[IE] Report of the Joint Committee on the Future Funding of Public Service Broadcasting

IRIS 2018-3:1/22

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On 13 December 2017, the Report of the Joint Committee on the Future Funding of Public Service Broadcasting was laid before the Irish Parliament. The 323-page Report follows an extensive public consultation process, and evidence from broadcasters and platform providers, to investigate possible viable alternative funding models for public service broadcasting. The Report makes a number of notable recommendations.

Firstly, the Committee recommends that a broadening of the existing charging regime be expanded to capture every household consuming media, regardless of the technology used. Such a new regime would incorporate all households, and not just those in possession of a traditional television set. The Committee recommends that the introduction of a non-device-dependent public service broadcasting charge (household-based) is feasible, efficient and practical considering the increasing threats to the sustainability of current licence fee revenues.

Secondly, the Committee recommends that the existing proportional allocation of licence fee monies be scrutinised and revised to ensure that any monies realised by the implementation of the anti-evasion strategy are provided to a diversity of existing and new sources in a fair and equitable way. Priorities may include restoring the public broadcaster, TG4, to more sustainable funding levels, and funding independent regional, local and community radio and television (as direct funding for their public service obligations under the Broadcasting Act 2009). The Committee recommends that the Minister establish a new scheme to assist these radio stations in the provision of local news and current affairs programmes. The scheme envisaged would be administered by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), and amend the BAI Sound & Vision Scheme (see IRIS 2017-7/26) to allow funding for a wider category of broadcasting to be supported.

Thirdly, the Committee agrees in principle to the introduction of re-transmission fees and giving RTÉ the capacity to negotiate with suitable platform providers (without prejudice to meeting their public service obligations). Re-transmission fees are fees paid by pay television platforms to broadcasters for the right to distribute (or re-transmit) the broadcasters' channels. The Report states that in Ireland, the free-to-air channels RTÉ, TG4 and TV3 are distributed over a variety of

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pay television platforms, including eir, Sky, Virgin Media and Vodafone. At present, these platforms do not pay the broadcasters re-transmission fees for carrying their channels, and broadcasters do not pay for the transmission of their channels by the platforms. Moreover, under section 114 (f) of the Broadcasting Act 2009, RTÉ is obligated "to establish, maintain and operate a television broadcasting service and a sound broadcasting service which shall have the character of a public service [which] shall be made available, in so far as RTÉ considers reasonably practicable, to Irish communities outside the island of Ireland." The Committee also considers that a provision should be included to review the negotiation process in relation to re-transmission fees.

Finally, the committee recommends that all references in legislation to "public service broadcasting" and "public service broadcasters" should be changed to "public service media", where appropriate.

Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Report of the Joint Committee on the Future Funding of Public Service Broadcasting, 13 December 2017

https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_communications_climate_action_and_environment/reports/2017/2017-11-28_report-on-the-future-funding-of-public-service-broadcasting_en.pdf

TV licence should be replaced by broadcasting charge - Communications Committee report, 13 December 2017

http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/mediazone/pressreleases/2017/name-45042-en.html

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