[FR] State of Progress on the Reform of the French Audiovisual Scene

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Aurélie Courtinat

After the French President announced on 8 January 2008 that he wanted to abolish all advertising on public-sector television channels, the Copé Commission brought together a number of parliamentarians and professionals to discuss the issue. After four months of hearings, the Commission has delivered its report, advocating the gradual abolition of advertising on public-sector television channels after 8 p.m., starting in 2009. Added to these proposals are a number of desires on the part of the President, resulting in the start of the reform. This summer, the Act on modernising the economy amended the anti-concentration thresholds for the terrestrially-broadcast digital channels. The budget allocation promised to France Télévisions to compensate for the loss of income as a result of the reform was granted at the end of August. Legislation is currently being drafted and bills should be submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval on 8 October 2008. Parliament is scheduled to examine the “audiovisual package”, which also includes the transposition into national law of the European Directive on audiovisual media services (AMSD), during the second half of October. The audiovisual package is directed more particularly, not only at increasing the volume of advertising on the private-sector channels and allowing them a second commercial break in works to enable them to absorb the advertising “manna” released by the reform, but also at shifting from sliding one-hour periods to clock hours for calculating this volume. The text is therefore likely to undergo a number of amendments and shuttle back and forth between the two chambers a number of times. The deadline of 31 December 2008 is speeding up the drafting process and will probably precipitate the debate, as the decision to proceed with the abolition of advertising on public-sector channels requires the Act modifying the Act of 30 September 1986 on the freedom of communication and the application decrees to be voted upon, which in turn means that the Government will have to organise enough time to promulgate and sign the texts after they have been negotiated in Parliament and any social manifestations that may occur are over. Time is therefore short for this reform.

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