sphera media lab

talk

FRONTLINES OF TRUTH:
DISINFORMATION IN REPORTING ON
AGGRESSIVE POWER STRUCTURE AND
THE ROLE OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA

with

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# SHOWCASING INDEPENDENT MEDIA VOICES

## Highlights from Sphera Media Lab 2025

Only days after the inauguration of a U.S. president who ironically is boasting about freedom of speech while attacking independent media and journalists, the fourth edition of the Sphera Media Lab provided a platform for exchange and connection. This initiative brought together in Brussels, a new generation of independent European media eager to collaborate and address contemporary challenges.

At a time when toxic alliances are emerging between authoritarian political powers and the worst stakeholders of digital and surveillance capitalism, it has become urgent to unite independent initiatives. These new forms of alliances seek to counteract the logic of algorithms and data exploitation by major platforms with a commitment to public interest and pluralism. This was the core purpose of the latest Sphera Media Lab, organised by the European Lab platform as part of the Sphera Network, a consortium of independent publishers to produce videos, podcasts and newsletters for socially-engaged Europeans.

For one day, over 40 speakers from across the continent and beyond (from Spain to Georgia, Afghanistan, Italy, Poland, and Hungary) gathered at LaVallée in Molenbeek (Brussels) to promote an alternative vision of journalism: collaborative, focused on young generations, and committed to the public interest.

# One Day Exploring Alternative Voices Emerging from Independent Media

Morning capacity-building workshops—all of which were fully packed—explored crucial topics. One of them, led by the Spanish media outlet El Salto and the Belgian outlet Médor, alongside Coop-Médias, examined how cooperative models could foster more horizontal and democratic structures for media projects. Another workshop, hosted by Brussels-based petites singularités, delved into alternatives to major digital platforms. The importance of addressing racial biases in European newsrooms was the focus of an additional workshop led by AJAR and ADIM. Meanwhile, Sphera, together with two other European journalism networks, ENTR and Perspectives, facilitated a session emphasising the need to connect with younger generations in editorial strategies.





As the American conservative podcast scene paved the way for Donald Trump to be back in the White House the first roundtable discussion of the Sphera Media Lab analysed the role of European podcast ecosystems in fostering a fairer and more virtuous society. Alongside two additional talks exploring the realities and workings of misinformation and disinformation processes, as well as the needs and ways to democratise digital spaces, the event included documentary screenings from Sphera's partners, featuring the work of VD News, Popaganda, and StreetPress. These documentaries shed light on alternative narratives about European societies, focusing on queer communities, emerging climate activism, and documenting far-right extremism, which permeates European football stadiums.

A segment also highlighted the experiences of journalists in exile, thanks to the Voix en Exil incubator, run by the NGO Singa. Now based

in Europe but originally from Afghanistan, Georgia, Iran, and Ukraine, six exiled journalists shared their stories, perspectives on their homelands, and contemporary journalism. This radio panel was co-hosted by members of Contistadors, a collective of people with disabilities, alongside media supported by the Hôtel71 incubator.

## Fighting for Independent Journalism at a European Scale

The day concluded with a final roundtable, uniting Ricardo Gutiérrez from the European Federation of Journalists, Oláh Kata from Hungary's leading independent media outlet 444, and Daphné Deschamps from France's StreetPress, which actively counters far-right narratives. Moderated by Quentin Ariès from the Sphera Network, the discussion highlighted the need to promote and support independent journalism at a European level.

Partnered with the European network Reset!, the session also reconnected local and European issues, with an introductory address by Fatima Zibouh, who advocates for Molenbeek's candidacy as the 2030 European Capital of Culture, the district where the Sphera Media Lab was held.



## A Call to Action for Independent European Media

In a world facing multiple crises, where the darkest forces of digital and surveillance capitalism openly advance a reactionary political agenda, European Lab, the Sphera Network, and its partners reaffirm the critical importance of independent journalism in today's public sphere. Against the bubble-driven algorithms that isolate individuals in their preferences and polarise democratic debates, we champion the strength of our networks, interdependence, pluralism, and critical thinking, anchored in editorial, political, and economic independence.

European Lab and the Sphera Network extend their gratitude to all the 40+ speakers who participated in the event, LaVallée for hosting us, the European Commission for its support, the 11 Sphera partners for their co-curation contributions, and the 500+ persons who joined us during the day to share a spirit of optimism.

**Mark your calendars for the next edition of the Sphera Media Lab in Automn 2025—pre-registration is now open <u>here</u>.**