

## 12<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AIPCE

### Introduction

The Alliance of Independent Press Councils of Europe (AIPCE) is a loose-knit network of European press councils for both press and broadcast media. Its annual conferences provide a forum for representatives of media self-regulatory bodies to discuss topics on journalistic ethics and to exchange ideas, experiences and information.

The Raad voor de Journalistiek (Netherlands Press Council) has organized the 12th Annual Meeting of the AIPCE, which was held on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> and Friday 5<sup>th</sup> of November 2010 in Amsterdam (most participants arrived on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> and left on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> of November). 76 professionals from 37 countries have attended the meeting.

### Wednesday 3 November

The participants were welcomed at the buffet dinner at NH Krasnapolsky, where the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Netherlands Press Council was celebrated.

### Thursday 4 November

#### Opening addresses

After **Victor Lebesque**, chairman of the Netherlands Press Council, welcomed all attendants, **Lydia Bremmer** held a speech on behalf of Marjan Hammersma, director Media, Literature and Libraries at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. In her speech Bremmer emphasized that the Dutch ministry stimulates press pluralism and tries to enforce the press sector itself by stimulating self regulation and accountability mechanisms.

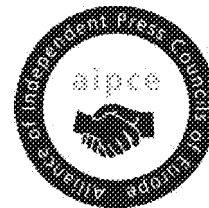
#### Country reports

In the next three sessions the participants shortly presented their country reports and highlighted some issues of special interest, followed by lively debates and discussions about, among other things:

- the development of ‘young’ press councils, mainly in Eastern Europe;
- transparency of press councils: the positive and negative sides of public considerations of complaints (like in Norway) and the publication of minutes of press council meetings (like in the UK);
- the relationship between the complaints procedures of press councils and court procedures. Although in some countries it not possible for a complainant turn to a press council and the court at the same time, it was underlined that the judgement of a case based on journalistic ethics is not the same as a judgement based on legal standards.

#### Online issues – jurisdiction of press councils

The last formal session of this day was introduced by **Antigoni Themistokleous** on behalf of the Cyprus Media Complaints Commission. In her presentation about ‘Online jurisdiction’ Themistokleous stated that press councils have to bear responsibility for allowing a relevancy gap to develop, were they ignore or refuse to deal with complaints about online publications. According to Themistokleous the issue of extending the jurisdiction of press councils to online publications is complex and in the deliberation on this matter press councils must address the question whether they will ever have the ability – and if so, to what extent – to harness online news sites.



In the discussion afterwards several participants explained the procedures of their respective press councils. In some countries press councils (for now) only deal with complaints about online publications of 'old' media (i.e. websites of traditional newspapers). However, in other countries press councils deal with publications of 'online-only' media as well.

Several interesting questions were raised, like:

- What to do if the online publication has been deleted before the complaint was studied by the press council?;
- Under what circumstances is an online publication to be considered as journalistic conduct?
- Should press councils deal with messages on blogs and Twitter?

Since this topic evidently is relevant for all press councils and taken into account that the new media are still developing, this matter certainly will be discussed further by email correspondence during the year and in the next meeting(s) of the AIPCE.

#### Side events

After a relaxing canal boat trip the participants were welcomed at the official residence of the mayor of Amsterdam. In her speech aldermen **Andrée Van Es** mentioned the change of the journalistic landscape, because of which press councils are faced with significant challenges. The day was closed by an informal diner at Café Restaurant Neva in the Hermitage of Amsterdam.

#### **Friday 5 November**

##### Consultancy in the Balkan area

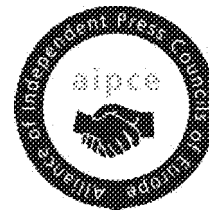
This conference day started with a presentation of **Ognian Zlatev** from the National Council for Journalist Ethics of Bulgaria. Zlatev gave an overview of the developments in the area and stressed the complexity of the matter because of political issues.

The introduction was followed by a lively debate and several statements of attendants from Balkan countries. It was mentioned that *local* consultants have more understanding about what is going on in the region and therefore such consultants might be more useful than consultants from outside the region. Besides, these local consultants cost less. The political and local will to develop freedom of the press and media self regulation are extremely relevant. Further it was accentuated that the area suffers from an image problem and that improvements are not recognized by external consultants. Although it is important that the attention for the region continues, the Balkan countries should 'not be treated as babies'. There should be 'partnership' in stead of 'patronage' with consultants and other press councils.

##### MediaAcT, a comparative research project on media accountability systems in EU member states as indicators for media pluralism in Europe

**Professor dr. Susanne Fengler**, initiator of this project, explained the main goals of the MediaAcT research and presented the first results. The researchers analyze the development and impact of established media accountability systems (e.g. press councils and codes of ethics) as well as new media accountability systems emerging in the Internet. The main goals of the project, which is funded by the European Commission, are:

- to investigate the quantity and quality of media accountability systems as prerequisites for pluralistic debates about media independence in times of growing media concentration;
- to compare the impact of established and innovative media accountability systems online on different media systems and journalism cultures in Europe and beyond;
- to develop policy recommendations for EU media policy makers, as well as incentives for media professionals and media users alike to actively engage in media accountability systems.



Fengler emphasized the importance of including the public in this project. Further she raised the question whether or not there will be any press councils in 20 years and mentioned the development of media self-regulation in entertainment form.

In the following discussion was mentioned that within the European Commission there is a lack of information about and recognition of the strength of media self-regulation. This gap could be filled by the report of Fengler and her team. Besides, the report might be useful for press councils dealing with online issues.

#### Online issues – readers' comments

As a kick off for the discussion **Ella Wassink** explained in her presentation 'Pre and post moderated platforms' that the German Press Council only deals with complaints on pre-moderated platforms. According to the German Press Council those platforms that offer comments without any moderation or with post-moderation only are not under journalistic control: this is not journalism but rather a pin board where no journalistic activity is involved.

In the debate afterwards the question was raised 'what should be in the competence of the press councils?' In some countries press councils are of the opinion that the editor in chief of the medium involved is responsible for the content of the whole website (in a lot of cases it concerns websites of traditional print media), including comments without any moderation or post-moderation only.

#### Privacy, public interest and social networking

In his introduction **Will Gore** clarified some decisions of the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) of the UK on this matter. According to the PCC social networks are a legitimate journalistic tool, but there are important restrictions on how they should be used. The 'public domain' is not a straightforward excuse for publishing delicate material. Further it can be legitimate for a journalist to contact individuals via social networks – applying to be a 'friend' – though rules on subterfuge apply and in cases involving grief, such approaches must be made with sensitivity. At last Gore raised the questions whether or not 'newspapers should be on Facebook', 'press councils should regulate journalistic Tweets' and 'press councils should Tweet'.

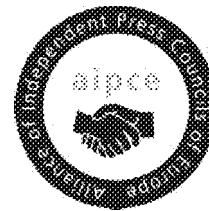
In the following discussion it appeared that several press councils have examples on dealing with these issues, all in different ways.

#### Initiative for an AIPCE-speaker

In his 'Initiative for a mutual voice of the European Press Councils' **Fernand Weides** from the Luxembourg Press Council pleaded for the election of a speaker (alternatively: a three-headed speaker council) for a term of one year until the next AIPCE meeting. The task of this speaker would be to represent the common interest of all AIPCE members in public. The common interests are defined either during the AIPCE meetings or through resolutions by circulation procedures (via email). Resolutions can only be taken unanimously and proposed resolutions should be communicated by the members early enough before the annual meeting so that the committees of the national Press Councils can form an opinion.

The introduction of Weides caused a lively debate, however there was no majority in favour of the proposal.

Nevertheless it was agreed that it is vital that all participants find opportunities to talk loudly and proudly about the AIPCE. The matter will be further discussed at the next annual meeting.



### Online issues – digital archives

In her presentation ‘A Enormous potential but more perilous use?’ **Antigoni Themistokleous**, PhD student at the University of Brighton, mentioned as a real challenge: the implication of media literacy initiatives to accomplish information literacy. According to Themistokleous policy makers and educators have a crucial role to play. Offering education, employment, communication opportunities equality and digital skills can be developed among those socially and technologically excluded. Introducing self-regulation might help to decrease online risks’ level.

In the following discussion several attendants explained the work of their respective press councils, which includes media literacy and educational programmes.

### The relationship between press councils and the resident, independent ombudsmen. Are we colleagues or competitors?

**Jacob Mollerup**, President of the Organization of News Ombudsmen (ONO), first explained the work of the ONO. He emphasized that both news ombudsmen and press councils are part of the media accountability system, and that all parts of this system are needed. In the opinion of Mollerup it is an advantage to have both. For all practical and principal reasons they can work nicely together – and supplement each other; there are small risks of tensions – but big advantages. Afterwards the question was raised whether or not a news ombudsman can be considered being independent from his editors. It was concluded that it is about earning trust, which is the same for press councils.

### Human rights and free speech

In her speech **Judge Dalia Dorner**, president of the Israel Press Council, stated that there is no democracy without human rights. Freedom of the press is both individual and institutional. It applies not just to a single person’s right to publish ideas, but also to the rights of print and broadcast media to express political views and to cover and publish news. A free press is one of the foundations of a democratic society. Journalism is not just a profession, but an occupation that exercises the right of free expression available to every citizen. Journalists have special responsibilities. The most basic responsibility in a free society is to practice ethical journalism. However, self-regulation of the press is not needed in states that do not recognize and protect the freedom of expression.

### Closing addresses

Apparently there are a lot of differences between countries with an ‘old’ media self-regulation system and countries with a relatively ‘new’ system. Nevertheless it is evident that all countries face the same problems concerning their images (building trust) as well as regarding the Internet. The meetings of the AIPCE are very useful to discuss all these issues and to exchange experience and knowledge. Next year the annual meeting will be held in Moscow.

### Side events

The day was closed by an informal diner at *De Kersentuin* followed by a concert of the *Koninklijk Concertgebouworkest* in the Concertgebouw.

Daphne Koene  
Secretary Netherlands Press Council