

CMFE

COMMUNITY MEDIA FORUM EUROPE

To: Ms Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth
Minister of Culture, Media and Sports
The Government Offices
103 33 Stockholm
Sweden

Subject: **Avoid commercialisation and privatization of community radio in Sweden**

Nijmegen, 28 January 2013

Dear Ms Adelsohn Liljeroth,

In a letter to you, May 8, 2011, the CMFE (Community Media Forum Europe) board questioned the loopholes in the Swedish radio law, which make it possible for private commercial operators to take control of community radio frequencies under the cover as "ideell förening" (voluntarily association).

In a letter to CMFE June 8, 2011 The Swedish Ministry of Culture responded "*One of the priorities for the Government is the protection of freedom of speech where community radio plays a vital role. The legislation thus stipulates that licences for community radio should only be granted to non-profit associations. It is of course important that the legislation is not circumvented. As the Swedish Broadcasting Authority is in charge of both granting the licences and supervising the adherence to the rules your letter will be forwarded to the Authority. The Swedish Government intends to closely follow the developments in this area.*"

The Ministry then commissioned the broadcasting authority to investigate if community radio is being commercially exploited. A report was presented to the government a year later. In its conclusions the authority did not find it necessary to suggest any change of rules or law regarding community radio in Sweden. However, the inquiry made by the authority was based on a general poll of the community radio sector. The approximately 25 radio stations licensed as "närradio" but commercially operated have not been directly contacted or investigated. The authority admits that there are some commercial operators but does not regard this as a problem. This is understandable, as those operators are not *formally* breaking any law.

As it has been reported to the CMFE, commercial radios on community radio frequencies are still operating and also that a niche market is on the increase. Especially in the Skåne region there are several commercial outlets being organized into networks. A new commercial network "Retro FM" in Malmö will be using the community radio frequencies in neighbouring towns (Vellinge, Kävlinge and Landskrona). Two others commercial radio stations running as "närradio" Guldkanalen and "Fun Radio" together have reached six percent of the total radio audience in Malmö.



CMFE was supported by the EU under the 'Europe for Citizens Programma 2011'

CMFE Office Heliendoorstraat 3 6534 SH Nijmegen The Netherlands Tel: + 31 24 3550559 Mobile: + 31 6 34150581
www.cmfe.eu We prefer mail to be sent electronically to president@cmfe.eu

Bank: ABN-AMRO Address: Keizer Karelplein, Postbus 79, 6500 AB Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Our details: CMFE IBAN: NL10 ABNA 0441 2794 73 BIC: ABNANL2A

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It is also reported to CMFE that the people and organisations behind those radio stations in Sweden do not pretend themselves to be anything else than "kommersiell närradio". This clearly indicates that community radio in Sweden is becoming less a resource for non-profit associations and more an opportunity for commercial operators who can circumvent the formal commercial radio sector and its official responsibilities including concession fees to the government.

Our assessment is that in Sweden commercialisation and privatisation of community radio will not end but rather increase. CMFE is quite puzzled by the conclusions by the broadcast authority.

CMFE regard the privatisation of "närradio" as a most serious problem, which is also a unique situation in Europe. There are, according to a 2012 CMFE mapping research, more than 2.200 community radio stations in Europe. In Sweden we mapped 140 so called "community radio stations". Of these 140 stations, 25 stations are not 'community radio' at all. On the contrary, these are privately and for-profit operated and represent an unfortunate exception on the European community media sector.

Privatisation will be detrimental to the development of community media in Sweden. It is also contradicting the intentions put forward by the European Parliament 2008 and the Council of Europe 2009 for non-profit community radio. A privatisation of community media will deprive the civil society of a major resource for freedom of expression and cultural development, especially for minority groups.

CMFE therefore calls on the Swedish government to take the issue under continued serious consideration and still to take the necessary steps to preserve community radio in Sweden.

We kindly ask you to inform us on further developments and keep us updated. And if any further information is needed, CMFE is of course available for any questions.

Yours sincerely,


Pieter de Wit
President CMFE



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