# EPRA: Overview of 15 Meeting

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*Susanne Nikoltchev*
*European Audiovisual Observatory*

On 16 and 17 May 2002, the 15 meeting of the European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA) took place in Brussels. The meeting, which was hosted jointly by the Belgian Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel de la Communauté française (CSA) and the Vlaams Commissariaat voor de Media (the regulatory authorities of the French and Flemish speaking Communities), attracted a total of 119 participants from 35 countries. 45 regulatory authorities were represented and were joined by observers from the Council of Europe and the European Commission.

Since its last meeting in September 2001 (see IRIS 2001-10: 3), EPRA membership has remained stable with 42 regulatory authorities.

The plenary session focused on the (direct and indirect) influence of politics on broadcasting. Professor Ian Hargreaves, from the University of Cardiff, opened the session by providing a detailed analysis of the very complex and fluctuating relationship between politics and broadcasting. He illustrated his analysis by commenting on some current manifestations of political influence on television in Italy, France, the United Kingdom, and Germany. This stimulating presentation was followed by a lively debate between the participants during which the modes of appointment of members of regulatory authorities, the rules regarding conflicts of interest and the issue of accountability were recurring themes. Some participants also emphasized that broadcasting content was much less endangered by politics than economics.

Thereafter the participants split into two working groups that met simultaneously to discuss, on the one hand, digital terrestrial television (DTT) and, on the other hand, advertisement and programme windows.

The working group on DTT opened with a presentation by Mr Olof Hultén from Sveriges Television (Swedish Television - SVT), on the current challenges of DTT for viewers, traditional broadcasters and national governments. He characterised the present and medium term perspective on the conversion to digital television in Europe as rather chaotic and uncertain, due to a lack of consultation with the viewers and a lax attitude on the part of engineers and politicians. Still, he considered that DTT was a good idea in the long run. As an illustration of the topic, Ms Lisa di Feliciantonio, from the AGCOM, briefly introduced the main

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features of the DTT regulatory framework in Italy. During the course of the discussion, DTT pioneers, i.e. the UK, Sweden, Spain and Finland, shared their experience with representatives from other countries about to launch DTT. The lack of realism of many switch-off dates set by national governments was also emphasized.

In the second working group, Ms Évelyne Lentzen, President of the Belgian CSA, presented different scenarios of cross-border advertisement and programme windows currently existing in Europe. The examples ranged from programmes transmitted in their entirety though a different language version, pan-European channels transporting different advertisement messages for each receiving state, advertisements transmitted from a neighbouring country but originating in a third country and exclusively targeting the receiving state, programmes especially made for and transmitted into a single target country etc. An intense discussion centered on the question whether the Convention on Tranfrontier Television should, if it does not do so already, protect smaller countries against the loss of audience share and advertisement revenues resulting from programme windows transmitted by broadcasters licenced in significantly larger neighbouring countries. The point was illustrated with the example of the Swiss advertising window of M6, a French broadcaster, exclusively targeting the French-speaking part of Switzerland. Currently, the French Conseil d'Etat is reviewing the compatibility of the French licence under which M6 operates with Article 16 of the Convention.

The meeting was rounded off by two reports on current developments in European media policy given by representatives of the Council of Europe (Media Division) and the European Commission (DG Education and Culture and DG Internal Market).

EPRA will hold its next meeting on 24 and 25 October 2002 in Ljubljana upon the joint invitation of the Slovenian Broadcasting Council and the Broadcasting Agency of the Republic of Slovenia.

***Background Papers of the 15 EPRA Meeting, held in Brussels on 16-17 May 2002***

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