[FR] Interim Report on Terrestrial Digital Television

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On 17 January Raphael Hadas-Lebel, a member of the Conseil d'État, submitted the report of the working party on "terrestrial digital television" of which he was chairman to Catherine Trautmann, Minister for Culture and Communication. The working party had been set up in October 1999 with the brief of analysing and summarising the many contributions received in response to a wide-ranging consultation of the professionals concerned. These recommendations are to be used by the Government in drawing up various provisions on terrestrial digital broadcasting for integration in the Audiovisual Act, which is to have its second reading in Parliament in March.

The rapporteur stresses that plans for terrestrial digital television must nowadays form part of a project led by the operators themselves since the main feature at stake is content. The legal framework that the public authorities need to determine must therefore restrict itself to laying down a few essential rules and thereby allow for adaptation in the inevitable evolution that will ensue, both technically and economically. Indeed the working party affirms that although analogue technologies are on the way out, the transfer from analogue to digital will last at least a decade. During this period almost all those involved agree in wanting simultaneous digital broadcasting for the existing terrestrially broadcast channels.

These existing channels, in both the public and private sectors, want to benefit from digital broadcasting to strengthen their positions in the market. They are therefore proposing to enrich their current offer by introducing services associated with current programmes, offering the main programme or new channels in unencrypted form or on pay-television. Few new editors seem to be appearing on this market compared with the present audiovisual scene.

Public-sector television is covered in detail in the report. While the existence of a strong public sector is desirable, the rapporteur nevertheless considers that legislation should redefine the tasks of the public-sector service in the new context.

Another important point raised by the working party concerns the development of local and regional channels. Digital technology is an important factor in the success of these channels, but what is really important is still their financing, and

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this obviously has to involve advertising. The working party therefore regards as essential a revision of a number of the rules on the broadcasting of advertising (for example, prohibiting advertising on television for major retailers or the cinema sector).

Another very important feature of the report is that is reaffirms the regulatory role of the CSA in terms of both content and supports. Some adaptation would nevertheless appear to be necessary, concerning - in particular - the methods of allocating resources. Two approaches are considered on this point, by the broadcasters on the one hand, and by the CSA on the other. Mr Hadas-Lebel attempts to summarise these proposals, and his solutions highlight the multiplex operator on the one hand and the editor on the other. The report also proposes different procedures for allocating resources to the public and private sectors.

Lastly, the working party draws the Government's attention to the need to adapt the anti-concentration provisions to this new environment. It proposes abandoning the present ceiling, which prevents an operator holding more than 49% of the capital of a channel.

La télévision numérique : Propositions pour une stratégie de développement, Raphaël Hadas-Lebel, janvier 2000.

La télévision numérique : Propositions pour une stratégie de développement, Raphaël Hadas-Lebel, janvier 2000.

Digital Television: Proposal for a Development Strategy, Raphaël Hadas-Lebel, January 2000.

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