

 OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE  
EU MONITORING AND ADVOCACY PROGRAM

 OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE  
MEDIA PROGRAM

  
CENTRE DE RECHERCHES POLITIQUES DE SCIENCES PO

The full text of this report is available at  
<http://www.eumap.org/reports/2005> and at  
<http://www.cevipof.msh-paris.fr>.

For further information please contact  
Elisabeth Kosellek at CEVIPOF, Paris  
[elisabeth.kosellek@sciences-po.fr](mailto:elisabeth.kosellek@sciences-po.fr) or  
Miriam Anati at OSI, Budapest,  
[manati@osieurope.org](mailto:manati@osieurope.org), + 36 30 2748533.

For immediate release

## How can French TV respond to citizens needs?

*Paris and Budapest, 24 November 2005* – Although it formally looks like a balanced dual system, French broadcasting is, in fact, dominated by a single private company: the commercial television station, TF1. At the same time, as in many other European countries, public service television broadcasting is experiencing a profound identity crisis. While it is recognised that the diversity of the French population is not well represented on French screens, France lacks the necessary legal instruments to implement affirmative action in this domain. Finally, public participation in broadcasting regulation is extremely low, while debate on French media policy is mainly confined to experts and professionals. Broadcasting legislation, which is drawn from dozens of laws, is overly complex and not easily understandable by citizens.

These are the main findings of the France country report included in the monitoring series *Television across Europe: regulation, policy and independence*, released today in Paris. Produced by the Open Society Institute (OSI) in cooperation with the Center for Political Research at Sciences-Po (CEVIPOF), the report provides a detailed analysis of the situation of broadcasting in France. It also makes concrete recommendations addressed at bringing the French television sector more in line with its citizens' needs.

As in many European countries, public service broadcasting in France is experiencing a serious identity crisis. The dilemma faced by the public service broadcaster France Télévisions is how to fulfil its cultural and educational mission, while also successfully competing with private channels. Thierry Vedel, reporter for the France report, writes: "Public television stations are caught in a double, and contradictory, bind: while being given public service missions and very exalted cultural aims, they are continuously compared to the private channels in terms of ratings, economic performance or professional management".

At the same time, the private channel TF1 has an average audience share of over 30 per cent, and receives over 50 per cent of the total television advertising spending in France. Such a dominant position cannot be found anywhere else in Western Europe. While the French regulatory agency, the High Council of Audiovisual (CSA), is now well established in the broadcasting landscape, it appears to lack the resources necessary to implement a regulatory system that is based purely on contracts with operators.

Many viewers and media observers concede that the diversity of French society is poorly reflected on French television. Regulation in this field — for example, in the form of quotas — is difficult, or even impossible to implement. Action in this domain therefore depends in large part on the voluntary commitments of television operators, which in the last years have taken a number of interesting initiatives to promote a greater diversity in their programmes and staff. Nonetheless, a constant monitoring of progress on increasing diversity by civil society is necessary.

More generally, the OSI report released today stresses that: “it is necessary to know much better what people really expect from television, and also how they actually assess programmes and how their expectations and evaluations can be accurately measured”. More comprehensive research and monitoring is also essential for the diversification of the television programming and to improve regulation. The OSI report recommends the creation of an independent observatory to develop monitoring methodologies and indicators for television, with the aim to encourage a civic culture for broadcasting. This structure would also serve as a discussion forum for all interested parties in broadcasting, including viewers.

A different problem facing the French broadcasting system is the low public participation in debate about media policy, which remains restricted to experts and professionals. The OSI report urges State authorities to take action to promote the expansion of truly representative viewers associations. It also calls on the Government to initiate amendments to the 1986 Law on Freedom of Communication, making citizens’ participation mandatory when the broadcast licences of television stations are renewed. Finally, as the accessibility and readability of laws is now recognised as a constitutional objective, the report recommends the consolidation of the audiovisual legislation into a clear and easy-to-use code of communication.

The OSI report presents a complete picture of broadcasting in France, with a focus on television. The report, the result of almost two years of work, looks at the general regulatory framework, analyses the performance of public service and commercial television broadcasters, and also reviews the development of new technologies in the country.

#### **Note to editors**

This report is part of a series of 20 country reports monitoring “*Television across Europe: regulation, policy and independence*”. The reports were prepared by EUMAP, the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program of the Open Society Institute, in cooperation with OSI’s Network Media Program. All reports are available online at <http://www.eumap.org>. More information on the Open Society Institute is available at <http://www.soros.org>.

The French report was developed in cooperation with the Center for Political Research at Sciences-Po (CEVIPOF). CEVIPOF has traditionally been known in France and in Europe for the quality of its research on political institutions and behaviour. Since the 1990s, CEVIPOF has gradually expanded its research fields to cover social and political transformations in post-industrial societies. CEVIPOF blends empirical research and theoretical approaches toward a better understanding of the changes in modern democracies. Beyond its mission of enhancing and disseminating knowledge within the scientific community, CEVIPOF is committed to using this knowledge in the interests of the citizens, contributing its expertise to public debate, and offering new perspectives of research and implementation. More information about CEVIPOF is available at <http://www.cevipof.msh-paris.fr>.