



**Resolution 2066 (2015)<sup>1</sup>**  
Provisional version

## Media responsibility and ethics in a changing media environment

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls that freedom of expression in the media is a necessary precondition for a democratic society and constitutes an indispensable requirement for its progress and for the development of every individual. Freedom of expression is comprehensively applicable, subject only to the conditions and restrictions foreseen in the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5).
2. As the exercise of such freedom carries with it duties and responsibilities, the Assembly welcomes the Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists adopted by the International Federation of Journalists, as well as codes of ethics adopted by journalists and media at national level in all member States. Such codes are a voluntary expression of professional diligence by quality-conscious journalists and media outlets to correct their mistakes and to make themselves accountable to the public.
3. Welcoming practical initiatives by journalists and their professional organisations to foster high ethical standards, such as the Ethical Journalism Initiative by the International Federation of Journalists adopted by its World Congress in Moscow in 2007 and supported by the European Union and the Council of Europe, the Assembly recalls its [Resolution 1003 \(1993\)](#) on the ethics of journalism and notes with concern that the changing media environment challenges journalistic ethics and that codes of ethics are not stringently adhered to by all journalists.
4. The Assembly is alarmed by the increase in racist discourse and hate speech in Europe and reminds member States that domestic laws must exist against war propaganda and advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence under Article 20 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as against the dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred and the incitement to racial discrimination under Article 4 of the United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.
5. Journalists work in many parts of Europe under conditions which are legally insecure and financially weak, often in freelance positions, thus making them more vulnerable to pressures on their work by third parties. Many media outlets have financial problems due to reduced readership, audience or viewers because of the growth of Internet-based media and often less profitable business models, thus challenging the editorial independence of such media. In addition, journalists and media are increasingly threatened by organised crime, terrorism and armed conflicts, thus threatening their whole work as such.
6. Recalling its [Resolution 1577 \(2007\)](#) "Towards decriminalisation of defamation", the Assembly reminds member States that statements or allegations in the media, even if they prove to be inaccurate, should not be punishable, provided that they were made without knowledge of their inaccuracy, without conscious intention to cause harm and that their truthfulness was checked with proper diligence. Member States should move forward with decriminalising defamation.

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1. *Assembly debate* on 24 June 2015 (24th Sitting) (see [Doc. 13803](#), report of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, rapporteur: Mr Volodymyr Arieiev). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 24 June 2015 (24th Sitting).  
See also [Recommendation 2075 \(2015\)](#).

7. Recalling its [Recommendation 1878 \(2009\)](#) on the funding of public service broadcasting, the Assembly reaffirms that public service broadcasters must be an important public source of unbiased information and diverse political opinions; they must function under high editorial standards of objectivity, fairness and independence from party political or economic interference. Therefore, the Assembly welcomes and supports the Editorial Principles and Guidelines by the European Broadcasting Union and calls on member States to ensure that their public service broadcasters fully implement them.
8. Recalling its [Resolution 1438 \(2005\)](#) on the freedom of the press and the working conditions of journalists in conflict zones, the Assembly reminds member States that journalists must be considered civilians under Article 79 of Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, provided that they take no action adversely affecting their status as civilians, and invites all media to indicate clearly to the public which reports are from war correspondents embedded in military or security forces.
9. Recalling its [Resolution 2001 \(2014\)](#) on violence in and through the media, the Assembly welcomes self-regulatory mechanisms by broadcasters and the film and games industry for protecting minors from violence by voluntarily rating their media content. Media outlets are editorially responsible for making sure that violent media content does not prejudice the dignity of the human being or impair the physical, mental or moral development of children and adolescents.
10. In view of the exponential growth in Internet-based media and the related changes in the internal structure of media outlets, the Assembly believes that media outlets should be a primary factor for defining and upholding the professional standards of their staff as well as those contributing to their media content. In this context, corporate codes of ethics and media ombudspersons should be established by media outlets, as well as mechanisms for complaints or other reactions by their readers, listeners or viewers with regard to compliance with such corporate codes.
11. The Assembly recognises self-regulation by the media as a means of reducing the influence of the State and other sectors of society over media content. In addition, self-regulatory mechanisms can facilitate out-of-court settling of disputes over media content. However, the Assembly reminds member States that limitations by public authorities to freedom of expression and information through the media must be prescribed by law, pursue a legitimate objective and be necessary in a democratic society. Media self-regulation necessarily has a voluntary and ethical aspect rather than a legally binding character.
12. Systems of media self-regulation have developed differently among member States, depending on political, cultural and legal traditions. In several countries, systems of co-regulation exist whereby domestic law sets the legal framework for self-regulatory media ethics. Where such systems include the possibility to impose fines and other penalties, the European Convention on Human Rights, in particular its Article 10, is applicable and must be respected.
13. The Assembly therefore invites media outlets, media staff and their organisations to increase voluntary adherence to their codes of ethics and their mechanisms for analysing breaches of such codes, with a view to providing adequate redress for those affected by such breaches. For this purpose, the Assembly invites the Alliance of Independent Press Councils of Europe to strengthen co-ordination among its members, in order to raise ethical standards across Europe, facilitate complaints procedures across borders and raise awareness among European media users.
14. The Assembly invites the European Union to co-operate with the Council of Europe in promoting media self-regulation, for instance by extending the standards of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive beyond the European Union as has been attempted by the European Convention on Transfrontier Television (ETS No. 132), but also through practical co-operation activities with national associations of media and journalists.