

A Manifesto for Media and Democracy in Europe

We, the undersigned, a coalition of concerned European media NGOs, professional organisations and civil society groups, declare that at a time of increasing uncertainty among Europeans about the future, there has never been a more important time for the promotion of informed, professional and pluralist media.

We strongly believe that in order to reinforce the values of European democracy, to meet the aspirations of the public and to confront a widespread crisis of confidence, which has led to a resurgence of intolerance and political extremism, it is urgently necessary to adopt practical confidence-building measures that will improve the flow of quality information between and within communities, and promote professional solidarity.

We call on lawmakers, media organisations, civil society groups and public bodies to act urgently to strengthen the quality of media and journalism in Europe. In particular, we seek the adoption and implementation of actions in defence of pluralism, diversity and professionalism, which will:

1. **Strengthen public service values in the media** by adopting policies and actions that will reverse the reduction of public service content in European media and will expand the public information space across all media sectors; and to **ensure the possibility of access for all to free public service content on all technical platforms.**
2. **Reinforce inter-cultural dialogue**, and challenge increasing cultural division, through new initiatives to raise awareness of minority concerns and cultural identity among media professionals, and to promote open discussion between media and representatives of different communities;
3. **Promote media pluralism** by combating media concentration and by supporting more and diverse media voices;
4. **Provide appropriate frameworks for other media**, in particular non-commercial media, capable of contributing to pluralism and diversity and providing a space for dialogue. These media could, for example, take the form of associative, community, local, minority or social media.
5. **Stimulate public engagement** with media and policymakers in order to develop a more balanced, accessible and democratic media system, including consultation of the public by regulators and public service media organisations, which may involve the creation of advisory structures reflecting the diverse nature of the public.
6. **Encourage editorial independence** in media by actively supporting the efforts of journalists and media professionals to work freely and to resist all forms of internal and external pressure that undermine the quality and ethical standing of media;
7. **Make equality between women and men a living reality** in the life of European media; **and renew efforts to end all forms of discrimination;**

8. **Adopt a comprehensive strategy for diversity** to help media meet the challenge of improving levels of diversity, both in content and within media institutions, and among broadcasters in particular
9. **Act to combat the digital divide** that exists in many European communities and improve access to new digital technologies for women and men of all ages across communities;
10. **Recognise the need for media literacy** and develop programmes that will increase the understanding of people, as citizens and consumers, of how media content, and especially information, no matter how it is disseminated and received, can shape and influence the world in which we live.
11. **Support scientific research on, and monitoring of,** media concentration and pluralism and promote public debate on these matters. Particular attention should be paid to the effect of media concentration on the diversity of media content; on the balance between entertainment programmes on the one hand and information and programmes fostering public debate on the other hand; and on the contribution of the media to the promotion of human rights and intercultural dialogue.

In order to achieve these objectives this Manifesto must be accompanied by supporting actions to improve the participation of European civil society in the development and implementation of media and information policy, as well as by a comprehensive Europe-wide campaign to raise awareness about how people can work together to promote common values, through professional media, in order to confront anti-social and undemocratic developments.

In addition, states should not only ratify, but also implement the UNESCO *Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions* adopted on 20 October 2005, which calls on States to adopt measures aimed at protecting and promoting the diversity of cultural expressions within their territory. Such policies should include measures aimed at enhancing gender and vulnerable groups' equality, as well as supporting diversity in the media, including through public service broadcasting.

We call on the Parliaments and governments of Europe, at the national and intergovernmental level, in particular at the level of the European Union and the Council of Europe, to promote, together with civil society groups and media organisations, a wide-ranging and inclusive debate on the activities and concrete actions needed to meet the demands and aspirations of people in Europe.

Follows: signatures (organisation; country; website)

Why we need this statement

1. To support media structures contributing to equality and intercultural dialogue

'Breaking news' and unfiltered information from distant conflict zones or major events are brought directly to our television, computer or mobile phone. Information is provided quickly but often not in context. This has implications for political debates concerning fundamental rights, including women's rights, cultural diversity and integration, religion, immigration and asylum, and it affects the lives of all in society.

Intercultural misunderstandings arise when audiences of different communities see their opinions and prejudices reinforced by media, either from national or international sources, which interpret events based on narrow cultural, and often religious, perspectives and values. There is a need for informed, professional and balanced reporting on the part of all media. If not, there will be increased intercultural misunderstandings, the fuelling of racism and xenophobia and the continued exploitation of fear and uncertainty within communities by unscrupulous political forces.

Media need to report professionally on gender equality issues, equality and the concerns of minority communities in order to raise awareness of intolerance in society. There is a need to have more dialogue between media professionals at all levels and civil society actors on these matters and for more efficient mechanisms of media monitoring on diversity issues.

European democracies can counter these developments by raising awareness of the complex issues involved and by encouraging media to promote awareness-raising and structural forms of dialogue between communities.

2. To enhance quality and public service values in a new media environment

Excessive commercialisation of media and severe reductions in editorial spending are threatening the mission of journalism. Cuts in training and less investment in the scope and range of editorial activity, including investigative journalism, are accompanied by a focus on entertainment and commercial imperatives that reduce quality and limit the capacity of media to play its watchdog role in society. **In this complex news environment journalists can become casual victims of prejudice and political manipulation** and newsrooms, driven by business priorities, may reinforce harmful stereotypes notably concerning women and minority groups.

Public broadcasters struggle to compete with transnational commercial companies in a radically-changing media environment. Traditional differences between public service and commercial output are diminishing. In Europe's new democracies public broadcasters are chronically undercapitalised and lack professionalism. They cannot compete with commercial rivals in the new digital media environment. Programming for ethnic, linguistic and other minorities, as well as news and investigative reporting are under threat.

A lack of political will to reinforce public service values and editorial independence means many countries still lack independent institutions providing balanced, reliable and trusted information available and accessible to society as a whole. In many quarters the battle for basic values is still being fought – professionalism and quality content, principles of public service, the use and

development of professional codes of ethics. Everywhere positive measures to save public service content in European media, and particularly broadcasting, are urgently needed.¹

3. To confront the developing concentration of media markets

Increasing concentration of media ownership in Europe at all levels -local, national and transnational-, puts diversity and plurality at serious risk. It makes it possible for certain media companies to strengthen their influence on public opinion and attitudes.

In the past years we have also seen the increasing role of telecommunication companies in the media business. The development of non-linear media services via the Internet and mobile phones is reinforcing the position of the purely profit-driven telecommunication companies in the sector.

Ownership structures must be transparent to ensure compliance with existing monopoly laws and to prevent dominant positions. There is an urgent need for effective national legislation requiring such transparency, as well as increased monitoring to evaluate the impact of concentration.

4. To enhance the participation of everybody in democratic media systems

In many European countries there are diverse sources of information, including 'community media' initiatives, that provide views and opinions not present in traditional media outlets. The content of such media can be created mainly, but not exclusively, by and for certain groups in society, can provide a response to their specific needs or demands, and can serve as a factor of social cohesion and integration. The means of distribution, which may include digital technologies, should be adapted to the habits and possibilities of the public for whom these media are intended. These broadcasters share a common set of values in line with professional journalism, but which are not driven by the commercial imperatives often followed by larger media organisations. By reflecting the diversity of society in their programmes, community media broadcasters strengthen public service values on the media landscape. Such activity is increasingly and urgently needed to strengthen the fabric of civil dialogue and democratic debate.

This process can be further supported by opening public access to broadcast media. It is an important step towards the development of a more democratic communication system which strengthens the rights of citizens.

5. To reinforce the independence of media professionals

¹ *The Council of Europe Declaration on the Public Service Remit in the Information Society, 27 September 2006* defines public service broadcasting as:

- A reference point for all members of the public, offering universal access;
- A factor for social cohesion and integration of all individuals, groups and communities;
- A forum for pluralistic public discussion and a means of promoting broader democratic participation of individuals.
- Concerning the factor for social cohesion public service media should satisfy the needs of migrant groups and underprivileged and disadvantaged social categories. This role of filling a gap in the market, which is an important part of the traditional public media remit, should be maintained in the new media environment.

In many European countries media professionals, both in commercial and in the public sector, work in vulnerable conditions, often without guarantees of their professional and social rights. There is a gradual deterioration in employment standards as media professionals are increasingly forced into atypical forms of working. Many work without contracts, and are unable to exercise their rights to collective bargaining, to non-discriminatory and equal opportunities between women and men, to non-discriminatory and adequate wages, and to minimal standards of social protection.

At the same time, they work without the professional status that allows them to apply appropriate codes of ethics, codes of practice, complaints procedures and other instruments of self-regulation, training and professional development. Legislative, regulatory and policy changes are urgently needed to address these gaps in protection.

Media responsibility to work according to ethical principles in order to fulfil their mission of informing, educating and entertaining the public can only be undertaken when the legal, social and professional conditions are such that journalists and other can work freely and without undue pressure.

6. To strengthen gender equality and diversity among media professionals

In order to create an atmosphere of respect for fundamental rights including women's rights, mutual understanding and intercultural communication, national media have an increasingly important role to serve as platforms for inclusive intercultural dialogue and as news and information providers trusted by all sections of multicultural society. To fulfil this role there needs to be more women and diversity among programming staff and the establishment of recruitment policies that are more representative of the diversity of the society media serve. Gender equality and diversity issues should also figure in training programmes and provide benchmarks for the judgement of newsroom and programming performance.

Women, as well as minority groups, are confronted with issues of access, power and portrayal in the media sector. Recent studies show that women, and minority groups, are relatively invisible in the media and are seriously under-represented in decision-making in the sector. There are many examples of good practice among public broadcasters of fair recruitment policies that are designed to ensure that women, and minority groups, are not discriminated against and are properly represented in the work place. Unfortunately, even the best models are flawed and require constant vigilance to ensure they are implemented.

Good practice of fair recruitment policies designed to ensure that women, and minority groups, are not discriminated against and are properly represented in the work place need to be extended across all media. Fair recruitment policies are also a way to develop intercultural dialogue via the media.

7. To share the benefits of new information technologies

Digitalisation and technological convergence are rapidly developing, but most of Europe is still unprepared for them. Large conglomerates are taking advantage of technological developments to deny access to truly diverse information. A democratic information society requires shared benefits and access for all. If not, the 'digital divide' within our societies will deepen. Public service media have an important role in providing content that is free at the point of use and

thus, in principle, accessible to all. Public education campaigns and a vigorous and informed public debate are urgently needed.

8. To improve standards of media literacy

Media literacy at all levels of schooling and education in the formal and non-formal sectors is needed to help media users understand how and why certain media content is produced. Awareness of the techniques, languages and conventions used by media is crucial to understanding media messages and the information, values and assumptions they convey. This encourages women and men to develop their own ways of making their voice heard in a diverse information society and it is a guarantee of independence in relation to the media. The understanding of media is also a key element of an inclusive information society that respects the dignity of women, minorities and vulnerable people, and the promotion of human rights.

Media literacy is not a taken-for-granted concept even in well developed and democratic countries. It is often neglected and this needs to be addressed urgently.

What Role for Governments and Structures for Dialogue?

The objectives of the European Alliance for Media Integrity require a robust debate and a new approach of public policy in the field of media, information and communications.

Authorities must do more to enhance public service values, to reinforce professionalism and to promote the engagement of all groups in European society in a media culture that respects fundamental rights and democratic and pluralist values.

Raising awareness of the role media play in promoting better understanding of the complex issues that govern relations between and within communities in Europe requires practical initiatives to support dialogue within and between media, media professional groups and other civil society actors.

Issues related to ethics and content of media are primarily matters for media professionals, but governments and regulatory authorities have a key role to play in creating the enabling conditions for a legal and regulatory environment in which independent media can develop.

Governments should act, where they have jurisdiction, to implement the demands of the present Manifesto.

Media professional and civil society groups committed to fundamental values of free expression, social justice and equality for all have no illusion about the challenging tasks ahead.

But little can be done unless political institutions, parties and governments, take their responsibility to place the protection and development of a democratic media culture at the heart of European policies. There is within the profession and within society at large, a growing sense that time is running out.