



January 2021

Journalists in schools: our 2021 resolution to empower critical minds

An Open Letter to European Union institutions and member states by journalists advancing critical media literacy in Europe's classrooms

Last month, the European Commission published landmark plans to secure the democratic foundations of our European Union, pledging urgent action to tackle the corrosive effect of disinformation at this critical juncture, and to secure diverse and independent voices in the media.

They proposed simultaneously to put checks on powerful internet platforms, address polarising effects of targeted advertising based on citizens' behaviour online, reduce financial incentives to propagate online disinformation and enable the public to resist polarisation.

A vital part of this plan is to empower citizens to make informed decisions as a fundamental part of securing the democratic process, and journalists must play a central role in this. The EU authority pledged ["to support the involvement of journalists in media literacy activities, in particular through 'back-to-school' initiatives"](#) enabling them to discuss their work and the role of the media with schools."

This timely recognition of our approach is terrific news for those of us who have been working in schools for years. Every time we enter a classroom – whether in person or virtually during the pandemic – we see our presence igniting the critical minds of children and teachers. Navigating the digital news universe alone in encrypted and video-based social media platforms such as WhatsApp and YouTube, children tell us daily they want the tools to sort facts from fakes. And while teachers tell us they feel under-resourced to handle this tricky subject, many of us have seen them embrace media literacy teaching after exposure to our approach.

We are media experts and journalists from print, online and broadcast media in three countries who have been visiting schools and speaking with children and teachers as news literacy volunteers – many of us for years. We have learned first-hand that the work of empowering young people to resist online manipulation and understand journalism is not only vitally important: it is also enriching to all of us who have had this experience.

We are eager to continue our work. We will continue to do so in a way that tells children the value of checking their sources as they build their world view, never prescribing what they should think. We encourage independent journalists across Europe to join our efforts.

But we also need you, the European Union institutions, to make good on your promises. And we need national governments to back the EU in the face of strong opposition and influence-buying from vested interests. Together you must act fast to take on the outrage industry and foster public resilience. European governments should make digital media literacy a permanent part of the school curriculum and of all teacher training.

Journalists have an immediate role in advancing media literacy as the world grapples with the transformation to the digital information universe. Eventually, every teacher – regardless of the subject they teach – must be able to integrate this new online literacy into their daily classroom work. Until then we are eager to accompany them. We need you to do your part.

Signed (with several comments from individual signatories):

1. Stephan Beuting, freelance journalist, Deutschlandfunk/WDR, Bonn
Media literacy is the key factor in social sustainability to face the problems of the 21st century. Let's start now.
2. Veronique Brüggemann, journalist, Hamburg
Media literacy is crucial for the survival of our democracies.
3. Konrad Buchwald, journalist, NDR Regionalstudio Neubrandenburg, Greifswald
4. Valentin Dauchot, journalist, La Libre Belgique, Brussels
5. Alix Dehin, independent journalist & part-time journalist for Le Ligueur, Brussels
6. Laurence D'hondt, journalist, Paris
7. Christian Diabl, journalist, Stadtrundschau, Linz
8. Valentina Dirmaier, freelance journalist, Vienna
It's so simple: showing kids the tools to unmask propaganda and distorted facts. Supporting teachers with easygoing methods is so joyful. As journalists we tend to be far from youngsters. Their worries are removed from our world. Pupils keep us up to date, give us a perspective on how media use is changing. The work with classrooms lets me scrutinise and value my work even more.
9. Ariane Dörendahl, journalist, Vienna
10. Marika Dresselhaus, freelance author, Cologne
As a journalist I've long been wary of bias in Germany's quality media. Online and social media have taken this a dangerous step further, and opinions are often based on mood and emotion rather than on facts. The pupils and teachers I meet during my classroom visits say we journalists, as actors within the media system, are best placed to facilitate media literacy for an enlightened society.
11. Annick Eimer, freelance journalist, Hamburg
12. Christian Erll, journalist, detektor.fm, Leipzig
Kids want to know how to get reliable information. During my school days I wanted to know, too, and I wish we had had more of what we're doing in schools now.
13. Jérôme Fétu, journalist, Belga, Brussels
14. Angela Fischer, journalist, MDR, Leipzig
15. Vera Gasber, journalist, ARD Studio Wien/Südosteuropa, Vienna
16. Sabrina Glas, journalist, Salzburger Nachrichten, Salzburg
17. Marine Guiet, journalist, Bx1 and RTBF, Brussels
18. Winnie Heescher, journalist, ZDF Hauptstadtstudio, Berlin
19. Anna Heidelberg-Stein, freelance journalist, i.e. ZEIT Online, Lüneburg
20. Ann-Kathrin Horn, journalist, Deutschlandfunk Nova, WDR, Cologne
Fact-checking, objective journalism and evaluation of sources are crucial to democracy. When all our information can come from anyone and anywhere - how can we know what's true or false? We can - if we strengthen media literacy. Let's not waste time! Let's act!
21. Joana Hostein, journalist, Radio France, Brussels
22. Michael Hyngar, ARD, Tagesschau, Hamburg
In the past, tall tales often spread by word of mouth. Nowadays, a few clicks and the right distribution list are all it takes to spread lies, prejudices and half-truths. The mood generated in this way can trigger major conflicts or influence elections. That's why we need to raise

awareness among the younger generation and give them the tools to quickly debunk all fairy tales and distinguish professionally researched news and facts from unverified opinions and fake news on social networks.

23. Julia Jaroschweski, journalist, Buzzig Cities Lab, Berlin/Rio
24. Lutz Kinkel, Dr., Journalist, Managing Director, ECPMF, Leipzig
25. Esther Körfggen, journalist, Deutschlandfunk Nova, Cologne
26. Nicola Kuhrt, journalist, Hamburg
27. Gunthild Kupitz, journalist and chief editor, Hamburg
28. Julia Kuttner, freelance journalist, tagesschau.de, Hamburg
29. Nicolai Kwasniewski, journalist, DER SPIEGEL, Hamburg
30. Romuald La Morté, journalist, LN24, Brussels
31. Patricia Labar, journalist, Le Soir, Namur
32. Maike Lahmann, journalist, NDR online, Hamburg
33. Philippe Laloux, journalist, Le Soir, Brussels
34. Olivier le Bussy, journalist, La Libre Belgique, Brussels
35. Anne Lebessi, journalist, La Libre Belgique, Brussels
36. Susanne Lembke, journalist, MDR Aktuell, Leipzig
37. Silke Liebig-Braunholz, journalist, Deutscher Fachverlag GmbH - dfv Mediengruppe, Hamburg
38. Anastasia Lopez, news journalist, Linz
39. Grégoire Lory, journalist, Euronews Brussels, Brussels
40. Antonin Marsac, journalist, Brussels
The damage that disinformation is doing shows it's essential to strengthen media education at school. To train critical minds on different sources of information. This is crucial especially when we note that fake news is more easily shared and more viral. Its influence is too often neglected, and the impact on democracies is palpable.
41. Philipp Maschl, journalist, Österreichische Rundfunk - ORF, Vienna
The more we learn about facts, the less we are taken in by fake news. That's our goal when we talk with pupils about journalism.
42. Valentin Mayr, journalist, Deutschlandfunk Nova, Cologne
43. Markus Mertens, journalist, mephisto 97.6, Leipzig
44. Michael G. Meyer, journalist, ARD Hörfunk, Berlin
45. Eva Mommsen, journalist, Westdeutscher Rundfunk/WDR, Cologne
46. Ilka Münchenberg, journalist, ARD aktuell, Cologne
This work provides journalists with the unique opportunity to speak to pupils regardless of their religion, social status, etc. This is what makes this approach so special to us journalists: Teaching children how to recognise Fake News and to empower them to form their own opinions, while learning from them as well.
47. Dagmar Penzlin, music journalist, Hamburg
48. Yvonne Pöppelbaum, journalist, managing director Freischreiber, Hamburg
49. Klaus Prömpers, journalist, Vienna
50. Daniela Prugger, freelance journalist, i.e. Wiener Zeitung, Kurier, taz, Al Jazeera, Vienna
51. Ansgar Rau, journalist, Westdeutscher Rundfunk - WDR, Cologne
Children and teachers are so grateful for our visits. They appreciate our lessons and support the important fight against fake news in our society.
52. Britta Reinke, journalist, WDR/ARD, Cologne
53. Stefanie Ruep, journalist, Der Standard - Salzburg Redaktion, Salzburg
54. Wilfried Rütten, media expert, European Journalism Centre - EJC, Cologne
55. Tom Schimmeck, author, Wedel
56. Christian Schmitt, journalist, Deutschlandfunk Nova - DLF Nova, WDR, Cologne

- 57. Teri Schultz, freelance journalist, Brussels
- 58. Jana Schulze, freelance journalist, TV/Online/Print, Rostock
- 59. Florian Skrabal, journalist, Dossier, Vienna
- 60. Jochen Spangenberg, media expert, Deutsche Welle (DW), Berlin, signing this in his private capacity

Bringing media literacy to young people and into schools is a highly important and rewarding undertaking. This becomes evident again and again, with every classroom visit. The teaching - and learning - of critical thinking and fact-based decisionmaking is a vital component for the functioning of democratic societies. The reactions I get from children of various ages and backgrounds make it more than worthwhile.

- 61. Michael Stang, journalist, Westdeutscher Rundfunk/WDR, Cologne
- 62. Ann-Kathrin Stracke, journalist, WDR Aktuelle Stunde, Cologne
- 63. Michael Stempel, journalist, ARD Morgenmagazin, Berlin
- 64. Aubry Touriel, journalist, DaarDaar, Antwerp
- 65. Maria Udrescu, journalist, La Libre Belgique, Brussels
- 66. Valentine Van Vyve, journalist, La Libre Belgique, Brussels
- 67. Aurore Vaucelle, journalist, La Libre Belgique, Brussels
- 68. Philipp Velten, journalist, ARD Morgenmagazin, Cologne
- 69. Sabine Verhest, journalist, La Libre Belgique, Brussels
- 70. Kai Voigtländer, media expert, Akademie für Publizistik, Hamburg
- 71. Heike Vowinkel, journalist, Berlin

One of the good experiences of 2020 was to see that so much is possible despite social distancing - even classroom visits for media literacy. That they are different, sometimes more challenging, but not at all worse. And above all: that these visits are more important than ever in view of the infodemic and the even more intensive use of digital media.

- 72. Silke Wettach, journalist, Wirtschaftswoche, Brussels
- 73. Jane Whyatt, media expert, European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, Leipzig
- 74. Carolin Wilms, freelance journalist, Leipzig
- 75. Barbara Wimmer, journalist, Futurezone, Vienna
- 76. Jakob Wirl, journalist, Puls4, Vienna
- 77. Guillaume Woelfle, journalist, RTBF, Brussels

*The signatories are media experts and journalists from print, online and broadcast media who advance media literacy in classrooms in Germany, Belgium and Austria as current and former participants of the 2017-founded news literacy project *Lie Detectors*. They follow the journalism ethics standards of the International Federation of Journalists and the Ethical Journalism Network. [Lie Detectors](https://lie-detectors.org) is an award-winning and independent media literacy organisation that works with professional journalists to secure democracy and tackle disinformation. It has been awarded the EU Digital Skills Award for its work in education.*

PRESS RELEASE: <https://lie-detectors.org/press-release-open-letter-journalists-team-up-with-schools-in-fight-against-disinformation/>

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