



POSITION PAPER

Fostering media diversity and press freedom

Making Europe a beacon for democracy

Media freedom

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Group of the Progressive Alliance of
Socialists & Democrats
in the European Parliament

European Parliament
Rue Wiertz 60
B-1047 Bruxelles
T +32 2 284 2111
F +32 2 230 6664
www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu

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INTRODUCTION

An open and free media landscape with divergent opinions and ideas is a key aspect in democratic societies. Media pluralism is considered highly important with regard to media policy, freedom of speech and a vibrant cultural sector. Media freedom and pluralism are fundamental values, enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Furthermore a properly functioning and open European media ecosystem is essential in order to inform citizens who are expressing deep distrust of the EU and the EU institutions, and to increase the accountability of the European Institutions and national governments.

In this context, pluralism of media owners, media sources and content is critical in order to promote media diversity. It is crucial to have access to a variety of information and transparent mechanisms, which guarantees that media services are independent.

Media diversity is crucial for a well-functioning democratic society. If encouraged it leads to an open and dynamic media sector, unfettered access to information, and also drives quality of content through competition in the market. It also allows for journalists to work freely and independently.

Every EU citizen ought to have access to good quality information – this issue is even more crucial at a time when trust in media is low and continues to decline in the European Union. According to Standard Eurobarometer survey on Media Use in the European Union published by the European Commission in autumn 2015, 41% of Europeans report low or zero trust in the media, up 3 percentage points since the Standard Eurobarometer survey of autumn 2014.

In several European countries, the work of some journalists is being suppressed, newspapers are struggling to stay alive and media pluralism is decreasing. This is particularly the case at local levels where we see more local newspaper businesses closing down or merging, due to financial problems, leading to a decrease in media organisations.

In parallel, we are witnessing more horizontal and vertical concentration which is accelerating because of digital convergence.

In order to continue to foster media diversity, our group proposes 16 action points to foster media diversity:

1 CONSISTENT STRATEGY FOR MEDIA COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

We need a coherent strategy for media competence and digital skills development at European and national levels. The aim of media literacy is to equip people of all ages and from all social backgrounds with the skills required to access, analyse, evaluate and produce media content, across all platforms.

2 OPEN ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Open access to information is to be guaranteed. Access to information leads to a higher participation in society. Therefore one of our main goals is the supply of open access to quality information. We also have to increase consequences for infringements of access to open information.

3 NET-NEUTRALITY AND NEW MEDIA

Net-neutrality is very important for the S&D Group. We need to safeguard the principles of an open, transparent internet and ensure that intermediaries do not discriminate in the provision of and access to media content.

4 ACCESSIBILITY, FINDABILITY AND RIGHT TO SHORT NEWS REPORTING

Media diversity and pluralism are only achievable if accessibility is provided and findability of editorial media and quality content is possible. News and quality content should be accessible to anybody who wants it. Within the AVMS-directive fair access to audiovisual content should be possible.

Access to short news reporting is of high value and losing this access could threaten the interests of media pluralism.

5 STRENGTHENING THE COLLABORATION OF JOURNALISTS AND TRADE UNIONS

Media concentration across the EU has led to insecurity for journalists. This insecurity has impacted their independence in their work and in some cases has led to them leaving

their trade unions. Collaboration between journalists is to be encouraged in order to fight for their rights, improve their working conditions and ensure the right of association in order to act with a strong united voice.

6 INVEST IN JOURNALISTS' EDUCATION - PROMOTE AND STRENGTHEN QUALITY AND INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

Investigative journalism plays a key role in a democratic society, and guarantees independence of journalism. The EU and member states should invest in journalists' education in order to increase the quality of investigative journalism.

7 IMPLEMENTATION OF JOURNALISM PRIVILEGES AND INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS FOR THE PROTECTION OF WHISTLE-BLOWERS

We have to implement uniform journalism privileges in the EU, namely the protection of journalists' sources and the right to protect the identity of sources.

We also need to establish clear and fair international and European standards for the protection of whistle-blowers as demanded by our Group in April 2016.

8 INCREASE PROTECTION FOR JOURNALISTS

We need to improve the protection of journalists when they are under attack. The '2015 World Press Freedom Index' reports an increase in attacks that are undermining press freedom. Journalists are being physically attacked and harassed throughout Europe, especially by extremists from mostly nationalist and/or right-wing groups. This development has to be taken seriously and our answer to it must be to increase protection.

9 QUICKER DECISIONS BY THE ECHR

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) should judge cases involving journalists as quickly as possible. As long as there is no decision made, journalists have no basis

for protection. The sooner a decision is made, the easier journalists can continue in their professional and personal lives.

10 STRENGTHEN COOPERATION WITH THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

The European Parliament has to strengthen cooperation with the Council of Europe in order to provide a joint approach to foster media diversity.

11 RECOGNITION THAT IMPROVING SECURITY FROM TERRORISM MIGHT ENDANGER JOURNALISTIC FREEDOM

Freedom and security are two values the legislator has to weigh up carefully. Improving security has become a priority in our fight against terrorism, but we also need to guard against measures that might endanger journalistic freedom. In the case of data protection and data-sensitive questions, exemptions for journalists, where appropriate and legal, need to be maintained.

12 TRANSPARENCY OF OWNERSHIP OF MEDIA ENTITIES

Transparency of the ownership of media entities and of whoever benefits from the ownership must be guaranteed in order to have a better oversight of the independence of the media. In this way, citizens must have the possibility to judge the source of the information for themselves.

13 CONTROL MEDIA CONCENTRATION AND ENCOURAGE PLURALISM

Over-concentration of the media sector (particularly in the newspaper sector) will lead to less variety of information. It is therefore our goal to control uncompetitive behaviour in the media sector. At present, control of media concentration at EU level is not efficient because of the very different ways it regulates media concentration. We call for a review

of EU antitrust and competition policy in this sector, which would also allow editors from the EU to develop new business models in the digital sphere.

14 NEW FINANCING INSTRUMENTS

The EU needs to look at new financing models for the newspapers and broadcasting sectors to guarantee that high-quality news is available to everybody. Models in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands are all good examples of best practice that could be considered in this context.

15 NATIONAL AUDIOVISUAL REGULATORY AUTHORITIES

Member states need to guarantee the independence of their national audiovisual regulatory authorities. The S&D Group supports the introduction of a binding commitment from member states to guarantee the independence of these authorities and calls on them to take into account existing models of efficient control as examples for best practices.

16 STRENGTHEN THE PRESENCE OF EUROPE IN THE MEDIA

- **Euranet Plus and European networks**

Euranet Plus reaches 22 million daily listeners across Europe, offering them an independent view on EU affairs by broadcasting to listeners via existing radio channels to reach audiences in a very cost-efficient manner. We call on the Commission to find a necessary contractual engagement to secure Euranet Plus's future.

- **European Centre for Press and Media Freedom**

The European Union should safeguard the existing and future funding for the "Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom" at the European University Institute and consider ongoing funding for the "European Centre for Press and Media Freedom" in Leipzig. Both institutions and their cooperation are important instruments at EU level to foster media pluralism.

- **Early-warning systems and the Media Pluralism Monitor**

Early-warning systems are to be preserved and upgraded. One of these early warning systems is the Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM). The Media Pluralism Monitor is designed to identify potential risks to media pluralism in member states. The MPM is based on a European Commission funded study published in 2009. The European Union is now funding projects to simplify and test the tool so that member states can realistically apply it.

In conclusion, one of the roles of the European Parliament is to monitor member states' promotion of media diversity both nationally and across the European Union. It is important that the Parliament points out abuses in member states and equally shares best practice on a regular basis. The S&D Group will strive to work with member states and our sister parties to guarantee media diversity at all times.