Dear Minister,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Imagine the following scenario: you wake up in the morning and you turn the radio on. You listen to the morning news. A little later, you get to read the daily newspaper. The selection of news and the comments very much resembles what you had already heard on the radio. After work, you sit in front of the TV set to watch the evening news and current affairs programme. Again, you find no particular difference between what you are seeing and what you had heard earlier on the radio and read in the newspaper.

Some 15 years ago, this scenario was the daily reality in the countries of the former Soviet bloc. One institution – the communist party – controlled all media and used them to spread its own message.

Even today, a similar scenario is not completely implausible: Imagine you come back home after a long working day and wish to relax in front of your TV. What do you see? 1st channel: sport, 2nd channel: sport, 3rd channel: soap opera and 4th channel: a bad TV series constantly interrupted by commercials. Overbored by this monotony, you switch your TV set off, remembering that in your country the media belong to a single person and that it would therefore be pointless to open a newspaper to find anything else.

Although this example might be an exaggeration, it shows that concentration of media ownership can be dangerous for freedom of expression and for pluralism, in particular.

There are, of course, other ways to look at media concentration. A case in point is the concentration of ownership through foreign investment in the media markets of South-Eastern Europe and the new EU member
countries. Though it often raises concerns in these countries, it can also have a bright side. The resources and the experience it brings can have a positive impact – making available more sources of information, stimulating higher-quality content, or improving the working conditions of journalists.

Obviously, it is not easy to evaluate the impact of media concentration and foreign ownership on media freedom and pluralism. International organisations, interest groups and media analysts have looked at the issue from various points of view.

The work of the Council of Europe on media concentration and pluralism is based on the European Convention on Human Rights, more specifically on its Article 10 which guarantees the right to freedom of expression and information. The Committee of Ministers has adopted two related Recommendations: one on measures to promote media pluralism1 and one on measures to promote media transparency2. Council of Europe experts have also recently prepared reports on Media Diversity in Europe3 and on Media Pluralism in the Digital Environment4.

I don’t intend to go into these texts in detail. Experts working with the Council of Europe will do that later during this conference. I would like simply to underline the following: pluralism of voices is an essential feature of democracy and needs to be protected. When we look for appropriate means to promote pluralism, we have to bear in mind that media diversity cannot solely be guaranteed by free markets rules, while, at the same time, we have to strike a balance between other fundamental principles of democracy, such as the right to property and the principle of the free flow of information and ideas.

When we speak of pluralism, we most often refer to the so-called “external” pluralism, that is, a diversity of different media outlets. The concept, however, also includes another dimension referred to as “internal” pluralism, namely the expression of a variety of views and opinions within the same media outlet, thus creating a platform for independent and balanced views. The importance of this second aspect should not be overlooked. It is especially pertinent at a time when increasing competition leads media owners or editors to give priority to what they consider as commercially attractive and to impose certain editorial choices on their journalists. One of the ways of securing internal pluralism might be to adopt within the media editorial charters negotiated between the owners

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1 Recommendation No. R (99) 1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on measures to promote media pluralism
2 Recommendation No. R (94) 13 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on measures to promote media transparency
3 Media Diversity in Europe H/APMD(2003)001, Report prepared by the AP-MD (Advisory Panel to the CDMM on media concentrations, pluralism and diversity questions)
and journalists. The idea is of course not to deny the legitimate right of the owners to define the editorial line of their outlets, but to balance it so that journalists can retain their freedom.

Last but not least, we should not forget the essential role of public service broadcasting in enhancing pluralism, through the dissemination of a variety of programmes catering to the needs of all groups in society, including minority groups which are not attractive for the commercial media. The Council of Europe has for a long time recognised and underlined “the vital function of public service broadcasting as an essential factor of pluralistic communication accessible to everyone”\textsuperscript{5}.

Other international institutions are also concerned with the issues that you are going to discuss during this conference. Article 11, paragraph 2 of the draft Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union provides that “the freedom and pluralism of the media should be respected”. A recent resolution of the European Parliament also shows the deep concern of European organisations with the issue of pluralism.

The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, the International Federation of Journalists, the South-East European Network for Professionalisation of the Media – our partner in organising this conference – have all approached the issue of media concentration from various points of view.

Today’s conference is an excellent occasion for all these institutions to share their findings and their experience as well as to identify possible ways of action to preserve media pluralism.

The Council of Europe, with its long-standing expertise in the area of media law and policy is willing to participate in this process, as part of its contribution to the promotion of freedom of expression and information. One, but not the only, vehicle for this is the Stability Pact Programme to which the Council of Europe provides a concrete contribution.

As always, we stand ready to provide our assistance for bringing media law and practice in line with European standards. In this perspective, the conclusions and recommendations of your conference will be of great importance and I look forward to receiving them.

Finally, I would like to thank the Slovenian authorities for hosting this Conference in this inspiring environment and the Government of the Netherlands for providing the financial contribution which has made this Conference possible.

I wish you a successful discussion.

\textsuperscript{5} 4th European Ministerial Conference on Mass Media Policy, Prague, 7-8 December 1994, Resolution No. 1 on The Future of Public Service Broadcasting