

# Freedom of press and media in the world

2011/2081(INI) - 20/05/2013 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Marietje SCHAAKE (ALDE, NL) on the freedom of press and media in the world.

Recalling the main principles and the role of the press and media, in particular in the digital age, Members underline that, recently, some governments have been responsible for hampering freedom, e.g. through the abuse of anti-terrorism or anti-extremism legislation. It is, however, vital that the press and media can operate **independently and free of pressure** through political and financial means. They are alarmed at the general downward trend in the grading of the press and media freedom environments in various countries both within and outside Europe.

Members emphasise that free, independent and pluralistic online and traditional media are one of the cornerstones of democracy and pluralism. They deplore the fact that journalists are frequently wounded or murdered or are being subjected to serious abuses throughout the world, often with impunity. In their view, the effects of impunity have an impact not only on the freedom of the press, but also on the daily work of journalists, as well creating a climate of fear and self-censorship. They believe that the **EU should take a tougher stance** towards countries that constantly allow such acts to go unpunished.

Overall, Members consider that laws, statutory regulation, intimidation, fines and highly concentrated ownership by politicians or others with conflicting interests are all factors that can limit the freedom to acquire and access information and that can result in threats to freedom of expression. Moreover, they deplore the fact that the criminalisation of expression is on the rise and are aware of the use of defamation, blasphemy and libel laws, as well as legislation referring to ‘the degrading of the country’s image abroad’ or to ‘homosexual propaganda. They regret that  **censorship fosters self-censorship**.

At the same time, Members consider that the trend of concentrated media ownership in large conglomerates to be a threat to media freedom and pluralism. They believe that public service media should be free and independent both from a financial and a political point of view. They encourage the development of ethical codes for journalists as well as for those involved in the management of media outlets, in order to ensure the full independence of journalists and media bodies.

**Digitisation:** Members recognise the important role played by digital and online media platforms in the uprisings against dictatorial regimes in recent years, as well as the magnified reach and impact of the information spread by these new media. Members are of the view that the digitisation of the press and media is adding new layers to the media landscape and  **facilitates everyone’s access to information**.

Members stress the need for global interoperability and appropriate regulation to free up the full potential of IT infrastructures. They deplore all attempts to create various forms of ‘closed internet’ or to censor bloggers, as well as the fact that numerous technologies and services deployed in third countries to violate human rights through censorship of information, mass surveillance, monitoring, and tracing and tracking of citizens and their activities on (mobile) telephone networks and the internet originate in the EU. They urge the Commission to take all necessary steps to stop this ‘digital arms trade’.

Members stress the fact that digital and (computer) data-driven platforms or services such as search engines are privately owned and require transparency so as to preserve the public value of information. They strongly condemn all attempts to use the internet or other online media platforms to  **promote terrorist activities**. They urge the authorities to take a firm stance in this respect.

**EU policies and external actions:** Members stress that the EU should lead by example in order to ensure the safeguarding of freedom of the press and expression. To this end, the Union should not interfere with content but should, rather, **support an enabling environment** and the lifting of restrictions on freedom of expression globally. However, they note with concern that, in recent years, some media, notably in the EU, have come under scrutiny themselves for unethical behaviour.

Members consider that the EU lacks a coherent strategic vision and benchmarks on the issue of press and media freedom. This is why Members call on the Commission, in particular DG DEVCO and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to improve their cooperation and coordination of programming, particularly by synergising their political and diplomatic work. They also urge the Union to play a more significant role notably in the candidate countries, as well as in relation to its immediate southern and eastern neighbourhood. They call on the EU to adopt a strategy to ensure that it closely monitors and reacts to changes in legislation which restrict pluralism and freedom of the press in third countries. To this effect, existing external financial instruments, such as the EIDHR, or even association agreements with third countries need to be mobilised.

Lastly, Members call on the Commission to:

- make the fight against impunity one of its priorities in its programmes concerning freedom of expression and the media;
- adopt a Press and Media Freedom Strategy in the framework of EU foreign policy;
- incorporate the recommendations of this report in the forthcoming Guidelines on Freedom of Expression (online and offline).