

Community media in Europe

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The Committee on Culture and Education adopted the own initiative report by Karin **RESETARITS** (ALDE, AT) on the role of Community Media in Europe, stressing that these media are an effective means to strengthen cultural and linguistic diversity, social inclusion and local identity. Community media fulfil a broad, yet largely unacknowledged role in the media landscape, particularly as a source of local content. However, this sector still lacks legal recognition and is now faced with several challenges, particularly the transition to digital and the new age of the Internet. That is why the report highlights the need to strengthen community media and reinforce their presence.

In fact, according to MEPs, community media help to strengthen the identities of specific communities of interest, while at the same time enabling members of those communities to engage with other groups in society, and therefore play an important role in fostering tolerance and pluralism in society. MEPs also stress that community media promote intercultural dialogue by educating the general public, combating negative stereotypes regarding social categories threatened with exclusion, such as refugees, migrants, Roma and other ethnic and religious minorities. They are therefore one of the existing means of facilitating the integration of immigrants and other disadvantaged members of society.

Community media can also act as a catalyst for local creativity, providing artists and creative entrepreneurs with a public platform for testing new ideas and concepts. They can also contribute to the goal of improving citizens' media literacy through their direct involvement in the creation and distribution of content. MEPs therefore encourage school-based community outlets to develop a civic attitude in the young and to increase their media literacy.

In this report, MEPs consider that community media should be defined as:

- non-profit making and independent, not only from national, but also from local power, engaging primarily in activities of public and civil society interest, serving clearly defined objectives which always include a social gain and contribute to intercultural dialogue;
- accountable to the community which they seek to serve, which means that they are to inform the community about their actions and decisions, to justify them, and to be penalised in the event of any misconduct, so that the service remains controlled by the interests of the community;
- open to participation in the creation of content by members of the community, who may participate in all aspects of the operation and management.

Pluralism and community media: MEPs stress that community media help to strengthen media pluralism, as they provide additional perspectives on issues that lie at the heart of a given community. In certain areas where public and commercial media no longer include local content, community media may provide the only source of local news and information and the sole voice of local communities. They can therefore also make citizens more aware of existing public services and can help to foster civil participation in public discourse. They may also serve as an effective means of bringing the Union closer to its citizens, provided they remain **politically independent**.

A sector in search of resources: MEPs note that the financial resources of community media vary greatly but are in general rather scarce. Noting that this sector lacks the support needed for it to be able to make major efforts to improve its representation to and contact with the European Union, MEPs consider that it should be given additional funding. They consider, in particular, that the sector could make more use of

EU funding schemes (including the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund). However, funding must come principally from national, local and/or other sources. MEPs also consider that digital adaptation would enable the community media sector to extend its innovative profile and to provide services bringing added value to the existing analogue offerings.

A sector in search of recognition: MEPs advise Member States to give legal recognition to community media as a distinct group alongside commercial and public media where such recognition is still lacking. The Commission is called upon to take into account community media as an alternative, bottom-up solution for increasing media pluralism when designing indicators for media pluralism. Member States are also called upon to offer more active support to community media to ensure media pluralism. At the same time, MEPs call on the Member States to make television and radio frequency spectrum available to community media, both analogue and digital, to take into account their social value. They also urge community media to establish a European Internet platform through which useful and relevant information for the sector can be diffused, and to facilitate networking and exchange of best practices.