Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
75
1949 - 2024
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 16062
08 October 2024

Strengthening freedom of expression: an imperative for the consolidation and development of democratic societies

Motion for a resolution
tabled by Mr Andrej HUNKO and other members of the Assembly

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

Freedom of expression, a cornerstone of democratic and pluralistic societies, enshrined in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is fundamental for an informed public debate and vital for democracy. In recent years, ordinary people in Council of Europe member States experience an overall trend of feeling restricted in their ability to voice critical opinions without being labeled or stigmatised. For example, polls in Germany have shown that 78% of respondents thought they were free to express their political opinion in 1990 while in 2023 only 40% of respondents agreed to the same statement.

Across Europe and beyond, freedom of expression is threatened by technology's ever-growing influence and actions of governments, corporations, influential pressure groups and private actors that shape public discourse. Those expressing opinions deviating from a dominant narrative in society, face threats of suspension, investigation, funding cuts or even violence. Physical assaults, legal restrictions, and retaliation against journalists, academics, medical experts, and politicians have become widespread, resulting in a suppression of controversial debate. Restrictions to freedom of expression, but also deliberate distortions of facts (“fake news”) in social media and beyond, threaten to undermine pluralistic public discourse.

Acknowledging the importance of freedom of expression, the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy proclaimed at the 2023 Council of Europe Summit commit to ensure “the right to freedom of expression, including academic freedom and artistic freedom, to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas, both online and offline”. As a follow-up to this commitment, the Parliamentary Assembly should investigate current challenges to the right of freedom of expression in Europe. Aimed at strengthening the right to freedom of expression, democratic participation, media literacy and democracy itself, the Assembly should also investigate possible democratic oversight mechanisms and the feasibility of setting up an early warning system for infringements, distortions and unjust restrictions to freedom of expression.

Signed (see overleaf)

Signed[1]*:*

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1. ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
EC/DA: European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance
EPP/CD: Group of the European People's Party
SOC: Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group
UEL: Group of the Unified European Left
NR: Representatives not belonging to a Political Group