

**Speech by Madeleine de Cock Buning**  
**Chairperson of ERGA**  
**Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights**  
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Ladies and gentlemen,

The history of Europe is one of darkness and light.

Much of our past has been shaped by violence, intolerance and exclusion. The First World War. The Second World War. Events shaped by the basest instincts and feelings known to man.

But our continent also has been a beacon of human progress. The European Union, for example, has given us seven decades of peace and prosperity.

Europe at its best embodies the values of humanity: freedom of expression, freedom of information, freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Free and pluralist media protect these values. They inspire, educate, and hold the powers that be accountable. They ensure our media cannot be blinded and muted.

Which is happening right now. In Hungary, the Népszabadság daily has been taken offline in response to political pressure. And this is just one example of a wider pattern that is unfolding against a backdrop of an alarming increase in intolerance, xenophobia and discontent. So more than ever, we need free and critical media and media regulators who can protect them.

But Europe's regulators are under siege. In Croatia, only the fall of the government prevented the entire regulator's board from being fired. In Greece, vacant positions on the board have not been filled for a year, while the government has claimed powers that are crucial to independent media. And in Poland, the ability of the regulator to appoint board members and managers of public broadcasters has been eroded.

My fellow board members of regulators in Romania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary and Macedonia tell similar stories. And this should worry us! We need excellent media regulators, with real powers of enforcement

and sufficient manpower. But most of all we need media regulators who are independent.

Institutionally independent, meaning they are legally separate from the state. Functionally independent, in order to make fair and balanced decisions. Financially independent, so they can function efficiently and effectively. And intellectually independent, so they remain autonomous under pressure.

The proposed directive for Audiovisual Media Services is a step in the right direction and part of it, I am proud to say, was inspired by a report published by ERGA. Unfortunately, some MEPs have proposed amendments to the proposal that would curtail the independence of regulators and diminish the role of ERGA.

We cannot allow this. ERGA plays a vital role in Europe's media landscape. We not only independently advise the European Commission, but also enable all European regulators to share experiences and learn from each other. This ensures that they can each deliver optimal results, which in turn strengthens the freedom and independence of our media.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The history of Europe is one of darkness and light. And today, we are at a crossroads. We have enjoyed seven decades of peace, but the mood now is changing. I urge everyone in this room to make sure the media, regulators and ERGA can ensure we go down the right path. Thank you.