Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 2675 (2026)[1]

Growing threats to media pluralism and the independence of the media

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly is gravely concerned by the growing threats to media pluralism and to the independence of the media. Evidence of this worrying trend can be observed in the increasing editorial control of the media sector by political and economic actors (so-called media capture), the mounting pressure against public service media, the emergence of "news deserts", and the intensification of competition and market dominance from online platforms.

2. As stated by the Committee of Ministers in its Declaration on the financial sustainability of quality journalism in the digital age, the sustainability of media outlets is at great risk, and this weighs particularly heavily on the local, investigative and cross-border journalism.This fact renders journalists vulnerable to pressures from powerful news sources and their employers, impinges on their investigative capacities and creates a climate conducive to both censorship and self-censorship. Moreover, the weakened sustainability has contributed to a growing concentration of media ownership and may lead to a less diverse news environment.

3. The Assembly recalls the case law of the European Court of Human Rights relating to freedom of expression and media pluralism, which has clarified that States Parties have a positive obligation to put in place an appropriate legislative and administrative framework to guarantee effective pluralism, in particular in the audiovisual sector. Both internal pluralism – within each media outlet – and external pluralism – across multiple outlets – should be considered together in order to guarantee diversity of overall programme content that reflects, as far as possible, the variety of opinions encountered in society.

4. The Assembly recognises that a certain level of media concentration is not inherently detrimental and can, in fact, play a beneficial role by ensuring the long-term sustainability of the media sector, particularly in small markets. However, an effective approach is essential to mitigate its potential adverse effects on the diversity and quality of available information. As such, mergers and acquisitions in the media sector should be assessed according to their impact on media independence and pluralism.

5. As recalled in Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership, transparency of media ownership can be helpful in making media pluralism effective by bringing ownership structures behind the media – which can influence editorial policies – to the awareness of the public and regulatory authorities.

6. The Assembly firmly reiterates that the editorial independence of the media must be protected at all costs, and that the governance and financing of public service media must be properly regulated and monitored in order to avoid political interference.

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1. *Assembly debate* on 30 September 2026 (32nd sitting) (see Doc. 16468, report of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, rapporteur: Ms Valentina Grippo; and Doc. 16474, opinion of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur: Ms Gala Veldhoen). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 30 September 2026 (32nd sitting).
See also Recommendation 2313 (2026).
Provisional version subject to editorial review.

7. The Assembly is alarmed by the capture of the media sector by political and financial actors for the purposes of controlling public information, concealing critical voices and manipulating public opinion. It is imperative to conduct research in order to elucidate the manner in which political and economic actors exercise control and exert influence over the media sector in ways contrary to public interest.

8. The Assembly emphasises the fundamental role that national media regulatory authorities can play in preventing media capture. In order to fully achieve this objective, it is essential that these authorities are independent, both in principle and in practice, and that they have adequate financial and human resources to fulfil their role, particularly in light of the enhanced competences that some of them will have under the new European Union legislation. Their decisions must be objective, justified, transparent, non-discriminatory, proportional, and subject to appeal before an independent appellate body.

9. There cannot be independent news media without an environment in which journalists can work safely and without fear or undue restrictions. Unfortunately, there is an increasing variety of threats, pressures and constraints under which journalists are carrying out their mission.

10. In this regard, the Assembly is deeply worried by the assessment carried out in 2025 by the partner organisations of the Council of Europe's Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists, which concludes that press freedom in Europe "stands at a tipping point", and endorses the recommendations outlined in the assessment.

11. Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine continues to pose the most significant threat to journalists across Europe. In relation to this issue, the Assembly recalls that journalists are civilians and are protected as such under international law, and that targeting and killing journalists is a war crime. Since February 2022, journalists and media workers have been killed and wounded while reporting from Ukraine, media premises and broadcasting infrastructure have been deliberately targeted, and at least 26 Ukrainian journalists remain unlawfully detained by the Russian Federation, most of them on fabricated charges and in conditions amounting to torture and ill-treatment; the journalist Viktoriia Roshchyna died in Russian custody in September 2024. The Assembly demands the immediate and unconditional release of all Ukrainian journalists held by the Russian Federation and calls for full accountability for crimes committed against journalists.

12. The Assembly considers that the systematic destruction of independent media in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation – the forced closure or seizure of Ukrainian media outlets, the replacement of Ukrainian broadcasting with Russian State propaganda and the persecution of local journalists – constitutes the most extreme form of media capture on the European continent today and a deliberately engineered "news desert". The same model has been fully implemented in the Russian Federation and in Belarus. The Assembly further notes that media pluralism in member States is under attack from outside through foreign information manipulation and interference, in particular by the Russian Federation, which uses State-controlled media, covert ownership and financing of media outlets and co-ordinated online campaigns to polarise societies and weaken support for Ukraine. It welcomes the measures taken by the European Union and member States to suspend the broadcasting of Kremlin-linked propaganda networks and stresses that such measures, taken in accordance with the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, are a legitimate defence of media pluralism and not a restriction of it.

13. Beyond conflict zones, journalists in Europe often face legal harassment as well as online and physical threats or attacks for simply doing their jobs; in particular, women journalists are disproportionately affected by intimidation and harassment.

14. The Assembly is concerned about the emergence of "news deserts", namely geographic or administrative areas, or social communities, where it is difficult or impossible to access sufficient, reliable, diverse information from independent local, regional and community media.

15. The Assembly acknowledges that there is no single solution to all instances of news deserts. There are nevertheless good practices and alternative business models that should be considered, with a view to reducing reliance on advertising and, as much as possible, ensuring independence from online platforms. The most successful experiences across Europe are those that rely upon pay membership or subscription, but this approach is not universally applicable.

16. Moreover, there is a lot of interest in philanthropy in some countries coming from bodies or foundations that are not linked with online platforms. The Assembly believes this is an issue that should be further investigated. Other options on the table are tax relief for local media outlets, a special status for the media, and redistribution of copyright revenues.

17. In this regard, it is imperative that the public support for local media be transparent and fair in allocating resources, including State advertising, in order to avoid media capture and threats to the independence of the media in general.

18. The Assembly stresses the urgent need to address the lack of data related to the economic and financial information for both local and community media. Locally focused audience measurements and detailed research on trust, audience perspectives, perceptions and engagement within local media markets are required.

19. The Assembly acknowledges that the European Union's European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) is a step in the right direction as it provides a template for action and includes measures intended to combat media capture. Non-EU countries, however, do not benefit from the protection provided by the EMFA.

20. The Assembly underscores the importance of discoverability in the online environment, that is, the ease with which an audiovisual work or service can be located on a platform or interface. Content prioritisation practices, algorithm recommendations and curation strategies have the potential to exert a detrimental effect on cultural diversity.

21. It is therefore vital that services of general interest, and in particular public service media, are given appropriate prominence on online platforms and TV interfaces.

22. In this regard, the Assembly notes with concern that connected TVs and virtual assistants are increasingly acting as gateways to audiovisual content and have therefore the potential to become gatekeepers with the power to determine which content is prioritised on our screens.

23. A further problematic issue is the exploitation of dominant positions by providers of artificial intelligence services that monetise third-party content without effective control by rightsholders and without offering fair remuneration.

24. In the light of these considerations, the Assembly calls on the Council of Europe member States to undertake the following measures:

24.1. introduce a legal requirement for national media regulatory authorities to regulate and monitor media pluralism in the audiovisual sector;

24.2. ensure the public availability and accessibility of accurate, up-to-date data concerning direct and beneficial ownership of the media, as well as other interests that influence the strategic decision making of the media in question or its editorial line, as advocated by Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership;

24.3. make the disclosure of beneficial ownership of the media mandatory in their legislation, including indirect control and financial interests, and make this information easily accessible through public registers;

24.4. assess the existence of media ownership rules in their national legislation and their applicability to new media services and online platforms;

24.5. establish rules in national legislation with the aim of limiting any potential interference with the editorial independence and operational autonomy of the media, and ensure that oversight is provided by national media regulatory authorities;

24.6. ensure that administrative decisions taken by national media regulatory authorities are objective, justified, transparent, non-discriminatory, proportional and subject to appeal before an independent appellate body;

24.7. encourage the development of common practices among European national media regulatory authorities for monitoring the internal pluralism of public service media;

24.8. ensure that national legislation relating to the governance of public service media contains robust guarantees for the independence of the appointment process for management bodies, and include the participation of civil society in this process;

24.9. provide action plans for a targeted and viewpoint-neutral support aimed at ensuring the sustainability of public service media, non-profit media and community media;

24.10. provide action plans for a targeted support of quality journalism, as defined in Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on promoting a favourable environment for quality journalism in the digital age;

24.11. provide financial support schemes for media sectors in particular for regional, local, hyperlocal and not-for-profit community media, with accompanying safeguards for their independent administration and oversight and for equitable and non-discriminatory distribution of such support in line with the principles of transparency and accountability and with the standards of the Council of Europe, as proposed by the Declaration by the Committee of Ministers on the financial sustainability of quality journalism in the digital age;

24.12. support alternative business models and non-profit initiatives regarding the provision of local news media services in geographic areas that experience a lack of reliable and diverse information sources from credible media outlets;

24.13. engage in effective co-operation with the Council of Europe's Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and provide timely and substantive responses to the the Platform alerts;

24.14. co-operate fully with international and national investigations into crimes committed against journalists in the context of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, provide emergency and long-term support to Ukrainian journalists and media outlets, in particular those working in front-line regions and those displaced from occupied territories, and maintain and, where necessary, extend measures against State-controlled media of the Russian Federation and Belarus engaged in war propaganda and foreign information manipulation and interference, with adequate procedural safeguards;

24.15. repeal or amend laws used to intimidate journalists, including criminal defamation and overly broad "fake news" or "State secrets" provisions and ensure clear public interest exemptions where restrictions apply;

24.16. adopt measures to protect women journalists and integrate gender-responsive and intersectional safeguards into journalist safety policies, including guidance for law enforcement, protective measures and digital security support;

24.17. implement Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on countering the use of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs);

24.18. offer protection against transnational repression of journalists, foster a culture of respect for press freedom and promote social dialogue and collective bargaining for all journalists, including freelancers;

24.19. ensure that media of general interest, and in particular public service media, are given appropriate prominence across all platforms;

24.20. ensure that the integrity of media services is safeguarded against unfair manipulation by online platforms;

24.21. adopt a regulatory approach that balances the rights and interests of artificial intelligence providers and copyright holders so that innovation is not achieved at the expense of creators, as requested by the Assembly in its Resolution 2654 (2026) "Copyright enforcement in the artificial intelligence environment".