[CH] Proposal to Change System for Collecting Reception Fee

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The Federal Council (the Swiss government) has been instructed by the Federal Assembly (parliament) to devise a new system for collecting the reception fee to bring the financing of the public service into line with the evolution of technology. Thus the motion tabled by the transport and telecommunications committee of the National Council (CTT-N), which was passed on to the Federal Council in September 2011, provides that the fee in future would cease to be dependent on the possession of an appliance allowing the reception of radio or television programmes, and would instead be levied on all households and companies. There would nevertheless be a provision for a number of exceptions, so that small businesses and some households would be exempt on social grounds.

In Switzerland the reception fee constitutes the main source of financing for the public-sector radio and television broadcasters. The current fee collection system links the obligation to pay the fee to the possession of a reception appliance. It was introduced at a time when very few people were able to watch television or listen to the radio, and it therefore made sense to limit the requirement to pay the fee to those people who could actually watch or listen to the programmes. The situation is quite different today, as everyone has ready access to radio and television programmes, particularly with the increasing use of multifunctional appliances.

The CTT-N motion is based on a report drawn up by the Federal Council in January 2010. The report noted that the evolution in technology constantly makes it more difficult and more expensive to abide by an obligation to pay linked to the possession of a reception appliance. Moreover, there are relatively few possibilities for financing radio and television programmes other than by means of a fee; it is therefore essential to be able to count on an effective collection system capable of ensuring the financing of public-service radio and television. The current system is not suited to the use of multi-function appliances.

After examining a number of variations, the Federal Council has recommended a fee collection system that is no longer linked to the possession of a reception appliance. As a result, every household and company will be required to pay a fee, regardless of whether or not they possess such an appliance. According to the Federal Council, the cost of collecting the fee under such a system should be

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lower than the cost of the present system, since it would cease to be necessary to determine or check whether households and companies have an appliance for receiving radio or television programmes. The Federal Council also believes it is legitimate for everyone to participate financially in the provision of a public service, since this is an essential aspect of ensuring democracy.

The Federal Council will submit a bill to Parliament, probably in 2012, but the new fee will not be introduced before 2017. The task of collecting the fee will be allocated by means of a public tender procedure.

Motion tabled by the Transport and Telecommunications Commission of the National Council, 23 February 2010

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