Parliamentary Assembly: Indicators for Media in a Democracy

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On 3 October 2008, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted Resolution 1636 (2008) and Recommendation 1848 (2008), both of which are entitled “Indicators for media in a democracy” and are based on an identically-named report.

The Resolution emphasises the importance of freedom of expression, information and the media in democratic society and it puts forward a list of 27 “basic principles” which it regards as a suitable basis for analyses of the media situations in Council of Europe Member States. This (check-)list comprises a wide range of media and journalistic freedoms guaranteed or promoted by other Council of Europe standard-setting texts.

Many of the basic principles concern safeguards for the effective exercise of journalism, including rights and protections for journalists: protection against physical threats or attacks; no undue registration or other such State-imposed requirements as preconditions for working in journalistic capacities (including refusals of entry or work visas for foreign journalists); respect for confidentiality of journalistic sources; freedom to disseminate content in the language of their choice; freedom of association (including trade union activities and the possibility of collective bargaining); adequate working conditions (including social security). Relatedly, other “basic principles” focus on the accessibility and availability of information, in particular the need to prevent undue restrictions on information due to privacy and state secrecy laws or exclusive reporting rights.

The importance of access to the media is also stressed, e.g. for political parties. Likewise, the need for the media themselves to enjoy “fair and equal access to distribution channels” is underscored. So, too, is the importance of transparency in media ownership structures and sources of funding; in regulatory and licensing processes and in journalistic activities. The need to prevent political or financial interference with editorial content (especially in respect of public service broadcasters) is also a recurrent concern in the Resolution. Self-regulatory mechanisms and journalistic codes of conduct are encouraged in the media sector.

The Recommendation, for its part, is more concise and calls on the Committee of Ministers to: endorse the basic principles set out in the Resolution; take them into

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account when assessing “the media situation in member states”, and “establish indicators for a functioning media environment in a democracy which is based on this list, and draw up periodical reports with country profiles of all member states concerning their media situations”.

Indicators for media in a democracy, Resolution 1636 (2008), Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 3 October 2008

http://assembly.coe.int/mainf.asp?link=/documents/adoptedtext/ta08/eres1636.htm

Indicators for media in a democracy , Recommendation 1848 (2008), Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 3 October 2008

http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta08/EREC1848.htm

Indicators for media in a democracy, Report, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Committee on Culture, Science and Education (Rapporteur: Mr Wolfgang Wodarg), Doc. 11683, 7 July 2008

http://assembly.coe.int/main.asp?Link=/documents/workingdocs/doc08/edoc11683.htm

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