

Budapest Declaration for Freedom of the Internet

06.15.2006.

As European media scholars we call the attention of the decision makers of the European Union and the Council of Europe that the revision of the Television without Frontiers Directive of the European Union and the European Convention on Transfrontier Television of the Council of Europe should not restrict freedom of expression and freedom of information on the internet, and should not impose undue, premature regulation on the fast changing new communication technologies.

The extension of the scope of some rather burdensome part of the Television Directive to the internet - as the draft new directive of the European Commission suggests with far too vague terms that would leave content providers and users uncertain in whether or not their various activities are regulated by the new directive - would be an unjustifiable restriction of freedom of speech and freedom of information. Neither the scarcity of frequencies, nor the push media character of television applies to the unique architecture of the Internet.

The unjustifiable restrictions suggested in the draft proposal of the European Commission would put freedom of speech and freedom of information at risk especially in Central-, and East-European countries where arbitrary use of the state regulatory power is more likely than at least in some West-European democracies. At the same time, the draft proposal of the European Commission would withhold the development of the information society services, especially of the smaller enterprises, while the restrictive and undue regulations would not be enforceable.

The E-Commerce Directive of the European Union already provides the necessary regulatory framework for the information society services. There is no any reason to duplicate the existing regulation with complicated, confusing new rules that would abridge freedom of expression and freedom of information, and would cause uncertainty that withholds investments and developments. If additional regulations of the information society services are needed at all, they should be backed by much more and much more carefully done research - especially by more impact assessment - than what has been done to support the draft proposal of the European Commission.

Further research might even lead to some deregulative changes in the E-Commerce Directive, as far as the unmatched opportunities for free communication through the internet are the strongest safeguards of media freedom especially in countries where other parts of the media is under government control. The fast development of the new communication technologies also triggers that both the European Union and the Council of Europe rather rely on self-regulation and let the new communication technologies to develop freely and people to exchange ideas and information through them unrestricted.

Signed by:

- Peter Molnar, Senior Research Fellow, Center for Media and Communication Studies, Central European University
- Willem Houwen, Kosovo Institute of Journalism and Communication, Head of School
- Brindusa Armanca, Editorial Director ZIUA Press Group; Professor at University of Arad, Romania
- Laura Ranca, Project Coordinator, Center for Media and Communication Studies, Central European University
- Obrad Savic, Professor, University of Leeds, UK
- Peter Dahlgren, Professor, Media and Communication Studies, Lund University, Sweden
- Eva Simon, Research Fellow, Center for Media and Communication Studies, Central European University
- Fred G. Brinkman, Senior Lecturer, Research Fellow, Public Perception Studies, School of Communication, Media and Music, Center of Communication for Sustainability, INHOLLAND University
- Jelena Surculija, Consultant in Media, Telecommunications and Internet law, Serbia
- Ingrid Volkmer, Professor, University of Otago, New Zealand; Vice-Chair of the ICA Philosophy of Communication Division; Fellow at the School of Communication Research, University of Amsterdam
- Inka Salovaara-Moring, Associate Professor, Department of Communication, University of Helsinki
- Ibrahim Al-Marashi, Sabanci University, Istanbul, Turkey; Visiting Fellow, Annenberg School for Communications, University of Pennsylvania
- Christina Slade, Macquarie University, Sydney and University of Utrecht, The Netherlands; Chair of the Philosophy of Communication Division, International Communication Association
- Kate Coyer, Goldsmith College, University of London
- Balazs Bodo, Media Education and Research Center (MOKK), Budapest University of Technology and Economics
- Sandor Orban, Project Manager, Center for Media and Communication Studies, Central European University

Non-European Media Scholars who are supporting the above written declaration:

- Andrew Calabrese, Professor, University of Colorado, Boulder, School of Journalism and Mass Communication
- Emran Kadhim Atea, Kerbala University, Iraq; Center for Media and Communication Studies, CEU, Budapest, Hungary
- Stephen McDowell, Associate Professor, Florida State university
- Katherine Sender, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania.