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WSIS TalkX 4 - The Role of Information, Journalism and Media in Countering COVID-19

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Our WSIS TalkX today will focus on the role of information journalism and media in countering COVID-19. This is our fourth WSIS TalkX. And I'd like to invite Giacomo from the European Broadcasting Union to please lead these talks. Giacomo, welcome. The floor is yours.

Giacomo Mazzone

Thank you very much. Trying to reach Christophe, one of the speaker that is lost in the cyberspace. I hope that you can hear me. Thank you for being with us today. The topic is the role of information journalism and media encountering COVID-19. I'm from the EBU European Broadcasting Union that is the largest Association of Public Service broadcasters in the world, and we have with us other important speakers that you will see that they have many things to say on this topic. And I don't want to waste more time. So I will go through is a small introduction with some slides that you will see in a moment.

Giacomo Mazzone

Okay, these are the speakers that you will have with us later in this conversation. And I want to start with some common point that are leading all the discussion today. The first thing. What happened during the crisis for the public service and the quality media that first, after long time, science based and fact based information became again crucial in the Congress in the public conversation. For the moment for many times, the news were mostly more about emotions. Now the people is looking for real information. Second, the sensationalism of fake news showed the limits because people want to look for real information that because it's a question of life or death, and they, for the first time since long time, people want to not to listen what they like to listen but what is real. That's created a favorable condition, but it's not so easy to manage. As a result of this modified conversation, we have audiences on news and factual programs that they jumped everywhere. We have done a study recently at EBU and you can see that for instance, this was the result in March this year compared to the previous year,

the demand for news, in television and radio etc. jumped by 21% since the beginning of the year, 16% over the previous year, as the EBU we are involved in different initiatives that try to tackle disinformation and the phishing on COVID-19. For instance, we are working on the Trusted News Initiativeⁱ that is made with many other big partners. BBC is leading this but there are also the platforms that are participating with it in the region. There is the Eurovision Social News Wire that is daily check of all the user generated content circulating on the network, on social network, to see which are the true and which are the false one. And there is a Journalist Trust Initiative but I will not mention more, because I think another of the speaker will mention later.

Giacomo Mazzone

So also about disinformation, there is also a lot of phishing, we have to be very careful in managing it, because we have a problem. People try to use this crisis situation to pretend to be somebody else. There has been a lot of, a wave of fake mail phishing with the World Health Organization, local, or in each country with the logo of the National Health System of others, pretending to be them and asking for money. We are distributing these simple tools to journalists to help them to avoid some typical traps of communication. Like there has been 10 Tips for Media In the COVID-19 Infodemicⁱⁱ that has been distributed very widely. Also, BBC has produced this very timely book about media on communicating, communicating public emergency health systemⁱⁱⁱ. And also there is a last initiative that they want to present you, that we are very proud of, that is an initiative for young audiences^{iv}. Because one of the most fertile, vulnerable audience in this crisis are the young people. because they are -- they don't manage exactly what's the problem. They are not aware of the situation, they are confined at home, they are not going anymore at school. So, they are in special needs. And what we do is through an exchange of best practices among our members, trying to provide education or linear TV, for instance, many public service channels, which the sport channels, dedicated sport channels into educational channels, because the sport offering this moment is very low. And they've been replaced by the school offer, an offer for educational programs on linear TV. The same as been made on digital platforms. So, there is a high degree of interaction that is possible. And then, one thing that is very important that we are working on is the information about the crisis in a positive and fun way, trying to explain especially to the smaller children what the situation is, and what they have to do. And then there are also conference for teenagers, question and answers with the audience etcetera, etcetera. So, you see that, we have done many different actions, we try to underline that is important to cooperate more and more because this experiences I shared with you are all part of an exchange of best practices, and bad practices also, among broadcasters. We daily exchange among us which are the best results, and which are the things that didn't work, in order to improve. So, multilateralism is more important than ever, and cooperation on international basis more important than ever. But I think that this will be one of the points that Rachel Pollack, to which I pass the floor will discuss more in detail. Christophe Deloire, the Secretary General of Reporters without Borders will be the next one. And then Mira Milosevic, Executive Director of the Global Forum for Media Development. I think that question can be raised eventually, after the next speak, or speak of Rachel, if you don't mind, so that we can collect the question for both of this first two speakers. Thank you very much. Two recommendations for the listeners and participants. First is we have an option for captioning. You can decide the If you want to have the captioning in various languages, your Zoom connection, your Team's connection allowed it, and you can try to use it. And then we recommend all the speakers talk slowly, because the captioning will work better if they speak slowly. Last recommendation, you have a question

answer, opportunity that is made available to you. So you can, you can try to use it if you want. And this allows you to raise question to the various speakers in the course of the conversation. Thank you very much. I give the floor to Rachel.

Rachel Pollack

Hello, good afternoon. It's great to join you, Giacomo and the rest of the speakers here today. My name is Rachel Pollack and I work at UNESCO in the communication and information sector. And, as Giacomo said, if we fully support the important work done by public service broadcasters for quality, professional reporting and the public interest, and also, as you mentioned, the need for multilateral and also multi-stakeholder cooperation between international organizations like our own media, civil society and private sector governments. And so that that certainly applies to tackling the challenges raised by COVID-19. I'll just give a little overview of some of the areas that we're working on in the communication and information sector. Specifically, you may have heard about UNESCO's work in relation to COVID and on education, and culture, on science. And that's that's really been tremendously important in the CI sector, in my field, so it spanned a range of issues. That includes things that Giacomo was discussing related to really supporting media, giving them the tools and the knowledge, the skills to be able to cover a pandemic like this. Because many journalists don't necessarily have a background in science journalism or health journalism. And connected to that, more generally, is the idea of providing life saving information. And so that can, of course include include information related to the spread of the virus and public health measures, and also information provided by governments, ideally, proactively related to public health. And so that ties in also to our work on access to information. And you may know in our sector we commemorate for international days, and so one of them is the Universal Day for Access to Information^v, exactly on this issue. We have also World Press Freedom Day^{vi}, which is coming up in just two weeks, and which will also this year really focus on the role of media, independent media press freedom in the context of COVID-19. We also do a lot of work on the safety of journalists. And this is also one area where we put special attention during the crisis, because journalists are facing new risks, both to their physical safety, sanitary issues, but also psychological and digital security, and so have faced some new challenges, and, in that realm, we have given the the question of disinformation quite a lot of focus, and so that's something that has been recognized by the WHO. They declared an infodemic in February, and then the Secretary General, most recently has talked about a misinfodemic. And this is really about the circulation of false information, and these can be rumors, or conspiracy theories, or other types of false information. And so thinking about ways to address that. And so one of them is through quality reporting and through fact checking. And we also promote media and Information Literacy so that people will have a critical view when they see content about especially social media content. And then there are a number of other ways a private sector tech companies that have partnered with governments and in some cases, and we will have, in the next week, actually two new policy papers that will be released on this issue of COVID-19^{vii} and disinformation^{viii}. And then there were another number of other related areas and themes that we work on and so that includes open science, open data. We've done work. Now there's a hackathon ongoing called Code the Curve^{ix}, also a campaign called #Don'tGoViral^x with the idea of sharing information and countering disinformation in Africa. So, we have a number of different initiatives, and I'd be happy to discuss them more and also just to really salute the work that is being done by organizations like EBU and Reporters Without Borders, GFMD. It's really, for this kind of global challenge, we need everyone to come together to find solutions. Thank you.

Giacomo Mazzone

Thank you very much, Rachel. I think that this complements very well what I was trying to introduce at the beginning of the discussion I remember you that you can raise questions through the question and answer function that is in your screen. So, please do, or if you want to intervene. For the moment, we have only technical recommendation about talking slower. And I think that this is useful for all the next speakers. So unless that there are requests for flow, okay. Is Christophe with us?

Christophe Deloire

Yes, I'm with you. I guess so..

Giacomo Mazzone

Yes, yes. Perfect. We don't know we can see you. Perfect. Can you give us your viewpoint on what we already discussed? Thank you very much.

Christophe Deloire

Thank you, Giacomo, and thank you, Rachel, for your invitation. As I'm not a native English speaker it will be easy for me to speak slowly. Just to start, some officials made recent statements that seem very positive, but that in the same time also are very worried. It's about information provided by our sources, including international organizations. Those statements give the impression that there are two types of actors beyond the general public itself. First, official communication actors, second, people who can spread this misinformation. It is of course perfectly legitimate and even necessary to requests from authorities from international organizations to provide true pieces of information, verified information. But the right to information, to reliable information, needs good journalism. It needs media to scrutinize official versions, whatever is the quality of those versions. It needs filters. The right to information needs filters. Filters with methods, ethics, transparency, independence, a plurality of filters. Journalism. We, as Reporters Without Borders, we published this morning the 2020 edition of the World Press Freedom index^{xi}. RSF's global indicator, its measure of the level of media freedom worldwide has deteriorated by 30% since this measure was created in 2013, improved very slightly in the 2020 index by one per cent. And then came to Coronavirus crisis. The 2020 World Press Freedom index shows that the coming decade will be decisive for the future of journalism, with the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the mini crisis that threaten the right to free reported independent, diverse and reliable information, but not only highlighting, amplifying the values crisis. What are the crises? First, a geopolitical crisis, due to the aggressiveness of authoritarian regimes. Second, a political crisis, due to the information cause, and infodemic is a symptom a new symptom of disinformation cause, a lack of democratic guarantees in the digital space. Third, a democratic crisis, due to polarization and repressive policies. Fourth, a crisis of trust, due to suspicion, and even hatred of the media, and then an economic crisis, impoverishing quality journalism. We launched a monitoring tool, the #Tracker_19. Have a look at the stories that clearly proved that there is a crackdown on media in this specific period, even implementation of the Shock Doctrine^{xii}. We clearly now need solutions, global and structural solutions, addressing the causes at the appropriate scale. The Initiative and Information Democracy^{xiii}, which was launched in 2018 by Reporters Without Borders is key to address in the infodemic, which is the last symptom of the information disorder. It aims at imposing principles to digital platforms. The initiative was supported by the UN Secretary General António Guterres, and UNESCO Director Audrey

Azoulay, when it was launched. We succeeded to get the signature of an international partnership on the margins of the last UN General Assembly. This partnership has now been signed by 34 countries. We have created with 10 other entities to form an Information Democracy. The framework is now ready. I call on all potential stakeholders to join. We are working on the work plan now. We also have launched a Journalism Trust Initiative^{xiv}, in partnership with EBU. And UNESCO, I have to say, was a key player in these initiatives. And I would like to thank both of you, and both of your institutions. It aims at creating concrete incentives for media which comply with journalistic standards, incentives regarding algorithmic indexation, advertising income, etc. We have published a standard last December^{xv}, under the aegis of the European standardization committee, and we are now entering the implementation phase. So these are solutions, they are on the table., we are in the process of implementing them. We want to work with all of you, and to be, of course, very inclusive because, as you mentioned, this is a multi stakeholder approach, and we need to really inclusiveness to be able to build those structural and global initiatives. Thank you.

Giacomo Mazzone

Thank you, Christophe. Very useful, I think that, as you told at the very end, there are many cross linking activities that we are doing together. And I think that when the real WSIS will come, we will be able to explore which has been the concrete results of these activities. I don't see request for the floor so we can actually continue for the other presentation. The last one that we have is Mira Milosevic. That is executive director of the Global Forum for Media Development. In the meantime, I remember that you have the question and answer possibility on your screen. So please use that tool to communicate with us or ask for the floor. Thank you very much.

Mira Milosevic

Thank you, Giacomo. Thank you, Rachel, Christophe, and our ITU colleagues for organizing this event, and I will just continue to provide additional arguments for what all three of you mentioned as urgent needs for supporting journalism and media, in the middle of this COVID crisis. So, Global Forum for Media Development, just quickly, is a network of over 200 organizations around the world who are working to support the freedom of media, freedom of expression, journalism, and news media. And we all share the same values as my colleagues who spoke earlier. What we particularly focus on is sustainability of news and journalism, and this crisis has only increased the problems that we have seen in the past. One of the main stories that we are seeing nowadays in the western, but also in media in developing countries, is that the biggest effect that COVID had, that was not reported, was in care and retirement homes around the world. There was even a data point that suggested that over a third of all deaths in Europe were reportedly recorded in care and retirement homes^{xvi}. This story came too late, because the period, the window of opportunity for reacting and preventing this, has gone and we are seeing the story only when we are trying to find out the true figures and facts about how many deceased cases unfortunately there were. Because of the lack of local reporters, especially in local communities, where things are happening we have failed to see a lot of information about this pandemic. There was a comment from one epidemiologist who said that, 20 years ago, when there was an epidemic in some country, he would rely on reporting from local newspapers, local radio stations, and local reporters to see what the trend of pandemic in in local communities is. At the moment this is very rare, and most of the reporting we're seeing is on the national level. We have seen a steady decrease the number of professional reporters since the economic crisis in 2008. In 2020, some reports

suggest that we will see a 75% decline of all advertising revenues globally for news media. In many countries at the moment we don't have a sustainable revenue sources for supporting journalism, and to support what Christophe, Rachel, and Giacomo were saying, we're all working together to promote advocacy for a better system of financing, supporting, independent journalism and media, not only recognizing the freedom restrictions, but also recognizing the financial restrictions that are posed on all our information systems. What we are seeing also, the second point after sustainability, is the crisis of trust, of course, is even more accentuated in this COVID crisis. And, before the crisis happened, we had a report from Edelman Trust Barometer^{xvii} that has shown that we have a world of two different trust realities, and that the growing sense of income inequality is actually also reflected in our ability to receive, interpret, and trust in news. So, the wealthier, more educated, public is a frequent consumer of what we would call credible news, whereas less educated public, with less income, and less ability to participate in public discourse, is turning even today to social media. So, this is something that's been confirmed by a recent study by Reuters Institute^{xviii} that has been looking in a COVID coverage in Argentina, South Korea, Spain, and the US. And finally, of course, to address all the problems that we are facing, I agree with all of you that we need to work together, share best practices, and an advocate for solutions. However, it seems to me that we have reached to the limits of what we call silo'd politics, working in small silos of issues. And we are, most of the time, in our own small community of freedom of media, and freedom of expression, advocates. It seems that it's time for all of us to join forces with other civil society communities, with the health community, with the climate change community, with the community that's advocating also for change in how we promote economic growth, and what we consider the economical success globally. So what we are doing as the Global Forum for Media Development, we're, of course, sharing all the information that we have from our members on best practices, we are organizing town halls and webinars, especially on issues like using online tools, working in a remote working environment, psychological issues, etc.^{xix} But, most importantly, we're trying to see where the problems of sustainability are, how the funding opportunities can be used at this time, but also in the midterm and long term^{xx}. And finally, how can we all work together to make sure that, as Christophe says, over the next 10 years, we don't completely lose the ability to have professional journalism reporting, especially in disadvantaged and local communities. You mentioned the Shock Doctrine, I just read the book from Naomi Klein as well, No is Not Enough^{xxi}. And there is a really fantastic proposal, that they've done in Canada, about how to bring all the sections of the society together to work for something that we would define as a better future^{xxii}. As we see response mechanisms to COVID, especially huge packages of economic recovery help, we need to make sure that this is directed towards just, equal, and democratic societies, and that includes a recognition of the role, and space for, professional journalism and media.

Giacomo Mazzone

Thank you very much Mira. That was very useful. I see the in the question and answer that there is already one question for you. I don't know if you have been able to follow the question and answer while you were talking? Probably not. The question is, where did the story appear that addressed the percentages in care and retirement homes. Can you send the link? I know that we have data for Italy, for instance, I'm sure that Christophe has for France. I don't know if there are European-wide data.

Mira Milosevic

I will take a look at what I've read and and share it, but after the meeting because I don't have it. I don't have it in my browser here.

Giacomo Mazzone

Okay. Thank you. So we will keep the contact of Ms. Hodin, or I don't know what is the pronunciation.

Mira Milosevic

Please then send me, send me her email and I respond.

Giacomo Mazzone

Okay, perfect. And then I see that also there was a question for Christophe. Have you been able to see, Christophe?

Christophe Deloire

No, I didn't.

Giacomo Mazzone

So, there is a question in the question and answer queue that have a certain Gedeon, a biblic name, for Mr. Deloire: Who is going to pay for JTI and the Information Democracy initiative.

Christophe Deloire

Regarding the Information Democracy, we did it with the general budget of RSF, under our own budget, And regarding the Journalism Trust Initiative, we had a few different supporters, from philanthropists to public money, but I would say that this initiative was totally independent. And the three of us, we know it, because we were part of it, and it's a self regulatory initiative. We succeeded to gather 120 entities from all over the world, media outlets, TV, radio, print, press, consumers associations, press [unintelligible], etc. and unions of journalists, too, from all over the world. And, all together, we considered how to define the basic rules, the basic methods, ethical rules, for journalism. And so that, based on this reference, we can build systems that will help to incentivize media outlets that comply with those principles. And it was really a common work, totally independent work, I would say even pluralistic work, because there were different visions. But I think that all the discussions, and I remember especially one discussion, which was a very long discussion in the UNESCO building when we had the meeting, all those discussions were really fruitful, whatever is the cultures.

Giacomo Mazzone

Thank you, Christophe. That's very useful. Probably, if I can build on that. Because, for instance, in your initiative, what is crucial is the attitude of the platforms, of the internet platforms. And also, in the other initiative that I mentioned at the very beginning from the EBU, about the Building Trust Initiative, the platform are directly involved. So, what do you think? tThere is a hope that they will try to comply, or you think that they prefer to stay away from real involvement?

Christophe Deloire

No, I am quite optimistic. Because I think that this is a situation forces a lot of stakeholders to move. And I think that the platforms are amending their positions. At the beginning, it is not a secret that they were absolutely reluctant to consider that there should be such trusted third party mechanisms to influence their algorithms. And, when they decided to officially register to the Journalism Trust Initiative, it was at least an evidence that they were not totally opposed to the principle. The more we had discussions, I think that the platforms understand that such tools can be very helpful for them. Because we as citizens, we have huge problems with the information disorder. We know with this epidemic as human beings, we have huge problems, and platforms have also a huge problem, because if a lot of human beings, millions and more of human beings, citizens have problems, it will be at the end problems of the platforms. And such initiatives can help them to solve their problems, and in the same time, that's even more important, of course, the problems of the general public.

Giacomo Mazzone

Thank you. There's [unintelligible] a question somebody ask about the Canadian example, can you write down to the exact name, or something to retrace this experience? Mira was clear the question, or do you want me to repeat?

Mira Milosevic

I'm sorry, I lost the connection for a second.

Giacomo Mazzone

Oh, yes. Now there is a question in the question and answer that he's asking about the Canadian experience that you mentioned. Somebody wants to know more details about that and eventually a link where they can learn more.

Mira Milosevic

Okay, I'll, I'll type that in the responses but Canadian government has something called the Local Journalism Initiative, and its modeled a bit on the BBC, where they use license fee money to fund local reporters in different communities. The Canadian government is funding, with a substantial sum, local media and communities In Canada, by funding reporters that will work with different newsrooms to report on local municipalities, but also on other issues, and now they're looking whether that can be also adjusted to help reporting.

Giacomo Mazzone

Christophe. Do you want to add something on that?

Christophe Deloire

No.

Giacomo Mazzone

Okay. Okay. I see another question in the queue that is about information at the time, about countries that are limiting the freedom or media in this crisis. As you know, we don't mention single countries in this conversation but, as a resource for you, probably you are aware the Council of Europe has

signaled some cases where this is occurring, and where they are intervening to try to, to see what can be done and these documents are public documents, made by an institution that take care about the freedom of expression. So, you can you can look at it, and eventually I can track it, if you leave your name.

Giacomo Mazzone

Then yes, there's the male or the lady that asked before for having the data about the houses. Then I will go back to Rachel, if Rachel is available. Rachel, what are you doing as UNESCO to try to help the government? Because some of the problems that has been mentioned both by Christophe and Mira are that the platforms, when it comes at the global level, they are responsible and they try to answer when Reporters without Borders, or other organizations, are vocal to them. But when it comes to national level, and the government are worried about fake news going around or even phishing activities, they are very slow in reacting, especially in developing countries. Is UNESCO doing something of that? Or, I also ask the ITU that is present which kind of assistance the government can find to tackle this problems.

Rachel Pollack

Yes, thank you Giacomo. And I see that Vincent Defourny is also... Oh, I will speak slowly for the transcript. I have to remember... Vincent is also in this call, and so if he has other things to add, the director of the UNESCO office in Geneva, that would be very welcome. We're doing a number of things, and I think you can also consider, at the global level, international activities, and then also at the national and regional levels. And so, we have colleagues, from around the world, who are now facing, in many cases, quite similar issues. And so, I think in some ways, this pandemic has brought us into closer contact on a day to day level, as we're all working electronically, and Microsoft Teams, and so sharing information also about how to address some of these issues. So, indeed, the issue of disinformation, misinformation, which some countries call fake news, is a concern by many actors and many governments around the world, and the ways to address that are not so simple. In some cases, then there's actually criminal laws against disinformation, or the spreading of rumors and in such cases, they might be over broad and actually disproportionate, and land some journalists who are doing legitimate reporting into trouble. And so, I think that continued work in providing governments with technical assistance on standards and freedom of expression and access to information remains very important during this time, and also in how to interpret what are the legitimate restrictions to some human rights, to free expression, and access to information, privacy, on the grounds of public health. And there can be legitimate restrictions, but the important aspect is to ensure that any such restrictions are necessary and proportionate, written in law, that there are sunset clauses at the end of the emergencies. And so, I think all of that has to be taken into consideration, and then also working with information.

Giacomo Mazzone

Rachel?

Rachel Pollack

Yes.

Giacomo Mazzone

Rachel, sorry, your last phrase was cut by the connection. Could you repeat? Sorry?

Rachel Pollack

Okay. Yes, I was just going to say, I think, building on what Christophe noted, that there are some cases of restrictions that have been put on media. And so, it's important to work with governments to ensure that international standards on free expression and access to information and privacy are upheld. And then also work with information commissioners, and a lot of that work has been ongoing in the framework of the SDGs, the Sustainable Development Goals, and building capacity, in implementation of, and access to, information laws. And so I think also, in this case, sometimes there are additional challenges posed simply in the number of request, and then practical aspects. And so that's one element. In some countries there, we've also seen a rise in hate speech, and that's been something also observed by various UN Special Rapporteurs. And so, that's also an area. I think, what is has been highlighted by both Christophe and Mira is that, in this pandemic, many ongoing challenges have been heightened or exacerbated. And that really then extends across the range of our activities, and to provide really additional support to governments but also to civil society and journalists, and bringing in the platforms into the conversation, to try to continue to uphold the values that we have always promoted, and that are especially important in these times.

Giacomo Mazzone

Thank you. Thank you for this additional information. Gitanjali told me that we are 80 people participating now,. That is good. I hope that they are awakening, and making more questions, so that we can react. In the meantime, I think that we are addressing many of the issues. One issue that we have not addressed, but that was mentioned in the question and answer, is about community journalism. I think it's important we are talking about the global level, about the national level, but it's true that in this pandemic situation most of the people is looking for the mayor, the neighbors, really at the micro level. And also, there is a problem, as Mira mentioned before, one of the main issues we have is that the traditional sources of financing for local information are gone. All the advertising has gone online, and so the local media and the community media are suffering very much of this lack of resources. Do you have any solution for that? You can suggest any -- any suggestion you want to give to governments? Because I suspect that many of people that are raising this issue are government. Mira?

Mira Milosevic

Well, it's difficult Thank you for the question. I agree, it's one of the most important ones for the future of journalism. It's a difficult one to respond. A lot of our members are working on supporting communities, and journalists, and media, in in communities. What we're seeing increasingly in more and more countries, including countries like the UK, is collaboration. So, the old world view of competition between, you know, media houses that are dominant in a certain region, or a town, seem to be behind us. And a lot of the small community stations, or newspapers, or digital media companies, or initiatives, are now sharing reporters. They're all working together on stories. We have that in countries, like Local Investigative Bureau in the UK, but we have that internationally as well with initiatives like organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project or CCRP, International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. We have different initiatives in Asia that work their way, in Africa as well. So yes, I think that we accept

the calling for collaboration on global level from organizations like ours, there is more calls and more initiatives in communities to work together.

Giacomo Mazzone

Thank you, Mira. This is very useful. But I'm wondering, and this is a question for Christophe., and also for Rachel, in some countries, there are specific plans, money from public that are going to support community, media, and local journalists. Are you against this? This money coming from public sources, not which conditions in order to avoid that, then they transform the community in propaganda tools? Christophe, you're nodding,

Christophe Deloire

Of course, public funding, public support can be very useful. There are some conditions. As you mentioned, of course, be sure that the support is not discretionary, for instance, and that it's not a way to influence the media outlets. But, in this afterworld, after this huge crisis, and [unintelligible] figures, is that you have a vertigo, with such figures about advertising. On advertising, we know it's not perfect funding for the media. But that's a big element of the funding. So, if advertising disappears, if, as it is a case in many countries, media outlets do not have the capacity anymore to print -- this is a case in some African countries -- if the distribution network falls down, it will also happen in some countries. So those media outlets will disappear. And Mira mentioned that it is a moment for solidarity, I totally share this view. But it will possibly also be a moment of stronger competition, and this competition can lead... what I mean is that, if the environment is much more difficult, this will be a question of how to survive for media outlets, and when you have to survive, compete. So, that's why you have to be -- that's the time to find ways to create solidarity, but it's not so obvious. So, I think governments, democratic governments, have to play a key role and, probably, the afterworld will not be the same, and if we want to have healthy media outlets, we will need support. We will need ways to promote the sustainability, possibly new ways of funding. it won't be easy, but up to the media outlets themselves to try to evolve. But that's easier to say than to do, and up to the governments to support, and I think this is highly needed. And we will pay attention, of course, that it is not a way to control them. Because this is always a risk, as we know, in many countries.

Giacomo Mazzone

Thank you Christophe. Rachel, I know that UNESCO is very keen about community media. Do you want to add something?

Rachel Pollack

Yes, thank you, Giac, maybe on both points. On community media, indeed, we've done a lot of work, especially in Africa, working with local radio stations. And, in the past few years, we've especially focused on equipping radio stations with ICTs to report on local issues, such as health and agriculture. And so these connections with radio stations, and radio unions such as EBU, have been tapped into during the pandemic to spread, as we say, life saving information, and also messages to counter misinformation and disinformation. So that's been quite quite an important area of work. And I can include the link in the chat. I would say quickly, perhaps, to make a plug, in two weeks we're planning to organize a webinar in connection with World Press Freedom Day on the subject of media independence in times of crisis. And so, one of the issues that I think was really brought up in a very in

a very convincing way by all of the speakers today, is that these ongoing trends and especially the lack of a sustainable funding model, and the drops in advertising revenue, really raised questions about how to support journalism going forward. And I think it was said quite nicely that, perhaps, and this is not a position of UNESCO, but it's something we're thinking about, how to support journalism, and especially public service, in a way that retains independence. And, really, I think we've seen through this crisis, how media do serve an essential public service role. And so they do need support. And and that's something that we're considering very closely.

Giacomo Mazzone

Yes, Rachel. Definitely that's important, and that's crucial. There is an interesting model that I want to share with you that answer to both the questions and doubts that were raised by Mira and Christophe before. It's the case, for instance, what happened in Norway -- of course, we are not talking about developing country -- but where there is the money everything is easier, but as a model I think that is something that needs to be reflected. A certain point, two years ago, the national broadcaster NRK want to create a new building for its own studios in in Bergen. And what they did is that, instead of making the building on their own, alone, they went to the local newspapers that announced that also they want to move. So, they went into a common building. And now, in the same building, they have a sort of media center where you have the television station that is very modern and very high tech, with very light infrastructure, so they use a lot of space less than they were using in the previous building. They have printing facilities of the newspaper, they have a newsroom, separate newsroom, of course, because they compete for different markets, they serve different interests. And also they have an incubator of startups, companies that produce apps that are used both by the newspaper and the local TV station, and there is a radio station. So, they have reduced massively the cost, they are sharing this cost all together. And even if the revenues are shrinking, now they can face better the competition, and each one of them compete in his own market. So, I think that the dream that we had in the past, when you were you have 10 newspapers in a local community are gone, and will be gone forever. But there are new ways on which you can compete for the quality, but reduce the cost, and take care of the current situation. I don't know If this is something that for people, that this can be an idea also for developing countries. Mira you want to say something?

Mira Milosevic

Yes, just quickly, we don't have much more time. But we are working with a large group of civil society organizations at the moment on a big appeal that we will we hope to launch on the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day on 3rd of May. And one of the things that we're looking at is, not only the straight state subsidies for media, including local and community media, that are of course tricky in some countries that are known for media capture, but we are also looking at recommending mechanisms such as tax relief, so not charging VAT on print media products, then not charging taxes on philanthropy donations to journalism, nonprofit organizations in different countries, and you would be surprised, even in Europe, most countries don't recognize nonprofit journalism as a charity cause. All kinds of economic reliefs and subsidies could be implemented is, as Christophe says, in this post COVID world. There is another call, even though advertising is falling, especially in the digital world, there is a tendency to blacklist so called 'uncomfortable' topics and words, so that they're not attached to advertising. And so, in digital advertising, a lot of platforms and advertisers are blacklisting COVID reporting, and that's taking away, already, very small amount of money that goes to to news media

online. So, there is a lot of mechanisms and instruments that you could call for that are very effective, and that, of course, can be manipulated if you have a very unfavorable environment, but in the most environments, there are mechanisms that can be quite independent, and not biased towards a certain player.

Giacomo Mazzone

Yep, seems? Yes. This is a very, very interesting approach. And I think that we can have a lot of suggestion for, when the WSIS will take place physically, for discussion. Thank you for being with us. We have the last five minutes in the schedule. So, if you have questions, now or never, as is said in the marriages, and if, in the meantime, I think that I can try to resume, even if it's been very rich debate and exchange where it's very difficult to resume. But I think that the most important point, on which we are all agreed, is that there is more need for reliable news and quality news. But this, the limit for this exercise is the sustainable funding model. Without a sustainable funding model at the various levels, the international news, the national news, and the community news, and the community journalists, the national journalists, the international journalists, then you will not have any possibility to have reliable news. And I think that this is a really a problem also for the government, not only a problem for us media operators, but also for the government, because if you don't have any public sphere anymore, where you can discuss the public discourse, then all the public discourse will be eye-checked in places where the interests can try to deform and bring to certain conclusion. The web scene during this crisis discovered that there is a real value for information, if you get the wrong information, you are dead. So, this is something that bring back to the harsh reality, because before you can argue: oh yes, the Russian influenced the US campaign, or not, is not true, and you can choose what was the the truth that you like the more. But, if you want to know if you will be at risk in going in a certain place, and you don't know that, and you get the information that you please, more. you [unintelligible]. So, this keeps, I think, put in a different perspective than we had before the value or the information. Any other point that I ask to the speakers? If there are other points that we want to suggest to WSIS for discussion, when we will talk about the media in the next edition of the WSIS in end of August. Garanjali has confirmed the 31st of August for the moment in the calendar, no?

Giacomo Mazzone

Yes, I assume so.

Gitanjali Sah

Yes, Giacomo, 31st August to the 4th of September at present.

Giacomo Mazzone

Okay. Good. So you have already some ideas for topics. So, I think we are working for you, as you see. That's good. Can I ask for seconds each speaker and then we close if there are no more questions. So we go in reverse order. Mira, first.

Mira Milosevic

I'm sorry. It took me some time to unmute. Yes, as you said, we need to address the sustainability definitely, but also government manipulation of media where it happens. The rise of toxic polarization in the public sphere, and also huge inequalities in our societies. And, of course, as we have mentioned,

the role of digitalization that has enabled and incentivized spread of disinformation and misinformation.
Thank you.

Giacomo Mazzone

Perfect. You've been listening for 30 seconds yourself.

Christophe Deloire

And as a final word, word, sorry, word.

Christophe Deloire

I would like to invite you to attend a press conference that we will give in three hours now, about the release of our World Press Freedom Index. We will have with us Edward Snowden, the whistleblower, we will have Joe Stiglitz, Nobel Laureate in Economics, Maria Ressa, a journalist from the Philippines, and Rana Ayyub from India. Unfortunately, this is full in the press conference itself, but you may have a look on the follow it on Twitter or Facebook, it will be broadcasted. So please join us.

Giacomo Mazzone

Thank you very much. If you have a link we can share.

Christophe Deloire

It's on our official Twitter and Facebook accounts, So, easy to find, yes.

Giacomo Mazzone

Easy to find. Perfect. That's good. Thank you very much, then Rachel.

Rachel Pollack

Yes. also takes a little bit for the microphone to get unmuted. I just like to thank again the other speakers and you, Giacomo, and the organizers, and all of the participants for your great questions. It's really, in the face of these challenges, I find that it's quite inspiring to see all of the initiatives, and ways that the global community has come together. I think a lot of important issues have been raised. I mentioned and put in the chat some links related to UNESCO's work. And I think in the next couple of weeks, we'll also have some new announcements and papers, webinars, events. And so we'd really like to hear from you also about, I think, what UNESCO, and the UN as a whole, could do in your communities, in your countries, and to have a dialogue because, I think that --- this is my first webinar for WSIS C9, and I understand that we're the coordinators, but it really belongs to everyone, and to see what actions are being taken around the world in terms of media, so please do stay in touch, and look forward. to hearing from you soon.

Giacomo Mazzone

Okay, thank you very much, Rachel. Just to before to close, I remember you that next Tuesday, there is another webinar of the WSIS series on Tuesday 28th on drones and COVID-19. A lot of issues about privacy that probably need to be discussed there, and the I pass the floor to Gitanjali for the closing, Thank you very much, everybody, for your participation.

Gitanjali Sah

Thank you very much, Giacomo and your panelists. Thank you, UNESCO. Rachel, welcome to the business family as the facilitator of the action line on media. And all the best Christophe for your launch in a couple of hours, and we hope to -- we had around 90 participants today, and we will keep working on improving the platform. I think the captioning worked very well today. And we hope to see you, as Giacomo said, on the 28th, next Tuesday, for our next talks on drones and COVID-19. Thank you very much. Bye bye.

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