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AD HOC ADVISORY GROUP ON PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA GOVERNANCE

(MC-S-PG)

**Meeting of
21 and 22 March 2011
Council of Europe, Agora building, Strasbourg
(Room G05)**

**Draft recommendation of the Committee of Ministers
on public service media governance**

1. Public service media constitutes an important public value which should not be diminished or abandoned in the new complex media environment. The specific role of public service media is to promote the values of democratic societies, in particular respect for human rights, political pluralism, the empowerment of citizens, social cohesion, inclusiveness and cultural diversity. In its 2007 Declaration on protecting the role of the media in democracy in the context of media concentration, the Committee of Ministers stressed “that adequately equipped and financed public service media, in particular public service broadcasting, enjoying genuine editorial independence, can contribute to counterbalancing the risk of misuse of the power of the media in a situation of strong media concentration.” Indeed, if public service media is weak, there is likely to be a democratic deficit, as public service media represents a fundamental component of the media system of democratic societies.

2. Public service media’s primary mission is to support general interest objectives such as social progress, public interest in democratic processes, intercultural understanding and societal integration, and to achieve this through a varied and high quality mix of content. As an important public source of unbiased information and diverse political opinions, it must remain independent from political or economic interference and must achieve high editorial standards of impartiality, objectivity and fairness. Public service media should be subject to constant public scrutiny and be accountable and transparent when performing its functions as it has the obligation to serve all kinds of publics, including minority communities who would not be served in a purely commercial market.

3. New forms of content and distribution offer many opportunities to public service media. But it also faces major challenges in the current stage of development of European societies. These include growing competition from commercial media and Internet companies exploiting the opportunities afforded by technological changes and evolving audience expectations. Public service media may also not always benefit from adequate long-term funding to allow for proper staffing and delivery of quality products, via and across all relevant platforms, which in turn may undermine its ability to sustain robust editorial independence.

4. The ability of public service media to fulfil its remit successfully in the future depends to a large extent on the quality and adequacy of its overall governance structure, i.e. both the “external” framework offered by the public authorities guaranteeing political independence and adequate and sustainable funding, as well as the “internal” governance arrangements of the public service media itself, adapted to the realities of a competitive environment. These arrangements are those which guarantee public service media an appropriate level of independence from government, or other forms of political or commercial pressure; and through which the public service media can ensure that both its organisational structures and its internal culture support decisions and operations that best serve the public interest. It is therefore of outmost concern for all member states that public service media governance should be addressed and where necessary rethought and reconstructed, so as to ensure that public service media can take advantage of the new possibilities to overcome present and future challenges.

5. A properly functioning governance system depends on a number of conditions. These include the processes through which the support of the key stakeholders - including member states - is secured, the existence of an appropriate level of independence from government or other public and private interests, and the procedural guarantees ensuring that its decisions are consistent with its remit, properly taken and fully implemented. The Committee of Ministers adopts the guiding principles appended hereto and recommends that member states:

- recognise the need for public service media to develop within a sustainable governance framework which secures both the necessary editorial independence and public accountability;
- further strengthen and, where necessary, enhance the appropriate legal and financial environment thereby guaranteeing the independence and sustainable development of public service media, empowering it to take up the challenges of technological progress and editorial competition;
- encourage public service media and provide it with the necessary resources and tools to review and develop its internal and external governance arrangements, at whatever stage it is in the process of transformation into fully fledged public service media, drawing inspiration from the appended guiding principles;
- encourage public service media to cooperate actively on a pan-European scale and to exchange best practices and best content in order to create a vibrant European public sphere and foster democratic citizenship within the wider Europe;
- ensure the largest possible distribution of the appended guiding principles which are designed to allow public service media to reinforce its essential position in the media system and improve its functioning in the digital environment in order to fulfil its democratic mission.