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## Public Service Media for Democracy

### Conference conclusions

#### The challenge

It is high time for a renewed commitment to Public Service Media in the digital age.

Democracy cannot function without free and open debate, without independent voices and pluralism of opinion and sources. A meaningful dialogue needs a well-informed citizenry. Independent PSM can empower democratic societies to have this dialogue.

PSM are distinctive from commercial media and platforms, they address citizens, not consumers.

Yet, PSM are under pressure in many member states of the Council of Europe; sometimes their very existence is put into question. Situations vary and problems relate to their organisational and editorial independence, their governance, their funding or the lack of a robust remit.

In the globalised digital media and platform environment PSM are competing with an ever-larger number of content providers and people are confronted with the so-called 'information disorder' which is characterized by an increase of mis- and disinformation. PSM content is often not easy to find and access via third-party platforms.

What is more, journalists work under increasingly dangerous conditions. They are being attacked physically and online, with waves of abuse on social networks. The pandemic and the war in Ukraine have dramatically worsened journalists' safety. The Council of Europe's Platform reports 13 journalists killed in 2022.

Adding to this situation, in increasingly fragmented societies, even in mature democracies, political populists attack media including PSM.

These worrying trends threaten our democracies. PSM can oppose them with trusted news and informed analysis that consistently rank among the most valued. Citizens should be enabled to access independent, engaging and relevant PSM content.

Against this background, conference participants confirmed the need for a renewed commitment to media freedom, pluralism and independent and sustainable PSM. Sustainable funding and limiting the influence of party politics on funding decisions is pivotal for the existence and the longer-term perspective of PSM.

They called on member states and on PSM to put the existing standards and values into practice. They welcomed the intention of the draft European Media Freedom Act, which builds upon the Council of Europe standards, to secure media pluralism and independence of PSM.

## A renewed commitment for Public Service Media – the way forward

Member states are expected to:

- reaffirm their strong commitment to freedom of expression and information, media freedom and pluralism;
- provide a favourable environment for free and safe journalism and establish constructive cooperation with all relevant stakeholders.
- provide adequate conditions in the digital age, including with legislation, to ensure the implementation of the relevant Council of Europe standards for PSM set out in the [Digest](#), notably those requiring States to:
  - secure a robust and broad, platform-neutral remit which will ensure that PSM can deliver high-quality and impartial content to the widest range of audiences, innovate, adapt to a changing media environment and drive digital transformation;
  - provide for stable and adequate funding, detached from political favour, which is fair and justifiable, transparent and accountable;
  - ensure PSM's editorial independence and institutional autonomy without political or economic interference;
  - enable a PSM governance system which provides for supervisory bodies with pluralistic composition to represent the interests of society in general and with members who are independent and competent; and with powers to hold PSM to account and ensure that they fulfil their public service remit;
  - ensure the independence of national regulatory authorities;
  - ensure the availability, findability, accessibility and prominence of PSM information and other content online, including on social media.

Public Service Media are expected to:

- adhere to the core values of universality, independence, excellence, diversity, accountability and innovation;
- defend their editorial and institutional independence;
- serve all segments of society and be accountable and answerable to the public they serve, with transparent decision-making procedures and processes that allow for public participation;
- pursue the implementation of professional standards and ethics in creating high quality and credible content;
- be accountable and answerable to the supervisory bodies;
- be a driver of innovation and digital transformation;
- maintain a dialogue with their audiences to respond to their needs and expectations;
- maintain and/or establish a dialogue with civil society, including with journalists' associations.

## Institutional follow-up

- A platform for regular dialogue should be set up involving PSM, national authorities and relevant civil society organisations, including journalists' associations, with a view to improving the implementation of standards relevant for PSM and fostering exchanges of experiences, including at ministerial level.
- Cooperation between the Council of Europe and the European Union should be pursued and strengthened with the aim of implementing shared European standards, improving the conditions for exercising the freedom of the media and PSM in the respective member states.