CMFE

COMMUNITY MEDIA FORUM EUROPE

To: European Commission
       Directorate-General for Competition
       State aid Registry
       HT
       963 B-1049 Brussels, Belgium

Subject: Revision of the Communication from the Commission on the application of State
            aid rules to public service broadcasting - Questionnaire for public consultation -
            10.01.2008
Nijmegen, 10 March 2008

Introduction CMFE
The Community Media Forum Europe was founded in autumn 2004 in Halle. It is a Europe-wide platform including national federations such as OLON (the Netherlands), the Hungarian Federation of Free Radios or the Austrian VFRÖ. Currently we reach out directly to 16 European countries, from Turkey to the United Kingdom. Formally the CMFE is registered in Belgium as a non-profit-oriented association (ASBL – association sans but lucrative). CMFE represents community media, also referred to as educational, grassroots, participatory or civic media. Community media are characterised by the active participation of the various communities they represent in the process of creating news, information, entertainment and culturally relevant material, with an emphasis on local issues and concerns. They incorporate minority languages, new formats, other sounds, types of music, voices. They promote intercultural dialogue amongst different communities and interest groups. As participatory media, they are often part of large civil society networks, and act as meeting points and catalysts for a variety of organizations and movements. Their main purpose is so to serve their public. As such community media can be seen as a specific form of public service broadcasting next to the more institutionalized, mostly large scale public broadcasting companies.

In that way, our sector is subject to EU-regulation concerning public service broadcasting and, in this case, to the rules of the EC Treaty on State aid.

State of the community media in the European Union
We like also to mention an important report just published by the European parliament, 'State of the community media in the European Union, Brussels, European Parliament, 2007'[1]. Some quotes to further clarify the community media sector:
"Community Media (CM) constitute a dynamic and highly diverse part of the European Union's media landscape. Yet, little information is available regarding the sector's scope, its potential and on the status of CM organisations in different Member States."

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[1] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/expert/eStudies/download.do?file=17791

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"This study begins by examining a number of CM's contributions that are of public interest. These contributions are illustrated with several case studies of CM initiatives. The sector's activities are often of social, cultural, political and economic relevance. Its contributions towards the public interest form the basis of political support CM receive in several Member States. These contributions are perceived and prioritised differently by CM organisations and governments across the EU. Subsequently, the sector's public profile varies from country to country."

Comments on the Revision
Rather then using the questionnaire we prefer to provide our comments in more general terms.

1. Definition of the public service remit
We strongly suggest including explicitly the community media sector as media activities which can be viewed as part of the public service remit. Community media activities are directly related to "the democratic, social and cultural needs". They also contribute to media pluralism not only by providing specific and unique content but also by providing new media tools to citizens in the communities this media serve. Community media offer citizens unique possibilities to actively participate in media production an in that way they also contribute to 'media literacy'. Community media are to be regarded as a distinct public, not-for-profit and often small scale local media alongside national public service broadcasters and outside of the commercial media sphere. As such, it is to the competence of Member States to provide for the funding.

2. We agree with the observation that there is no apparent need to change existing rules regarding dual funding (e.g. subsidies from local and/or national governments, subscribing/sponsoring and/or advertisement and/or voluntary contributions by citizens).

3. Community media operate in a way that market distortions are (hardly) an issue. The media services, provided by community media, can't be provided and are, as far as we know, nowhere provided by commercial media services.

4. Into account has to be taken that community broadcasters are using not only TV programmes to fulfil their goals. Especially radio is often used as main broadcasting medium, but new media as internet and other digital broadcasting services gain more importance very fast. It is important to emphasis that new media possibilities do not replace 'old' media broadcasting services, but rather enhance them: a mixed media service is stronger then the sum of its individual media services. Possibilities to use new media services, next to being able to continue using traditional media, are of vital interest for community media, so subsidies from (local) governments should also be available for this new services.

In this context we want to underwrite an important notion of the Council of Europe, in his Submission to the Internet Governance Forum Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 12 to 15 November 2007, page 6: under 'Public service value on the Internet'[2]: *"The reliability (quality, authenticity and diversity) of information on the Internet is a key factor in making informed choices and decisions. This helps to foster the Internet as a space of trust, freedom and confidence. Developing and promoting 'islands of trust' on the Internet, for example by means of content provided by public service media or public authorities, is one important way forward which we are currently examining and developing at the Council of Europe."* And further on page 9 under 'Public service media': *"According to the latest Council of Europe standard-setting instrument on this area, states should ensure that public service media are present in all platforms, including the Internet. Such media have to be provided with the specific legal, technical, financial and organisational conditions necessary to this end."*

We hope that our contribution helps renewing the framework in a way that *European citizens* can profit from an even more vivid pluralistic media landscape and a new media environment, in where public service media, including community media, can not only maintain but also strengthen and broaden their important role in addressing the democratic, social and cultural needs of their societies.

Yours sincerely,

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2 Building a free and safe Internet, Council of Europe, submission to the Internet Governance Forum Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 12 to 15 November 2007
See also: Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)16 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures to promote the public service value of the Internet

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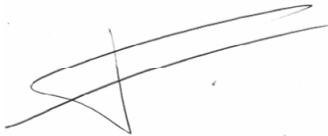*We prefer mail to be sent electronically to: pdw@olon.nl*
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