

Freedom of press and media in the world

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution 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, Parliament underlines 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. Members 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.

They 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. Parliament also believes that the **EU should take a tougher stance** towards countries that constantly allow such acts to go unpunished.

Parliament stresses that indirect pressure on the press and the media can be brought by governments. It considers that in many countries the media rely heavily on **government advertising**, which can then become a tool to pressurise the media, and that licences or fiscal penalties can also be used to restrict the operation of critical media.

Overall, Parliament considers 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, it deplores 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. It regrets 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. Too often media are used as and/or are involved in traditional **propaganda tools**. They emphasise 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: Parliament recognises 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. It is 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**.

Parliament stresses the need for global interoperability and appropriate regulation to free up the full potential of IT infrastructures. It deplores 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. It is concerned over mass surveillance, mass censoring, and blocking and filtering tendencies affecting not only the media and the work of journalists and bloggers but also hindering the work of civil

society in bringing about significant political, economic and social change. It calls on the Commission to take all necessary steps to stop this ‘**digital arms trade**’.

Parliament stresses 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. It strongly condemns all attempts to use the internet or other online media platforms to **promote terrorist activities**. It urges the authorities to take a firm stance in this respect.

EU policies and external actions: the resolution stresses 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, Members note with concern that, in recent years, some media, notably in the EU, have come under scrutiny themselves for unethical behaviour.

Strategy: Parliament considers that the EU lacks a coherent strategic vision and benchmarks on the issue of press and media freedom. This is why it calls 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. Members 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, Parliament calls 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).