

Public consultation on the revision of the ‘Television without Frontiers’ Directive

The Newspaper Society’s submission on Issues Paper for the Audiovisual Conference in Liverpool:

Media Pluralism - What should be the European Union’s role?

The Newspaper Society represents the regional newspaper industry. Its members publish around 1300 regional and local newspaper titles throughout the United Kingdom including daily morning and evening newspapers, weekly and Sunday titles, both paid for and free. It is read by around 40 million adult readers - approximately 83% of the adult population and in surveys that audience has rated it the most trusted media.

The UK regional press faces fierce competition for its local readers and its advertisers. This competition emanates from a wide range of sources. These include other regional and local newspapers, paid for and free, daily, weekly and Sunday; national daily and Sunday newspapers; national, regional and local magazines; directories; letterbox services; direct mail; national, regional and local television and radio services provided by both public service broadcasters and commercial broadcasters, with related data services and multimedia applications; and an ever increasing and ever evolving proliferation of online media and content services.

The regional press has benefited from consolidation of ownership as regional press specialists have acquired, invested and developed the industry. This has helped ensure a vigorous, well-resourced and effective regional and local newspaper industry. Dedicated and focussed regional newspaper companies have helped the regional press to maintain a central role in the changing communications industries, against fierce competition. The industry itself remains diverse in comparison with the other media sectors against which it competes.

Regional newspaper companies’ development has included necessary diversification into regional media companies, offering a media portfolio so that they can continue to deliver local content to local audiences in the ways wanted by its local community. The regional newspaper industry considers that deregulation of special newspaper controls and cross-media ownership controls are vital to the future development of the industry. Stricter controls would be highly detrimental to the regional press. When changes to the media regulation have been under consideration in the UK, the Newspaper Society has consistently put forward proposals for deregulation of media ownership with the united support of the regional newspaper industry and mandate of all its membership, both large groups and small publishers. These have resulted in legislative changes. However, the regional newspaper industry considers that this dialogue should remain a domestic one and that there is no basis for European Commission intervention.

Media pluralism is a matter for Member States alone. There is no need or justification for European action on media pluralism. The UK regional newspaper industry considers there is no need for EU initiated and supported studies of local media. Consolidation has proved helpful for the industry, it remains diverse and includes large and small publishers. The UK regional newspaper industry certainly continues

its traditional rejection of the Commission's suggested alternative approach of Government support. The UK regional newspaper industry considers that Government support and subsidy would compromise press freedom. The European Commission does not have legal competence to regulate newspaper content and the UK newspaper industry is wholly opposed to any special statutory codes governing the content of print and online newspapers. Ownership consolidation does not compromise editorial independence nor lead to any loss of a range of content, news, information, voice, views, comment, opinions, debate, forum and interaction at local level. Media pluralism, however widely defined, is a matter for Member States and there are no grounds for European Union action.

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