

## **No to a return of AFP-Services!**

**Behind a simple name change lies a fundamental issue: the independence, credibility, and public service mission of AFP. In 2020, management finally renamed our AFP-Services corporate services subsidiary FACTSTORY, yielding to a long-standing union demand. The objective was clear: to put an end to a dangerous confusion between information and communication, a confusion all the more problematic given that management had never hid its readiness to exploit the AFP brand to attract private clients. While, to our knowledge, management is not considering reviving the AFP-Services name, it is, on the other hand, increasingly blurring the lines between FACTSTORY and AFP. SUD is concerned this could have serious repercussions by exposing the Agency to a major risk to its reputation and, ultimately, its public service mission.**

Over the years management has repeatedly insisted that AFP needs subsidiaries to diversify its revenues as our media clients are in decline. The thinking goes that profits from these other activities could be used to help finance our public interest mission. It hasn't always been so straightforward in practice. AFP was late entering highly competitive sectors subject to severe swings in activity. FACTSTORY has now posted losses for three years in a row, digging itself a hole of more than €1.2 million. MediaConnect, our other commercial subsidiary, has racked up more than €1.5 million in losses in its five years of operation. Despite the best efforts of their employees, these **commercial activities aren't supporting the Agency's development!**

The concern is further heightened by the plan to use AFP journalists to work for FACTSTORY in order to cut costs. While management claims this measure would (for now) only affect stringers, this does not alter the nature of the problem: such a blurring of roles constitutes a serious breach of the most basic ethical principles of journalism.

AFP plans to impose a "group tariff" – the same price for an AFP news assignment or a commercial assignment for FACTSTORY. Commercial assignments generally pay more than those for media, thus FACTSTORY will be using AFP to lower what it pays to operate. According to staff representatives on AFP's board of directors, management hopes to make up to 15% in savings this way. We're concerned this opens AFP up to accusations that it is (ab)using its state funding to gain a competitive advantage in an unrelated commercial market.

FACTSTORY will also be losing its own commercial staff, according to staff representatives on the board. AFP's commercial staff will now handle FACTSTORY. We won't be able to fault any client about getting confused between AFP's information and communication products. And we couldn't fault them for trying to leverage one against the other.

SUD is also concerned that the same staff working on both news and corporate projects may violate the spirit if not the letter of to the European Commission's injunction that we put commercial activities that don't concern our public interest mission into subsidiaries.

We are also concerned about staff journalists becoming involved in projects sponsored by major corporations. These projects, even when launched at the initiative of our journalists and with the best of intentions, can lead us into situations that raise doubts among the public about the impartiality of our work. AFP journalists in Europe are currently preparing an exposition about women pursuing inspiring careers being sponsored by L'Oréal. Even if the multinational which makes tens of billions on beauty care products that objectify women won't get to use the materials in its commercials, this doesn't mean the events won't lead to publicity where L'Oréal will get a reputational boost thanks to the work of AFP.

Management gave this project its blessing hoping that it will be good publicity for AFP. The fact that none of the work done by our journalists will be transmitted on our newswires, according to management, doesn't resolve our concerns that it could raise doubts about the impartiality of the other work we do. If L'Oréal is picking up the entire tab for the project then it sends a message that AFP journalists can be hired for PR work. If L'Oréal is just underwriting the exposition, then there is a whiff of public money being used for the benefit of a private company. This is all the more shocking as we're in the midst of a period of austerity.

Even if L'Oréal isn't gaining direct or indirect control over AFP, such partnerships with big multinationals raise risks that AFP oversteps a fundamental prohibition in its 1957 statute: that the Agency "may under no circumstances take account of influences or considerations liable to compromise the exactitude or the objectivity of the information it provides".

We've raised this issue in the past, in particular concerning AFP carrying out fact-checking for TikTok without sufficient controls. SUD took the issue to AFP's Higher Council in 2024, which instructed management to ensure that commercial activities don't raise any suspicions concerning the impartiality of the Agency's information. The Higher Council also instructed management to remain constantly vigilant about protecting AFP's reputation.

Nevertheless, management continues to blur the lines between information and communication, putting journalists in untenable ethical situations and the Agency in a situation where there will undoubtedly be suspicions about the impartiality of its information. We're afraid this path will one day lead to an industrial accident concerning our reputation and risks creating problems for the state subsidy of our public interest mission.

**SUD calls on management to abandon these dangerous choices and reaffirm its respect for a clear, strict, and non-negotiable separation between editorial and commercial activities. AFP's independence is not for sale. Our mission is worth it!**

Paris, April 27, 2026

**SUD-AFP (Solidarity, Unity, Democracy)**

