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Executive summary

**Report on regional public television in Europe
Albania, Belgium, Bosnia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland,
Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Serbia,
Slovenia, Sweden**

25 April 2004

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1. Premise

In the spring 2003 the University of Lugano made for Rai-Radiotelevisione Italiana the first step of a research on regional public televisions concerning eight European countries: **France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom**. The research was presented during the Circom Assembly of last year in Grado (Italy) enriched with a synthesis of data and answers collected through a questionnaire sent by our Association to all its members for the occasion. The second step of the research, presented here, has been made by the University of Lugano during the spring 2004, with the aim to identify the main characteristics of public television on the regional level in 15 European countries, that implement the 8 countries analysed before: **Albania, Belgium, Bosnia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, Hungary**. Those new cases provide an enlarged range of elements for comparison. At the same time we have collected from Circom members more questionnaires that will be enclosed to the qualitative research report.

2. High diversity of structure

What follows from the analysis of the surveyed cases is a high level of variety of public television activity on the regional level. This clearly depends on the size and population of different countries, on the central and local administrative organization, on the level of linguistic homogeneity and on a series of historical, political and cultural factors. For this reason it is difficult to talk of one or more models of public regional television.

In fact, however, there is an important factor of comparison, which allows us to subdivide the surveyed cases in two large categories, as we did in the first step report: the statute of regional television centres in terms of independence or organic dependence on the national television companies.

3. Independent or decentralised regional broadcasting

In Belgium, Bosnia, Denmark, Greece, Netherlands, Portugal, Russia and Serbia there are public regional television centres independent from national television companies. In Albania, Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Sweden and Slovenia there are regional centres, which constitute an organic and integrated part of the national television companies. Where regional public televisions are independent in some cases they broadcast only to the regional population as in Denmark, Portugal, Netherlands, Finland, Russia, Sweden, in other cases they broadcast at national level as in Belgium and Greece. Where regional public televisions are local branch of national companies in some case they produce only for regional transmissions as in Albania, Finland, Slovenia, Sweden, in other cases they produce also for national public television channels as in Hungary, Ireland, Czech Republic. In the case of Portugal, regional television centres are independent companies, owned in part by national public television, and they produce programs also for the international public channel to reach the “Diasporas” of regional population.

4. Relationship with regional institutions

Differences concern also the relationship between the regional television centres and the regional political, cultural, and social context. In some cases the relationship is important as in Belgium, Bosnia, Denmark, Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, and Serbia. In other cases it not evident not evident as in Hungary, Ireland, Sweden, and Finland. In the first case the regional

institutions are engaged on financing and/or controlling the regional television stations at different levels. In the second case the regional station activities are financed and controlled by the national broadcasting companies. The case of Portugal is particular because the regional television stations operate independently from the national broadcasting company, but are managed and in part owned by it.

5. Range of activities

Also the extension of regional broadcasting activities changes from one country to another. In some cases the regional activity is limited to some daily news broadcasted in a window inside the national programs as in Finland, Hungary, Ireland and Sweden; in other cases it concerns a more or less wide range of programs of various genres as in Belgium, Netherlands, Denmark, Portugal, Russia, and Portugal. In correspondence to that dimension, there are differences in the economic resources at disposal of each regional television. In some cases, like in Netherlands, the regional television stations are licensed to do also other communication activities as print and electronic publishing and Internet.

6. Financing

Also at economic level there are many differences from case to case. There are three main typologies. The first is the financing by advertising and sponsorship as in Albania. The second is the financing by public (national or regional) grant in some cases combined with advertising. In Netherlands, regional public television are financed by national and regional government grants and advertising. In Belgium the Walloon public television is financed by government grant and advertising. In Portugal the regional public television is financed by regional government grant, by licence fee and advertising. In the third case the financing is only by licence fee, as in Finland and Hungary, or by licence fee and advertising (or other commercial activities) as in Bosnia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia

7. Four special cases

There are some cases where the structure or the function of regional television stations presents some particular characteristics useful to be mentioned.

7.1. Regional broadcasters for national audiences

In Belgium, each region and community have their own legislative and executive organs and their own powers. The responsibility over culture is located at a community-level. This means that audiovisual media, television include, are language-related and a community-matter.

For the Flemish speaking community broadcast VRT, a national public radio-television company which has two TV channels (TV1 and Canvas).

For the French speaking community broadcast RTBF, a national public radio-television company which has two TV channels (RTBF1 and RTBF 2).

For the German speaking community, which has a population of 69.000 inhabitants, broadcast BRF, a national public radio-television company that since 1997 has a limited television service.

Also in Greece there is a regional television station, ERT-3, located in Thessaloniki, that broadcast for the entire national audience.

7.2. Regional broadcaster: independent and in cooperation with third parties

Netherlands has 13 public regional broadcasting channels independent from national broadcasting. ROOS (*Stichting regionale omroep overleg en samenwerking*) is the coordinating instance of the 13 public regional broadcasting channels. Its tasks are to promote

the interest of the sector dealing with the political field, the several governments and other parties; to develop the policy; to conclude contracts for the collective and to take care of other communal interests. Transmission time is allocated to regional television only if the government of the province declares to take care of the financing of the public regional broadcasting station. Among content obligations, there are: 50% of the transmission time must concern information, culture and education; 50% percent of the transmission time can be assigned to the province for public information. The regional broadcasting channels are allowed to transmit commercials for third parties and are not allowed to transmit their programs outside the borders of the province for which their programs are made.

7.3. Regional broadcasting under social control

The regional stations in Denmark are independent with their own board of directors and management. They also have a council of 50-100 people representing a wide range of different social organizations in each region. Every four years the Council elects the Board of Directors. Apart from that, the role of the Council is to comment on programs and to give inspiration and good ideas. It meets twice a year.

The regional TV2-stations can broadcast news, sports, contests, teletexts and information for the public. They are not allowed to provide other programme services, but they may provide other services, including telecom services in connection with their programme services, in order to utilise the stations' technical equipment, special expertise etc. They may establish new companies or contribute capital to existing companies in order to carry out other activities, or in order to co-operate on media related activities with other enterprises. The stations may not use their license fees for that purpose.

The fulfilment of the regional TV2 stations public service obligations are specified in public service contracts between the Minister of Culture and the individual stations. Each of them must prepare annual statements for it and must produce news and current affairs programmes, and the programming must emphasise regional affiliation.

7.4. Independent regional broadcasting managed by national public broadcasting company

In Portugal, since 2003, television law (m.32/2003) has redefined and strengthened the activities of the regional public broadcasters establishing especially:

- a) the creation of autonomous regional audiovisual companies, controlled by regional governments with the participation of the national public broadcaster (Rádio e Televisão de Portugal, RTP), which separately manage the television channels in the regions of Madeira and the Azores;
- b) regional programs must not interfere with programs transmitted by the national public broadcasters in these regions;
- c) the programs offered by the autonomous regional channels should deal with subject matter of specific interest to the region and feature the values and the characteristics of the regional culture;
- d) the national public broadcaster allows the free transmission of its channels by the autonomous regional channels;
- e) the Government allocates the 50% of the resources to the autonomous regional television companies with public service activities.

8. Development of digital terrestrial television

Digital terrestrial television at regional level is another item considered in the study. In which we find that there are some countries where the projects or the experiences are well evident or already operational as in Finland, Denmark, Ireland, Hungary, Netherlands and in many other where nothing exist or is known in that field as in Albania, Czech Republic, Portugal, Greece, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia

Let's see the situation in three countries, Finland, Netherland and Sweden where this activity has already taken off.

The Finnish public television YLE started its digital terrestrial transmissions 1 September 2000 in the areas of Helsinki, Tampere and Turku. In the first phase the channels YLE TV1, YLE TV2 and MTV3 and Channel Four Finland were transmitted simultaneously both as digital and as analogue compatible broadcasts. The first phase of the construction of digital TV was finished in September. By the end of the year 2000 more than a half of the Finns lived within the digital tv broadcasting area. Today all the regional YLE television have their news broadcasted simultaneously both analogue and digital. Helsinki, Tampere and Turku houses three of the regional stations.

In Sweden terrestrial digital television was introduced in 1999 not only at national level but also in five regional SVT channels (Nordnytt, Västnytt, Sydnytt, Östnytt and ABC). The stations could at that time reach roughly half of the population. All of the 11 regional SVT are broadcasted also by digital satellite. At the end of 2000 the digital broadcasting at regional level was able to cover 12% of people (or about 1 million Swedes). In 2002 SVT24 broadcasted 8 700 hours, 24 hours all days. Nearly 900 hours were news from the programme Aktuellt, the news Rapport or news and production from all the regional SVT channels.

On the 28th of May 2003 the Swedish Parliament decided that analogue television broadcasting in Sweden will be switched off by the 1st of February 2008. Terrestrial television will then be all digital. The switch-off will be realized in steps. The Government will develop the details regarding switch-off, expected to be presented to Parliament early 2004. This also concerns questions such as the digital coverage and the licensing method.

9. Regional television's forecast

Regional public broadcasting in Europe shows a high level of heterogeneity due to the differences of its institutional, socio-political, economic and cultural history and context in each country. For that reason also problems and prospects differ from country to country and it is not possible to show a model towards which every country is aiming to. Nevertheless, it's possible to point out some areas of useful discussion for the next future.

- First of all the financing problem. In many cases the money invested for regional broadcasting is not sufficient to offer at regional level a wide range of programmes both from quantity and tv genres point of view.
- A second point concerns the level of cooperation and exchange between regional television stations and local cultural and social institutions.
- A third point to consider is the level of autonomy that regional public television stations have with regards to two relevant powers: the one of national television companies and the one of regional institutional powers.
- A fourth interesting question is: to what extent programmes originated at regional level must or can be broadcasted at national level (directly from regional stations or inserted in national transmissions).
- A fifth point concerns the level of transfrontier cooperation and exchanges between regional public television of neighbouring countries.
- The last but not less important point is that concerning money, programmes, radio frequencies and all the other elements that must taken into account for the digital terrestrial television take off and the analogic transmissions switch off at regional level.

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