

**Declaration of the Committee of Ministers
on the role of community media in promoting social cohesion
and intercultural dialogue**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 11 February 2009
at the 1048th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe,

Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles that are their common heritage;

Recalling the importance for democratic societies of a wide variety of free and independent media, which are able to reflect a diversity of ideas and opinions and contribute to the mutual enrichment of cultures, as stated in its Declaration on the freedom of expression and information (29 April 1982);

Reaffirming that media pluralism and diversity of media content are essential for the functioning of a democratic society and are the corollaries of the fundamental right to freedom of expression and information as guaranteed by Article 10 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ETS No. 5), given their essential role in guaranteeing free expression of opinions and ideas and in contributing to effective participation in democratic processes by many groups and individuals;

Recalling its Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2007\)2](#) on media pluralism and diversity of media content, which calls on member states to encourage the development of different types of media, including community, local, minority or social media, capable of making a contribution to pluralism and diversity and providing a space for dialogue, while responding to the specific needs or requests of certain groups in civil society and serving as a factor of social cohesion and integration;

Recalling also its Declaration on protecting the role of the media in democracy in the context of media concentration (31 January 2007), which stresses that policies designed to encourage the development of not-for-profit media can be another way to promote a diversity of autonomous channels for the dissemination of information and expression of opinion, especially for and by social groups on which mainstream media rarely concentrate;

Bearing in mind its [Recommendation No. R \(97\) 21](#) on the media and the promotion of a culture of tolerance, which stresses that the media can make a positive contribution to the fight against intolerance, especially when they foster a culture of understanding between different ethnic, cultural and religious groups in civil society;

Recalling also its [Recommendation No. R \(97\) 20](#) on "hate speech", which recommends that member states take appropriate steps to combat hate speech and ensure that such steps form part of a comprehensive approach to the phenomenon, which also targets its social, economic, political, cultural and other root causes;

Convinced, in this context, that member states should, in particular, while respecting the principle of editorial independence, encourage the media to contribute to intercultural dialogue, as defined in the Council of Europe "White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue" (May 2008), so as to promote mutual respect, pluralism, tolerance and broadmindedness, and to prevent potential conflicts through discussions and the wider democratic participation of persons belonging to all ethnic, cultural, religious or other communities;

Recalling the importance of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ETS No. 157), in particular as regards the obligation of the parties to recognise the right of persons belonging to national minorities to receive and impart information in the minority language and to ensure that

persons belonging to national minorities are not discriminated against in their access to the media and are granted the possibility of creating and using their own media;

Recalling also the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ETS No. 148), in particular as regards the obligation of the parties to ensure, facilitate and/or encourage the creation of media outlets in regional or minority languages;

Bearing in mind the political documents adopted at the 7th European Ministerial Conference on Mass Media Policy (Kyiv, March 2005), which underline, *inter alia* the need to foster intercultural dialogue via the media, paying particular attention to the interests of persons belonging to minority groups and to minority community media; and, more specifically, the objective set out in the action plan to examine how different types of media can play a part in promoting social cohesion and integrating all communities and generations;

Bearing in mind also the provisions of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, adopted on 20 October 2005, which stipulates the right of the parties to formulate and implement their cultural policies and to adopt measures to protect and promote intercultural dialogue and the diversity of cultural expressions;

Recalling the recommendations of the UNESCO Maputo Declaration on fostering freedom of expression, access to information and empowerment of people, adopted on 3 May 2008, regarding the particular contribution that all three tiers of broadcasters – public service, commercial and community – make to media diversity and, in particular, the role of community broadcasters in fostering under-represented or marginalised populations' access to information, means of expression and participation in decision-making processes, and stressing the need to improve conditions for the development of community media;

Recalling Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1466 (2000) on media education especially as concerns the need for the involvement of different stakeholders in an active dialogue on media education, *inter alia* educational bodies, parents' organisations, media professionals, Internet service providers, NGOs, etc.;

Recalling the European Parliament Resolution of 25 September 2008 on Community Media in Europe (INI/2008/2011), which stresses that community media are an effective means of strengthening cultural and linguistic diversity, social inclusion and local identity, as well as media pluralism;

Recalling also the Joint Declaration on Diversity in Broadcasting of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Organization 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 in Africa, adopted on 14 December 2007, stating that community broadcasting should be explicitly recognised in law as a distinct form of broadcasting and benefit from fair and simple licensing procedures;

Understanding community media, also referred to in different sources as "third sector", "minority media", or "social or civic media", as complementary to public service media and commercial media, and noting that community media operate in many Council of Europe member states and in over 115 countries worldwide;

Convinced that community media, which by definition and by their very nature are close to their audiences, serve many societal needs and perform functions that neither commercial nor public service media can meet or undertake fully and adequately;

Recognising the contribution of community media in fostering public debate, political pluralism and awareness of diverse opinions, notably by providing various groups in society – including cultural,

linguistic, ethnic, religious or other minorities – with an opportunity to receive and impart information, to express themselves and to exchange ideas;

Conscious that in today's radically changed media landscape, community media can play an important role, notably by promoting social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and tolerance, as well as by fostering community engagement and democratic participation at local and regional level, as documented by research;

Recognising that minority community media, by using the language of their audience, are able to reach out effectively to minority audiences;

Aware that while community media can play a positive role for social cohesion and intercultural dialogue, they may also, in certain cases, contribute to social isolation or intolerance; conscious that to avoid this risk, community media should always respect the essential journalistic values and ethics common to all media;

Recognising the crucial contribution of community media in developing media literacy through the direct involvement of citizens in the process of creation and distribution of media content, as well as through the organisation of training programmes, issues that are particularly important in the digital environment;

Recognising the role of community media in developing innovation and creativity of citizens, which is also vital for increasing diversity of content;

Noting that community media, taking the form of broadcasting and/or other electronic media projects, as well as print format, may share to a greater or lesser extent some of the following characteristics: independence from government, commercial and religious institutions and political parties; a not-for-profit nature; voluntary participation of members of civil society in the devising and management of programmes; activities aiming at social gain and community benefit; ownership by and accountability to the communities of place and/or of interest which they serve; commitment to inclusive and intercultural practices,

Declares its support for community media, with a view to helping them play a positive role for social cohesion and intercultural dialogue, and in this connection:

- i. Recognises community media as a distinct media sector, alongside public service and private commercial media and, in this connection, highlights the necessity to examine the question of how to adapt legal frameworks which would enable the recognition and the development of community media and the proper performance of their social functions;
- ii. Draws attention to the desirability of allocating to community media, to the extent possible, a sufficient number of frequencies, both in analogue and digital environments, and ensuring that community broadcasting media are not disadvantaged after the transition to the digital environment;
- iii. Underlines the need to develop and/or support educational and vocational programmes for all communities in order to encourage them to make full use of available technological platforms;
- iv. Stresses the desirability of:
 - a. recognising the social value of community media and examining the possibility of committing funds at national, regional and local level to support the sector, directly and indirectly, while duly taking into account competition aspects;

- b. encouraging studies of good practice in community media, and facilitating co-operation and the exchange of good practice, including exchanges with such media in other regions of the world, as well as between community media and other interested media, for example by exchanging programmes and content or by developing joint projects;
 - c. facilitating capacity building and training of community media staff, for example via training schemes within the framework of lifelong learning and media literacy, as well as staff and volunteer exchanges with other media and internship arrangements, which could enhance the quality of community media programmes;
 - d. encouraging the media's contribution to intercultural dialogue through initiatives such as the setting up of a network to exchange information and support and facilitate initiatives which exist in this field in Europe;
- v. Invites community media to be conscious of their role in promoting social cohesion and intercultural dialogue and, to this end, to elaborate and adopt or, if appropriate, review codes of professional ethics or internal guidelines and to ensure that they are respected.