[FR] Results of the FM Band Audit

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At the end of 1997, the Minister for Culture and Communication expressed the desire for a thorough reconsideration of the FM band by the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (CSA - government television and radio monitoring body), in order to check objectively and definitely if there were any frequencies available or ways in which some could be freed.

As soon as it was set up by the CSA in May 1997, an audit follow-up committee comprising operators and broadcasters defined the aims of the audit. These were to see whether it was possible to plan frequencies more profitably, and to render use of the FM band more transparent. The committee also felt that optimising the frequencies schedule should be carried out in the general interest, without giving an advantage to any specific category of radio, and should cover both the public and private sectors. To achieve this, the CSA decided that an initial study would be carried out in a test area - the Rhône-Alpes region - with an extension to the whole country depending on the results obtained.

After tendering, two companies were selected to carry out the work, which started in February this year. After reading the technical reports submitted by these companies on completion of their task, the audit follow-up committee met at the CSA on 20 October to consider the results of this first stage, and to submit its conclusions.

The committee noted that the present state of affairs as reported did not reveal any "anomaly" in the overall occupation of the spectrum. Nevertheless, "disparities in terms of power, cover and recovery rate between private operators and public-service operators" were noted, as well as the fact that a relatively large number of public-service frequencies were not being used (the figure for the test region is estimated at 139 according to officials at Radio France). The committee felt that, although it appeared an interesting solution at first sight, an overall reconfiguration of the entire spectrum would be impossible to carry out now given the "technical constraints connected with the international coordination and budgets its implementation would require". In the light of this work and the solutions put forward by the companies carrying out the study, the audit follow-up committee did not feel it appropriate to extend the audit to the rest of the country. Nevertheless, the committee wished to consider the matter further, in conjunction with operators, broadcasters and the CSA.

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An ad hoc working party is therefore to be set up for this purpose in order to continue this work. A number of radio operators had been hoping for a thorough investigation with the prospect of seeing new frequencies freed up, and therefore regret that the audit is being "put on a back burner". The lack of elasticity as regards resources for terrestrial broadcasting - exacerbated by the fact that in France mass-market radio frequencies are concentrated in the FM band alone - should however be relieved by the prospects opened up by digital radio.

Résultats des travaux de l'audit de la bande FM, Communiqué du Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel du 27 octobre 1998.

Results of the audit of the FM band; communiqué from the Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel (CSA) dated 27 October 1998.

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