

CMFE
Position on the
White Paper
on a European Communication Policy COM (2006) 35 final

The CMFE welcomes the intention of the White Paper for the construction of a new European Communication Policy involving citizens and the civil society and enhancing the public debate on the local, regional, national and European level.

The CMFE identifies the increasing transnational media concentration and commercialisation of the sector as one important trigger for the lack of local media. Simultaneously most public service programs and channels have reduced or stopped their local production due to the competition they are facing with commercial formats. This situation is regularly criticised in reports dealing with the risks for media diversity and pluralism e.g. the report on “Transnational media concentrations in Europe” prepared by the ADMD of the Council of Europe or the Boogerd-Quaak-Report of the European Parliament “on the risks of violation, in the EU and especially in Italy, of freedom of expression and information (Article 11(2) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights)”.

The CMFE supports the intention of the White Paper to develop a new communication policy on the principles of:

- the right to information
- freedom of expression
- inclusiveness
- diversity
- participation

We are convinced that these **core values** can not be implemented from the top but must be the **result of a large bottom-up process** where the **partnership between European Institution and Civil Society is essential**.

Actually it is Community Media with its open access approach which involves local populations and communities in communication processes. This reflects the cultural diversity to its highest extend and constitutes a forum for dialogic communication on local, regional and European issues.

Experience shows that cooperation of people involved in Community Media with politicians and public authorities contributes to the strengthening of the democratic involvement of their communities. This is a fact for local issues but even much more for those which seem to be far from people’s everyday lives. This is the case with many topics dealt on the European level. A even higher potential exists for building a dialog and involving groups and communities which are neglected or not addressed at all by the traditional media system (as youngsters, seniors, migrants, minority language groups or people in remote areas).

The role of Community Media for establishing trans-border communication is stressed by the “report on Regional media and transfrontier co-operation” voted by the congress of regional and local authorities in the Council of Europe and embedded in the joint recommendation

when it calls to implement “...*regulations on multilingual community media applicable to all current and future analogue and digital broadcasting platforms, in order to guarantee citizen participation in the media and strengthen individual involvement in democratic life*”.

In this sense CMFE calls upon the European Commission to recognize the important role of local Community Media for realizing a more democratic communication all over Europe. In this sense it would be crucial to find adopted measures to support community media and other civil society groups to develop their capacities and to interconnect at the European level.

Civic education

Community Media exists in varied forms in nearly all European countries. Still, until now the potential of Community Media for civic education and social communication is recognized by national authorities and governments only to a very limited extent. Ireland is a recent example how training in Community Media can be integrated in a national education system as a contribution to strengthen social and communicative skills of its practitioners and trainees. This potential could be developed at a much wider scale if these capacities and the potential of Community Media were recognised and supported on the European level. This potential could also help to close the Digital Divide which is especially relevant on the local level and for disadvantaged or marginalized groups and communities.

The **CMFE recommends** that in all actual and future initiatives the European Commission should improve adopted measures enhancing local communication on European topics.

As a short term initiative we propose to the Commission the **support of the establishment of a European multilingual Community Media correspondent group** which could deliver the European topics directly to the local communities and establish a face to face forum for the dialogue with European decision makers.

As a mid term initiative the CMFE calls upon the Commission to establish a **European Community Media Fund** to support the large number of national and European Community Media projects which contribute to the construction of a European public sphere at the local level.

CMFE is ready to contribute to all further discussion on the democratisation of European Communication and to take part in future groups of specialists working on this topic.