



Promoting minority languages through community media

Recommendations from AMARC to the European Parliament and the Commission

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Context.

1. The protection of the rights of linguistic minorities is a human rights obligation.

According to UNESCO the translation and promotion of local languages supports cultural and linguistic diversity, and provides a basis for the social, economic and cultural life. However, the globalization of digital media is having a direct and negative impact on minority languages and cultural diversity. Community media is a tool that reinforces pluralism and diversity, not only through the production of radio content, but through democratic and participatory processes that support and reinforce the European identity and cultural wealth through the use and promotion of minority languages in Europe.

According to Eurolang, in Europe there are 60 minority languages and 50 million people (10 % of European population) communicate through a minority language. Community media plays an essential role for these populations by consolidating the perception of belonging to a group, a community. Community media is a space for providing information and for the expression of local or regional sensitivities. It also fulfils an educational and cultural aim, as it preserves the local identity of the native language and culture in a contemporary context.

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2 Conference topics available in: <http://www.greens-efa.eu/radio-broadcasting-in-minority-languages-10572.html>
Conference video streaming available in: <http://greenmediabox.eu/archive/2013/10/16/radio-broadcasting-in-minority-languages/>

In European Union context, some States have cut budget for education and culture issues because of the economic crisis and, in the same way, several public media have been closed. Those decisions worsen the situation of minority languages and cultural contract. Promoting community media help to alleviate the damage caused by government neglect.

2. The "Alfonsi Report" has brought to the political and civic debate the issue of minority languages in Europe.

The proposed resolution of the European Parliament by MEP François Alfonsi (Report on European languages in danger of extinction and linguistic diversity in the European Union (2013/2007 (INI)), calls on the EU and the Member States to pay attention to the endangered status that many European languages find themselves in, and to commit to a policy of protection and promotion that corresponds to the task of preserving the diversity of cultural and linguistic heritage of the Union, by supporting policies for the protection of the languages within the linguistic communities.

The report calls on the European Commission and the Council to adopt policies and programmes that would support endangered languages and linguistic diversity with the creation of EU financial support mechanisms for the period between 2014 and 2020 that should focus on the role of media.

Normative Framework.

1. The fundamental right to communication in minority languages.

The right for a member of a minority or indigenous community to use their own language is a human right. Access to the media is a right readily available to the socially and economically powerful classes, but it is not equally available to minority or indigenous communities. However, international law also recognizes the right of access to media to sectors (minorities, women, socially excluded groups, indigenous communities, etc) that are prevented, because of lack of access to media skills and/or resources, from participating in public debate.

International law guarantees freedom of expression not only to States or businesses, but also to minority or indigenous communities, which have the same right to have 'quality' media to ensure cultural and linguistic diversity. The right to freedom of expression includes the right to create media companies, the freedom of individuals and citizens to communicate freely through any medium, and this right, guaranteed by international law, is the main legal framework on which to base claims in support of community radio.

The additional Protocol Number 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights, states categorically that "The enjoyment of the rights recognized by law shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour of skin,

language, religion, political or other measures, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status."

Minority language speakers are in many cases denied the right to access and receive information and opinions in their own language, so the right enshrined in Protocol Number 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights is not sufficiently protected. The Protocol has not been implemented in a way to ensure equal access of minority language speakers to broadcasting licenses to enable them to develop media activities in their own languages as part of the special considerations needed to protect cultural minorities. We, therefore, consider that the damage that occurs is not limited to the language community but also affects fundamental individual and subjective rights.

AMARC asserts that the effective exercise of the right to communicate makes the use of peoples' languages an exercise of the right to individual and collective identity. In this context AMARC also asserts that the right to access radio and television frequencies is a right for minority groups that make up the cultural and ethnic diversity of the territories and peoples of the world.

AMARC echoes the words of the United Nations Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression. In his statement of 2007 not only recommends the adoption of anti-monopoly laws to prevent undue concentration of media or cross-media ownership, also recommends support for those wishing to establish new types of media. In this regard the promotion of community media can offset monopolistic practices observed in some member states that impact negatively on linguistic and cultural diversity.

2. The recognition of community media as key instruments for cultural and linguistic diversity by the European Parliament and the European Commission.

It is part of the ethos of community media to support expression, creation and dissemination of content in minority languages or about minority languages.

The European Parliament resolution on community media on September 2008 describes the third sector of media communication as an instrument for expression and for information for minority cultural groups in society, and as a tool for intercultural dialogue. In this sense, the European Parliament stresses that Community Media (CM) is an effective means of strengthening cultural and linguistic diversity, social inclusion and local identity.

This recognition of the social value of media is also reflected in the Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the role of community media in promoting social cohesion and intercultural dialogue (*Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 11 February 2009 at the 1048th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies*).

Also, community media promotes intercultural dialogue through the education of audiences, and it plays a significant role in training programmes and in the provision of media literacy to citizens through direct participation in the creation and dissemination of content. In the absence of public and commercial media in certain regions in the EU and its periphery, and the tendency of commercial media to reduce

local content, Community Media (CM) might provide the only source of local news and information, and the only voice for local communities.

To develop to its full potential, Community Media (CM) needs to achieve high quality production and training activities. However, the lack of adequate financial resources hinders these aspirations. Financial support and the use of new technologies and platforms would allow the sector to increase its innovative stance and provide new and vital services that would bring added value to the existing services.

3. Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD)

The Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) recognises communication services as economic but also cultural services. There could be a commercial aim, but that the right of expression should be provided with an overview of public service.

Support to Minority languages through community media.

AMARC considers that European Parliament and EU Member States should not only recognise the positive contribution of Community Media (CM) in terms of the social value that it provides in a very extremely cost-effective manner, but should consider the sustainability, growth and development of the sector by creating mechanisms that guarantee financial resources as well as the availability of frequency spectrum - analogue and digital- for community radio and television.

In addition, Community Media (CM) could make more use of EU funding instruments, through accessing of specific programmes, such as the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund as well as developing education and training opportunities for journalists offered by the Lifelong Learning. However, in some cases, the financial requirements to take part in these programmes makes impossible for community media to participate in them.

In its 2008 resolution, the European Parliament urges Community Media (CM) to establish a European on-line platform to disseminate useful and relevant information for the sector and facilitate networking and exchange of best practices. The open Forum that took place in October in Brussels facilitate the creation of AMARC Europe's minority language working group, which is now responsible for the development of a working axis on European regional minority languages that will focus on creating tools for the promotion and evaluation of minority languages and the measurement of the status of linguistic diversity. Hence, Community media could develop tools for the exchange of best practices, expertise, professional training and skills transfer.

Within these aims, AMARC considers a priority to promote, in the European context, opportunities for the exchange of best practice, the development of key skills, the creation of tools and strategies to promote the use and mainstreaming of endangered

languages in community media and the preservation and promotion of linguistic diversity.

The first step will require mapping community media broadcasting through minority languages in different European regions and define the role of community radio.

Recommendations from AMARC to the European Parliament and the Commission.

1. To promote the existence of a common European framework to guarantee the development, growth and sustainability of community media projects.
2. To encourage member states to reserve 33% of the electro-magnetic radio spectrum for community media broadcasting in regional languages.
3. To guarantee equality in terms of broadcasting power and access to airwaves to other local broadcasters (public or commercial).
4. 4. To broaden the possibilities for community media funding, avoiding budget limitations and putting in place mechanisms to secure public funding at local, regional, national and international level. The European Parliament and Council of Europe praised community media role in ensuring social cohesion, cultural and linguistic diversity, pluralism and freedom of expression of citizens. This “public interest” approach should be fully recognised and supported by public funds.

Referenced documents

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