

Europe's Media in the Digital Decade: An Action Plan to Support Recovery and Transformation

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The Committee on Culture and Education adopted an own-initiative report by Dace MELBRDE (ECR, LV) on Europe's Media in the Digital Decade: an Action Plan to Support Recovery and Transformation.

European media in the digital decade: an action plan to support recovery and transformation

Members recalled that a pluralistic, independent and well-funded news media sector is critical to the smooth functioning of our democracies and societies, while a competitive and resilient European audiovisual sector helps promote European cultural and linguistic diversity. The media sector plays a significant role in the economy, contributing to job creation and growth and accounting for around 3% of the EU's GDP. The media ecosystem was already in a fragile state prior to the COVID-19 epidemic as evidenced by the decline in media plurality. The pandemic has exacerbated existing problems and generated new ones.

This report calls on the Commission to elaborate comprehensive industrial strategies for both the news media sector and the audiovisual sector.

Recovery and support

Members urged the Commission and Member States to **increase support** for the news media and audiovisual sectors and for the cultural and creative sectors more generally, with particular attention to SMEs. They called for an increase in funding for the news media and audiovisual sectors under the various programmes of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and invited the Commission to encourage Member States to increase support for these sectors by making use of the funds made available through their national recovery plans.

The report specifically called for the creation of a **permanent EU News Media Fund** to empower independent news coverage, safeguard the independence of European journalists and their profession, and guarantee the freedom of the press.

The Commission should consider the introduction of tailor-made support schemes for the news media and consider the introduction of insurance guarantees for audiovisual co-productions. Members believe that special attention should be paid to all support measures for Member States with low audiovisual production capacity.

The report encouraged Member States with adequate fiscal scope to help boost media production, distribution and consumption of news media and audiovisual works, including cinema admissions, through fiscal and financial incentives that meet these needs, while taking into account the differences between physical venues and the online domain.

Ensuring a level playing field

The report draws attention to the fact that the current crisis risks **speeding up news media consolidation**, especially within Member States, which may undermine media pluralism and the quality and impartiality

of information, especially in smaller markets. It therefore called on competition authorities to remain vigilant and to examine the long-term impact of mergers and acquisitions not only on market shares, but also on linguistic and cultural diversity.

Members are concerned that **global online platforms** are having a considerable disruptive effect on the media sector as they dominate the data and advertising market and have radically changed the public's consumption patterns. Existing legislation does not fully provide a fair framework on key issues in the online ecosystem, such as data access, data transparency, platforms and algorithmic accountability, and advertising rules, especially regarding online political advertising.

Members considered the **timely adoption of legislation**, through relevant provisions, to help address these shortcomings to be a matter of urgency, notably the future Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act, and a significantly reinforced code of practice on disinformation.

In view of the additional challenges facing **news media operating in smaller markets**, Members considered that the EU should foster cross-border cooperation and enhance diversity in markets, thus addressing challenges of fragmentation and national focus. Members called on Member States to provide a stable and adequate financial envelope for **public service media** on a multi-annual basis to preserve their independence from governmental, political and market pressures, and thus preserve the diversity of the European media landscape.

Towards the transformation and promotion of the European media and audiovisual sectors

The report highlighted the need to transform the news media sector, including through increased support for journalism training, building individual and collective skills for innovation and cooperation.

The report stressed, inter alia, the importance of:

- developing a **general strategy for media and information literacy**;
- ensuring that strengthened media independence and media and information literacy form an integral part of the **Union's foreign policy**;
- promoting the creation and growth of digital **media start-ups** by facilitating access to finance and providing a supportive framework;
- significantly **expanding the European audience** by making content legally available across EU borders while safeguarding the principle of contractual freedom and using existing opportunities available across the EU, such as the portability regulation;
- increasing the **visibility of EU programmes and initiatives** to promote the production and circulation of high-quality European works with international potential, across the EU and beyond;
- reducing the **audiovisual sector's carbon footprint**, especially at the production stage, which accounts for most CO₂ emissions.