European Parliament: Press and Media Freedom in the World

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On 13 June 2013, the European Parliament adopted a Resolution on the freedom of press and media in the world. The adoption of the resolution is timely as it focuses on a number of pressing issues that have dominated political and news agendas recently. It usefully addresses those issues - such as media pluralism, the protection of journalists, whistle-blowing, net neutrality and mass surveillance - from the perspective of their relevance to freedom of expression of the media in the contemporary, increasingly digitised media environment.

The Resolution references an array of international and European human rights legal texts, as supplemented by relevant reports and initiatives adopted by different institutions and mechanisms that are active in the area of freedom of expression. Importantly, it acknowledges the relevance of initiatives such as the Ruggie Framework that sets out 'Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights' and European Parliament texts that underscore the relevance of corporate social responsibility and the growing private governance dimension to freedom of expression.

The Resolution proceeds from a reaffirmation of key principles and of the role ascribed to the press and media in democratic society, to an overview of recent developments and a consideration of the consequences of digitisation. It then turns to the incorporation of relevant principles and priorities in EU policies and external actions and sets out a multi-stranded strategy for the advancement of those principles and priorities by different EU organs.

The Resolution is critical and condemnatory of a litany of threats to press and media freedom and the rights of media actors: attacks on and murders of journalists, which are often accompanied by impunity; concentrations of media ownership; State pressurising of media actors; (increasing) criminalisation of expression and imprisonment of journalists and bloggers, pursuant to, inter alia, defamation, blasphemy and other laws; the lack of legal assistance for journalists, etc.

Similarly, the Resolution deplores "all attempts to create various forms of 'closed internet', since they represent serious breaches of the right to information". Its concern over "mass surveillance, mass censoring, and blocking and filtering

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tendencies affecting not only the media and the work of journalists and bloggers" leads it to deplore also "the fact that numerous technologies and services deployed in third countries to violate human rights through censorship of information, mass surveillance, monitoring, and tracing and tracking of citizens and their activities on (mobile) telephone networks and the internet originate in the EU". It therefore urges the Commission to "take all necessary steps to stop this 'digital arms trade'". The Resolution also stresses (i) the need for greater understanding of the role of intermediaries and their responsibilities, and (ii) "the fact that digital and (computer) data-driven platforms or services such as search engines are privately owned and require transparency so as to preserve the public value of information and prevent restrictions on access to information and freedom of expression". The need for "whistleblower and source protection" and the need for the EU "to act to that end globally" are also stressed.

The Resolution calls for coherence and leadership by example in the EU's external relations, on issues relating to press and media freedom. The final section of the Resolution makes a number of general and specific - political, financial and other - recommendations to this end.

Resolution on the freedom of press and media in the world, European Parliament, Doc. No. 2011/2081(INI), 13 June 2013

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2013-0274+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN

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