

Community Media in Europe

In a 2012 mapping CMFE (in close cooperation with EPRA) made stocktaking of community radio and television in Europe. There are 2.237 community radio stations counted in 29 countries (of 47 European countries), to be compared with a world total estimate of 17.000 community radio stations. Most community radio stations are operated on a non-governmental non-profit basis with limited budgets. Almost all community radios are still broadcasting on analogue FM both in Europe and in other parts of the world.

Digital transition: switch off

The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) is promoting a digital transition for wireless television to be completed 2020. However, there is quite another discourse for wireless sound broadcasting. ITU has not yet indicated any need to replace analogue radio with any of the present four digital systems technically approved 2012. The ITU approved systems are DAB/DAB+, DRM30/DRM+, HD Radio (IBOC) and ISDB-T.

Community radio and digital radio

Today the DAB system (invented 1985 and introduced 1995) is promoted by and put in operation by large-scale broadcasters in some European countries. DRM+, a system of much later origin, has been introduced and tested in various countries as France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Slovakia and the UK. This system is promising to offer an extra digital choice for future small-scale local broadcasting as community radio. For DRM+ frequencies on the FM-band (Band II) (and also Band I and III) can be used, while for DAB a new Band III on higher frequencies is reserved.

In a letter to The European Commissioner for the Digital Agenda, Ms Neelie Kroes (Dec 19, 2011) CMFE and AMARC Europe concluded that *DAB is in many cases unsuitable for community (local) radio stations. We pleaded for preservation of the FM Band for radio broadcasting and introduction of DRM+ (on FM and eventually even on Band III) standard alongside DAB(+).*

In the response, Ms Kroes of the European Commission is *recognizing that the future of radio distribution will be multi-platform. It is stressed that public policy should be technology-neutral and open to adapt to future evolutions.*



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This remarks support community media in calls on national governments and regulatory bodies to include DRM+ in their radio digitalization programmes.



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Council of Europe and European Parliament

We find also support in two important European policy documents:

1. The *Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the role of community media in promoting social cohesion and intercultural dialogue* as adopted in 2009 by the Committee of Ministers of the 47 member states of the Council of Europe, in where it *"Draws attention to the desirability of allocating to community media, to the extent possible, a sufficient number of frequencies, both in analogue and digital environments, and ensuring that community broadcasting media are not disadvantaged after the transition to the digital environment."*
2. European Parliament resolution of 25 September 2008 on *Community Media in Europe (2008/2011(INI))*, in where the Parliament *"Calls on Member States to make television and radio frequency spectrum available, both analogue and digital, bearing in mind that the service provided by community media is not to be assessed in terms of opportunity cost or justification of the cost of spectrum allocation but rather in the social value it represents."*

The AMARC Europe conference *"Communication Rights in the Digital Environment"* (Brussels May 2012), which included CMFE participation, called upon the European Union and its Member States:

1. To take account of the community radio sector in all relevant European policies including those relating to media pluralism, information and communication technologies, the digital dividend, and cultural, social and economic affairs.
2. To provide specific legal and regulatory conditions that fosters the development of the community radio sector in analogue and digital environments.
3. To ensure the equitable allocation of broadcasting spectrum between public service, commercial and community broadcasting services on analogue and digital platforms.
4. To establish measures to provide public financial support to the sector including assisting community radio services that seek to adapt to digital platforms.
5. To ensure that digital broadcasting technologies and laws allow community radios the right to both own and operate their own transmission systems.
6. To ensure that the representative organizations of the community-



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broadcasting sector at the European level and in each Member State are systematically consulted on all relevant matters of European and Member State policy.

Conclusion

AMARC Europe and CMFE strongly support the retention of analogue FM. We do not see the urge for an imminent digital transition nor for a switch off. Without proper considerations for local and community radio such a transition can be detrimental to both the individuals and organizations operating community radio stations as well as their listeners as equipment has to be replaced in both ends. For a future transition, DRM+ as a transparent and low cost system should be available for community radios in Europe, next to the more expensive and complex DAB+ system for some situations.

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