Parliamentary Assembly: Resolution on online media and journalism

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On 25 January 2017, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted a new Resolution entitled “Online media and journalism: challenges and accountability”. The Resolution begins with some general observations on the benefits and risks associated with new online media. On the one hand, the Resolution notes new online media “create[s] more media pluralism”, offers everybody the possibility to disseminate information and views to the public at large, and enables the public to become aware of human rights violations in places that attract little media attention.

However, the Assembly expressed its concerns about the “weakening of professional media” and “exponential growth in internet media which do not adhere to professional standards of journalism”. Further, “disinformation and manipulation” frequently occur, and the Parliamentary Assembly noted with concern the number of online media campaigns designed to misguide portions of the public through intentionally biased or false information, hate campaigns against individuals and also personal attacks, often in a political context, with the objective of harming democratic political processes.

The Assembly welcomes the fact that large online media have established a policy whereby users can identify factual errors or factually false posts by third parties on their websites, such as on Facebook News Feed or through Google’s “webpage removal request tool”.

The Assembly then makes a number of recommendations to member states. These include that public service broadcasters should make full use of the technical possibilities offered by online media, but should exercise the greatest editorial diligence with regard to user-generated or third-party content. Further, member states should: ensure “the traceability” by law-enforcement authorities of users of online media when they violate the law; co-operate with online media and internet service providers in order to set up codes of conduct to counter illegal hate speech online; and develop “clearer rules” on the liability of site owners for content posted by third parties.

The Assembly also called upon the European Federation of Journalists and the Association of European Journalists to ensure that professional journalistic media uphold their editorial standards in their internet presence, including third-party

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content, as well as user generated content. The Parliamentary Assembly stated, “all third-party content posted on the internet presence of professional media falls under the editorial responsibility of these media”. Finally, the Assembly recommends that the European internet Services Providers Association develop ethical quality standards regarding their transparency and the due diligence of their media services; allow users to report false information to service providers; to voluntarily correct false content, or publish a reply in accordance with the right of reply, or remove such false content; and to set up alert mechanisms against people who regularly post insulting or inflammatory text.

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Resolution 2143 (2017) Online media and journalism: challenges and accountability, 25 January 2017

http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=23455&lang=en

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