

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

**4th European Ministerial Conference
on Mass Media Policy**

Prague (Czech Republic), 7-8 December 1994



**The media in a
democratic society**

Resolutions and
Political Declaration

EXTRACT

Prague 1994

RESOLUTION No 1

THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

The Ministers of the States participating in the 4th European Ministerial Conference on Mass Media Policy (Prague, 7-8 December 1994);

Recalling the principles which were adopted on public and private broadcasting in Europe on the occasion of the 1st European Ministerial Conference on Mass Media Policy, held in Vienna on 9 and 10 December 1986:

Noting the importance of the changes which have taken place in broadcasting since that Conference, and in particular the emergence of the mixed system of public and commercial broadcasting;

Acknowledging that public service broadcasting, both radio and television, support the values underlying the political, legal and social structures of democratic societies, and in particular respect for human rights, culture and political pluralism;

Stressing the importance of public service broadcasting for democratic societies;

Recognising therefore the need to guarantee the permanence and stability of public service broadcasting so as to allow it to continue to operate in the service of the public;

Underlining the vital function of public service broadcasting as an essential factor of pluralistic communication accessible to everyone;

Recalling the importance of radio and **stressing** its great potential for the development of democratic societies, particularly at the regional and local levels;

I. General Principles

Affirm their commitment to maintain and develop a strong public service broadcasting system in an environment characterised by an increasingly competitive offer of programme services and rapid technological change;

Acknowledge, in line with the conclusions adopted at the 1st European Ministerial Conference, that privately owned companies as well as public organisations may provide such a service;

Undertake to guarantee at least one comprehensive wide-range programme service comprising information, education, culture and entertainment which is accessible to all members of the public, while **acknowledging** that public service broadcasters must also be permitted to provide, where appropriate, additional programme services such as thematic services;

Undertake to define clearly, in accordance with appropriate arrangements in domestic law and practice and in respect for their international obligations, the role, missions and responsibilities

of public service broadcasters and to ensure their editorial independence against political and economic interference;

Undertake to guarantee public service broadcasters secure and appropriate means necessary for the fulfilment of their missions;

Agree to implement these commitments in accordance with the following framework:

II. Policy framework for Public service broadcasting

Public service requirements

Participating States agree that public service broadcasters, within the general framework defined for them and without prejudice to more specific public service remits, must have principally the following missions:

to provide, through their programming, a reference point for all members of the public and a factor for social cohesion and integration of all individuals, groups and communities. In particular, they must reject any cultural, sexual, religious or racial discrimination and any form of social segregation;

to provide a forum for public discussion in which as broad a spectrum as possible of views and opinions can be expressed;

to broadcast impartial and independent news, information and comment;

to develop pluralistic, innovatory and varied programming which meets high ethical and quality standards and not to sacrifice the pursuit of quality to market forces;

to develop and structure programme schedules and services of interest to a wide public while being attentive to the needs of minority groups;

to reflect the different philosophical ideas and religious beliefs in society, with the aim of strengthening mutual understanding and tolerance and promoting community relations in pluriethnic and multicultural societies;

to contribute actively through their programming to a greater appreciation and dissemination of the diversity of national and European cultural heritage;

to ensure that the programmes offered contain a significant proportion of original productions, especially feature films, drama and other creative works, and to have regard to the need to use independent producers and co-operate with the cinema sector;

to extend the choice available to viewers and listeners by also offering programme services which are not normally provided by commercial broadcasters.

Funding

Participating states undertake to maintain and, where necessary, establish an appropriate and secure funding framework which guarantees public service broadcasters the means necessary to accomplish their missions. There exist a number of sources of funding for sustaining and promoting public service broadcasting, such as: licence fees, public subsidies, advertising and sponsorship revenue; sales of their audio-visual works and programme agreements. Where appropriate, funding may also be provided from charges for thematic services offered as a complement to the basic service.

The level of licence fee or public subsidy should be projected over a sufficient period of time so as to allow public service broadcasters to engage in long term planning.

Economic practices

Participating states should endeavour to ensure that economic practices such as the concentration of media ownership, the acquisition of exclusive rights and the control over distribution systems such as conditional access techniques, do not prejudice the vital contribution public service broadcasters have to make to pluralism and the right of the public to receive information.

Independence and accountability

Participating states undertake to guarantee the independence of public service broadcasters against political and economic interference. In particular, day to day management and editorial responsibility for programme schedules and the content of programmes must be a matter entirely for the broadcasters themselves.

The independence of public service broadcasters must be guaranteed by appropriate structures such as pluralistic internal boards or other independent bodies.

The control and accountability of public service broadcasters, especially as regards the discharge of their missions and use of their resources, must be guaranteed by appropriate means.

Public service broadcasters must be directly accountable to the public. To that end, public service broadcasters should regularly publish information on their activities and develop procedures for allowing viewers and listeners to comment on the way in which they carry out their missions.

Means of transmission

Participating states should ensure that public service broadcasters are guaranteed adequate means of transmission and, as the case may be, of retransmission, to enable them to fulfil their missions.

New communications technologies

Participating states should bear in mind that new communications technologies are giving rise to profound changes in broadcasting, which require them to develop clear principles for sustaining a system of public service broadcasting capable of evolving in the new technological context.

Participating states should encourage public service broadcasters to contribute to the development of research and experimentation in new communications technologies in close collaboration with industry, taking account of the interests of consumers.

Particular attention should be given to developing the opportunities offered by telecommunications for the introduction of digital broadcasting and new services.

Public service broadcasters should be able to exploit new technologies necessary for the fulfilment of their missions.

Participating states, together with public service broadcasters, should examine at regular intervals at the European level the impact of technological change on the role of public service broadcasting at both the national and transnational levels.

European co-operation and solidarity

Bearing in mind the possibilities offered by existing European structures, participating States should facilitate co-operation between those public service broadcasters wishing to collaborate and form alliances in areas such as programme exchange, the production of programmes, technological research and the development of multilateral public service channels.

The Council of Europe should follow closely the development of multilateral public service channels and study the problems which may arise in this respect.