

1st Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Media and New Communication Services

Address by Katrín Jakobsdóttir, the Icelandic Minister of Culture, Education and Science

Director General, Ministers, ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the First Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Media and New Communication Services here in Reykjavik. This event is organized by the Council of Europe in co-operation with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in Iceland.

I believe that important work is being carried out within the Council of Europe by its Steering Committee on the Media and New Communication Services (CDMC). The work covers a wide range of issues of pan-European importance for freedom of expression and information, in particular media in times of crisis, media concentration and pluralism, the promotion of tolerance, the impact of new media-like mass communication services, and the evolution of public service media.

Seven European Ministerial Conferences on Mass Media Policy have already taken place which have established work programmes for the Council of Europe in the media field over the past decades.

The constant developments in information society and the convergence of media and communication services and technologies have created both opportunities and challenges for our human rights. Protecting and promoting our human rights in these new environments is of paramount importance, and that is why it is immensely important to include new communication services within the work of the Council of Europe.

The CDMC has been very active in fulfilling the Kiev Ministerial Conference Action Plan of 2005, and many important Pan-European policy documents have been adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe as a result of the CDMC's work. A few examples of this important work include Committee of Ministers Recommendations and Declaration on:

measures to promote the public service value of the Internet;

the remit of public service media in the information society;

protecting the dignity, security and privacy of children on the Internet:

measures to promote freedom of expression and information with regard to Internet filters.

The Internet and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have revolutionised our societies. People have much easier access to all kinds of information; they are able to express their views in a variety of new interactive ways such as by using social networking sites and blogs. New media have changed the way we communicate with each other.

However, the Internet and ICTs raise a number of questions concerning human rights, including the right to private life in the information society. Large parts of our societies have become "prosumers" equipped with cameras and recorders on their mobile phones and handheld computers. In a matter of moments incidents in a private place or events happening in public are accessible on the Internet in on sites such as YouTube, MySpace and Facebook.

Media literacy for all groups in society should therefore be a priority. For example, young people are often unaware and/or do not feel concerned by challenges to their privacy when using new media – they leave digital traces about their online habits and preferences which is used for commercial profiling practices by third parties.

Both traditional and new media is an immensely important source of information for democratic participation of citizens. In particular, independent public service media is necessary as a source of quality information. A public service media offering quality

programming, news and culture raises the benchmarks for private media companies - both traditional and new media companies. This is why it is important for public service media to evolve and to offer new media services to its users. Users of public service media are growing older and are not being followed by younger audiences who increasingly demand interesting and interactive non-linear content. In this regard, the efforts being made by the Council of Europe in addressing this important issue is very much appreciated.

I would also like to underline the cross-border nature and challenges of new media-like mass communication services, in particular the new business models for these services that can circumvent the rules and regulations applied to traditional more domestic media. Having said that, this does not mean that providers of these services are irresponsible, yet they do raise important questions regarding issues such as illegal content, copyright, protection of minors, and the right to reply in new media environments.

These new business models call for reflection regarding new regulations including self- and co-regulation. It is therefore very positive to see that among many of the new media providers awareness has increased about their media impact and responsibilities. I believe that a constant dialogue needs to take place between key stakeholder groups including non-governmental organisations, media professionals and governments in the development of frameworks for media and media-like mass communication services.

To put this into a historical perspective, media regulation has traditionally been dealt with at the national level where different issues and cultural emphasis has been taken into account in each country, emphasising the necessity of strengthening national language, national and regional culture, and the need to consider technical infrastructures.

Minimum standards for traditional broadcast media started 20 years ago with the European Convention on Transfrontier Television of the Council of Europe and the "Television without Frontiers" Directive of the European Union. And even though such standards have evolved, amendments are being made to both the Convention and the Directive which reflect some of the new challenges for media in a globalised world. New media is crossing the borders and legislation of many countries -both in and outside of Europe- and some would argue that this Convention and Directive are no longer sufficient to fully address all the different issues relating to media and new media-like mass communication services. This means that countries need to co-operate and dialogue between each other much more through platforms such as the Council of Europe.

On an equal footing and in a forward looking manner like in this Ministerial Conference, I believe that the Council of Europe is the most appropriate platform for key stakeholder groups, including governments, the private sector and civil society, to shape the present and future evolution of the pan-European media landscape from a human rights perspective.

I, for my part, am greatly looking forward to this Conference, in particular as regards the multi-stakeholder dialogue and views to be expressed and the conclusions and agreements that it will render.