

## **EU public consultation on public broadcasting**

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**The Labour Party, Ireland.**

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1. The Labour Party values and supports the role of public broadcasting.

Public service broadcasting has always been a fundamental cornerstone of the Irish broadcasting system. It promotes diversity, social and cultural values that are essential to a properly functioning democracy. The core values of public service broadcasting remain steadfast whatever the broadcasting technology environment. However, digital technologies may undermine the delivery of broadcasting of a public service nature and threaten broadcasting principles such as being free at the point of use, universally available and connecting with the majority of the national audience. It is important that the risk associated with the growth of digital TV of a predominantly pay-per-view service with fewer locally-produced programmes is addressed and mitigated through the support for public broadcasting. Therefore the funding and support for public broadcasting is more important than ever.

2. TV licence collection methods must be updated and addressed

Public broadcasting in Ireland is funded by a TV licence mechanism. In an age where there is a growing convergence of technologies the need for public broadcasting funding is vital. Therefore the changing nature of TV, and the role of the TV licence fee and its collection should be addressed.

Ireland must examine measures to avoid the situation that arose in 2008 where 54 people were imprisoned for not paying their TV licence, at an estimated cost of €2,000 a week.

The fact that a person can be sent to jail for not paying their licence fee is farcical and a waste of our prison resources. The considerable cost of sending someone to prison for

non-payment of a TV licence highlights the need to come up with serious alternatives that work.

The Irish government has set out limited measures that give people the option of paying a fine rather than prison, but this does not go far enough. Countries such as Greece have developed methods such as collecting a percentage of a person's electricity bill that goes towards public broadcasting. A mandatory measure such as this, with derogations for the minority of households who do not have a TV, should be seriously looked at.

### 3. Convergence

In Ireland there is a strong case for making the leap towards setting up one regulator, combining ComReg and the soon to be established Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, particularly in view of the convergence of technologies taking place in the Communications area.

It is clear that:

- 1) We need one regulator as pertains in other countries, not two as is proposed. It is inevitable that this will happen eventually so we should do it now.
- 2) The cost of establishing another 'quango' with all its attendant apparatus is considerable. Under the Broadcasting Bill 2008 the costs will be borne by the broadcasting industry at a time when advertising revenues are plummeting.
- 3) ComReg currently has a wide ranging capacity of legal and financial expertise. To establish a section to deal with issues of content and complaints is a simple, effective and forward-looking approach which acknowledges the realities of our economic status and our technological future.