



Ministry of Education, Science and Culture



Strasbourg, 20 May 2009

MCM(2009)024

**1st Council of Europe Conference of Ministers
responsible for Media and New Communication Services**
A new notion of media?
(28-29 May 2009, Reykjavik, Iceland)

Community Media Forum Europe (CMFE) and AMARC Europe
A new notion of media – the community media perspective

Community Media Forum Europe

CMFE is a network of policy experts, organisations and federations, which aim to support the role of Community Media on the European level. Its members include many national federations of Community Media in Europe, as well as networks, projects and experts that support the development of Community Media. CMFE works closely together with *AMARC-Europe*, the European branch of the World Association of Community Radiobroadcasters.

Since 2007, the CMFE has been working as an observer with the Group of Specialists on Media Diversity (MC-S-MD) of the Steering Committee on the Media and New Communication Services (CDMC) of the Council of Europe. It has provided extensive input and expertise on the work of the MC-S-MD, with, as an important result, the '*Declaration on the role of Community Media in promoting social cohesion and intercultural dialogue, as adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 11 February 2009 at the 1048th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies*'¹.

The role of Community Media

Community Media are non profit-making media serving local communities or communities of interest and allowing public participation in media production. As such they constitute the 'Third Media Sector' with a clearly distinct identity alongside the national public service sector and private commercial media.

In its Declaration on the role of Community Media, the Committee of Ministers recognise Community Media as a distinct media sector and acknowledged its role in fostering public debate, political pluralism and media literacy, promoting social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and tolerance, and strengthening community engagement and democratic participation. The Committee recognised that Community Media perform functions that neither commercial nor public service media can meet or undertake fully and adequately. "*(...) Community Media (...) 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.*"²

European Parliament

On 25 September 2008, the European Parliament adopted the '*Resolution on Community Media in Europe (INI/2008/2011)*'³, in which it stresses that Community Media are an effective means of strengthening cultural and linguistic diversity, social inclusion and local identity, as well as media pluralism.

On 24 September the European Parliament also adopted the '*Resolution on concentration and pluralism in the media in the European Union (INI/2007/2253)*'⁴. The Resolution "*welcomes the dynamics and diversity brought into the media landscape by the new media and encourages responsible use of all the new technology such as mobile TV as a platform for commercial, public and community media;*" and "*recommends that the regulations governing state aid are devised and implemented in a way allowing the public service and community media to fulfil their function in a dynamic environment, while ensuring that public service media carry out the function entrusted to them by Member States in a transparent and accountable manner, avoiding the abuse of public funding for reasons of political or economic expediency;*"

¹ Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the role of community media in promoting social cohesion and intercultural dialogue. http://www.cmfe.eu/docs/_Declaration_Community_media_adopted_CM-11-02-09E1.pdf, 3.

² See footnote 1

³ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?language=EN&reference=A6-0263/2008>

⁴ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P6-TA-2008-0459&language=EN>

Good practices

Examples of good practices are recent developments in United Kingdom. Ofcom introduced community radio licensing and the first licence was awarded in March 2005. In the press release for '*The Community Radio Annual Report*'⁵, (2008) Ofcom states: "*Community radio stations reflect the variety of cultures, demographics and tastes in the UK.*" Regarding "*Wide social benefits*" Ofcom states further that: "*(...) on average, each station operates with 74 volunteers who together give around 214 hours of their time a week. Across the sector this represents over 100,000 volunteer hours a month. In fulfilling their wider requirements to deliver social gain to their communities, each station are also required to provide training and accessibility.*"

In the Netherlands community media are, as local radio- and TV-stations, part of the public broadcasting sector. Since its start some 25 years ago, more than 200.000 citizens participated, e.g. as journalists, technicians, board members, in one of the now almost 300 local media organizations. These organisations provide citizens with important extra tools to express themselves, to take actively part in local democratic processes by constructing their own information and discussion tools. More than one third of the Dutch public (estimated 5.5 million out of the total of 16.5 million Dutch inhabitants) use these media, on a weekly base, as a source for local information⁶.

In a response to the report from the WRR, the Scientific Council For Government Policy⁷, on the future digital media environment, the Dutch government formulated it as follows: "*Local broadcasters are an integral part of the public service media. They provide a window on the immediate environment and are forums for opinion shaping in local democracy. Local broadcasting thereby also offers citizens the opportunity to participate themselves in the production of radio and television.*"⁸

'A new notion of media?'

The focus on 'new media' implicates crucial steps towards rethinking notions of 'Media', considering increased practices of participation and interactivity. It poses the important question of what public service means in the changing media environment and propose policies to safeguard public interest values, including media access, freedom of expression, and media pluralism.

However adequate recognition of the role of community media, particularly community broadcasting, as part of the 'third media sector', in providing access and means of public participation, still fails. Community Media are also to be seen as *social processes* where, for example, citizens meet each other in studios to together build and form their own radio- and TV-programmes and web services. In that way Community Media are real 'social media'. They so contribute to building and strengthening communities in real life situations more than the other so-called 'social media' on Internet as 'Blogs', 'Twitter', 'YouTube' or 'Facebook' (also called: Web 2.0 or 3.0).

A 'new notion of media?' should therefore not only refer to this new technologies but also to emerging participatory and social media practices that exist across different media platforms, both 'new' and 'old'. This new notion should also highlight Community Media as an effective means of strengthening cultural and linguistic diversity, social inclusion and cohesion, as well as media pluralism, and for promoting intercultural dialogue, community engagement and democratic participation (in accordance with the Council of Europe Declaration from 11 February 2009⁹).

⁵ http://www.ofcom.org.uk/radio/ifi/rbl/commun_radio/cr_annualrpt/

⁶ Bereiksonderzoek Lokale omroepen in Nederland, Interview-NSS/OLON, April 2006
http://www.olon.nl/publiekdocs2/0110_olon_landelijk_klo_2005_rapport.pdf

⁷ 'Focus op functies: uitdagingen voor een toekomstbestendig mediabeleid' (WRR, 2005)

⁸ Kabinetsreactie WRR-advies 'Focus op Functies' Kamerstuk (02-06-2006)

⁹ See footnote 1

The public service remit

Not only Public Service Broadcasting is there to ensure access to sources of information. Also Community Media are recognised to be playing this crucial role in fostering media access, particularly with regards to minorities and marginalized communities. Community Media need and deserve, as a recognised distinct media sector, support for providing significant contributions to core objectives such as media pluralism, intercultural dialogue, media literacy and social cohesion. In order to be consistent with the Council of Europe's recent work and declarations, future policy should equally recognise the need to support Community Media as media of general public interest.

CMFE's engagement in the future

Community media have an urgent need for *an enabling policy environment at the local, national and regional level, including legal recognition, allocation of frequencies, access to digital broadcasting networks and public funding, in order to allow it to fulfil its function as a non-profit service that fosters access to information, citizen participation, democracy and media literacy.*

Therefore, the Community Media Sector needs also (e.g. within the future work of the Council of Europe in the field of media and communications):

- Pursue work on media literacy, in its consumption and production aspects, with the aim of making users, creators and distributors of content (in particular children and young people) responsible, informed and critical participants in the information society.

- Examine how to support media projects such as community media, that promote the empowerment of citizens, in particular women and marginalized communities, through skills building and the access to means of media production.

The CMFE offers its dedicated support to future work on media and communications issues to help find solutions for the important questions that surround the development of a 'New Notion of Media'. The CMFE and its constituency have extensive experience and expertise in areas such as democratic participation and citizen empowerment, intercultural dialogue, cultural and media pluralism, media literacy, and the convergence (and integrated use) of new and old media platforms.

'Information is the currency of Democracy'¹⁰. Hundred's of thousands of citizens participate on a regular base in thousands of Community Media all over Europe. They take responsibilities for their own media. They receive training in media and journalistic skills. They so play an invaluable and necessary role in controlling and strengthening democratic processes and builds bridges among different cultures.

¹⁰ Attributed to Thomas Jefferson