



# PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA FOR DEMOCRACY



Joint conference by the Council of Europe  
and the European Broadcasting Union

22 November 2022  
Vilnius, Lithuania

[www.coe.int/PSM4democracy](http://www.coe.int/PSM4democracy)

ORGANISED BY:

**EBU**

OPERATING EUROVISION AND EURORADIO



In partnership with:

**LRT**

Hosted by:



Joint Council of Europe - EBU conference  
**PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA FOR DEMOCRACY**

## Concept Note

Freedom of expression and information as guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights constitutes one of the essential foundations of a democratic society. Yet, in recent years, it has been in decline in many countries. Press and media independence has been steadily eroded and the pandemic has only amplified this trend.

Two years of pandemic and this year's events with a war in Europe have yet again demonstrated both the importance of freedom of expression and the challenges for journalism in times of crisis. Most importantly, they have more than ever brought to the fore the need for trusted reliable news.

Disinformation, a growing problem associated with the negative effects of digital transformation and identified as the most visible phenomenon of the so-called 'information disorder' has taken a new dimension during the pandemic and again with the outbreak of the war against Ukraine.

Another sign of the deteriorating situation of freedom of expression is the increasing threat to the safety of journalists across Europe, reflected by the rising number of alerts on the Council of Europe's Platform for the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists. Sadly, the current events in Ukraine also demonstrate how vulnerable media workers are when reporting from war zones, the tragic list of victims getting longer by the day.

Public service media (PSM) is not spared from negative developments. PSM organisations are faced with an increasing number of challenges to their independence and sustainability, sometimes even with closure. Voices are getting louder, warning that these worrying trends threaten the very nature of our democracies. Namely, the European Broadcasting Union's (EBU) research has shown how well-funded, independent PSM goes hand-in-hand with healthy democracies.

While the need for independent PSM has become even stronger evidence during the pandemic and in times of war, PSM's key role for democratic societies had long been recognised by the Council of Europe and solidified with a set of standards. Council of Europe member states have agreed to implement these standards at national level. They cover the remit, funding and governance of PSM, including in the online and platform environment.

A Declaration adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2006 summarises the requirements necessary for independent PSM, calling on member states *to provide the legal, political, financial, technical and other means necessary to ensure genuine editorial independence and institutional autonomy of public service broadcasting organisations, so as to remove any risk of political or economic interference.*

Fulfilling these requirements remains a challenge to many Council of Europe member states, further complicated by the shift from traditional to digital media environment. PSM competes with an ever-larger number of content providers, including online and on-demand, which operate across many different platforms. Expectations for more innovative services and quality content are not always accompanied by adequate conditions and sufficient funding.

Protecting freedom of expression is a key priority in the Strategic Framework of the Council of Europe. The conference will discuss the key role of credible, independent, impartial, well-funded and innovative public service media in safeguarding this core human right. It will explore how CoE standards are put into practice and reflect on why this is critical for society, especially in times of crisis.

A digest of existing standards relevant to PSM will be provided before the conference.

Case studies from different countries will illustrate the problem areas and we will Freedom of expression and information as guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights constitutes one of the essential foundations of a democratic society. Yet, in recent years, it has been in decline in many countries. Press and media independence has been steadily eroded and the pandemic has only amplified this trend.<sup>1</sup>

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Disinformation, a growing problem associated with the negative effects of digital transformation<sup>2</sup> and identified as the most visible phenomenon of the so-called 'information disorder'<sup>3</sup> has taken a new dimension during the pandemic and again with the outbreak of the war against Ukraine.

Another sign of the deteriorating situation of freedom of expression is the increasing threat to the safety of journalists across Europe, reflected by the rising number of alerts on the Council of Europe's Platform for the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists.<sup>4</sup> Sadly, the current events in Ukraine also demonstrate how vulnerable media workers are when reporting from war zones, the tragic list of victims getting longer by the day.

Public service media (PSM) is not spared from negative developments. PSM organisations are faced with an increasing number of challenges to their independence and sustainability<sup>5</sup>, sometimes even with closure. Voices are getting louder, warning that these worrying trends threaten the very nature of our democracies. Namely, the European Broadcasting Union's (EBU) research has shown how well-funded, independent PSM goes hand-in-hand with healthy democracies.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [RSF press freedom index](#)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/secretary-general/report-2021>

<sup>3</sup> Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy: 'Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking', Claire Wardle, PhD and Hossein Derakhshan, with research support from Anne Burns and Nic Dias, October 20

<sup>4</sup> Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists: <https://fom.coe.int/accueil>

<sup>5</sup> The [Media Pluralism Monitor 2020](#) (covering developments in 2018-2019 in EU plus in Albania and Turkey) has a special chapter on public service media governance and funding. It identifies 12 countries in which PSM's independence is at high risk: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Romania, and Turkey.

The [Media Pluralism Monitor 2021](#) even states that the independence of public service media governance is at high risk in 15 countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Montenegro, Poland, the Republic of North Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia and Turkey.

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.ebu.ch/publications/research/login\\_only/report/democracy-psm](https://www.ebu.ch/publications/research/login_only/report/democracy-psm)

member states have agreed to implement these standards at national level. They cover the remit, funding and governance of PSM, including in the online and platform environment.

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A digest of existing standards relevant to PSM will be provided before the conference.

Case studies from different countries will illustrate the problem areas and we will discuss best practice to showcase what PSM can deliver if the standards are respected and the PSM mission can be fulfilled.

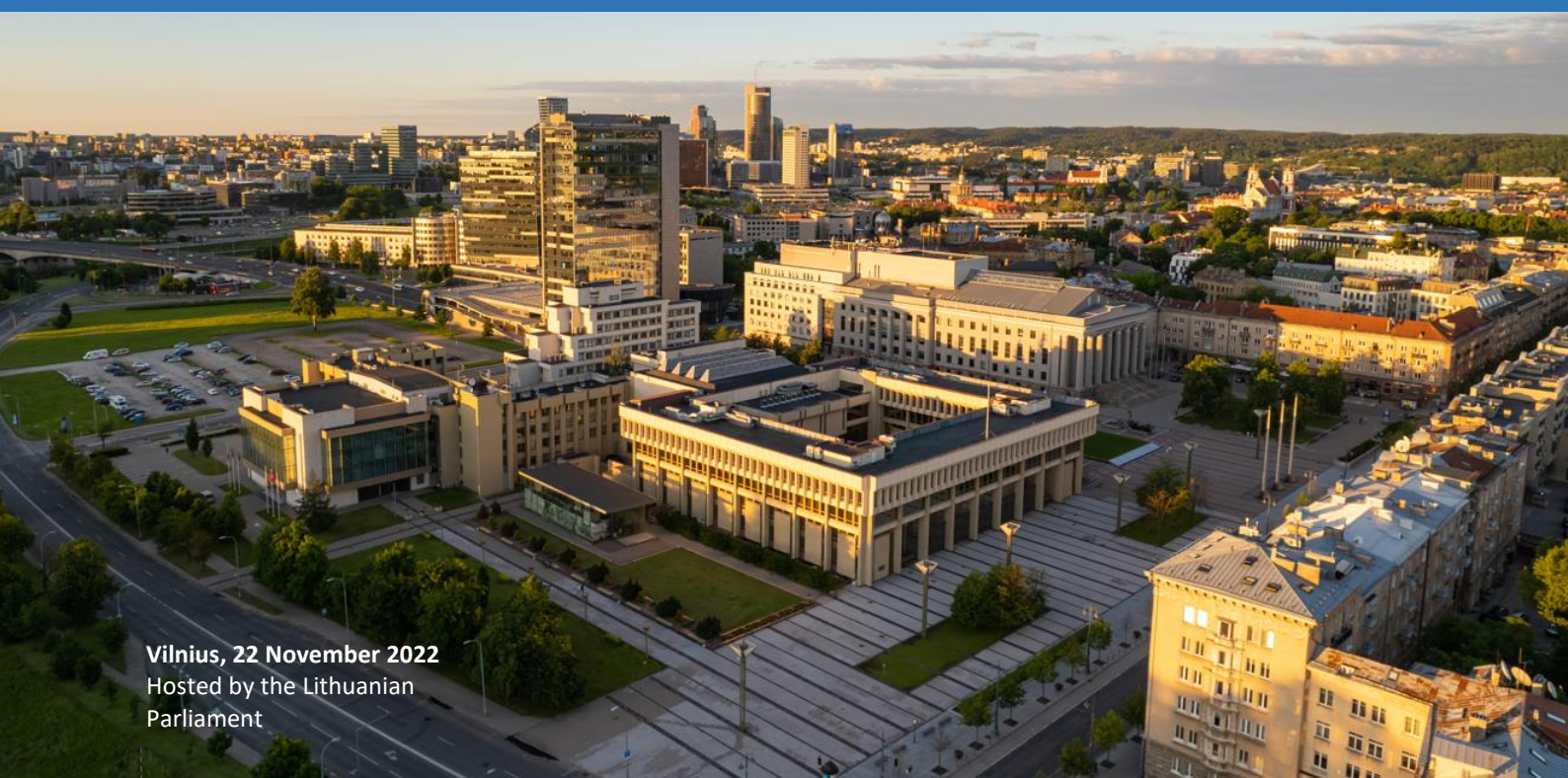
Discussions with high-level representatives of the Council of Europe and its member states, EBU Members, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, national Parliamentarians, the European Audiovisual Observatory, EU institutions, regulatory authorities, the OSCE, UNESCO, and journalists and other civil society organisations are expected to lead to a set of concrete recommendations on how to improve the situation, along with a reflection on whether the applicable standards should be reviewed to meet the most recent challenges facing PSM. The recommendations will be reflected in the conclusions of the conference.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://search.coe.int/>

The **PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA FOR DEMOCRACY** conference will orchestrate discussions between high-level representatives of the Council of Europe and its member states, EBU Members, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, national Parliamentarians, the European Audiovisual Observatory, EU institutions, regulatory authorities, the OSCE, UNESCO, and journalists and other civil society organisations. These debates are expected to lead to a set of concrete recommendations on how to improve the situation, along with a reflection on whether the applicable standards should be reviewed to meet the most recent challenges facing PSM. The recommendations will be reflected in the conclusions of the conference.

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The **European Broadcasting Union (EBU)** is the world's leading alliance of public service media (PSM). It has 112 member organizations in 56 countries and have an additional 31 Associates in Asia, Africa, Australasia and the Americas. Its Members operate nearly 2,000 television, radio and online channels and services, and offer a wealth of content across other platforms in more than 160 languages.

[www.ebu.ch](http://www.ebu.ch)

The **Council of Europe** is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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