

EU Digital Services Act must support the media and press freedom

10 September 2020



Free Press Unlimited believes online platforms should contribute to a healthy and pluralistic media landscape. However, today, the lack of regulatory framework as well as the increased role of a few platforms in accessing information have a negative impact on press freedom. We believe these challenges should be addressed by the upcoming Digital Services Act. That's why we contributed to the EU public consultation launched by the European Commission this summer.

Online and social media platforms have a strong impact on what people read, see or view. With their algorithms, they decide which information people have access to or consume. Thanks to social media and search engines, people consume more news - a trend which further increased during the COVID-19 pandemic*. However the use of algorithms based on users' profiles, the concentration of advertisement revenues by a few dominant platforms, as well as the increased speed with which information circulate, have huge impacts on press freedom and media viability. With great power comes great responsibility.

The Digital Services Act

At the end of 2020, the European Commission will launch the Digital Services Act (DSA). This act will update the current legal framework for digital services and online platforms within the European Union (EU). It will touch upon and define various issues, such as protecting the rights and safety of users and the liability regime of digital platforms.

What Free Press Unlimited wants

We live in an era where access to reliable information is a matter of life and death. Furthermore, access to information is a fundamental right. But the independent media, the ones who provide

us with this information, are struggling to survive. Therefore Free Press Unlimited advocates that the European Commission should use the DSA as an opportunity to re-balance the power dynamics between online platforms and the media, while addressing connected issues related to the spread of disinformation and online advertising. We call upon the European Commission to take into account the following issues:

- 1. Supporting a free media landscape in order to tackle the spread of disinformation.**
First of all, supporting long-term financial viability of the media will address the spread of disinformation by upholding quality of news content. Content take-down, automatic filtering or blocking of information leads to censorship of the media as some state actors use these tools to censor journalists. Second, media literacy can help citizens to develop their critical thinking and assess which journalistic sources are trustworthy. Lastly, promoting authentic and professional journalistic sources in a transparent way and in partnership with civil society organisations, can help to give more visibility to reliable information over inaccurate content.
- 2. Equitable share of revenues between online platforms and the media sector.**
Social media and search engines have a strong impact on the consumption, distribution and production of news. These platforms display and monetise on content that is produced by the media. However the media don't get their share of the incomes but in addition media have to play these platforms to distribute the news. They are forced to engage in a race to the bottom by prioritising the number of clicks over content quality in order to see their content displayed by these platforms. We advocate for the DSA to put forward concrete proposals which strive for equitable share of revenues and pave the way to fair redistribution systems. So that media generate income for the content they create.
- 3. Enhancing transparency of online advertising.**
Advertising used to be the main source of income of the media. Today, the online advertising market is largely concentrated in the hands of a few dominant platforms. The lack of transparency and accountability of online advertising value chains. Be they political or commercial advertisements, they do not allow stable income generation for media outlets. We advocate for the DSA to put forward concrete proposals to increase transparency and accountability of online advertising and ultimately, support financial viability of the media.

* According to the [Reuters Institute 2020 Digital News Report](#).