

Council of Europe: 4th European Ministerial Conference on Mass Media Policy

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On 7 and 8 December 1994 the Ministers responsible for media policies in the Member States of the Council of Europe met in Prague to discuss the role of the media in a democratic society, the future of public service broadcasting in Europe and journalistic freedoms and human rights.

A political Declaration on Media in a Democratic Society was adopted indicating that the Ministers want to intensify their support for the democratic reform of the media in Central and East European countries and to ensure better co-ordination of the various initiatives to assist both policy makers and media professionals in these countries. Furthermore, the Ministers recommend that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe instruct its Steering Committee on the Mass Media (CDMM) to consider the advisability of preparing a binding legal instrument or other measures embodying basic principles: the right of access of the public to information held by public authorities.

Appended to the Resolution is an Action Plan for the period until the next Ministerial Conference to take place in Greece in 1997. The Action Plan is addressed to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe proposing to concentrate on (i) media concentration issues, (ii) access to information held by public authorities and the protection of journalistic sources, (iii) the implications of new communications technologies on human rights and democratic values, (iv) the protection of holders of copyrights and neighbouring rights in the media sector in relation to new communications technologies, (v) sound and audio-visual piracy, (vi) media and intolerance as well as (vii) media and violence issues. The Media Ministers also ask the Committee of Ministers to study, in close consultation with media professionals, possible ways of improving the protection of journalists in situations of conflict and tension. The first Resolution the Media Ministers adopted calls for the maintenance and development of a strong public service broadcasting system in an increasingly competitive environment. It develops a broad concept of public service broadcasting based on a number of public service requirements. These include: pluralistic, innovative and varied programming, meeting high ethical and quality standards and catering for both majority and minority interests; the expression of a broad spectrum of views and opinions and of cultural creation; the promotion of social cohesion and integration; the promotion of audio-visual production, and the dissemination of different European

cultures in their full diversity. To enable public service broadcasters to fulfil these missions, the Resolution stresses the need to have an appropriate and secure funding framework and to guarantee independence against political and economic interference. It also emphasizes the vital contribution public service broadcasters have to make to pluralism and the public's right to receive information, warning against economic practices which may compromise this function. The guarantee of adequate means of transmission is to keep access open to distribution networks and systems.

Furthermore, the Resolution encourages the involvement of public service broadcasting in new communications technology and new services.

The second Resolution outlines eight principles: journalistic freedoms adopted by the media Ministers. The principles concentrate on the responsibility, protection, functioning and independence of journalists. Moreover, transparency in regard to ownership structures of the various media enterprises and the relationship with third parties who have influence on the editorial importance of the media is mentioned as an important principle.

At the end of the Ministerial Conference, the Ministers made a statement on violations of journalistic freedoms particularly in situations of war, conflict and social and political tension, condemning such violations as infringements of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The practices in territories of former Yugoslavia were specifically referred to.

Council of Europe, The media in a democratic society. Political Declaration, Resolutions and Statement, 4th Ministerial Conference: Mass Media Policy, Prague, 7-8 December 1994, MCM (94)20.

