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**JOURNALISM IN THE VANGUARD OF CHANGE**

**Varna Declaration  
of the European Federation of Journalists**

# Journalism in the Vanguard of Change

## Varna Declaration of the European Federation of Journalists

The dramatic restructuring of the media economy across the world and particularly in Europe poses serious questions for all in journalism and the media industry.

The technology that allows people to create and share content is undercutting media that serve their communities. As blogs and social networks shine a light on new parts of the world, in other parts traditional media, particularly newspapers, are turning the lights out.

Media markets are collapsing. The flight of advertising to the Internet and a new generation of users who have less time for newspapers and traditional television have caused panic in an industry which is cutting jobs and slashing editorial costs at the expense of quality journalism and weakening democratic pluralism.

Over the past months, the decline of journalism and media in Europe caused by employers desperate to squeeze even more profits out of the sector has been dramatically accelerating as a result of the recent economic downturn. However, the media crisis we are witnessing in Europe has been years in the making and predates the recent recession.

The crisis is having a dramatic impact on media coverage of the political, social and democratic life of Europe. There is no longer a satisfactory balance between private sector media and publicly-funded outlets, broadcasting in particular, which has traditionally provided pluralist and diverse information to European citizens.

There is no longer any certainty that media pluralism can be assured. The private sector is no longer able to guarantee the provision of information services that have been central to preserving and enhancing standards of democracy in Europe.

At the same time, the public broadcasting landscape is in a crisis of its own, and is still subject to undue political pressures.<sup>1</sup> In the heartlands of European media both public and private media are equally under extraordinary pressure.

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<sup>1</sup> See the recent report "*Television across Europe. More Channels, Less Independence*" published by the Open Society Institute, which reveals how in Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Republic of Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia the crisis of independence is acute.

This is not a short-term crisis. The extent of the collapse of traditional media in the United States has already caused enormous shock both to media practitioners and public bodies. And there is little doubt, sooner rather than later, that Europe, too, will face the consequences of market restructuring.

This change is inexorable and offers potential for the creation of more open, more engaged and more informed communities, but this will only happen if there is protection for the professional, public purposes of journalism – to stimulate, educate and inform public debate, and to call to account those who exercise power in society. Journalism provides the mechanism for scrutiny and a check on corruption and it keeps societies open.

In response to this challenging environment the European Federation of Journalists believes that the future of journalism must be brought into the heart of debate at national and international level about the key role media across Europe play in building democracy based upon stability, social justice and fairness.

Journalists and their unions are determined to defend the working conditions, professional standards and union rights that are the lifeblood of democratic media. We believe that journalism and media professionalism which is the creative heart of European media must be protected, nourished and encouraged to develop.

With this in mind the EFJ is calling for a continental campaign to revive commitments to public service values in media and quality journalism, through the Ethical Journalism Initiative and according to the following principles:

1. The EFJ remains implacably opposed to all forms of censorship and self-censorship that are barriers to progress. Democracy cannot function if governments fail to create the legal and regulatory conditions that allow journalists to work freely.
2. Journalism needs to be reliable and credible and that requires investment in jobs and the work that journalists do and the elimination of precarious social and working conditions. The right of all journalists – permanent staff or freelance – to work in decent conditions, with their authors' rights and professional status underpinned by protective regulation is a guarantor of quality journalism.
3. There must be more commitment to professional education and training – particularly in societies striving to develop more open, pluralist and representative government.
4. Multimedia convergence requires new models of governance; press council and broadcast media councils and different forms of self-regulation, co-regulation and legally-binding rules. Existing structures are increasingly made obsolete by the realities of the Internet.

5. The changing world of information requires innovation and a new vision, based upon old and tested values. The EFJ recognises that the challenges cannot be overcome by journalists and their unions acting alone. We need to build new alliances involving all stakeholders – media owners, civil society groups and policymakers at national and European level – to create new dialogues and debates about strengthening the role of media.

We must seize the opportunity of a change of administration within the European Union during 2009 to launch a public debate, at national and European level, about the future of media in Europe.

This debate must not focus only on communications policy or technical issues arising from the technological convergence of telephony, broadcasting, print and digital media. These are important, but the critical and historical challenge is to reinforce the role of journalism as a core mechanism for pluralism and public engagement in the democratic life of Europe.

For this reason the EFJ, during its Annual Meeting 2009 in Varna, declares it will place the journalists of Europe in the vanguard of change with the following actions:

- To campaign vigorously for changes in European policymaking to permit a full examination of media developments and to encourage new initiatives, including a European-wide summit involving all stakeholders and the creation of a European Union media task-force, with union representation, to guide member states in their navigation of the uncertainties created by the media crisis;
- To investigate, with media owners and other partners, the scope for improving structures for dialogue with policymakers and governments;
- To support proposals at national and European level to provide urgent support for media while insisting that any forms of assistance, whether in traditional or innovative forms, must be conditional upon the following:

**Respect for the ethical principles** of editorial independence and journalistic freedom and to enhance these values in the changing landscape of media organisation and journalism;

**Respect for social rights**, including labour standards and decent working conditions for journalists and other media employees;

**Investment in quality journalism**, promotion of diversity and reaffirmation of public service values in pluralist media systems;

- To continue to monitor changes taking place across the industry in Europe and to report on developments;
- To support journalists in their resistance to reckless cost-cutting strategies and to promote the development of strong EFJ unions across Europe and their capacity to reach out to all groups in society, notably young people;
- To organise, during 2009, a European-wide conference on the media crisis to identify further actions to be taken in the defence of journalistic work and the development of new initiatives to strengthen media in Europe.

The EFJ believes the future offers great opportunities as well as powerful challenges. We support our member unions in their defence of the profession and the jobs of journalists and we shall promote new engagement, dialogue and debate on the future that highlight the importance of a society of values, dialogue and press freedom for all.

*Varna, Bulgaria*  
*16<sup>th</sup> May 2009*