

Why do we organise the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Media and Information Society ?

In pursuing its statutory aim to achieve greater unity between its member states, notably in respect of freedom of expression and information and its corollary media freedom online and offline, the Council of Europe is constantly facing new challenges. Information and communication technologies are developing rapidly and the impact on our societies is considerable. New challenges to human rights and democracy continue to emerge by the day in the information society.

In order to anticipate and address developments in the media field, the Council of Europe periodically convenes Conferences at Ministerial level. Following seven Ministerial Conferences on Mass Media Policy and one on Media and New Communication Services, the Council of Europe is now organising - with Serbia as the host - the Conference of Ministers responsible for Media and Information Society on the theme:

“FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND DEMOCRACY IN THE DIGITAL AGE, Opportunities, Rights and Responsibilities”

This Conference offers opportunities for Ministers to meet and discuss topics of particular concern for European policy with strong links to democratic sustainability on our Continent. The Conference will address opportunities and problems relating to freedom of expression and other fundamental rights and freedoms in respect of the Internet, its openness and governance.

Furthermore, the persistence of the essential role of media standards in pluralist democracies in the digital age will also form part of the discussions, with a view to testing the relevance of fundamental media values developed by the Council of Europe over decades in an increasingly converging media context.

The phenomenon of harassment, deprivation of liberty and even killings of journalists and others performing such functions is a disgraceful and appalling problem of critical importance, also in Europe. The Conference will address this situation and discuss Council of Europe added value and policy in close co-operation with its member States and the international community.

Incitement to violence and hatred, in particular online, is a common concern in all parts of Europe. The Council of Europe is actively involved in developing standards and practical measures against these phenomena in close co-operation with its member States. The Conference will take stock of measures underway and discuss further action to curb these phenomena, which threatens our common core values.

The Ministerial Conference will be held in **Belgrade on 7 and 8 November 2013**. In addition to the minister round tables, it will cater for parallel sessions and side events, all with a broad and transparent multi-stakeholder approach.