MEDIA FREEDOM
RAPID RESPONSE

MFRR FRANCE MISSION REPORT

CRITICAL JUNCTURE FOR MEDIA FREEDOM AHEAD OF 2027 ELECTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Although France enjoys a legal and regulatory framework[1] which is generally supportive of media freedom, challenges are mounting ahead of the 2027 presidential election, with clear implications for the country's democracy.

In recent years, the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) consortium and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) have documented a persistent and growing number of attacks against media professionals. These pressures on media freedom and media pluralism are unfolding against the backdrop of the 2027 presidential elections and in a highly polarised political environment.

Political deadlock in the parliament and the approaching electoral cycle have stalled key media freedom reforms or fast-tracked them without due democratic consultation. At the same time, growing electoral support for far-right political parties, some of which have demonstrated particular hostility towards journalists, particularly those working for the public broadcaster, raises questions about the future direction of media policy and reform, as well as the protection of journalists' rights.

MFRR delegation with colleagues from Reporters Without Borders (RSF), L'Observatoire français des atteintes à la liberté de la presse (Ofalp) and French unions.
Credit: MFRR

In response to these concerns, the MFRR consortium conducted an advocacy mission in Paris from 9-11 June 2026. Led by the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), the mission was supported by its French affiliates (SNJ, SNJ-CGT, CFDT Journalistes and FASAP-FO), as well as the French Observatory on Violations of Press Freedom (OFALP), an official MFRR partner, and was joined by Reporters Without Borders (RSF).

This report provides an in-depth analysis of the state of media freedom in the country, assessed following in person and online meetings with journalists, editors, legal experts, civil society organisations, the

1 Law on the Freedom of the Press of 29 July 1881

Regulatory Authority for Audiovisual and Digital Communications (Arcom), and government officials including representatives of the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of Justice. It also examines the state of implementation of the key EU media laws and outlines key recommendations to reverse the worrying trend.

The report was jointly produced by the EFJ, ARTICLE 19 Europe, the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), Free Press Unlimited (FPU), and the International Press Institute (IPI), while RSF contributed to some sections. The report provides detailed recommendations for the French government, parliament, law enforcement officers, political authorities, Arcom, media houses and media professionals.

A French version of the report – translated with the support of OFALP – is also available.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Media freedom in France is at a critical juncture ahead of the 2027 French presidential election. While the country has a broadly pluralistic media landscape and retains strong legal protections for press freedom, the media environment is facing mounting challenges in a highly polarised political environment.

These include pressures on editorial independence from billionaire owners, threats to the independent public service media, circumvention of rules regarding internal pluralism, harassment of journalists through vexatious lawsuits, insufficient legal safeguards to protect journalists' rights and sources, and increasing threats to reporters' physical safety.

Although media concentration has long represented a pressure on journalism in France, it has been exacerbated further in the run-up to the 2027 election, as media ownership interests have openly sought to amplify partisan political narratives.

France's rules for preventing excessive concentration have not kept pace with deepening cross-media ownership concentration and the expansion of large conglomerates. As a result, six industrial groups now control the majority of France's national media landscape. Many of these media owners have significant interests outside journalism and to different extent use media assets to influence political debate or advance broader economic and ideological agendas. The French regional press has not escaped consolidation, with the majority of its regional daily newspapers in the hands of a few media conglomerates.

The editorial and political pressures journalists face are being exacerbated by the thousands of job cuts announced since the beginning of the year, including the replacement of media employees by artificial intelligence agents[2] and the cancellation of programmes due to budget restrictions, resulting in increasing job insecurity in a rapidly evolving media ecosystem.

As of 29 September 2026, the MFRR consortium already **documented** a total of 75 press freedom violations affecting 117 media professionals since the beginning of the year. Verbal abuse of journalists remains the most common type of attack recorded (64%), primarily in the form of threats, discrediting, and harassment, taking place both offline and online. Interference constituted the second most frequent violation (22.7%), while physical attacks perpetrated by private individuals and law enforcement officers counted for 13.3% of recorded cases. Other attacks included attacks on property (18.7%), data attacks (9.3%), and legal threats (5.3%), mainly in the form of civil and defamation lawsuits, interrogations, and arbitrary arrests.

2 A recent court decision **suspended** the dismissal of 8 editorial secretaries from the press group infopro digital until real life experiments have been done on their replacement by AI tools.

At the structural level, the alignment of national legislation with the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), in full force since 8 August 2025, has been stalled. No bill has been passed in parliament, leaving the question of the media regulatory authority Arcom's regulatory mandate over print and online press unresolved, with no clear timeline for reforms in sight. Months following the **Parliamentary Commission Inquiry** into the "Neutrality, Operation and Financing of Public Broadcasting", France's public service broadcasters have faced intensified political pressure over their funding, governance and perceived impartiality, eroding public trust at a crucial time.

Vexatious litigation, including Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), remains one of the most common tools used to suppress the free press in the country. Although an Anti-SLAPP law was passed in 2026 and covers both cross-border and domestic cases, the law is widely considered to be lacking, as it excludes criminal defamation proceedings and omits key reforms, including stronger sanctions against claimants, a reversal of the burden of proof, and measures addressing private international law issues.

Another pressing issue affecting media freedom in France is the insufficient protection of journalists' sources. The 2010 law governing source protection contains vague wording and a lack of meaningful standards, and has enabled repeated breaches of press freedom over the past 15 years, including major cases in recent years affecting investigative journalists.

While France remains a major supporter of press freedom internationally, at home the country retains serious challenges and at times the institutional response to the pressing issues facing media freedom in the country has been insufficient. While it is commendable that France is one of the biggest host countries for journalists in exile in Europe, more can be done to ensure these journalists are able to properly continue their work after fleeing their countries.

With journalist safety insufficiently protected and media pluralism undermined by growing concentration, urgent action from the authorities is required to safeguard media freedom in France through robust legislation in line with EU media law.

MEDIA PLURALISM AND MEDIA INDEPENDENCE

Concentrated ownership in the hands of industrial billionaires and increased pressure on editorial independence

France's primary legislative framework on media concentration – the Law of 30 September 1986 on freedom of communication (**Loi Léotard**) – is now 40 years old. Its thresholds are widely acknowledged to be obsolete and unenforceable against today's digital, multi-platform conglomerates. The mission assesses that the prolonged failure to modernise this framework is a deep structural problem underpinning the deterioration of press freedom in France.

Concentrated ownership in the hands of a small number of industrial billionaires lies at the centre of the challenges facing media pluralism in the country: the exploitation of information to serve specific economic and political interests, the shaping of public debate according to owners' agendas, and, in some cases, direct interference with editorial policy and the dismissal of journalists who do not comply. Takeovers are also regularly accompanied by economies of scale, involving the merging of certain departments and staff reductions within newsrooms. Consolidation also has an impact on the collective rights that newsrooms have built up over time, with the risk that new owners may challenge company-wide agreements, particularly codes of ethics.

The Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom's **2026 Monitor** rates the risk to market pluralism in France as "very high", identifying it as the area of greatest concern amongst all the indicators assessed. France's overall risk score in terms of media provider pluralism stands at 90 per cent (very high risk). The level of risk relating to concentration in the broadcast and print media in France has reached a record high of 97 per cent. These figures confirm the seriousness of the threats to pluralism. The mission considers that media concentration is a deep-rooted structural problem which exacerbates the other threats identified in this report.

SIX NON-MEDIA INDUSTRIAL GROUPS CONTROL THE MAJORITY OF THE FRENCH NATIONAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE

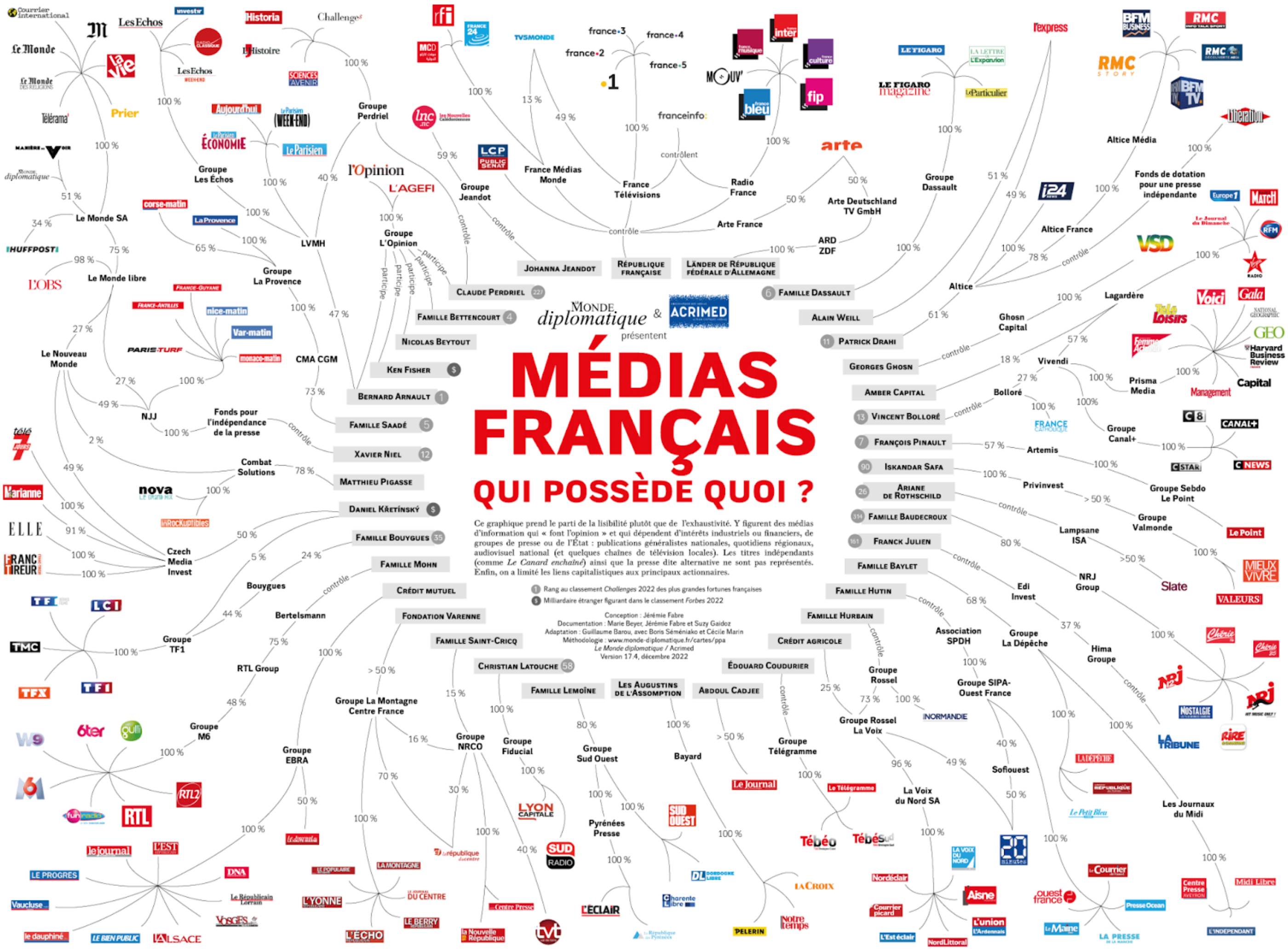
- **Bolloré Group**: Controls notably *Canal+* and *CNews*. Since the Vivendi split in December 2024, *Prisma Media*, as well as *Europe 1* and *Le Journal du Dimanche* (via Lagardère), are no longer legally part of Vivendi: they are grouped within the *Louis Hachette Group*, of which the Bolloré group is the principal shareholder. *Prisma Media* constitutes one of the main magazine publishing groups in France.
- **LVMH (Bernard Arnault)**: Owns notably *Le Parisien*, *Les Échos*, *Paris Match*, and the economic weekly *Challenges*, which was acquired at the end of December 2025 along with *Sciences et Avenir* and *La Recherche* through Éditions Croque Futur. LVMH has engaged in exclusive negotiations with UNIFY Group (formerly Reworld Media) for the sale of *Sciences et Avenir* and *La Recherche*; this transaction is therefore not yet finalised.
- **CMA CGM (Rodolphe Saadé)**: Controls CMA Media, which notably groups together *BFMTV*, *RMC*, *La Provence*, *Corse Matin*, *La Tribune*, *La Tribune Dimanche*, and the digital media outlet *Brut*. In 2026, *BFMTV* remains the leading continuous news channel in France according to data provided by CMA CGM.
- **Bouygues (Martin Bouygues)**: Controls *TF1*, the **most-watched** television channel in France.
- **Dassault Group (heirs of Serge Dassault)**: The Figaro Group, owner notably of *Le Figaro*. The Dassault family also controls Dassault Aviation, an aerospace manufacturer distinct from the press group. The French state, notably through the Ministry of the Armed Forces and the Directorate General for Armaments, has historically been Dassault Aviation's primary client for its military activities.
- **Xavier Niel**: The founder of Iliad, the telecommunications group to which Free belongs, was one of the main architects behind the acquisition of *Le Monde* in 2010. However, he no longer personally controls *Le Monde* Group: since 2024, it has been majority-owned indirectly by the Fund for the Independence of Journalism. In 2026, Xavier Niel retains only a single share in *Le Monde* Group (*Télérama*, *Courrier international*, *La Vie*, and *Le Nouvel Obs*) through his company NJJ Strategy.

Such concentrated landscape has raised major concerns about the potential for media ownership to exert influence and shape and spread certain political narratives. The most prominent example is businessman Vincent Bolloré's media empire. Produced by RSF, the documentary 'System B' **features** a series of exclusive testimonies from journalists detailing Bolloré's methods across the media landscape. These include mechanisms of intimidation and control deployed both when the billionaire owner acquires media outlets and when reporters investigate his industrial activities.

The Bolloré empire warrants particular attention. Its reach and influence go beyond the media and encompass a wide range of industries: advertising and communications through Havas (one of the world's largest communications groups), pay-TV and broadcasting (*Canal+*), retail (Relay stores), and publishing (e.g. Larousse – publisher of France's leading dictionary).

Quoted in the European report (Media Pluralism Monitor 2026) on France, Alexis Lévrier, an associate professor at the University of Reims Champagne-Ardenne, demonstrated that French far-right media

outlets, such as *Frontières* – in which Bolloré has held a 25% stake since early September – and *Valeurs Actuelles*, although not formally owned by Vincent Bolloré, benefit from the exposure given to their views by the Bolloré Group's channels, particularly *CNews*.



« Médias français : qui possède quoi ? » : découvrez les nouveaux arrivants
Credit: The Media Leader
This graph does not include all French media outlets, but helps illustrate the high level of concentration that characterises the country's media landscape.

In **November 2024**, together with Bernard Arnault, Rodolphe Saadé, the Dassault family and other conservative investors, Bolloré acquired the École Supérieure de Journalisme (ESJ Paris), one of France's oldest journalism schools, founded in 1899. A separate but connected issue is l'Institut libre de journalisme (ILDJ), a private school co-founded in 2018 by entrepreneur Alexandre Pesey, who also runs Institut de formation politique, a training program for young conservatives. A *Le Monde* investigation found in 2024 that 45% of ILDJ graduates are recruited by Bolloré or Pierre-Edouard Stérin-affiliated media or companies. Stérin is also a billionaire businessman who founded **Projet Périclès**, a 150 million euros initiative to financially support conservative and far-right think tanks, training programmes, and media outlets. According to journalists and civil society groups the mission met with, the goal of these enterprises is to educate a new generation of journalists and media workers with far-right inclinations, and 'reshape' journalism in France from within the profession.

This complex integration of media, advertising, distribution and training within a single industrial group represents a concentration of influence that goes well beyond what existing French law is equipped to address, and pushes the boundaries of what the EMFA's media pluralism test (Article 22) can address.

The mission heard consistent testimony that the current media ownership concentration has translated directly into documented editorial interference. The imposition of a new editor-in-chief at *Le Journal du Dimanche* in 2023 **triggered a 40-day strike**, with more than 90% of the newsroom resigning. In 2025, **RSF documented** that hundreds of journalists at Bolloré-owned outlets were subject to **lifelong confidentiality clauses** preventing them from publicly discussing editorial and management conditions. At *La Provence*, owner Rodolphe Saadé suspended editorial director Aurélien Viers in March 2024 **over a front page he deemed "ambiguous"**. *La Provence*'s journalists launched a strike, denouncing what they called "inadmissible editorial interference". Viers was reinstated after three days.

The mechanism of influence goes beyond individual appointments. Several civil society organisations and media professionals described to the mission what they characterised as a coordinated tactic to set a specific agenda across the Bolloré platforms. For instance, a topic is introduced on *CNews*, amplified through *Europe 1* and *Le Journal du Dimanche*, and then picked up and discussed across the wider media landscape for several days.[3]

France also has a high concentration of regional media. A significant proportion of regional daily newspapers are controlled by a small number of groups, some of which are in the media sector. However, in some cases, they are also controlled by large conglomerates or billionaires who are not in the media sector. Data from the ACPM clearly **illustrate** the handful of major players in the regional daily press.

- **Rossel France** operates in northern France, parts of the west and east; in the Hauts-de-France region, Normandy and Champagne-Ardenne, as well as in other regions such as Savoie and the south of France. For example, the Rossel France group owns *20 Minutes* alongside the SIPA/Ouest-France group; *La Voix du Nord*; *Courrier picard*; and many others;
- The **Ebra Group** (Crédit Mutuel) in the east as far as Savoie (including, for example, Le Progrès, Le Républicain Lorrain and Vosges Matin...)
- The **Centre-France** group, whose main owner is the Varenne Foundation, has a particularly strong presence in the Centre Region and the Massif Central. Its portfolio includes, for example, *La Montagne*, *Le Berry Républicain*, *Le Journal du Centre*, *Le Populaire du Centre*, *L'Écho Républicain*, *La République du Centre* and *L'Yonne Républicaine*. The group claims to have a presence in 13 departments and four regions.
- The **Sud-Ouest** Group, controlled by the Lemoîne family, publishes, for example, *Sud Ouest*, *Charente Libre* and *La République des Pyrénées*... In September 2026, the Lemoîne family and Rossel France entered into exclusive negotiations with a view to the sale to Rossel of approximately 80 per cent of the Sud-Ouest Group's share capital.
- The **La Dépêche du Midi** group, which has long been owned by the Baylet family, operates in south-western and southern France. Its portfolio includes La *Dépêche du Midi*, *Midi Libre*, L'Indépendant, *Centre Presse Aveyron* and *Le Petit Bleu* d'Agen, as well as several other publications in the media and services sectors.
- There are also other players, such as **Xavier Niel**, who owns, for example, the *Nice-Matin* group (*Nice-Matin*, *Var-Matin*, *Monaco-Matin*).

While its jurisdiction is no longer strictly limited to the audiovisual sector and extends, in particular, to the digital sector, Arcom does not, as of now, have all the legal tools necessary to address the growing concentration of media. Although the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) has been fully applicable since August 8, 2025, France has not yet adopted the legislative provisions necessary to implement Article 22, which concerns the assessment of media market concentration.

3 Le Procès Bolloré, les médias de la haine devant le tribunal, Fonds pour la liberté de la presse (FPL), 2026, p. 14,

Since 2019, France has had a press self-regulatory body – the Council for Journalistic Ethics and Mediation (CDJM) – which, in addition to dealing with referrals, issues recommendations and organises training courses. Membership of the CDJM is voluntary. The main publishers' organisations are not yet represented on the council, and only two of the four representative trade unions are involved (the SNJ and the CFDT are members; the SNJ-CGT and FASAP-FO are not). However, the association remains open to civil society and journalists' collectives. The CDJM contributes to the research and work of the International Alliance of Independent Press Councils (AIPCE), notably through the European consortium PressCouncils.eu.

During a meeting, Arcom assured the mission it is ready to take on an expanded role once granted the legal mandate. Arcom itself acknowledged that the 1986 concentration framework requires modernisation. Arcom will chair the **European Board for Media Services** (Media Board) in 2027, the EU body responsible for issuing opinions on media market concentrations and on national measures affecting pluralism under the European Media Freedom Act. This leadership role at the European level stands in tension with Arcom's own constrained domestic mandate. Its enforcement record remains extremely low: the Arcom **intervened** in only 0.5% of hate speech reports filed with it, despite well-documented instances of such content on e.g., *CNews*. The mission also heard concerns regarding Arcom's governance and appointment arrangements, raising questions about the regulator's independence and impartiality at the very moment its remit needs to expand.

INTERNAL PLURALISM, A MAJOR REGULATORY ISSUE

Internal pluralism[4] has become a major regulatory issue, particularly through the 24-hour news channel *CNews* case. Following a complaint filed by RSF, in February 2024 the Council of State **instructed** Arcom to enforce the internal pluralism requirement among broadcasters. In July 2024, Arcom established new criteria to ensure pluralism requirements were properly scrutinised, which no longer solely focused on treating political figures equally on air, as had previously been the case. Now, Arcom is also supposed to verify the diversity of guests and topics, and how broadcasters present them on air. This marked a shift from a primarily quantitative approach to a more substantive assessment of pluralism. **RSF's subsequent investigations** highlighted weaknesses in implementation, including the possibility of formally balancing political speaking time through low-audience nighttime broadcasts while maintaining significant imbalances during peak hours. In June 2026, based on the investigation and **referral** filed by RSF, Arcom **formally notified** *CNews* over a "structural imbalance" in the representation of different viewpoints. A belated decision, but a firm measure against a publisher that intentionally and willfully fails to comply with its legal obligations.

The risks stemming from market concentration are especially acute ahead of France's 2027 presidential election, when concentrated ownership structures create amplification channels for both domestic political agendas and external interference.

For instance, Xenia Fedorova, former head of *RT France* – the Russian state-controlled broadcaster banned across the EU since March 2022 – has become a regular commentator on *CNews* and *Europe 1* and a columnist for *JDNews* (the digital supplement of *Le Journal du Dimanche*), all within the Bolloré ecosystem. In May 2026, Renew Europe MEP Valérie Hayer **lodged a complaint** with Arcom over Fedorova's remarks on *CNews* and *Europe 1* which relayed core Kremlin propaganda narratives. Fedorova said that 'the West is the party that wants to prolong the conflict' – by 'conflict' she meant the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The French government and President Emmanuel Macron have since **described** her as a Kremlin "propagandist", and a group of MEPs has called for EU sanctions against her. Several of Fedorova's on-air statements have **prompted complaints** to Arcom that remain under review, illustrating the regulator's limited capacity to act swiftly even where its audiovisual competence clearly applies. In late July 2026, the Interior Ministry issued

4 The obligation on every audiovisual media organisation to ensure that a diversity of ideas and opinions is represented on air.

an expulsion order against Fedorova, accompanied by a **house arrest order** and **asset freeze**. On 3 August 2026, her emergency appeal (référé-liberté) was **rejected** by the Paris administrative court for failing to meet the "extreme urgency" threshold. A second emergency procedure (référé-suspension) was also **rejected**. The substantive challenge to the legality of the expulsion (recours au fond) remains pending before the tribunal, with no date yet set for a ruling. Fedorova's lawyer **says** she remains abroad and will not return to France until the order is suspended or annulled, and that she intends to pursue further legal challenges. Despite all of this, Fedorova continues to publish directly within the Bolloré ecosystem and has **authored** several pieces in Le Journal Dimanche since her expulsion. *CNews* itself does not appear to treat Fedorova's on-air return as problematic. On 9 September 2026, Interior Minister Laurent Nuñez wrote to Arcom warning that *CNews* would face criminal prosecution if Fedorova returned to air remotely from abroad. Days later, on 16 September, *CNews* **cancelled** Nuñez's own scheduled appearance on "La Grande Interview".

The mission considers the Fedorova case emblematic of how concentrated, opaque ownership structures can provide a durable media platform for foreign interference and information manipulation (FIMI), with existing oversight mechanisms proving too inefficient or too slow to respond. Furthermore, as France has not yet aligned its national framework with the EMFA, there is a lack of systematic monitoring of media ownership. Among the key provisions, Article 6 of the EMFA provides for the creation and management of a public database, overseen by a public agency, to enable an accurate assessment of beneficial ownership of media outlets.

DOMESTIC LEGAL FRAMEWORK GOVERNING PRESS FREEDOM REQUIRES URGENT IMPROVEMENT

The 1986 media law's thresholds evaluate each media type in isolation: press, television, radio. This means that cross-platform concentration, which is precisely how all six dominant owners operate, falls entirely outside their scope. The **États généraux de l'information** (EGI), Macron's 2023-2024 reform initiative, among others, promised to modernise the framework and adapt it to the current reality, including by addressing the monopolisation of the market by non-media industrial conglomerates. However, it remains merely on paper and hasn't been pushed through due to political deadlock, a deeply fragmented parliament, and **active resistance** from the very media lobby groups the reforms were designed to constrain.

The mission delegation welcomed Green MP Sophie Taillé-Polian introducing two key bills on editorial independence and market concentration. The bill on media market concentration (**n° 2216**) provided for the introduction of a cross-platform "share of influence" threshold on media ownership and required Arcom to issue an opinion before the French competition authority rules on any media merger. The bill on editorial independence (**n° 1924**) sought to make public subsidies and broadcast frequencies conditional on journalist approval of editorial director appointments which is called '**droit d'agrément**.' This exists informally in a handful of outlets, for instance at *Le Monde*, *Les Echos*, or La Croix, but has no legal basis elsewhere. However, none of the bills resulted in legislation being passed.

The bill on media market concentration was examined by the National Assembly's Cultural Affairs and Education Committee on 4 February 2026. The bill was then debated in plenary on 12 February 2026, during which Article 1 of the bill was adopted but the examination of the entire text could not be **completed**. The bill on editorial independence was referred to the Cultural Affairs and Education Committee but was not subsequently examined by the committee.

The mission delegation calls on politicians across party lines to resume this important legislative work, to prioritise a meaningful debate and adoption of a strong anti-monopoly law that strengthen media pluralism and protect editorial independence in line with Article 22 of the EMFA.

The acquisition of the French weekly business magazine *Challenges* by the luxury goods group LVMH, which was completed in December 2025, is a clear example of the threats posed to editorial independence by billionaire ownership interests, and of France's failure to implement the mechanism relating to media pluralism and editorial independence required by Article 22 of the EMFA.

Bernard Arnault, the chairman and CEO of LVMH, already holds a stake in the national business daily *Les Echos* and *Investir*. Following the agreement to acquire Croque Futur Editions, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the Syndicat National des Journalistes (SNJ) **filed** an urgent request with the Paris Administrative Court to implement the merger control measures relating to media pluralism and editorial independence stipulated in Article 22 of EMFA. At the same time, the French journalist trade unions SNJ and SNJ-CGT, supported by SNME-CFDT, referred the matter to the Competition Authority, requesting a ruling on whether this transaction constitutes an abuse of the LVMH group's dominant position. This case is currently being examined by the Authority. Despite the double legal offensive, the sale was completed at the end of December. In February 2026, RSF, SNJ and SNJ-CGT brought the matter before the Conseil d'État, arguing that the French state had failed to implement Article 22 of the EMFA. In July, the Conseil d'État ultimately **rejected** their legal challenge, ruling that the measures necessary for the application of this European regulation in France were the responsibility of the French legislator. The ruling also noted that administrative justice could not force the government to consult Parliament on this matter, further highlighting the continuing gap in France's regulatory framework. Since LVMH took control of Croque Futur Editions eight months ago, *Challenges* newsrooms have already suffered several disastrous **decisions**, including the denunciation of its editorial charter, a pillar of the title's independence, reinforcing once again the irrevocable harm to editorial independence invoked when challenging the sale agreement.

The mission calls on French authorities to implement EMFA's ownership provisions without further delay, and use them to assess and, where necessary, block acquisitions currently underway.

Threats to independent public service media

THE DETRIMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSION INQUIRY INTO THE PUBLIC BROADCASTING'S FUNDING AND INDEPENDENT FUNCTIONING

Public service media in France continue to face multiple political pressures which threaten their independence and sustainable financing. The most recent flashpoint was the **Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry** into the "Neutrality, Operation and Financing of Public Broadcasting. The Commission of Inquiry, which was conducted from November 2025 to April 2026 at UDR initiative[5], was marred by multiple attempts by its leading members to discredit public service media.

In its latest edition, the European "Media Pluralism Monitor" (MPM 2026) **report** notes that "the committee itself has been criticised for its far-right bias and has taken on the appearance of an anti-public-service crusade led by its rapporteur, the far-right MP Charles Alloncle".

During the hearings on the Committee, the MFRR consortium **monitored** several incidents of selective examples and unsupported insinuations that were used by the rapporteur Charles Alloncle to weaken public support for state-funded media. Some lawmakers such as Jérémie Patrier-Leitus, head of the inquiry, also

5 The commission of inquiry into the neutrality, functioning and financing of public audiovisual broadcasting was created on 28 October 2025, based on Article 141, paragraph 2, of the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly, at the initiative of the Union of the Right for the Republic (UDR) group exercising its 'right of draw'.

accused one of Bolloré's media arms, the Lagardere News Holding, of circulating lists of hostile questions towards public broadcasters. Alloncle denied having used these questions. The parliamentary commission inquiry faced significant criticism over its clear lack of political neutrality due the behaviour of some of its members and its rapporteur. During the process, Alloncle and other politicians used their personal social media accounts to discredit media professionals from public broadcasters online and announce findings before any official conclusions have been published. These incidents drew accusations that the public inquiry had been distorted into a far-right attack on the country's public media system.

The **report** of the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry on Public Audiovisual, drafted by MP Alloncle, was narrowly adopted and published in spring. It set out 70 recommendations which the journalists, media representatives, and civil society organisations the delegation met strongly criticised as lacking objectivity and undermining the role of public service media. The proposal to cut the budget by €1 billion and close channels raised serious concerns for the future of the French public service media. *France Télévisions* was already in a precarious position following unprecedented budget cuts in 2025, which led to layoffs and a reduction in programming. There were also growing fears of political interference in editorial content, and funding became the subject of increasingly heated debate. Five months after the Alloncle report was submitted, the government is planning a €47 million cut in funding for *France Télévisions*' 2027 budget. This actually represents an additional €90 million in savings, since 2026 saw revenue from the sale of real estate assets. This severe cutback is leading *France Télévisions*' management to consider extreme scenarios, such as closing *France 3*, its regional channel,– and replacing it with *France Info* on channel 3. This would abandon the *France Télévisions*' regional news mission and risk deepening media deserts in many regions where the local daily press is already struggling.

MFRR delegation at the French Ministry of Culture, together with colleagues from RSF and the journalists' union.
Credit: MFRR

Other cost-cutting measures are being considered, such as a voluntary departure or layoff plan affecting about 1,000 people, a drastic reduction in investments in creative production, documentaries, or programming, or even a merger of *France 3* and the *ICI* radio network. All of these measures would result

in the abandonment of entire segments of the public broadcasting system's mandate and a considerable weakening of news coverage, primarily at the local and regional levels.

As for *Radio France*, lack of sufficient public funding (a **4,1 million-cut** in 2026 following a **23,9-million-cut** in 2025) has led the public broadcaster to slash in its young-adults-oriented radio station, *Mouv'*, with an end to its costly FM frequencies in **August 2026**. *Mouv'* is now a purely musical online player without any staff. Most of its non-permanent members **have left**. Another radio station has paid the cost of diminished funding: *France Musique* has given back around **300 FM frequencies** over the summer in 2026. Its coverage of the national territory has **slumped from 90% to 70%**, leaving behind distraught and angered listeners who cannot fall back on the digital audio broadcasting service because of their location. This situation creates inequality in having access to classical music and more broadly, having access to what the public service broadcaster has to offer to all citizens.

ALLONCLE'S REPORT RAISED QUESTIONS OF COMPLIANCE WITH THE EUROPEAN MEDIA FREEDOM ACT (EMFA)

Concerns of the mission delegation are also raised by the fact that the report published by Alloncle, the Committee's reporteur was amplified by the media empire of conservative billionaire Vincent Bolloré; he is to publish a book in September 2026, with the help of a publishing house owned by Bolloré, swearing to disclose new "secrets" about public service media.

Initiatives including the **counter-report** by La Scam, and an **analysis** by Un bout Des Médias, have offered insights into the levels of harm such politically coloured reports can have to media pluralism and freedom of the press. However, while Arcom has published a **study** on the impartiality of broadcasters in France, the country still lacks an official initiative that provides independent insights into the level of threats facing public service media.

The proposal to cut the budget by €1 billion and close channels raised serious concerns of incompatibility with the Article 5 of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) regarding public service media's political independence and adequate financings' imperatives. Under Article 5, France is required to ensure that funding procedures for public service media providers are based on transparent and objective criteria laid down in advance, free from any political influence. Those funding procedures are crucial to guarantee that public service media providers have adequate, sustainable and predictable financial resources corresponding to the fulfilment of and the capacity to develop within their public service remit.

Under Article 5 of EMFA, France must also ensure that public service media providers are editorially and functionally independent and provide in an impartial manner a plurality of information and opinions to their audiences. However, the commission inquiry and its subsequent report pose significant risks to editorial independence of the public broadcasters that can already be assessed in the newsrooms.

For instance, *France Télévisions* has seen the arrival of journalists and commentators from far-right media outlets such as *CNews* to participate in or host programs on *France 2* and *France Info*. *Radio France*, which was also targeted during the commission for its supposed lack of impartiality and so-called "left-wing bias," is seen as having caved in to Alloncle's campaign as it gave a column to a prominent far-right journalist from *Valeurs actuelles*, Charles Sapin, five months after the end of the enquiry. This has led to a successful strike within the French public broadcaster. Sapin eventually decided not to publish his editorial while denouncing alleged lack of pluralism. Bolloré-owned media widely reported Sapin's allegations, despite Arcom's **June statistics** showing *France Inter*'s airtime imbalance actually favored the far right.

To preserve the independent operation of broadcasting and defend citizens' rights to pluralistic information, the mission delegation urgently calls on French authorities to comprehensively implement EMFA, including its Article 5. The leadership of public service media must be recognised and protected as a crucial pillar of democracy.

SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

Hostility against journalists: Death threats and public discrediting on the rise

Over the past few years, media professionals in France have faced persistent hostility over their reporting of public interest.

As of 29 September, verbal abuse remains the most **frequently documented** press freedom violation in France on the Mapping Media Freedom (MapMF) platform, primarily taking the form of threats and discrediting campaigns. Most alarmingly, death threats have constituted half of all threats logged so far this year. While a significant proportion of intimidation occurs online, **death threats** are not confined to the internet.

The recent incident in which **large-calibre bullets** were sent to the newsrooms of *Le Petit Bleu* and *La Dépêche du Midi* has raised particular concerns about the safety of journalists. Last year, severe death threats were recorded, including the interception of a **parcel bomb** by the gendarmerie, a 'Charlie Hebdo'-style threat against a **local radio station**, and **bomb threats** that forced *RMC-BFM* and *France Télévisions* to evacuate their premises.

During the mission, the delegation heard from several journalists who reported severe cases of death threats, as well as sexual, sexist and misogynistic harassment. Some of them expressed concerns about being labelled as 'far-left' or 'far-right'. They reflected on a media environment in which reporters are often categorised and targeted for their reporting. For instance, some of the journalists whom the delegation met with and who were subjected to online threats were dangerously and subjectively labelled on an '**interactive map**' published by the far-right outlet *Frontières*, which claimed to detail the far-left movement in France.

In 2025, media and officials associated with the far-right were the **source** of at least 10 attacks on journalists and their representatives through smear campaigns, online harassment and public discrediting attempts. In late 2025, journalists affiliated with CFDT Journalistes and the union itself had, in fact, were **targeted** on social media from Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far-right MPs in the National Assembly, following the publication of a booklet[6] containing resources and advice for journalists on how to deal with the rise of the far right, and the various attacks and attempts at interference.

The delegation warns of a potential intensification of pressure on journalists in the run-up to the first round of the French presidential election. Monitoring from **previous electoral periods** demonstrates how journalists face heightened risks during political campaigns. During the 2024 European and legislative elections, the number of recorded attacks almost quadrupled, primarily in the form of online threats. Attacks motivated by xenophobia doubled, with 70% of these referring to the electoral context. Journalists reporting on the

6 On 2 December, the CFDT Journalistes published a booklet **entitled** 'Face à l'extrême droite, plus que jamais journalistes ! Un livret pour jouer notre rôle démocratique".

far right were particularly targeted. Several journalists the delegation met reported feeling hesitant to cover certain political topics because of prior targeting, highlighting growing concerns about self-censorship.

In 2024, concerns about journalists' safety intensified when the far-right website '**Réseau Libre**' called for at least 58 media professionals who had signed a statement opposing the far right to be "shot in the back of the head". An increase in verbal attacks has already been **recorded** in the context of this year's municipal elections.

In February 2025, comments made by Sophia Chikirou, an MP for left-wing La France Insoumise (LFI), who **labeled** journalists as "little Nazis" following the media coverage of the death of far-right activist Quentin Deranque, sparked strong reactions regarding the respect due to journalists. Whilst some media reports had been **perceived** by the profession as "surprisingly biased" or "misleading", the mission delegation reminded elected representatives of their duty to set an example. This is of paramount importance in the current hostile and tense climate for journalists.

More recently, on 29 September 2026, a statement by Marine Le Pen, the Rassemblement National (RN) candidate for the presidential election, in which she **urged** *Mediapart* to put on "their Kevlar suit" following revelations published by the media concerning Jordan Bardella, President of the RN, led to a report being filed with the public prosecutor. This latest incident has renewed the delegation's concerns about the treatment of the press.

The mission further notes that hostility towards the press is also manifested by the numerous **physical attacks** that were mainly perpetrated by private individuals. In the event of an attack, freelancers are particularly vulnerable and struggle to benefit from the legal protection or insurance cover offered by large newsrooms.

According to the MFRR monitoring, journalists who report on environmental issues are increasingly targeted. Since 2023, for instance, the MapMF platform has **documented** 31 incidents targeting 44 journalists for their environmental reporting in France. Among the most recent cases recorded is an incident of assault that took place in August 2026, during which a journalist from the regional daily *Nice-Matin* was **pushed** to the ground by an elected representative.

Le Monde journalist **Stéphane Horel**, whom the mission delegation met with, has been subjected to multiple thefts and attempted break-ins, believed to be linked to her cross-border investigation into PFAS pollution. The delegation **reiterates** that thefts and attempted break-ins at journalists' homes are not merely acts of property damage, but a form of intimidation that is deeply concerning both for their safety and for the protection of their sources.

With less than a year to go until the French presidential election and the risk of increased pressure on the media, politicians and public figures are strongly urged to publicly denounce any threatening or discrediting behaviour, including that of their peers, and uphold their duty to set an example At the same time, media professionals are strongly encouraged to systematically report any threats, including acts of interference, to the relevant authorities.

Discriminatory treatment and physical integrity of journalists increasingly at risk during protests

Journalists covering protests, unrest and politically sensitive events face violence from both demonstrators and law-enforcement officers. Since 2024, the Mapping Media Freedom platform has **recorded** nineteen instances of law enforcement violence targeting at least 30 journalists, thirteen of whom **sustained** injuries. The **majority** of these incidents (16) occurred during demonstrations, often while reporters were clearly identified.

This includes the case of **photojournalist Anna Margueritat**, who was struck in the face following a police charge on 1 May 2026. The attack on freelancer **Enzo Rabouy**, occurring shortly before the mission to Paris, further highlighted the excessive use of force by law enforcement officers. Freelance Enzo Rabouy said:

> ***"On 30 May, whilst I was filming the celebrations following PSG's Champions League victory from a distance, a police officer struck me on the head from behind with his baton and left me unconscious on the ground. When I came round, there was blood everywhere: on my hand and on the ground. Other police officers administered first aid to me. This was not the first time a police officer had struck me on the head whilst I was wearing a press armband: it had already happened to me a year earlier, during the 8 March demonstration. I have also been subjected to several arbitrary arrests. In January 2025, I was filming a man hanging a Palestinian flag on the forecourt of Notre-Dame when the police intervened. They checked my identity, took my press card and demanded that I stop filming. One police officer even tried to get me to reveal my sources. A few days later, I was summoned on charges of 'incitement to hatred': I refused to disclose my sources, and the case was dropped. A few months later, on 1 July 2025, as I was returning from holiday, around fifteen plainclothes police officers handcuffed me as I got off the train at Montparnasse station. They suspected me of having filmed a protest at the Paris Air Show a few weeks earlier. They identified me by tracking my phone. They also used CCTV cameras in Le Bourget and on the RATP network to retrace my movements on the evening of the incident. I was taken into police custody and asked to provide my phone's passcode, but I refused. They kept me in a filthy cell for 24 hours: There were faeces on the walls and a foul stench. My colleague and I had to take our tops off because it was so hot."***

During the meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Interior, the delegation cited a persistent failure to implement the National plan for the maintenance of order (SNMO) on the ground. Adopted in 2020 as part of the draft Comprehensive Security Bill, and subsequently amended in 2021 following objections to its original wording, the SNMO remains the key piece of legislation governing interactions between journalists and law enforcement officers during demonstrations. The measures provided for by the SNMO apply to all gatherings – whether authorised, unauthorised or prohibited – in accordance with the provisions of the Act. Whether caused by a lack of political will, insufficient knowledge, or inadequate resources, its non effective application seriously undermines the safety of journalists and hinders their work in the field.

During the meeting, the case of Rabouy was acknowledged by interlocutors as concerning. However, the delegation was disturbed by several statements suggesting the responsibility for the attacks lay with journalists. While acknowledging that journalists are not legally required to identify themselves visibly, the Ministry of Interior said that it is in practice impossible for the police to recognise who is a journalist and

who is not, even claiming that more and more citizens suddenly claim to be journalists, when they are, in the eyes of the police, violating the public order. The delegation reiterated that journalists are under no obligation to visibly identify themselves, as many fear this may increase their risk of being targeted by private individuals.

In July 2026, the Administrative Court of Nantes (5th Chamber) ruled that the state was liable for the injuries sustained by two photojournalists from the newspapers *Libération* and *Reporterre*, following the explosion of a GLI F4-type instant tear gas grenade on two separate days during a demonstration at Notre-Dame-des-Landes in April 2018. In the ruling, the court reaffirmed that the journalists' lack of clear identification was a circumstance that was "nevertheless insufficient to exempt the State, even partially, from liability", given that it is undisputed, on the one hand, that the journalists were in the vicinity of protesters who were not seeking a confrontation with law enforcement and, on the other hand, that they immediately complied with orders to leave the scene.

Although media professionals must take proper safety measures, the delegation reminds law enforcement that they must act proportionately when maintaining public order and wear a visible RIO (police identification number) allowing their identification. The delegation reiterates that the protection of the journalists under the SNMO provisions must apply to all protest scenarios, whether or not they have been formally declared.

The mission members are also concerned about the practice, which has been brought to their attention, whereby no internal disciplinary action is taken in cases of police misconduct until a court has ruled that the law enforcement officer is guilty. Beyond the questionable legality of these reported practices, if proven to be true they would pose a significant risk to the safety of journalists. The Ministry of the Interior failed to provide clear explanations for how such cases are handled.

The delegation also notes that there have been very few convictions following incidents of police violence against journalists. For example, of the 21 complaints lodged by RSF since 2019 on this matter, only two cases have resulted in a conviction:

- The police officer responsible for the violence against journalist Kevin Figuier – who, whilst covering a "Yellow Vests" rally on 20 April 2019, was injured in the back and leg by a crowd-control hand grenade thrown by the police – was **sentenced** by the Toulouse Criminal Court on 21 February 2023 to a suspended fine of 2,000 euros and to pay 800 euros in damages to the journalist;
- The **sentencing** on 17 March of the CRS officer who committed acts of violence against the freelance photojournalist Adrien Lévy-Cariès – who was covering a "Yellow Vests" protest in Paris in December 2018 – to a 20 month suspended prison sentence.

Time constraints prevented a discussion with the Ministry of Interior regarding the downgrading of the National Plan on Urban Violence (SNVU), introduced in August 2025, from a formal national scheme to an operational guide (GOVU). Specifically, the plan fails to recognise the special status of the press or clarify their rights when covering protests and urban conflicts, and even expressly excluded the protection of journalists provided by the SNMO in its first version. An exclusion that was removed **following criticism**. This step backward has come at a cost: treating journalists as ordinary citizens without any recognised special status, and prompting unions of journalists (SNJ, SNJ-CGT, CFDT Journalistes) and organisations (Reporters Without Borders and the Human Rights League) to file an appeal with the Council of State. In a ruling on 7 July 2026, the Council of State dismissed these appeals, but solely on the grounds that the GOVU is not intended to infringe on journalists' rights or to extend the powers of the police in a context of "urban violence".

Journalist Anna Margueritat was injured by special troops during the large-scale Labour Day rally took place in Paris on 1 May 2026.
Credit: Firas Abdullah

The meeting with the Ministry of Interior was also an opportunity to flag discriminatory treatment of the press between those holding a professional press card (issued by the CCIJP), an international one (issued by the International Federation of Journalists), or an employer-issued assignment letter.

Under French law, it is not mandatory to hold a press card in order to practise the profession. Labour law provides for a presumption of an employment contract for journalists. Moreover, many media professionals, particularly freelancers, photographers and documentary filmmakers, carry out their work without a press card. Some of them are paid on an invoice basis, a practice which is **illegal** in France and may constitute social security contribution fraud.

While some journalists have access to internships or immersion programs within police departments, the numerous documented incidents highlight the urgent need for appropriate training for law enforcement officers. Such training must focus on respect for the rights of media professionals in order to prevent any violence or obstruction of their work. The strict application of the SNMO, whose provisions concerning journalists are clear and, in theory, protective, would be an essential prerequisite for proper journalistic coverage of demonstrations – whether they are authorised, unauthorised or banned, as specifically mentioned in the document.

The delegation also raised concerns with the Ministry of Interior regarding the prohibition on journalists interviewing exiled reporter **Mahammad Mirzali** during the trial of his attackers, who had attempted to assassinate him. Consequently, journalists accredited to cover the trial were forced to conduct interviews outside the secure court premises, in public places, thereby putting their own safety and that of Mr Mirzali at risk. Mr Mirzali had expressly asked the court for the trial to be covered by the media.

According to an exchange of the European Federation of Journalists with the President of the Rennes Judicial Court, the measure was taken in line with recommendations allegedly issued by the Ministry of Interior as part of exceptional measures for the high-profile trial. However, during the meeting with a representative from the Ministry of Interior, the delegation was told this measure was made following a recommendation from the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry of Justice committed to providing further clarification. Whilst the delegation is still unaware of the reason for the incident to date, discussions with the two ministries concerned have served to reiterate the importance of allowing accredited journalists to conduct interviews within the security perimeters defined by the police. Although the delegation recognises the complexity of maintaining security during sensitive trials, the enhanced security measures put in place must under no circumstances restrict freedom of information or jeopardise the safety of journalists.

LEGAL THREATS

Weak legislation on the protection of sources

Weak legislation on the protection of sources in France was one of the key concerns raised during the mission. The national and international ethical framework requires journalists to protect the confidential sources of their information by not disclosing their identities. The voluntary decision to reveal one's sources, in the absence of any penalty, and more generally to cooperate with the judicial process, appears to be a matter for the judgement of the journalist concerned. In parallel, the French legal framework offers relative protection for the confidentiality of journalistic sources against interference by public authorities, whilst granting journalists the right not to disclose their sources. Under no circumstances may a journalist be compelled to reveal their sources.

However, the 2010 Dati Law governing the protection of journalists' sources lacks concrete standards and contains vague language, such as the phrase "overriding public interest," which allows for the circumvention of source confidentiality but is not precisely defined. This law has led to repeated violations of press freedom over the past fifteen years. At least 27 journalists have been summoned or placed in police custody by France's domestic intelligence agency, the General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI), according to figures **compiled** by the French magazine *Telerama*. The public prosecutor's office is also continuing to prosecute *Disclose* journalist Ariane Lavrilleux. The **reopening** of the investigation into her case on 8 July 2026 by the Paris Court of Appeals has paved the way for a potential indictment of the investigative journalist and could also lead to the questioning of the other contributors to the "Egypt Papers" investigation, the report that led to Lavrilleux's detention and the police raid on her home three years ago. The court's decision has marked a troubling turning point for the protection of journalists' sources and the right to access to information in the public interest.

Another legal case targets journalist Philippe Miller – whom the delegation met – after a complaint for "data theft" was filed by a law firm that the journalist has reported on for its questionable practices. Miller and his source (former intern of the law firm) were **arrested** in a café in Paris on 12 December 2024. The journalist's work computer, mobile phone, and notebook were confiscated. To challenge the seizure of his professional equipment, Miller invoked the protection of his sources. However, the judge in charge of liberties and detention **upheld** the breach of source confidentiality, ruling that the mere existence of a criminal investigation constituted an "overriding public interest". If a criminal investigation is all it takes to overrule source protection, then source protection effectively no longer exists.

More than a year later, Miller's equipment remains confiscated. Although the Court of Cassation affirmed that source protection extends to all journalistic activities in public spaces, it ultimately **dismissed** his appeal and upheld the seizure of his equipment. The Court considered that the failure to rule within the five-day deadline and the failure to seek a less intrusive measure did not constitute an abuse of power. Miller is now considering an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights.

In a meeting with representatives from the Ministry of Justice, the delegation expressed deep concern regarding the regular practice of public prosecutors frequently requesting to lift source protection for journalists during criminal investigations. Acknowledging the constraints of a saturated parliamentary calendar, the delegation advocated for a circular as a crucial first step to curtail this concerning practice. Additionally, the delegation committed to providing the Ministry with detailed analysis on the discrepancies between French legislation and European standards regarding source protection, in particular Article 4 of the EMFA which was to be implemented no later than 8 August 2025. The Ministry, for its part, expressed openness to maintaining an ongoing and constructive dialogue on the issue.

A recent case in September involving French Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu raised further concerns for the mission delegation. Prime Minister Lecornu's office **reported**, in accordance with Article 40 of the French Code of Criminal Procedure, a leak to the Public Prosecutor's Office regarding an article published in the daily financial newspaper *Les Échos*. The article revealed a government proposal intended for the 2027 budget bill. In a statement, the Prime Minister's office noted that the facts might constitute a breach of trust or professional secrecy. It warned that those who engage in such behaviour expose the state and place themselves in a situation of disloyalty and illegality, which could result in criminal prosecution. While the Prime Minister's office insisted that the press itself was not the target of the complaint, the decision has reignited serious concerns about the lack of protection for journalists' sources under the guise of the "higher interests of the state and nation".

A working group, including *Disclose*, the National Union of Journalists (SNJ), Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the Free Press Fund (FPL), Sherpa, the Judicial Press Association (ADJ) and the journalists' branch of the French Democratic Federation of Labour (CFDT-Journalistes), argues that the inadequate legal framework in place must be strengthened and **issued five key recommendations** addressed to the Ministers of Justice and the Interior, which the mission delegation supports. The delegation also believes that Article 4 of the EMFA is crucial for protecting journalists' sources, and is calling for its effective implementation.

Testimony from Philippe Miller: "We have filed a case with the European Court of Human Rights to have France condemned"

> ***"In its ruling, the Court of Cassation lists the violations of the law on the protection of journalistic sources that my source and I were subjected to. It then concludes its decision by refusing to sanction them, on the grounds that the law itself provides no mechanism for sanctioning such violations. This decision cruelly exposes the structural inadequacy of the 2010 Dati Law and the urgency of reforming it. Far from being an impenetrable shield, the law amounts to an obstacle to the protection of sources. The absurdity of its legislative framework is striking: its scope of application is restricted to the journalist's home and office. I myself was arrested by around ten officers and searched in the street. While the Court of Cassation staged its own show of jurisprudential courage by nevertheless agreeing to apply this law, and by extending, through this ruling, the guarantee of source protection to searches carried out on public roads, the law remains no less ineffective for that. The decision is also misleading: my computer, my phone and my notes remain confiscated, and my journalistic investigation is still obstructed. A situation made all the more scandalous by the fact that the liberty and custody judge exceeded the legal five-day deadline to rule on the challenge. Since this ruling confirms once again that the Dati law fails to meet European standards, my lawyer and I have filed a case with the European Court of Human Rights to have France condemned."***

Abusive lawsuits and weak transposition of Anti-SLAPP Directive

Vexatious litigation has long been one of the major threats to press freedom in France. Wealthy individuals and companies can abuse defamation proceedings to impose heavy legal costs, consume journalists' time and deter reporting on matters of public interest. During the mission, stakeholders informed the delegation that defamation lawsuits are increasingly filed by politicians, especially on the local level. The mission flagged this issue with the Ministry of Justice and deplored the weak transposition of the EU anti-SLAPP legislation.

In May 2026, France transposed the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive through Decree No. 2026-337, introducing measures for the early dismissal of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation. While the French government initially considered a broader transposition of the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive, spending two years drafting legislation based on recommendations from the États généraux de l'information (EGI), it adopted a decree on 5 May 2026 without consulting civil society organisations, journalists' groups or other stakeholders.

The law, which was drafted behind closed doors by the Ministry of Justice, faced sharp criticism from media freedom and human rights groups. Although it extends certain protections to domestic cases and is not limited to cross-border lawsuits, it has been widely criticised as insufficient, inadequate, and incapable of effectively addressing the problem of SLAPPs. National media freedom and human rights groups have referred to the weak transposition of SLAPPs in France as a "missed opportunity". Most concerningly,

the decree applies only to civil proceedings and leaves out criminal defamation cases which, as the local stakeholders informed the mission, constitute a significant proportion of the defamation lawsuits faced by media organisations and journalists in France. As a result, a vast number of SLAPPs remain outside the scope of the safeguards introduced by the decree.

It should be noted that several key reforms that had been proposed during the initial drafting process were ultimately excluded from the decree, including stronger sanctions against SLAPP claimants. Arguably, such a limited transposition of the Directive reflects a lack of political will to take meaningful action against SLAPPs. Moving forward, France should amend the current anti-SLAPP legislation to ensure it fully addresses the problem of SLAPPs in the country in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

The law in France should apply to the full range of SLAPP cases, beyond civil or commercial cross-border cases, and should cover criminal lawsuits. Additionally, France should increase penalties to make SLAPPs genuinely dissuasive. This could include raising the maximum civil fines for abusive or delaying litigation, easing the issuance of such fines (the criteria set by case law are currently so stringent that civil fines are very rarely issued), and making it easier for people wrongly subjected to criminal proceedings to recover their lawyers' fees. Non-profit private legal entities - including associations and trade unions - should be allowed, with the target's consent, to support them in proceedings or provide relevant information to the court. In order to address the financial imbalance typical of SLAPPs, targets of all kinds of SLAPPS (including criminal proceedings such as defamation) should be able to have their legal costs covered from the outset by the claimant, following a judge's decision.

Testimony from Johan Weisz, co-founder of independent investigative media StreetPress: “The StreetPress editorial team receives around a dozen new complaints a year.”

> ***"As of mid-September 2026, StreetPress has 14 legal proceedings pending. The vast majority of these are SLAPP lawsuits brought either by representatives of the far right or by large corporations seeking seven-figure sums in damages. In practical terms, not a week goes by in our editorial office without some legal development: a summons (to appear in court) served by a bailiff, a formal notice, a court ruling, a right of response, or a preparatory meeting with our legal adviser ahead of a hearing or to respond to a formal notice. The StreetPress editorial team receives around a dozen new complaints a year. When the complainants are far-right elected representatives, they benefit from official immunity. The costs of the proceedings are covered by their local authority. This means they can engage the best law firms, or have no hesitation in appealing if they lose at first instance – as was the case in a case we won at first instance against the town of Beaucaire, in the south of France. SLAPP lawsuits are also a form of financial pressure designed to silence us. A company we investigated did not like the content of our articles. The result: multiple complaints, seeking a total of €1,500,000 in damages – more than our media outlet’s annual budget!"***

JOURNALISTS IN EXILE

France is one of the biggest host countries for journalists in exile in Europe. In 2024, the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs launched a large programme called ‘**Voix en Exile**’ to support journalists in exile’s safety and the continuation of their journalistic profession. This is a crucial initiative that sets an example for other European countries, as a **growing number** of journalists are seeking a safe haven in Europe against the backdrop of rising authoritarianism and growing conflict worldwide.

Mission partners met with journalists in exile from Tunisia, Afghanistan, Benin, Algeria, Guinea, Egypt, Yemen, Pakistan and Haiti, to hear from those voices and understand their needs. Some had been in France for over a decade, others had just arrived, many were in touch with each other, or helped newcomers to find their way in the French system. This immediately showed one of the strengths of the programme, which has successfully contributed to creating networks among journalists in exile and offers them spaces for journalistic content production.

More broadly, France has various government institutions and organisations in place that offer support to journalists in exile, ranging from housing to psychosocial support, to protection measures. However, they often operate in silos, resulting in exiled journalists seeking support are sent from one institution to another. The journalists in exile also indicated that they increasingly face online or offline transnational repression. They are threatened or attacked by embassies from their countries of origin, or their family members are intimidated by the government back home. Some of the journalists present had reported these forms of repression to the French authorities, which had in some cases resulted in protection measures, but not in diplomatic pressure on the perpetrator state. Some journalists felt their case was taken less seriously due to their migration background.

Many of the journalists indicated that they struggled with a lack of a steady income for various reasons: because their degree in journalism wasn't recognised by the French authorities, they lacked French language proficiency, or a lack of access to French news outlets, editors, and journalist networks, while also being disconnected from other exiled journalists from the same country of origin who relocated across Europe. These barriers hamper exiled journalists in continuing their journalistic reporting, both to French or international audiences and to audiences in their country of origin.

> ***"The most important is that we can continue our profession, because that's the reason why we risked our lives and why we left our home countries in the first place" - Egyptian exiled journalist Sayed Sobhy.***

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to the government authorities

MEDIA PLURALISM AND EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE

- Strengthen the financial sustainability of independent nationwide and local media for example by including a dedicated budget line for local and independent media in the state budget, or by supporting cooperative or non-profit ownership models for outlets;
- Publicly condemn any attacks targeting media or media professionals, including attempts at political interference, intimidation, or incitement to hatred

SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

- Conduct thorough investigations into acts of violence and intimidation against media professionals, including online, and to prosecute the perpetrators in accordance with relevant legislation;
- Make physical attacks on media professionals in the context of demonstrations an aggravating circumstance, both for demonstrators and police officers;
- The Ministry of Interior must address the persistent lack of implementation of the National plan for the maintenance of order (SNMO) by law enforcement authorities;
- State officials must publicly condemn any attack on the press perpetrated by their peers and law enforcement officers in breach of the SNMO;
- The Ministry of Justice and Interior must clarify the legal justification for limiting the accreditation of journalists covering the Mirzali high profile trial, which led to serious restrictions on their safety and media freedom. For future court proceedings, it should ensure adequate conditions within the defined security perimeters, for accredited journalists to cover such trials, including so-called 'exceptional' trials.

PROTECTION OF SOURCES

- Strengthen the protection of the confidentiality of sources when the aim is to provide legitimate information to the public by attributing equivalent legal protection to journalists as the professional secrecy of lawyers;
- Provide adequate and timely legal recourse to journalists to challenge the lifting of source confidentiality, including adequate legal remedy and sanctions in case of breach of source confidentiality.

ABUSIVE LAWSUITS AND SLAPPS

- Strengthen financial penalties for abusive litigation by easing the criteria for issuing civil fines for abusive or delaying proceedings as well as increasing their maximum amount to ensure they have a genuinely dissuasive effect;
- Enable civil society support for SLAPP targets by allowing non-profit legal entities to intervene in proceedings with the target's consent or provide relevant information to the court;
- Introduce a reversal of the burden of proof to better protect SLAPP targets and address the imbalance inherent in abusive litigation;
- The Ministry of Justice must ensure that judges receive sufficient and adequate training regarding SLAPP lawsuits.

JOURNALISTS IN EXILE

- Invest in network building between French journalists and media outlets and exiled journalists and continue to fund trainings, including French language courses;
- Improve collaboration and information exchange between institutions that offer support to journalists in exile, in order to address silos and create a clear focal point for exiled journalists to turn to;
- Take measures to address transnational repression against journalists residing in France, including enhanced provision of safety equipment, awareness-raising and collaboration across government authorities on this phenomenon, the establishment of a national hotline for transnational repression that can refer journalists to relevant support mechanisms, diplomatic action towards perpetrator states and criminal prosecution of threats and attacks.

Recommendations to the Parliament

MEDIA PLURALISM AND EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE

- Implement the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) and its Article 22, which requires EU Member States, including France, to assess the impact of mergers on media pluralism and editorial independence using explicit and objective criteria;
- Prioritise the adoption of a strong anti-monopoly law on media concentration and a law protecting editorial independence, building on the work begun by the bills tabled by Sophie Taillé-Polian;
- Ensure that the implementation of the EMFA Article 6 includes the creation and maintenance of a public database, overseen by a public body, enabling an accurate assessment of the beneficial ownership of the media;
- Strengthen and more clearly define Arcom's mandate in merger review. The draft media law should specify the legal weight of Arcom's opinions so they genuinely inform the final decision-making process conducted by the Autorité de la Concurrence;
- Implement the EMFA and its Article 5 in order to guarantee the independence of public service media providers, in particular, to ensure adequate, stable and transparent funding for public service media; and also a more transparent, independent and democratically based process for appointing the heads of public service media;
- Refrain from making any unfounded and defamatory (online) insinuations towards journalists and media outlets. Legitimate concerns must be addressed through constructive dialogue based on evidence. Commissions of parliamentary inquiries should not be misused to promote privatisation or undermine the vital role of public service broadcasting.

PROTECTION OF SOURCES

- Implement EMFA Article 4, which protects journalists from being forced to disclose their sources and from unlawful surveillance;
- Amend law no. 2010-1 on the Protection of Journalistic Sources with stricter and more clearly defined limitations to the conditions on the lifting of source confidentiality, including independent judicial review. The broad wording of the current legal condition of "overriding public interest" allows for the disproportionate application of this measure, resulting in press freedom violations;
- Extend the scope of source confidentiality to include media collaborators, filmmakers, and authors of investigative books or documentaries;
- Improve the legal protection of whistleblowers by facilitating procedures and extending the scope of Law No. 2022-401 of 21 March 2022, which aims to improve their protection (the Waserman Act).

ABUSIVE LAWSUITS AND SLAPPS

- Amend the current anti-SLAPP legislation to ensure that it aligns with the Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)2 on combating the use of strategic prosecutions against public participation (SLAPPs)
- Ensure meaningful consultation of the expert civil society organisations for any future reforms of the anti-SLAPP legislation;
- Ensure the anti-SLAPP legislation applies to the full range of SLAPP cases, including criminal defamation proceedings.

Recommendations to law enforcement authorities

SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

- Enable media professionals to carry out their reporting freely and safely, and effectively comply with the SNMO, including wearing their RIO identification number and protect media professionals on the ground;
- Establish training programs for law enforcement authorities to ensure they have an adequate understanding and knowledge of press freedom and the rights of journalists;
- Ensure transparency and promptness in the handling of internal investigations and the imposition of disciplinary sanctions in cases of police misconduct, including proven instances of police violence against journalists carrying out their journalistic duties, regardless of their visible identification;

Recommendations to Arcom

- Expedite the pending complaints, and improve the timeliness and transparency of its complaints process, including by setting clear deadlines for reviewing and ruling on complaints;
- Include professional organisations in Arcom's governing bodies.

Recommendations to media houses and media professionals

POLITICAL TARGETING AND INCREASED PRESSURE ON EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE

- Resist and denounce any attempt at political interference or discriminatory treatment aimed at censoring, intimidating or influencing the editorial line of a journalist or media organisation, and to avoid contributing to the reinforcement of such practices or encouraging self-censorship;
- Introduce the requirement of a vote of confidence by the editorial team to approve any change in management;
- Establish a clear protocol to support their journalists who are targets of coordinated online harassment as a result of political pressure;
- Develop and implement safeguards to prevent shareholders from interfering with editorial policy;
- Create opportunities for discussion within the editorial team on these issues and train journalists to recognise such pressures;
- Initiate the necessary serious and good-faith negotiations to establish an effective social dialogue between publishers and journalists, enabling improvements to journalists' working conditions through their collective agreement.

SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

- Report any incident that undermines the right to freedom of the press or the physical safety of a journalist or their sources to the relevant authorities;
- Establish comprehensive support protocols for journalists, particularly freelancers and investigative journalists, including accessible legal representation, coverage of legal costs and the provision of psychological support resources. Media organisations are encouraged to collaborate with professional journalists' unions and relevant associations to establish appropriate support protocols;
- Newsrooms must equip reporters, photographers and freelancers with safety equipment where necessary, and carry out thorough risk assessments prior to covering high-risk environments;
- Journalists and media organisations are encouraged to implement robust cybersecurity protocols and cyber safety training to protect sensitive data. Online threats must not be downplayed and must be treated as a risk to the safety and well-being of journalists, as well as to the profession itself;
- Contact journalists' trade unions or organisations specialising in press freedom and freedom of information such as Reporters Without Borders (RSF) in the event of an infringement of press freedom or a security risk;
- Report and document any violations of press freedom to relevant organisations such as the **French Observatory on Breaches of Press Freedom** (OFALP) or the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) consortium, which enables incidents to be recorded on the Mapping Media Freedom (**MapmF**) and the **Council of Europe to promote the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists**, and to provide public and practical support.

MEDIA FREEDOM
RAPID RESPONSE