

Press Release: 4 June 2015

EC alters conclusion of investigative journalism study

The European Commission has published the results of a study into investigative journalism in the EU with different conclusions from those reached by the study's authors.

The study, ordered by the European Commission in 2013, set out to explore the feasibility of giving financial support to cross-border investigative journalism within the EU. It was a response to a vote by the European Parliament to fund both a study and a pilot scheme. Some MEPs believed that closer scrutiny from journalists would make the institutions of the European Union work better. They wanted the EC to give grants to worthy, investigative projects.

The study was carried out by a group of respected journalists and lawyers, supported by a headquarters research team, and submitted at the end of 2013 after several cross-table progress meetings with EC officials.

It took ten months for the EC to accept the study. Its chief authors, the expert group of journalists and lawyers, were surprised to find that their conclusion that there *is* a case for selectively subsidising eligible investigative projects had been altered without further reference to them.

The published version cites "legal and financial issues" and argues that "administration costs" would make the scheme unviable, a conclusion with which the expert team who carried out the study disagree.

A budget line of €1.5 million set aside for a trial of the recommended scheme has disappeared from the EC's approved budget.

Now MEPs want to know why the EC altered the recommendations and are reported to be preparing a case of maladministration to submit to the EC ombudsman.

The arrest of senior executives at the governing body of world football has highlighted the important role played by investigative journalists in combating corruption at international bodies. The *Times* of London noted that "British journalists at the *Sunday Times* and the *BBC* have led the way in exposing corruption and bribery among senior Fifa officials in the face of inaction from world football and European prosecutors". The *BBC* also played a role in exposing corruption at the International Olympic Committee.

Background

- 1) The Feasibility Study was to “determine whether there is a need for EU financial support for cross-border investigative journalism and to define possible models of funding that would satisfy both the requirement of independence of investigative journalists as well as all legal obligations of the Commission”.
- 2) It was commissioned by the Directorate-General for Communication from Media Consulting Group (France) and Europe Ltd (Hungary) and funded from the Preparatory Action budget (Cross-border journalism, Budget line 160206). A previous study in 2010 was unsuccessful. This time the EC imposed strict methodological and operative conditions which included the appointment of an expert team of investigative journalists and media lawyers.
- 3) The expert team reviewed available literature and previous studies, including the European Parliament’s report on *Deterrence of fraud with EU funds through investigative journalism in EU-27* (2012) and the *Feasibility Study for Erasmus for Journalists* (2011), and surveyed the state of investigative journalism in all 28 member countries and existing funding and reward schemes. The Consultant sought the views on the feasibility of EU support for cross-border journalism of more than 200 potential stakeholders and beneficiaries – reporters, editors, association and foundation representatives - through phone and personal interviews. Five status meeting were held in Brussels between the Consultant and Expert Group and EC representatives. Minutes of these meeting recorded that participants reached conclusions on all issues and that work was progressing.
- 4) While the submitted version (Dec 2013) of the study supports the setting up of an EU funding scheme for cross-border investigative journalism and declares the proposed scheme to be legally and financially feasible, the published version (Oct 2014) concludes that “the Study could not identify a clear legal justification on which a EU support scheme would be based.” A detailed analysis of differences between the two versions is here attached. Several chapters and all annexes supporting the original conclusions are missing from the published version.
- 5) Detailed analysis of the results are presented in Annexes to the Study which have not been published.
- 6) For further information please refer to: <http://english.atlatszo.hu/2014/11/12/parliament-proposed-grant-scheme-for-investigative-journalism-lost-in-the-maze-of-commission-administration/>