[FR] MPs Adopt Bill on Electronic Communications and Audiovisual Services at First Reading

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The National Assembly adopted the bill on electronic communications and audiovisual services, transposing the "telecoms package" (see IRIS 2003-5: 15 and IRIS 2003-6: 9) at its first reading on the evening of Thursday, 12 February 2004. Apart from slight changes concerning networks and telecoms services, the text more importantly contains new legislative provisions concerning the audiovisual sector in line with recent economic and technological developments, thereby effecting a thorough reform.

The bill contains a series of amendments authorising the financing of local television stations by local authorities and proposing greater flexibility in anti-concentration arrangements and tax reduction measures.

It also lays down a framework of regulations for broadband television. It relaxes considerably the constraints of regulations hampering the development of cable and includes a series of amendments instituting must-carry requirements for public-sector terrestrially broadcast channels on all broadcasting media (cable, satellite, broadband) and entitlement of private terrestrially broadcast channels to be broadcast on any media at their request and at their expense.

The text also reinforces the powers of the Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel (audiovisual regulatory bodyCSA), firstly by empowering it to settle disputes between channel editors and distributors, and secondly by giving it the means check and penalise channels outside Europe broadcasting by satellite to Europe in respect of programmes that seriously infringe human dignity. The Government was nevertheless careful that these prerogatives should not encroach on those of other regulatory authorities, or on those of the Conseil de la concurrence (competition board).

The text also provides the necessary details to enable the CSA to have the clear means for organising the launch of terrestrially broadcast digital television, the maximum number of terrestrially broadcast digital channels controlled by any one operator having been changed to seven. Lastly, it lays down the conditions for the launch of digital radio in France. The text will be examined by the Senate on 13, 14 and 15 April.

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Bill on electronic communications and audiovisual communication services, adopted by the National Assembly at its first reading on 12 February 2004

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