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On 9 February 2019, the Council and its Member States adopted conclusions¹ which welcomed the measures and recommendations presented by the Commission on 12 September 2018 in its elections package, as well as the actions outlined in the Action Plan against Disinformation. The conclusions underlined that free, reliable and pluralistic media underpinned effective and healthy democracy and that, in the same vein, open, secure and accessible internet and online platforms could facilitate participatory, transparent and effective democracy. In addition, they stressed that the right to freedom of expression, which included the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference from public authorities and regardless of frontiers, was a fundamental right of every citizen of the Union. The conclusions recalled the importance of guaranteeing to citizens an open public sphere and of ensuring a level playing field for political campaigning and electoral processes that citizens could trust.

The Council and its Member States underlined that professional media played a key role in the gathering, verification, production and dissemination of information and thus were indispensable to public discourse. In this context, whistle-blowers played an important role in aiding the work of journalists and the independent press. Furthermore, the role of independent public service media in safeguarding democracy, pluralism, social cohesion and cultural and language diversity remained vital. Moreover, many private media actors delivered content which was also in the public interest. Against this background, the conclusions called on the Commission and the responsible authorities in the Member States to strengthen the European media ecosystem in order to secure the sustainable production and visibility of independent and professional journalism as a way to empower citizens, protect democracy and to effectively counter the spread of disinformation.

¹ Conclusions on securing free and fair European elections - 6573/1/19 REV 1.