

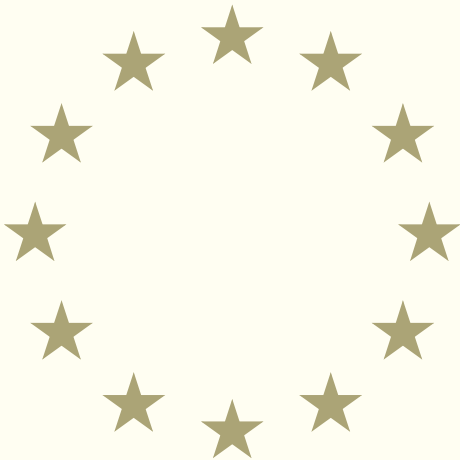
2024 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

A New Deal for the Right to Information



| 12 PROPOSALS |

RSF REPORTERS
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PREAMBLE

In the past five years, the European Union (EU) has done more for the right to information than during previous mandates, adopting important legislation on media freedom and digital technology.

The undermining of journalism and the spread of disinformation, due in particular to foreign interference, have a toxic effect on democratic debate in the Member States of the EU.

The next five years will be decisive for the right of European citizens to reliable news information and for the protection of the European information environment from propaganda and the manipulation of information by authoritarian regimes.

So that the European Union can be protected against violations of press freedom and media pluralism, and ensure that the reliability of news and information can be preserved, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) calls for a **New Deal for the Right to Information**¹.

¹ In 2021, the RSF-initiated Forum for Information and Democracy published a series of recommendations in a report entitled A New Deal for Journalism. The steering committee responsible for the report was chaired by Rasmus Nielsen, director of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford.

1. Incorporate the right to reliable information into the Treaty on the European Union (TEU)

The EU must fully commit to the right to reliable information, which is an essential condition for freedom of opinion and expression. This right must become a cross-cutting objective of all of its policies (digital, competition, foreign affairs, and so on).

The inclusion of the right to reliable information in Article 3 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) aims to translate this necessary ambition into law. It must result in an obligation on the EU to take action and formulate ambitious policies such as the New Deal that we are proposing.

2. Establish a principle of “informational exception” so that information is not treated like any other good

Information is a public good that is essential for the exercise of freedom of opinion, respect for human rights and the integrity of democratic processes.

Taking inspiration from the ‘cultural exception’ model, the EU must enshrine a principle of “informational exception,” that aims to recognise that information is not a commercial good. On this basis, derogations from the EU rules on the internal market should be lawfully allowed to the extent that they are necessary and proportionate in order to safeguard the right of European citizens to access reliable news and information.

3. Require algorithms and digital services to promote reliable sources of news and information

In response to online disinformation, the spread of which is currently amplified by recommendation algorithms, digital access to reliable content produced in accordance with journalistic ethics and professional methods must be promoted.

All digital services (including social media, search engines and chatbots based on artificial intelligence) that citizens use to access news and information must incorporate reliability criteria into their systems, such as those provided by the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI).

4. Create a system for protecting the European information environment

In response to authoritarian regimes that exclude freely and independently reported information from their own information environment while exporting their manipulative campaigns to democratic ones, the European Union must arm itself while fully respecting its core values.

RSF has proposed a legal system, promoted by two European Parliament resolutions, that would make it possible to do this while avoiding any arbitrary decision-making. This system would be based, on the one hand, on an extension of the relevant EU media regulation to foreign media and, on the other hand, on a reciprocity mechanism.

5. Activate the “human rights clause” in EU trade agreements in the event of a violation of the right to information

The EU must leverage its commercial power to advance the right to information around the world.

Press freedom violations in third countries must be regarded as sufficient grounds for suspending trade negotiations or relationships. In the event of persistent and systematic erosion of the right to information in the country concerned, the European Commission must not hesitate to impose targeted sanctions and, as a last resort, suspend the application of an agreement by activating “the human rights clause.”

6. Launch a European AI plan to protect the right to information

To prevent AI from becoming a weapon of mass disinformation, the EU must address the specific challenges that AI poses in the field of information. In particular, existing legislation (the Digital Services Act and the AI Act) must be supplemented by imposing requirements related to respect for pluralism, the reliability of information and intellectual property rights.

The EU must provide financial support for the development, within the Union, of AI tools specifically dedicated to journalism, such as the Spinoza Project.

7. Fund the creation of a European AI language model in the media sector

The growing use of AI applications in the media raises a risk of dependence on technologies developed by a handful of mainly non-European companies. Yet, it is important that European media retain their sovereignty over the processing of their data and freely develop their own content and tools using AI techniques.

This is why the EU must fund the development of a powerful language model based on European media data and integrating high standards of pluralism and reliability of information.

8. Tax the largest digital platforms in order to fund journalism

In the spirit of the agreement reached at the OECD, the European Commission should propose the creation of a European tax on the Tech Giants that would be levied on the turnover they generate within the EU, regardless of where their headquarters are physically located.

The tax revenues would help to fund journalism in Europe, and therefore redistribute part of the value being captured by the largest digital platforms to the detriment of European media.

9. Direct EU funding towards a massive investment in journalism

The European Union cannot content itself with contributing so little to the sustainability of news media and journalism. The funding it currently provides to journalism under the Creative Europe programme is too low and is pointlessly coupled with funding that benefits the cultural sector only.

The European Commission must therefore propose the creation of a new budgetary programme for journalism, including significant resources that aim to meet the challenges at stake.

10. Launch a European plan for protecting journalists

In 2024, too many European journalists continue to be subjected to threats that endanger their physical and psychological integrity. The European Recommendation on the safety of journalists that the Commission adopted in 2021 is not enough.

RSF calls on the Commission to immediately adopt additional measures to support national investigations into crimes committed against journalists; to combat cyber-harassment and undue surveillance of journalists; and to provide more support to exile media and journalists in Europe.

11. Develop European leadership through the Partnership for Information and Democracy

The global online information and communication space needs to be regulated according to democratic principles in order to continue to support freedom of opinion and expression.

The European Commission should join the Partnership for Information and Democracy, an initiative launched by RSF in 2019 to which 52 countries around the world have since signed up (including 25 EU members). The EU could use this framework to develop North-South cooperation on digital regulation.

12. Appoint a European Commission Vice-President for democracy and fundamental rights to implement the New Deal for the Right to Information

The New Deal for the Right to Information needs to be embodied in a European commissioner with the rank of vice-president and who holds strong legitimacy in this area. This Commissioner must have authority over several of the Commission's departments in order to achieve the New Deal's various objectives.



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