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CULTURAL, EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

REPORT*

“The Role of Mass Media in the Socio-Economic Development of the BSEC Member States”

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Receiving and using information in the interests of the socio-economic development of a society is an essential need not only for every person, but also for the public administration. Partnership and interaction between the government and society is most important direction in strengthening democratic civil society, which ensures the effectiveness of the activities of public bodies. A special role in the improvement of the rule-of-law state and civil society is played by mass media as a tool for expressing the will of people and an important component of formation of the political, social and legal culture of citizens.

2. In the age of the rapid development of information technologies, when news reach people throughout the world in seconds by means of different media platforms, almost every year new internet and social media services and opportunities are created. The scope and pattern of information development is both an indicator and a factor determining the progress of a society, since the impact of media information determines to a greater extent the socio-economic awareness and behaviour of citizens. The ongoing process of informatization of societies enhances the role of the mass media as a comprehensive source of information, increasing the importance of the media in the socio-economic development of states, including the BSEC Member States. At the same time, it should be emphasized that the global interactive media environment, in which the population has equal opportunities to participate, creates risk of spreading false, misleading, fake information.

3. PABSEC has been attaching attention to the role of mass media in the Black Sea Region and has adopted the relevant recommendations. The Recommendation “The Role of Mass Media in Promoting Cooperation in the Black Sea Region” (47/2000) emphasises the paramount role of the mass media for the creation and development of any democratic society and notes that the variety of mass media offers a certain degree of pluralism. Based on this Recommendation in 2001 and 2002 the PABSEC brought together the representatives of the Public Broadcasters of the BSEC Member States at the annual meetings to exchange information and experience and discuss existing problems. At the same time, the 1993 Black Sea Convention on Cooperation in the Fields of Culture, Education, Science and Information, states that “The Parties will encourage cooperation among national information agencies, unions of journalists, periodicals, television and radio networks including exchange of publications, television and radio programmes”.

4. Due to the topicality of the issue that mass media influence continues to expand and develop, especially with the technological progress, the PABSEC Cultural, Educational and Social Affairs Committee decided to focus on the “The Role of Mass Media in the Socio-Economic Development of the BSEC Member States” as the main item of the agenda of its 60th Meeting. The contributions to the Report were received from the National Delegations of the Republic of Armenia, Greece, the Republic of Moldova, the Republic of North Macedonia, Romania, Russian Federation, the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Türkiye and Ukraine. Reference material was also obtained from the official websites of the UN, the UNDP, the UNESCO and other relevant international organizations and sources on the Internet.

II. THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE BSEC MEMBER STATES

5. The mass media are an inseparable part of modern society. The development of society today is more dependent on the media, which are direct participants in all events and express the interests of different segments of society. The development of media sector depends on cultural traditions, economic status, the strength of democratic institutions and the level of professionalism of journalists. The news plays a crucial role in updating people with the current

affairs. Based on the information received through the media, the society forms its own opinion about what is happening. In the process of shaping global information community, significant changes take place in the economic and social spheres. Global information environment, as well as common economic and political unions in different countries and continents are created, social institutions are mediatized and virtualized, mechanisms for forming political culture change, various information and economic platforms are established, etc.

6. The media is often called the “fourth branch of power”, because it has a powerful influence on social awareness, which in turn play one of the decisive roles in shaping public opinion and formulating the public interests of citizens. Public opinion exists in almost all spheres and areas of society, but public interest is mobilised only on those topical problems, facts and events that are covered by the mass media. The media constitutes an important element for improving the governance, enhance state-citizen relations, support informed democratic decision-making, decrease public tolerance of corruption or poor governance, changing attitude towards corruption in society and decreasing tolerance for it, etc.

7. It is noteworthy to emphasize the important role of the media in enhancing economy, creating a necessary information field for attracting investors, and also offering objective and constructive criticism of the government activities. The achievement of progress in the socio-economic development requires a concerted level of coordination between the government and the citizens. The media also serves as a conduit for the people awareness regarding new economic projects and socially relevant state targeted programs.

8. Creating a high-quality information product and bringing it to the public is the primary task of the media for the effective implementation of targeted state programs. In the context of the modern development of the media industry, the level of interest in print media continues to decline and is noticeably less attractive compared to television, radio, the Internet and social networks. Despite the growing popularity of Internet resources, broadcast television remains the dominant form of mass media for informing the population. To this end, it is necessary to ensure the receipt of complete and objective information on socio-economic development by increasing the efficient interaction between the population, the media and public authorities and building constructive dialogue.

9. Globalization and digitalization are expanding the virtual social media environment, providing numerous opportunities for development of new values in society, especially in the new generation. In recent years, the transition from traditional media to social networks has accelerated in many areas of life, including socio-economic development. Communication and information media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube started to build new social connections, allowing people to share experiences and comments anytime, anywhere. Today, social networks serve not only as a channel for the dissemination of information, but also as a new means of measuring public opinion. Social networks are increasingly being used by officials to ensure due social awareness, analyse the results, and identify socially relevant socio-economic problems. Nevertheless, one of the serious barriers preventing the full and active use of social media in business sector is the unresolved problems of legal regulation.

10. The media is a mirror of a society and along with achievements and positive changes, also reflect negative phenomena, including the fight against corruption, which affects socio-economic welfare of people. The media are the most effective tool in exercising public control over authority and combating corruption, using to maximum extent the resources of print and electronic media, as well as the potential of bloggers and journalists. A strong, free, and independent media sector ensures an effective fight against corruption by informing the general public about the effectiveness of the results achieved in the fight against corruption, promoting

its timely detection and preventing the consequences, ensuring transparency and openness of public control.

11. Media is an essential tool for social cohesion. Media can also be used to bridge cultural divides, to advocate for positive social change, and to inform citizens about their rights and responsibilities. Journalists today are the architects of worldview values, the creator of social reality, highlighting information communications that transform modern society. When used effectively, media can play an important role in building a just and equal society. Media can serve as an effective tool for grassroots mobilization and fundraising, enabling communities to influence decision making.

12. At present, one of the topical problems is the pace and extent of the dissemination of fake news and false information in all spheres of life through digital media and social platforms. Fake news problem today is a pressing issue all over the world. Discussions around fake news decreases media credibility, doubting their objectivity and impartiality. There are serious concerns about the erosion of criteria and standards for the preparation and dissemination of information, which paves the way to distortion of vision. The level of trust in the media also influences its impact, both on state authorities and on society in general. In different countries, this issue is being addressed through the introduction of respective laws criminalising dissemination of false information, and the work of law enforcement agencies.

13. It is noteworthy to mention that the PABSEC has paid special attention to the cooperation in media sector and has organised several events related to this field. The Declaration, signed at the First Meeting of the Public Broadcasters of the BSEC Member States, held in Bucharest, Romania on 16-17 May 2001 has demonstrated the commitment of the public broadcasters to the basic principles of freedom of expression and information, as well as promoting friendship and understanding, stability peace and raising public awareness about the challenges of the BSEC Organisation.

14. The Second Meeting of the Public Broadcasters of the BSEC Member States was held in Chalkidiki, Greece on 16-17 May 2002 upon the invitation of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation. During the meeting the participants made a substantial exchange of views on ways and modalities of fostering their cooperation taking up the subjects of the public broadcasters in the new stage of the BSEC, international co-productions, training courses, exchanges of news programmes, cooperation in the field of radio, institutional framework of cooperation, participation in the EU programmes, common policy in international gatherings, interaction on the international arena, activity of the Coordination Group.

Situation in the BSEC Member States

15. The policy of the media and telecommunication services in *the Republic of Armenia* is regulated by the legal documents, including The Law “On Mass Media” adopted in 2003. This law regulates relations pertaining to the implementation of media activities, defines the guarantees of ensuring the right of freedom of speech, the accreditation of journalists, the right of reply and refutation regarding the disseminated information, and the grounds for which the implementers of media activities are not subject to liability.

16. The main sectoral law regulating the telecommunications sector in the Law of the Republic of Armenia “On Electronic Communications”, which provides the legal basis for the provision of telecommunications services in the country and includes detailed provisions on regulation, licensing, and technical requirements. The Law defines the basic concepts, general principles of regulation, the rights and obligations of participants in the telecommunications markets. The Law also defines the basic rules for connecting networks, exchanging traffic, and allocating

limited resources, such as radio frequencies and license numbers. The Law also establishes the basic norms for competition, including additional obligations for dominant market players.

17. One of the important laws in this area is the Law “On Freedom of Information”, which was adopted in September 2003 and became one of the advanced documents that was highly appraised by the international experts. The Law ensures the realization of the right to access and receive information.

18. One of the other major areas of activities of the Armenian Government is the issue of guaranteeing that everyone is equal before the law, the prevention of manifestations of discrimination, as well as the ensuring of exercise of rights. The Government resolutely continues its policy for preventing and pursuing torture and inhumane and degrading treatment. The Government also guarantees the legal and practical conditions required for truly free and unimpeded activities of human rights activists. The Government attaches great importance to raising public awareness about human rights and the ways to protect them - encouraging officials of state and local self-government bodies, as well as the public and citizens to protect their rights and ensuring the ongoing enhancement of the knowledge of citizens about human rights and the ways to protect them.

19. The policy and some provisions regarding the media activities and telecommunications services in the Republic of Armenia are reflected in the Memorandum of Cooperation, which was signed on 19 April 2022 between the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia, the Standing Committee on Science, Education, Culture, Diaspora, Youth and Sports of the National Assembly of the Republic Armenia and the Committee for the Protection of Freedom of Speech. The main goal of the cooperation envisaged by the memorandum is the modernization of the media development policy in the Republic of Armenia and the reform of the legislation regulating the media activities in accordance with contemporary challenges and new conditions for telecommunication technologies the development using best international practices and norms. The reforms to be carried out through joint efforts also aim at improving the information space in the country, promoting quality journalism, reducing disinformation, hatred and violence.

20. In *Greece*, the General Secretariat for Communication and Media of the Presidency of the Government is responsible for the national legislation related to the media and telecommunication services. Its main mission is to provide timely and accurate information to the public regarding the government’s work, to regulate on various media and audiovisual matters as well as to exercise its supervisory responsibilities over the Athens News Agency - Macedonian Press Agency (ANA-MPA) and the National TV broadcaster (ERT AE). Furthermore, it is charged with the competence of policymaking on media, taking into consideration the evolution of technology and it is responsible for the application of the law in the media industry.

21. The fundamental laws related to the media and telecommunication services are: Law No. 4779/2021, which regulates the audiovisual media, in all its forms of promotion and reproduction; namely, traditional television, custom-made audio-visual services, video-sharing platforms and social media services exclusively with regard to their user-generated audiovisual content. This law has strengthened the independence of its media regulator, the National Council on RadioTelevision (NCRTV) and includes provisions aimed at reinforcing the independence of the NCRTV from the Government and other state entities. Law No. 5005/2022, which promotes transparency by publishing information, including the publisher, the director and the chief editor, the administrator and the domain name beneficiary. For the first time, the new law sets up a Registry for Print Media (MET) as well as a Registry for

Electronic Media (MHT), within a modern digital environment, where all print and electronic media service providers are called to register, in order to have access to state advertising.

22. As far as the policies and national programs regarding the activities and protection of the mass media freedom are concerned, Greece has already launched a series of initiatives, aligned with the Commission Recommendation (EU) 2021/1534, with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding that contains a common framework of cooperation which includes, inter alia, the preparation and submission of proposals for legislative and non-legislative initiatives to ensure the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists and other media professionals, the documentation and specialization of policies and initiatives regarding online safety, digital literacy and empowerment of journalists. In addition, a Training School on the Safety for Journalists was successfully held for the second time by the Peace Journalism Laboratory that focused on the two top issues on the European agenda in relation to the safety of journalists and the freedom of the press.

23. The work of the Conference traced how the State, journalists and media respond to the relevant challenges. Finally, an International Training Center for the Safety of Journalists and Media Professionals was established, based in the city of Thessaloniki. Specifically, on 20 January 2023, upon the initiative of the General Secretariat for Communication and Media of the Presidency of the Government, a working meeting was held in Thessaloniki, with the participation of local stakeholders. The International center studied issues related to the safety of journalists and media professionals, both in war zones and crisis areas, as well as everyday issues where threats to journalists and media professionals and freedom of information arise. In addition, it has provided practical training, which included, inter alia, advisory services, assistance in providing appropriate equipment before and during the journalistic mission and psychological support.

24. With regard to the Institutional mechanisms and measures taken at the national level in the terms of the independence of the mass media, a Task Force has been created, which convenes once a month and covers the following topics: data collection, reporting attacks against journalists, security of journalists in conflict situations, digital safety, digital transformation, online media, legal harassment etc. During the year 2021, an important and ambitious program was completed for the support of the companies that suffered the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, including newspapers of national circulation as well as regional and local newspapers and magazines and the content providers of regional TV stations, radio stations and electronic media. The program had a budget of €18.5 million and supported 697 large, medium and small-sized companies at local, regional and national level. A Grant for Transport & Printing Paper costs was given in order to support the print media sector during the pandemic. A Reduced Postal Tariffs for Regional and Local Press was also provided for the circulation of local and regional newspapers and magazines within the country.

25. Freedom of expression and media independence are crucial to the functioning of a democratic society. Thus, *the Republic of Moldova* has undertaken to transpose and implement European directives and best practices related to the legislative framework in the field of mass media. The first progress was registered in 2018, when the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova adopted the National Concept for the Development of Mass Media in the Republic of Moldova. This document serves as a reference point for public policies in the media field, policies aimed at strengthening the role of the media system in ensuring the citizens' constitutional right to information and in strengthening a democratic society. The document also establishes the regulatory framework for media activity, which will ensure its operation on democratic principles and in a secure media space. In the same way, the legal and economic

framework is regulated ensuring the management of the media field as a specific economic agent under the conditions of the market economy and fair competition.

26. The adoption in the same year of the Code of Audiovisual Media Services of the Republic of Moldova was an important result, which contributed to the creation of a more pluralistic environment and to the consolidation of the country's efforts to transpose and implement the EU Directive on audiovisual media services. Also, the recent changes made in the Code (June/November 2022) aim to ensure the legal regime of property and strengthen the mechanism for securing the audiovisual informational space. In 2022, the Strategy for Audiovisual Development for the years of 2023-2027 was adopted, which represents an alignment of the planned actions with the provisions of the EU-Republic of Moldova Association Agreement, according to European standards and international best practices.

27. In 2022, the authorities of the Republic of Moldova and the representatives of civil society cooperated on the dimension of securing the national informational space to counter disinformation and manipulation using the media space, especially in the context of the war in Ukraine. The amendments voted in June 2022 to the Code of Audiovisual Media Services brought a series of improvements to the sanctions framework for the content classified as disinformation. The toughening of fines and the reduction of the number of sanctions required for requesting the suspension or withdrawal of the broadcasting license have succeeded in limiting the manipulative information flows, with a hint of disinformation. Thus, on 16 December, the Commission for Emergency Situations of the Republic of Moldova adopted the decision to suspend, during the state of emergency, the broadcast licenses for six television channels (Primul in Moldova, RTR Moldova, Accent TV, NTV Moldova, TV6 and Orhei TV). In 2022 alone, the six TV stations were imposed 84 sanctions, cumulatively.

28. The reason for the suspension of broadcasting licenses was to protect the national information space and prevent the risk of disinformation through the spread of false information and attempts to manipulate public opinion. Also, in this regard, a Coordinating Council for ensuring informational security, with four levels - media, cyber, operational, civic-private, was established under the Government of the Republic of Moldova. The amendments of the Code of Audiovisual Media Services (CAMS) banned, in the media services, the disinformation, audiovisual programs with informative, informative-analytical, military and political content that were produced in states other than the EU, the USA, Canada and the states that ratified the Convention on cross-border television and audiovisual programs that, regardless of their origin, justify wars of aggression, deny war crimes and crimes against humanity or incite hatred.

29. At the same time, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova made changes to the Law on Electronic Communications, which completed the transition process to terrestrial digital television. The new amendments also provide for a mechanism of state aid, which primarily targets the national digital multiplex provider. Although there are visible attempts to diversify their sources of funding, most independent media operate largely from external grants, which constitute at least half of their annual editorial budgets, a fact that does not allow most media institutions to adopt sustainable financial models, which would ensure them true economic and editorial independence. Experts in the field believe that, in the realities of the Republic of Moldova, editorial independence cannot be found a priori in politically affiliated mass media, in those financed by the state or by structures with business interests.

30. The Law on Media of the *Republic of North Macedonia* regulates the basic principles and conditions to be fulfilled by media publishers (print media publishers and broadcasters) in the performance of their activities, and ensures the protection of minors, the editor-in-chief and

editorial board, the right of a journalist to express his/her opinion and position and refuse an order, that is, task, protection of sources of information, publicity of media publishers and the right to correction and response to published information. Media content is not subject to this law.

31. The Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services regulates the rights, obligations and responsibilities of broadcasters, providers of on-demand audiovisual media services and operators of public electronic communication networks that broadcast or rebroadcast program services of broadcasters. The main purposes of this law is to ensure in the Republic of North Macedonia: the development of audio and audiovisual media services, the promotion of freedom of expression, the development of independent production, encouragement, promotion and protection of the cultural identity, language and traditions of the communities in the Republic of North Macedonia, respect for cultural and religious differences, cultural encouragement of public dialogue between citizens with the aim of consolidating mutual understanding and tolerance for the improvement of relations between different communities, encouragement of creativity, educational and scientific development.

32. The Republic of North Macedonia has ratified the relevant European and international legal documents that guarantee and regulate the protection of freedom of expression, such as the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms was ratified in 1997, and hence Article 10, which regulates freedom of expression. The Republic of North Macedonia has also accepted the European Convention "Television without 7 Frontiers", which was ratified in 2003. The Republic of North Macedonia is among the small number of countries in Southeast Europe that have accepted the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, ratified in 1997, which refers to enabling national minorities equal access to media and the possibility of establishing minority media in order to promote tolerance and enable cultural pluralism.

33. The freedom of media in the Republic of North Macedonia is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia. Article 16 guarantees freedom of thought and public expression of thought, freedom of speech, public performance, public information and the free establishment of institutions for public information. The Law on Audio and Audiovisual and Media Services guarantees freedom of reception and rebroadcasting of audio and audiovisual media services from the member states of the European Union and other European countries signatory to the European Convention on Cross-Border Television of the Council of Europe on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia.

34. Freedom of media may be limited only in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia. It is forbidden to publish, i.e. broadcast media content which threatens national security, to encourage the violent overthrow of the constitutional order of the Republic of North Macedonia, to call for military aggression or armed conflict, to encourage or spread discrimination, intolerance or hatred based on race, sex, religion or nationality. Beyond these prohibitions, it should be emphasized that the media publisher is independent in its editorial policy, i.e. in the implementation of its concept program and it is responsible for its operations in accordance with the laws that refer to this area.

35. **Romania** has taken the necessary measures to adapt the national law to the provisions of Directive 2010/13 of the European Union as amended by Directive (EU) 2018/1808 on the Audiovisual Media Services (AVMSD), in view of the changing market environment. The EU Directive was transposed into Romanian law by the Law 190/2022 on the modification and completion of the Audiovisual Law No 504/2002 and entered into force on 3 July 2022. Pursuant to the Audiovisual Law No 504/2002, as amended and supplemented, the National

Audiovisual Council (CNA), as the sole regulatory authority in the field of audiovisual media services, guarantees respect for the pluralistic expression of ideas and opinions in the content of audiovisual media services offered to the public, including the protection of political pluralism, encourages free competition and ensures the pluralism of sources of public information by issuing audiovisual licences and retransmission authorisations for the operation of radio and television broadcasting programme services.

36. The Council also ensures the protection of human dignity, the right to one's own image and the protection of minors, the protection of Romanian culture and language, the culture and languages of national minorities, as well as the transparency of the organisation, functioning and financing of the media in the audiovisual sector. The new audiovisual rules apply to all audiovisual media services, regardless of their means of delivery (this allows the regulation of audiovisual programmes/content to be technologically neutral) and aim to create a regulatory framework fit for the digital age, leading to a safer, fairer and more diverse audiovisual landscape.

37. Audiovisual Law No 504/2002, as amended, stipulates that CNA shall raise public awareness of the use of audiovisual media services by developing and promoting media literacy among all social groups, including through or in partnership with the Ministry of Education. As regards providers of video-sharing platform services, the Audiovisual Law specifies that they must establish effective measures and tools for audiovisual media literacy and increase users' awareness of those measures and tools.

38. The Audiovisual Law No 504/2002, as amended and supplemented, emphasises the "service" nature of radio and TV channels belonging to audiovisual service providers, specifying that "the broadcasting and retransmission of programme services shall ensure political and social pluralism, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, information and education, including scientific information, and entertainment of the public, while respecting fundamental human rights and freedoms" and reiterating the constitutional obligation to ensure "objective" information to the public.

39. Possible solution to the problem of regulatory fragmentation in the protection of media freedom in the EU may be the European Commission's new project for a regulatory instrument at Member State level to ensure the impartiality and integrity of the EU media market. On 16 September 2022, the European Commission proposed a Regulation establishing a common framework for media services in the internal market (European Media Freedom Act or EMFA), amending Directive 2010/13/EU (Audiovisual Media Services Directive). Described as "a new set of rules to protect media pluralism and independence in the EU", the regulation was accompanied by the Commission Recommendation of 16.09.2022 on internal safeguards for editorial independence and ownership transparency in the media sector, based on "best practices gathered from the sector".

40. The free and independent mass media activity in *Russia* is ensured by the Article 29 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, according to which censorship is banned, freedom of ideas and speech, as well as freedom of mass communication are guaranteed. In accordance with the Law of the Russian Federation No.2124-1 "On the Mass Media" of 27 December 1991, the mass media carry out their activities on the basis of professional independence. Interference in any form by officials or state bodies in the editorial and broadcasting policy of the media is a violation of professional independence, which is unacceptable in accordance with the current legislation.

41. At the same time, it is not allowed use of mass media for purposes of committing criminally indictable deeds, divulging information making up a state secret or any other law-protective

secret, disseminating material containing call for terrorism activities or publicly justifying terrorism and any other extremist information, spreading of broadcasts propagandizing pornography or the cult of violence and cruelty and uncensored swear language. A procedure for restricting access to such information has been established.

42. The Russian Federation does not have any regulatory bodies for the broadcasting sector. The media activities may be terminated or suspended only by decision of the founder or by a court in civil proceedings at the claim of the registering authority. The activities of Internet sites are regulated in accordance with the general rules of law. The legislation also provides the rules on restricting access to Internet sites that distribute information in violation of copyright. The Ministry of Digital Development, Telecommunications and Mass Media of the Russian Federation annually provides state support to print and electronic media for the implementation of socially important projects in priority areas of state policy (implementation of national projects; combating the distortion of history, patriotic, spiritual, and moral upbringing; strengthening interethnic relations, preserving languages and cultures of the peoples of Russia, etc.).

43. An important direction of state regulation of the media is to ensure the protection of traditional Russian family, spiritual and moral values. At the end of 2022, a federal law was adopted aimed at prohibiting the dissemination in the media of information that contributes to the formation of non-traditional sexual relations and preferences. The topical task for the state is to ensure the objectivity and reliability of information in the mass media. To this end, federal laws were adopted in 2019 aimed at combating the spread of false information on the Internet. In April 2020, criminal liability was introduced for the public dissemination of false information about circumstances threatening life and health of citizens; false socially significant information that entailing grave consequences. In 2022, federal laws were adopted introducing liability for the dissemination of false information about the actions of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation as part of a special operation and in relation to state bodies operating abroad.

44. The field of media in *the Republic of Serbia* is regulated by the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia ("Official Gazette of the RS" No. 98/06), the Law on Public Information and Media ("Official Gazette of the RS", No. 83/14, 58/15 and 12/16), the Law on Electronic Media ("Official Gazette of the RS", No. 83/14 and 6/16 - other laws), the Law on Public Media Services ("Official Gazette of the RS", No. 83/14, 103/15 and 108/16) and the Law on Ratification of the European Convention on Transfrontier Television ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 49/09). In 2014, the aforementioned laws were fully harmonised with European regulations and international standards.

45. In order to ensure a favourable environment for freedom of expression, the Law on Public Information and Media stipulates that any direct and indirect discrimination of programme editors, journalists and other persons involved in the public information sector is forbidden, in particular based on their political choices and beliefs or other personal characteristics; that it must not endanger the free flow of information through the media, as well as the editorial autonomy of the media, especially by putting pressure, threatening, or blackmailing editors, journalists or sources of information; that a physical attack on an editor, journalist and other persons participating in the collection and publication of information through the media will be punishable by law.

46. In accordance with the Law on Public Information and Media, the authorities responsible for public information affairs at the republic, provincial and local levels provide from the budget part of the funds to realise public interest in the field of public information and distribute

them based on conducted public tenders and individual grants, respecting the principles of granting the state aid and protection of competition, without discrimination.

47. The field of electronic communications in the Republic of Serbia is regulated by the Law on Electronic Communications (“Official Gazette of the RS”, No. 44/10, 60/13 - decision of the Constitutional Court, 62/14 and 95/18 - other laws) and regulations adopted based on that law. The current Law on Electronic Communications was adopted in 2010 and relies on the regulatory framework of the European Union in the field of electronic communications from 2002. The new law on electronic communications determines the rules and goals regarding the regulation of the electronic communications sector. Furthermore, the new Law encourages the development of connectivity and coverage of electronic communication networks and their use by all citizens and the economy, encourages market development and supports the improvement of the business environment, enables more efficient management and use of limited public goods, and provides additional protection for end users while enabling maximum benefits in terms of choice, price and quality of services.

48. The Constitution stipulates that everyone has the right to freedom of expression, i.e. to freedom of opinion and transmission and provision of information and ideas. The Constitution guarantees freedom of the media and stipulates that everyone have the right to establish a means of public information, without approval, in the manner provided by law. There is no censorship in the Republic of Serbia. The dissemination of ideas and information can be limited only in the cases provided by the Constitution, which is in accordance with Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, if it is necessary to prevent endangering public and national security, endangering the territorial integrity of the state, endangering health and morals, violations of human dignity.

49. The Constitution of *the Republic of Türkiye* and the Press Law are the two primary legal instruments that ensure the independence of the mass media in Türkiye. Article 28 of the Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye, states that the press is free, it cannot be censored and establishing a printing house cannot be made conditional on obtaining permission and depositing a financial security. The Constitution guarantees the freedom of the press and telecommunication services. In addition to the Constitution, Article 3 of the Press Law No. 5187, the pillar of the freedom of the press and broadcasting, declares that the freedom of press includes the right to obtain and disseminate information, criticize, interpret and create works, which is a clear indicator of the values adopted by Türkiye regarding freedom of press and broadcasting.

50. The primary legal instruments that regulate media and telecommunication services in the Turkish judicial system are the Constitution; the Press Law; Law on the Regulation of Broadcasts on the Internet and Fighting Against Crimes Committed Through These Broadcasts; Personal Data Protection Law; Press Labor Law; Turkish Penal Code; Turkish Civil Code; the Law on the Organization of the Press-Advertising Agency, and the Law on Misdemeanours.

51. The development of mass media has been effective on the transformation of societies of today’s world both socially and economically. The internet and social media, which have entered almost every home today, are also effective on consumer behaviour. In this context, according to the survey conducted by the Information Technologies Authority, the rate of households with internet access in Türkiye increased to 94.1% in 2022 from 92% in 2021. According to the same survey, the rate of individuals using the internet was 85%, and the rate of individuals using the internet regularly was 82.7%. In addition, the rate of individuals using e-government services was determined as 69%.

52. The Ministry of Commerce of Republic of Türkiye announced the e-commerce statistics for the first half of 2022 through the Electronic Commerce Information System (ETBIS). Accordingly, the total e-commerce volume in Türkiye has reached 348 billion TL during the first 6 months of 2022, indicating an increase of 116% compared to the same period of the previous year. The volume of retail e-commerce volume was realized as 233 billion TL during the same period. In addition, the number of orders placed online has increased by 38 percent from 1 billion 654 million TL during the first 6 months of 2021 to 2 billion 294 million TL during the same period of 2022.

53. Along with the increasing use of mass media and social networks due to the advances in technology, complaints have also increased in the virtual environment and misuse of personal data and information has become widespread. In this context, the Digital Media Commission was established in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye in 2020 in order to prevent grievances and use of the Internet in a way that violates individuals' personality, privacy and other fundamental rights and freedoms or that harms the physical and psychological development of children. The said Commission executes the functions of assessment, consultation, reporting, and giving advice and feedback regarding the misuse of internet and technology.

54. An integral component of the socio-economic development of *Ukraine* is the efficient development of the media and an efficiently functioning information services market. Developed media and a well-functioning information services market contribute to economic development (development of entrepreneurship and business) and social development (strengthening of democracy and transparency). The main threat to the development of media and the functioning information services market in Ukraine today is the full-scale armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. The aggressor deliberately destroys the information infrastructure of Ukraine, hunts Ukrainian independent journalists and tries to pollute the information space with its propaganda, which hinders socio-economic development and also poses an existential threat.

55. At the same time, the effective work of the media in war situation is, prior of all, not about socio-economic development, but rather about the possibility to provide maximum information to the society about the hostilities and get it prepared for all scenarios. Despite the burden of a full-scale war, the Ukrainian society and the government managed to maintain a balance between the interests of national security and freedom of speech.

56. With the aim to protect the national information space and establish effective rules for the functioning of the information services market, a number of steps have been taken in cooperation with the Parliament, the most meaningful of which was a large-scale media reform in Ukraine and the adoption of the Law of Ukraine "On Media". The new Law represents the implementation the EU Directive on audiovisual media services in the legislation of Ukraine, ensuring fair regulation of both traditional and online media.

57. Creating favourable conditions for the functioning of new media is a prospective area for the economic development in Ukraine. At the same time, the protection of the activities of the media is the key to guaranteeing freedom of speech and the right to access information.

58. Ukraine, both its civil administration and its military command, provides the best conditions for the work of representatives of foreign media in Ukraine covering information on hostilities. Ukraine invites its partners, including the PABSEC, not to stand aside and join the support of the Ukrainian media affected as a result of the Russian aggression.

III. INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND FRAMEWORK

59. Global media organizations are broad wide and continuously develop. They refer to various agencies that conduct diverse activities, from content production to regulation. Some media organizations such as media corporations play a key role in globalization as they produce and disseminate cultural and social products around the globe.

60. *The United Nations* recognizes the important role of independent media in bringing good governance and increasingly demanded by citizens across the globe. People want their voices to be heard and they want institutions that are transparent, responsive, capable and accountable. In defining the central importance that information plays in sustainable development, an UN highlights how information empowers people to determine their own development path. The sustainable development must be a process that allows people to be their own agents of change: to act individually and collectively, using their own ingenuity and accessing ideas, practices, and knowledge in the search for ways to fulfil their potential.

61. Primary aim of *the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)* is to contribute peace and security in the world by promoting collaboration among nations through education, science, culture and communication. UNESCO's Constitution stresses the need for information and communication within and between nations. It links the free flow of ideas to the broader objective of preventing wars and "constructing the defences of peace" by "advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples" so that "suspicion and mistrust between the peoples of the world" no longer exists. In November 2020, UNESCO strengthened its work to support media viability by launching an initiative with the aim of addressing the global emergency facing independent news organizations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The media viability initiative, launched in partnership with the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), includes original research and data collection on the extent of the viability crisis. This initiative benefits from the support of UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), an intergovernmental body that has worked for over 40 years.

62. Since its inception, *the Council of Europe* has been deeply concerned with such topics as media pluralism, media transparency, freedom of expression, the right to information, data protection etc. Its activities in this field are particularly governed by Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Cooperation in the field of mass media is conducted on a multilateral basis under the European Cultural Convention (Paris, 1954), which enables the whole European continent to cooperate on equal terms. The right to freedom of expression and freedom of the media as protected by Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights are pillars of democratic security in Europe. The Media and Internet division of the Council of Europe is a reference point within the broad area of the work accomplished by different Council of Europe bodies on freedom of expression and media. The division also ensures the work of the Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI). The Media and Internet division issues publications on relevant topics and organises activities, such as conferences, seminars and other events to foster discussions on how to best preserve freedom of expression and information. The division works with various subjects under freedom of expression, such as protection of journalism and safety of journalists, decriminalisation of defamation, gender equality in the media, countering hate speech.

63. The necessity of an independent, robust and diverse news media sector is a cornerstone of the *European Union* democracies. According to the EU vision, funding for the news media sector requires complying with a set of key principles to ensure that the support provided does not lead to political interference or hamper the diversity of news media outlets. Finding a right

balance between public and private funding is needed, while considering the diversity of operators in the news media sector. Transparency in the way funding is allocated and channelled is an important prerequisite for the design of news media support schemes, as well as maintaining independence and safeguarding editorial responsibility of news media outlets. The Media Action Plan released by the European Commission in December 2020 is a timely initiative, considering the important impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is the first policy document explicitly setting out a vision and dedicated initiatives for the news media sector, including specific funding lines.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

64. The achievement of the social and economic well-being is one of the main priorities and objectives of every society. Being an essential part of the daily lives of the people, mass media plays a significant role in this regard, through the creation and development of democratic and knowledgeable societies. As such, the media industry encourages individuals to express their opinions on various topics, connects and unites people from all over the world through different platforms, making it easy for them to exchange and share knowledge, cultures and ideas. In order for the socio-economic development to be just and sustainable, citizens must productively participate in the decisions that shape their lives.

65. As important providers of information, the media representatives are more likely to promote better socio-economic situation by means of providing independent, good-quality information, with broad reach. An independent and effective media plays an essential role in improving governance, reducing corruption, increasing economic efficiency and stability, and creating positive socio-economic change.

66. Development of cooperation in the field of mass media in the BSEC Member States should be further strengthened and the peace and international understanding, mutual respect and tolerance among the peoples inhabiting the region should be facilitated. Exchange of cultural programmes on different platforms would contribute to the better knowledge and better understanding, which will undoubtedly lead to the strengthening of economic cooperation and the prevention of conflict situations. To this end, it is necessary to emphasize the important role of the mass media in the socio-economic development of the BSEC Member States and the deepening of relations between peoples and their countries, in ensuring peace and progress.

67. In the era of information technology development, the mass media have become one of the main resources of the world community, no less important than economic, scientific, technological, energy and environmental resources. Therefore, it is necessary to use all the achievements of information and communication technologies only for creative purposes and for the benefit of the development of states, the region and whole mankind.