Journalism and new media - creating a public sphere in Europe

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The Committee on Culture and Education adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Morten LØKKEGAARD (ADLE, DK) on journalism and new media – creating a public sphere in Europe.

Members call on the institutions to create together a European public sphere which is characterised by the opportunity for all EU citizens to participate, and the basis for which is free access, free of charge, to all Commission, Council and Parliament public information in all EU languages. In this regard, they welcome the joint declaration of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission entitled ' Communicating Europe in Partnership'.

Overall, EU news coverage must be provided by all types of media, in particular the mass media, and must be impartial, factual and independent, which is a central prerequisite for generating pan-European debate and creating a European public sphere.

The report notes that lack of online news and information on the EU and its institutions is not the problem, which in fact lies in the availability of a wide range of information without any real order of priority, leading to a situation in which too much information kills information. It notes that all the institutions have launched their own news platforms, which **fail, however, to interest a broad section of the public** because often they are not sufficiently clear, attractive or understandable, in many cases owing to the use of overly technical language that is very off-putting for people who are unfamiliar with European Issues. Members take the view that there should be an **introductory portal** to the platforms which clarifies the workings of all the EU institutions. They maintain that communication should be based on genuine dialogue between the general public and policy-makers and calm political debate between members of the public. It wishes to see more interactive dialogue based less on institutional communication, which is often uninviting and too detached from people's everyday lives.

The Commission is called to **strengthen its communication policy** and put it high on the list of priorities when the renegotiation of the post-2013 multiannual financial framework is due to start.

Member States: the report underlines the importance of involving national MPs in EU policy-making, and welcomes initiatives such as live participation by national MPs in EP committee meetings through webstreaming. It also stresses the important role played by political parties in shaping public opinion on European issues. Members point out that they play a leading role in fostering debate and contributing to the European public sphere and that they should give European issues a more prominent position in their programmes. They believe that civil society organisations have an important role to play in the European

debate and that their role should be enhanced by means of targeted cooperation projects in the public communication sphere. The report underlines the need for each Member State to have a **specialised EU affairs office**, with a person responsible for explaining the local, regional and national implications of EU policies.

The committee points out that the European integration process needs to be brought closer to young people, and accordingly calls on the Member States and regions to consider – in order to familiarise pupils with the EU institutions – incorporating the EU more fully into all education curricula.

Media and the EU: concerned about the cuts to the Commission's communication budget lines, members suggest that the Commission promote and fund exchanges between broadcasters and other media professionals from different Member States in relation to best practice in covering the EU, including training the public service and private media sectors. Stressing the media's special role as an intermediary in the process of shaping the democratic will and public opinion, members state that there is a need for reliable political information, including in the area of new media.

Members find the recent decrease in the number of accredited journalists in Brussels extremely worrying, and consider this new state of affairs to be in the interests of neither the EU institutions nor the accredited press in Brussels. They call, therefore, on the EU institutions – in order to support those currently in Brussels – to cooperate more closely with press representatives in Brussels and to display greater openness towards them. They propose in this respect that steps be taken to facilitate the accreditation procedure for journalists.

The report stresses the need to set up a group of correspondents from among the specialised, accredited journalists in Brussels, whose role would be to **cover EU news in a more instructive manner** while guaranteeing editorial independence, with the purpose of this 'taskforce' being to provide information in a manner that is fully transparent and accessible to the EU public.

Members encourage the Commission and Parliament to strengthen further their commitment to educate and train staff in communication skills, enabling them to communicate with the media and with the public in order to improve the EU institutions' provision of information and communication. They regard enhanced recruitment of media professionals in order to fulfil these requirements as essential. The Commission is called upon to be open to all means of communication, to have greater contact with journalists and the media and to support all projects and initiatives aimed at better informing the public about EU affairs.

Public service media: the report stresses that national and regional public service broadcasters have a particular responsibility to inform the public about politics and policy-making at EU level. Moreover, Member States should have a responsibility to cover the EU in the context of their public service function of informing and supporting citizens and civil society and they should take on board communication techniques relying on the new media so as to increase their credibility via open public participation.

EU/local level: the EU institutions should help to decentralise EU communication policy in order to give it a local and regional dimension so as to bring different levels of communication closer to one another, and should encourage the Member States to provide the public with more information on EU-related matters. Members call on the Commission to continue with the 'going local' approach, with a view to making the EU more visible at local level.

European Parliament: Members suggest that the European Parliament working group, to be set up on a temporary basis, examine existing new media solutions and come up with proposals on how to create interparliamentary relationships between national or regional parliaments and the European Parliament. Recognising the enhanced role of national parliaments and thus the importance of the European Parliament's information offices in the Member States, Members point out that in order to become more visible they must adapt their mission statement to include strengthening links with national parliaments, local and regional authorities and representatives of civil society. They highlight the need for EP information offices to go local and provide targeted information about Parliament's decisions and activities to the general public. They propose that consideration be given to **allowing the information offices greater independence**.

Journalism and new media: Members stress that the Member States must come up with viable concepts for the EU media that go beyond merely passing on information and enable them to contribute fully to the

EU’s cultural and linguistic diversity. The report stresses that, although **social networks** are a relatively good way of disseminating information rapidly, their reliability as sources **cannot always be sufficiently guaranteed and they cannot be considered to be professional media**. **Caution is therefore required when taking up these new tools**. Members observe with interest that, despite the irreversible emergence of social networks, journalism has kept its key role in news broadcasting, since journalists use these highly diverse networks to carry out in-depth research and check facts, thus giving rise to a new model of participatory journalism and furthering the dissemination of information. They highlight the crucial role of journalists in a modern society faced with a barrage of information, since they alone can bring significant added value to information by using their professionalism, ethics, skill and credibility to make sense of the news.