April 2, 2009: Declaration of the Community Media Forum Europe (CMFE) supporting the Polish Third Media Sector

COMMUNITY MEDIA (THIRD MEDIA SECTOR) are non-profit organizations promoting the freedom of speech and the democratic participation. They are initiatives empowering the civil society, especially the minorities or other groups absent in the mainstream media. However, the activity of these social initiatives is often hindered because of the lack of regulation and the difficulties to obtain economic resources.

For those reasons, and aiming to legitimate and regulate the Community Media activity, several initiatives have been developed within Europe during the last years, as the Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the role of community media in the promotion of the social cohesion and the intercultural dialogue, adopted by the Council of Europe in February 2009, or the Resolution of 25 of September of 2008 of the European Parliament on Community Media in Europe (2008/2011 (INI)).

Behind these advances there is the activity of international organizations as the World Association of Community Radios (AMARC) and the Community Media Forum Europe (CMFE). The former recommended a Community Media regulatory framework at international level in 2007, while the latter gathers policy experts, organizations and federations since 2004 supporting the participation of the Community Media sector on the debate and the decision making at the European and national level.

Concerning the Polish case, we would like to draw the decision makers' attention to the fact that the legal recognition for the Community Media in Poland is insufficient. However, it does not mean that such initiatives in Poland do not exist. A lot of interesting, especially radio but also TV, projects are Internet implemented. Enabling them to broadcast on air would contribute to the development of the Polish democracy.

Unfortunately, in the new project of Media Law Ustawa o zadaniach publicznych w dziedzinie usług medialnych there seems to be also no place for Community Media. Although, in this act a new category of broadcaster – “public benefit broadcaster” was introduced, the number of the potential beneficiaries of this status was radically limited (for this status could apply only: schools, universities and boroughs).
According the given reasons, the Community Media Forum Europe (CMFE) - REQUESTS to the Polish Government to advance in the Third Media Sector recognition watching over the European harmonization through the implementation of guidelines as the Resolution of 25 of September of 2008 of the European Parliament on Community Media in Europe (2008/2011 (INI)), which invites the EU Member States to recognize and to support this sector.

- REQUESTS to establish special granting procedures according the specificities of the Community Media sector instead of obliging them to compete with the commercial media in unequal conditions, and also to avoid call for competitions addressed only to the commercial sector. The CMFE considers necessary the set of measures guarantying the existence of the Third Media Sector, granting part of the available concessions to the Community Media.

- SUPPORTS the Community Media Broadcasters and citizens’ claims in order to improve the broadcast regulations. More specifically, the CMFE asks for an extension of the list of the beneficiaries of the legal status of “public benefit broadcaster” to non-profit Non Governmental Organisations.

CMFE strongly recommends that the government, referring to the mentioned Declaration of the Council of Europe and the Resolution of the European Parliament, supports Community Media initiatives in Poland. CMFE offers to the Polish administration any help with expertise and welcomes its feedback to this letter.

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