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For immediate release

Romanian television in troubled waters

Bucharest and Budapest, 28 November 2005 – In spite of a high number of media outlets, of legislation that should guarantee media independence, and of substantial foreign investment, Romanian TV is in troubled waters: public service broadcasting has long suffered from a lack of political independence, while the ownership patterns of commercial television stations reveal an excessive concentration and insufficient transparency; in both public service and commercial stations, journalistic freedom is limited and programming is increasingly tabloid and trivialised.

These are the main findings of the Romania report included in the monitoring series *Television across Europe: regulation, policy and independence*, released today in Bucharest. Drafted by Manuela Preoteasa and produced by the Open Society Institute (OSI), with the full support of the Center for Independent Journalism, the report provides a detailed analysis of the situation of broadcasting in Romania. It also offers 22 concrete recommendations addressed at bringing the television sector in Romania in line with its citizens' needs.

Romania's public service broadcaster, the Romanian Television Broadcasting Corporation (SRTV), has long served as a government mouthpiece — none of the governments to lead the country over past years has had the courage to put an end to this tradition of cohabitation. Between 2000 and 2004, control and censorship of SRTV was particularly harsh, with direct government interference in the station's editorial line. However, the centre-right coalition in power since 2004 has already established a parliamentary commission in charge of investigating the performance of the public service broadcaster, and has now initiated a bill that, if urgently adopted, gives some hope of reform of the public service broadcaster.

The report released today calls on Parliament to speed up adoption of legislation to introduce an independent audit of the management and editorial independence of the public service broadcaster. It also calls on Parliament to ensure that the independence of the public service broadcasters is safeguarded, when the Law on the Romanian Public Radio (SRR) and Romanian Television Broadcasting Corporation (SRTV) is changed. In particular, the new law should ensure a broader social representation in the Councils of Administration of SRTV and SRR, and introduce provisions on professional competence of the councils' members.

Although it has the mission to provide distinctive, qualitative educational and informative programming, SRTV's programming is as tabloid and as trivialised as that of commercial television. In the commercial sector, in order to avoid clashing with their powerful owners and their influential political and business

circles, television journalists have simply stopped covering real political topics. Primetime newscasts have made a habit of covering “non-news” with little relevance for the community, such as car accidents. To improve quality in broadcasting, the OSI report urges public service and commercial broadcasters alike to support educational and cultural policy in broadcasting, for example by establishing a fund for the support of quality in broadcasting that would be managed by a private, independent body.

Television ownership concentration in Romania has increased over the last few years and today two large private players dominate the market — the Pro TV group and Antena 1. However, taking the television market as a whole, there is scarce data as to the sources of financing of the players, which makes television a non-transparent sector. To address this situation, the OSI report calls on the Romanian broadcasting regulator, the National Audiovisual Council (CNA), to initiate a debate about the necessity to oblige television operators to disclose the financing sources and strictly enforce existing rules on ownership concentration, turning the commercial television in Romania into a healthy and transparent sector.

The UK Ambassador to Romania, Quinton Quayle, stated recently: “I think my view of the state of the media in Romania is a bit like the Commission Report on Romania's preparation for EU Accession: has made encouraging progress, but still has some way to go”. The OSI report aims to provide Romanian policy makers with concrete, realistic recommendations on how to ensure that progress in the broadcasting sector is as rapid as possible.

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>.

We would like to acknowledge the Center for Independent Journalism for its strong support to the program. More information about the Center is available at <http://www.cji.ro>.