

Resolution No 2

Preserving the essential role of media in the digital age

The Ministers of States participating in the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for media and information society, held in Belgrade, Serbia, on 7 and 8 November 2013, adopt the following resolution:

1. Media are constantly evolving; society witnesses new forms of media and self-expression, bringing new possibilities for creation, innovation and dissemination. Whilst media in the digital age provide opportunities never known before, the development of new forms of media is inevitably disruptive to traditional media.
2. We are committed to creating the necessary conditions to maintain the essential role that media play in a democratic society also in the digital environment; the provision of information, the nurturing of public debate, the enhancement of the transparency and accountability in respect of public affairs and other matters of public interest or concern – the “public watchdog” function – justify media’s special status and protection in societies based on pluralism and democracy.
3. The Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on a new notion of media provides criteria for identifying media and offers guidance for a graduated and differentiated regulatory response, in line with Council of Europe standards. This instrument offers assistance in understanding the functioning of the media, both online and offline, with a view to preserving and developing their traditional role in the digital age.
4. We are concerned that media pluralism and diversity can be threatened by excessive media concentration at national and international level and by State interference. The risks associated with media concentration have grown more acute in the digital age both in Europe and beyond. Access to diverse information and content is also threatened by the emergence of new online players and “gatekeepers” benefiting from dominant positions at national and global level.
5. We consider it important to further consolidate effective media self-regulation as a prerequisite for media freedom and independence of the media. Regulation, including its milder form of co-regulation, or “regulated” self-regulation, should comply with the requirements set out in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the standards that stem from the relevant case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

6. We have entered into a new phase in digital convergence. Connected television and other connected devices lead to new forms of distribution and control over content. This may bear on the diversity of content and users' choice or lead to fragmentation as a result of different platforms that are not interoperable. It also raises concerns about the protection of children. The constant development and convergence of technologies also poses new challenges as regards the collection and processing of personal data and the profiling of users irrespective of their gender.
7. We consider that, alongside editorial independence, professional journalism is crucial for accomplishing media objectives. The situation of journalists increasingly working in precarious situations and in freelance positions, together with the emergence of new forms of online journalism and what is sometimes referred to as "citizen journalism", require innovative ways of promoting ethical standards while protecting freedom of expression and information, and reconciling it with the right to privacy.
8. We recognise that the protection of journalistic sources as a condition for investigative journalism remains of critical importance in the digital age, considering the necessity for media to ascertain the authenticity of content received from multiple sources without exposing them to tracking and reprisal.
9. The preservation of the essential role of media in the digital age justifies, alongside commercial media, further support for, on the one hand, a well-funded, sustainable, independent, high quality and ethical *public service media* providing distinctive content on all services and platforms and, on the other hand, non-profit *community media* capable of addressing the specific needs of various communities and committed to inclusive and intercultural practices.
10. **In view of the above, we invite the Council of Europe to:**
 - (i) closely examine the state of media concentration, transparency of media ownership and regulation and their impact on media pluralism and diversity, and consider the need for updating European standards in this respect in the digital age;
 - (ii) promote truly independent media in Europe based on effective self-regulation;
 - (iii) propose measures to preserve and strengthen media's watchdog function by creating a favourable legal environment for vigorous investigative journalism and critical scrutiny of all matters of public interest;
 - (iv) explore means of promoting professional and ethical journalism effectively, taking due account of the expanded range and number of actors in the digital age;

- (v) carefully consider, in the light of Council of Europe standards on media pluralism and diversity of content, questions relating to digital convergence, connected television and other new arrangements for the delivery of essential media content or information and, in this context, examine the role of public service media and community media services.