

**PRESS RELEASE: Embargoed until 14.30pm Monday 24 October 2016**

## **Independent report for European Parliament group raises concerns about concentration of Irish media ownership**

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Today, an independent report, *Report on the Concentration of Media Ownership in Ireland*, written by lawyers from Doughty Street Chambers, London, and KRW Law, Belfast has been launched in Dublin.

The four authors are Caoilfhionn Gallagher and Jonathan Price, barristers at Doughty Street Chambers, and Gavin Booth and Darragh Mackin of KRW Law.

The report explains the international, European and Irish standards which protect freedom of expression and support plurality and diversity of voices in the media. It is now well established that plurality in the media is a feature and essential component of a well-functioning democratic society. The Council of Europe says that, "democracy would be threatened if any single voice within the media, with the power to propagate a single viewpoint, were to become too dominant."

Ireland has one of the most concentrated media markets of any democracy. The clustering of media ownership was heavily criticised in a March 2016 report on Ireland published by the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom in Florence (research conducted by Dr. Roderick Flynn, Dublin City University). Dr. Flynn's research placed Ireland in the highest level of concern for "concentration of media ownership", and expressed particular concern about the country's largest newspaper publisher, Independent News and Media, and its largest shareholder, Denis O'Brien.

Today's report echoes and supports Dr. Flynn's concerns regarding the Irish media market, and highlights further features which amplify the risks to freedom of expression and plurality. The report concludes that there is a perfect storm created by the combination of the highly concentrated Irish media market along with shortcomings in the Irish defamation regime, and Mr. O'Brien's initiation of a large number of proceedings against media organisations in relation to their coverage of his business affairs. Taken together, these features threaten news plurality and undermine the media's ability to perform its vital watchdog function.

A new statute in 2014 (the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014) addresses these issues prospectively, but it has no means of addressing pre-existing issues in the market. The authors' view is that urgent action is now needed to address these serious concerns. They recommend that the Irish Government establish a cross-disciplinary Commission of Inquiry to closely examine media plurality issues and make recommendations, and that this should be done within a tight timeframe given the months which have already passed since the March 2016 report by Dr. Flynn. They also recommend that there be a revised Recommendation on media pluralism by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, as their key standard dates from 1999, almost two decades ago.

**Notes for Editors:**

1. The report is available for download on the KRW Law and Doughty Street Chambers websites, or by email from Gavin Booth, KRW Law, at [Gavin@kevinwinters.com](mailto:Gavin@kevinwinters.com).
2. This is an independent report, which was commissioned by Lynn Boylan MEP and the GUE/ NGL Group of the European Parliament.
3. Any queries concerning the report should be directed to:  
KRW Law (+442890241888 or [gavin@kevinwinters.com](mailto:gavin@kevinwinters.com)) or  
Doughty Street Chambers (+442074041313 or [c.gallagher@doughtystreet.co.uk](mailto:c.gallagher@doughtystreet.co.uk)).