[IE] Regulator consults public on Draft Media Plurality Policy

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On 11 December 2018, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) launched a public consultation process regarding a new draft Media Plurality Policy. BAI's 2017-2019 Statement of Strategy states that the regulator should "promote a plurality of voices, viewpoints, outlets and sources in Irish media". More precisely, the three key strategic objectives of the BAI in this regard are to: facilitate a mix of voices, opinions and sources of news and current affairs in the audiovisual media in order to enhance democratic debate and active citizenship in Ireland; increase the production and availability of culturally relevant audiovisual content for Irish audiences; and foster and promote high-quality programming in the Irish Language.

This consultation is concerned with the draft Media Plurality Policy ("the draft Policy"). The draft Policy articulates the BAI's understanding of the meaning and importance of media plurality and details the measures that it takes and will continue to take to foster a plurality of voices, viewpoints, news outlets and sources in the Irish media. The draft Policy is based on the 2009 Broadcasting Act, the 2014 Competition and Consumer Protection Act and by the BAI's Strategy Statement. The purpose of conducting the consultation process in respect of the draft Policy is to elicit the views of the public and interested stakeholders - including broadcasters and media professionals and owners - on how the BAI views media plurality. The submissions received in response to the public consultation 2018 will inform the BAI's decisions in respect of the final Policy, which is to be published in the first half of 2019.

Against this background, the primary purpose of the draft Policy document is to provide context for the BAI's role in respect of media plurality. The BAI has a statutory role under the 2014 Competition and Consumer Protection Act, which includes providing advice to the Minister on media mergers, and conducting plurality-focused research on a regular basis. The BAI's role also has a European context - particularly in respect of the Council of Europe's 2018 Recommendations on Media Pluralism and Transparency of Media Ownership and the European Convention on Human Rights.

The draft Policy aims in the first place to provide a definition of media plurality that takes account of the extent of the diversity of both media content and media

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ownership of media; it also addresses this two-fold concept in terms of both external plurality (as regards the spread of ownership and control of media businesses) and internal plurality (in terms of the nature of particular media content - both political and cultural - and the sourcing methods of media organisations).

The second objective of the consultation is to outline why media pluralism is important. Media pluralism makes an important contribution to a well-functioning democratic society through informed citizens, but its importance must necessarily be considered in the context of a rapidly evolving and highly innovative media environment. Current challenges include significant changes in the consumption of different media; concern regarding disinformation, misinformation and mal-information; the aggregation of personal data; the impact of news filters, intermediaries and algorithms; and threats to the financial ecosystem of news and cultural production.

Lastly, the draft Policy details policy objectives; it also outlines the measures taken by the BAI in order to promote and support media plurality in Ireland. These key activities include: licensing; the BAI's Ownership and Control Policy; the BAI's obligations under legislation related to media mergers legislation; research; media literacy; the BAI's Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality in News & Current Affairs; the Broadcasting Funding Scheme (including Sound and Vision and the BAI's archiving policy); the Irish Language Action Plan; and dialogue with stakeholders.

The deadline for submitting responses (in respect of the consultation process) to the Irish broadcasting regulator is 30 January 2019.

Public consultation on Draft Media Plurality Policy

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