

# COPEAM 27<sup>th</sup> annual Conference and 26<sup>th</sup> General Assembly

Media & Science: accurate information in the age of denialisms

Rome, 23 October 2020

## GENERAL PRESENTATION

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Due to the restrictions related to the current health emergency, the **27<sup>th</sup> annual Conference of COPEAM** was held online on 23 October 2020, upon kind invitation of Rai Radiotelevisione Italiana and with the support of Eni.

Representatives of public broadcasters and cultural and audiovisual operators of the Mediterranean region gathered on the Zoom platform to debate around the topic “*Media and Science: accurate information in the age of denialisms*”. A live streaming on COPEAM Facebook page was also available.

Part of the works took place at RAI’s headquarters in Rome, in the beautiful setting of *Sala degli Arazzi*.



**150 subscriptions** (*Zoom platform*)  
**+440 views** (*FB streaming*)



**24 countries** (*Europe and MENA*)

# Opening

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COPEAM Secretary General **Claudio Cappon** opened the Conference, giving the floor to **Marcello Foa**, President of RAI (host of the event), who wished a fruitful working session to all the participants, pointing out the crucial role that public service media have to play in correctly forming the public opinion, especially in this time of pandemic.

The Italian Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, **Manlio Di Stefano**, shared a video-message focused on the threat posed by the dissemination of misleading information and fake-news with a direct impact on public health and security, mostly spread on social media. “Citizens need to be helped to navigate in the vast amount of the available information”, he said, stressing the importance of enhancing the public’s critical thinking and ability to properly assess the sources.

## Plenary session

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### *Introduction*

### *Science credibility at stake: how to gain audiences’ trust*

The topic’s introduction by **Noel Curran**, Director General of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), focused on the challenges of reporting science by public service media, particularly in relation to the Coronavirus. A particular attention was put on the importance of specialization: PSMs have reacted promptly to the pandemic, with a wide use of **specialist correspondence and health correspondence**, and growingly providing science programs and podcasts. A critical matter concerns the fact that a lot of airtime was given to governments’ statements and briefings in the last months, with the risk of being sometimes perceived as governments’ mouthpiece.



Additionally, he pointed out that there is no such thing as “one” science, hence the importance of offering different perspectives and points of view, involving credible personalities and fact checking the information. In fact, media have invested a lot in countering disinformation, increasingly engaging **fact-checkers** in their organizations: “accurate information saves lives in a situation like this”, he added. The result of this overall response was an **exponential rise in trust in public service media** over the last months.

Finally, the challenge of **engaging younger audiences** by public service media was mentioned. The need to go beyond the traditional audiences has become a priority for the entire radio and television sector, in Europe and in the rest of the world. When it comes to attracting the youngster, a lot depends on the content and on the way to access it. He underlined that, in the last months, public service media have seen a 40% increase of this kind of audiences, thanks to digital contents, to the availability of apps and to the educational services provided to kids, who were at home when schools had closed down. The EBU, he concluded, is launching a big initiative aimed at helping its members assess what is effective for the young public and what has worked best in these difficult times.



## Panel

### *Media vs pseudoscience and the Covid-19 experience*

In the session moderated by **Alessandro Baracchini** from RaiNews24, the three panelists – Ms. Gema Revuelta, Director of the *Center of Studies of Science Communication and Society* at the University of Barcelona, Mr. Ashraf Amin, journalist of *Al-Ahram* newspaper, and Ms. Milica Momčilović, President of the *World Federation of Science Journalists (WFSJ)* - highlighted, in particular, the **difficulties and opportunities that have arisen with the Covid-19 in their work of scientific communicators** and their experience in fighting pseudoscience.



**Gema Revuelta** pointed out that the main feature of this pandemic was its unpredictability, while requiring at the same time urgent communication to the public. The acceleration of the pandemic and of its related research, together with the explosion of public attention, has therefore posed a **problem of reliability of data**, with a reduction of time available for fact checking. She highlighted that part of the uncertainty of the information relating to Covid19 was due to intentionally produced fake news and political use of information, while another part of is something inherent to science itself: what seems to be a good hypothesis today, tomorrow can - in fact - be proved wrong. Thus, **the main challenge as science communicators is explaining to citizens that science does not generate absolute truths**.

She also mentioned a success of the Spanish Association of Scientific Communication (AECC): convincing the Spanish government to invite science journalists to their regular briefings and press conferences, with the result of increasing the quality of the questions asked and consequently of the information provided.

As academician, she finally emphasized that this health crisis gave a chance to students to work on a real case, by means of big data, peer-reviewing, interviews to scientists, and the design of campaigns targeting young people, who traditionally are not well covered. **“Students have understood the role of communication in a health alert and the importance of taking into account the different needs of the social groups”**, she concluded.

**Ahraf Amin** described some of the specific issues concerning the **Arab world** to this regard. In particular, he noted that the massive coverage of the pandemic had an overall negative impact on the public, fed up by the huge flow of information about the pandemic. The scarcity of **qualified science journalists** was also stressed as a weak point: despite the efforts made in the last years to attract and train young journalists, their number in the Arab media organizations is quite limited vis-à-vis the number of readers and the extent of dissemination required in order to enhance education and knowledge on such matters.

He also noted how **exchange programs on science journalism**, like the one set up by the Goethe Institute since 2017 between Germany and several Arab countries, has turned out to be an asset during the sanitary crisis, allowing to exchange information and opinions online with experts and colleagues from abroad.



Finally, Mr. Amin stated that many start-ups in Egypt and in the region have organized hackathons on the topic of the pandemic, in order to share IT practical solutions and to design useful apps aimed at disseminating information in Arabic. In particular, they have developed algorithms able to aggregate data from trusted sources, like the WHO and the Ministry of Health, and to “translate” them into a simple language.

**Milica Momčilović** underlined how this emergency has shown that health and science topics are important as much as the matters related to economy and society. **“This is the moment when science journalists are the most important professionals in the media”**, she said; health journalists are trained about topics such as epidemiology



and immunology; they know how to choose experts and select evidence-based information. Most of the times, general reporters unfortunately do not get to ask relevant questions. Therefore, she believes that in the future, health reporters and science journalists should be part of the newsrooms in the mainstream media.

The problem of time was also highlighted: while pseudoscience can be fast, quality science journalism needs time to be delivered, because of the huge flow of specialized information and number of sources that have to be processed and fact-checked.

Ms. Momčilović finally presented a good practice developed by the World Federation of Science Journalists (WFSJ) in the Covid19 time, with the collaboration of the World Health Organization: a **web-based platform available in more than 7 languages dedicated to the pandemic**, with scientific papers, contacts of international experts and colleagues covering the topic and with the organization of regular briefings also open to general reporters. Thanks to this tool, journalists can directly ask questions to the WHO on different health subjects and collect accurate information to be delivered to their audiences.



## **Presentation of COPEAM Prizes' winners**

The following COPEAM international awards were announced during the Conference:

- The Special Prize for the **UNAOC Plural+ Festival** to Anwar Al-Shawabkeh, for the video *“Walls”*;
- **Inter-Rives 7 COPEAM/ASBU Special Prize**, sponsored by the City of Vinci (Italy), delivered to Hanan Rady from NMA (Egypt) for the documentary *“The Maze”*;
- **The 2020 ERN-Med Prize** *“Changing Societies: communicating the Mediterranean diversities”*, won ex-aequo by RTVE (Spain) and France Télévisions (France) and sponsored by the Anna Lindh Foundation;
- **The 2020 Kantara Prize for Photography** *“Mediterranean Rivers”*, awarded to Marco Castelli (1<sup>st</sup> prize).



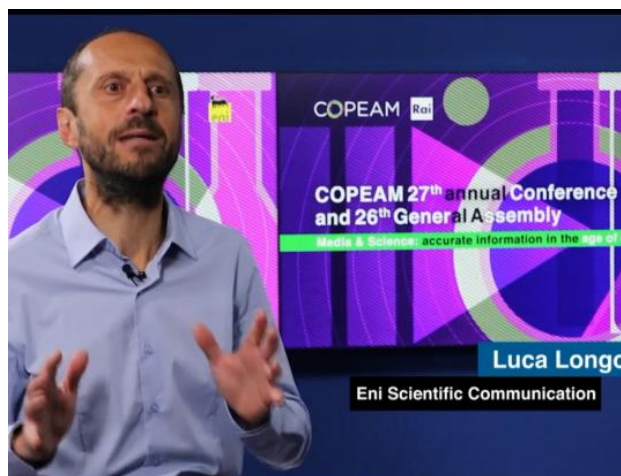
## Other contributions

### - **The decarbonization strategy of ENI**

In the framework of the Conference, ENI presented its decarbonisation strategy, representing a unique plan in the field industry in terms of approach and objectives.

The witness pointed out how in our era of wide spread fake-news, the most dangerous denialism is the effort to discredit the scientific consensus over the man-made global warming and climate change. Media and communicators have the ethical duty to educate and inform the public, solving all possible doubts about such crucial issue.

ENI is committed to **accelerate the energy transition for a carbon-neutral future**, a mission inspired by the SDGs of the United Nations 2030 agenda. ENI business model therefore includes an integrated portfolio of new technologies focused on three pillars: the decarbonization of transports, the decarbonization of electricity and the CO<sub>2</sub> capture, storage and utilization. A focus was also made about ENI's effort to fight the current pandemic, through the funding of health-care projects internationally and the support of some of Italy's most important hospitals such as the Policlinico Gemelli in Rome and the Ospedale Luigi Sacco in Milan.



### - **Call for international solidarity to Lebanon**

The Ambassador of the Republic of Lebanon to Italy, H.E. **Mira Daher**, evoked in a video-message the terrible explosions that shook Beirut on August 4. She called for the support of the international community and of the Mediterranean neighboring countries in keeping helping Lebanon in rebuilding what was destroyed, in a moment when the country is also facing a dangerous financial, economic, political and health crisis.

## Events associated to the Conference

### **COPEAM Commissions' meetings**

The operational meetings of **COPEAM Commissions** (Television, Radio, Gender Equality and Diversity, Training, News Exchange, Cinema/Festival/Culture, Audiovisual Heritage), traditionally included in the works of the annual Conference, this year took place online prior to the main event, during the month of October. In that framework, delegates from COPEAM network discussed about the ongoing projects and the new activity proposals for the upcoming year.

### **COPEAM General Assembly**

After the Conference closing, COPEAM members took part in the online **General Assembly**, in order to assess the Association's annual activity and financial situation. The Assembly also conducted the elections for the renewal of COPEAM managing bodies, with a new Steering Committee and the confirmation for another 4-year mandate of Mr. **Claudio Cappon** as Secretary General and of Mr. **Kazimir Bačić (HRT)** as President of the Association for two more years.

# Links

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[Click here to watch the Conference replay](#)

[Click here for the Press Review](#)

[Click here for COPEAM Commissions' summaries](#)

[Click here to watch the video of 2020 COPEAM special prizes](#)



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