PACE resolution on propaganda and freedom of information in Europe

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On 1 October 2024, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted a resolution on propaganda and freedom of information in Europe.

The resolution is the result of a few years of work by the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, notably following the motion for a resolution from August 2022 (Document 15594), which expressed the need to develop legal criteria allowing the identification of propaganda, which should be prohibited in Council of Europe member states.

The resolution sets out the balance between countering harmful and illegal propaganda and the protection of the right to freedom of information as a human right, protected under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Fighting harmful propaganda must not become a pretext for censorship, produce a chilling effect, or prevent or discourage an unhindered debate on issues of public interest. Principles such as freedom of expression, media freedom and pluralism are at the centre of this resolution, to ensure, *inter alia,* that restrictions and countermeasures are limited to those necessary in a democratic society. The resolution further observes the importance of the Council of Europe's role in reinforcing cooperation among member states, but also the need to reinforce collaboration between public authorities and the private sector. The need to safeguard the public's right to know, empower citizens to make informed choices, enhance reliance on democratic institutions and increase the resilience of society as a whole is also strongly emphasised.

The resolution provides a set of recommendations and concrete actions:

1. For member states to develop holistic strategies to counter illegal propaganda and provide effective responses to the spread of harmful, though legal, propaganda. These include:

- imposing targeted sanctions on certain media outlets or war propagandists;

- introducing safeguards to avoid the abuse or misuse of restrictive measures;

- establishing proper independent media oversight mechanisms;

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- promoting media and information literacy and investing in media and civic education programmes to uphold critical thinking;

- reinforcing the transparency of media ownership and financial sources.

2. For professionals and organisations in the media sector, these include:

- adhering to the highest professional standards to ensure quality information, including while using generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools and distributing information via automated systems.

3. For internet intermediaries, these include:

- developing adequate tools – including AI tools under human control – to identify illegal propaganda and block its dissemination, possibly before it becomes accessible to Internet users, and remove content promptly and effectively when requested by the competent authorities. Platforms should, however, only resort to content removal as a measure of last resort;

- enhancing algorithmic transparency;

- ensuring that the AI systems they develop or use uphold Council of Europe standards, including the new Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law.

Propaganda and freedom of information in Europe, PACE Resolution 2567 (2024)

https://pace.coe.int/en/files/33808/html

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