Media pluralism and media freedom in the European Union

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The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Barbara SPINELLI (GUE/NGL, IT) on media pluralism and media freedom in the European Union.

The Committee on Culture and Education, exercising its prerogative as an associated committee in accordance with Article 54 of the Rules of Procedure, also gave its opinion on the report.

The report noted that media freedom, pluralism and independence are crucial components of the right to freedom of expression. The media play an essential role in democratic society. The scope of such a role should be enlarged to encompass online and citizen journalism, as well as the work of bloggers, internet users, social media activists and human rights defenders, in order to reflect today's profoundly changed media reality while respecting the right to privacy.

Moreover, fake news, cyberbullying and revenge porn represent growing concerns for our societies, especially among young people.

Recent political developments in various Member States, where nationalism and populism are on the rise, have led to increased pressures on and threats against journalists, which show that the European Union must ensure, promote and defend media freedom and pluralism.

Increased funding: Members called on the Member States to take appropriate measures, including ensuring **adequate public funding**, to safeguard and promote a pluralist, independent and free media landscape.

Violence and threats against journalists: expressing deep concern at the abuses, crimes and deadly attacks still being committed against journalists and media workers in the Member States because of their activities, Members called on the Member States to do their utmost to prevent such violence, to ensure accountability and avoid impunity and to guarantee that victims and their families have access to the appropriate legal remedies. They also called on Member States to set up an independent and impartial **regulatory body**, in cooperation with journalists' organisations, for monitoring, documenting and reporting on violence and threats against journalists and to deal with the protection and safety of journalists at national level.

Members also expressed concern over the deteriorating working conditions for journalists and the amount of psychological violence that journalists witness and called on the Member States to set up **national action plans**, in close cooperation with journalist organisations, to improve the working conditions of journalists and to ensure that journalists will not be victims of psychological violence.

In particular, the report highlighted the state of media freedom in Malta following the assassination of anti-corruption journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia in October 2017, who was also subjected to harassment, including precautionary warrants freezing her bank accounts, and threats made by multinational companies. Members welcomed the decision to name the European Parliament's press room and an annual prize for investigative journalism after her.

The report also underlined the importance of ensuring adequate working conditions for journalists and media workers.

Digitalisation and cyberbullying: Members recognise that the new digital environment has exacerbated the problem of the spread of disinformation, or so-called ‘fake’ or ‘false’ news. In this regard, they encouraged social media companies and online platforms to develop tools to enable users to report and flag potential fake news in order to facilitate prompt rectification and to allow for review by independent and impartial certified third party fact checking organisations.

Reiterating that **cyberbullying**, revenge porn and child sexual abuse material are a growing concern in our societies and can have extremely serious impacts, especially on young people and children, Members encouraged all Member States to draw up forward-looking legislation to address these phenomena, including provisions for detection, flagging and removal from social media of content which is manifestly harmful to human dignity.

Whistleblowers: Members reiterated their call on the Commission and the Member States to set up and implement an adequate, advanced and **comprehensive framework for common European legislation to protect whistleblowers.** They also called for journalists to be given proper tools to inquire and receive information from EU and Member States’ public administration authorities, according to Regulation 1049 /2001 on public access to documents, without facing arbitrary decisions denying such right of access.

Member States are called on to adopt and implement a **media ownership regulation** in order to avoid horizontal concentration of ownership in the media sector and indirect and cross-media ownership, and to guarantee transparency, disclosure, and easy accessibility for citizens to information on media ownership, funding sources and management.

The Commission is called on to:

- allocate permanent and adequate funding in the EU budget to support the Media Pluralism Monitor at the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom, and to create an annual mechanism for the assessment of the risks to media pluralism in the Member States;
- monitor and collect information and statistics on media freedom and pluralism within all Member States and to closely analyse cases of the infringement of the fundamental rights of journalists.

Lastly, Members stressed the need to **abolish geoblocking of information media content**, thereby allowing EU citizens to access online, on-demand and replay streaming of other Member States’ television channels.