

European Commission Seeks Support for More Active Media Policy

Two new **consultations** launched on 22 March are a sign that the European Commission may be seriously considering a more active role in media policy. Support from the European Parliament appears likely, given that the Civil Liberties Committee **recently passed** a resolution calling for regular monitoring of media laws in Member States.

The **first Consultation** is aimed at getting responses to **a report** produced by the High Level Stakeholder Group on Media Freedom and Pluralism. This group of external experts recommended that the Commission should proactively protect media freedom and pluralism within member states. As Mark Thomson explained in an **early post** on the report this including monitoring and encouraging public investment in journalism and state intervention to preserve media important to maintaining pluralism. In the meantime, **another report** from legal experts at the European University Institute has argued that the EU does have competence in this area. The question of its own competence in areas of media freedom and pluralism is one of the main issues for which the Commission is now seeking input through the consultation.

The **second consultation** is on the independence of audiovisual media regulators. This is indirectly related to the **INDIREG report** which identified ways of assessing both formal and de facto independence of those national regulatory bodies responsible for the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD). This report found variation among the regulators and in several cases gaps between formal and de facto independence. At the moment the AVMSD sets out no criteria for the independence of regulatory bodies and the consultation seeks feedback aimed at a possible revision of Article 30 of the AVMSD in that direction. The current article only reads:

“Member States shall take appropriate measures to provide each other and the Commission with the information necessary for the application of this Directive, in particular Articles 2, 3 and 4, in particular through their competent independent regulatory bodies.”

If the EU starts to take a more active role in protecting media freedom and pluralism within Member States it will be a big change. In the area of media policy the Union has so far limited itself to broadcasting and only in matters pertaining to consumer protection and the promotion of a common market in audiovisual media services.. Such a change is exactly what the **European Initiative for Media Pluralism** is calling for in its demands that the Commission start work on a new directive on media pluralism and press freedom. Could these consultations demonstrate that the Commission is already taking the first steps?

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