[FR] Television Licence Fee to Be Combined with the Housing Tax in 2005

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Last December, when his Ministry's budget was adopted, the Minister for Communications announced that a working party was to be set up to look into redefining the methods for establishing and collecting this fee, which is the main source of financing for public-sector audiovisual services (see IRIS 2003-7: 8). The aim is to improve on its yield, increasing the EUR 2 billion it produces and combating fraud.

On 25 July, the Government adopted the principle of combining collection of the television licence fee with that of the housing tax, starting next year. Housing does indeed correlate to some extent with possession of a television set, although even this has its limits. Starting in 2005, households that do not have a television set will be required to mark a special box on their income tax return, declaring this to be so "on their honour"; otherwise they will have to pay (EUR 116.50 for a colour television set in 2003). The practicalities of the system still need to be clarified, particularly concerning the exemptions that could, at the present stage, be extended to people receiving "minimum government benefit" and to television sets in second homes. Reactions have not been slow in coming. The French society of dramatic authors and composers (Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques SACD) welcomed the Government's decision as being "useful in combating fraud and improving the yield from collecting the licence fee". The trade unions, on the other hand, have not concealed their hostility towards the draft reform that "threatens the financing of the audiovisual sector. The Government, under cover of taking action against those who avoid paying the fee, is making use of this to justify a cutback in the number of employees." It is true that the reform provides for keeping on just 400 members of staff in the supervision department of the 1 400 employed at present in the licence fee department. The rate of non-payment, currently estimated at 8.57%, is average for Europe, and its opponents believe that the reform would cost considerably more than initially anticipated, particularly as regards the planned exemptions.

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