

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001636/24
to the Commission
Mathilde Androuët (Pfe)
(5 September 2024)**

Subject: EU funding for far-left media: jeopardising the neutrality and plurality of public debate

The far-left media outlet StreetPress is indirectly receiving EU funding via the Sphera Network. The latter, begun by cafebabel.com, has received funding from the 'Europe for Citizens' programme, including a generous annual grant of EUR 200 000 between 2014 and 2017. This is a deeply worrying state of affairs, highlighting as it does the potential misuse of European public funds to support media outlets with an overt political bias that seek neither neutrality nor plurality of viewpoints, which could seriously compromise the quality of public debate in Europe.

1. Can the Commission confirm precisely how much was granted to cafebabel.com and Sphera Network, and the precise criteria for awarding these funds?
2. What safeguards are in place to ensure that European funds are not used to promote any one political ideology at the expense of another?
3. Does the Commission really consider it acceptable for funds that are supposedly intended to promote European citizenship to be diverted to support openly far-left media, thereby risking dangerously unbalancing democratic debate in Europe?

Submitted: 5.9.2024

**Answer given by Executive Vice-President Vestager on behalf of the European Commission
(25 October 2024)**

1. Sphera Network gathers ten partners across Europe. It has been selected for funding under the European Parliament pilot project and preparatory action 'A European public sphere: a new online media offer for young Europeans' that aims to bring the EU closer to young people by increasing the availability of online information that affects young people ⁽¹⁾. Under the current grant, Sphera Network receives EUR 1.94 million. Since the project's inception in 2021, the total EU co-financing amounts to EUR 3.9 million. The coordinator of Sphera Network, Cafébabel, received a yearly grant of EUR 200 000 between 2014 and 2021 under the Europe for Citizens programme ⁽²⁾.

2. EU grants are subject to the principles of transparency and equal treatment as set out in the Financial Regulation ⁽³⁾. Calls for proposals are open to all eligible entities. All proposals are evaluated against the same criteria listed in the calls, which include the relevance of the project to the objectives of the call, the effectiveness and rationale of the methodology and organisation, the experience of the team, the outreach plan and expected audience figures, as well as cost-effectiveness of the action.

Calls require applicants to abide by professional journalistic standards by signing a Declaration on standards and independence, guaranteeing that all beneficiaries act in full editorial independence. Moreover, projects are monitored during implementation to make sure that the commitments are respected.

3. The Commission supports a diverse public debate. All beneficiaries must commit to journalistic standards and to respect general principles such as transparency, non-discrimination, accuracy, pluralism and independence.

⁽¹⁾ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/eu-supports-four-media-consortia-enrich-pan-european-debate-among-young-europeans>

⁽²⁾ https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/departments-and-executive-agencies/justice-and-consumers/justice-and-consumers-funding-tenders/funding-programmes/previous-programmes-2014-2020/europe-citizens-efc_en

⁽³⁾ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:L_202402509