

**WARSAW DIALOGUE FOR DEMOCRACY 2017**  
**Tackling the challenges for independent media**  
*Panel debate co-organised by the European Endowment for Democracy*

**National School of Public Administration (56 Wawelska Street)**  
**7 December 2017 | 15.15 - 16.45**

Free media have always been perceived as a fundamental pillar of functioning democracies and a platform for democratic discourse. However, playing this crucial role requires having the trust of your audiences, whilst the newest research shows that the confidence in the mass media has sunk to a new low globally. The center of gravity is shifting from offline to online, with a concurrent increase of confidence in online outlets. Distrust in the media intertwines with anger and disillusionment towards politicians, both perceived as belonging to the elites. The current state of affairs creates a fertile ground for tabloid content with limited credibility to spread on the media landscape, unfiltered by the lens of professional, balanced journalism. Emotionally engaging and entertaining (dis)information resonates with people, surrounding them with fabricated stories, often created with the aim of influencing them for political or financial purposes, or a combination of both.

With increasing control by governments and business interests, financial difficulties, shady ownership, a surge of tabloid online media portals, as well as foreign interference, there is a growing need to support credible and balanced journalism committed to engage audiences through quality content. While there are numerous independent media initiatives globally, a large number of them struggles to continue operations, with their journalists facing daily threats, intimidation and risk of imprisonment. The problem of external pressure also hijacks the access to funding; given the dependency media companies can have on advertising, with advertisers often withdrawing if the content is too politically sensitive, resulting in the media company losing its much needed revenue. On the other hand, the creation of a new monopoly of online media giants over programmatic advertising constitutes yet another challenge.

The new increasingly difficult challenges are rooted in deteriorating media landscapes, non-conducive for freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity. In many countries, supporting institutions, professional capacity building and infrastructure are far from sufficient for the proper functioning of independent and pluralistic media. To this end, the panel debate addresses the following questions:

- What are the challenges faced by independent media outlets in different parts of the world and how do they attempt to overcome the obstacles? Is there a common denominator for all the geographical areas? Which tools are used by independent outlets to address a new set of challenges?
- How can media reflect plurality, diversity and freedom of speech while continuing their operation in increasingly challenging political and economic environment worldwide?
- What external and institutional support is needed? How to maintain access to funding and keep the advertisers' close, without compromising the content?
- What would be the ideal framework for media to operate in?
- How can we help audiences distinguish between fact and fiction and face the challenge of distrust? How can media become a better cater for their readers?

**Speakers:****Tamar Chergoleishvili | Tabula Media (Georgia)**

Tamar Chergoleishvili is a Director General of Tabula Media, which she founded in 2010 as a weekly magazine. Since then, Tabula has transformed into one of the most influential and widely-read online multimedia platforms in Georgia. Through its TV and web editions, Tabula provides Georgia with an open forum, which helps citizens remain informed on public issues, allowing them to defend their independence, personal, economic and civic freedoms through creating engagement in the public sphere. Tabula's goal is to encourage critical thinking and protect journalistic standards, consequently safeguarding Georgia's pro-Western orientation, political pluralism, free market, human rights, and rule of law.

Prior to Tabula, in 2000-2010, Tamar Chergoleishvili served at various posts at the Council of Europe, in Strasbourg. In her capacity as the head of the Council of Europe's Legal Task Force, she contributed to Georgia's legislative reforms in the fields of criminal justice, economic crime, cybercrime, human rights and media. She also cooperated with the US Department of Justice on the reform of the General Prosecutor's Office of Georgia (1999-2000). She was actively involved in the legislative and judicial reform process as a programme coordinator for the American Bar Association in 1997-1998. Tamar graduated from the Department of International Law and International Relations at Tbilisi State University. | <http://www.tabula.ge/en> | @Tabula\_news

**Natalia Antelava | CEO and Editor-in-Chief, Disinformation Crisis, Coda Story**

Natalia Antelava is a co-founder and editor in chief of Coda Story, an award winning non-profit newsroom dedicated to in-depth, continuous coverage of major crises. Coda Story puts a team of journalists on one crisis at a time and stays with it, providing unique depth, continuity and understanding to events that shape our world. Coda wishes to allow for a full understanding a crisis as an essential tool to address it, and shed light on what happens with major events after the media spotlight moves on.

Originally from Tbilisi, Georgia Natalia Antelava started her career freelancing in West Africa. Since then, she had been BBC's resident correspondent in the Caucasus, Central Asia, Middle East, Washington DC and India. She has reported undercover from Burma, Yemen and Uzbekistan, covered the war in Iraq, the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 and conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Her investigations into human rights abuses in Central Asia, Iraq and the United States have won her a number of awards, including an Emmy nomination. In addition to a career in broadcast journalism, Natalia has also written for the Guardian, Forbes magazine and the New Yorker among others. | <https://codastory.com> | @antelava

**Sami Elmoudni | The Moroccan Forum for Young Journalists**

Sami Elmoudni is a human rights activist, journalist and founder of the Moroccan Forum for Young Journalists. Prior to joining the Moroccan channel "Medi1 TV", where he is working at the department of investigative and documentary stories, he had been writing for different independent newspapers (2009 – 2013). He is a winner of the Arab Journalism Award (Dubai, 2014) and the very first winner of the investigative journalism prize awarded by the AMJI, *L'association Marocaine de Journalisme d'Investigation*, for his 2014 story "Abdul Aziz Noamani: the full story of the founder of the first religious armed organization in Morocco".

The Moroccan Forum for Young Journalists (MFYJ), a newly established association of young journalists. Prior to launching the assembly, the group's founder engaged in two months of consultations with different young Moroccan journalists to identify their most pressing needs. One of the main challenges identified was the lack of representation of young journalists at the Moroccan Journalists syndicate. Another conclusion was that Moroccan young journalists lack a professional framework sensitive to their professional needs while being complimentary to the work of civil society organizations already active on covering the situation of freedom of expression and press from a human-rights-based approach. The overall objective of MFYJ is to create a new platform that meets the professional needs and expectations of young Moroccan journalists, advocate for freedom of press, the rights to access information and the right for vocational trainings.

**Dumitru Alaiba | CPR Moldova**

Dumitru Alaiba is Programmes Director at CPR Moldova – an independent think tank he co-founded in January 2017 in Chişinău. Since its establishment, the organization has been advocating for the effective protection of democratic freedoms, including freedom of expression, and organizing campaigns against corruption. In one of their programmes, CPR is supporting the work of free media, especially investigation journalists, by promoting an effective and uniform application of the access to information legislation across government institutions, demanding more transparency, and open data to ensure free access to public information, thus limiting the risk of corruption within the administration. CPR is taking an active part in forging and strengthening coalitions within the civil society to ensure transparency and access to information. CPR's message is that public information, being produced by taxpayer money, is a public good, thus any barrier to access it is unjustified. By curbing access to information, the authorities risk to send the message that they protect corruption, favoritism and conflicts of interests.

Prior to his present position, Dumitru has been working for the Moldovan Prime minister's Office between 2009 and 2016, his last capacity being as Head of Prime Minister's Economic Council Secretariat since 2013. Contracted by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, he headed a team of five professionals in charge of promoting business climate reforms with special focus on transparency and e-services, and other tools that will limit corruption and ensure equal opportunities for all entrepreneurs. Prior to his work in the Government, Dumitru has been doing international consultancy, having worked in four EU countries between 2004-2009. He is an economist by education. | <http://cpr.md/> | @dumitru\_alaiba | alaiba.wordpress.com

**Moderator: Diana Moukalled | Daraj (Lebanon)**

Diana Moukalled is a veteran journalist that has extensive experience in both traditional and new media. She started her career as a correspondent for Future Television where she covered many regional and international topics in her series "Through the Naked Eye" particularly problems of women and minorities in the MENA region and in the world; namely, Women under Taliban (1999), Women in Iran (1999), Crimes of Honor in Jordan (2000). Her expertise varies from news writing and reporting, to documentary and TV production and war coverages in hot zones including Afghanistan, Iraq and Lebanon. Human Rights, women, war, minorities and many other issues were topics of her long and extensive world coverages.

She is one of the co-founders of Daraj, which is a new media outlet that aims to be the first independent pan-Arab multimedia platform publishing analyses and investigative reports. It meets rising demand from the Arabic-speaking online community and responds to a real need for a regional independent media outlet where professional journalists could publish credible, impartial and well-investigated stories independent of politically controlled media. | <http://www.daraj.com/> | @dianamoukalled