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For further information contact
Miriam Anati at
manati@osieurope.org or
Alessandra Lombardi at
+39 347 7589385 or email:
alexlomb@gmail.com

Press release

Italian broadcasting: the silent scandal

Rome, London, Budapest: 21 October 2008 – Since the adoption of the so-called “Gasparri” law in 2004, and despite Prodi’s two years in government and a new government now in place, the reform of Italy’s broadcasting system has not only come to a halt; it has disappeared from the political agenda.

Although foreign coverage of Italy never fails to mention Berlusconi’s influence over television, this situation now appears to stir little controversy at home. Realistic alternatives to the status quo have become hard to imagine, let alone to initiate.

Tackling the problems of Italy’s broadcast sector (the most monopolized in Western Europe) was a priority for the centre-left coalition that came to power in May 2006. Yet, once in office, the coalition government appeared to lose conviction.

Hence, according to a new report by the Open Society Institute (OSI), “pluralism of information and the independence of RAI were strangely neglected” by Romano Prodi’s administration.

The report on Italy, included in the series “Television across Europe 2008”, will be presented on Wednesday, 22 October in Rome to the press and to a public of professionals during *Eurovisioni 2008*, a yearly event focusing on broadcasting policy. Former minister Paolo Gentiloni and other experts will discuss the reports’ findings with the authors.

As Prodi’s minister of communications, Gentiloni prepared a bill to reform RAI. As submitted to the Senate in May 2007, this bill was meant to guarantee RAI’s independence from political and economic interests, including provisions to ensure the transparency of appointments, candidates’ experience and parliamentary hearings of the candidates. But Parliament’s reaction was lukewarm; Italian deputies had come to see their control over RAI as a natural prerogative.

As a result the Italian TV market remains stagnant, due to the extraordinary level of concentration. The two largest operators, RAI and Mediaset, still command around 85 per cent of both the audience and advertising. Frequencies are also in their hands, making it practically impossible for other players to enter the arena. Political influence

over RAI, the public service broadcaster, and political bias in the Mediaset channels, have not been addressed.

Digital terrestrial television has been unable to break the status quo by encouraging new operators into the market, in part because of legal provisions that impede newcomers from entering the digital market.

Only satellite television seems to bring some dynamism to this otherwise immobile market.

Along with a full account of Italy's broadcasting stalemate, the new OSI report offers detailed recommendations for progress. It calls on Parliament to modify appointment criteria for senior positions at RAI, and also to introduce antitrust provisions for the analogue and digital television market. These provisions should stimulate competition and ensure that digitisation will not strengthen the current duopoly.

It is clear that only legal reform can move the TV market towards greater pluralism, independence and competition. Given recent experiences, however, it remains unclear who in Italy can take up the burden of initiating positive change.

Note to Editors

This report is part of the monitoring series, *Television across Europe: Follow-up Reports 2008*. The series updates the analysis in nine of the twenty countries that were included in the 2005 series of reports, *Television across Europe: Regulation, Policy and Independence*: Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Italy, Lithuania, the Republic of Macedonia, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

Both series of reports were produced by the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program (EUMAP) of the Open Society Institute and the Media Program of the Open Society Foundation, in cooperation with local experts and civil society organisations. The full text of all the reports, as well as a European overview, is being published in English and in translation on <http://www.mediapolicy.org>

The Italian 2008 report was prepared by Gianpietro Mazzoleni, Professor of Sociology of Mass Communication and Political Communication, University of Milan and Giulio Enea Vigevani, Professor of Constitutional Law and Media Law, University of Milan Bicocca. It is presented in Italy by Eurovisioni. For further information on the foundation see <http://www.eurovisioni.it>.