

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 496 (2023)¹

Local and regional media: watchdogs of democracy, guardians of community cohesion

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”) refers to:

a. its [2021-2026 priority 6b](#). “Democratic societies: quality of representative democracy and citizen participation” outlined in the 2021-2026 Priorities of the Congress, stating that the protection of independent media and the provision of correct information to all citizens are crucial for the quality of representative democracy;

b. its Resolution 374 (2014), outlining the key role of subnational media as a tool for building participatory democracy;

c. the explanatory memorandum to its Resolution 496 (2023) “Local and regional media: watchdogs of democracy, guardians of community cohesion” (CG(2023)45-11fin);

d. the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2023 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions and its Target 16.10 to ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms in accordance with national legislation and international agreements;

e. Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership, which states that “media freedom and pluralism are crucial corollaries of the right to freedom of expression, as guaranteed by Article 10 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ETS No. 5, the Convention)”;

f. Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on promoting a favourable environment for quality journalism in the digital age and its guidelines, in particular paragraph 1.1.5 calling on States “to develop and promote a range of funding schemes and instruments, including at the local level” to uphold media diversity as a basis for quality journalism; paragraph 1.3.2 on the promotion of media pluralism and diversity; paragraph 2.4.3 on local and hyperlocal media; paragraph 2.5.1 on the complementary nature of different media types; and paragraph 2.5.5 on political non-interference of local authorities in media;

g. the Committee of Ministers’ declaration of 13 February 2019 on the financial sustainability of quality journalism in the digital age, which outlined that public policy measures should be developed and strengthened to ensure that types of media serving local and rural communities have financial and legal resources and space to operate on all distribution platforms;

h. the Council of Europe’s Campaign for the Safety of Journalists, launched in October 2023 under Latvia’s Presidency of the Committee of Ministers.

2. The Congress notes with concern that:

a. the decline of local and regional media and the emergence of so-called local news deserts risk undermining the crucial role that subnational media play in upholding democracy at the local and regional levels and in fostering cohesion in the communities they serve;

b. rural and socio-economically disadvantaged communities are particularly likely to become local news deserts, exacerbating already existing inequalities;

c. the proximity of local and regional media to the communities they serve and to public authorities can make them particularly susceptible to pressure and political interference or even violence, undermining their independence and their role as watchdogs of local and regional democracy;

d. local and regional media are particularly vulnerable to economic downturns and have been among the hardest-hit economic sectors during the Covid-19 pandemic, which poses a risk to their financial sustainability;

e. local and regional media have limited resources to train and upskill staff and journalists, affecting their position in the digital environment and the quality of media content.

3. The Congress calls on local and regional authorities in member States to:

a. launch public awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of local news and the consequences of local news deserts in co-operation with community leaders, civil society, journalistic organisations and residents;

b. attract and retain talented journalists in local communities through fellowships, internships and other programmes providing opportunities, training and financial support;

c. develop a code of practice and training for elected officials and local and regional administrations regarding interactions with local media that promote transparency, openness and effective communication to protect independence and avoid political interference;

d. design and implement a support system for local and regional media that is transparent and has the public interest at its core, and encourage the establishment and development of non-profit news organisations, community media outlets and hyperlocal news initiatives that can help fill the gaps left by declining commercial media;

e. promote collaborative journalism initiatives that foster partnerships between local news outlets, community organisations, schools and academic institutions with a view to

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress during the 45th Session on 25 October 2023 (see document [CG\(2023\)45-11](#), explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs Cecilia DALMAN EEK, Sweden (R, SOC/G/PD), and Mélanie LEPOULTIER, France (L, ILDG).

pooling resources, expertise and audience reach to ensure comprehensive local news coverage.

4. The Congress calls on national associations of local and regional authorities to support their members in the implementation of this Resolution.

5. The Congress commits to supporting the Council of Europe's Campaign for the Safety of Journalists through the promotion of the safety and independence of local and regional journalists and encourages its members to join their respective member State's national chapter if possible.