[IT] Parliamentary Committee Approves Service Contract for Italy’s Public Service Media Operator

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On 7 May 2014, the Joint Committee of the Italian Parliament responsible for the oversight of public service media (Commissione parlamentare per l'indirizzo generale e la vigilanza dei servizi radiotelevisivi) gave its opinion on the draft national service contract, which will govern the relationship between Italy’s public service operator (RAI) and the Ministry for Economic Development (the Ministry) for the next three years.

The national service contract is an act of paramount importance in Italian media policy insofar as it is instrumental in the definition of RAI’s public service remit, along with the Consolidated Law on Audiovisual and Radio Media Services (CLARMS, Legislative Decree no. 177 of 31 July 2005) and the regional service contracts concluded by RAI with the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano.

The Joint Committee’s opinion proposed a number of amendments to the draft submitted by RAI and the Ministry on 20 September 2013, which in turn had been prepared taking into account the guidelines issued by the Ministry and the Italian Communications Authority on 29 November 2012 (see IRIS 2013-2/30).

In particular, the Joint Committee called for stricter transparency commitments for Italy’s public service operator. While the draft service contract merely required RAI to disclose aggregated data on the pay ranges of its highest-ranking employees, the Joint Committee recommended that RAI should also divulge the resumes and remuneration of both its employees and its consultants.

The Joint Committee also introduced provisions concerning the rationalisation of public expenditure. In particular, the Committee suggested the introduction of a specific contract proviso compelling RAI to primarily rely on its internal resources for the achievement of its remit and to hire external consultants only in accordance with the objective criteria followed by other public entities.

As far as television advertising is concerned, the Joint Committee’s opinion advocated the imposition of an outright ban on both direct and indirect advertising of gambling services. Moreover, the Joint Committee called for the establishment of internal auditing procedures to detect surreptitious advertising in the course of its programmes and to prevent individuals frequently appearing as hosts in RAI programmes from promoting activities or initiatives to which they

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are related.

Finally, in order to promote access to public service programmes by persons with disabilities, the Joint Committee recommended, inter alia, to the display of subtitles for all the lunchtime and evening editions of the news and to broadcast at least one edition of the news each day in Italian Sign Language.

The Opinion of the Joint Committee, although required by law prior to each renewal of the national service contract, is not legally binding. RAI and the Ministry will thus define the final text of the service contract in the coming weeks.

Commissione parlamentare per l'indirizzo generale e la vigilanza dei servizi radiotelevisivi, Parere del 7 maggio 2014 sullo schema di Contratto di servizio tra il Ministero dello sviluppo economico e la RAI Radiotelevisione italiana S.p.a. per il triennio 2013-2015

http://parlamento17.camera.it/application/xmanager/projects/parlamento17/attachments/documenti_approvati/pdfs/000/000/007/ContrattoDiServizio_Parere20140507.pdf

Parliamentary committee for the oversight and governance of public service media, Opinion of 7 May 2014 on the draft service contract between the Ministry of Economic development and RAI Radiotelevisione italiana S.p.a. for the period 2013-2015

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