

## Lost in Media

Book presentation and debate on migrant perspectives and the public sphere, 6 November 2019,  
European Parliament

Organised by European Cultural Foundation and Hello Europe/Ashoka and co-hosted by MEPs [Dragos Tudorache](#) (Renew Europe) and MEP [Damien Carême](#) (Greens/EFA). The debate gathered over 30 participants (EP, EC, Permanent reps, journalists, civil society) including active involvement of MEPs [Ana Donáth](#), [Erik Marquardt](#) and [Julie Ward](#) and the attendance of MEP [Maria Walsh](#) (EPP). Four political groups were represented [Renew Europe](#), [Greens/EFA](#), [S&D](#), [EPP](#).

### *What is at stake?*

Ever since the ‘migrant crisis’ hit the headlines in 2015, refugees and migrants perspectives have been lost in the mainstream media. Migrants and refugees are represented “the other”, as vulnerable bodies, dangerous outsiders, silent actors, desperate hordes, or as numbers, but rarely with their human stories. There are many examples. MEP Ana Donáth (Renew Europe) emphasised that populists’ success is based on addressing the fear of the unknown. Journalist Dawid Krawczyk (Political Critique) shared that leading party in Poland has campaigned portraying refugees as threats to “our Christian values” and as “containers of diseases”. MEP Erik Marquardt (Greens/EFA) raised the question what to do against disinformation, so that people do not believe in the truth anymore. Salma Zulfiquar (artist, UK) alarmed about escalating intolerance and hate toward migrants, refugees and LGBT in the UK after the Brexit referendum.

Migrants have entered European societies, but their legitimate voices have been ignored, their stories not heard. If migrants are to become EU citizens, they need to be participants, rather than subjects, in the public debate. [Lost in Media](#) discussion discussed policy opportunities to make that happen, bringing recommendations and solutions to EU policies of media and integration.

*“Europeans seem to have forgotten that they were the migrants.” (MEP D. Tudorache)*

The topic and the book is close to the hearts of MEPs who acclaimed the initiative and acknowledged the need to promote those human, personal stories, lost in the overarching stigma of the refugee crisis narrative in Europe. Dragos Tudorache (worked at DG Home) acknowledged that media perception and narratives on migrants’ stories is very important, also because it can influence policy decisions. EP should work for the cause of just and inclusive media coverage of migration and refugee processes. He noted that the Europeans have forgotten that they were the migrants in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century (on the way to the North America).

*“C’est une crise de l’accueil [...] Il n’y a rien de pire que l’indifférence!” (MEP D. Carême)*

*“There is a crisis of solidarity, not a refugee crisis.” (MEP J. Ward)*

MEP Damien Carême, former mayor of Grande-Synthe (Nord Pas de Calais, France), crossing point for refugees from France to the UK, shared his experience with accommodating refugees in 2015. He felt alone as mayor, to find urgent solutions. He believes there is a crisis of accommodating the refugees, as a structural phenomenon. What works is to create interactions between newcomers and the locals, and catalyse solidarity. Although it is very hard to offer solidarity in a place with high unemployment and high number of people on the verge of poverty. [Lost in Media](#) brings a needed perspective on the

migrants, which is not there: Carême is appalled by describing the migration flow as “tsunami”, while many people are dying on the way to Europe. *Nothing is worse than the indifference!*

*“We need an inclusive European public sphere!” (M. Weijs, ECF)*

Laura Batalla Adam shared the determination of Hello Europe/Ashoka to bring the positive side of migration to the public and political debate, in order to challenge the existing preconceptions. Which led to the collaboration with the ECF on **how can we change the narratives and ensure that migrants and their stories are at the centre of the conversations?**

Menno Weijs (European Cultural Foundation) promoted ECF’s ambition for a **more inclusive European public sphere** and advocated for **rethinking the function and the purposes of media in our societies**. This debate should help **translating this plea into policy on a European level**. Discussing these issues at the heart of the European democracy (the EP) is an opportunity to rethink:

*“Is media just another economic area left to the free market, or is it a crucial ingredient for a functioning democracy?” (M. Weijs, ECF)*

**We advocate for larger scale initiatives at the European level** and hope this meeting to become a starting point of a process in which **civil society, media and politics can work together** on shaping a media policy that supports our democracy and European values of openness and inclusiveness.

The panel, moderated by Marta Rodríguez (EuroNews), included contributions from four practitioners (Poland, Netherlands, Spain and UK). David Krawczyk pointed out that state owned media in Poland are propagating exaggerated numbers of migrants, as opposed to the very small number of applications for asylum. Media diversity, pluralism, free press, alternative business models do exist but they are not mainstreamed.

*“Integration became a dirty word, and media should be kept responsible for that. Stop hate spreading among communities!” (S. Zulfiquar, UK)*

Salma Zulfiquar (ARTconnects, UK) shared concerns about the recent negative trends in British media, which became irresponsible, promoting extremist views, “out of control”. She insisted on measures to **hold media responsible** for mainstreaming hate speech and stigmatising refugees, eastern Europeans or LGBT. In the same time, journalists call for refugees’ stories, which repels refugees on the one hand (instrumentalising, victimising etc.), and leave the public unsensitised on the other. **The stories of migrants can be better told through their art and creation.**

Lucila Rodriguez - Alarcón ([porCausa](#)) emphasised a number of practical challenges and obstacles for journalists to cover properly the migration stories, such as high cost of quality coverage and related travel; keep the audience’s interest high cannot always be achieved by good stories. She feels nothing could be done against hate speech, disinformation and their massive spread. **It is urgent to recover the space and audiences that are scared, confused, misinformed.**

***What antidote against hate speech in media?***

*“We must keep repeating the truth to oppose fake news and disinformation.” MEP Julie Ward*

MEP Julie Ward insisted that EU Member States should stick to and share the European values, instead of undermining them. There is *a real battle to keep here at EP* on these values.

*“Undocumented migrants cannot travel to make their voices heard.” (S. Koolen, We Are Here)*

Savannah Koolen ([We Are Here](#), Amsterdam) shared a success story about integration of [former] non-documented refugees to the Netherlands, who since 2012 had been raising awareness and drawn public attention. Gathered by We Are Here collective's Media team, they produced social media outlets on the topic. After years of struggle, having received status in the Netherlands, they have jobs and life here.

### *Recommendations: What can we do?*

- We must be ambitious about our demands for an **inclusive European public sphere** – beyond projects, towards EU policies.
- EU should explore new ways to support new and progressive media spaces, including legal back up, for ensuring strong, inclusive media platforms, and **just and inclusive reporting**;
- Promoting **inclusive perspective** while telling the migrant's stories should be part of it. Use marketing techniques of telling stories, and use the most recent feeds formats that work, to reach out to new audiences.
- Develop a **journalism ethics code** (not compulsory by nature), to be acquired by journalists associations across Europe.
- EU institutions should support and initiate more projects on **media inclusion, against disinformation, hate speech and fear**, as well as to enable new and independent media to work better, have more spaces for journalism;
- MEPs should **take social media more seriously** and change the language to reach out broader public.
- Media shall provide spaces and platforms for the good stories and voices of the refugees and migrants (mindful that fewer people read local/regional [subsidised] press, but everyone reads social media);
- National trade unions or associations of journalists (such as NUJ in UK) should be actively involved in EP projects, as well as the European federation of journalists;
- More spaces for media should come together. MEPs could possibly consider to take the migrants' perspective to speak on their own behalf (instead of MEPs only talking about migration issues), or at least to use a quote from refugees.
- EC shall review the way they spend their annual budget (about a billion EUR a year) for Communications.
- Specific travel facilitation (journalism or travel pass) for refugee journalists to be established (to overcome their mobility obstacles).

The [European Cultural Foundation](#) (founded in 1954) works for open and inclusive and better Europe. Created for the promotion of European unity through education and culture exchanges, ECF believes that culture can build resistance to divisive forces, can boost European experiences, and tell the stories of Europe. ECF has explored the topic of migrants in media through Erasmus+ project [Displaced in Media](#) (2017-2019) that contributed, among other, with [Recipe Book](#) for media and journalists, and [Displaced in Media Magazine](#) for policymakers. Project partners and journalists contributed to the publication [Lost in Media](#) (2019), promoted in Amsterdam, Brussels, London and Venice.

Since 1981, Ashoka identifies and supports social entrepreneurs with solutions to social problems. Till now, [Ashoka](#) has more than 3,500 fellows in over 90 countries. Hello Europe (launched in 2015, today present in 13 countries) aims to find solutions in migration, integration and refugee movements, and help them expand to new countries/places. Hello Europe aims to bring the positive side of migration to the public and political debate, in order to challenge the existing preconceptions about migration, and provide solutions.