

Without state aid AFP won't live



The French government has given AFP a "one shot" bonus of €1.6 million, our CEO announced last week. This is an important development which demonstrates the fragility of AFP's finances, as well as that resistance is not futile.

POLITICS, not economics, is the driving force

Last year was a turning point in AFP's history: the reform of the agency's statute was approved and a new five-year Aims and Means Contract signed. A new financing model in compliance with EU competition rules and which supposedly guarantees the agency's funding was put in place. Under this framework the French state has the right to subsidize the agency up to the estimated cost of its public interest mission.

It would have been embarrassing to see AFP's new model fail the first year.

So, in December our CEO Emmanuel Hoog had to admit he couldn't balance the 2016 budget. Other than the agency's rising debt, there are two factors which could explain the difficulties:

.The hoped-for rise in commercial sales may have failed to materialize. When asked during the last meeting of the Works Committee, the CEO refused to give any info about 2015 results.

.A delay in management's original calendar for the new company wage and benefits deal, which foresaw the first savings in 2016 from their plan for us to work more for less money.

The French state's exceptional aid is supposed to mask that fact that the new financial model for the company is based on the sacrifices to be made by employees. While our wages have been frozen since 2012, work conditions have worsened as many services have seen drops in staffing.

By battling against the denunciation of nearly all of our wage and benefit agreements (several days of strikes in July following the call of the CGT, FO, CFE-CGC and SUD trade unions; a lawsuit by the Health and Safety Committee), AFP staff succeeded in delaying management's **anti-social big bang**.

.The notice period on the renunciation of our wage and benefits agreements ends February 9. Until then, Mr Hoog could still go back on his decision.

.In 2016 the French government will disburse to AFP €1.6 million more than the €105.82 million it had planned for the agency's public interest mission. Mr Hoog said the additional aid is compatible with European regulations as the total (€107.42 million) is still below the 100% of the calculated amount of the public interest mission.

A telling revelation. A year after the adoption of AFP's new model of financing, the state funding to AFP under the Aims and Means Contract is already at least €1.6 million under the authorized amount. **The French state is disengaging from AFP.** The difficult sacrifices that we make to ensure AFP performs its mission to provide impartial and authoritative information to the public are being taken by the state, which reduces its support to the agency.

SUD says no to austerity policies. Instead of working more for less, we call for limiting work hours to encourage wider employment. Instead of sweetheart deals for companies, tax policy should be aimed at boosting our public services and purchasing power. The French state should maintain, not cut, its support to AFP, which is the only way to retain its standing as a global news agency and properly carry out its public interest mission.

Paris, 26 January 2016

SUD-AFP
(Solidarity - Unity - Democracy)

