



CMFE
COMMUNITY MEDIA FORUM EUROPE

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European Media Organizations express support to Swiss public service and local TV and radio stations

Freedom of information at risk through the NoBillag-initiative

PRESS RELEASE

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On March 4th Swiss citizens will decide through a national vote whether to abolish the media reception fee, previously collected through the company Billag (hence the initiative's name "NoBillag"). The current Swiss media system is comprised of public service, private and community media, each sector with its specific functions and roles. The abolition of the national media reception fee would result in the loss of reliable sources of information and put democratic values at risk.

In a country characterized by great linguistic and cultural diversity, public service media operated by [SRG SSR](#) not only guarantees access to information in all 4 national languages (Swiss German, French, Italian and Romansh) but also ensures social cohesion and a sense of shared national identity. Public service media, through its online, digital and terrestrial distribution channels RSI, RTR, RTS, SRF and SWI, provides reliable news and quality journalism. Its mission is also to produce educational content and entertainment, to safeguard freedom of information and to enable the development of an informed public sphere, as required by Article 93, paragraph 2 of the Swiss Federal Constitution. Should the NoBillag initiative pass, precisely this article would be eliminated, thus undermining the fundamental right to freedom of expression and information of Swiss citizens. Last but not least, accessibility of information for citizens with visual, hearing or cognitive impairments is also guaranteed by public service media, whose main programs and news are subtitled and available as audio-description.

The yearly media reception fee does not only fund public service, but also 34 local TV and radio stations distributed across all 4 language regions. Of these, 9 radio stations are federated in the national association [UNIKOM](#) – Union of non-commercial radios – and fulfil the functions of community media. The sector is defined by Article 36 of the Swiss broadcast law (RTVG) as 'complementary' to public service and private broadcasting. Its main tasks are to provide open access to media production facilities and training, to produce local, diverse and complementary cultural content and to operate on a non-profit basis. Thousands of volunteers, including citizens with a migrant background, are actively involved in production and management of UNIKOM radio stations, with programs aired in more than 25 languages and with specific intercultural, multilingual training formats in place.

The Swiss media system has been a model for democratic countries. Thanks to its dedicated funding, public service broadcasting can provide stable professional opportunities and working conditions to journalists, artists, musicians and film makers and support a vibrant

cultural sector. Local and non-commercial broadcasting would not survive without the financial contributions it receives today. The consequences of abolishing such a model would endanger diversity, pluralism and freedom of information and would make Switzerland the only European country without public service media.

On Saturday, February 3rd several Swiss radio and TV studios opened their doors to the public to explain how they work and why it's important to reject the NoBillag initiative. The following European media organizations wish to express their full support to Swiss colleagues across all sectors, unions, schools and universities: [AMARC Europe](#) (World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters), [Community Media Forum Europe](#) (CMFE), [European Broadcasting Union](#) (EBU), [European Federation of Journalists](#) (EFJ).

EBU Director General Noel Curran said: *"As people's trust in social media platforms declines and as the spread of fake news and misinformation grows online, public service media is a source of independent information and debate. Trust levels for public service media, particularly on TV and Radio, are increasing. We should do all we can to ensure that public service broadcasting in Switzerland continues to provide an independent, diverse voice in an increasingly complex and divisive world."*

"Local, non-commercial radios serve and involve those members of society that are less represented in the mainstream, bringing their viewpoints into public discourse." commented Michael Nicolai, President of AMARC Europe.

"Community media are essential for a pluralistic media landscape, in Switzerland and elsewhere. We hope to see Swiss community radios continue to fulfil their important societal functions: support of non-mainstream arts & culture, inclusion of minorities and marginalized communities, as well as commitment to intercultural integration.", added Judith Purkarthofer, President of CMFE.

Mogens Blicher Bjerregård, President of the European Federation of Journalists, said: *"Public service media is ever more important in a media eco-system that increasingly reduces its capacity to provide quality pluralistic information. Often public service media is the only place left for investigative programs. We need public service media and must make sure that it remains or - in some countries - becomes free from political and commercial pressures."*

References - Council of Europe:

- ▶ [The role of Public Service Media](#) (2017)
- ▶ [Declaration on the role of community media in promoting social cohesion and intercultural dialogue](#) (2009)

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About AMARC

AMARC, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters, is the international non-governmental organization for the promotion, support and development of community radio world-wide. AMARC Europe is the European regional section of AMARC grouping together radios and their national federations from 23 European countries, a network of 250 community broadcasting services. The headquarters of AMARC Europe were established in Brussels, Belgium, in 2008. The principal activities of AMARC Europe are policy, research and advocacy; training and exchange of personnel; program exchange and co-productions; solidarity and co-operation between East, Central and Western Europe and with community radio broadcasters in other regions of the world. See also www.amarceurope.eu

About CMFE

Founded in 2004, Community Media Forum Europe (CMFE) represents networks, national federations and projects active within the Third Media Sector at the European level. Community media, taking the form of local, non-commercial broadcasting, play an important role in the promotion of media literacy, cultural diversity and democratization of communication. CMFE serves as a platform for dialogue and recognition of community media at the European level, as a clearly distinct media sector alongside national public service and private commercial media. According to a joint mapping by CMFE and the European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA) in 2012, a total of 2237 community radio stations and 521 community television stations are active across Europe.

CMFE has an observer status with the Steering Committee on the Media and Information Society (CDMSI) of the Council of Europe and is part of the CoE International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGO) Conference. Currently, CMFE has 106 members (of which 28 are National Federations or networks) from 23 European countries. Among its affiliate members it counts also individuals and organizations from Africa, Asia and North America. See also www.cmfe.eu

About the EBU

The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) is the world's foremost alliance of public service media (PSM). Our mission is to make PSM indispensable. We have 73 Members in 56 countries in Europe, and an additional 34 Associates in Asia, Africa, Australasia and the Americas. Our Members operate nearly 2,000 television and radio channels together with numerous online platforms. Together, they reach audiences of more than one billion people around the world, broadcasting in more than 120 languages.

We strive to secure a sustainable future for public service media, provide our Members with world-class content from news to sports and music, and build on our founding ethos of solidarity and co-operation to create a center for learning and sharing. Eurovision Media Services, our business arm, has an outstanding global reputation and is the first-choice media services provider for many media organizations and sport federations around the world.

We have offices in Brussels, Rome, Dubai, Moscow, New York, Washington DC, Singapore and Beijing. Our headquarters are in Geneva, Switzerland.

Discover more about the EBU on www.ebu.ch.

About EFJ

The European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) is the largest organization of journalists in Europe, representing over 320,000 journalists in 70 journalists' organizations across 44 countries.

Created in 1994 within the framework of the IFJ Constitution, the EFJ represents the interests of journalists' unions and associations and their journalists. It has established an independent legal status as an international non-profit association in February 2013.

The EFJ fights for social and professional rights of journalists working in all sectors of the media across Europe through trade unions and associations. The EFJ promotes and defends the rights to freedom of expression and information as guaranteed by Article 10 of the European convention on human rights. The EFJ supports its affiliates to foster trade union development and to maintain or create environments in which quality, journalistic independence, transparency, pluralism, public service values, and decent work in the media exist. The EFJ is recognized by the European Union and the Council of Europe as the representative voice of journalists in Europe. It has registered with the EU Transparency Register (No. 27471236588-39). The EFJ is member of the Executive Committee of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). The EFJ has its headquarters in Brussels, Belgium.

More about EFJ on <https://europeanjournalists.org>