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## Press release

### How can the Italian “television anomaly” be ended?

*Milan and Budapest, 16 December 2005* – The Italian television system is comparable from an economic point of view to that of Europe’s most developed media markets. However, when it comes to political ties, pluralism and independence, it resembles much more closely Europe’s transition countries.

This is the main conclusion of the Italy country report in the monitoring series *Television across Europe: regulation, policy and independence*, released today in Milan. The report, produced by the Open Society Institute (OSI), was drafted by Gianpietro Mazzoleni from the Università degli Studi di Milano and Giulio Vigevani from the Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca. In its recommendations it suggests possible solutions to reduce the intertwining of television and politics, break Mediaset’s monopoly on commercial broadcasting and ensure that public service broadcasting in Italy can enjoy real independence from political and economic interests.

According to the report, from an economic point of view, the Italian television market is thriving, with healthy advertising revenues and huge television production. However, the bulk of television advertising revenues is swallowed by the country’s goliaths, RAI and Mediaset, which each operate three nationwide analogue television channels.

It is hoped that digitalisation will break this duopoly, which badly affects the diversity of programming and plurality of expression on Italian broadcasting. However, there are justified fears that, in the absence of necessary legislative changes, the current major players on the television markets will be given enough of the digital spectrum to perpetuate their dominance in the digital market as well.

This is in addition to the anomaly manifest in the position of the current Prime Minister, who can manipulate public opinion - particularly during elections - through his control of both public and private television channels.

The OSI report makes several recommendations. Among others, it calls on the Italian Parliament to adopt legislative changes aimed at transforming the Communications Guarantee Authority (AGCOM) into a body with more independence from political powers and additional sanctioning powers.

At the same time, it is important to carry out a thorough reform of RAI with the aim of transforming it into a real public service broadcaster. In particular, the report calls on the Italian Parliament to halt the privatisation of RAI and, instead, to break the State-owned corporation into two companies, one with public service obligations and the structure of a BBC-like foundation, and the second with a commercial profile, which should be sold on capital markets. Parliament is also urged to amend legislation to ensure that RAI becomes a really independent institution, modelled on the Constitutional Court or the Bank of Italy.

To spark competitiveness in the Italian broadcasting market, the OSI report urges the Parliament and Government to take a series of steps to ensure easier access of more competitors to the market, and clear provisions on the formation of dominant positions. “Parliament should also adopt legislation imposing limits on the advertising revenues that a media company can control,” the report states.

Moreover, the report shows that it is crucial for the Italian Parliament to amend the Law on Conflict of Interests to introduce explicit incompatibility provisions between elective and government positions and ownership of media outlets.

The OSI report is the result of almost two years of monitoring. It offers a complete picture of television in Italy, looking at the general regulatory framework, the performance of public service television and commercial television, and analysing 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, as well as a regional overview, are available online at <http://www.eumap.org>. More information on the Open Society Institute is available at <http://www.soros.org>.

The Italy report was drafted by Prof. Gianpietro Mazzoleni from the Political Science Department of the Università degli Studi di Milano and Prof. Giulio Enea Vigevani from the Law department of the Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca.