Media concentration and pluralism in the EU

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PURPOSE: to provide an overview of the economic and legal reality of today's European media landscape with a view to protecting media pluralism.

BACKGROUND: the media face radical changes and restructuring due to new technology and global competition. Maintaining media pluralism is crucial for the democratic process in the Member States and in the European Union as a whole.

Responding to continuing concerns from the European Parliament and non-governmental organisations about media concentration, and its possible effects on pluralism and freedom of expression, the Commission presents a three-step approach on media pluralism in the European Union.

The three steps set out by Commissioner Reding and Vice-President Wallström, responsible for Institutional Relations and Communication Strategy, follows suggestions made at the Liverpool Audiovisual Conference in 2005, and indicates how this politically-sensitive issue should proceed.

Already the new Directive "Audiovisual Media Services Without Frontiers" (see COD/2005/0260) contributes to media pluralism in this respect. In particular, it would oblige Member States to guarantee that their national regulatory authorities are independent from their national governments and audiovisual media service providers.

CONTENT: In the 'Reding-Wallström' approach, the notion of media pluralism is much broader than media ownership. It covers access to varied information so citizens can form opinions without being influenced by one dominant source. Citizens also need transparent mechanisms that guarantee that the media are seen as genuinely independent.

The 'Reding-Wallström' approach has **three steps**:

1. **A Commission Staff Working Paper on Media Pluralism**: it outlines efforts to promote pluralism by third parties and organisations, notably the essential work undertaken by the Council of Europe, and has a concise first survey of Member States' audiovisual and print media markets. This baseline analysis also includes information on national media ownership regulations and the very diverse regulatory models of the 27 Member States;
2. **An independent study on media pluralism in EU Member States** to define and test concrete and objective indicators for assessing media pluralism in the EU Member States (in 2007);
3. **A Commission Communication on the indicators for media pluralism in the EU Member States (in 2008)**, on which a broad public consultation will take place. This could lead to an evaluation of the opportunity for applying the media pluralism indicators, for example through a further study.

Throughout the whole process, the Commissioners' Group on Fundamental Rights, as well as the European Parliament and Council will be kept informed about the progress made.