



FRANCE

A new page opens in the history of Mediapart

Mediapart co-founder Edwy Plenel, until now its president and publishing editor, has passed the reins to Carine Fouteau. As this new page opens in the history of Mediapart, she sets out here how this online journal will pursue with its founding mission of reporting for the public good, alongside the ambition of broadening its readership. Mediapart will, she writes, continue to disturb some and unite many through the force and quality of its journalism.

Carine Fouteau - 22 March 2024 à 18h44

“We need a new press in France, and that project is Mediapart.” It was with those words, marking a certain confidence in the future, that Edwy Plenel presented his first editorial for Mediapart, published on March 16th 2008.

In a pledge of continuity with the tradition of thorough, honest and committed journalism, he placed himself under the auspices of Albert Camus who, writing six decades earlier in the newspaper *Combat*, born from the wartime French Resistance movement, explained how he wanted “to free newspapers of money and give them a tone and truth which places the public at the level of what is the best within them”.

In March 2008, we at Mediapart were a team of around just 20, mostly made up of journalists who came from diverse backgrounds and who dreamt of awakening, even undermining, the French media landscape. Defining ourselves as being radically democratic in face of the monarchy-like presidential system of France’s Fifth Republic, we began from almost nothing, working under the corrugated iron roof of a former garage in the east of Paris. That is, almost nothing except for the essential: a clear vision of our journalistic principles and a gamble on the value of news.

We placed ourselves resolutely in our epoch, that of the still fledgling digital revolution, while refusing to submit ourselves to the lure of audience figures and free access. Going against the tide of received opinion about the internet, we demonstrated the legitimacy of a subscription model, which was the absolute guarantee of our independence, that of an online journal funded exclusively by its readers, a founding choice that immediately distinguished us from other media.

That model continues to make Mediapart a journal unlike others. For by refusing advertising, billionaire shareholders and the pressures they exert, and by accepting none of the public subsidies paid to the press nor funding from the big tech giants, we have given ourselves, thanks to our subscribers, the means to produce quality journalism, free of any influence, guaranteed to be free of censorship by others or by ourselves.

It is a freedom to reveal what is denied, hidden, or ignored, and to make the invisible visible. We are accountable to no-one other than our readers who we placed at the centre of our project. Because we believed in the virtues of a lively democracy, we created a participative platform within Mediapart – the Club – and which is unique in France. Over time it has transformed itself into a veritable community of contributors, loyal and united, via their blogs and contributions.

That was 16 years ago and history has proved us right. Mediapart has become an indispensable counterbalance to the powers that be. We have become known to the broad public thanks to our investigative journalism, which has had political, institutional, legislative and fiscal repercussions.

These include the revelations of the manipulation by her entourage of L’Oréal heiress Liliane Bettencourt, the tax evasion via a hidden foreign bank account of budget minister Jérôme Cahuzac, the financing of Nicolas Sarkozy’s 2007 presidential election campaign by the regime of Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi, the conflict of interest in the activities of Emmanuel

Macron's chief of staff Alexis Kohler, the Russian funding of Marine Le Pen's far-right party, and the behind-the-scene workings of media tycoon Vincent Bolloré's empire. We have opened new fields of investigation, including on environmental issues, police violence, gender discrimination and sexual violence – notably with actress Adèle Haenel's taboo-lifting revelations and the accusations levelled against actor Gérard Depardieu.

Profitable for the past 13 years, Mediapart has become the third-placed French daily in terms of subscriber numbers, behind *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*. Our subscribers now total just over 220,000, while our turnover in 2023 was just under 22.446 million euros, representing a year-on-year rise of almost 6%. Our net profit last year amounted to 2.26 million euros.

To ensure that Mediapart remains independent for ever, we modified our statutes in 2019 to create the Fonds pour une presse libre (Fund for a free press, or FPL), a not-for-profit structure that ring-fences our journal by making it definitively impossible to either buy or sell Mediapart.

A time of transmission

A new page has now opened in the history of Mediapart, with its co-founders now completing the passing of the reins to the team which produces it on a daily basis.

Following the departures of François Bonnet, Laurent Mauduit and Marie-Hélène Smiejan, and that of Gérard Desportes several years before them, it is now the turn of Edwy Plenel, Mediapart's president and publishing editor since 2008, to stand down from his responsibilities and to hand them to me.

This stage has been long prepared, and is in total accordance with our values, which have always placed the collective intelligence above personal adventures. In the manner of pioneers, the Mediapart co-founders have opened up a path, and they established the framework for a serene transmission from one generation to another.

Because his voice much matters to us, Edwy Plenel will not disappear from our pages. Like François Bonnet and Laurent Mauduit, he will continue to contribute to

Mediapart's contents, and to present intellectual and cultural figures who illustrate the inventiveness of our current times.

Under our statutes, and unlike what is practiced elsewhere, it is stipulated that Mediapart should only be presided by a journalist. Arriving at Mediapart at its very beginnings, after leaving the French economic daily *Les Échos* when it was bought by luxury goods group LVMH, I initially reported on migratory issues. I did so with passion, such it was that they seemed to me to contain so many other issues in turn, and with sensitivity and a political approach.

I tried to impart what struck me most: the concrete impact of state policies on lives, bodies and trajectories. Subsequently, from 2018 to 2023, I occupied the post of co-editor of Mediapart alongside Stéphane Allières, during which time I learnt how to engage myself on behalf of a collective, to understand its driving forces and needs, convinced that in order to produce the best reporting it is necessary to guarantee the best possible working conditions.

Picking up the relay from the co-founders, we will continue the adventure in our own manner, that of a new generation.

Together with Cécile Sourd (general manager), Lénaïg Bredoux and Valentine Oberti (the newly appointed co-editors), Fabrice Arfi (co-head of our investigations desk and member of Mediapart's governing board), Renaud Creus (head of communications), Olivier Grange-Labat (product and technical services director), Cédric Lepécuchelle (director of the subscriptions department) and Julie Sockeel (marketing director), we are today ready to write the next chapter of Mediapart's history, with determination and modesty. We know we can count on an incredibly talented and united team of 139 staff, half of who are journalists.

Picking up the relay from the co-founders, we will continue the adventure in our own manner, that of a new generation, led by women, and of a diverse and plural team which above all seeks out the truth of events.

Our objective is clear: to widen our readership to make

Mediapart a major journal for a broad audience, and which both disturbs and unites through the force and quality of its reporting. By being useful to you, we hope to make ourselves indispensable.

We exercise our profession with a certain joy, a resolute joy, that of publishing stories that are “hot potatoes” and which, if possible, bring about change. Unveiling the truth, as we see it, is fundamentally to be on the side of the vitality and collective society, rather than complaint and withdrawal.

In an [interview with Mediapart](#), French philosopher Nadia Yala Kisukidi illustrated that way of thinking. “To fight oppression demands political imagination, to invent what hasn’t yet been, despite all the violence that crosses us and which can knock us down,” she said. “To believe that what has not yet happened can indeed be invented. For that to be so, a lot of vital resources are needed; joy cancels out the feeling of fatigue.”

Reinvention in a world of disruption

The base is solid, but the challenge is immense. Over the past 16 years the context has significantly darkened. We have entered an epoch that is more unstable than ever, that has seen a regression in rights, and a climate catastrophe. The wars in Ukraine and Gaza destabilize the planet. Globalised capitalism endlessly fragilizes whole sections of society. The ecocidal multinationals enrich themselves while exhausting the Earth’s resources. Migrants perish crossing borders. Racism in all its forms wrecks lives. The menace of the far-right has never been as pressing. Corruption destroys the pact of democracy. Women continue to die under the blows of their partners.

Today, the headwinds are violent and, in the French media, manifest themselves by an extreme rightwing trend, and by the brutalization of public debate. In the wake of the digital revolution monopolized by the tech giants, technological mutations, notably the development of artificial intelligence, are transforming our ecosystem, without us knowing what uses will be made of this, for better or for worse.

There exists a little character who gives a poignant account of the darkness we are crossing through. He is

Angelus Novus (New Angel), drawn in ink and charcoal in 1920 by the Swiss-German artist Paul Klee. The monoprint was bought by the German philosopher Walter Benjamin, and is today exhibited in a museum in Jerusalem.

The work depicts a sort of wide-eyed, disarticulated angel with its wings spread upwards. Like a messenger, the angel looks – and us with him – at something that scares him; an uncertain future full of the horrors of the past. I present him here as a totem, because, in his fragile and defensive manner, he is warning us.

But we are convinced that there is no cause for fatalism. We believe, as the Canadian activist, academic and author Naomi Klein put it in [an article](#) published in 2022 by The Intercept, that “It is still possible for humans to change the world we have built when life is on the line, and to do it quickly and dramatically”. There are numerous reasons to have hope. They translate around the world in wake-up calls, mobilisations, resistance and changes, notably among the young on questions of gender and the environment.

In face of the cynicism of the powerful, initiatives abound within society. While our ways of living are drastically changing, new forms of existence are being imagined, relationships are knotted, acts of solidarity are developed and alternatives invented, most often off the radar of traditional political parties. Mediapart is totally in step with these preoccupations – how to better live with our planet, how to breathe easier, how to better feed ourselves, how to build together what is common to us all.

Revelations and the sense of events

It is amid this moment, when what is the worst and what is possible is juxtaposed, that Mediapart begins a new phase in its existence. We believe we have a role to play in avoiding a catastrophe, and we take the opportunity to present, in all transparency, who we are, how we work, our guiding principles and the tools at our disposition to bring out the information that prevents the world from continuing to tick over according to the law of the strongest.

Our mission for democracy is to give back to you what

belongs to you, namely information of public interest that allows you, as citizens, to exercise your right to know about – and to have a say about – decisions taken in your name. That quest is now, more than ever, of importance in order for each and every one to remain free in their views and choices, to take part in public debate, to find their place in society and to act in all conscience.

- **The facts versus fake news**

The times when the internet appeared to be a haven for sharing information and views between equals now seem distant. Under the pressure of media empires, as powerful as they are destructive, the profusion of fake news and hate speech is a challenge for democracies. Countering the poison of prejudice, we at Mediapart are committed to delivering honest, verified, cross-checked and documented information, which respects the right of reply and the absolute protection of our sources.

“Freedom of opinion is a farce unless factual information is guaranteed and the facts themselves are not in dispute,” wrote the German-American philosopher and historian Hannah Arendt, in her 1967 essay *Truth and Politics*. Our journalistic work, founded on thoroughness and honesty, is the guaranty of the relationship of confidence between you and us.

- **Cutting through confusion**

In our coverage of news, we do not seek to be exhaustive. Instead, our editorial choices focus on distinguishing events and producing clarity. While our readers are faced with an ever more acute “news fatigue”, our role is to help in stepping back and sorting through it all, in prioritizing, and contextualising. In sum, to give sense to events and to provide intelligibility.

Our economic model facilitates that task because it is founded upon the loyalty of our subscribers, unlike the audience criteria which drive certain media to employ “click bait” in order to attract advertising.

- **A commitment to combat domination**

We place ourselves within a classic tradition of journalism which is as revolutionary as it is old. In 1907,

US publisher Joseph Pulitzer, who was hardly an extremist, declared that his newspaper, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, “will always fight for progress and reform, never tolerate injustice or corruption, always fight demagogues of all parties, always oppose privileged classes and public plunderers, never lack sympathy with the poor, always remain devoted to the public welfare, never be satisfied with merely printing news, always be drastically independent, never be afraid to attack wrong, whether by predatory plutocracy or predatory poverty”.

The progressive values of equality, social justice, solidarity, sobriety and probity that we champion make up the plinth of our editorial line. We are attentive to the conditions of minorities and the rights of foreign nationals; we seek to contribute to the safeguard of a planet on which everyone has a habitat; we refuse the process of ‘normalization’ of the far-right and its ideas; and, in this time of wars, it is important to underline that our journal is anti-imperialist, anti-authoritarian and anti-colonialist.

Mediapart is a committed journal, but not militant. We belong to no camp other than the right to know. Our field of investigations cover all political parties, whether they be of the Right or the Left, along with multinationals and their management, trades unions and their leaders, NGOs and their practices, influencers, and all public figures who claim to exercise, in whatever manner, authority. We do not look away for the wrong reasons.

- **Impactful journalism versus resignation**

Our investigations do not only aim to denounce wrongdoing, but also seek to prompt awareness and the transformation of our environment by challenging unfounded claims to legitimacy, which are often inherited from the past.

To cite but three examples of this:

– Mediapart’s revelations of how French budget minister Jérôme Cahuzac held [a tax-dodging secret bank account abroad](#) led to the creation of financial crime branch of the public prosecution services, the PNF, which was given greater means to combat white-collar crime. They also led to the creation of an administrative body to ensure

transparency surrounding the financial affairs of politicians, the Haute Autorité pour la transparence de la vie publique (HATVP).

– Our revelations of [allegations of sexual assault and harassment](#) levelled against Member of Parliament and speaker of the National Assembly, Denis Baupin, published in 2016, one and a half years before the advent of the #MeToo movement, opened the path to wider media reporting of sexual abuse in France. While the incidents of which Baupin was accused fell under the statute of limitations, our reports placed a spotlight on male domination and abuse of power in public office and encouraged victims to speak out.

– Our revelations about [Russian funding of the far-right Front National party](#) (now renamed Rassemblement National) led to the adoption in 2017 of a law banning political parties from obtaining loans from banks based outside of European Union member states.

In [a speech](#) she gave on the occasion of winning the Nobel Prize in literature in 2022, French author Annie Ernaux warned that in Europe, “an ideology of withdrawal and closure is on the rise and continuously gaining ground in hitherto democratic countries”, adding that “a duty of vigilance” was needed. “Silence, at certain times of history, is out of place,” she said. With the perspective of the French presidential election in 2027, we consider, like her, that to fight against the habituation to rank ideas is a major priority.

Against the threat of resignation, our objective, by revealing information that has strong impact, is to make action possible. Just like with climate change, while it is not too late it is urgent to act. Fatalistic surrender is for those who do not have very much to lose.

- **Broader accessibility**

More than ever, we have the ambition of enlarging our readership to include a younger and socially broader audience. To fully play our role in casting light on public debate, we endeavour to address a readership from all walks of life. To produce information that would only be comprehensible for a minority would serve to reinforce the privileges of those “in the know”, and cause an irreparable rupture with the promise of equality that is

at the heart of our commitment to democracy.

We have decided to strengthen the offer of contents on our website. To ensure the pleasure you have in visiting Mediapart, we are developing new formats, designed to better reach you according to where you are and the usage you may prefer. These new formats include videos (as we have already introduced with our regular discussion programme [À l'air libre](#), on YouTube, and [Abonnez-vous](#), on Twitch) and audio content (with our [podcasts](#), our cultural programme [L'esprit critique](#), and [audio articles](#)).

To improve the accessibility of Mediapart requires that we reflect society in all its forms. We have not escaped the effects of social replication, and we will continue with our efforts in that regard. Integrating diverse profiles within our team is a necessity; each one brings with them supplementary viewpoints, concerns and sources.

- **Creating ties**

Mediapart is one out of just a few media that build a concrete relation with their readers. We do so through the blogs subscribers have in our Club section, through the holding of public events, through our internal moderation service, and through a dedicated subscription service. We constantly seek to better valorise this community by being attentive to its opinions and needs, and by ensuring that it can thrive within a welcoming space where everyone feels at ease.

To help it grow, we are developing access to Mediapart in libraries, multi-media libraries, schools and universities.

In the French media ecosystem largely owned by a few industrialists from sectors such as arms manufacturing, construction, and luxury goods, it is more urgent than ever to be united. Mediapart will continue to play a driving role among actors of the independent press, notably through the [Fonds pour une presse libre](#) (FPL) and the [Syndicat de la presse indépendante d'information en ligne](#) (Spiil), which represents the French online news media.

We have numerous and fertile partnerships with media across France who share our professional values,

including [Mediacités](#), [Marsactu](#), [Le Poulpe](#), Rue89 in [Lyon](#) and [Strasbourg](#), the [Bondy Blog](#) and [La Déferlante](#). At a European level, we employ our know-how in investigative journalism with colleagues at the European Investigative Collaborations ([EIC](#)) consortium, and we enjoy ties with media in Spain, Italy, Greece, Slovakia and Croatia who, like us, are concerned at the illiberal offensive gaining ground in Europe. Our new partnership with the Ukrainian website [The Kyiv Independent](#) is particularly dear to us. To form alliances between the diverse voices we all represent is to allow us to be stronger and have greater impact.

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Ever since its creation, Mediapart has advanced alongside society and those who mobilise and make things possible, and who are its lifeblood. As we engage upon a new phase of development, consolidation, and

emancipation, we intend to contribute, through the trustworthiness of our reporting, to helping establish a clear vision, to making one's voice heard, and in finding the energy to act.

We hope to profit from this somewhat solemn and novel moment in our history to convince you to join with our ever-growing number of subscribers, and to lend us your confidence in our ability to be useful to you.

- The original French version of this article can be found [here](#).

English version by Graham Tearse

Carine Fouteau