assets in Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands, including: TV channels (7); Radio stations (8); Newspapers and Magazines (18 + about 150 door-to-door papers); Telecom (2).

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[REDACTED] Schibsted (Sweden/Norway)

Schibsted group owns media houses, marketplaces and online services. They engage over 200 million people in more than 22 markets.

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(v) The perspective of national news media publishers

- Now I would like to turn to [REDACTED] and ask them to present us their views on the situation of publishers operating mostly at national level. I understand [REDACTED] may provide also insights from other markets than [REDACTED] own given [REDACTED] role [REDACTED]
- I am particularly interested if the current situation is likely to lead to structural changes, for instance with regard to the online consumption of news.

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[REDACTED] Les Echos - Le Parisien Group (France)

Les Échos-Le Parisien group is a French holding company active in the media and advertising sector. It is a subsidiary of LVMH (LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton), and it is included in the group's "Press and Media" division.

Les Echos is the first daily French financial newspaper, founded in 1908 [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] It is the main competitor of La Tribune, a rival financial paper.

Le Parisien is French daily newspaper covering both international and national news, and local news of Paris and its suburbs.

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[REDACTED] GEDI, [REDACTED] the European Newspaper Publishers' Association ENPA (Italy)

The **Gruppo GEDI** is one of Italy's leading publishing groups. GEDI, listed on the Milan Stock Exchange, publishes la Repubblica, La Stampa, Il Secolo XIX, 13 local daily, the weekly l'Espresso and other magazines. Part of the group are also three national radio stations (Radio DeeJay, Radio Capital and m2o). GEDI is present in the internet sector and through Manzoni collects advertising for his and for third-party publications.

(vi) The perspective of magazine publishers

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- I am curious how [REDACTED] could complement this picture from the specific viewpoint of magazine publishers.

[REDACTED] Roularta Media Group (Belgium)

Roularta Media Group NV is a Belgian multimedia group operating in two main segments: print media and audiovisual media. The print media segment consists of free newspapers such as De Streekkrant, De Zondag and Steps and news magazines, for instance Knack and Le Vif/L'Express. The group is the owner of several French magazines: L'Express, L'Expansion, L'Etudiant and Point de Vue.

The group is co-owner of two local TV channels - Focus TV and WTV and has also internet properties such as lexpress.fr, knack.be and letudiant.fr.

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(vii) The perspective of commercial radios

Suggested speaking points

- *The period of confinement has also influenced the radio sector, with many Europeans choosing radio as their main source of information.*
- *I am aware of the negative economic impact of the crisis on the commercial radios, whose business model is largely based on advertising.*
- *I would like to ask [REDACTED] how [REDACTED] sees the situation of Europe's commercial radios and how public authorities could help through financial or regulatory means.*

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[REDACTED] the Association of European Radios, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] the Association of Commercial Broadcasters in Austria (Austria)

Association of European Radios (AER) is the Europe-wide trade body for commercial radio, representing the interests of over 5,000 commercial radio stations to the EU Institutions. AER promotes the development of European commercially funded radio broadcasting, by ensuring a fair and sustainable economic framework for radio to thrive in.

(viii) Wrap-up & next steps

Suggested speaking points

- *In our responses to the impact of this crisis, we need to address the challenges of the entire EU media sector but also tailor them to the needs of the news industry.*
- *I have already had a discussion with the representatives of the audiovisual sector. My services, together with the European Audiovisual Observatory, are assessing the impact of the crisis on this sector.*
- *Today's discussion helped me to understand the impact on the news media sector, and will feed into our thinking how to effectively support this sector, both in the short and longer-term perspective.*
- *I would like to thank you for your contributions and I am open to hear any additional feedback from your side that might help us to emerge stronger from this crisis.*

3. Key messages / LTT

- The current COVID-19 outbreak has further highlighted **the importance of reliable news media and sources of information** for our societies. We are well aware that the economic downturn ensuing from this crisis is putting at risk the news media ecosystem.
- Member States have already started to adopt or are planning to adopt initiatives to support the sector.
- We are willing to **accompany Member States in developing their responses**, in particular, through a mapping of the measures already in place and exchange of best practices to identify the most effective ones.
- [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- At EU level, we are exploring both **short-term responses** as well as **longer-term solutions**.
- Our short-term actions could help news media outlets face their cashflow problems by facilitating **access to credit**. The existing **Cultural and Creative Sectors Guarantee Facility** is available for news media for that purpose and will be further strengthened and adapted to the new circumstances.
- We are also open to discuss further financial solutions to sustain the news media sector, in particular at the local and regional level.
- Finally, on the regulatory front we note your call to change the EU law that exempts the **platforms** from making their online spaces safe. We understand your concerns around the market power of platforms in the online environment, especially in online advertising markets. We are also closely following the discussions around the implementation of the new

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publishers' right, in particular in France. I am determined to address these vital issues, and thus I am keen to hear your ideas on possible solutions.

4. Defensives

➤ Emergency laws in Member States

- Over the past weeks, several EU governments have adopted emergency measures to address the health crisis caused by the outbreak of the coronavirus. We are living in extraordinary times, and governments need to be able to act rapidly and effectively to protect the public health.
- While strictly defined derogations are permissible, emergency measures must not suspend the exercise of critical fundamental rights and any measures must be proportionate to the specified aims.
- Democracy cannot work without free and independent media.
- Measures which have an absolute – or virtually absolute – chilling effect on free speech and reporting go counter to the principle of media freedom and free debate. Now it is more important than ever that journalists are able to do their job freely and precisely, so as to counter disinformation and to ensure that our citizens have access to crucial information.
- The European Commission will closely monitor, in a spirit of cooperation, the application of emergency measures in all Member States. We all need to work together to master this crisis. While doing so, we will uphold our European values and human rights. This is who we are, and this is what we stand for.

➤ Keyword blocking in online advertising and financing of news media - (ad blocking)

- The Commission is aware that the reduction of news media revenues could also be due to the practice of advertisers, agencies and ad-tech companies in the digital advertising ecosystem to block COVID-19 related keywords.
- This practice aims at avoiding the misplacement of advertising on online disinformation sites or on sites that promote, for example, false cures for coronavirus. However, it can also have the effect of preventing advertising from appearing next to widely consulted trusted news sources about the pandemic. This can harm the entire news media industry.
- We urge the ad industry to acknowledge the problem and to take measures. To avoid depriving trustworthy news sources of revenue, the Commission further

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encourages the advertising industry to provide, in accordance with the Code of Practice on disinformation, brand safety tools, which enable advertisers to discriminate between websites that are misleading or purveyors of disinformation and trustable sources. We also encourage online social media to strengthen the visibility of trusted news sources.

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- [redacted]
- [redacted]

[redacted]

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➤ Google's policy on press publications in France and possible measures

- The Commission is closely following the implementation of the copyright directive and the discussions around the implementation of the new publishers right in France.
- [REDACTED]
- The Commission is aware of the recent decision of the French competition authority on the complaint filed by French press publishers on Google's behaviour. The French authority has required Google to engage in good faith negotiations with publishers with the objective of paying them for the use of their content online.
- We want to make sure that the Copyright Directive achieves its objectives on the ground, to the benefit of the press sector. [REDACTED]
- The Commission is working intensively with Member States to assist them in the correct implementation and application of the Copyright Directive, notably in the context of the Copyright Contact Committee, which gathers experts from governments.

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Background for the defensive on Google and press publishers in France

Following the adoption of the French law transposing the new publishers right introduced by the Copyright Directive (in the autumn last year), Google announced that – in France – the search engine “Google news” would display extracts of articles published by newspapers online without paying the publishers. The headlines of newspaper articles will be shown in Google search by default (Google considers that headlines are excluded from the new copyright rules, which is questionable, though open to interpretation). Extracts of press publications longer than headlines would be shown only if publishers agree to give Google a free licence. In practice, this means that press publishers are facing a “take it or leave it” situation – they will not receive money from Google and, if they refuse to grant free licences to Google, they will not be indexed by Google and therefore will face the risk to “disappear from the internet”.

Last October French press publishers filed a complaint at the French competition authority about Google’s announcement. The competition authority has not made a decision on substance yet. However, in April 2020 it has already delivered an interim decision with precautionary measures to ensure that press publishers and Google start good-faith negotiations immediately.

The French Authority has “noted the existence of a serious and immediate attack on the press sector resulting from Google’s behaviour, which deprives publishers and press agencies of a resource vital to ensure the sustainability of their activities, and this at the crucial moment of the entry into force of the Law on press publishers’ rights”.

In the meantime, Google is also having discussions with selected publishers like Le Monde and Le Figaro to pay for their licensed press publishers’ content. However, this initiative is still in the stage of reflection and it remains unclear how it would affect the entire publishing environment.

In parallel, Google announced several actions in support of the media in view of the crisis:

- The Google News Initiative has launched a global Journalism Emergency Relief Fund to support small- and medium-sized news organizations producing original news for local communities. The Fund’s aim is to support the production of original journalism for local communities in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and to provide news organizations financial assistance at this critical time. The window for applications opened on April 15 and closes on April 29.

- Google.org is giving \$1 million collectively to the International Center for Journalists and the DART Center for Journalism and Trauma which plans to provide immediate resources to support reporters globally, and to help journalists exposed to traumatic events experienced during the crisis.

- To help fight coronavirus misinformation, Google is providing \$6.5 million in funding to fact-checkers and nonprofits.

commercial
interests

5. Background information

News media sector - overview

The news media industry is composed of **several sub-sectors and actors**:

- Media professionals (such as journalists and editors)
- Publishers – newspapers and magazines (print or online)
- Broadcasters - television (private or public) and radio (private or public)
- Press agencies
- Community media
- Distributors
- News stands' owners and employees

In general, news media relies a lot on advertising revenue. Sales and subscriptions is another important source of revenue, and some rely on public subsidies and/or private philanthropy too. Media outlets with strong brands (e.g. Axel Springer, RTL) have launched successful digital offers. However overall, even before the crisis, the economic outlook was negative.

Traditional news media has been in structural decline for some time, with audiences, revenues and employment falling significantly. Digital substitution is the main reason for this decline: while digital distribution channels represent a growing sector (average growth rate of 7.4%), traditional media is contracting (e.g. revenues of newspapers were falling, on average, by 6% per year). Turnover of the press industry in the EU declined between 2013 and 2017 reaching EUR 73.275 million. The number of employees and companies also decreased, with 37.151 companies employing 440.103 people in 2017.

It appears that Google and Facebook control up to 80% of the revenues in the online advertising markets. At the same time, publishers get less than 30% of the advertising revenues generated by their content¹. Local news outlets are disappearing, but also digital-native professional media faces difficulties. General interest media content, relevant for Europeans from an informational and cultural point of view, is struggling to attract (young) audiences in the online environment. Also, consumers' readiness to pay for news is weak: just 12% would subscribe to a news service, compared to 28% who would choose a video streaming service².

The impact of the current crisis

¹ The publisher's right introduced by the new Copyright Directive aims to improve the negotiating position of publishers in the new digital media environment. This in view of creating fairer rules for the marketplace, strengthening quality journalism. The new rules may be even more important if news media consumption is increasingly moving online due to the pandemic. The Commission is providing support to Member States in the transposition period to ensure the timely and correct implementation of the rules.

² 2019 Digital News Report

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The COVID-19 outbreak will accentuate the economic hardship in the news media sector, and many (especially smaller and/or local) news media outlets risk disappearing or at least reducing the number of journalists they employ or contract. According to recent reports, the effect of economic downturns on print advertising expenditures is on average 4 times bigger than the effect on television advertising expenditures and in the current situation some local publishers might experience the advertising revenues drop even by 50 percent.³ In terms of job losses, freelance journalists are likely to be especially impacted.

On the positive side, both online news sites and television news programmes are experiencing a surge in audience attention as people seek to understand the pandemic. According to Comscore, compared with the week Dec 30, 2019 - Jan 5, 2020, visits to general news websites or mobile applications went up by 68% in France, 57% in Germany, 125% in Italy, 87% in Spain and 51% in the UK in the week March 16-22, 2020⁴.

However, the impact is likely to be predominantly negative:

1. **Falling revenues.** According to News Media Europe (NME), in many European countries, the coming months will likely witness a significant fall in advertising income for news publishers. Early estimates suggest the drop may range from 30% to 70% of industry-wide revenues depending on the country.⁵ Reuters Institute predicts, in short term, huge declines in advertising revenues, likely declines in reader revenues for many titles (though some may, over time, see an uptick), and declines in other streams of revenue. Reportedly, some advertisers have reduced the number of digital ads placed on the news websites next to stories about the coronavirus pandemic⁶. In some countries, the postal delivery is disrupted, whilst online subscriptions have varying success rates in EU Member States⁷.
2. **Business continuity.** Newsrooms are increasingly working online, but journalists find it difficult to travel and perform their work “on the ground”. Also, depending on the country, access to information from governmental sources may be problematic.

The crisis is likely to affect the news media sector **in all Member States**. However, the effect may be different, depending on various factors, such as consumer habits regarding buying electronic or paper versions, size and GDP or severity of the confinement⁸. For example, the impact is likely to be greater in smaller, less prosperous Member States, where take-up of paid digital content offers is relatively lower.

³ <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/risj-review/what-will-coronavirus-pandemic-mean-business-news>

⁴ <https://www.comscore.com/Insights/Blog/Coronavirus-pandemic-and-online-behavioural-shifts-March-30-update>

⁵ <http://www.newsmediaeurope.eu/news/covid-19-and-the-news-media-journalism-always-comes-at-a-cost/>

⁶ <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/news-sites-need-ads-to-survive-the-coronavirus-more-than-35>

⁷ <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/paying-for-news-and-the-limits-of-subscription/>

⁸ For instance, regarding measures affecting in particular newspaper stands – see for example Belgian exemption for newspaper shops or the Spanish decision to consider media professionals as essential workers.

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The impact is likely to be bigger on **private media** (as opposed to public service media) due to the severe shortfall in advertising revenues. It is expected that newspapers with business models based on subscription will have less difficulties in the immediate future than those depending heavily on advertising and newsstand sales.

Whilst this note focuses mainly on the “traditional” news media sector, i.e. newspapers and magazines, whether online or print, the other sectors are also heavily impacted by the current crisis and follow similar trends.⁹

The case for financial support of news media

- Just as banks are a key infrastructure underpinning economies, so independent news media is a **key infrastructure underpinning democracies**. It is crucial that professional media organisations remain present, diverse and active at national, regional and local levels, in order to investigate and cover public interest news on local, domestic and European / international affairs. Journalists and the news media are also key stakeholders in the upholding of the rule of law. In times of crisis, it is even more important that journalists are able to do their job, not least to avoid disinformation. **Publishers as well as journalists are calling on the EU for help.**

Actions by Member States

- Member States will be at the forefront of any effort to provide immediate financial relief / support long-term viability of news media. In particular, they may decide to provide additional support under the Temporary Framework for State aid measures to support the economy in the current COVID-19 outbreak.
- Some examples: Italy proposed to subsidise 30% of investments in advertising, in a bid to soften the impact on newspapers and kiosk sellers. The German federal government is stepping in with a EUR 50 billion aid package for the country’s creative and cultural sectors. It will support media enterprises, including newspapers. In Ireland EUR 2.5 million will be allocated for the support of news, current affairs and information programming on independent radios during the crisis. Denmark announced EUR 24 million to support local media: up to 80% of losses in advertising revenue will be compensated for news outlets. Sweden announced additional SEK 200 million (roughly EUR 20 million) for press and media aid targeting both the written press (paper and digital) and audiovisual news sector.
- The EU could play a role in coordinating the efforts of Member States. On 20 March 2020 the Croatian Presidency (the Minister of Culture) wrote a letter to fellow ministers of culture, highlighting the negative impact of the crisis on professional

⁹ The European Association of Commercial Radios indicate that advertising revenues are today unpredictable and threaten some radio stations of closure. European broadcasters also signal significant impact in terms of advertising revenues.

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media and journalists and inviting the ministers “to come together and share experiences in order to develop new models and implement sustainable solutions on the national and the EU level to help the cultural and creative sectors”.

- [REDACTED]

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- There is also a need to monitor emergency measures adopted by Member States in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic, to make sure that these measures are taken in compliance with the EU and international obligations relating to human rights as well as the EU law principles of proportionality and necessity and do not lead to major disruption of activities of news media organisations and professionals.

EU actions

- [REDACTED] The ongoing projects supporting activities in the field of media freedom, media pluralism and investigative journalism are financed from yearly ‘Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions’ of limited scope and resources. They focus on monitoring violations to media pluralism and freedom and protecting media freedom by providing legal and practical support to journalists under threat; financing collaborative journalism; training of journalists; deploying innovative working methods and business models in news media; monitoring media pluralism; and fostering self-regulation.

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- Please see Annex 2 for an overview of other - potentially relevant - EU funds.

- [REDACTED]

1. Short-term actions

- **Facilitating access to credit** could help media outlets facing temporary shortfall in revenues, but otherwise confident in their business prospects. News media can fully benefit from the existing Cultural and Creative Sectors Guarantee Facility. The Facility

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enables SMEs and organisations from cultural and creative sectors to get a loan from a financial institution (EUR 1 000 to EUR 2 million) in 14 participating countries.

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2. Longer-term actions

- **Creative Europe – Cross-sectoral strand.** To stabilise actions in favour of media freedom, media pluralism and media literacy, the European Commission has proposed to include a dedicated budget (61 million euros over 7 years) in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027, Creative Europe, Cross-sectoral strand). Co-legislative negotiations are ongoing, the programme is expected to start in 2021.
- **Horizon Europe.** The next research and innovation framework programme (2021-2027) could address some of the news media needs, in particular those linked to innovation, under Clusters 2 'Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society' and 4 'Digital, Industry and Space'.

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- InvestEU. will bring together the European Fund for Strategic Investments and the currently available 13 EU financial instruments (including Cultural and Creative Sectors Guarantee Facility).

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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3. Regulatory aspects

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- The network of EU audiovisual media regulators (ERGA) has set up an action group to look at the economic effects on the crisis on the European media ecosystem.

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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- With the polarisation and disinformation brought about by the crisis, it would be important that access to trustworthy general interest information online is privileged.

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- **Copyright:** Article 15 of the Copyright Directive (2019/790) provides press publishers with exclusive rights on the online use of their press publications by online service providers. The deadline for Member States to transpose these new rules is June 2021. The press publishers' right in the Copyright Directive only applies to press publishers established in the EU. The Commission will closely monitor the transposition and implementation in Member States.

Stakeholder engagement

- In order to appropriately frame and target EU action, we propose to engage with stakeholders, via a series of structured dialogues, including with the ones listed in the Annex below. These dialogues could lead to the establishment of a European News Media Industry Forum by the end of the year.

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