

Mission Project: How to democratise media finance

What is the problem?

The media landscape is changing rapidly. Quality media outlets are struggling as free online and free print news and lower advertisement income threaten their finances. Most can remain competitive only with state financial subsidies. If a given state turns illiberal, however, it can cut funding, ruining independent media or compelling it to sell out to powerful private actors. The media then can no longer fulfil their role reporting on, for example, government scandals. This undermines democracy.

What is the solution?

Media vouchers: a revolution in how media finance works:

- *What are media vouchers?* Every adult is given one voucher per year that they can donate to their favourite media outlet.
- *What would change?* State media financing would be put into citizens' hands and out of government control.
- *How does this work in technical terms?* Citizens could submit their vouchers with their annual tax returns, applications for social benefits, or other regular points of contact, depending on the country.
- *Would people not simply award their vouchers to the most popular media outlets, which often are not the best quality?* To prevent this, the scheme would include a cap on possible funding through media vouchers.

Progressive MEPs should introduce the idea in their campaigns, especially in countries in which media pluralism is threatened. Contacts should be established with the French Social Democrats, who have already endorsed this idea.

How does it affect Europeans?

The media is the 'fourth estate', which provides a space for factual reporting and critical discussion of issues, and sometimes even solutions to problems our societies are facing. They must represent a level playing field, upholding the truth and facts, and acting independently of political party and government power. Media dominance by powerful conservative-nationalist governments, parties and private actors are the biggest enemy of progressive policymaking.

What does it cost?

This can be defined individually. Where state media finance schemes already exist they may simply be democratised with vouchers, at no additional cost. If no such scheme exists, the cost would depend on the value of the voucher. A 50 euro voucher for each German adult, for example, would cost around 3.5 billion euros per year. For comparison, the German state media funding scheme (GEZ) cost 8.4 billion euros in 2021.

Would you like more detailed information about this policy?

Contact Rule of Law Mission: [FES Democracy of the Future](#) | democracy.vienna@fes.de