Parliamentary Assembly: The Funding of Public Service Broadcasting

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On 25 June 2009, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation 1878 (2009), entitled “The Funding of Public Service Broadcasting”.

In a time when public acceptance of the funding of public service broadcasting has decreased, the Assembly once again emphasises the important role of public service broadcasting. The Assembly states that public service broadcasting remains an essential element for governments in meeting the needs of individuals and society as a whole with regard to information, education and culture. Public service broadcasters ensure media pluralism and provide the public with unbiased information, which should be accessible and affordable for the public at large. The important public value of public service broadcasting should not be abandoned.

According to the Assembly, the structure of public service broadcasting should be adapted to national or regional circumstances. Therefore it should be up to national legislators to decide on a specific mission, structure and funding of public service broadcasters. The Assembly is worried about the trend within the European Union (EU) to restrict the powers of national legislators concerning public service broadcasting as a result of Internal Market regulations. The Assembly states that EU law should not interfere with the power of Member States to adapt public service broadcasting to specific national needs. The Assembly refers to the Unesco Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions of 2005, which specifically stated that Member States may adopt measures aimed at providing public financial assistance and enhancing diversity of the media including through public service broadcasting. The European Union is a signatory to the convention.

The Assembly calls upon Member States to ensure that public service broadcasters have a clear mission and the long-term funding to fulfill this mission. Member States should also guarantee the editorial and managerial independence of public service broadcasters. They should be able to operate independently of national governments. On the other hand, the funding of public service broadcasting is in the public interest; therefore public service broadcasters must meet certain quality standards. National legislators must ensure the accountability of public service broadcasters by establishing public accountability

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mechanisms for quality control.

While the Assembly emphasises the importance of public service broadcasting, it acknowledges that the environment in which public broadcasters exist has changed. Public service broadcasters have to compete with commercial channels, on-demand media services and the constantly growing supply of audiovisual content on the internet. The Assembly recommends that public service broadcasters should also make use of new technologies and offer new additional services like on-demand media services.

This could increase their accessibility, as a result of which even more people can be reached, especially young people.

In conclusion, Member States should adapt the funding of public service broadcasting to the new audiovisual media environment. But at the same time, they should still safeguard the key principles of public service broadcasting, such as diversity, independence and impartiality.

The Funding of Public Service Broadcasting, Recommendation 1878 (2009), Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 25 June 2009

http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta09/EREC1878.htm

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