[BE] Who Will Trace the Cheats?

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In 1997 the Belgian Communities, given responsibility in 1971 for regulating television, assumed responsibility for collecting broadcasting licence fees. The annual amount (BEF 7,488 for a television, BEF 1,092 for a car radio) is still fixed at national level, but the product is allocated to the Communities' budgets, in which it constitutes one of the very few tax revenues. The very Community-minded governments were therefore much more motivated to collect the fees efficiently than was the national service, set up within the former Régie des Téléphones (State-run telephone service) but marginalised to some extent since the service (which became BELGACOM) was more concerned with opening up the market for telecommunications and developments towards the new technologies.

The Flemish-speaking Community has set up its own collection service and, according to La Libre Belgique, has in three months located a further 3-5,444 car radios and 29,104 televisions, bringing the annual product of the tax in the northern part of the country up to BEF 16,000 million. This is an increase of BEF 250 million but could still be improved on, as the number of undeclared car radios is estimated at 150,000 and undeclared televisions at 250,000, all evading payment of the fee despite the fact that the operators of cable networks (to which more than 90% of homes are connected) are required to supply the authorities responsible for collecting the fee with a list of their subscribers at regular intervals.

The French-speaking Community hopes to do equally well, and is employing 163 agents for the purpose, recruited mainly from the former State-run service; at any event, it has included revenue amounting to BEF 96,1 million in its budget for 1988 compared with BEF 87,7 million in 1996. In the course of 1997, 40,000 more colour televisions and 25,000 more car radios were `found'.

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