

Thursday 3 May 2018

P8_TA(2018)0204

Media pluralism and media freedom in the European Union

European Parliament resolution of 3 May 2018 on media pluralism and media freedom in the European Union (2017/2209(INI))

(2020/C 41/09)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 49 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and Articles 9, 10 and 16 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and the European Social Charter,
- having regard to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), adopted and opened for signature and ratification by UN General Assembly resolution 2106 of 21 December 1965,
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2001 regarding public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to Protocol No 29 on the System of Public Broadcasting in the Member States,
- having regard to the European Charter on Freedom of the Press,
- having regard to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence,
- having regard to the declarations, recommendations and resolutions of the Committee of Ministers and Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Opinions and the Rule of Law Checklist of the Venice Commission,
- having regard to the Council of Europe study entitled 'Journalists under pressure – Unwarranted interference, fear and self-censorship in Europe',
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the UN Convention against Corruption and the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions,
- having regard to the General Comment No 34 of the UN Human Rights Committee,
- having regard to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights,
- having regard to the relevant resolutions of the UN General Assembly, the UN Human Rights Council and the reports of the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression,
- having regard to the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity,
- having regard to the work carried out by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on media freedom, in particular by its Representative on Freedom of the Media,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 145, 31.5.2001, p. 43.

Thursday 3 May 2018

- having regard to the work carried out by the Council of Europe Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists,
- having regard to the joint declaration on freedom of expression and 'Fake News', disinformation and propaganda, issued on 3 March 2017 by the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Organisation of American States (OAS) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information,
- having regard to the outcomes of the World Press Freedom Index, published by Reporters Without Borders, and to those of the Media Pluralism Monitor of the European University Institute's Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom,
- having regard to the Policy Brief entitled 'Defining Defamation: Principles on Freedom of Expression and Protection of Reputation' published by ARTICLE 19,
- having regard to its resolution of 21 May 2013 on the EU Charter: standard settings for media freedom across the EU ^(?),
- having regard to its resolutions of 12 March 2014 on the US NSA surveillance programme, surveillance bodies in various Member States and their impact on EU citizens' fundamental rights and on transatlantic cooperation in Justice and Home Affairs ^(?) and of 29 October 2015 on the follow-up to the European Parliament resolution of 12 March 2014 on the electronic mass surveillance of EU citizens ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 16 March 2017 on e-democracy in the European Union: potential and challenges ^(?),
- having regard to its resolution of 25 October 2016 with recommendations to the Commission on the establishment of an EU mechanism on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights ⁽⁶⁾,
- having regard to its resolutions of 14 February 2017 on the role of whistleblowers in the protection of EU's financial interests ⁽⁷⁾ and of 24 October 2017 on legitimate measures to protect whistleblowers acting in the public interest when disclosing the confidential information of companies and public bodies ⁽⁸⁾,
- having regard to the conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on media freedom and pluralism in the digital environment ⁽⁹⁾,
- having regard to the EU Human Rights Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline and the Commission Guidelines for EU support to media freedom and media integrity in enlargement countries, 2014-2020,
- having regard to the Commission's 2016 Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights entitled 'media pluralism and democracy' and the relevant contributions published by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights,
- having regard to the High Level Expert Group on fake news and online disinformation appointed by the Commission to advise on the scope of the phenomenon of fake news as well as defining the roles and responsibilities of relevant stakeholders,

^(?) OJ C 55, 12.2.2016, p. 33.

^(?) OJ C 378, 9.11.2017, p. 104.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 355, 20.10.2017, p. 51.

⁽⁵⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2017)0095.

⁽⁶⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0409.

⁽⁷⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2017)0022.

⁽⁸⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2017)0402.

⁽⁹⁾ OJ C 32, 4.2.2014, p. 6.

Thursday 3 May 2018

- having regard to European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) opinion 5/2016 on the review of the e-Privacy Directive (2002/58/EC),
 - having regard to Directive (EU) 2017/541 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on combating terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA and amending Council Decision 2005/671/JHA ⁽¹⁰⁾,
 - having regard to the European Council conclusions on security and defence of 22 June 2017,
 - having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and the opinions of the Committee on Culture and Education and of the Committee on Legal Affairs (A8-0144/2018),
- A. whereas the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of opinion are fundamental human rights and indispensable conditions for the full development of individuals and their active participation in a democratic society, for the realisation of the principles of transparency and accountability and for the fulfilment of other human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- B. whereas pluralism is inseparable from freedom, democracy and the rule of law;
- C. whereas the right to inform and the right to be informed are part of the core basic democratic values on which European Union is founded;
- D. whereas the importance of pluralistic, independent and trustworthy media as guardian and monitor of democracy and the rule of law cannot be underestimated;
- E. whereas media freedom, pluralism and independence are crucial components of the right to freedom of expression; whereas the media play an essential role in democratic society, by acting as public watchdogs, while helping to inform and empower citizens, through widening their understanding of the current political and social landscape, and fostering their conscious participation in democratic life; whereas the scope of such a role should be enlarged to encompass online and citizen journalism, as well as the work of bloggers, internet users, social media activists and human rights defenders, in order to reflect today's profoundly changed media reality while respecting the right to privacy; whereas net neutrality is an essential principle for an open internet;
- F. whereas fake news, cyberbullying and revenge porn represent growing concerns for our societies, especially among young people;
- G. whereas the spread of false news and disinformation on social media or search websites has strongly impaired the credibility of the traditional media which consequently inhibits their capacity to act as watchdogs;
- H. whereas public authorities have the duty not only to refrain from implementing restrictions on freedom of expression, but also the positive obligation to adopt a legal and regulatory framework which fosters the development of free, independent and pluralistic media;
- I. whereas, pursuant to Articles 2 and 4 of the ICERD and Article 30 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the freedom of expression shall never be used to defend expressions that violate the Convention and the Declaration, such as hate speech or propaganda based on ideas or theories of the superiority of one race or group of persons of one colour, or ethnic group, or which attempt to justify or promote racial hatred and discrimination in any form;
- J. whereas public authorities have the duty to protect the independence and the impartiality of the public media in particular as actors serving democratic societies, as opposed to satisfying the interests of governments in power;

⁽¹⁰⁾ OJ L 88, 31.3.2017, p. 6.

Thursday 3 May 2018

- K. whereas the authorities must also ensure that the media comply with the laws and regulations in force;
- L. whereas recent political developments in various Member States, where nationalism and populism are on the rise, have led to increased pressures on and threats against journalists, which show that the European Union must ensure, promote and defend media freedom and pluralism;
- M. whereas, according to the Council of Europe, the abuses and crimes committed against journalists by both state and non-state actors, have a grave and chilling effect on freedom of expression; whereas the risk and frequency of unwarranted interference heightens the sense of fear among journalists, citizen journalists, bloggers and other information actors, leading to a potential high degree of self-censorship, while undermining citizens' rights to information and participation;
- N. whereas the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression recalled in September 2016 that governments have a responsibility not only to respect journalism, but also to ensure that journalists and their sources are protected by strong laws, the prosecution of perpetrators and ample security where necessary;
- O. whereas journalists and other media actors still face violence, threats, harassment or public shaming in the European Union mainly because of their investigative activities to protect the public interest from the misuse of power, corruption, human rights violations or criminal activities;
- P. whereas guaranteeing the safety and security of journalists and other media actors is a precondition for them to fully play their role and exercise their capacity to properly inform citizens and to participate effectively in public debate;
- Q. whereas, according to the Council of Europe Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists, more than half of the cases of abuses against media professionals are committed by state actors;
- R. whereas investigative journalism should be promoted as a form of civic engagement and as an act of civic virtue supported by communication, learning, education and training;
- S. whereas the radical evolution of the media system, the rapid growth of the online dimension of media pluralism and the rise of search engines and social media platforms as sources of news represent both a challenge and an opportunity for the promotion of freedom of expression, for democratising the production of news by involving citizens in the public debate, and for converting a growing number of information users into information producers; whereas, however, the concentration of power of media conglomerates, platform operators and internet intermediaries, and media control by economic corporations and political actors risk causing negative consequences for the pluralism of public debate and access to information and having an impact on the freedom, integrity, quality and editorial independence of journalism and broadcast media; whereas a level playing field at European level is necessary for ensuring that search engines, social media platforms and other high-tech giants respect the rules of the EU digital single market, in fields such as e-privacy and competition;
- T. whereas journalists require direct, immediate and unencumbered access to information from public administrations to properly hold the authorities to account;
- U. whereas both information obtained on the basis of the right of inquiry as well as information obtained through whistleblowers complement each other and both are essential to journalists' ability to fulfil their mission to act in the public interest;
- V. whereas journalists require the fullest legal protection to use and disseminate such information of public interest in their line of work;
- W. whereas the right to request and receive information from public administrations remains patchy and incomplete across the European Union;

Thursday 3 May 2018

- X. whereas the media sector plays a key role in any democratic society; whereas the effect of the economic crisis, coupled with the simultaneous growth of social media platforms and other high-tech giants and highly selective advertising revenues, have dramatically increased precariousness in the working conditions and social insecurity of media actors, including independent journalists, leading to a dramatic drop in professional, social and quality standards in journalism that may negatively affect their editorial independence;
- Y. whereas the European Audiovisual Observatory of the Council of Europe has denounced the emergence of a digital duopoly, with Google and Facebook representing up to 85 % of all digital advertising market growth in 2016, imperilling the future of traditional advertising-financed media companies, such as commercial TV channels, newspapers and magazines which have a far more limited audience reach;
- Z. whereas, in the context of enlargement policy, the Commission has the duty to demand full compliance with the Copenhagen criteria, including freedom of expression and the media, and the EU should therefore set the example of the highest standards in this field; whereas, once members of the EU, states are continuously and unequivocally bound by human rights obligations by virtue of the EU Treaties and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and whereas respect for freedom of expression and the media in the Member States should be subject to regular scrutiny; whereas the EU can only be credible on the global stage if press and media freedoms are safeguarded and respected within the Union itself;
- AA. whereas research consistently finds evidence that women are in the minority across media sectors, particularly in creative roles, and are severely underrepresented at senior, decision-making levels; whereas studies of women's participation in journalism suggest that, while there is a relatively good gender balance among entrants into the journalism profession, the distribution of decision-making responsibilities is characterised by a significant gender disparity;
- AB. whereas the provisions of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and of the TEU, which ensure respect for these principles are pursued through positive actions to promote freedom and pluralism of the media, to promote the quality, access to and availability of information (positive freedom), but also requires omissions on the part of public authorities in order to avoid harmful aggression (negative freedom);
- AC. whereas unlawful and arbitrary surveillance, particularly when carried out on a mass scale, is incompatible with human rights and fundamental freedoms, *inter alia* freedom of expression – including freedom of the press and protection of confidentiality of journalistic sources –, the right to privacy and data protection; whereas the internet and social media play a role in spreading hate speech and fostering radicalisation leading to violent extremism by circulating illegal contents, especially to the detriment of young people; whereas tackling such phenomena requires close and coordinated collaboration between all relevant actors, at all levels of governance (local, regional and national) as well as with civil society and the private sector; whereas effective security and counterterrorism laws and activities, as well as measures aimed at countering and preventing hate speech and violent extremism should always be the subject of fundamental rights obligations, so as to avoid any conflicts with the protection of freedom of expression;
- AD. whereas, echoing the Council of Europe, whistleblowing is a fundamental aspect of freedom of expression and plays an essential role in detecting and reporting irregularities and wrongdoing, and in strengthening democratic accountability and transparency; whereas whistleblowing represents a key source of information in the fight against organised crime, in investigating, identifying and publicising cases of corruption within the public and private sectors and in detecting tax avoidance schemes set up by private companies; whereas the adequate protection of whistleblowers at EU, national and international level, as well as the promotion of a culture of acknowledgement of the important role played by whistleblowers in society, are preconditions for ensuring the effectiveness of such a role;
- AE. whereas, in the context of fighting corruption and maladministration in the EU, investigative journalism should receive particular consideration and financial support as a tool serving the public good;

Thursday 3 May 2018

- AF. whereas, according to the findings of the Media Pluralism Monitor, media ownership remains highly concentrated and this constitutes a significant risk to the diversity of information and viewpoints represented in media content;
- AG. whereas the coverage of EU affairs and the work of the EU institutions and agencies should be subject to the criteria of media pluralism and media freedom, on an equal footing with the coverage of the national news, and should have multilingual support to reach the maximum number of EU citizens;
1. Calls on the Member States to take appropriate measures, including ensuring adequate public funding, to safeguard and promote a pluralist, independent and free media landscape in the service of democratic society, including the independence and sustainability of public service media and community media and grassroots media, which are crucial elements of a favourable environment for guaranteeing the fundamental right to freedom of expression and information;
 2. Emphasises the shared responsibility of lawmakers, journalists, publishers and internet intermediaries, but also of citizens as consumers of information;
 3. Calls on the EU institutions to guarantee full implementation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in all their decisions, actions and policies, as a means to thoroughly uphold media pluralism and media freedom from undue influence from national public authorities; asks the Commission, in this regard, to introduce human rights impact assessments for the evaluation of its legislative proposals and to present a proposal for the establishment of an EU mechanism on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights in line with the relevant Parliament resolution of 25 October 2016;
 4. Stresses the need to have in place independent monitoring mechanisms to assess the situation of media freedom and media pluralism in the EU, as a means to promote and protect the rights and freedoms enshrined in Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and Article 10 of the ECHR, and to promptly react to possible threats to them and violations of them; calls on the Commission and the Member States to fully support and strengthen the tools already developed in this regard, such as the Media Pluralism Monitor and the Council of Europe Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists;
 5. Calls on the Commission, as guardian of the treaties, to treat attempts by Member States' governments to harm media freedom and pluralism as the serious and systemic abuse of power and the move against the fundamental values of the European Union enshrined in Article 2 TEU that they are, in view of the fact that the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of opinion are fundamental human rights, and that media freedom, pluralism and independence play an essential role in democratic society, including by acting as a check on government and state power;
 6. Calls on the Member States to carry out an independent review of their relevant laws and practices in order to protect freedom of expression and freedom and pluralism of the media;
 7. Expresses its deep concern at the abuses, crimes and deadly attacks still being committed against journalists and media workers in the Member States because of their activities; urges the Member States to do their utmost to prevent such violence, to ensure accountability and avoid impunity and to guarantee that victims and their families have access to the appropriate legal remedies; calls on Member States to set up an independent and impartial regulatory body, in cooperation with journalists' organisations, for monitoring, documenting and reporting on violence and threats against journalists and to deal with the protection and safety of journalists at national level; calls on the Member States, moreover, to fully implement Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors;
 8. Expresses its concern over the deteriorating working conditions for journalists and the amount of psychological violence that journalists witness; calls, therefore, on the Member States to set up national action plans, in close cooperation with journalist organisations, to improve the working conditions of journalists and to ensure that journalists will not be victims of psychological violence;
 9. Is concerned about the state of media freedom in Malta following the assassination of anti-corruption journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia in October 2017, who was also subjected to harassment, including precautionary warrants freezing her bank accounts, and threats made by multinational companies;

Thursday 3 May 2018

10. Strongly condemns the murder of Slovak investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his partner Martina Kušnírová;
11. Welcomes the decision to name the European Parliament's press room after murdered journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia; reiterates, in this context, its call for a European Parliament annual prize for investigative journalism to be named after her;
12. Calls on the Conference of Presidents to present a proposal on how Parliament could honour the work of Ján Kuciak, and to consider renaming Parliament's traineeship for journalists after him;
13. Calls on the Member States to fully support the initiative launched by Reporters Without Borders for the creation of a Special Representative to the United Nations Secretary-General for the safety of journalists;
14. Calls on the Member States to create and maintain, in law and in practice, a safe and secure environment for journalists and other media actors, including foreign journalists pursuing their journalistic activities in the Member States, enabling them to carry out their work in full independence and without undue interference – such as the threat of violence, harassment, financial, economic and political pressure, pressure to disclose confidential sources and materials, and targeted surveillance; stresses the need for the Member States to guarantee efficient legal recourse procedures, in respect of the above acts, for journalists whose freedom to work has been threatened, so as to avoid self-censorship; highlights the importance of taking a gender-sensitive approach when considering measures to address the safety of journalists;
15. Underlines the importance of ensuring adequate working conditions for journalists and media workers, in full compliance with the requirements of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Social Charter, as a means of avoiding undue internal and external pressure, dependency, vulnerability and instability, and hence the risk of self-censorship; highlights that independent journalism cannot be guaranteed and fostered by the market alone; asks the Commission and the Member States, therefore, to promote and elaborate new socially sustainable economic models aimed at financing and supporting quality and independent journalism, and to ensure that the public is accurately informed; asks the Member States to strengthen financial support to public service providers and investigative journalism while refraining from involvement in editorial decisions;
16. Condemns attempts by governments to silence critical media and demolish media freedom and pluralism, including by more sophisticated ways that do not typically create an alert in the Council of Europe Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists, such as by government members and their cronies buying up commercial media outlets and hijacking the public service media to serve partisan interests;
17. Highlights the necessity of supporting and broadening the scope of activities of the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, particularly of its legal support to journalists under threat;
18. Underlines that media professionals often work in precarious conditions with regard to their contracts, salaries and social guarantees, which compromises their ability to work appropriately and thus hampers media freedom;
19. Recognises that freedom of expression may be subject to restrictions – provided that they are prescribed by law, pursue a legitimate aim and are necessary in a democratic society – in the interests of, among other aspects, protecting the reputation and rights of others; expresses its concern, however, at the negative and chilling effects that criminal defamation laws might have on the right to freedom of expression, freedom of the press and public debate; calls on the Member States to refrain from any misuse of criminal defamation laws by striking a fair balance between the right to freedom of expression and the right to respect for private and family life, including reputation, while ensuring the right to an effective remedy and avoiding excessively severe and disproportionate penalties and sanctions, in line with the criteria laid down by the ECtHR;
20. Calls on the Commission to propose an Anti-SLAPP (strategic lawsuit against public participation) Directive that will protect the independent media from vexatious lawsuits intended to silence or intimidate them in the EU;
21. Considers that the participation in democratic processes is founded, first and foremost, on effective and non-discriminatory access to information and knowledge; calls for the EU and its Member States to develop adequate policies to attain universal access to the internet and to recognise internet access – including net neutrality – as a fundamental right;

Thursday 3 May 2018

22. Deplores the decision adopted by the US Federal Communications Commission to repeal the 2015 rules on net neutrality, and highlights the negative consequences that decision might have, in a globally interconnected digital world, on the right of access to information without discrimination; calls on the EU and the Member States to pursue a course of strengthening the net neutrality principle by building on and further developing the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC) Guidelines on the Implementation by National Regulators of European Net Neutrality Rules;

23. Highlights the important role played by independent and pluralistic media in political debate and the right to pluralistic information both during electoral terms and in the intervening periods; stresses the need to guarantee full expression for all political actors, in line with the provisions of the ICERD, and to base the amount of airtime they are given on public service broadcast channels on journalistic and professional criteria and not on their degree of institutional representativeness or political views;

24. Calls on the Member States and the Commission to refrain from adopting unnecessary measures aimed at arbitrarily restricting access to the internet and the exercise of basic human rights or at controlling public communications, such as the adoption of repressive rules on the establishment and operation of media outlets and/or websites, the arbitrary imposition of states of emergency, technical control over digital technologies – i.e. blocking, filtering, jamming and closing down digital spaces – or the de facto privatisation of control measures by pressuring intermediaries to take action to restrict or delete internet content; calls for the EU and the Member States, furthermore, to prevent such measures from being adopted by private operators;

25. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure full transparency on the part of private companies and governments in the use of algorithms, artificial intelligence and automated decision-making, which should not be implemented and developed in such a way as to lead to, or with the intent of achieving, the arbitrary blocking, filtering and removal of internet content, and to guarantee that any EU digital policy and strategy must be drafted with a human rights-based approach, providing for appropriate remedies and safeguards and in full compliance with the relevant provisions of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and of the ECHR;

26. Reiterates that cyberbullying, revenge porn and child sexual abuse material are a growing concern in our societies and can have extremely serious impacts, especially on young people and children, and highlights that the interests and rights of minors must be fully respected in the context of the mass media; encourages all Member States to draw up forward-looking legislation to address these phenomena, including provisions for detection, flagging and removal from social media of content which is manifestly harmful to human dignity; encourages the Commission and Member States to strengthen their efforts to build effective counter-narratives and to provide clear guidelines that ensure legal certainty and predictability for users, service providers and the internet sector as a whole, while ensuring the possibility of judicial redress in accordance with national law, in order to react against the misuse of social media for terrorist purposes; stresses, however, that any measures restricting or removing internet content should only be adopted in specified, explicit and legitimate circumstances and under strict judicial oversight, in line with international standards, the case law of the ECtHR, and Article 52 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union;

27. Takes note of the Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online, promoted by the Commission; points to the wide margin of discretion left to private companies to determine what constitutes 'illegality' and calls for such margins to be restricted, so as to avoid any risks of censorship and arbitrary restrictions on freedom of expression;

28. Reaffirms that anonymity and encryption are essential tools for the exercise of democratic rights and freedoms, for promoting trust in the digital infrastructure and communications, and for protecting the confidentiality of sources in journalism; recognises that encryption and anonymity provide the privacy and security necessary for the exercise of the right to freedom of opinion and expression in the digital age, and recalls that free access to information necessarily implies safeguarding the personal information citizens leave behind when operating online; takes note of the fact that encryption and anonymity can also give rise to abuses and wrongdoing and make it difficult to prevent criminal activities and to conduct investigations, as pointed out by law enforcement and counter-terrorism officials; recalls that restrictions on encryption and anonymity must be limited in keeping with the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality; calls on the EU institutions and the Member States to fully endorse and implement the recommendations set out in the Report of the UN Special Rapporteur of 22 May 2015 on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, addressing the use of encryption and anonymity in digital communications;

Thursday 3 May 2018

29. Encourages the development of ethical codes for journalists as well as for those involved in the management of media outlets, in order to ensure the full independence of journalists and media bodies;

30. Underlines that law enforcement and judicial authorities face many obstacles while investigating and prosecuting online offences, also due to discrepancies between Member States' legislation;

31. Notes that in the evolving digital media ecosystem, new intermediaries have emerged with the ability to influence and control information and ideas online by acquiring gate-keeping functions and powers; underlines that there must be sufficient independent and autonomous online channels, services and sources with the capacity to deliver a plurality of opinions and democratic ideas to the public on issues of general interest; calls on the Member States to develop new or existing national policies and measures in this regard;

32. Recognises that the new digital environment has exacerbated the problem of the spread of disinformation, or so-called 'fake' or 'false' news; recalls, however, that this is not a new phenomenon, nor is it restricted to the online sphere; stresses the importance of guaranteeing the right to quality information by enhancing citizens' access to reliable information and preventing the propagation of online and offline misinformation; recalls that the use of the term 'fake news' should never be aimed at undermining public trust in the media or at discrediting and criminalising critical voices; expresses its concern about the potential threat the notion of fake news could pose to freedom of speech and expression and to the independence of the media, while underlining the negative effects that the spread of false news might have on the quality of political debate and on the well-informed participation of citizens in democratic society; stresses the importance of ensuring effective self-regulatory mechanisms based on the principles of accuracy and transparency, and providing for proper obligations and instruments in relation to source verification, and of fact checking by independent and impartial certified third-party fact checking organisations to assure the objectivity of information and its protection;

33. Encourages social media companies and online platforms to develop tools to enable users to report and flag potential fake news in order to facilitate prompt rectification and to allow for review by independent and impartial certified third party fact checking organisations, tasked with providing precise definitions of fake news and disinformation in order to reduce the margin of discretion left to private sector actors, and to continue to display and label as 'false news' information revealed as such, with a view to stimulating public debate and preventing any re-emergence of the same disinformation in a different form;

34. Welcomes the Commission's decision to establish a High Level Expert Group on fake news and online disinformation composed of representatives of civil society, social media platforms, news media organisations, journalists and academia, in order to analyse these emerging threats and propose operative measures to be taken both at European and national level;

35. Underlines the responsibility of online actors in avoiding the spread of unverified or untrue information with the sole purpose of increasing online traffic through the use of, for example so-called clickbait;

36. Recognises that the role and investment of press publishers in investigative, professional and independent journalism is essential for fighting against the proliferation of 'fake' news and stresses the need to ensure the sustainability of pluralistic editorial press content; encourages both the Commission and Member States to invest adequate financial resources in media and digital literacy and in developing communication strategies, together with international and civil society organisations, in order to empower citizens and online users to recognise and be aware of dubious sources of information and to spot and expose deliberately false content and propaganda; to this end, also encourages the Member States to integrate media and information literacy into national education systems; calls on the Commission to consider best practices from national level to ensure the quality of journalism and the reliability of information published;

37. Reiterates the right of each individual to decide on the fate of his or her personal data, in particular the exclusive right to control the use, disclosure of personal information and the right to be forgotten, defined as the possibility to obtain a prompt removal of contents that might be prejudicial to his or her own dignity, from social media and search websites;

Thursday 3 May 2018

38. Recognises that the Internet and, more generally, the development of the digital environment has expanded the scope of several human rights, as shown, for instance, by the judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union of 13 May 2014 in case C-131/12 *Google Spain SL and Google Inc v Agencia Española de Protección de Datos (AEPD) and Mario Costeja González* ⁽¹⁾; calls, in this regard, on the EU institutions to launch a participatory process in order to draw up a European Charter of Internet Rights, taking into account the best practices developed in the Member States – in particular the Italian Declaration of Internet Rights – to be used as reference point, together with the relevant European and international human rights instruments, for the regulation of the digital sphere;

39. Underlines the key role of whistleblowers in safeguarding the public interest and in promoting a culture of public accountability and integrity in both public and private institutions; reiterates its call on the Commission and the Member States to set up and implement an adequate, advanced and comprehensive framework for common European legislation to protect whistleblowers by fully endorsing the Council of Europe's recommendations and Parliament's resolutions of 14 February and 24 October 2017; considers it necessary to ensure that reporting mechanisms are accessible, safe and secure, and that the claims of whistleblowers and investigative journalists are professionally investigated;

40. Stresses that the legal protection of whistleblowers when publicly disclosing information rests in particular on the public's right to receive it; underlines that nobody should lose the benefit of protection on the sole grounds that he or she might have misjudged the facts or that the perceived threat to the public interest did not materialise, provided that, at the time of reporting, he or she had reasonable grounds to believe them to be true; recalls that persons who knowingly report wrong or misleading information to the competent authorities should not be considered as whistleblowers, and thus should not benefit from the protection mechanisms; stresses, furthermore, that any person who is prejudiced, whether directly or indirectly, by the reporting or disclosure of inaccurate or misleading information should be afforded the right to seek effective remedies;

41. Encourages both the Commission and the Member States to adopt measures to protect the confidentiality of the information sources in order to prevent any discriminatory actions or threats;

42. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that journalists are given the proper tools to inquire and receive information from EU and Member States' public administration authorities, according to Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 on public access to documents, without facing arbitrary decisions denying such right of access; notes that the information obtained through the right of inquiry by journalists or by citizens, including information obtained through whistleblowers, is both complementary and essential to journalists' ability to fulfil their public interest mission; reiterates that access to public sources and events should depend on objective, non-discriminatory and transparent criteria;

43. Emphasises that freedom of the press requires independence from political and economic power, which implies equal treatment regardless of editorial orientation; reiterates the importance of preserving journalism that benefits from mechanisms which prevent the concentration of single, monopolistic or quasi-monopolistic groups, ensuring free competition and editorial diversity; calls on the Member States to adopt and implement a media ownership regulation in order to avoid horizontal concentration of ownership in the media sector and indirect and cross-media ownership, and to guarantee transparency, disclosure, and easy accessibility for citizens to information on media ownership, funding sources and management; underlines the importance of applying appropriate restrictions on media ownership by persons holding public office and of ensuring independent oversight and effective compliance mechanisms in order to prevent conflicts of interest and revolving doors; considers it essential to have independent and impartial national authorities to ensure the effective supervision of the audiovisual media sector;

44. Urges the Member States to develop their own strategic capabilities and engage with local communities in the EU and the EU neighbourhood to foster a pluralistic media environment and to communicate EU policies coherently and effectively;

45. Invites the Member States to fully support and endorse the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member States on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership adopted on 7 March 2018;

46. Recalls the important role played by public broadcasters in preserving media pluralism, as highlighted in Protocol No 29 to the Treaties; calls on the Member States to provide them with the adequate financial and technical means necessary for performing their social function and serving the public interest; calls on the Member States, to this end, to guarantee their editorial independence by protecting them, through clearly defined regulatory frameworks, from any form of governmental, political or commercial interference and influence, while at the same time, assuring all public bodies and entities which exercise powers in the areas of broadcasting and telecommunications full management autonomy and independence;

⁽¹⁾ ECL:EU:C:2014:317.

Thursday 3 May 2018

47. Urges the Member States to align their policy of issuing licenses to national broadcasting companies with the principle of respect for media pluralism; stresses that the fees charged and strictness of the obligations related to the issuing of licenses should be subject to scrutiny and should not jeopardise media freedom;
48. Calls on the Commission to check whether Member States allocate broadcasting licences on the basis of objective, transparent, impartial and proportionate criteria;
49. Suggests that in order to efficiently safeguard media freedom and pluralism, the participation in public procurement of companies whose ultimate owner also owns a media company should be prohibited or at least made fully transparent; proposes that Member States should be required to regularly report on all public funding provided to media enterprises and that all public funding provided to media owners should be regularly monitored; stresses that media owners should not have been convicted or found guilty of any criminal offence;
50. Stresses that any public funding to media organisations should be given on the basis of non-discriminatory, objective and transparent criteria, which should be made known in advance to all media;
51. Recalls that the Member States should find ways to support the media, by ensuring, for example, VAT neutrality as recommended in its resolution of 13 October 2011 on the future of VAT ⁽¹²⁾, and by supporting initiatives related to the media;
52. Calls on the Commission to allocate permanent and adequate funding in the EU budget to support the Media Pluralism Monitor at the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom, and to create an annual mechanism for the assessment of the risks to media pluralism in the Member States; stresses that the same mechanism should be applied to measure media pluralism in candidate countries, and that the results of the Media Pluralism Monitor should have an actual bearing on the progress of the negotiation process;
53. Calls on the Commission to monitor and collect information and statistics on media freedom and pluralism within all Member States, and to closely analyse cases of the infringement of the fundamental rights of journalists, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity;
54. Stresses the need to step up the sharing of best practices among the Member States' audiovisual regulatory authorities;
55. Calls on the Commission to take into account the recommendations contained in Parliament's resolution of 25 October 2016 on the establishment of an EU mechanism on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights; in this sense, calls on the Commission to include the results and recommendations of the Media Pluralism Monitor on the risks to media pluralism and media freedom in the EU when drawing up its annual Report on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights (European DRF Report);
56. Encourages Member States to step up their efforts to strengthen media literacy and promote training and educational initiatives among all citizens through formal, non-formal and informal education from a lifelong learning perspective, also by paying special attention to initial and ongoing teacher training and support as well as by encouraging dialogue and cooperation between the education and training sector and all relevant stakeholders, including media professionals, civil society and youth organisations; reaffirms the need to support age-appropriate innovative tools to promote empowerment and online safety as compulsory elements of the curriculum at schools and to bridge the digital divide both through specific technological literacy projects and with adequate investments in infrastructures, in order to ensure universal access to information;
57. Emphasises that developing a sense of critical appraisal and analysis with regard to the use and creation of media content is essential to people's understanding of current issues and contribution to public life, as well as their knowledge about both the transformative potential and the threats inherent to an increasingly complex and interconnected media environment; stresses that media literacy is a crucial democratic skill that empowers citizens; calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop specific measures in order to promote and support media literacy projects, such as the pilot project on Media Literacy for All and to develop a comprehensive media literacy policy targeting citizens of all age groups and all media types as an integral part of the European Union's education policy, supported accordingly by relevant EU funding opportunities such as ESI Funds and Horizon 2020;

⁽¹²⁾ OJ C 94 E, 3.4.2013, p. 5.

Thursday 3 May 2018

58. Notes with concern that, as highlighted by the 2016 Media Pluralism Monitor, media access by minorities, local and regional communities, women and people with disabilities is at risk; stresses that inclusive media are essential in an open, free and pluralistic media landscape, and that all citizens have the right of access to independent information in their mother tongue, be it a state or minority language; underlines the importance of providing European journalists, especially those working in lesser-used and minority languages, with adequate training and retraining opportunities; calls, therefore, on the Commission and Member States to encourage and support research, projects and policies that improve access to the media, as well as relevant initiatives aimed at vulnerable minority groups (such as the pilot project on Internship opportunities for minority language media), and to guarantee opportunities for participation and expression for all citizens;
59. Encourages the media sector to safeguard gender equality in media policy and practice, through co-regulatory mechanisms, internal codes of conduct and other voluntary actions;
60. Urges the Commission and the Member States to engage in social campaigns, education programmes, and more targeted training and awareness-raising activities (including for industry decision-makers) to promote egalitarian values and practices through funding and promotion at both national and European level in order to address gender inequality in the media sector effectively;
61. Recommends that the Commission develop a sectoral strategy for the European media sector based on innovation and sustainability; considers that such a strategy should strengthen cross-border collaboration and co-productions between media actors in the EU in order to highlight their diversity and promote intercultural dialogue, to enhance cooperation with individual newsrooms and audiovisual services of all the European institutions, in particular with that of Parliament, and to foster media coverage and visibility of EU affairs;
62. Stresses the importance of developing further models for the establishment of a European public service broadcasting platform that fosters EU-wide political debates based on facts, dissent and respect, contributes to a plurality of views in the newly converged media environment and fosters the visibility of the EU in its external relations;
63. Requests that the Commission and the Member States protect media freedom and freedom of speech in contemporary arts by promoting the creation of artworks that give voice to social concerns, encourage critical debate and inspire counter-speech;
64. Stresses the necessity to abolish geoblocking of information media content, thereby allowing EU citizens to access online, on-demand and replay streaming of other Member States' television channels;
65. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.
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