Media pluralism and media freedom in the European Union

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The European Parliament adopted by 488 votes to 43, with 114 abstentions, a resolution on media pluralism and media freedom in the European Union.

Members recalled that media freedom, pluralism and independence are crucial components of the right to freedom of expression. However, 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.

Parliament called on the EU institutions to guarantee full implementation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in all their decisions, actions and policies, as a means to thoroughly uphold media pluralism and media freedom from undue influence from national public authorities.

Increased funding: Parliament 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. It asked the Commission and the Member States to promote and elaborate new socially sustainable economic models aimed at financing and supporting quality and **independent journalism** and to strengthen financial support to public service providers and **investigative journalism** while refraining from involvement in editorial decisions.

Violence and threats against journalists: in order to prevent crimes and deadly attacks against journalists and media professionals in the Member States because of their activities, Members urged Member States to set up **an independent and impartial regulatory body** to report violence and threats against journalists and to ensure the protection and safety of journalists at national level. They stressed the importance of ensuring efficient legal recourse procedures for journalists whose freedom to work has been threatened, so as to avoid self-censorship.

The Commission is invited to propose an **anti-SLAPP Directive** (strategic lawsuit against public participation) that would protect independent media from vexatious lawsuits aimed at silencing or intimidating them in the EU.

Fake news and cyberbullying: Members recognised 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.

Parliament reiterated 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. The resolution 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.

Media ownership: 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. Members stressed the need to have in place independent monitoring mechanisms to assess the situation of media freedom and media pluralism in the EU.

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.