[IE] Broadcasting Forum Report

IRIS 2002-10:1/18

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The Forum on Broadcasting, established by the Government in March 2002 (see IRIS 2002-7: 13), reported in August. Many individuals and organisations, including Radio Telefís Éireann (the national public service broadcaster, RTÉ), the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI) and the Office of the Director of Telecommunications Regulation (ODTR), made written submissions to the Forum. The ODTR set out the current position regarding broadcasting services in Ireland and the future under the new EC Framework Directives. The BCI set out all the relevant statutory provisions and assessed various aspects of the current position regarding the range and types of broadcasting services. It supported many of the present arrangements, accepted the appropriateness of public/private partnerships in the context of the development of new channels, and made the case for a single content regulator.

The main conclusions of the Forum centred on the importance of fostering and strengthening public service broadcasting. Funding and requests for a greater increase in the licence fee had been major issues over the years, particularly with the planned introduction of digital television (see IRIS 2001-4: 9, IRIS 2001-8: 11 and IRIS 2002-4: 7). The Forum took the view that funding should be sufficient to allow RTÉ, as the designated public service broadcaster in the State, to fulfil its obligations and plan for the future on a realistic level. Increased public funding for RTÉ should be conditional, however, on RTÉ's fulfilment of its public service obligations and on its efficient operation, which should be monitored in accordance with a Charter. Transparency was identified as a key requirement in various specified areas of its operation, including commissions from the independent production sector.

The Forum also recommended the establishment, by legislation, within three years, of a new single regulator for broadcasting in Ireland to be called the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), to assume the existing regulatory functions of the BCI and the RTÉ Authority. An autonomous Broadcasting Complaints Commission should remain and the ODTR should continue to regulate distribution platforms, but with formal liaison between the ODTR and the BAI.

Other recommendations include the promotion of community broadcasting as a stated policy objective of the Government and regulatory authorities. Irish-language broadcasting should be enhanced and incentivised and children's

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programming should be encouraged in the case of all broadcasters. In addition, the Government should promote, at a European level, clear and enforceable policies in relation to children's advertising.

The Government is still accepting responses to the Report online prior to formulating its proposals.

"Forum on Broadcasting Report to the Minister For Communications Marine and Natural Resources Dermot Ahern TD", August 2002

http://www.dcmnr.gov.ie/files/BroadcastingFinal.doc

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