



**CONSORTIUM**

des médias communautaires  
de langues officielles  
en situation minoritaire

of Official Language Minority  
Community Media

**Official language minority community media, the overlooked of the  
official languages reform project**

Brief for the Consortium of Official Language Minority  
Community Media,

Presented to the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages,  
for its study on the official languages reform project unveiled on  
February 19, 2021 by the Minister of Economic Development and Official  
Languages, English and French: Towards a substantive equality of official  
languages in Canada.

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## Introduction

- [1] The Consortium of Official Language Minority Community Media (the “Consortium”) is an alliance of Réseau.Presse, the Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada (“ARC du Canada”), the Quebec Community Newspapers Association (“QCNA”) and the English-Language Arts Network (“ELAN”), the four organizations representing the interests of the entire official language minority community media sector. Since 2016, the four agencies of the consortium have spoken with a single voice on the issues affecting some 105 community newspapers and radio stations.
- [2] Created in 1976, **Réseau.Presse** (also known as the Association de la presse francophone) is the sole network of French-language newspapers published in Canada outside Quebec. It represents the interests within the Consortium of community newspapers with a readership of over 500,000 Francophones and Francophiles. Réseau.Presse serves as the spokesperson for the French-language minority community media.
- [3] Founded in 1991, the mission of **ARC du Canada** is to help the French language thrive in a minority situation by creating, maintaining and developing a network of community radio stations. ARC du Canada brings together community radio stations broadcasting in eight provinces and two territories with over 300,000 listeners. ARC du Canada serves as the spokesperson for French-language minority community radio stations in Canada.
- [4] **QCNA** has been dedicated to the professional and economic development of Quebec’s English-languages community and their companies since 1980. Representing 30 newspapers with a readership of some 824,000 people, QCNA serves as the spokesperson for English-language minority community print media in Quebec.
- [5] **ELAN** is a meeting place for Anglophone artists and cultural workers in various disciplines and regions in Quebec where they can share their skills and resources, bring together new audiences, find new collaborators, seek funding, defend their interests and work together with the Francophone artistic community. ELAN represents the interests of five English-language minority community radio stations and serves as the spokesperson for English-language minority community radio stations in Quebec.
- [6] More than 2 million Canadians living in official language minority communities are served by community newspapers and radio stations. Many of the readers and listeners of official language minority community media live in communities that are geographically distant from those that the dominant media serve. This weakens the vitality of those communities.
- [7] The future of official language minority communities depends largely on their access to quality community media. They are the only real local media and the only ones with the mandate to cover local issues and events.
- [8] In the next section, the Consortium **(A)** discusses the obvious lack of recognition of community media in the official languages reform project. In the following section **(B)**, the Consortium provides its recommendations to the Committee.

## **A) Official language minority community media, the overlooked**

- [9] In the brief it presented to the Senate Standing Committee on Official Languages in June 2018, the Consortium of Official Language Minority Community Media proposed a number of ways to support minority radio stations and newspapers.
- [10] Yet, the official languages reform project makes no mention of official language minority community media.
- [11] The government seems to want to fold official language community media in with institutions or associations.

*Make a commitment to support sectors key to the vitality of official language minority communities (for example, immigration, the educational continuum, school management by schools boards and councils, health, culture, justice and other services) to promote and protect the presence of strong institutions for official language minority communities, in collaboration with provincial and territorial governments.*

- [12] The approximately 105 community media are neither associations nor institutions; they are distinct local media that serve the public interest, protect democracy, inform the communities of local issues and disseminate French-Canadian culture.
- [13] What is alarming is that it seems that the official languages reform project seems to want to give only CBC/Radio-Canada the capacity to protect, promote and encourage learning of the two official languages and to raise the profile of the French language and serve as a vector of Francophone culture.
- [14] CBC/Radio-Canada is mentioned 17 times in the project, and community media are not mentioned once.
- [15] Yet, despite the pandemic afflicting the country since 2020, the consumption of community media by Canadians in minority communities has not decreased; quite the contrary, online consultation of articles in community newspapers has increased by 25% to 35% and radio audience ratings have increased by 15% to 20%.
- [16] This growth demonstrates beyond the shadow of a doubt the importance, indeed the necessity, of considering local media such as the 105 official language minority community media an essential service.

## **B) Addition to the official languages reform project**

- [17] The crisis in community media is a longstanding situation. Many parliamentary committees have pointed out the problems that community media have faced and continue to face, and they have formulated recommendations to address those problems.
- [18] For example, in its study on changes to the *Government of Canada Communication Policy*, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates concluded in 2017 that “the government’s ‘digital-first’ approach and its commitment to significantly reduce advertising expenditures might limit the choice of media [by] favouring digital media over perhaps

more costly traditional media.”<sup>1</sup> The Committee also noted “that there could be some misalignment between the government’s digital-first strategy and the reality that many Canadians targeted by programs and services are best reached through more traditional media, including television, radio and print media.”<sup>2</sup> At the end of its study, the House of Commons committee recommended that “the Government of Canada increase advertising purchasing for weekly, multicultural and community newspapers and other local media, so that the government meets the stated directive that communications are responsive to the diverse information needs of the public.”<sup>3</sup>

- [19] The House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, in its study on local communities and media, published a report in 2017 entitled *DISRUPTION: Change and Churning in Canada’s Media Landscape*, in which it set out the following statement of principle:

*Given the media’s importance as a reflection of Canada’s diversity and a pillar of our democracy, the Government of Canada must implement the necessary measures to support the existence of a free and independent media and local news reporting.*<sup>4</sup>

The Committee recommended that the federal government offer “offer greater support to Indigenous, ethnic and official language minority print media”<sup>5</sup> and “ that federal institutions increase their dissemination of information in official languages, ethnic and Indigenous communities.”<sup>6</sup>

- [20] In June 2018, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages submitted its report after reviewing the programs to support official language minority community media. The Committee noted that “in recent years, the federal government has neglected its responsibilities to OLMC media by significantly reducing its advertising with them.”<sup>7</sup> Its recommendations include calling on the Treasury Board to amend the *Policy on Communications and Federal Identity*<sup>8</sup> so that it expressly mentions that the “deputy heads” of federal institutions must meet “the objectives of the Official Languages Act, as set out in sections 11 and 30 and subsections 41(1) and 41(2) of the Act.”<sup>9</sup>

- [21] The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, in its 2017 investigation report stated that “federal institutions have largely shifted to the Internet for their advertising and that this trend has been growing for several years. The result has been a considerable reduction in the share of advertising dollars that go to community newspapers and radio stations across the country.”<sup>10</sup> Worse still, OCOL concluded that the Privy Council Office, Treasury Board Secretariat, Department

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<sup>1</sup> Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, [Reaching Canadians with Effective Government Advertising](#) (December 2017), p 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p 39.

<sup>4</sup> Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, [DISRUPTION: Change and Churning in Canada's Media Landscape](#) (June 2017), p 7

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p 40

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p 52.

<sup>7</sup> Standing Committee on Official Languages, [Media in the Digital Age: Reconciling Federal Responsibilities to Official Language Minority Communities with New Trends](#) (June 2018), p 4.

<sup>8</sup> Treasury Board Secretariat, [Policy on Communications and Federal Identity](#), updated in 2016.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p 23.

<sup>10</sup> Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, Final Investigation Report of the Interim Commissioner of Official Languages. Public Works and Government Services Canada, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Privy Council Office, Canadian Heritage, Ottawa, June 2017, *supra* at p. 33.

of Public Works and Government Services Canada and Department of Canadian Heritage failed to demonstrate “leadership, as they failed to respond to a situation they were clearly aware of and whose consequences could have hindered community newspapers and radio stations, which are development and vitality tools.”<sup>11</sup> OCOL thus recommended that the federal government adopt positive measures, in accordance with its obligations under section 41 of the *Official Languages Act*.<sup>12</sup>

- [22] Despite all that, the reform document seems to have nothing to say about such support.
- [23] The Consortium asks that your committee take advantage of its study of the official languages reform project to promote the role and importance of official language minority community media as a motor of vitality for the communities that they serve and recommend that the reform project be enhanced by explicitly recognizing that community media are neither an institution nor an association and expressly guaranteeing the protection and development of community media in its own right.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*