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Community Media in Europe

European Parliament resolution of 25 September 2008 on Community Media in Europe (2008/2011(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 150 and 151 of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to the Treaty of Amsterdam amending the Treaty of the European Union, the Treaties establishing the European Communities and certain related acts, signed on 2 October 1997 and Protocol No 9 on the system of public broadcasting in the Member States¹,
- having regard to Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which recognises the legitimacy of public policies for the recognition and promotion of pluralism,
- having regard to Directive 2002/21/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 March 2002 on a common regulatory framework for electronic communications networks and services (Framework Directive)²,
- having regard to Directive 2002/19/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 March 2002 on access to, and interconnection of, electronic communications networks and associated facilities (Access Directive)³,
- having regard to Directive 2002/20/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 March 2002 on the authorisation of electronic communications networks and services (Authorisation Directive)⁴,
- having regard to Directive 2002/22/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 March 2002 on universal service and users' rights relating to electronic communications networks and services (Universal Service Directive)⁵,
- having regard to Directive 2007/65/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2007 amending Council Directive 89/552/EEC on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the pursuit of television broadcasting activities⁶,

¹ OJ C 340, 10.11.1997, p. 109.

² OJ L 108, 24.4.2002, p. 33.

³ OJ L 108, 24.4.2002, p. 7.

⁴ OJ L 108, 24.4.2002, p. 21.

⁵ OJ L 108, 24.4.2002, p. 51.

⁶ OJ L 332, 18.12.2007, p. 27.

- having regard to Decision No 676/2002/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 March 2002 on a regulatory framework for radio spectrum policy in the European Community (Radio Spectrum Decision)¹,
 - having regard to the White Paper presented by the Commission on a European communication policy (COM(2006)0035),
 - having regard to the Commission Communication of 20 December 2007 on a European approach to media literacy in the digital environment (COM(2007)0833),
 - having regard to its resolution of 14 July 1995 on the Green Paper strategy options to strengthen the European programme industry in the context of the audiovisual policy of the European Union²,
 - having regard to the Commission Staff Working Document on Media Pluralism in the Member States of the European Union (SEC(2007)0032),
 - having regard to its resolution of 22 April 2004 on the risks of violation, in the EU and especially in Italy, of freedom of expression and information (Article 11(2) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights)³,
 - having regard to the study ‘The State of Community Media in the European Union’, commissioned by the European Parliament,
 - having regard to the Council of Europe Recommendation (Community Media/Rec(2007)2) of the Committee of Ministers to member states on media pluralism and diversity of media content,
 - having regard to the Council of Europe Declaration (Decl-31.01.2007E) of the Committee of Ministers on protecting the role of the media in democracy in the context of media concentration,
 - having regard to the Joint Declaration on Diversity in Broadcasting drafted by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, the OAS Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and the ACHPR (African Commission on Human Rights and Peoples' Rights) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, adopted on 12 December 2007,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (A6-0263/2008),
- A. whereas community media are non-profit organisations accountable to the community that they seek to serve,
- B. whereas their non-profit nature means that the primary objective of such media is to engage in activities of public or private interest without any commercial or monetary profit,

¹ OJ L 108, 24.4.2002, p.1.

² OJ C 249, 25.9.1995, p. 219.

³ OJ C 104 E, 30.4.2004, p. 1026.

- C. whereas being accountable to the community means that community media must inform the community about their actions and decisions, justify them, and be penalised in the event of any misconduct,
- D. whereas there are major differences between Member States regarding community media dissemination and impact, which are the most extensive in those Member States which clearly recognise their legal status and are aware of their added value,
- E. whereas community media should be open to participation in the creation of content by members of the community, and thereby foster the active participation of volunteers in media production rather than passive media consumption,
- F. whereas community media very often do not represent a majority of those in society but serve instead a variety of smaller, specific target groups overlooked by other media, which are in many cases locally or regionally based,
- G. whereas community media fulfil a broad yet largely unacknowledged role in the media landscape, particularly as a source of local content, and encourage innovation, creativity and diversity of content,
- H. whereas community media are obliged to present a clearly defined mandate, such as providing a social benefit, which also has to be reflected in the content they produce,
- I. whereas one of the main weaknesses of community media in the European Union is their lack of legal recognition by many national legal systems, and whereas, moreover, none of the relevant Community legal acts have yet addressed the issue of community media,
- J. whereas the introduction of a code of practice, in addition to legal recognition, would clarify sector status, procedures and role, contributing to sector certainty while also ensuring independence and preventing misconduct,
- K. whereas the internet has propelled the sector into a new age with new possibilities and challenges, and whereas the costs of switching from analogue to digital transmission put a considerable burden on community media,
- L. whereas 2008 has been designated European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, which means that the media in the Union have a particularly important role to play, providing an eminently suitable means of expression and information for smaller cultural entities within society as a whole and for continuation of the intercultural dialogue throughout 2008 and beyond,
- M. whereas community media are an important means of empowering citizens and encouraging them to become actively involved in civic society; whereas they enrich social debate, representing a means of internal pluralism of ideas; and whereas concentration of ownership presents a threat to in-depth media coverage of issues of local interest for all groups within the community,
- 1. Stresses that community media are an effective means of strengthening cultural and linguistic diversity, social inclusion and local identity, which explains the diversity of the sector;

2. Points out that community media help to strengthen the identities of specific interest groups, while at the same time enabling members of those groups to engage with other groups in society, and therefore play an important role in fostering tolerance and pluralism in society and contribute to intercultural dialogue;
3. Stresses also that community media promote intercultural dialogue by educating the general public, combating negative stereotypes and correcting the ideas put forward by the mass media regarding communities within society threatened with exclusion, such as refugees, migrants, Roma and other ethnic and religious minorities; stresses that community media are one of the existing means of facilitating the integration of immigrants and also enabling disadvantaged members of society to become active participants by engaging in debates that are important to them;
4. Points out that community media can play a significant role in training programmes involving external organisations, including universities, and unskilled community members, and act as a valuable hub for work experience; points out that training people in digital, web and editorial skills through their participation in community media activities provides useful and transferable skills;
5. Points out that community media act as a catalyst for local creativity, providing artists and creative entrepreneurs with a public platform for testing new ideas and concepts;
6. Considers that community media contribute to the goal of improving citizens' media literacy through their direct involvement in the creation and distribution of content and encourages school-based community outlets to develop a civic attitude among the young, to increase media literacy, as well as to build up a set of skills that could be further used for community media participation;
7. Stresses that community media help to strengthen media pluralism, as they provide additional perspectives on issues that lie at the heart of a given community;
8. Points out that, in light of the withdrawal or non-existence of public and commercial media in some areas, including remote areas, and the tendency of commercial media to reduce local content, community media may provide the only source of local news and information and the sole voice of local communities;
9. Welcomes the fact that community media can make citizens more aware of existing public services and can help to foster civil participation in public discourse;
10. Considers that community media may serve as an effective means of bringing the Union closer to its citizens by addressing specially targeted audiences; and recommends also that the Member States collaborate more actively with community media in order to enter into a closer dialogue with citizens;
11. Points out that good quality community media are essential in order for the sector to fulfil its potential and stresses the fact that without proper financial resources there cannot be such quality; notes that the financial resources of community media vary greatly but are in general rather scarce, and acknowledges that additional funding and digital adaptation would enable the community media sector to extend its innovative profile and to provide new and vital services that bring added value to the existing analogue services;

12. Notes that the sector lacks the support needed for it to be able to make major efforts to improve its representation to, and contact with, EU and national decision-makers;
13. Stresses the need for community media to be politically independent;
14. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to take into account the contents of the resolution by defining community media as:
 - (a) non-profit making and independent, not only from national, but also from local power, engaging primarily in activities of public and civil society interest, serving clearly defined objectives which always include social value and contribute to intercultural dialogue;
 - (b) accountable to the community which they seek to serve, which means that they are to inform the community about their actions and decisions, to justify them, and to be penalised in the event of any misconduct, so that the service remains controlled by the interests of the community and the creation of 'top-down' networks is prevented;
 - (c) open to participation in the creation of content by members of the community, who may participate in all aspects of operation and management, although those in charge of editorial content must have professional status;
15. Advises Member States, without causing detriment to traditional media, to give legal recognition to community media as a distinct group alongside commercial and public media where such recognition is still lacking;
16. Calls on the Commission to take into account community media as an alternative, bottom-up solution for increasing media pluralism when designing indicators for media pluralism;
17. Calls on Member States to support community media more actively in order to ensure media pluralism, provided that such support is not to the detriment of public media;
18. Stresses the role that may be played by local, regional and national authorities in supporting and promoting community media by providing suitable infrastructure, together with support within the context of programmes encouraging exchanges of best practice, such as the Community 'Regions for Economic Change' (formerly Interreg) programme;
19. Calls on Member States to make television and radio frequency spectrum available, both analogue and digital, bearing in mind that the service provided by community media is not to be assessed in terms of opportunity cost or justification of the cost of spectrum allocation but rather in the social value it represents;
20. Acknowledges that on the one hand only a small portion of the sector has the knowledge and experience to apply for and benefit from EU support, while on the other hand funding officers are not aware of community media's potential;
21. Recognises that the sector could make more use of Community funding schemes in so far as they contribute to the objectives of community media, through the implementation of a number of specific programmes, such as those of the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund as well as the opportunities for educating and training journalists through the Lifelong Learning Programmes and others; stresses, however, that

funding must come principally from national, local and other sources;

22. Urges community media to establish a European internet platform through which useful and relevant information for the sector can be diffused, and to facilitate networking and exchange of best practices;
23. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions, and to the governments and parliaments of the Member States.