

Policy Research Alert

FROM FLASH-IT, A DISSEMINATION PROJECT RELATING EUROPEAN POLICY PRIORITIES TO EU-FUNDED RESEARCH IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

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Minding the Media: Up to Date on the Fourth Estate

New technologies and market forces are radically changing Europe's media landscape, with far-reaching implications for society. Two recently completed research projects shed light on the meaning of these changes, suggesting how journalistic accountability and media freedom can be strengthened in the Internet age.

Digital communication platforms are transforming the way journalistic content is produced and consumed. With the help of the Internet, information and opinion can now be disseminated instantly on a vast scale at little or no cost. That is having a huge impact on traditional media sectors (particularly print), where a process of consolidation is underway. The rapid pace of change makes it difficult to assess the status quo, including adherence to the journalistic values that underpin European democracy. EU-funded research is helping to address this knowledge gap.

Comparing media accountability systems in EU member states, MediaAct¹ (Media Accountability and Transparency in Europe) yielded vital insights into the current state of media pluralism in Europe. The project analysed the impact of established media accountability systems (press councils, codes of ethics) as well as new media accountability systems emerging in the Internet (media criticism in blogs). A second project, MEDIADDEM² (European Media Policies Revisited: Valuing & Reclaiming Free and Independent Media in Contemporary Democratic Systems), examined factors that promote or hinder policy development for media freedom and independence. Among other things, the findings show how similar media accountability instruments function in different cultural contexts.

Both projects produced highly accessible web-based outputs, with MediaAct issuing its final research report in a richly illustrated magazine-style format and offering an online training tool for learning media accountability. MEDIADDEM's final report includes recommendations aimed at helping EU institutions address pressures on media freedom and independence.

The potential policy impact of the two projects is reflected in a special report³ published earlier this year by the High-Level Group on Media Freedom and Pluralism, an independent group established by the European Commission. The hard-hitting document offers 25 policy recommendations that were formulated with input from both MediaAct and MEDIADDEM.

¹ <http://www.mediaact.eu/>

² <http://www.mediadem.eliamep.gr/>

³ <http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/high-level-group-media-freedom-and-pluralism>