[FR] New Audio-visual Bill in the Spring?

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Charlotte Vier
Légipresse

Catherine Trautmann, Minister for Culture and Communication, presented a Communication on the reform of legislation in the audio-visual sector to the Council of Ministers on Wednesday, 28 January 1998. When she took up office in June 1997 she had announced her intention to amend the Act of 30 September 1986. The Communication sets out the main features of the Bill, which should be tabled in the Spring. In the meantime, the Minister wishes to set up concertation with all professionals in the audio-visual sector. According to its description, the Bill appears to be more modest than the reforms announced a few months ago. Six areas for consideration are mapped out. Contrary, firstly, to what had been intended, the thresholds of capital concentration (currently 49%) will not be reduced; indeed the text refers to other measures (still to be defined) to `increase the independence and financial transparency of communication undertakings'. These measures point to the separation into an independent structure of the communication activities of large-scale industrial groups.

The text goes on to strengthen the mechanisms guaranteeing pluralism and the proper functioning of markets. The French media authority, CSA (Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel), will have a role to play here in co-operation with the Competition Council (Conseil de la Concurrence) in plans for purchase or acquiring holdings in the communications sector. The rights of the public are also said to be taken into consideration; access to the broadcasting of major events will be guaranteed. The presence of the public-sector channels in the various satellite offers will be ensured by statutory means in order to not distort competition between the various operators. There should moreover be true concertation on the public-sector pole. The constitution of France Télévision as a genuine group and the merger of Arte and La Cinquième will be finalised. The CSA will emerge strengthened from the reform, as we have seen, with the task of giving its opinion on any plans for concentration, but beyond that the distribution of responsibilities between the government and the regulatory body will be clarified. Lastly, consideration will be given to the general legal framework of communication services in order to unify the schemes for distribution by cable and via satellite, and also to take into account the development of regional and local television channels.

In recent years a number of attempts to reform French legislation on the audio-visual sector have failed. We will need to wait some months to see whether Mrs Trautmann's bill will fare any better.

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Communication relative à la réforme de la législation sur l'audiovisuel, 28 janvier 1998

Communication on the reform of legislation in the audiovisual sector, 28 January 1998

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