



Info

Reform of European television rules one step closer

The reform of the European television came one step closer when the Committee on Culture and Education decided on Tuesday to accept a draft second reading compromise reached with the Council presidency on the Audiovisual Media Services Directive.

The new legislation aims to update the 1997 Television without Frontiers directive, now to be dubbed the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, to bring it into line with new developments in audiovisual technology and advertising. The Commission's proposal is intended to create a level playing field for public and private broadcasters and independent producers. It also aims to widen the scope of the rules to include new media.

Since the European Parliament adopted its first reading in December 2006, negotiations have been going on between the rapporteur, Ruth Hieronymi (EPP-ED, DE), and the German Council presidency to reach an agreement. The result of this process was backed on Tuesday by the Committee on Culture and Education. If the 27 ministers responsible for Media also back the deal when they meet on 24 May, the Culture Committee will recommend Parliament to accept the Common Position without amendments.

The compromise reached between the rapporteur and the German Council includes the following decisions:

- On the issue of **product placement**, the placement of a specific product would be allowed in a limited range of programmes, and then only under strict rules. Product placement would be banned in "news and current affairs programmes, children's programmes, documentaries and programmes of advice". "Product integration and thematic placement shall be prohibited in principle." Before a programme containing product placement starts and when it ends, a special signal should appear. This signal should also appear before commercial breaks.
- The principle of the **country of origin**, meaning that the rules in the country where the broadcaster is located should apply, remains, but controls will be in place to ensure it is not abused.
- Access to **media services for disabled people** has been put directly into the legislation, and not only in the introductory remarks. The compromise has on this point taken into account the position of the Parliament, to integrate these

rights in the binding legislation.

- There will be a special **code of conduct towards children** also fully integrated in the binding paragraphs of the legislation. The code of conduct should avoid for instance junk food commercials aimed at children.
- As for the **frequency of commercial breaks**, the compromise accepts the position adopted by Parliament in December, to limit commercial breaks in "the transmission of films made for television (excluding series, serials, light entertainment programmes and documentaries), cinematographic works, children's programmes and news programmes" to "once for each scheduled period of 30 minutes". In children's programs commercial breaks will not be allowed unless the programs are more than 30 minutes long. The upper limit for commercials is 12 minutes an hour.

Assuming the media ministers approve the deal, the legislative process looks likely to be completed at this second reading stage. The Committee's recommendation is, of course, not binding on the plenary. Any amendments at second reading require an absolute majority in Parliament (i.e. at least 393 votes in favour).

Procedure: Co-decision, Second reading -- Plenary Vote: July (possibly)

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Chair : Nikolaos Sifunakis (EL) - PES

Committee on Culture and Education