

**Speech given by CR Secretary General Johan Lindén  
at the EPP/CoR annual Summer University**

June 5<sup>th</sup> 2012

Thank you for inviting me.

I'm going to focus on three things:

- A brief introduction to Circom regional
- The importance of local and regional television in the development of European democracy
- The relation between us in the media and the European institutions

**In the early 70:s** a Frenchman, a German, a Belgian, Italian and an Englishman were sitting together -talking about the most wonderful thing there is – the television business. They realised that they had a lot in common and things that they should have in common. Soon they were joined by a Norwegian woman and the first steps of Circom were taken. Today around 300 TV-stations in Europe are members of Circom regional. And the Circom of today has a much better gender balance than in the 70:s.

The history of Circom is a history of individuals that gather around the idea that **international collaboration** is a good thing, **personal meetings is crucial for development** and that **public service broadcasting is essential** for the development of **democracy**.

As of today:

- More than **5000 delegates** have attended the conferences all around Europe.
- More than **3000 programmes** have been scrutinised, judged and prized as the premiers of European Television in the Prix Circom Awards

- More than one **1000 journalists and TV producers** have been trained by Circom

Our objectives are:

1. To **promote** European regional television **production and broadcasting**
2. To **be innovative** and from a **practical** point of view **contribute to the development** of regional culture and identity
3. To bring **institutions, academia and industry professionals together** and initiate a dynamic cultural approach in regional development;
4. To provide a network of the **exchange** of ideas, experience, knowledge, **facilitate co-productions**, exchange of **programmes**, staff and equipment,
5. Increase relevant **vocational training** for journalists and technicians.
6. **Award the Prix CIRCOM** Regional to the best regional programmes in Europe. We do this every year at our **annual conference**. The next one is in May 2013 in Santiago de Compostela in Spain. You are all most welcome. And you don't have to walk there.

And Circom is very much alive. This is a good year. We have a:

Record number of entries to the Prix Circom

Record number of delegates at the last conference

Record number of training offers for professionals in all functions

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After more than a year of constant reports of European, national and regional **financial crisis**, it is crucial to stress the **importance** of regional television.

The concept of a **public sphere** is based on the assumption that it is necessary for a democracy to have an open communication between the citizens, private sectors and the public or governing authorities and institutions. In order to

sustain such a system it is necessary to have **an independent interconnecting element** in the realm of public sphere - **the media**.

National public broadcasters are often occupied in a fierce battle with competitors **and** tend to **focus more and more** on entertainment, fiction, sports and other genres that attract large audiences - but not necessary **discuss societal issues** or portrait the life of the everyday working man or woman. Thus these kinds of topics are easier to find in regional television. **Regional television therefore fulfils a crucial role in explaining Europe to politicians and institutions and EU policy and actions to the citizens of Europe.**

For many regional and local **journalists** in Europe every day is a **battle** for the **freedom** of the media, the right to **editorial independence** and the right to **fulfil** a crucial democratic function. In governments and institutions all over Europe we can see a tendency of wanting to **control** and **manage** media, in the end limiting the freedom of speech – **which of course is counterproductive to the development of democracy.**

**The editorial freedom of the media is central and must not in any way be compromised.** During 2011 and 2012 we have seen several tendencies that powerful interests groups are trying to narrow the scope of the freedom of the press, public television and regional public television. This development is monitored with great concern and will be in our focus for the years to come.

**In a sense the heterogeneity of a European public sphere is a precondition of its very existence.** This is why regional television is so important. In order to have a public sphere which can effectively reach out and influence individual, political and institutional decision making, an open political discourse is essential. It must be an environment of **constructive disagreement** among major actors, be it individual or institutional. A public sphere needs to be based on a sincere and real possibility of cross views, mobilisation of common

identities, common values, conflicting views, arguments, shared views and compromises.

One definition of the public sphere is based on the condition that people have to talk about the **same topic** within the same time frame and with a comparable degree of relevance.

*However, more recent definitions* assume the existence of **various public spheres**, rejecting thus the homogeneity of national as well as a transnational public spheres. The main idea is that *in* this **multi-level framework** the focus of public communication in the European Union and its policies might become a **parallel structure to the national political level, therefore not replacing it but rather complementing it.**

According to this approach a European public sphere **does not** necessarily mean **that topics discussed are exclusively related to the European level, quite to the opposite.** A discourse initially confined to regional and national grounds could be therefore moved in turn on the ‘higher’ European level and vice versa. For a European public sphere it is essential that communication flows in two directions; from the citizens to governing authorities and from governing authorities to the citizens. **Regional Television is the skilful intermediary giving voice to citizens, explaining political action and scrutinising misbehaviour in all arenas.** Regional television might even be more crucial to fulfil this task than national broadcasters.

### 3. EU institutions and television

Circom Regional has after some years of absence from the European Institutional community, decided to be more present over the coming years. I’m happy to say that many institutions are open for **discussion** and different kinds of **collaborations**. The **Committee of the Regions** have opened their doors and

we have started some interesting talks that I'm sure will end in some fruitful collaboration for the near future. At our annual conference last month - **both** the Audio-visual unit of the **European Parliament** *and* the **Council of Europe** were present and made valuable contributions to the conference content. The council of Europe is also the sponsor of the Prix Circom investigative category and with the parliament we have some interesting training collaborations in the pipe line. This is good and promising.

However, there are also examples of the **contrary** that is very recent. For more than two years many Circom members were occupied in answering a call for tender to create a European Television network, worth more than 80 million Euros. The call was issued by the European Commission. The call was advocated by Commissioner Margot Wallström and was due for decision by the cabinet of the new Commissioner, Vivianne Reding.

A grate number of meetings with the commission were held. The Commission demanded hard and sometimes ambiguous requirements. In the end there were two large consortiums left in the competition – One consisting mainly of public service broadcasters and one mainly of commercial broadcasters. The amount of work and money that was put into the competing offers was enormous, basically because the whole industry saw the value of such a common network. Several hundreds of people – technicians, engineers, producers, lawyers, managers – were involved for more than two years in companies all over Europe. And **instead** of awarding one of the two consortiums with the contract the commission cancelled it and kept the money within the cabinet. One of the major reasons for cancelling the project was that the Commission did not feel it **could control the output good enough**. In layman's terms: the commission wanted **propaganda** not journalism.

The process, called competitive dialogue, reviled a complete **non** understanding of the basic logic behind the fundamental concepts of “**Freedom** of information, **Editorial** independence and the **Freedom** of the media”. The arrogant behaviour surrounding the cancellation did not strengthen the confidence in European institutional work and turned off a whole industry. A symbolic sum was paid to the consortiums, and it was so **small** it was like a slap in the face.

The process and cancellation did not bring the media industry and European institutions any **closer**, nor did it in any way bring **European citizens closer to each other** or in any way **explain Europe to the institutions or Institutional actions to the European citizens**. This is not good and not promising.

One of the reasons Circom Regional has decided to be more active towards the European institutions is because we believe that the Freedom of information, Editorial independence and the Freedom of the media are necessary for the development of **democracy** in Europe *and* the **legitimacy** of the European Union. In this context regional television is crucial in explaining and portraying Europe from the top-down and vice versa. Regional and local television is crucial whatever perspective you choose to use.

Circom regional are going to be here to remind whoever needs to be reminded of that. Because we think Europe is worth it!

Thank you!