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on measures to support alternative media in Europe in order to guarantee a pluralistic media environment and cultural diversity
(2008/2011(INI))

Committee on Culture and Education

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CONTENTS

	Page
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION	3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT.....	7

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on measures to support alternative media in Europe in order to guarantee a pluralistic media environment and cultural diversity (2008/2011(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 150 and 151 of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to Directive 2002/21/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 March 2002 on a common regulatory framework for electronic communications networks and services (Framework Directive)¹,
- having regard to Directive 2002/19/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 March 2002 on access to, and interconnection of, electronic communications networks and associated facilities (Access Directive)²,
- having regard to Directive 2002/20/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 March 2002 on the authorisation of electronic communications networks and services (Authorisation Directive)³,
- having regard to Directive 2002/22/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 March 2002 on universal service and users' rights relating to electronic communications networks and services (Universal Service Directive)⁴,
- having regard to Directive 2007/65/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2007 amending Council Directive 89/552/EEC on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the pursuit of television broadcasting activities⁵,
- having regard to Decision No 676/2002/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 March 2002 on a regulatory framework for radio spectrum policy in the European Community (Radio Spectrum Decision)⁶,
- having regard to the White Paper presented by the Commission on a European communication policy (COM(2006)0035),
- having regard to the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European approach to media literacy in the digital environment

¹ OJ L 108, 24.4.2002, p. 33.

² OJ L 108, 24.4.2002, p. 7.

³ OJ L 108, 24.4.2002, p. 21.

⁴ OJ L 108, 24.4.2002, p. 51.

⁵ OJ L 332, 18.12.2007, p. 27.

⁶ OJ L 108, 24.4.2002, p.1.

(COM(2007)0833),

- having regard to the Commission Staff Working Document on Media Pluralism in the Member States of the European Union (SEC(2007)0032),
 - having regard to its resolution on the risks of violation, in the EU and especially in Italy, of freedom of expression and information (Article 11(2) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights)¹,
 - having regard to the study ‘The State of Community Media in the European Union’, commissioned by the European Parliament,
 - having regard to the Council of Europe Recommendation Community Media/Rec(2007)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on media pluralism and diversity of media content,
 - having regard to the Council of Europe Declaration (Decl-31.01.2007E) of the Committee of Ministers on protecting the role of media in democracy in the context of media concentration,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (A6-0000/2008),
- A. whereas community media are non-profit organisations and accountable to the community that they seek to serve,
- B. whereas non-profit means that the primary objective of such media is to engage in activities of public and private interest without any commercial or monetary profit,
- C. whereas accountable to the community means that community media must inform the community about their actions and decisions, justify them, and be penalised in the event of any misconduct,
- D. whereas community media are open to participation in the creation of content by members of the community,
- E. whereas community media very often do not represent a majority of those in society but serve instead a variety of smaller specific target groups which are in many cases locally based,
- F. whereas community media are obliged to present a clearly defined mandate, such as providing a social gain, which also has to be reflected in the content they produce,
- G. whereas one of the main weaknesses of community media in Europe is their lack of legal recognition by many national legal systems,

¹ Adopted Texts, P5_TA(2004)0373.

- H. whereas moreover so far none of the relevant legal texts of the European Union addresses the issue of community media,
- I. whereas the World Wide Web has propelled the sector into a new age with new possibilities and challenges,
- J. whereas transition costs from analogue to digital transmission put a considerable burden on community media,
- 1. Stresses that community media are an effective means to strengthen cultural and linguistic diversity, social inclusion and local identity, which explains the diversity of the sector;
- 2. Points out that community media help to strengthen the identities of specific communities of interest, while at the same time enabling members of those communities to engage with other groups in society, and therefore play a key role in fostering tolerance and pluralism in society and contribute to intercultural dialogue;
- 3. Stresses that community media are a tool for the integration of immigrants and also enable disadvantaged members of society to become active participants by engaging in debates that are important to them;
- 4. Points out that community media act as a catalyst for local creativity, providing artists and creative entrepreneurs with a public platform for testing new ideas and concepts;
- 5. Considers that community media contribute to the goal of improving citizens' media literacy through their direct involvement in the creation and distribution of content;
- 6. Points out that training people in digital, web and editorial skills through their participation in community media activities provides useful and transferable skills;
- 7. Stresses that community media help to strengthen media pluralism, as they provide additional perspectives on issues that lie at the heart of a given community;
- 8. Welcomes the fact that community media can make citizens more aware of existing public services and can help to foster civil participation in public discourse;
- 9. Notes that the financial resources of community media vary a lot but are in general rather scarce;
- 10. Notes that the sector lacks the support to make major efforts to improve its representation to and contact with the European Union and national decision-makers;
- 11. Urges the Commission to collaborate more actively with community media to enter into a closer dialogue with citizens;
- 12. Calls on the Commission to define community media as media that are:

- a) non-profit, engaging primarily in activities of public or private interest without any commercial or monetary profit;
 - b) accountable to the community which they seek to serve, which means that they are to inform the community about their actions and decisions, to justify them, and to be penalised in the event of any misconduct;
 - c) open to participation in the creation of content by members of the community.
13. Urges Member States to give legal recognition to community media as a distinct group alongside commercial and public media where such recognition is still lacking;
 14. Calls on the Commission to take into account community media as an alternative, bottom-up solution for increasing media pluralism when designing indicators for media pluralism;
 15. Calls on Member States for more active support of community media to ensure media pluralism;
 16. Recommends that Member States appoint a member of the community media sector to their national regulatory authorities so that community media's concerns can be addressed;
 17. Asks Member States to include specific provisions for community media activities when defining 'must carry' obligations;
 18. Asks the Commission to take into account the notion of community media in the ongoing reform of the telecommunication sector's regulatory framework as well as in the future legislation of the media sector;
 19. Acknowledges that on the one hand only a small portion of the sector has the knowledge and experience to apply for and benefit from EU support, while on the other hand funding officers are not aware of community media's potential;
 20. Encourages the sector to make more use of EU funding schemes, such as the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, Lifelong Learning Programmes and others;
 21. Proposes that the Commission establishes a European Internet platform through which to spread useful and relevant information for the sector, to facilitate networking and exchange of best practices;
 22. Calls on the Commission for a regular dialogue with the sector at European level given the added value of community media for the implementation of the EU's objectives and to support the sector's participation in such discussions;
 23. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions, and to the governments and parliaments of the Member States.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

1. Defining community media

This report looks for measures to support community or alternative media in Europe in order to guarantee a more pluralistic media environment, cultural diversity and to clearly define the sector as a distinct group in the media sector. Community or alternative media ('CM') can be defined as:

media that are non-profit and accountable to the community that they seek to serve. They are open to participation in the creation of content by members of the community. As such, they are a distinct group within the media sector alongside commercial and public media.

CM are addressed to specific target groups. They have a clearly-defined task, which is carried out in line with their content. Social benefit for a community is a primary concern.

CM create cohesion, give identity, promote common interests and preserve cultural and linguistic diversity.

CM are generally run by committed, creative citizens with a strong social conscience.

CM contribute to the goal of improving citizens' media literacy through their direct involvement in the creation and distribution of content.

2. Historical context and status quo

CM activity first appeared in Latin America in the 1940s as a protest movement in a tin mine and then further developed in North America in the 1950s.

In Western Europe CM emerged in the 1960s and 1970s and sought to provide alternative content compared to public service broadcasting channels, which had to adhere to strict, state-imposed content regulations. With the liberalisation of the 1980s some CM initiatives were granted legal status. Since then, the sector has slowly but steadily experienced further recognition throughout Western Europe.

In many of the countries that joined the European Union in 2004 and in 2007, however, the sector has experienced a slightly different history. Pirate broadcasting has been used as an instrument by civil rights movements to protest against authoritarian governments. Examples are the Slovenian Radio Student which was founded in 1969. Furthermore the Church has played an important role in the development of alternative media movements in some other Central European countries. In Poland for example, Catholic CM radio was closely linked to the Polish opposition that led to the changes in 1989.

The emergence of the World Wide Web has over recent years propelled the sector into what some call a Third Age of community media. CM share this challenge with all other media as well.

3. Social and cultural gain

Community media can serve a variety of social and cultural objectives.

The role of CM in cultural dialogue, social inclusion and community cohesion

CM help to strengthen the identities of specific communities of interest while at the same time enabling members of those communities to engage with other groups of society. They therefore can play a key role in fostering tolerance and pluralism in society.

Example: In London, young school dropouts and football fans run an Internet radio project concerned with various aspects of being a fan. The young people provide match commentaries, interview idols, discuss racism, homophobia and violence, and bring aggressors face to face with victims. They are assisted by professional broadcasters from a London university. The project receives government support and funding from a major London football club, which publicises it on its home page.

CM is an effective means to strengthen social inclusion and local empowerment too. CM may enable disadvantaged members of a community to become active participants in society to engage in debates concerning issues that are important for them.

Example: Angel Radio (UK) targets and is made by senior citizens who seek to play a more active role in community life. The station creates a lot of content that specifically deals with issues relating to the elderly. The radio station tries to spark public debate on issues important to the constituency. It has produced CDs for local schools that seek to raise awareness regarding issues such as the neglect of the elderly as well as physical and mental abuse of senior citizens.

CM help people facing new challenges to overcome them, because through CM they can more easily find others who are facing the same challenges.

Example: A new start in a country with an unfamiliar culture and language is an everyday occurrence for mobile Europeans. Any new beginning is easier if you can share your experiences with people from home who are doing the same thing. Internet platforms that make this possible are examples of well-functioning CM.

Community media and media literacy

CM have the potential to serve as a tool to strengthen individual skills in professions in the media environment. Training in digital skills and web skills in the context of a CM activity provides extremely useful and transferable skills. This helps people not only to get a job in the media sector but also to gain in self-esteem and self-confidence. They begin to regain their motivation to learn.

Community media as a link between local communities and local public services

CM can make citizens more aware of existing public services and encourage them to likewise

help public services to better cater for the needs of the community. Local public service institutions can collaborate with CM to engage with the local community.

Promotion of local creative potential

CM act as a catalyst for local creativity and give artists and creative entrepreneurs a platform for testing new ideas and concepts in public.

Example: Amsterdam Open Channel is a community television initiative. TV shows like Hoekstreen Live offer avant-garde creative programmes. Hoekstreen Live is a twelve-hour-long show adopting a participative approach to talk shows as the camera is passed from hand to hand to anyone willing to film. People wishing to participate can enter the studio and contribute live to the show. It is also experimenting with the convergence of Internet and broadcast media. It has a virtual TV crew that films and broadcasts events taking place on 'Second Life', a web-based virtual world.

Media pluralism and community media

Media pluralism is a concept that involves citizens' access to a broad variety of information sources on a broad range of content that enable them to form their opinion without the undue influence of one dominant, opinion-forming power. As such it is considered an important element in a democratic society and is therefore also enshrined in Art. 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. CM help to strengthen media pluralism as they provide additional perspectives on issues that lie at the heart of a given community.

Example: La Maison des Media Libres is a French initiative that brings together four CM television initiatives under one umbrella organisation in order to provide an alternative perspective on current affairs as well as social and cultural issues. The objective is to establish an alternative media centre that includes television and radio production, book publishing, film distribution and activities.

4. The EU and CM

Communication policy

The White Paper on a European communication policy makes a clear reference to the right of information, freedom of expression, inclusiveness, diversity and participation which should guide EU policy-making in this area. One of the core principles promoted in the White Paper is to address citizens' concerns directly by 'going local'. EU policy initiatives and their effects should be debated in the local context of people's everyday life. CM could help to foster civil participation in public discourse and assist the Commission in creating links between citizens' concerns and EU policies. **Collaborating more actively with locally-based CM could be a way for the Commission to enter into closer dialogue with citizens.**

Education and media literacy

The recent Commission Communication on media literacy states that 'it is also important that citizens better understand the economic and cultural dimension of media and that a discussion take place on the importance for Europe's economy of having strong and competitive media

at a global level, delivering pluralism and cultural diversity'. **CM clearly contribute to the goal of improving citizens' understanding of the media industry**, especially through citizens' direct involvement in the creation and distribution of content.

Media pluralism

The Commission intends to publish in early 2009 a Communication on Indicators for Media Pluralism reflecting wide concern among EU institutions that media pluralism and diversity are hampered by media concentration. This is supposed to be accompanied by a public consultation. **This consultation should take into account CM as an alternative, bottom-up solution for increasing media pluralism.** Additionally, **Member States' more active support of CM could be a way to ensure media pluralism.**

5. The needs of the sector

One of the main weaknesses regarding the position of the CM in Europe is the lack of legal recognition in many national laws. One of the positive examples is the United Kingdom, where CM are legally recognised alongside private and commercial media. By contrast, the EU, so far, does not make reference to CM as a distinct form of media, but operates only within the terms of public and commercial media service providers.

None of the relevant legal texts takes up the notion of CM.

Under these conditions CM face a difficult situation.

Having an officially recognised legal status is important for the development of CM. It enables the sector to raise its profile among policy makers as well as to engage with possible advertisers or funding bodies.

Based on the regulations currently in force, Member States should make use of the possibility to define 'must carry' obligations in their national laws to include CM. 'Must Carry' obligations need to be reasonable in the light of clearly defined general interest objectives. Such objectives include inter alia freedom of expression, media pluralism, cultural and linguistic diversity and social inclusion.

Cultural diversity and media pluralism can be used by national authorities to assess the necessity for operators to include specific broadcasting services in their networks. In the digital environment it is also important to ensure that tools such as electronic programme guides include the CM available in their listings. Therefore **the EU and Member States' regulatory authorities should take up these notions to justify allocation of radio frequencies to CM and their inclusion in the digital environment, including following the digital switchover.**

In this respect it should be noted that transition costs from analogue to digital transmission put a considerable burden on CM activities.

6. Financing of community media

Financial resources of CM can vary a lot but are in general rather scarce. EU funding can be

an important source of revenue. Due to the fact that the sector is heterogeneous and the benefits of CM are widespread, the sector can benefit from a range of EU funding such as the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, Lifelong Learning Programme and others.

However, only a minority of the sector has the knowledge and experience to apply for and to benefit from EU support. On the other hand, funding officers are also not aware of the breadth of CM's potential.

Thus, the scope exists to **further integrate the concept of CM into EU support actions. Information on application to existing EU funding should be spread through a European internet-based source dedicated to CM.**

7. Organisation and representation of the sector at EU level

The absence of any kind of reference to CM in EU documents is a clear sign that the sector lacks links with legislators and administration at European level.

The on-going revision of the European telecommunication rules would be an important occasion for the sector to raise its voice and to participate in the debate. The same goes for the envisaged public consultation on indicators for media pluralism. **The added value of CM for the implementation of EU objectives is a good argument for the Commission to consider supporting the sector's participation in discussions at European level.**