

## Management's projects:

# Where has our public interest mission gone?



Selling off our headquarters, staff cuts, reorganizations that will touch everyone... if the possibilities our new CEO evoked are still being evaluated before an intended decision in October, one thing is already sure: Fabrice Fries is planning a new round of spending cuts that we will bear the brunt of and which will be an even more virulent attack on AFP's foundations. But it is important to note what is missing from the CEO's discourse: *whether its talking about the Agency's **finances** or **editorial projects**, the public interest mission (mission d'intérêt général - MIG) has simply **disappeared**.*

## **AFP's financing**

The French state conferred AFP with the MIG but has not paid the full price: since 2015 **the undercompensation of the MIG totals €17.9 million!** During that time management already tightened the belt a couple notches. Now it says we have to do it again.

## **Editorial projects**

In order to face up to the accelerated disengagement of the state, the top priority has become generating 30 million euros in additional revenue from images in five years. Management also wants to *monetize combating fake news, bring client service into the heart of newsrooms* and develop **partnerships** on all fronts, including with major groups which are driven by profit and their own political agendas. We are not far from abandoning completely our unique status which was supposed to be the bulwark for our independence and reliability.

## **Austerity is not inevitable: it is a political choice!**

The MIG was absent from the Fries' program during his election in April. This is logical as under EU competition rules state support from AFP via the MIG (110.8 million euros in 2017) is allowed until 2025. After that, the French state will have to make its case with Brussels for support for AFP, "*which will analyze it under the prism of the market economy investment principle for state aid*" (page 8 of Fries' program<sup>1</sup>). **Decryption: AFP will need to function like any other private firm.** This is an objective one finds in all of the measures announced or taken by the new CEO.

This orientation fits perfectly with that of President Emmanuel Macron's dream to turn France into a "**start-up nation**". The politicians swear the coffers are empty after having cut taxes on businesses and the rich. But this nevertheless serves as the *justification to gut public services before opening them up (wider) to private interests: education, health care, retirement savings, transport, information...*

Macron and Fries may be new, but their recipe is old. We need to stand together and say:

- **NO to austerity and the destruction of our social safety net**
- **YES to a society based on values, not the law of the jungle/market**

The sine qua non is having a pluralist media not in the control of private groups. Let's call together for the government to fully fund AFP's public interest mission!

<sup>1</sup> "Understanding Project Fries" - <http://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article497>