



BRUSSELS, 17 - 18 November 2016

Session Ia: Media pluralism and independence from financial pressures and constraints

This session will look at how to protect the media sector from undue commercial influences having a harmful effect on media pluralism, independence and quality journalism.


Media convergence has influenced the way media outlets monetise content. In some cases, it has become difficult for media businesses to remain financially viable, thus further exposing them to possible pressures. The session will look at these matters, as well as at issues such as the role of advertising and of IT companies, pressures resulting from ownership structures and media distribution channels, and state influence on financing, including the issue of state aid and state advertising.

The session will also consider the issue of transparency of media ownership. The importance of this issue was stressed in the 2013 Council conclusions on media freedom and pluralism in the digital environment¹ where transparency of media ownership and funding of sources were highlighted as essential to guarantee media freedom and pluralism. As a follow-up the Commission organised an exchange of best practices on transparency of media ownership in 2014. The majority of respondents of the public consultation ahead of the Colloquium considered transparency of ownership a fundamental requisite. The reasons most commonly given were that a lack of transparency of ownership does not allow a correct assessment of media concentration, as well as of possible vested interests behind media reporting. Thus it prevents the public from drawing own conclusions about the quality of the information provided by the media.

The public consultation also confirmed that a very large majority of respondents found media convergence to be having a “negative” or “lowering” effect on quality journalism, with the financial sustainability of quality journalism being the primary concern. Although several respondents noted some benefits from journalists’ use of technology and citizen journalism, many more expressed fears that those institutions that traditionally have invested in journalism are threatened by “information intermediaries” online and changing consumption patterns.

According to the report of the High Level Group on Media Freedom and Pluralism, the changing funding model constitutes a significant challenge for quality journalism. In many Member States this type of journalism is increasingly suppressed or replaced by less expensive free-lancing, with journalists working under deteriorating or even degrading working conditions and having insufficient resources to pursue stories in depth. More and more news is provided by agencies.

¹ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/139725.pdf



The debate will discuss how to protect the media sector from undue commercial influences and pressures resulting from ownership structures and media convergence.

The discussion will also look into impact of political influence, such as influence resulting from state aid or state advertising.

Indicative questions to steer the discussions:

1 – What measures could be taken to minimize the effect of commercial influences or political influence resulting from ownership structures as well as state aid and state advertising in order to promote media pluralism and independence, quality journalism and democracy? Could you indicate any best practice on how to ensure plurality of ownership and real/effective transparency of ownership?

2 – In times when media convergence is changing the ways media content is monetised and media outlets are struggling to keep their businesses financially viable, how can media convergence and quality journalism be reconciled? How can the effects of possible financial pressures resulting from this situation be minimised?

