

## **G7 Media Ministers' Communiqué**

19 June 2022

1. We, the Media Ministers of the G7, met in Bonn on 19 June 2022 to work more closely together on issues regarding our media policies and their role in strengthening democracy - a task that requires a global response.
2. We as the G7 stand up for open, free and democratic societies. We will promote them and protect them. We firmly believe that democracies are best placed to serve their people and to address global challenges such as climate change and threats to sustainable development, as well as to provide people with the greatest security and freedom.
3. We condemn Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which is being waged against a free and democratic society in violation of international law. This has always been a war built on lies, with the Kremlin creating false pretexts for invasion, obscuring the truth, and hiding and denying war crimes. It has shown us once again just how horrifying the effects of systematic and coordinated manipulation of the information environment can be. As Russia sought to disseminate disinformation abroad, it sought to silence and censor independent media at home. Journalists and the free media as a whole have been among the first targets of this war.
4. This is not the first time in history that information manipulation, disinformation and the restriction of media freedom have been explicitly designed to support and enable injustice and oppression. However, we also recognize the courage and professionalism of Ukrainian and international media covering this war.
5. As the G7, we reaffirm our commitment to a free and open media environment; robust and independent journalism; an open, free, global, interoperable, reliable and secure internet; and resilient telecommunication services. As G7 leaders decided last year, we need to cooperate in opposing government-imposed internet shutdowns and restrictions, which, among other harms, prevent people from accessing independent media reporting. We have to ensure and encourage access to and dissemination of independent media and in particular shine a light on regions affected by war and crisis.

6. A society in which individuals can freely exercise the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including seeking, receiving and imparting information and ideas of all kinds, is of foundational importance for democracy and liberty. Free and plural media are an indispensable component for this: by providing accurate information and diverse viewpoints, they enable the public to participate in societal debates, make informed choices, and hold their governments to account.
7. Information manipulation, including disinformation, and hate speech can undermine and hinder open, democratic dialogue and debate, and can promote division and polarisation. As a result of targeted harassment and abuse, some parts of society, especially groups subject to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination such as women and girls, LGBTQI+ individuals, and members of marginalised racial and ethnic communities, censor themselves, avoid specific topics, and even refrain from participating in public debates online entirely. Online harassment and abuse not only impedes individual ability to exercise their right to freedom of expression, but the suppression of diverse voices results in an opportunity cost in terms of the free exchange of ideas and ultimately lost innovation. This can result in the dominance of one-sided, false or manipulative content in public discourse online.
8. To counter these threats, we will work together to protect and advance freedom of opinion and expression as laid down in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and further enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The G7 will take measures to preserve and promote free, independent and pluralistic media landscapes and improve economic, social, legal and actual conditions for those who shape those media landscapes to serve our democracies.

### **The protection of journalists and media professionals and their significance for democracy**

9. When democracies are under attack, all too often journalists and members of the media are the first to have their human rights curtailed and to face threats and repression. Women in journalism are disproportionately impacted by threats and attacks, which are more often gendered and sexualised than threats against their male counterparts and increasingly take place online. Around the world, journalists and media professionals are persecuted, threatened and even killed for their work. In many cases, these crimes go unpunished. In democracies too, there have been attacks on journalists by those seeking to suppress fact-based and accurate reporting.

According to the Reporters Without Borders 2022 World Press Freedom Index, press freedom is threatened in 70 countries worldwide; in 28 of those countries, the situation is classified as “very bad”.

10. Not only individual journalists, but also newspaper publishers and broadcasters are censored or blocked entirely from operating. Digital platforms that provide access to content also increasingly face attempts at censorship by autocratic states, impeding the free flow of information from traditional media outlets, as well as calls from society more broadly to restrict content.
11. In Russia, independent journalists and media outlets have long faced oppression, and now those who have reported about the war in Ukraine have been censored, repressed, threatened and forced to close. We have seen multiple media reports of abductions of journalists, as well as local elected officials, civil-society leaders, and others. And we have seen reports of deliberate targeting of Ukraine’s independent media by Russian forces.
12. But it is not only Russia that suppresses critical and contrary opinions and threatens journalists. Around the world, journalists face harassment and violence for their work, and press freedom is being restricted, both online and offline. According to Reporters Without Borders, last year more than 400 journalists, media professionals and bloggers were imprisoned, and more than 40 were killed for their work. At least 12 journalists have been killed in Ukraine since Russia’s full scale invasion began.<sup>1</sup>
13. These shocking examples show that protecting a free, independent and pluralistic media landscape means first and foremost protecting journalists, particularly women journalists and those from marginalised communities.
14. This requires a comprehensive approach that is both self-critical and prepared to cooperate and assist abroad in partnership with countries around the globe. Prevention of crimes against journalists also relies on the broader conditions in which media outlets, social media, and technology platforms operate.

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<sup>1</sup> As of 6 June 2022, according to the Council of Europe’s Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists.

### **Independence of the media and economic conditions**

15. Media companies are enterprises that research, report and disseminate editorial content that inform the public and, in so doing, help people form their opinions. They are vital to democracy and its ability to function. These companies also should work to ensure that trustworthy information and diverse perspectives are available to the public. Therefore, we encourage independent and transparent standards developed by individual companies or within the sector itself (self-regulation) to ensure that media companies remain accountable to their audiences.
16. Governments also play a role in maintaining conditions that allow independent media outlets to thrive. We seek to promote optimal environments for an economically sustainable and resilient media sector in order to preserve a pluralistic media landscape in the long term. However, any public funding, subsidies or state advertising should be distributed based on transparent criteria that do not lead to direct or indirect governmental interference and any other political influence on editorially independent media.
17. Regarding the growing power of state-controlled media structures in multiple countries around the world, it is essential that we continue to fight against state-sponsored information manipulation and interference, including disinformation, while robustly defending media freedom and freedom of expression. Governmental non-interference in editorial work of independent media, including public service media, is a key principle in this regard and need to be ensured by legal and regulatory safeguards, including transparency requirements for foreign investments and ownership structures.

### **Technological conditions and media convergence**

18. Media convergence, new forms of communication and new ways of shaping opinion have fundamentally altered the conditions under which media operate. At the same time, people around the world continue to need trustworthy journalism, free and independent reporting, and unimpeded access to reliable and pluralistic sources of objective information.
19. Globalisation, unimpeded access to fact-based information both online and offline, and the digital transformation have created a media environment in which cross-border access to media content and services is possible. The availability of

information and spaces of communication is no longer contingent on national borders. Today, we can communicate directly with people around the world and access an unprecedented abundance and range of unfiltered first-hand impressions and different perspectives. This enables people to hear a broader range of viewpoints and develop global understanding, as well as facilitating connections across the world.

20. Competition for users' attention and for shaping the dominant narrative about current events no longer takes place only locally and regionally, but rather globally. This speaks to the importance of tackling the digital ecosystem challenges in an integrated way, with collaboration across governments and with all interested stakeholders to work together towards a common vision.
21. Digital platforms play an ever more important role in this digital ecosystem and in the opinion-forming process online. These private companies have a strong influence on access to and the visibility of media content, and they dominate the advertising market.
22. The internet and digital technologies enable innovation, the free and open exchange of opinions and ideas, and unprecedented opportunities for participation in public and social discourse.
23. However, to fully seize the opportunities digital transformation brings, we should also manage its potential risks. In particular, we reaffirm the need to respond to those actors who threaten freedom and democracy by limiting access to independent sources of information, who inhibit plurality, and who engage in information manipulation and disinformation to sow doubt, distrust and hatred. At the same time, social-media platforms and other digital technologies have given rise to new forms and manifestations of violence through their misuse, including amplification of preexisting forms of gender-based violence through their scale, speed, and reach.
24. We strongly encourage platforms to act responsibly, in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, to prevent and address situations where their algorithms may elevate or amplify content that either incites imminent violence or otherwise violates the platforms' own terms of service and policies.
25. We will promote access to a variety of sources of information and a range of opinions to facilitate pluralistic, vibrant democratic discourse and participation in society, while also supporting a secure public space of communication and ensuring that

individuals have ready access to independent, fact-based, trustworthy sources of information – offline as well as online.

26. That is why we have extensively discussed media policy online and offline issues, especially access to and availability of trustworthy information, freedom from discrimination, equality of opportunity, transparency and user autonomy. We have also talked about how human rights such as freedom of expression must be respected online and offline and how the influence of opinion, which is based on market power, can be better tackled.
27. In addition to traditional media, civil-society initiatives also play a key role in a vibrant democracy and make a vital contribution to enabling individuals to form opinions. They create new opportunities for participation, especially for marginalised groups, and empower public opinion-forming, as well as providing new media formats. They inform people, raise awareness, and can help improve media literacy and impart trust in democracy and the media.

### **Conclusions for international media policy**

28. We have therefore committed to work together more closely in the coming years, especially in the following areas:

#### **A. Supporting media freedom**

##### **We commit to**

- further mutual exchanges about market-based policy approaches that could level the playing field between dominant digital platforms and news businesses, and that allow bargaining over the total value of the news content created by journalists,
- establish the right conditions to safeguard the freedom, independence and pluralism of the media, making sure that media markets function well and allow for the sustainable economic development of the media,
- help support the sustainability of the media sector and its innovation and digital transformation, and therefore welcome implementation of commitments made at the Summit for Democracy to strengthen the sustainability and resilience of independent media and encourage all actors –

- governments, philanthropies, the private sector – to do more,
- reach common ground on how to effectively address information manipulation and interference, including tackling propaganda and countering disinformation, while also respecting human rights and taking steps to protect the ability of critical and dissenting voices can continue to be heard around the world and human rights are respected,
  - act against state-driven censorship, network connectivity disruptions, and media bans of the free press, while bolstering the important role of independent media,
  - discuss ways to improve access to, and availability of, diverse and reliable information sources, with freedom from discrimination, equality of opportunity, transparency and user autonomy as key principles (such as through the international multi-stakeholder forum on the diversity of content online launched by Canada),
  - work to support online platforms' transparency and provision of services that are safe, and promote respect for freedom of expression and information, and encourage such platforms to ensure the digital environment is fair and respectful of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including in particular freedom of expression, and encourage such platforms to support media freedom and pluralism,
  - advance existing initiatives to promote media freedom and plurality of media (such as the Media Freedom Coalition, the Diversity of Content Online initiative launched by Canada, UNESCO, the Media Pluralism Monitor, the Freedom Online Coalition, the Declaration for the Future of the Internet),
  - advance existing initiatives that support civil society, fact-checkers and researchers engaged in detecting and exposing threats from and incidents of information manipulation including disinformation threats and incidents and analysing trends (such as the European Digital Media Observatory),
  - strengthen efforts to coordinate approaches to prevent and response to online harassment and abuse and technology-facilitated gender-based violence, recognizing that targeted harassment and abuse online, which disproportionately impacts especially women, girls, and LGBTQI+ persons, can be an impediment to individuals' ability to exercise their right to freedom of expression, build consensus and foster joint efforts with international partners on the best data. Stakeholders need to understand the effect of platform policies and interventions to address mis- and disinformation, for

- example the UK's Measuring Effective Interventions Framework initiative,
- strengthen mutual exchange to identify and counter malign information manipulation influenced by foreign governments that threatens media independence and to promote transparency of media ownership structures.

## **B. Protecting journalists and media professionals**

The current political situation in many places shows the fragility of human rights, including freedom of expression, as well as of the rule of law and press freedoms. In multiple countries, independent media professionals who can no longer practice their profession have been forced to leave and continue their work in exile. We need to act in a strong alliance to defend press freedom worldwide and to work effectively to protect journalists and media professionals.

### **We commit to**

- keep developing and advancing programmes as well as work on accommodation options to support journalists and media professionals who are threatened in their home country or have fled from it, so that their voices are not silenced at home, and therefore welcome Germany's initiative to actively support journalists as well as other individuals defending the freedom of expression,
- to protect and support – in accordance with each country's own approach - journalists and media professionals under threat, while respecting the empowering of organisations that systematically monitor press and media freedom,
- deepen our collaboration through existing initiatives, such as the Media Freedom Coalition and the Global Media Defence Fund (GMDF), which help to protect media freedom and journalists and to take action against abusive litigation against journalists and human rights defenders (known as SLAPP suits) which is used to silence them.

### **C. Cooperation and inclusion of civil society**

Freedom, plurality and sustainability are the values that should guide our path forward into the future. We will connect with civil-society actors, advance concrete initiatives, and in doing so strengthen the multilateral order to create and preserve peace. Space for open, democratic debate online and offline has to be maintained, in which ideas, projects, and visions of democratic society can be shared and discussed.

#### **We support all those who stand up for democracy by**

- noting the work of international initiatives and mechanisms such as the OECD's work on Rebuilding Trust and Reinforcing Democracy and the Partnership on Information and Democracy,
- reaffirming our commitment to existing institutions such as the European Audiovisual Observatory, which are important sources of information for media policy,
- cooperating in opposing politically motivated internet shutdowns and restrictions,
- welcoming initiatives that promote a safe and secure information environment, media and information literacy and trustworthy journalism, and therefore welcoming the Democracy Newsroom initiative,
- encouraging initiatives that contribute to a viable, diverse and independent media industry, supporting innovation and digital transformation, including through additional collaborations to support and sustain independent public interest media,
- welcoming media initiatives that enable independent journalism to remain a watchdog of democracy at local, national and international levels and contributes to the public debate,
- encouraging the initiative "Transparency and freedom of opinion – Crisis resilience of media",
- welcoming the Canada-led international Guiding Principles on Diversity of Content Online, which were developed in collaboration with a multi-stakeholder working group that includes counterparts in other countries, and with civil-society and industry partners,
- encouraging the establishment of media literacy courses for all generations to enable individuals to clearly differentiate between fact-based information and disinformation, to understand how manipulative tactics can be used

online and offline and to understand journalism as an indispensable part of the checks and balances in democratic societies.

#### **D. Initiating work processes – the way forward**

We therefore intend to anchor media policy even more firmly at the global level as a field of work that is relevant to democracy. In coordination with existing initiatives and formats, in particular with the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM), we want, for the first time, to create a forum for increased dialogue at the G7 concerning the global media online and offline, a dialogue which requires a global response, and developing solutions and cooperative approaches.

#### **In order to achieve these goals, we commit to**

- continue to closely coordinate on questions concerning the spread of content and information from a security, human rights, technical and media policy perspective, and pursue a joint approach to support media freedom and pluralism,
- create a follow-up process to achieve the aforementioned goals,
- welcome the input of international experts on media freedom in state decision-making processes, in addition to forums such as the EU, the CoE, OSCE and the UN,
- actively use opportunities for cooperation with international associations, civil-society organisations and initiatives on current media-related issues.