Media concentration and pluralism in the EU

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The Committee on Culture and Education adopted the report by Marianne **MIKKO** (PES, EE) on concentration and pluralism in the media in the European Union, calling on the Commission and the Member States to safeguard this pluralism. In this context, it is important to ensure that all EU citizens can access free and diversified media in all Member States as a pluralistic media system is an essential requirement for the continued existence of the democratic European social model.

Noting that the European media landscape is subject to continuing convergence, MEPs highlight that the concentration of ownership of the media system creates an environment favouring the monopolisation of the advertising market. MEPs regret, in particular, that **profit-making is the only determining factor**, disregarding the values expressed in journalists' codes of conduct. According to MEPs, a suitable balance must be found between competition and pluralism in the media and between public and private broadcasters.

Maintaining quality and pluralism: according to MEPs, the main objectives of public authorities should be to ensure a high level of media quality (including those of the public media) and to guarantee the full independence of journalists. Measures must therefore be taken to improve the competitiveness of European media concerns and to improve the consistency of application of competition legislation at European and national level.

Indicators to evaluate media pluralism: while MEPs welcome the initiatives on self-regulation, they call for greater safeguards in this area such as the **creation of a charter for media freedom** to guarantee freedom of expression and pluralism. They therefore stress the need to institute monitoring and implementation systems based on reliable and impartial indicators. In this context, the Commission is called upon to develop specific indicators to evaluate media pluralism and to analyse its orientation as regards democracy, the rule of law, and human and minority rights.

Uniform application of a legal framework: to ensure the independence of journalists and editors, they must be provided with a legal framework and specific legal and social guarantees: MEPs stress, therefore, the importance of creating **editorial charters** to prevent owners, shareholders, or outside bodies such as governments, from interfering with news content. It is also essential to ensure that all political and social sensibilities are represented, in particular in the context of news and current affairs programs. The Commission is called upon to commit itself to promoting a stable legal framework with a guaranteed high standard of protection of pluralism in all the Member States. It is also called upon to take additional measures, including: the creation of an objective framework for granting broadcasting licences in the areas of cable and satellite TV and analogue and digital broadcasting markets (in order to prevent abuses by companies enjoying monopolies or dominant positions); taking into consideration issues such as commercial misuse of user-generated content. MEPs recall, in this respect, that on several occasions the Commission has been called upon to draw up a **directive that would aim to ensure pluralism** and preserve cultural diversity. In order to improve transparency in the media, MEPs encourage the disclosure of ownership of all media as well as the background of the broadcaster and publisher.

Functions of public service media: Member States are called upon to support their public service broadcasters: these must maintain a high-quality reputation, offer an alternative to commercial channels, play the card of journalistic pluralism and enable democratic dialogue with all citizens. MEPs recommend, in particular, that the regulations governing state aid be devised and implemented in a way that enables the public services and community media to fulfil their function in a dynamic environment, while ensuring that public service media carry out their function in a transparent and accountable manner, avoiding the

abuse of public funding for reasons of political or economic expediency. MEPs also suggest the creation of independent media ombudsmen or comparable institutions in the Member States in which they do not already exist.

Codes of conduct: MEPs suggest that, for private-user-generated content in commercial publications and channels, ethical codes of conduct and terms of usage should be encouraged and royalties, commensurate with its commercial value, should be introduced.

New media: MEPs welcome the diversity brought into the media landscape by the new media, such as mobile TV. However, they ask for clarification regarding the **status of weblogs** and remuneration for the commercial use of user-generated content, assimilating them for legal purposes with any other form of public expression. They also support the protection of copyrights at the level of online media, the third parties having to mention the source when taking over declarations. In order to ensure that traditional forms of media do not lose out in an evolving media environment, MEPs call on public media to develop new services, including digital.

Online players and data protection: MEPs are concerned about the dominance of a few large online players. They therefore call for greater transparency with respect to personal data and information kept on users by Internet search engines, email providers and social networking sites. They call on the Commission to reflect on this issue and to draw up minimal guidelines or a sector-specific regulation to safeguard media pluralism online. In any event, competition rules should also apply to online media. New media also raise ethical issues: that is why the Commission is called upon to take into consideration the issues arising from the unethical usage and commercial misuse of user-generated content.

Promoting cultural diversity: MEPs call for media content to also reflect European regional diversity. In addition, they call on the Commission to take due account of the Unesco Convention on cultural diversity when making a decision about the need to revise the EC Broadcasting Communication.

Media literacy: MEPs recommend the inclusion of media literacy among the European key competences. Media education should, in fact, enable citizens to critically interpret the content proposed to them. The Commission should pay greater attention to standards of critical content assessment.

Spectrum and allocation of the digital dividend: lastly, MEPs reiterate that the regulation of spectrum use must take account of public interest objectives such as media pluralism and thus cannot be subjected to a purely market based regime. They call, in particular, for a balanced approach to the allocation of the digital dividend to ensure equitable access for all players.