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Council

Journalism cannot survive on principles alone. Europe must defend the business that sustains it.

An Open Letter to the European Commission on World News Day, 28th September 2026

Christian Van Thillo, Chairman, European Publishers Council

On World News Day, which is also the United Nations' International Day for Universal Access to Information, we celebrate the journalists who report from war zones, sit through court hearings, investigate wrongdoing, explain events beyond our borders and verify what is true before putting it on the public record.

But today I want to talk about something less celebrated: **the business of journalism.**

Without a sustainable business, there is no journalism. And without journalism, democracy loses the people whose job it is to find out what is happening, distinguish fact from falsehood and hold power to account.

The European Commission rightly recognises that independent journalism is essential to the resilience of democracy. President von der Leyen reinforced this in her recent State of the Union address through principles that matter profoundly to our industry: AI with human agency; Europe's ability to set the rules rather than Big Tech; and, above all, the importance of reliable, independent information. She described the battle against disinformation and foreign interference as "cognitive warfare", adding: "In Europe, we form our own opinions based on access to reliable, independent information."

We agree. But Europe now needs to connect those principles to the economics of journalism.

Bots don't walk towards danger to find the truth. Journalists do.

Journalists witness wars, sit through trials, cultivate sources, scrutinise documents and expose corruption. Behind them are editors, photographers, lawyers, developers, data specialists and commercial teams. Publishers finance all of this before knowing whether a story will generate a single subscription or euro of advertising revenue.

Somebody has to pay for it.

Publishers have transformed their businesses, investing in digital subscriptions, advertising, data, technology and direct relationships with their audiences. What they need now is a fairer market in which those investments can succeed.

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Today, those markets are increasingly shaped by a handful of global technology companies. Publishers finance the journalism on which search engines, social networks and now generative AI services depend, yet that journalism can be accessed and used at enormous scale without permission, transparency or fair remuneration.

At the same time, platforms increasingly control how audiences discover information, while AI-generated answers can substitute for visits to the journalism from which they draw. Publishers lose not only traffic and direct relationships with readers, but the data, advertising and subscription revenues that sustain journalism. **Advertising remains an essential part of that financing**, yet publishers compete in a market where dominant platforms control much of the technology, data and advertiser relationship, while publishers face growing restrictions on using data responsibly to understand and serve their audiences.

This is not an argument for weaker privacy. It is an argument for consistent and proportionate rules. Readers should be able to make genuine choices about the use of their data, and publishers should be able to use data transparently and responsibly to build direct audience relationships and compete for advertising. European policy should not reinforce the structural advantages of the dominant platforms it is supposed to address.

We are not asking for special treatment. We are asking for fair markets, effective enforcement and for the law to apply equally to everyone, including the world's largest technology companies. As President von der Leyen put it: "Europe has the power to act. It is we who decide our rules, not big tech."

Europe cannot say that journalism matters to democracy while allowing its economic foundations to be steadily weakened.

So, our message to the European Commission this World News Day is simple:

Defending journalism means defending the economic conditions that sustain it. Europe has not been passive: it has adopted copyright rules, the Digital Markets Act, the Digital Services Act and the AI Act. **But rules matter only if they are enforced effectively.**

AI can draw on the record. Journalists create it. That record does not appear by itself. It takes people, investment and institutions capable of financing the continuous work of finding, verifying and reporting what is happening in the world. Publishers must be able to control and realise the value of their work, build sustainable relationships with audiences and advertisers, use data responsibly and compete fairly.

Europe cannot champion reliable, independent information while allowing the business that produces it to be undermined.

Journalism has a cost. Europe must ensure it continues to be worth paying for.

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