Parliamentary Assembly: Resolution and Recommendation on journalist safety and media freedom

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Ronan Ó Fathaigh
Institute for Information Law (IViR), University of Amsterdam

On 24 January 2017, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted a Resolution and Recommendation on attacks against journalists and media freedom in Europe (for a previous resolution, see IRIS 2015-4/2). The Resolution begins with PACE welcoming the establishment of the Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists. The Platform allows the compilation of alerts regarding serious concerns about media freedom and the safety of journalists in Council of Europe member states by certain Partner Organisations (see IRIS 2017-2). However, PACE notes "with concern that, unfortunately, the relevance of this tool has been confirmed by the high number of cases which have given rise to alerts on serious threats to media freedom in Europe".

The Resolution then moves on to developments since its previous 2015 resolution (2035) on journalist safety, and "welcomes" the release of an Azerbaijani journalist from detention, and also Georgian legislation, "which provides a framework for freedom and stability of the media as well as the law on broadcasting". However, PACE expresses "regret" at having to reiterate a number of concerns identified in the 2015 resolution, including in relation to Ukraine; the closure of the broadcaster ATR and other Crimean-Tartar media in the Crimean Peninsula; and continued efforts in Georgia to change the ownership of the country's most popular pro-European television station, which has caused "continued concern". Further, it "notes with sadness that 16 journalists have died violently in member states since January 2015", and "strongly calls on the competent prosecutors to thoroughly investigate" a number of unresolved cases.

The Resolution makes specific calls on a number of countries in relation to media freedom, including Turkey, the Russian Federation, Azerbaijan, Hungary, Poland, France, Greece, and Belarus. Notably in the audiovisual context, the Resolution notes "that the situation of public service broadcasting is difficult in several member states [and] the Assembly recalls that the independence of such broadcasters from governments has to be ensured through law and practice. Governments and parliaments must not interfere in the daily management and editorial work of such broadcasters, which should establish in-house codes of conduct for journalistic work and editorial independence from political sides.

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Senior management positions should be refused to people with clear party political affiliations". Moreover, it welcomes "the efforts of the Ukrainian authorities to establish a strong public broadcasting system [and] the Assembly emphasises the importance of continuing without delay the full implementation of the public broadcasting law adopted by the Ukrainian Parliament in April 2014, and of transforming State media outlets into public service media".

Finally, in its Recommendation, PACE recommends that the Committee of Ministers (a) allocate adequate resources to the functioning of the Platform, to enable target follow-ups to the alerts, (b) remind member states of their commitment under Article 3 of the Statute of the Council of Europe "to co-operate sincerely and effectively in the realisation of the work of the Platform", and (c) include Belarus in the countries addressed by the Platform.

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Resolution 2141 (2017) on attacks against journalists and media freedom in Europe, 24 January 2017

http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=23400&lang=en

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Recommendation 2097 (2017) on attacks against journalists and media freedom in Europe, 24 January 2017

http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=23403&lang=en

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