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NOTE

From:	Permanent Representatives Committee
To:	Council
Subject:	Draft Council conclusions on access to reliable news as part of the European Democracy Shield - <i>Approval</i>

1. On 11 July 2025, the Presidency presented the first draft of the Council conclusions on access to reliable news as part of the European Democracy Shield.
2. The Audiovisual and Media Working Party examined the text at a number of meetings, with Presidency submitting subsequent revised drafts at each meeting. The final Presidency compromise proposal can be found in the Annex to this note. One Member State could not support this text at working party level.

3. On 14 November 2025, in the context of the preparations for the forthcoming meeting of the Council (Education, Youth, Culture and Sport), the Permanent Representatives Committee was not in a position to confirm its agreement on the text of the above-mentioned Council conclusions. One delegation could not support the text. The Permanent Representatives Committee decided to submit the draft conclusions to the Council with a view to their approval.
 4. In light of the above, the Council (Education, Youth, Culture and Sport) is invited to approve the text of the Council conclusions as set out in the Annex to this note at its session on 28 November 2025.
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**Draft Council conclusions on access to reliable news
as part of the European Democracy Shield**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING THAT:

1. Access to reliable news is a fundamental prerequisite for our democracies to function. News media operating under editorial responsibility and in accordance with professional and ethical journalistic standards therefore play an important democratic role in safeguarding the information sphere, ensuring access to reliable news and upholding vibrant and resilient democracies.
2. The protection of media freedom and media pluralism are pillars of democracy and of the rule of law and play an integral role in facilitating freedom of expression and the right to be informed, and in fostering an open democratic discourse.
3. Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) and disinformation pose widespread, complex and serious societal challenges¹ which need to be addressed by, inter alia, proactively fostering a sustainable sphere of reliable, pluralistic and accessible media. At the same time, misinformation² spread without ill intent and direct liability also poses a separate growing challenge for the news and information sphere, exacerbated by new, often digital, dissemination and consumption patterns.

¹ As recognised, for instance, during recent discussions at the UNESCO World Press Freedom Day 2025 and in the 20th edition of the World Global Risks Report 2025 of The World Economic Forum.

² See, for instance, the [2020 ERGA report](#) on ‘Notions of Disinformation and Related Concepts’, European Regulators Group of Audiovisual Media Services.

4. Increasing pressure is being placed on the news sector and on the broader information sphere. This stems from several factors that are often interconnected, and which must be addressed in order to foster reliable news, such as:
- a) Digital challenges – where online platforms, digital gatekeepers, including search engines, and algorithm-driven content have an immense impact on existing media business models and advertising revenues. The same is true of Artificial Intelligence (AI) services, which provide new opportunities but also pose a challenge as they increasingly produce news-like content and deliver summaries and overviews of news without any clear editorial responsibility and possibly based on copyright protected content. This creates a need for both innovation and market adaptation as well as efforts to ensure a more level playing field so as not to undermine access to reliable information and trust in journalistic content.
 - b) The emergence of actors in the media environment such as online content creators (also referred to as influencers) producing and disseminating news-related content. In some cases, these actors are already classified as media service providers, but they may not be consistently subject to the same rules as traditional media, even though they often have the same or a wider reach and impact, in particular on younger audiences;
 - c) Geopolitical challenges – where malign actors see a growing potential for weakening and discrediting democratic discourse, critical thinking and the sense of shared trust within our societies.

5. The impact of digital challenges is particularly significant for small, independent, including commercial, local and regional news media service providers and news media services, especially in smaller communities and less widely spoken languages.
6. Geographical news deserts can emerge when access to locally produced news content is reduced or absent altogether, while demographic, social and generational divides can affect the way in which different groups access and engage with reliable news sources. At the same time, other factors such as increasing polarisation driven by engagement-based algorithms, FIMI campaigns and the spread of artificially generated or unverified content also contribute to the divide in media consumption and trust in journalistic content.

RECOGNISES THAT:

7. The European Union has, in recent years, taken a number of steps to develop the regulatory framework for present-day media services to better reflect the current challenges and to provide relevant tools in a digital context. This includes, in particular, the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)³ and the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD)⁴. It also includes the Digital Services Act (DSA)⁵, the Digital Markets Act (DMA)⁶, the Digital Single Market Copyright Directive (DSM Directive)⁷ and the Artificial Intelligence Act⁸ as important instruments for regulating the broader digital sphere. This has very significant implications for the media sector and for the information ecosystem. The Anti-SLAPP Directive⁹ further contributes to protecting journalists and media outlets from abusive litigation. Co-regulatory tools such as the DSA Codes of Conduct on disinformation and countering hate speech online may also play an important role in holding platforms accountable for the spread of misleading and harmful content contributing to systematic risks, e.g. in the context of elections. However, such tools must be regularly evaluated in order to ensure their effectiveness in practice.

³ Regulation (EU) 2024/1083 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 establishing a common framework for media services in the internal market and amending Directive 2010/13/EU (European Media Freedom Act) (OJ L, 2024/1083, 17.4.2024).

⁴ Directive (EU) 2018/1808 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 November 2018 amending Directive 2010/13/EU on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services (Audiovisual Media Services Directive) in view of changing market realities (OJ L 303, 28.11.2018, p. 69).

⁵ Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market for Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act) (OJ L 277, 27.10.2022, p. 1).

⁶ Regulation (EU) 2022/1925 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 September 2022 on contestable and fair markets in the digital sector and amending Directives (EU) 2019/1937 and (EU) 2020/1828 (OJ L 265, 12.10.2022, p.1).

⁷ Directive (EU) 2019/790 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on copyright and related rights in the Digital Single Market and amending Directives 96/9/EC and 2001/29/EC (OJ L 130, 17.5.2019, p. 92).

⁸ Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence and amending Regulations (EC) No 300/2008, (EU) No 167/2013, (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1139 and (EU) 2019/2144 and Directives 2014/90/EU, (EU) 2016/797 and (EU) 2020/1828) (OJ L, 2024/1689, 12.7.2024).

⁹ Directive (EU) 2024/1069 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 on protecting persons who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded claims or abusive court proceedings (OJ L, 2024/1069, 16.4.2024) as accompanied by the Commission Recommendation 2022/758 of 27 April 2022 on protecting journalists and human rights defenders who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded or abusive court proceedings.

8. While the AVMSD introduced the definition of editorial responsibility into EU law, the EMFA has reaffirmed and further expanded it. Under the EMFA, media service providers are entrusted with both certain obligations and rights, including, in particular, new safeguards under Article 18 to protect editorial content from restrictions or suspension of content without sufficient grounds by providers of very large online platforms (VLOPs).
9. Editorial responsibility, independence and ownership transparency, as well as professional and ethical standards are defining characteristics of reliable news. Any reference to reliable news in these conclusions does not imply any state-mandated definition or intervention in the independence of the news media service providers. Instead, reliable news is to be understood as news media content produced by editorially responsible and accountable media service providers in accordance with professional and ethical journalistic standards, in compliance with relevant law. Where relevant, this also includes robust co-regulatory or self-regulatory mechanisms governing editorial standards which in many Member States have been developed at due distance from government influence in order to underline media freedom and editorial independence.

10. The role of public service media in securing access for all to reliable news content, across both traditional and digital media platforms, must be protected. Independent and broadly trusted public service media serve as a civic safeguard and social pillar, especially in times of crisis and instability.
11. The Council has previously, for instance in its conclusions on the assessment of the legal framework for audiovisual media services and video-sharing platform services (the AVMSD)¹⁰, and in its conclusions on safeguarding a free and pluralistic media system¹¹, stressed the need for a sustainable media sector, coherent regulation and access to reliable information as part of the democratic infrastructure.
12. The European Commission has also recently taken important steps in relation to, for instance, Europe's Media in the Digital Decade: An Action Plan to Support Recovery and Transformation¹², the European Democracy Action Plan as well as other relevant Commission initiatives.

¹⁰ C/2025/2954.

¹¹ 2020/C 422/08.

¹² COM (2020) 784 final.

WELCOMES:

13. The initiative of the European Commission to launch a European Democracy Shield aimed at, inter alia, promoting participation and engagement in democratic life, and in particular to contribute to a sustainable, free, independent and pluralistic media sector, with full respect for fundamental rights and democratic values.
14. The commitment laid down in the priorities of the European Commission for the period 2024-2029 to build on, ensure and enhance a reliable, independent, pluralistic and sustainable media sector and to increase support for and protection of independent journalists within the European Union. In that context, the Council also takes note of the new Media Resilience Programme, as announced by the Commission President in her State of the European Union address, and welcomes the opportunity to engage on how best to support independent journalism and media literacy.
15. The launch of the European Board for Media Services (EBMS) established under EMFA, and replacing and succeeding its predecessor, the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA), in fostering and upholding a free and pluralistic media sector across the EU.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE FIELDS OF COMPETENCES, TO:

16. Explore ways to clarify the applicability and scope of editorial responsibility, as defined in the AVMSD and in the EMFA and as related to similar concepts of media accountability. The aim is to ensure access to reliable news information, and adherence to journalistic standards, and, where relevant, to expand the use of editorial responsibility to encompass new actors disseminating news or news-like content, such as online content creators, and to encourage them to reliably exercise editorial responsibility. By expanding or encouraging the use of editorial responsibility across relevant actors and to better reflect digital realities, this can help provide positive incentive structures for the production and dissemination of reliable news without compromising media freedom and independence.
17. Examine whether current accountability systems are sufficient for new digital services curating news content, including AI systems, and whether current due diligence obligations adequately cover search engines and online platforms. Such services might not be directly involved in or responsible for the production of news and media content and their content is often generated by users and algorithms. However, they remain central gatekeepers and play an increasingly important role in content distribution and, in some cases, production. This has an impact on media pluralism, freedom of opinion and of expression, access to independent and reliable news, the emergence of local news deserts, and, ultimately, democratic processes.

18. Consider ways to ensure a level playing field between online platforms and specific actors in the media environment vis-à-vis editorially responsible news media services to contribute to a more sustainable, independent, pluralistic and free media sector. Particular attention should be paid to ensuring fair regulatory treatment for reliable and editorially responsible news media in order to prevent any competitive disadvantages. Achieving a level playing field may involve streamlining legislation to reduce uneven requirements and administrative burdens, while still maintaining consistent regulatory standards. At the same time, attention must be paid to ensuring that rules and other measures are consistent and transparent and that their interplay is well-defined in order to enable effective and coherent implementation and enforcement. Those objectives should also remain central in connection with any upcoming evaluations of the relevant legislative framework, e.g. the AVMSD.
19. Continue to assess the effects on media pluralism and the editorial independence of media service providers when proposing new legislative, regulatory or administrative measures, taking into account the provisions of Article 21 of the EMFA.
20. Regularly follow up on the above legal acts, implementation, action plans, Council conclusions and other relevant documents and policy decisions in order to continuously assess the need for further action, streamlining and coherence.
21. Monitor and assess the current copyright rules applicable to journalistic content, such as press publications, in the context of market developments, digital platforms and AI technologies. This should take into account the appropriate inclusion of the perspectives of rightsholders and could be examined in the context of the upcoming evaluation of the DSM Directive.

22. Enhance availability and access to media support funds, at both EU and Member State level, and ensure that these are also accessible for providers of reliable, independent and editorially responsible news, journalistic content and, in particular, local news entities without compromising media independence. This could include a review of the application of state aid rules, including, where appropriate, the state aid General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER) in line with recent Council Conclusions¹³.
23. Encourage ways to support EU-wide media projects, such as cross-border media platforms and other collaborations among independent and public service media, that provide accurate and reliable news and present the rich and diverse cultural and linguistic heritage of Europe. Such projects could serve as a contribution to a European public sphere within the EU, as reliable European voices in the world and as an asset in the fight against disinformation and misinformation.
24. Explore how to secure the best possible conditions for a free, independent and pluralistic news media environment within a competitive market so that media service providers can establish sustainable business models or make the necessary adjustments. This is especially relevant given that Big Tech platforms have gained an increasingly larger share of advertising revenue and AI technologies and AI-generated content could threaten existing business models as they benefit from news content from European media services without contributing to the creation of such content.
25. Facilitate innovative ways to strengthen the advertisement-driven business models of providers of reliable news and examine how this interacts with broader EU law. For instance, by looking at how EMFA, AVMSD, DMA and competition rules can contribute to and facilitate the competitiveness and accessibility of online advertising services for all players in the value chain, including editorial media. In that regard, it continues to be important to tackle the self-preferencing behaviour of gatekeepers as well as to examine the need for interoperability requirements across advertising services.

¹³ C/2025/2954

26. Explore ways to foster and highlight advertising practices that contribute to the economic sustainability of the news sector in full respect of editorial independence. This should be done without creating any burdens or disclosure requirements.
27. Further safeguard and enhance the independence and relevance of public service media, foster collaboration and ensure that such media outlets are able to remain digitally relevant and present by recognising the importance of public service media being able to publish digitally and across various publishing formats within and in compliance with European state aid and competition law. If necessary, assess whether current state aid rules are still fit for purpose to allow for the digital reality, presence and continuing relevance of public service media today to meet democratic, social and cultural needs.
28. Allow for and, where relevant, foster the appropriate prominence of media services of general interest as envisioned in, for instance, Article 7a of the AVMSD, including on online platforms and digital interfaces controlling or managing access to and visibility of reliable news. Such measures could contribute to the fight against disinformation and FIMI and help ensure that users have easier access to diverse, high-quality and reliable information, including local news, on their services.
29. Carefully examine ways in which prominence measures can be effectively implemented in an increasingly digitalised and cross-border context without compromising national competences or media independence, and without creating unnecessary burdens for providers. One possible way forward could be for Member States, on a voluntary basis, to exchange on best practices on how prominence measures, including related technical standards, can be optimised and easily adopted in similar ways in different Member States, with the potential to also contribute to the ongoing evaluation of AVMSD.

30. In cooperation with the media sector, support tools and efforts for people, advertisers, service providers and online platforms to easily recognise content from reliable and editorially responsible news media outlets. This can be done, for instance, by increasing media and digital literacy, availability of journalistic training, as well as awareness of the value of accurate and reliable information. Such measures could contribute to enhanced pre-bunking, de-bunking and fact-checking but should be in line with professional and ethical journalistic standards, editorial responsibility and independence and in compliance with media ownership transparency obligations in order to ensure a healthy information ecosystem.
31. Encourage news media service providers to promote the clear attribution of authorship to media content, such as the practice of byline journalism, without compromising either media independence or the safety of journalists. This could work as a means of reinforcing transparency, accountability and public trust in journalism, as well as copyright protection, while also supporting labelling as a means of recognisability of AI-generated content.
32. Continue to follow up on and exchange views on the political commitments of the 2020 Council conclusions¹⁴ and the 2024 Council conclusions¹⁵ to promote media literacy actions that combat misinformation and disinformation and strengthen resilience across all age groups and vulnerable groups, especially minors. This could include measures to raise public awareness of the risks associated with using AI services to find news content and of the importance of verifying information before sharing it on social media, particularly for users with a significant audience. In that context, support, carry out or encourage initiatives to detect and label AI-generated and AI-manipulated content in line with the relevant provisions of the AI Act.

¹⁴ Council conclusions on media literacy in an ever-changing world, OJ C 193, 9.6.2020, p. 23.

¹⁵ Council conclusions on democratic resilience: safeguarding electoral processes from foreign interference, 10119/24.

33. Improve knowledge and public awareness of FIMI and disinformation processes through, for instance, multidisciplinary research, the compilation of data on media consumption patterns and other awareness-raising activities. In that context, existing structures such as the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) and European networks of fact-checkers could be drawn on or enhanced.
34. Ensure that media policy is integrated into the consideration of broader geopolitical security and digital policies in order to safeguard our democracies and further empower citizens and strengthen their resilience, since access to reliable news is a fundamental prerequisite for the functioning of our democracies. This can be done, for instance, by taking into account the role of and consequences for media in the formulation of broader policy objectives and strategies while maintaining full respect for media freedom and editorial independence.
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