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Journalism and new media - creating a public sphere in Europe

European Parliament resolution of 7 September 2010 on journalism and new media – creating a public sphere in Europe (2010/2015(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Title II of the Treaty on European Union,
- having regard to Articles 11, 41 and 42 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to the joint declaration of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission entitled ‘Communicating Europe in Partnership’, signed on 22 October 2008¹,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 2 April 2008 entitled ‘Debate Europe – building on the experience of Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate’ (COM(2008)0158),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 24 April 2008 entitled ‘Communicating Europe through audiovisual media’ (SEC(2008)0506),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 21 December 2007 entitled ‘Communicating about Europe via the Internet – Engaging the citizens’ (SEC(2007)1742),
- having regard to the Commission working document of 3 October 2007 entitled ‘Proposal for an Inter-Institutional Agreement on Communicating Europe in Partnership’ (COM(2007)0569),
- having regard to Decision No 1904/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 establishing for the period 2007 to 2013 the programme Europe for Citizens to promote active European citizenship²,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 1 February 2006 entitled ‘White Paper on a European Communication Policy’ (COM(2006)0035),
- having regard to its resolution of 16 November 2006 on the White Paper on a European communication policy³,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 13 October 2005 entitled ‘The Commission’s contribution to the period of reflection and beyond: Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate’ (COM(2005)0494),
- having regard to its resolution of 12 May 2005 on the implementation of the European

¹ OJ C 13, 20.1.2009, p. 3.

² OJ L 378, 27.12.2006, p. 32.

³ OJ C 314 E, 21.12.2006, p. 369.

Union's information and communication strategy¹,

- having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (A7-0223/2010),
- A. whereas access to information for citizens and communication between policy-makers and voters are central elements of our representative democratic societies and a fundamental prerequisite for the exercise of the public's right to full and informed democratic participation in national and EU public life,
- B. whereas the public have a right to be informed about the EU and its specific projects, to express their views on the EU and to be listened to; whereas for communicators the challenge lies specifically in facilitating that dialogue,
- C. whereas the last European elections did not reverse the trend of declining voter turnout, highlighting the need to continue efforts to overcome the distance between the EU and its citizens,
- D. whereas there is clear evidence of citizens being under-informed on EU policies and issues and, at the same time, wishing to be better informed, as reflected in the results of various Eurobarometer polls; whereas those polls indicate that this lack of information is one of the main reasons for people deciding not to vote and being reluctant to trust the EU institutions,
- E. whereas the Treaty of Lisbon has given Parliament more power in the context of EU decision-making, making it even more important for EU citizens to be aware of their elected representatives' work,
- F. whereas the Lisbon Treaty introduces a new form of public involvement in the shaping of EU policies, the European citizens' initiative; whereas public access to, and critical understanding of, information are of key importance to the success of the European citizens' initiative,
- G. whereas a public sphere can be understood as a space in which public policies may be better understood by, and discussed with, all EU citizens and all sections of the population, in all its diversity, with a view to meeting their expectations more effectively, and whereas it must be a venue both for the provision of information and for wide-ranging consultations transcending national borders and fostering the development of a sense of shared public interest throughout the EU,
- H. whereas the term 'new media' is used to describe networked digital information and communication technologies; whereas those new technologies foster the dissemination of information and diversity of input and make for a more deliberative democracy; whereas electronic social media create new forms of public, which are physically dispersed but bound by a shared interest in the same topic, with the potential to create new transnational public spheres,
- I. whereas the use of social media platforms by Parliament in the 2009 European election campaign successfully increased the number of active users, especially among young

¹ OJ C 92 E, 20.4.2006, p. 403.

people,

- J. whereas there has been a change in the way young people perceive, use and exploit the media; whereas young people make wide-ranging use of the new technologies as a means of communication,
- K. whereas the creation of a European public sphere is closely related to the existence of pan-European or transnational media structures; whereas there is no overarching European public sphere at present, but whereas there are very lively national public spheres between which synergies should be developed, along the lines of, for example, the Franco-German television channel Arte,
- L. whereas, pursuant to the Protocol to the Treaty of Amsterdam on the system of public broadcasting in the Member States¹, it is up to the Member States to define and organise the remit of public service broadcasting organisations,
- M. whereas legal regulations governing the media market differ widely among individual Member States, and need to be respected,
- N. whereas national media, and in particular public service broadcasters, have a special responsibility to inform the public extensively about political decision-making and governance, which should extend to EU affairs,
- O. whereas improving people's knowledge of the EU requires EU studies to be incorporated into the school curricula,
- P. whereas journalism is an important gauge of democracy and should guarantee free access to a wide range of views; whereas journalists and the media play a leading role in the European integration process,
- Q. whereas, in its search for public legitimacy in the Member States, the EU should foster the establishment of transnational media that can give Europe a new democratic and independent dimension, while tightening up the rules intended to safeguard pluralism and combat concentration of media ownership,
- R. whereas the emergence of new communication tools has transformed all branches of journalism and the media industry, prompting a rethink of the methods traditionally employed in the sector, enabling anyone to create and share content on blogs; whereas social networks have become a central Web 2.0 feature and have changed habits and brought a new dimension to news provision, as an increasing number of journalists are using such networks as a source of, or means of disseminating, information; whereas social media are used to some extent in researching and producing various types of article and are used by journalists to publish, share and promote their articles,
- 1. Takes as its starting point the fact that it must be the goal of the EU institutions to create together a European public sphere which is characterised by the opportunity for all EU citizens to participate, and the basis for which is free access, free of charge, to all Commission, Council and Parliament public information in all EU languages;

¹ OJ C 340, 10.11.1997, p. 109.

2. Welcomes the joint declaration of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission entitled 'Communicating Europe in Partnership', and urges the EU institutions to respect and uphold this declaration;
3. Takes the view that EU news coverage must be provided by all types of media, in particular the mass media, and must be impartial, factual and independent, which is a central prerequisite for generating pan-European debate and creating a European public sphere;
4. Notes that lack of online news and information on the EU and its institutions is not the problem, which in fact lies in the availability of a wide range of information without any real order of priority, leading to a situation in which too much information kills information; notes that all the institutions have launched their own news platforms, which fail, however, to interest a broad section of the public because often they are not sufficiently clear, attractive or understandable, in many cases owing to the use of overly technical language that is very off-putting for people who are unfamiliar with European issues; takes the view that there should be an introductory portal to the platforms which clarifies the workings of all the EU institutions;
5. Maintains that communication should be based on genuine dialogue between the general public and policy-makers and calm political debate between members of the public; wishes to see more interactive dialogue based less on institutional communication, which is often uninviting and too detached from people's everyday lives;
6. Believes that, in order to be effective, communication must make it clear that political decisions taken at EU level are of direct relevance to the daily lives of EU citizens, who see the EU as still being too distant and having too little influence in terms of solving their real problems;
7. Calls on the Commission to strengthen its communication policy and put it high on the list of priorities when the renegotiation of the post-2013 multiannual financial framework is due to start;

Member States

8. Recalls that under new Article 12 TEU national parliaments are involved in EU policy-making at an earlier stage than before, and encourages this involvement with a view to increasing the degree of EU political debate at national level; underlines the importance of involving national MPs in EU policy-making, and welcomes initiatives such as live participation by national MPs in EP committee meetings through webstreaming;
9. Stresses the important role played by political parties in shaping public opinion on European issues; points out that they play a leading role in fostering debate and contributing to the European public sphere; takes the view that they should give European issues a more prominent position in their programmes;
10. Believes that civil society organisations have an important role to play in the European debate; takes the view that their role should be enhanced by means of targeted cooperation projects in the public communication sphere;
11. Underlines the need for each Member State to have a specialised EU affairs office, with a person responsible for explaining the local, regional and national implications of EU

policies and acting as a point of reference to whom people can direct their attention on EU matters;

12. Emphasises how important it is for press officers at the Commission representations and Parliament information offices in the Member States to be media professionals, whose task it is to play an active and visible role in national debates on European issues;
13. Points out that the European integration process needs to be brought closer to young people, and accordingly calls on the Member States and regions to consider – in order to familiarise pupils with the EU institutions – incorporating the EU more fully into all education curricula, focusing on the historical background, purpose and workings of the EU, and encourages them to exchange best practice in this area at EU level; believes that fully involving schools is of essential importance to EU communication policy, in order to reach out to and engage young people;

Media and the EU

14. Welcomes the Commission and Parliament training schemes for journalists on EU matters, and calls for them to be extended in order to meet the increasing demand; expresses its concern about the cuts to the Commission's communication budget lines, especially the 'information for the media' budget;
15. Recognises the importance of Euronews extending its range of languages to cover all the EU Member States (and beyond) and to continue being a model of independent television journalism which will promote objectivity in news, quality in politics and transparency in advertising;
16. Stresses the crucial importance of respecting the media's freedom and editorial independence at both EU and national level, especially the right of public service radio and television broadcasters to schedule their programmes as they see fit, as their programme autonomy is a fundamental value of the EU and its media landscape and is extremely important in order for a free, open and democratic society to flourish;
17. Points out that social media have immense potential for reaching young people, and therefore encourages the Commission and Parliament to strengthen editorially independent media reporting, which is conducted at a distance from the state;
18. Stresses, in view of the media's special role as an intermediary in the process of shaping the democratic will and public opinion, the need for reliable political information, including in the area of new media; stresses the importance of fostering partnerships between public service and private media in order to reach a broader spectrum of the public;
19. Encourages the Commission and Parliament to strengthen further their commitment to educate and train staff in communication skills, enabling them to communicate with the media and with the public in order to improve the EU institutions' provision of information and communication; regards enhanced recruitment of media professionals in order to fulfil these requirements as essential;
20. Calls on the Commission to be open to all means of communication, to have greater contact with journalists and the media and to support all projects and initiatives aimed at better informing the public about EU affairs;

21. Suggests that the Commission promote and fund exchanges between broadcasters and other media professionals from different Member States in relation to best practice in covering the EU, including training the public service and private media sectors;
22. Finds the recent decrease in the number of accredited journalists in Brussels extremely worrying, and considers this new state of affairs to be in the interests of neither the EU institutions nor the accredited press in Brussels; calls, therefore, on the EU institutions – in order to support those currently in Brussels – to cooperate more closely with press representatives in Brussels and to display greater openness towards them; proposes in this respect that steps be taken to facilitate the accreditation procedure for journalists;
23. Welcomes the fact that many media operators, and in particular public service broadcasters, have made a significant investment in new interactive, non-linear media services covering news and current affairs, especially on the internet, which include European content and as a result are above all reaching a younger audience;
24. Recognises that public service broadcasters are not the only tool that can be used to get the EU's message across to its citizens, as empirical evidence suggests that private broadcasters are also a key resource for EU news coverage and can assist in the development and promotion of a European public sphere;
25. Welcomes the pilot project on research grants for cross-border investigative journalism; takes the view that the independence of members of the selection panel is crucial to ensuring editorial independence;
26. Encourages an EU initiative to set up training programmes on EU affairs, especially for young journalists; maintains that steps should be taken to encourage journalists to produce regular news items on the work of the EU institutions; encourages the Member States to incorporate courses in journalism using new media into their school curricula;

Public service media

27. Stresses that, according to the 'Amsterdam Protocol', it is the competence of the Member States to define, organise and finance public service broadcasting; encourages the Member States, therefore, to include EU coverage when appropriate in accordance with editorial independence and journalistic ethics;
28. Stresses that national and regional public service broadcasters have a particular responsibility to inform the public about politics and policy-making at EU level; underlines, in this regard, that public broadcasters need to look critically, with full editorial independence, at their own EU coverage and to set ambitious targets;
29. Stresses that the Member States should ensure the independence of public service broadcasters, and that the latter have a responsibility to cover the EU in the context of their public service function of informing and supporting citizens and civil society;
30. Underlines the need for public service media to take on board communication techniques relying on the new media so as to increase their credibility via open public participation; encourages public service broadcasters, for example, to create online forums using webstreaming, where the public can follow and exchange views on debates in national parliaments and the European Parliament;

EU/local

31. Stresses the importance of ensuring that the EU institutions work alongside each other in improving communication activities; takes the view that the EU institutions should help to decentralise EU communication policy in order to give it a local and regional dimension so as to bring different levels of communication closer to one another, and should encourage the Member States to provide the public with more information on EU-related matters;
32. Calls on the Commission to continue with the ‘going local’ approach, with a view to making the EU more visible at local level;
33. Notes the Commission’s work with, and funding of, local radio and TV networks; points out that broadcasters must have full editorial independence;

European Parliament

34. Suggests that a European Parliament working group, to be set up on a temporary basis, examine existing new media solutions and come up with proposals on how to create inter-parliamentary relationships between national or regional parliaments and the European Parliament;
35. Recognises the enhanced role of national parliaments and thus the importance of the European Parliament’s information offices in the Member States; points out, however, that in order to become more visible they must adapt their mission statement to include strengthening links with national parliaments, local and regional authorities and representatives of civil society;
36. Highlights the need for EP information offices to go local and provide targeted information about Parliament’s decisions and activities to the general public; proposes that consideration be given to allowing the information offices greater independence in deciding how they communicate with the general public;
37. Takes the view that Parliament’s information offices in the Member States should play a more influential role in involving national, regional and local media; suggests increasing the budget lines for Parliament’s information offices, with the specific aim of ensuring better communication;
38. Believes that an assessment should be made of the value for money provided by EuroParlTV, on the basis of a comprehensive analysis of ratings and audiences; believes that EuroParlTV should be made more effective by further integrating it into Parliament’s internet strategy while making appropriate adjustments to its status in order to ensure its editorial independence, and by making its content as widely available as possible for TV channels and online media wishing to use it;
39. Welcomes the fact that the European Parliament Prize for Journalism includes the category of new media;

Journalism and new media

40. Urges journalists and other media professionals to come together to discuss and consider the European journalism of tomorrow;

41. Stresses that the Member States must come up with viable concepts for the EU media that go beyond merely passing on information and enable them to contribute fully to the EU's cultural and linguistic diversity;
42. Stresses that, although social networks are a relatively good way of disseminating information rapidly, their reliability as sources cannot always be sufficiently guaranteed and they cannot be considered to be professional media; underlines that the way in which data is handled on social network platforms can in many cases be dangerous and give rise to serious breaches of journalistic ethics, and that caution is therefore required when taking up these new tools; emphasises the importance of drawing up a code of ethics applicable to new media;
43. Points out that changes to the way in which journalists pursue their profession are paving the way for more open and committed media serving communities that are increasingly well informed, but that steps must be taken to ensure that this is in the interests of journalism as a whole and does not affect the status of journalists;
44. Stresses the need for journalists and media professionals to remain alert to developments in their ever-changing professions and to take advantage of the possibilities offered by social networks, which are likely to enable them to expand their knowledge networks and facilitate what could be called 'web monitoring'; observes with interest that, despite the irreversible emergence of social networks, journalism has kept its key role in news broadcasting, since journalists use these highly diverse networks to carry out in-depth research and check facts, thus giving rise to a new model of participatory journalism and furthering the dissemination of information;
45. Highlights the crucial role of journalists in a modern society faced with a barrage of information, since they alone can bring significant added value to information by using their professionalism, ethics, skill and credibility to make sense of the news; points out that the quality and independence of the media can be guaranteed only by means of rigorous professional and social standards;

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46. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.