

## **Stocktaking – The Road Ahead**

(The future activities of the Council of Europe in media and information society fields: orientation and priorities)

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Mister Chair, distinguished Ministers and Excellencies, colleagues!

I am very grateful for the chance to address you in my capacity as Chairman of the Steering Committee on Media and Information Society, known as the CDMSI. I will take this opportunity to take stock of achievements, highlight challenges we face and map out priorities and future activities of the Council of Europe to protect freedom of expression in the digital age.

Firstly, I would like to recall the important work done by the Council of Europe over the decades to protect freedom of expression in a rapidly changing environment. Under various names, the committee I have the honour to chair has, over the decades, constantly strived to improve its working methods. Dialogue within the Committee continues to take place in a friendly and constructive atmosphere of mutual trust and respect.

However, challenges to freedom of expression remained and were addressed by numerous instruments prepared by the Steering Committees. The Ministerial Conferences of Kyiv in 2005 and Reykjavik in 2009 also played a crucial role in this regard. The Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on a new notion of media adopted in September 2011 is but one example providing member states with useful and usable guidance for establishing and maintaining policies in line with human rights in a rapidly changing environment.

Through its consensus-building environment, the Council of Europe has managed to identify and address trends in international Internet related policy making. This is illustrated by major policy documents, such as Recommendations on the remit of public service media in the information society, on media pluralism and diversity of media content, on protecting and promoting freedom of expressing on the internet, on the public service value of the internet and on empowering children and protecting them in the digital age. The most recent Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states on gender equality and media adopted in July of this year is another example of the Council of Europe continuously striving to address issues that are essential for the functioning of a democratic society through its standard-setting.

I am therefore particularly grateful to the Minister of Justice of Armenia for having highlighted the importance of the Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on measures to promote the respect of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights adopted in 2010 and the most topical Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on Risks to Fundamental Rights stemming from Digital Tracking and other Surveillance Technologies adopted in June of this year.

These important activities have led to recognition of the Council of Europe as a pioneer in freedom of the media and information society standard-setting work. The long and wide-ranging expertise of the Council of Europe in promoting freedom of expression online and offline is also reflected impressively through its media cooperation programmes ranging today from the South Caucasus and Ukraine to South-Eastern Europe and Hungary. It is also reaching beyond our geographical boundaries as the Organisation nowadays provides

assistance to our neighbouring countries, such as Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan. This work led to strong cooperation with the European Union. Its impact includes reforming public service media, journalism education, and supporting networks of media professionals to name but a few examples.

Furthermore, ties were strengthened with other organisations with which we share common interests, namely the OSCE, the UN, as well as the ITU and ICANN. I should also recall that this work strongly benefitted from the multi-stakeholder approach, making the private sector and civil society Council of Europe partners by providing opportunities and room for participation, thus enabling and nourishing genuine dialogue.

The way forward - Challenges to be addressed

Ladies and Gentlemen, our conference in Belgrade has given us ample opportunities to discuss the challenges ahead:

The need to defend media pluralism versus media concentration.

The need to ensure transparency of media ownership.

The need to develop and uphold well-functioning public service media in particular in times of economic crisis and austerity measures.

The need to invest in media literacy programmes in order to develop critical minds, not only with our younger generation.

The need to effectively address threats to journalists. The safety of journalists is in my opinion the most telling indicator of the state of freedom of expression in any given country. And freedom of expression is a core indicator for the health of a democratic society.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am convinced that our Ministerial Conference in Belgrade will play a crucial role for enhancing protection of freedom of expression and thus democracy. The foundation has been laid with the Belgrade political declaration and its three accompanying resolutions. The Committee of Ministers has decided to take one topic a step further, namely the safety of journalists. A thematic debate on this issue will take place already on 12 December in Strasbourg. I trust that the continuous discussion will lead to a strong instrument in this regard. This way, the Council of Europe will live up to the expectations of many who count on the Council's on-going activity. And I know that with our combined efforts, we will be able to address the challenges ahead.

Normally I would finish at this point but the keynote speech by my fellow Latvian Nils Muižnieks and what Dunja Mijatović said in the multistakeholder session on the safety of journalism won't let me.

What have we achieved since the last conference in 2009 in Reykjavik? It is true that we have been at the forefront of standard setting and our work has been recognised not only in Europe but also by the world at large. Who else has done such pioneering work in the field of Internet governance as the Council of Europe? Who else has produced such a comprehensive exposition of the new notion of media and who else but the Council of Europe has produced a manual for the governance of public service media? The declaration on the dangers of tracking and surveillance was drafted before anyone had even heard of Edward Snowden. Yes, we have been responsible for a substantial body of standard setting instruments but unless they are referred to and implemented, they are only pieces of paper. And it's the implementation and adherence to the standards we have set for ourselves that is often in question. These standards have not been imposed on us by outside forces; we, the Member

States of the Council of Europe, have conceived, drafted and adopted them and therefore it seems to me paradoxical, hypocritical and cynical if we then go on to ignore them and flout them. How many journalists have been threatened, beaten up, arrested, jailed and even killed this year? In which of the Member States does the LGBT community enjoy full freedom of expression and assembly? Why is defamation still a criminal offence in Europe? Why is there still not genuine transparency of media ownership and why does the European Commission also now feel the need to address the question of the independence of media regulators? If these weren't such serious questions, I would ask you to send your answers on a postcard to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

Thank you!