[FR] CSA Delivers Its Opinion on the Bill to Reform the Public-Sector Audiovisual Scene

IRIS 1998-10:1/22

Bertrand Delcros
Radio France

Since the additional protocol to the Treaty of Amsterdam, there has been much discussion in Europe on the identity and strengthening of the public-sector audiovisual scene. The French Government is doing something about it. Before the end of the year it is to submit to a vote in Parliament a bill to reform the public audiovisual scene. The audiovisual regulatory body, the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (CSA), has already delivered its opinion on the text of the bill.

The provision which is undoubtedly the most significant concerns the method of financing the public-service television channels. It is intended to reduce substantially the space devoted to advertising on the screens of the national companies France 2 and France 3. In practice, advertising would almost completely disappear after 8.30 pm. This would obviously result in a loss of financial income, which would be compensated by subsidies paid by the State. In its opinion, the CSA noted that the reduction in revenue from advertising and its compensation in the form of a budget allocation was likely to lessen the obligations incumbent on the public-sector channels to invest in audiovisual production. The CSA therefore felt that budget allocations should be made dependent on production obligations.

A further provision in the bill also deserves attention, namely the method of appointing the chairmen of the public-sector channels. Since 1982, these have been appointed by the regulatory body. There is no intention of changing this arrangement but rather the role of the State would be strengthened, as it must be borne in mind - in a context of public-sector television facing stiff competition from the commercial channels - that the State is the sole shareholder of the national channels. The bill therefore provides for the creation of a holding company comprising France 2 and France 3, Sept-Arte and perhaps RFO as well. According to the bill, inspired by the legislation on commercial companies, the CSA would continue to appoint the chairman of the holding's management board, but on the basis of the prior opinion of the supervisory council, on which representatives of the State would be in a majority. The CSA makes some reservations in its opinion, as it feels that the State's influence could be overpowering.