[SE] Digital Terrestrial Broadcasting

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As of 1 April 1999 the Swedish terrestrial broadcasting network was opened for digital broadcasting under concession granted by the Swedish Government. A number of broadcasting companies, so far 11 programme distributors, were afforded this opportunity by the Government, among them Canal + Television AB, Cell Internet Commerce Development AB, TV 3 AB, and Kanal 5 AB. However, these concessions do not cover the full potential of the terrestrial network, which, at its maximum, virtually comprises all households of Sweden. Initially, the Government has chosen some regions of Sweden, mainly densely built-up areas such as the Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö regions. But the project is obviously a first step towards making digital broadcasting available in the whole country by use of the terrestrial net, now used only by the two analogue TV channels of Sveriges Television AB (SVT) and by TV 4 AB, a commercial broadcaster, both companies broadcasting under special government concession.

A Government concession for digital broadcasting may be valid for a single broadcasting company or shared by two. In the case of a concession to a single licensee the company undertakes to broadcast for at least 25 hours a week. If the concession is shared, the companies must broadcast for at least 50 hours a week, divided between them at their discretion.

As for the content of digital terrestrial broadcasting, the successful companies have been chosen on the basis of the programme declaration which each applicant had to present. Further, each company is obliged to follow some rudimentary rules, for example to respect privacy, to uphold objectivity, not to discriminate against advertisers and not to broadcast sponsored programmes mainly targeting children under 12 years of age. Also, all licensed companies have undertaken not to accept radical changes of ownership resulting in more ownership concentration in the media.

Still, the Government may set up more austere demands with respect to digital programme content, in line with what is traditionally called for in terrestrial broadcasting, namely impartiality and diversity of programming including news bulletins. These demands are only directed towards the programme sources of SVT and the single commercial broadcaster already active in the terrestrial network, TV 4. This is of importance also regarding the impact of the «must carry» obligation of cable network owners. Their obligation to distribute free of charge certain digital channels is limited to those channels which are bound by such a

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widened set of obligations just mentioned. More precisely, the new regulation on terrestrial digital broadcasting limits the "must carry" obligation to four channels at the most - three channels from companies financed by fees and one commercial channel. The practical effect of this is that SVT may offer viewers a new channel, in addition to those two channels SVT already broadcasts, and expect it to be covered by the "must carry" obligation of the cable network owners.

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