

MJRC

**MEDIA & JOURNALISM
RESEARCH CENTER**

ANNUAL REPORT

2023

**Media and Journalism
Research Center**

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A Word From the Director

The year 2023 was a period of significant growth and transformation for our center, both in terms of our operational capabilities and our intellectual output.

First and foremost, 2023 marked the conclusion of our center's transition from a research institution affiliated with Central European University (CEU) to an autonomous think tank with its self-funding system while maintaining its complete research autonomy. The center has a small team and maintains low overhead costs by leveraging all its resources to fund cutting-edge research. This outcome would not have been possible without the generous support of several organizations, particularly those engaged in philanthropic and research activities. You will find them all in this report and on the center's webpage.

The independence of our research is probably our greatest source of pride, both on an individual level and as a community of experts. Thanks to the support of organizations, we are able to pursue research in areas of our choosing without pressure or threat of reprisal.

This distinctive think tank model also enables us to uphold the academic rigor that ensures our studies are referenced, used by regulators and investors, and frequently referenced in media articles, policy debates and academic exchanges.

Additionally, this model enables us to establish and continually revitalize extensive global collaboration initiatives encompassing hundreds of countries across all continents.

In 2024, our mission will continue to be driven by these three key goals: financial independence, academic excellence, and large collaboration networks.

The upcoming year will mark the conclusion of our ongoing strategy, which is built on three pillars: researching journalism, funding journalism, and doing journalism. In 2024, we will initiate a consultation process with experts within and outside our community to develop the next three-year strategy (2025-2027). Concurrently, we will reinforce our ongoing efforts to achieve the strategic goals we have set for ourselves.

In 2024, we intend to expand our flagship projects to include countries where there is a pressing need for media research. We aim to initiate collaborations in countries with limited media research activity in the MENA region and Sub-Saharan Africa, while maintaining our expansion in Latin America. Additionally, a series of studies examining trends in media and journalism in Europe are scheduled for completion.

Secondly, we have plans to develop new partnerships, particularly with the private sector. We will build on our existing expertise and experience in engaging with investors interested in supporting and financing independent journalism.

Finally, in order to bring new energy to the field, we intend to significantly expand our engagement with younger generations through the MJRC Young Media Researchers Program. We are currently in discussions with our academic partners regarding the development of a series of courses for students interested in learning more about the challenges faced by independent media worldwide.

The independent journalism sector is facing significant challenges and threats on a global scale, as governments intensify their efforts to exert control over the media landscape. The phenomenon of media capture is spreading rapidly to an increasing number of countries. The aforementioned circumstances paint a rather dismal picture.

However, there are also indications of positive growth on the horizon. New generations of journalists are emerging, seeking and inventing new forms of doing journalism independently. New forms of resistance are emerging in many countries around the world. While recognizing that the fight against authoritarianism and government control in the media is challenging, we believe it is crucial to join forces and support those who engage in this difficult fight to create new spaces for independent journalism to flourish.

It is for these people we plan to continue working in 2024 as we have done so far.

Marius Dragomir

Our Research

Media Influence Matrix

The Media Influence Matrix is an extensive and dynamic project that examines the impact of shifts in policy, funding, and technology on media and journalism in the specific context of different countries worldwide. The project was initiated by MJRC Director Marius Dragomir in 2017 and is subject to continuous updates and expansion by local experts commissioned by our Centre. Since its inception, we have published 42 reports across 22 countries. In 2023, we expanded our work in Latin America, collaborating with local journalists and academics to produce studies on various aspects of media in Colombia, Argentina, and Mexico. In this regard, we have established robust and long-term collaborations with esteemed institutions such as the Latin American Observatory of Regulation, Media and Convergence (OBSERVACOM), the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC), the Autonomous Metropolitan University Cuajimalpa in Mexico, and the Research Center for Cultural Industries, Communication Policies and Public Space (ICEP) in Argentina. In partnership with some of the aforementioned entities, the Media and Journalism Research Center launched a study in February 2023 that highlighted the disparities between large national media groups and smaller outlets operating in Argentina.

Subsequently, further reports were published on Colombia's media regulations and the role of key decision-makers, which revealed a more diverse but financially struggling media landscape in the country. A new study, released in August, examined the relationship between big tech and journalism, revealing that access to and use of ICT in Colombia has progressively improved, though it remains far from optimal.

In Mexico, following thorough research, our experts reached eye-opening conclusions, as detailed in the report published last August. One of the outcomes disclosed by our team in Mexico is that the tension between technology and news directly impacts the financing of media companies focused on journalism.

State Media Monitor

State Media Monitor is another pioneering Media and Journalism Research Center project. It provides a comprehensive analysis of state and public media outlets globally, categorizing them according to three key factors that influence their autonomy: funding, ownership/governance, and editorial autonomy.

The State Media Monitor, the world's largest state media database, is updated on a regular basis by a consortium of independent experts. The monitor is frequently referenced by media outlets, both locally and internationally, and is a key resource for media regulators and tech companies in the development of new policies and labelling practices for state media on their platforms.

The 2023 comparative overview covered a total of 157 countries, with 592 state-administered media entities mapped. These entities collectively own nearly 6,200 media assets, including television and radio channels, print titles, news agencies, and news portals (the websites associated with their traditional media operations were not included in this figure).

The situation of state and public media worldwide remains a cause for concern. The 2023 study found that only 99 outlets held editorial independence, representing a decrease of three outlets compared to the previous year. Of those, only 19 could be classified as independent public service media, which is considered the gold standard for media independence in all aspects.

Global Media Finances Map

The Media and Journalism Research Center has launched the pilot country database in its Global Media Finances Map, building on data about media companies all over the world collected over more than 20 years through projects run in partnerships with more than 200 institutions. The project is based on a methodology that tracks ownership changes in media companies worldwide, as well as data about their financial performance and their links with people, institutions and companies, including politicians, political parties, governments, religious movements, academic institutions, NGOs and corporations in other industries.

The project's objective is to provide meaningful and comprehensive data about media outlets and their finances, which can be used for both informative purposes and complex regulatory and financial analyses. The project has been developed in collaboration with academic institutions and local trade and statistical offices.

Media Sustainability

The launch of a new report for the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), written by Marius Dragomir along with a group of MJRC experts in mid-March 2023, marked the launch of our Media Sustainability Research Series. The reports in this series focus on topics ranging from investigations identifying good practices for businesses to support independent media, documenting models of advertising aimed at supporting media outlets, to mapping projects that fund media and journalism.

The report for CIMA consisted of two phases: one global mapping of good practices of engagement between private businesses and independent journalism, followed by in-depth country-focused research that analyzed three countries in Eastern Europe: Czechia, Romania and Serbia.

The report highlighted that the media sectors in these three countries have much to share, including a similar trajectory of reform following the fall of communism in the region and also the challenges media capture has wrought on media independence and freedom in the area over the past decade.

Another common trait revealed by the research is that the private sector has not been a prominent actor in protecting information integrity and supporting independent media in CEE. This situation must change in order to build a healthy media ecosystem that is an indispensable condition for ethical businesses to thrive, concluded the study.

Decoding the Power Play

At the end of 2023, Media and Journalism Research Center launched Decoding the Power Play: Media and Elections in 2024 project, whose aim is to uncover the connections between media corporations and political entities, whether they are politicians or political groups.

The project's main goal is **not** to forecast election outcomes or monitor disinformation patterns. Rather, it seeks to shed light on the emerging dominant political structures and the media entities that bolster and magnify their messages. This would improve our understanding of the information and media ecosystem.

The results of this project are planned to be collected in a series of studies scheduled to be published in November 2025.

Mapping EU Spending on Media Projects

The EU has been investing billions of euros into media-related projects through several funds and programs, with the goal of improving the quality of journalism and the resilience of the media sector. But what is the impact of these funds on the quality of journalism we get today? How many of its research projects have led to groundbreaking findings that changed the media ecosystem in Europe? What kind of projects, topics and organizations has the EU funded?

In an effort to understand the impact of EU funding on the media and journalism across Europe, MJRC launched in 2023 an initiative that aims to build a data-driven map of EU-financed media-related projects that is meant to serve as a basis for analysis of various aspects of the EU funding in the media.

Support for Media Freedom in Lebanon

MJRC is part of a consortium that includes Maharat Foundation and Legal Agenda, two NGOs based in Lebanon, that won in Q1 2023 a grant from the European Union to run the project “Support to Media Reform in Lebanon to Enhance Freedom of Expression”.

The goal of the project is to enable local actors, including MPs, relevant ministries, judges, lawyers, scholars and media makers to create policy openings, building on European standards while making sure only those fitting the context apply.

MJRC hired a team of experts who wrote six studies on EU standards and good practices that provide inspiration for media policy in Lebanon throughout 2023. They were published in 2023, with some of them scheduled to be released in 2024.

Countries in Focus

The MJRC's research strategy is founded on two key principles: **a) comparative analysis** and **b) focus on countries with limited media research**. In addition, the geographical scope of our research is contingent upon the availability of researchers and resources to extend our research activities to countries, particularly in the Global South.

In 2023, the center has been expanding its reach to Latin America, with studies issued in Argentina, Colombia and Mexico, and preparations for further work in Brazil and Chile. Concurrently, we have been developing partnerships in other regions, with a particular focus on the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) and Sub-Saharan Africa.

As part of these efforts, we anticipate the publication of a series of research studies in countries in these regions in 2024.

MJRC Fellowship

The MJRC fellowship program is centered around a research project that fellows will choose and develop in cooperation with and with the support of the MJRC. We offer the affiliation of MJRC Fellow, intellectual and programmatic guidance during the research project as well as support in publication of papers and reports through our own publications series as well as those run by our academic partners. The center has a cooperation agreement with the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC) in Spain.

In January 2023, Fatima el Issawi joined our Fellowship Program. Fatima el Issawi is a Reader in Journalism Studies at the University of Essex and Associate Professor in Journalism (in residence) at Northwestern University in Qatar. She led several research projects on the interplay between media and political change in the region.

Dr. Andrei Richter, a Research Professor at Comenius University in Bratislava and Adjunct Professor at Webster University in Vienna, joined our Fellowship program in February 2023. He previously served as Director and Senior Adviser at the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media from 2011 to 2022.

Dr. Courtney Radsch, a fellow at UCLA's Institute for Technology, Law & Policy, also joined our Fellowship program in February 2023. A strategic advisor and global thought leader on the intersection of technology, media, and human rights, Dr. Radsch has extensive experience as a journalist, scholar, and press freedom advocate.

In the same month, Simone Benazzo became part of our Fellowship program. His research at MJRC explores the role of critical journalism in holding autocratic rulers accountable, even under hostile conditions. His focus is on Central and Southeastern Europe, specifically Poland, Hungary, Serbia, and Turkey.

Anastasiia Vorozhtsova, an MA graduate in international relations from CEU with academic and professional experience in Russia, the USA, and Austria, also joined our Fellowship program in 2023. A freelancer for The New York Times podcast The Daily, Anastasiia monitors news coverage of Russia and the war in Ukraine, conducts research and interviews, translates, and facilitates connections between sources and New York Times journalists.

In August, we also welcomed Yijing Chen, a PhD candidate at the Department of Network and Data Science at the Central European University (CEU). Her research focuses on online political communication, social media, and social networks.

Also joining in August, Cerasel Cuteanu is a PhD candidate in Marketing at Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj, Romania. His research delves into the complex issue of fake news, a crucial topic in today's information age.

MJRC Young Researchers Program

The MJRC Young Media Researchers Program is a training and mentorship initiative aimed at discovering and promoting young talents with an interest in media research. Launched in early 2023, the program seeks to equip the participants with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the media landscape and contribute meaningfully to it.

The program is both a platform for learning and an avenue for young enthusiasts to engage with experts in the field, gain valuable insights, and build a robust network that could open doors to numerous opportunities. The program is designed to empower the participants, helping them carve out a successful career path in media research.

MJRC Funding Program

The Media and Journalism Research Center embarked on a new activity: funding of independent media outlets and journalistic projects in media environments with a high level of capture.

The center designed a research project anchored in a sub-granting program, whereby philanthropic organizations contribute financing to a fund managed by the MJRC that awards the finances in the form of grants to independent media organizations vulnerable to capture. The aim of our funding program is to support the media outlets in achieving financial sustainability or, at the very least, strengthening their resilience to better withstand hostile attacks by the government or businesses close to authorities.

Philanthropic organizations work with the MJRC primarily because of its extensive knowledge of the media sector in countries with high levels of media capture. In designing the funding strategy for this program, the center is using its database of in-depth knowledge about media outlets that has been built through its networks of researchers over the past 25 years.

Our center continues its efforts to fund independent media outlets where they need such support most. **Funding, all of it from philanthropies, of over US\$ 1.1m has been so far channeled by the center media outlets in countries where the space for independent journalism has shrunk**, a result of the pressures from government and associated businesses on media companies.

MJRC Community of Experts

The Media and Journalism Research Centre is a legally constituted entity, incorporated in accordance with Estonian legislation. The center has an academic agreement with the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC) in Spain. The center's regular operations are managed by a small team comprising the MJRC Director and colleagues responsible for communications, publications, IT, and administration.

Furthermore, the MJRC plays host to a global community of over 50 experts from across the globe. As our research output increases rapidly, we anticipate that the number of experts engaged in MJRC projects will reach 120 by the end of 2024.

MJRC as a Reference

Throughout 2023, the work of our center has been featured in various publications, reports, and newspaper articles. Below is a selection of media mentions. For all the citations of our work, see [Citation Station](#) on our website.

- On 16 September 2022, the European Commission introduced the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) to protect media pluralism and independence. The International Press Institute (IPI) supported the Act, emphasizing media ownership transparency and the misuse of state power. IPI also called for civil society and academic involvement in media monitoring, highlighting the Media and Journalism Research Center as a key contributor.
- In April 2023, Twitter, led by Elon Musk, labeled NPR as “state-affiliated media,” alongside outlets like Russia Today. MJRC Director Marius Dragomir criticized the decision in Newsweek, calling it misleading since NPR operates without state control.
- At the #MFRR Summit 2023, MJRC Director Marius Dragomir discussed how the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) can protect independent media, highlighting its potential, challenges, and implementation. The event was organized by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF).
- In an op-ed for Euronews, MJRC Director Marius Dragomir noted that Europe’s media issues arise from a “disproportionately high concentration of wealth” due to government-business collusion. He called for breaking these ties by limiting access to public funds and implementing new ownership rules for media organizations.
- In 2021, the Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF) launched Pluralis, an impact investment mechanism for independent media in Europe. With input from the MJRC, Pluralis created an Impact Dashboard to assess sustainability, plurality, and information accessibility. MJRC also helped develop a Media Plurality Matrix to evaluate whether Pluralis’ investments shift power dynamics in media markets and analyzed audience reach to understand its societal impact.

- As the Digital Services Act comes into effect, Euractiv investigated the impact the Act might have on national regulatory bodies, questioning whether they'll be able to maintain their independence or have the resources to oversee DSA compliance. The article quoted Media and Journalism Research Center experts who highlighted the challenges faced in the Central and Eastern European region.
- The [Institute for Information Law \(IVIIR\)](#) at the [University of Amsterdam](#) hosted a conference titled "Rethinking Media Law and Policy for Europe" on October 6th, 2023. The event was attended by a number of experts who have worked with our center including Marius Dragomir, Krisztina Rozgonyi, Zsuzsa Detrekoi and Andrei Richter. The event aimed to analyze the evolving media landscape characterized by the dominance of digital platforms and politicization and how this presents intricate challenges for media law and policy.
- MJRC was cited in International Business Times about the Chinese propaganda efforts in India. MJRC's Director emphasized that our current understanding of Chinese propaganda is still only the tip of the iceberg. Each new research project uncovers more and more projects and funds dedicated to shaping global narratives.

MJRC Outreach

Our social media presence includes [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), [X](#), [Instagram](#) and [Threads](#). In 2023, we gained approximately 3,000 followers on LinkedIn, bringing our total to **4,300** since the center's launch. On Facebook, we have **1,600** followers; on Twitter, **1,357**; and on Instagram, **500**.

We also launched a weekly newsletter on LinkedIn, which attracted around **1,700** new followers in 2023, increasing to **2,413** by 2024.

MJRC Finances

The Media and Journalism Research Center is an independent, self-financed think tank, with grants and commercial revenues generated by the organization serving as its primary sources of funding.

In 2023, our total budget was nearly €600,000. Approximately 75% of the budget is generated through the implementation of projects financed by philanthropic organizations, non-governmental organizations and private foundations. In 2023, we engaged with or received support from 31 organizations, including Open Society Foundations (OSF), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the European Union, the Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF), the Internews Network, Thomson Foundation and the Prague Civil Society Center. In 2023, we generated a quarter of our funds through commercially generated revenues through consultancies carried out by our experts.

It is the policy of MJRC **not to accept funding from governments**, as we believe this may affect the integrity of our research. When it comes to European Union, our policy is to limit EU funding to an absolute minimum.

All surplus funds are held in the MJRC Research Fund, which is used to finance original research projects initiated and carried out by the MJRC.



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