

COE ministerial meeting in Reykjavik 2009

Sub-theme 2: Trust the content -trust the media

Response by civil society:

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Thank you very much for the invitation and for this excellent opportunity to speak on behalf of the European listeners and viewers and readers, at this first -and i don't hope last European media conference organized by the the Council of Europe.

EURALVA welcomes the recognition by the ministerial resolution that public service broadcasters in Europe need increased funding; and access to the internet. We regrets, however, that the political declaration offers no mechanism by which to guarantee genuine public service broadcasting to listeners and viewers.

Looking at the legal background article 10 (1) of the European convention on human rights guarantees, subject to the restrictions in article 10(2), the right both to impart and to receive information and ideas.

But for most mass media, and especially for public service broadcasting, there is *an asymmetrical relationship* between the right of the broadcasters to *impart* information and ideas, and the rights of individual listeners and viewers to *receive* them.

This structural asymmetry can only be remedied by establishing, in each member of the Council of Europe, a *circle of trust* between listeners and viewers, national governments and regulators, and the public service broadcasters themselves.

When we are looking back: Despite the ministerial resolution on public service broadcasting, which was agreed in Prague in 1994, and the follow-up recommendations and declarations, there are many European countries, where public service broadcasting is inadequate.

This is not simply because of a shortage of funds, or lack of access to the internet, but because of poor editorial policy and weak journalism.

EURALVA considers that it will only be possible for listeners and viewers to establish a circle of trust, when each public service broadcaster in Europe:

- *establishes editorial guidelines in line with those set down in the Prague ministerial resolution of 1994.*
- *develops a parallel code of practice for its journalists, and provides them with sufficient resources to fulfil the editorial commitments which it has made.*

Looking at the the approach of the EU, we also notes that public service broadcasters within the European Union, are only entitled to receive state aid because *public service broadcasting fulfils the democratic, social and cultural needs of society* in each member state. Regrettably, however, the competition directorate of the European Commission *has failed to establish minimum editorial standards* for public service broadcasters in each member state.

The result has been, that EURALVA is losing confidence in the state aid provisions of the Amsterdam treaty will actually ensure that public service broadcasters in the European Union will genuinely fulfil the democratic, social and cultural needs of listeners and viewers in each member state.

In order to turn the fine aspirations of the ministerial resolution into practice, we will propose that the ministers also undertake to require their public service broadcasters

- *to commit themselves to editorial standards which will guarantee the delivery to listeners and viewers a steady supply of information and ideas which are designed to fulfil their democratic, social and cultural needs.*
- *to institute a programme of journalistic training, which is designed to ensure parallel journalistic standards amongst all their journalists.*

EURALVA also proposes that the Council of Europe should establish a fund which is designed to assist public service broadcasters in poorer European countries to fulfil both of these needs.

We finally support the proposal in the resolution, that the Council of Europe shall provide a forum for discussion and where appropriate propose guidance for a positive development of the public service media.

Such a forum must have representatives from civil society. It is after all us -the listeners and viewers and readers -who would like to trust the content and the media and that needs a circle of trust.