

## Press Release

Bucharest and Budapest, 19 May 2008

### **Romanian broadcasting: playground for political and business interests**

There were hopes after the 2004 elections that the end of Social Democratic rule would boost media independence. Instead, a new Open Society Institute report on the situation of television in Romania indicates, Romanian broadcasting remains the playground of media moguls, interested in pursuing their political and business interests rather than producing high-quality, independent and diverse television programmes. The report, released today in Bucharest, is part of the series “*Television across Europe: Follow-up Reports 2008*”.

Although the Romanian media boasts hundreds of channels, the broadcast sector is dominated by four giants: two foreign investors, and two local companies. Over the past three years, Central European Media Enterprises increased its stake in the four channels licensed under the Pro TV company, maintained its radio interests, bought a sports channel and entered the publishing, printing houses, cinema and entertainment markets. Its main rival, the German group ProSiebenSat.1, which bought the Scandinavian media group SBS Broadcasting in June 2007, has a comfortable position in the radio market, where it holds 75 local licences.

Pluralism is not helped by the law, which does not require transparency on the part of actual or would-be investors; nor does it obstruct cross-ownership of different media outlets. Without such legal provisions, the main regulatory body, the National Audiovisual Council, and the anti-monopoly watchdog, the Competition Council, were helpless to stop the concentration of capital in the broadcast market, which has continued apace.

The public service broadcaster, the Romanian Television Company (SRTV), still waiting for its long-promised restructuring, continues to be a prey to political interference. According to the report’s author, Manuela Preoteasa, “the corrupt political climate surrounding SRTV directly hurts the station’s independence. Parliament has contributed to the further politicisation of public service broadcasting by inadequate legislation and the perpetuation of oversized public broadcasters, which have been struggling to finance their operations.”

The National Audiovisual Council has made efforts to be transparent, organising public consultations. Parliament, unfortunately, has acted very differently, often ignoring the regulator as well as the public in its deliberations on media. Even worse, the Government took over the management of the frequency spectrum: an extraordinary move that contradicts the European principle of regulatory independence.

The Senate, which was much criticized for its lack of transparency, cancelled the legal process to introduce digitalisation despite the approaching deadline for analogue switch-off in 2012.

This timely report is published just as Romania's long-awaited bill on digital transition in broadcasting, drafted by the Ministry of Culture, is presented for public debate. The report released today calls upon the Romanian regulators and lawmakers to adopt as soon as possible a new strategy which would specify procedures for the introduction of digitalisation. The strategy should be preceded by a serious debate involving all main stakeholders.

### **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 covered in the 2005 series of reports, "*Television across Europe: regulation, policy and independence*": Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Italy, Lithuania, 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 Network Media Program (NMP) 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 Romanian 2008 report, as well as the 2005 report, was drafted by Manuela Preoteasa, managing partner with EurActiv Romania. The Romanian Center for Independent Journalism and Media Monitoring Agency were associated with its preparation and promotion.