

## [BE] A positive assessment for local media, but challenges remain

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The Higher Audiovisual Council (*Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel* – CSA) of the French Community of Belgium recently published an evaluation report on the fulfilment of the public service remit and implementation of five other specific objectives by the 12 French-speaking Belgian local media organisations that replaced local television stations.

The public service obligations are set out in agreements between the Government of the French Community and each local media organisation. They relate to news, cultural development, lifelong learning (including media literacy), the active participation of the population of the respective coverage area, and production and co-production volumes. The five other objectives relate to the visibility of these obligations, synergies between local media organisations and with the public service broadcaster RTBF, specific staffing and equipment requirements, the equality and diversity plan, and financial stability and management.

The evaluation report is based on the annual audits carried out by the CSA for the years 2022 to 2024, as well as the responses provided by the local media organisations to a specific questionnaire drawn up in 2026.

The CSA notes, in general, that the local media organisations are fulfilling their obligations. Only minor breaches have been identified. The CSA nevertheless highlights certain areas for attention and makes various recommendations. In particular, the legal framework applicable to the local media organisations needs to be improved and brought more closely into line with new consumption habits; their visibility on RTBF's Auvio platform, through which they are distributed, needs to be increased; and, in accordance with the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), they must receive stable, adequate and predictable funding. This last point is particularly sensitive in a context of budgetary austerity. The CSA recommends, in particular, "ensuring compliance with the principle of proportionality between the level of obligations incumbent on the local media organisations and the resources available".

The CSA's report therefore raises several issues that should be taken into account when the agreements between the government and the local media organisations are revised or renewed. The agreements currently in force are valid for a renewable period of nine years. Since the current period began in February 2022,

the CSA report comes at the halfway point of this period.

***Rapport « Évaluation à mi-parcours de la mise en œuvre des conventions conclues entre le Gouvernement de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles et les éditeurs de médias de proximité »***

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*Report: "Mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the agreements concluded between the Government of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and local media organisations"*

