

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES OF EUROPE

Recommendation 119 (2002)¹ on the state of regional print media in Europe – Pluralism, independence and freedom in regional press

The Congress, bearing in mind the proposal of the Chamber of Regions,

1. Recalling the responsibility the regional press has in:

a. reporting on regional politics and administration and other matters of public interest with a view to fostering a good understanding of a pluralistic democratic system among the population;

b. reporting on cultural life, including sports, to maintain and strengthen a sense of regional identity among the population;

2. Emphasising the importance of the existence of a variety of newspapers and other publications/media outlets in each region, presenting diversified views and information;

3. While bearing in mind the fundamental principle of the editorial independence of the media;

4. Recalling Recommendation No. R (2000) 1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on fostering transfrontier co-operation between territorial communities or authorities in the cultural field, and in particular section III in the Appendix to the recommendation, on specific areas of action and its sub-paragraph v on the media, which among other things calls for:

a. the development of transfrontier bilingual newspapers/magazines containing information on the border region;

b. the creation of transfrontier press clubs to report objectively on the neighbouring region(s);

c. the use of Internet for transfrontier co-operation in the cultural field (particularly in the creation of transfrontier bilingual newspapers);

5. Recalling the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1506 (2001) on freedom of expression in Europe and Recommendation 1407 (1999) on media and democratic culture;

6. Noting the study on *Promotion of Transfrontier Media at Local and Regional Level*, 2000 (series: Transfrontier Co-operation in Europe – No. 8) prepared by the Select Committee of Experts on Transfrontier Co-operation, Directorate of Co-operation for Local and Regional Democracy;

7. Noting the importance of some regional printed press publications for ethnic and other minorities;

8. Noting that economic and political pressures on regional media may threaten its editorial independence and even the very existence of pluralistic regional media, and condemning such pressure;

9. Recalling Recommendation No. R (99) 1 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on measures to promote media pluralism and taking account of the European Commission Green Paper on Pluralism and Media Concentration in the Internal Market – an assessment of the need for Community action (COM (92) 480 final);

10. Recalling the existence of EU instruments, most of which are also open to the applicant countries to the EU, aimed at supporting:

a. culture in printed format, among other things, by supporting publishing houses;

b. regions lagging behind in their development, in particular by means of the Interreg programme, promoting co-operation between regions for the purpose of economic development, including in the cultural field;

11. Wishing to encourage regional newspapers to report news also from areas beyond the administrative borders of the region in which they are based in order to increase knowledge about the area as a whole;

12. Supporting transregional co-operation between regional newspapers, both domestically and internationally, to promote cultural exchange and to promote tolerance;

13. Welcoming joint transfrontier co-operation in the field of the print media, such as the examples of good practice given below and mentioned in the study referred to in paragraph 6 above:

a. German-Polish press club *Against Stereotypes*, which, among other things, publishes its own informative magazine targeted at journalists and decision makers involved in transfrontier co-operation;

b. publication of the transfrontier newspaper *Dreilandzeitung* in the French and German border region of north-west Switzerland;

14. Invites member states to:

a. promote regulatory instruments that favour truly competitive and pluralistic regional press markets in order that all individuals and groups in society have access to a diverse range of information and opinions through the regional press;

b. promote co-operation between regions in the media field by removing discriminatory measures and regulations, such as certain tax mechanisms, that may inhibit the free flow of information and news produced by the regional print media;

c. ensure that editorial and journalistic independence is guaranteed in the regional press, in accordance with the relevant Council of Europe standards;

d. raise the importance of the regional print media for the democratic life of citizens and non-citizens at all levels of government;

e. investigate areas for closer co-operation between member states in respect of the mass media generally, and more specifically the regional print media;

f. examine how to eliminate legislation that renders data collection across borders more difficult without, however, endangering data protection for individuals;

g. restate their commitment to a pluralistic and diverse regional media landscape and recognise the importance of a diverse regional print sector in the political and social life of individuals as well as regional and other communities and groups, and accordingly develop specific activities to this end;

h. collectively investigate measures and possibilities to maintain a diverse and independent regional print media sector that fulfils its role in the democratic life of regional communities;

15. Invites the Council of Europe Secretary General to request the appropriate Council of Europe services to:

a. assist member states in nurturing free, pluralistic and independent print media;

b. Support exchanges of journalists, the promotion of media ethics, and training schemes for editors and journalists;

c. co-operate with the CLRAE in arranging future conferences and activities in the field of regional media;

16. Invites the European Commission to ensure that its competition rules favour pluralism in regional printed media by, among other things:

a. extending its cultural support programme to, in the future, include support to regional media;

b. being forthcoming regarding support for regional media when allocating structural funds, in particular within Interreg;

c. accelerating the publication of a directive aimed at ensuring diversity of information for the public, particularly in the regional press;

17. Invites the European Parliament to consider ways of maintaining a pluralistic and independent regional media in current EU member states as well as in applicant countries.

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Regions on 5 June and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 6 June 2002 (see Doc. CPR (9) 4, draft recommendation presented by Mr T. Souladze in the name of Mr P. Kittelmann, rapporteur).