[AT] Public-service Broadcasting in the Spotlight

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In late July 2005 the Verband Österreichischer Privatsender (Austrian Commercial Broadcasters' Association - VÖP) made a complaint to the European Commission asking it to investigate the public-service programming remit of Österreichischer Rundfunk (the Austrian public-service broadcaster - ORF) as well as ORF's financing from advertising revenue and licence fees, and its involvement in the specialist channel TW1. The VÖP claimed that ORF itself determined the level of licence fees without any external supervision. It also complained that exclusive rights to cover winter sports organised by the Österreichische Skiverband (Austrian Ski Association) had not been put out to tender, but had simply been awarded to ORF over a lengthy period of time.

In early 2005 the Commission announced that it would consider a closer review of ORF's activities only at a later date. Nonetheless, it had asked the Austrian Federal Government for details of ORF's remit and what its online activities actually involved.

ORF has countered by pointing out that it is legally bound by the requirements of the so-called Financial Transparency Directive (as amended by Directive 2000/52/EC). It also argues that its Internet activities fall within its public-service remit, there being no provision in the legislation that would restrict it to purely programme-related activities. This meant that its online service could carry a wide range of information.

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