

THE BELGRADE RESOLUTION

adopted at ENPA General Assembly, 24th May 2013

ENPA calls on the EU and National Governments to recognise industry self-regulation as the guarantee of freedom of expression and freedom of the press

Press freedom is the main guarantee of pluralism and diversity of opinion and information in democratic society. ENPA is concerned by specific challenges to press freedom in some parts of Europe. However, EU legislation governing press freedom and media pluralism is not the solution. In this context, publishers of newspapers and news media wish to underline the following points:

- Member States have sole competence for preserving media pluralism

The European Union does not have the competence to regulate media pluralism. ENPA therefore rejects the proposal of the High Level Group on Freedom and Pluralism of the Press, appointed by the European Commission, which recommended the establishment of an independent surveillance authority to control the media. An independent press sector should *never* be subject to national governmental or European control or surveillance. Moreover, national media markets are very diverse and have been shaped by historical and cultural developments. Media pluralism can only be assessed in a meaningful way by national authorities who can adapt their legislative framework according to national, regional and local specificities.

- Changing media landscape brings new challenges

Any assessment of media pluralism today should look not only at “traditional” media, but also at the digital environment. Newspapers are using the opportunities provided by digital technologies to bring professional content to citizens in new formats and to stimulate democratic debate online. European and national competition authorities should, however, monitor with particular attention the activities of a small number of multinational technology companies and search engines that increasingly act as “gate keepers” of the Internet. This dominant position held by a handful of players should not be allowed to restrict media freedom and pluralism, or impose restrictive conditions on publishers.

- Self-regulation is an essential tool to guarantee editorial independence

Self-regulation and press councils are aimed at preserving media freedom and pluralism, while at the same time promoting the truthfulness of information. Voluntary national self-regulation systems may be developed, including best practice and codes of conduct, but this must be by the media business itself in the various Member States. EU legislation in this area would decrease rather than increase press freedom. The imposition of EU “standards” could well encourage more repressive, rather than more liberal, state controls upon freedom of expression. Newspapers should have the freedom to decide voluntarily about their future activities and business structures, bound solely by national legal frameworks.