



**EPC** | European  
Publishers  
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## News Release

### HIGH LEVEL GROUP RESORTS TO REGULATION TO PROTECT PRESS FREEDOM IN EUROPE

A High Level Report funded by the European Commission with the intention of making recommendations that would protect press freedom, especially from interference from the State, has come up with recommendations for media companies to be tightly regulated by independent bodies (to be monitored by the European Commission) that would have the power to investigate complaints and enforce fines. The group also says that there should be harmonization of media law across the 27 member states.

Whilst Europe's leading publishers welcome the group's commitment to upholding press freedom by tackling state interference and considering financial support for quality journalism, we regret that this led them to some recommendations which, if enacted, could impose Europe wide rules of the game on an independent, free press. The European Publishers Council (EPC) will oppose the idea that the European Commission should regulate "independent" national media councils.

EPC Executive Director Angela Mills Wade said: "The High Level group has missed a golden opportunity to address the real challenges and to support an independent press that promotes democracy and cultural diversity throughout the world.

"We are quite taken aback by the report's recommendations. The EU does not have legal competence under the treaties to harmonise substantive media laws such as defamation. Any notion of harmonised rules of the game, monitored by the EU, is anathema to press freedom - the very thing the group was tasked to protect."

Angela continued: "Independent press councils and self-regulatory bodies or press ombudsmen exist already in most EU countries and operate according to national cultural and social mores. Journalists follow codes of ethics and high professional

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standards are already adapted to the digital environment.”

Commissioner Neelie Kroes has welcomed the report but says that a political debate will follow with all stakeholders invited to give their feedback.

Angela added: “The free and independent press faces deeply challenging times in spite of soaring audiences online, where profits are elusive.

“We welcome the recognition that competition rules need to adapt to the new media eco-system because it is a fact of digital life these days that most content made available online by publishers, whether free at the point of consumer access or behind a pay-wall is re-used widely - mainly by commercial organisations, but without authorisation by the rights holders, and without any remuneration.

“We don’t need new media regulation, however; what we need are the right conditions for the long term viability of quality journalism and professional media. We look forward to taking part in the debate that follows.”

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**ENDS  
22 JANUARY 2013**

**Note to editors:**

The full terms of reference are here:

[http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/media\\_taskforce/doc/pluralism/hlg/hlg\\_tor.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/media_taskforce/doc/pluralism/hlg/hlg_tor.pdf)

The full report of the group is here:

[http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/media\\_taskforce/doc/pluralism/hlg/hlg\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/media_taskforce/doc/pluralism/hlg/hlg_final_report.pdf)



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