



**EPC** | European  
Publishers  
Council

## News Release

### **FRANCISCO PINTO BALSEMÃO STEPS DOWN AS CHAIR OF EPC AFTER 15 YEARS AT THE HELM**

A former Prime Minister of Portugal and Chairman of the leading media group Impresa, **Francisco Pinto Balsemão** steps down as Chairman of the European Publishers Council (EPC) today after 15 years of dynamic leadership. Mr. Balsemão transformed the EPC, adapting it to the new challenges and responding to the threats and opportunities posed by the digital age.

A staunch proponent of the freedom of expression and of a free and independent press, Mr Balsemão has presided over Europe's most influential media lobby group during a time of unprecedented digital revolution and the dramatic transformation in the production, dissemination and consumption of news media globally.

Addressing the newly-appointed College of Commissioners, Mr Balsemão says:

"If I can impart any words of wisdom following 15 years of dialogue and collaboration with Brussels' regulators and decision-makers, working with the EPC team to ensure regulation is fit for 21<sup>st</sup> century news gathering and reporting, it would be the following:

The digital single market brings huge benefits. It is a family of different media, cultures and languages; this diversity enriches the European Union. I call on the new digital chief to consider that there can be no "one-size-fits-all" approach to any media regulation; our differences are our strengths and what provides value to society. Our diversity should be supported and nurtured; it underpins freedom of expression. A free, diverse media is the engine of civil society but when global companies become overly dominant, abusing their scale and influence, European media and our citizens lose out, impoverishing our cultural diversity. This is why the investigation into Google's abuse of a dominant position is critical to our future and must continue until an assurance of fair competition is delivered."

#### ***The big issues:***

During Mr Balsemão's tenure as Chairman, there have been many regulatory issues affecting the media; advertising, data privacy, e-commerce, financial journalism, state aid, audiovisual media services, VAT harmonisation...but none so crucial in this time of digital revolution as the issue of copyright - the best way to incentivise content creators to make their content available online.



One of the outgoing chairman's major legacies is the success of the Linked Content Coalition (LCC)<sup>1</sup>, an EPC inspired idea following Vice-President Neelie Kroes's call for "Big Ideas for the Digital Agenda". The LCC brings together, for the first time, every part of the content industry jigsaw (images, TV and film, press, music etc) to share expertise to develop new technology to make copyright work for multi-media on the web. The innovative data model developed by the LCC, already adopted by the UK's Copyright Hub<sup>2</sup> and now being trialled via the ongoing EU co-funded RDI project<sup>3</sup> looks set to become a new standard approach for the expression of online rights information. As an initiative, it is a prime example of how the EPC responds to the concerns of EU regulators with actions as well as words.

Mr Balsemão said: "Over 100 million newspapers are sold each day, many via apps and online subscriptions and over 360 million Europeans read magazines regularly. The rich body of Europe's scientific technical and medical journals are downloadable and searchable while 9 million book titles are published each year, 2.5 million of which are already in digital formats. None of this would have been possible without a stable EU copyright framework. Copyright has been the cornerstone of creativity for more than 300 years and will, if allowed to do so, help to withstand the onslaught from American internet juggernauts whose anti-competitive behaviours threaten the very fabric of Europe's cultural heritage."

Mr **Juan Luis Cebrián**, Executive Chairman and Editor-in-Chief of Grupo Prisa in Spain, said: "Francisco Pinto Balsemão has made a crucial contribution to journalism and to European politics. It is impossible to underestimate the enormity of the role Balsemão has played through the media in the development of a modern democracy and culture in Portugal. He has led the European Publishers Council with courage and tenacity, defending the interests of newspaper publishers in difficult economic times and during profound technological change. But more important than that, is his lifelong defence of freedom of expression and the core values of journalism. We all owe him an immense debt of gratitude."

Dr **Hubert Burda**, Chairman of Burda Media in Germany said: "Francisco Balsemão's chairmanship of the EPC could not have been at a more important and exciting time. His exceptional leadership steered us towards our common goals through years of innovation and transformation, and together we have achieved so much."

Mr **Carlo De Benedetti**, President of L'Espresso in Italy said: "I would like to thank Francisco for all the efforts and care that he dedicated to his job in such difficult times for newspaper companies, not only in Europe."

Mr. **Harri – Pekka Kaukonen**, CEO of Sanoma Corporation in Finland said: "Francisco's commitment to defend a free press and interests of private media in Europe through all these years has truly made a strong impression on us."

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.linkedcontentcoalition.org](http://www.linkedcontentcoalition.org)

<sup>2</sup> [www.copyrighthub.co.uk](http://www.copyrighthub.co.uk)

<sup>3</sup> [www.rdi-project.org](http://www.rdi-project.org)



Mr **Christian Van Thillo** who was amongst the founding members of EPC in 1991 today takes over as Chairman of the EPC with the unanimous support of members. In a meeting in Brussels to say farewell to Mr Balsemão and to welcome Mr Van Thillo, members declared that a strong EPC was more important than ever before. Christian Van Thillo is CEO of De Persgroep, which owns newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations, and digital media in Belgium and the Netherlands.

On the occasion of his election by the members of the EPC Christian Van Thillo said: “It is an honour and privilege to take on the Chairmanship of the European Publishers Council at the moment that a new European Commission and Parliament take office. Francisco’s dedication to the news media industry has been inspirational and his input into the EPC’s work with Europe’s regulators has been tireless. We at the EPC, and indeed the whole news media industry in Europe, owe him a debt of gratitude. I look forward to working with all my colleagues in the EPC to help shape the future of Europe’s digital media market.”



For further information, please contact Heidi Lambert on Tel: +44 7932 141 291 or EPC Executive Director Angela Mills Wade on Tel: +44 1865 310 732

**Note to editors:**

Photograph of Francisco Pinto Balsemão attached.

Photograph of Christian Van Thillo attached.

**EPC Achievements include:**

- Recognition for *advertising self-regulation*;
- *Exemption for journalists* from 1995 Data Protection directive;
- *Media ownership directive* scrapped;
- *VAT – first amendment in EP on zero rating*;
- *Exemption for journalists and media* from statutory Market abuse control;
- *Media exemption* from “Rome II” to *stop forum shopping in privacy and libel cases*;
- Gained a right to *short news extracts*,
- Gained the *exemption for the press online from the Audiovisual media services regulation*;
- Shaped existing *copyright framework* of law;
- The EPC *action against Google’s abuse of a dominant position*;
- The EPC’s *Big Idea for the Digital Agenda* gained high level Commission support and led to formation of *Linked Content Coalition* and *EU co-funding for major copyright licensing project (RDI)*.
- The EPC approach through two *copyright vision papers* and our leadership of the *Linked Content Coalition* has *helped change direction of copyright policy* at EU level.
- We complement our work with our annual publication of the *Global Media Trends Book*.