Role of public service television in the multimedia society

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The European Parliament has approved an own-initiative report by Mrs Carole TONGUE (PSE, UK) on the role of public service television in the multimedia society. In view of the rapidly-changing audio visual environment, the report makes an impassioned plea in support of public service broadcasting (PSB). The report is concerned about the growth in the power of private transnational monopoly groups, which could lead to the marginalisation of public service broadcasting. It calls on the European Commission to make greater use of Article 92(3) of the Treaty on European Union, which was designed to encourage Member States to provide financial support to promote culture. The national governments should be free to decide how public broadcasting services should be financed. Public funding was fully justified as long as public service companies fulfil all their commitments. Parliament approved the directives of the European Commission on state aid for culture and held the view that Community legislation on competition should not be used to fragment the European public service broadcasting market. Such channels should therefore be excluded from the provisions of the draft directive on media concentration. The report seeks to encourage national broadcasters to work together to produce quality programmes. Broadcasters should also be urged to engage in the exchange of programmes. The report also proposes that financial support be granted to European broadcasting organizations such as ARTE and EURONEWS. The European Parliament considers inadmissible the improper granting of exclusive rights to broadcast sporting events and scientific and technical shows or events, which should be broadcast by all information media for the widest audience. PSB should be accessible to all citizens and the European Commission should see to it that this remains so. Cable and satellite broadcasting companies should be obliged to offer PSB programmes so that the latter might play a leading role in the development of new services. Cooperation could also be fostered by the inclusion of a greater number of European multicultural programmes, which are not necessarily national productions, in the programming schedules of public broadcasters. These broadcasters should invest in intra-European co-production and exchange of programmes, making use of support programmes such as MEDIA 2 and the proposed European Audiovisual Guarantee Funds. They should also be required to broadcast a majority proportion of European works. The report calls on Member States to ensure stable and realistic funding for PSBs in order to ensure their viability in a competitive market and to guarantee their political and economic independence. It is also the responsibility of national governments to ensure that public service channels have as wide an audience as possible, through the use of digital broadcasting. Adequate investment should be provided for this purpose. The report calls on the IGC to include clear provisions for public services in any new Treaty arrangement. Lastly, in calling on the Commission to finance preliminary feasibility studies with a view to establishing pan-European public service channels, the European Parliament expressed the hope that these channels would respect the obligation to produce and transmit a majority proportion of European works.