

Parliamentary Assembly: Resolution on the status of journalists in Europe

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On 4 December 2017, the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe unanimously adopted a draft Resolution on the status of journalists in Europe. The Resolution addresses the increasing precariousness of the journalistic profession in the light of the collapse of traditional finance models following technological changes and the development of online media, among other issues. According to the Resolution, the precarity of the profession of the journalist is reflected in several factors: the undermining of editorial independence or staff layoffs; the booming number of freelance journalists; a deterioration in working conditions; and inequality between women and men in the profession.

The rapporteur's explanatory memorandum to the Resolution reflects more deeply on matters relating to journalists' status. As a starting point, the rapporteur's report reflects on how the emergence of blogs, social networks, interaction with users and exchange of information in real time is diminishing previous differences between journalists, experts or mere citizens. Moreover, the status of journalists varies widely from one country to another, bringing the question of how possible or necessary it is to actually define what a journalist is. The rapporteur's report gives a brief review of journalists' status in Europe, which is defined by law in several countries such as France, Belgium, Georgia and Turkey. Other countries, such as Germany and Poland do not have a legal definition of a journalist. The memorandum also reviews the requirement of press cards and the existence of self-regulatory bodies throughout Europe. According to the report, despite technological developments, professional journalism has remained in essence the same. Hence, the official status of journalists has remained the same. New sources of information have emerged. Moreover, journalists' daily lives are changing by the requirement of new tasks and skills regarding social media. Furthermore, job insecurity and an explosion in the number of freelancers also poses challenges. Finally, another matter addressed by the memorandum is the gender inequality in media. Among other issues is the pay gap: in the European Union, women journalists earn 16% less than men, while the difference is as high as 24% in countries such as Belgium, where only 30% of journalists are women.

Having regard to these challenges, the Resolution recommends that Member States, among other measures, review their domestic legislation to identify areas

to be updated and take into account recent technological and economic developments. Moreover, the Resolution recommends the exploration of avenues for the alternative funding of media, such as the redistribution of advertisement revenue; including freelancers in the scope of labour legislation in terms of minimum pay;; and institutionalising innovatory crowdfunding initiatives. Furthermore, the Resolution establishes measures to be taken in order to tackle gender inequality in media, such as drawing up studies and introducing mechanisms to incite employers' organisations to tackle the problem in the long term. The Resolution also called on trade unions and journalists' organisations to undertake different measures on this subject, such as promoting membership to journalists' trade union, particularly among young people, women and providers and managers of content; promoting the mentoring of young journalists (particularly young female journalists) in order to better equip them against discrimination; stimulating dialogue between professional journalists and other content-provider professions; diversifying themes and fields of training; representing journalists in collective bargaining and agreements; and defending the rights of freelancers in the workplace and within social legislation.

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, Laws on the status of journalists in Europe need to be revised, 4 December 2017

<http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=6889&lang=2>

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, The status of journalists in Europe, 4 December 2017

<http://website-pace.net/documents/19871/3306947/20171204-StatusJournalistsInEurope-EN.pdf/80000471-7f19-49b5-8186-0ca1b185fa8f>

