

[AL] Public Consultation on the Strategy for Digital Broadcasting

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Ilda Londo
Albanian Media Institute

The transition to digital broadcasting in Albania is expected to face a series of challenges, according to the latest public discussion among stakeholders.

On 27 April 2010 the Këshilli Kombëtar i Radios dhe Televizionit (National Council of Radio and Television), the regulatory authority for broadcasting, and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) representation in Albania jointly organised a conference on “Digital Television: Near and Far”. This conference marked the conclusion of a two-year long awareness and discussion campaign on the strategy for the transition to digital broadcasting. Participants included representatives of the regulatory authority, national and local media outlets, civil society representatives, etc.

One of the main concerns of the discussions during the conference was the role of the public broadcaster in the digital switchover and in the allotment of national frequencies. According to the current strategy Radio Televizioni Shqiptar (Albanian Radio Television, RTSH) has the right to two national frequencies out of a maximum of eight frequencies. Many participants claimed that RTSH has not shown any evidence of being able to create and administer two multiplexes and that therefore one of them should be reserved for operators that can invest in such an effort. However, concerns about the provision of content of public interest arise in such scenarios.

Another main concern was the fate of numerous local radio and television stations against the backdrop of the digital switchover. The strategy discusses several options of ownership and administration of network operators, giving preference to ownership of networks by consortia of existing TV stations. However, representatives from these TV stations said that this would be difficult to implement due to high investment costs and inability to reach agreement among competing TV stations. As a result the pluralism of information and media outlets would be endangered.

Finally, the issue of existing digital broadcasting platforms in the country is a major one. Terrestrial and satellite digital broadcasting was started in Albania in July 2004 by the Digitalb company (see IRIS 2007-8: 5), later followed by the Tring company and Shijak TV. Although the exact number of subscribers is not known, a

significant number of households already has had access to the packages offered by these platforms.

The licensing of the existing and new companies will be a new test for the authority and fairness of the regulator. The Albanian Parliament has already passed the Law on Digital Broadcasting in 2007 (see IRIS 2007-8: 5), which will be implemented after the strategy is approved by an ad hoc commission established for this purpose.

Strategjia

http://www.kkrt.gov.al/images/stories/kkrt/dixhitalizimi/strategjia_e_reduktuar.pdf

Strategy for the transition to digital broadcasting

Analysis of the strategy by the OSCE

http://www.osce.org/documents/pia/2009/02/36304_en.pdf

