

# Ministerial Conference on Mass Media Policy

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In March 2005, the 7<sup>th</sup> European Ministerial Conference on Mass Media Policy was held in Kyiv (Ukraine). Its central theme was: “Integration and diversity: the new frontiers of European media and communications policy”. It led to the adoption of a Political Declaration, three Resolutions on the Conference's main themes, an Action Plan and a Resolution on the media in Ukraine.

The Political Declaration welcomed the activities carried out by the Council of Europe in the media field since the previous Ministerial Conference on Mass Media Policy in Cracow in June 2000. It sketched the priority issues addressed in the aforementioned Resolutions and invited the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to implement the Action Plan adopted at the Conference. “[F]or this purpose,” it also requested the Committee of Ministers to “redefine the mandate of the Steering Committee on the Mass Media (CDMM) so that it can fully encompass the new information and communication technologies and, accordingly, to rename it the Steering Committee on the Media and New Communication Services (CDMC)”.

In Resolution No. 1, entitled, “Freedom of expression and information in times of crisis”, the Ministers of participating States reaffirmed the need to uphold the right to freedom of expression during times of crisis. In such circumstances, there must be particular concern for the “free and unhindered exercise of journalism and the physical integrity of journalists”. The Ministers therefore agreed that “all cases of violence against journalists or media be fully and independently investigated” and that appropriate assistance be given to the media to reduce the risks facing media professionals. The Ministers furthermore agreed, inter alia, that inter-State cooperation should be strengthened at the European level, “in order to remedy situations where media professionals of a member State encounter a threat to their safety or their freedom when covering crisis situations on the territory of another member State”. Earlier undertakings to respect and implement existing Council of Europe standards on safeguarding freedom of expression and information in times of crisis were reaffirmed.

As its title would suggest, a central aim of Resolution No. 2, “Cultural diversity and media pluralism in times of globalisation”, is to promote cultural and linguistic diversity in the media as an end in itself, but also to foster intercultural dialogue and tolerance. In this vein, it highlights the interests of persons belonging to

minority groups and of minority community media, and secures the Ministers' agreement to "encourage access to the media by persons belonging to national minorities". It reiterates the conviction that it is necessary to "safeguard in the digital environment the essential public interest objectives, which are cultural diversity and media pluralism". It also recognises the "particularly important role of public service broadcasting in the digital environment, as an element of social cohesion, a reflection of cultural diversity and an essential factor for pluralistic communication accessible to all". The participating Ministers were therefore prepared to undertake to "ensure the legal, financial and technical conditions to enable public service broadcasters to accomplish their mission in an effective manner". Finally, the Ministers restated their commitment to implement Recommendation (2003) 9 of the Committee of Ministers on measures to promote the democratic and social contribution of digital broadcasting, and agreed to inform the Council of Europe about the measures pursuant thereto.

In Resolution No. 3, "Human rights and regulation of the media and new communications services in the Information Society", reference is made to the Declaration of the World Summit on the Information Society (see IRIS 2004-2: 1) and the political message from the Committee of Ministers to the Summit. Reference is equally made to the Committee of Ministers' Declaration on freedom of communication on the Internet (see IRIS 2003-7: 3). The Resolution condemns "attempts to limit public access to communications networks and their content or to interfere with communications for motives contrary to democratic principles", stressing that limitations are only permissible if they comply with Articles 8 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Under the Resolution, participating Ministers undertake to:

- ensure that regulatory measures governing media and new communications services respect pluralism, diversity, human rights and non-discriminatory access;
- increase efforts to guarantee effective and equitable access for everyone to new communications services, skills and knowledge, thereby countering digital exclusion;
- adopt measures to improve public access to official documents and information through new communications services, thereby enhancing transparency in public life and promoting democratic decision-making;
- increase measures and cooperation to reduce the risks for minors of the dissemination of harmful content on new communications services;
- make greater efforts to combat the use of new communications services for disseminating content prohibited by the Cybercrime Convention and its Additional Protocol concerning the criminalisation of acts of a racist and xenophobic nature committed through computer systems (see IRIS 2003-1: 3).

The accompanying Action Plan sets out an array of detailed measures to further the objectives of the three Resolutions.

The Resolution on the Media in Ukraine welcomes that country's efforts to bring its standards of freedom of expression, information, pluralism and media independence into line with those developed under the ECHR. It calls on the Council of Europe and its Member States to step up their cooperation with Ukraine in the media field, inter alia, through the adoption and implementation of a new media action plan for the country.

***Texts adopted at the 7th European Ministerial Conference on Mass Media Policy, Kyiv (Ukraine), 10-11 March 2005***

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