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Commentary

Non-commercial radio and TV channels: Important tools for the development of democracy and freedom of speech

Non-commercial radio and TV channels are necessary and important elements in the creation of media plurality. This has been emphasized in a recent report commissioned by the European parliament and a recommendation from the Council of Europe. What is the state of non-commercial channels in the Nordic countries?

How should "non-commercial radio and TV channels" be defined? In *The state of community media in the European Union*, the report commissioned by the European parliament, the term "community media" is used and applied to non-profit media institutions, run mainly by volunteers to serve the local community or different kinds of minorities.

Why and how did non-commercial channels come into being? De-regulation of Nordic media markets began in the 1980s. The radio and television monopolies had to give way as a result of the political will to open the area for new channels. Enthusiasts ran many of these channels, and their own efforts were often the only resources available. The first years of trial activities were followed by permanent regulations and concession systems, which during the decades to follow were evaluated and to some extent amended.

Political opponents of the broadcasting monopoly often called attention to the possibilities of the market – the sale of advertising – as a financing concept for the new private channels. The commercial local and regional media sector has grown in volume over the years, and several of the channels have become interesting for the large media corporations. However, in the Nordic countries, there still exists a varied undergrowth of non-commercial radio and TV channels that from time to time become the object of attention of political authorities.

During recent decades, technological development has taken paths that enthusiasts from the last days of the broadcasting monopolies could hardly have dreamt about. The Internet has opened up new possibilities for transmissions via broadband. Included in the terms of concession imposed on developers of new digital terrestrial television networks by the authorities of Denmark and Norway is that a channel must be reserved for non-commercial open channels, and they will start transmissions as soon as the development of the networks has come to an end. This is in line with the recommendation on the subject of must-carry for non-commercial channels given in the European Parliament's report *The state of community media in the European Union*. In Sweden, the owners of cable TV networks have a must-carry obligation for the non-commercial local TV channels.

The good examples of the Nordic countries

The non-commercial channels of the Scandinavian countries benefit from the goodwill and support of the political authorities – good examples for other European countries – the report *The state of community media in the European Union* notes: "According to some observers, in the past two decades the CM sector has experienced more support from governments in North-Western European countries, such as the Scandinavian countries, than in the South-West of Europe. For example, in many Scandinavian countries, CM was introduced to the national media landscape through government initiatives. In the South-West of Europe, as is the case in Spain and Portugal, the sector has had to struggle harder for recognition and developed bottom-up.

In many of the countries that today comprise the new EU Member States, the sector has experienced a slightly different history. (...) As can be seen from the Sector Mapping, not all legal frameworks of the new Member States recognise the specific character of CM until today."

Media pluralism and freedom of speech are important elements in work to promote the development of democracy, and the non-commercial media are needed in this respect, the report states. Policy choices regarding financing of non-commercial channels are highlighted, and in the report several possible sources of financing are described – some also involving channels in the pan-European cooperation – within the framework of EU programmes.

The European Council's Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on media pluralism and diversity of media content, from January 2007, states in its Section 4 that "(Member) states should encourage the development of other media capable of making a contribution to pluralism and diversity and providing a space for dialogue. These media could, for example, take the form of community, local, minority or social media. The content of such media can be created mainly, but not exclusively, by and for certain groups in society, can provide a response to their specific needs or demands, and can serve as a factor of social cohesion and integration. The means of distribution, which may include digital technologies, should be adapted to the habits and needs of the public for whom these media are intended."

"Non-commercial" – a broad concept

Denmark, Norway and Sweden all have concession concepts that comprise "non-commercial radio and TV channels", but the designation of the concepts, the conditions for transmission permits and the granting of concessions differ from one country to another. During the past few years, the authorities of all three countries have evaluated the concession systems for the local channels.

In Finland, there is no single concession concept for non-commercial channels. In Denmark, non-commercial radio and TV channels benefit from government subsidies amounting to nearly 50 million DKK a year. In Norway, state grants of nearly 10 million NOK are channelled to the local radio and TV sector, where the non-commercial channels are one of several concession concepts. In Sweden, no state subsidies are given to the field of non-commercial channels. (Please see the "fact area" at the end of this article for detailed information on the sector "non-commercial channels in the Nordic countries").

If a non-commercial media sector is to survive, the authorities must prevent covert private

takeovers of channels and chain activities for commercial purposes. If that happens, it will undermine the advertising market for the commercial local channels. Serious actors in the non-commercial sector will strongly resist a development in this direction.

In Sweden, there is a debate on the conditions for non-commercial channels, in the wake of a report on non-commercial channels published by the Swedish Radio and TV Authority in the autumn of 2007 (see more about the report in the "fact area" at the end of this article).

The editor and publisher of the Internet-based Public Access, Christer Hederström, for many years a strong advocate of improved conditions for non-commercial channels, comments on the report published by the Swedish Radio and TV Authority in Public Access 1:2008:

"Non-commercial radio is a disaster, caused by the total disinterest of former governments in changing the concession concepts. The civil society is losing frequency after frequency; private interests, through dummy organizations, are taking over in order to transmit commercial radio without licence fees."

Public Access has compiled a list over, according to Hederström, "22 privately owned commercial local radio channels." The local radio channels ('närradio' in Swedish) may sell advertising time in order to finance transmissions, but the channels were at the outset reserved for unincorporated non-profit associations, transmitting within the boundaries of a municipality.

If the boundaries are widened, as the Radio and TV Authority's proposes in its recent report, the door is open for commercial chains in the field of non-commercial radio. And this means competition for the private commercial local radio sector, called PLR in Swedish. According to Hederström, the PLR sector also "(has) derailed. It has absolutely no local foundation, but today consists of two networks owned by the media corporation MTG and American risk capital. Anyway, who needs nationwide music channels when almost everyone has access to an mp3-player and web radio?" Hederström asks.

He also notes that – in contrast to Denmark and Norway – Swedish open non-commercial channels are not included in the must-carry regulations for the digital terrestrial television network.

In an interview in the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* on 22 March 2008, Hederström follows up: "In Germany and Denmark, the non-commercial broadcasting sector benefits from some of the TV and radio licence revenues. In France, there are around 570 non-commercial radio channels that get approximately half of their financial needs covered by state subsidies, funded by profits from private commercial radio channels."

Hederström says to *Dagens Nyheter* that he has never understood why the big Swedish daily newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet*, published by a private commercial corporation, receives 60 million SEK per year in press subsidies, while the local non-commercial radio sector gets nothing. He suggests that a central organization should be established that could distribute state grants, like the organizational structure found in the area of sports. Administrative, legal and technical questions would then be taken care of by a central service-oriented organization, while the unincorporated non-profit associations could concentrate on producing programmes.

Overview of the conditions for non-commercial channels in the Nordic countries

Denmark

In Denmark, the authorities only give grants to non-commercial local radio and TV channels that have broad contact with the community in which they are based. Commercial advertising is prohibited, but income in the form of sponsorship or gifts is allowed. The Radio and Television Board allocates transmission permits and supervises the use of permits and operating grants. Almost 50 million DKK are allocated annually to the operation of several hundred non-commercial local radio and TV channels. All permissions in the radio sector have been prolonged to 31 December 2010, due to possible reorganization of the frequencies in the FM-band.

A comprehensive report ordered by the Ministry of Culture, published in 2002 and called "Diversity and quality – an evaluation of the system of operating grants to the local radio and TV sector," shows among other things that the people involved on both the transmission and receiving end think that the non-commercial electronic local media perform central democratic functions, and that access to expression, concerning both political and cultural themes, is regarded by many as a democratic benefit and a forum that at best may help to maintain and develop a special local identity. Most non-commercial channels are members of organizations associated with the umbrella organization SAML – the Association of Community Media.

Finland

In Finland, there is no single concession concept called "non-commercial channels". However, six local radio channels with allocated frequencies in the FM-band have traits resembling those of non-commercial channels in the other Nordic countries. One of them, *Radio Moreeni*, is run by the University of Tampere. Another, *Radio Robin Hood*, has among other things participated in cooperation projects supported by the EU. Behind the umbrella organization *Finlandssvensk lokal-TV*, covering the Fenno-Swedish area in Finland with several local TV channels, are mostly local TV channels run by unincorporated non-profit associations and municipalities. Around 25 Fenno-Swedish local TV channels are in operation.

Norway

The category "niche radio" is the nearest thing to non-commercial radio channels in Norway. Niche radio is one of three categories of local radio, but there is no need for a niche radio channel to transmit local content, and the authorities cannot guarantee a lower limit of transmission time for niche radio channels. The authorities impose restrictions on the income of niche radio channels. The concessionaires may receive an income of up to 100,000 NOK annually for advertising and sponsorship activities, and this income may constitute a maximum of 30% of the total annual operating income. Profits must not be paid to the owners of the channels. The Media Authority is responsible for the announcement of transmission permits and grants.

In 2005, a working group presented a report on new framework conditions for the radio sector, which has resulted in new efforts from political authorities to improve general conditions for the local radio sector in order to strengthen local media diversity, according to the Media Authority. The total state subsidies to all types of local radio will amount to around five million NOK in 2008.

The Media Authority had received one hundred and forty-one applications for permits in the niche radio field when the deadline arrived in January 2008. In March 2008, the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs decided to prolong the existing concession period by half a year, to the coming turn of the year.

In March 2008, an association called *Foreningen Frikanalen* (Free Channel) was allocated the concession for transmissions of non-commercial television in the new digital terrestrial network. The transmissions will start in the autumn of 2008, and will replace the system of local TV via the analogue terrestrial network of the public service broadcaster NRK2, where permits have been allocated to denominational organizations and unincorporated non-profit associations. The new concessionaire, *Frikanalen*, has the support of many unincorporated non-profit associations. State subsidies for the local TV sector in Norway are around five million NOK.

Sweden

In Sweden, the first trials using local non-commercial radio, called "närradion", began in 1979. The Radio and TV Authority grants concessions to transmission of local non-commercial radio, the radio of the unincorporated non-profit associations. The permits cover a transmission area that normally comprises a municipality. Commercial advertising is allowed, however it is prohibited to promote commercial interests in an "improper manner". With the exception of 10 hours a month, the programmes must be self-productions. The Radio and TV Authority estimates that the listener share for local non-commercial radio as a whole is around 2.4%.

In the 1980s, it became possible to freely transmit non-commercial local television through the cable networks. Sponsored programmes may be transmitted, but the activities of non-commercial local television are not to be financed by advertising.

Today, no direct state subsidies are allocated to either local non-commercial radio or local non-commercial television channels. The non-commercial local channels have several associations, among them *Närradions riksorganisation* (for local radio) and *Riksförbundet Öppna Kanaler i Sverige* (for local TV). More than 1,000 unincorporated non-profit associations have permits to transmit local non-commercial radio, and there are 26 local non-commercial TV channels.

The Radio and TV Authority put forward a report on local non-commercial channels in the autumn of 2007. The principal proposals for amendments concerning the local non-commercial radio sector are that all registered religious communities will receive transmission permits, that it is no longer required that only self-productions be transmitted and that it will be easier to obtain a wider transmission area. The proposals regarding the local non-commercial radio sector have been sent out for a hearing by the Ministry of Culture.

In the field of local non-commercial television, the Radio and TV Authority proposes that the transmission form should be called "när-TV" (to correspond with "närradio"), that even the operators of broadband networks have to comply with the must-carry regulations, like cable TV operators do today, and that in networks offering both analogue and digital transmissions, the local non-commercial television channels will also be allowed to transmit in both modes.

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Media Notebook

Nordic cooperation

Nordic Game Program should be continued

[Nordic cooperation]

The production of Norwegian and Nordic computer games must be strengthened. The Norwegian Minister of Culture, Trond Giske, made this clear when he presented a White Paper on computer games to the Norwegian Parliament. (See more about this, under the heading "Information society").

The White Paper on computer games also comprises a proposal to continue the initiative taken by the Nordic Council of Ministers: the Nordic Game Program. The Program, initiated in 2006, supports the development of innovative and creative Nordic computer game projects. The aim is to ensure that Nordic consumers will be able to choose between more Nordic computer games.

Source: The Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers (12 March 2008)

Naja Marie Aidt from Denmark wins the Nordic Council Literature Prize for 2008

[Nordic cooperation]

The Nordic Council Literature Prize for 2008 goes to the Danish author Naja Marie Aidt for her collection of short stories "Bavian" ("Baboon") from 2007.

"The 15 short stories in Bavian (Baboon) are based in a world that appears indistinguishable from everyday life. Naja Marie Aidt writes with a graceful and ominous realism that draws out undertones of reality", wrote the Adjudication Committee.

Source: The Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers (29 February 2008)

Virtual expedition in Nordic literature

[Nordic cooperation]

On 27 February, the five Nordic public service stations – dr.dk, nrk.no, svt.se, yle.fi og ruv.is – launched a comprehensive virtual writers' atlas - the Nordic Writers' Atlas.

Preparations for the project started three years ago, and it is supported by Nordvision, the Nordic Council and Nordplus Språk. Nordplus is the Nordic Council of Ministers' most important programme in the area of lifelong learning. Nordvision is a television and media partnership involving the five Nordic public service broadcasting organizations funded by license fees.

At the time of launching of the writers' atlas, 126 Nordic writers were presented: 30 from each of the countries Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden and six from Iceland. The Atlas tells about the writers in text and pictures, ties the writers together through relations across time and countries, and makes the most of the gold mine of old archive cuts and clips preserved by the Nordic public service companies.

Source: Nordvision/DR Kommunikation (26 February 2008)

Two New Partners Join Nordisk Film & TV Fond

[Nordic cooperation]

Finland's Channel 4/Nelonen and Sweden's Kanal 5 will increase the total number of Partners from 15 to 17, allowing producers more options to seek funding and access Nordisk Film & TV Fond's top-up financing scheme. The activity of both broadcasters takes effect immediately, writes the newsletter of Nordisk Film & TV Fond.

"One of our key guidelines for funding is that producers must have a broadcasting contract with one or more of our Partners. The addition of Channel 4 and Kanal 5 brings our broadcasting Partners from 9 to 11, so this increases the number of potential investors production companies can seek funding from," Hanne Palmquist, CEO of Nordisk Film & TV Fond explains.

Nordisk Film & TV Fond is an important financing body for all Nordic countries in the development, production and distribution of feature films, television (fiction) and documentaries, plus cultural film initiatives. Palmquist adds: "Often it's the last piece of the financial puzzle that makes the whole project a 'go' and the importance of this is something we are keenly aware of."

Source: Nordisk Film & TV Fond/Nordic Council of Ministers
(4 February 2008)

A prosperous 2007 for Nordvision cooperation activities

[Nordic cooperation]

Cooperation between the Nordic public service companies in 2007 resulted in the transmission of 1,848 hours of TV, equal to 4,231 programmes, in the TV companies DR, NRK, RÚV, SVT, UR and YLE, according to a message from Nordvision.

Nordic drama series are especially sought after by the channels of neighbouring countries. The cooperation comprising factual, children's and educational programmes was productive, and 2007 was a record year for the Nordic exchange of news.

The preceding year was one of changes in the public service companies, and to a certain extent one of extensive schemes trying to cope with economic difficulties. This shows that it is important to maintain strong ties of Nordic cooperation in this field, especially at a time of hard competition from private television companies.

In another message, Nordvision writes that the public service channels have lost market shares during recent years, and that this development continued in 2007.

Nordvision is a television and media partnership involving the five Nordic public service broadcasting organizations funded by license fees. Nordvision was established in 1959 by the public service broadcasting companies in Denmark (DR), Finland (YLE), Norway (NRK) and Sweden (SVT). Iceland (RUV) joined Nordvision in 1966. The core of Nordvision partnership is co-production of programmes and web projects, programme exchange, and the sharing of professional expertise and experience in expert groups.

Source: Nordvision (6 February 2008/29 January 2008)

Printed media

Fall-off for circulation of Danish paid papers, but readership figures improve

[Printed media] [Denmark]

Of the large Danish paid newspapers, only *Børsen* and *Information* had a rise in the circulation in 2007, the Swedish trade paper *Medievärlden* writes. *Børsen* increased by 2.7%, *Information* by 0.1%. *Kristeligt Dagblad*, one of the winners of recent years when it comes to circulation, experienced a decrease of 3.8%.

JP/Politikens Hus is worst hit; the corporation's three paid papers showed a decline of almost 30,000 copies. *Politiken* fell by 8.6% and now has a circulation of 112,128 copies. Next in line is *Ekstra Bladet*, minus 8.2% (89,800 copies), and *Jyllands-Posten*, minus 6.4% (133,432 copies).

The flagship of the corporation Det Berlingske Officin, *Berlingske Tidende*, showed a somewhat better result, "only" 4.6% down (118,739 copies). The corporation's evening paper, *B.T.*, was worse off, with minus 6.0% (83,333 copies), *Medievärlden* writes.

In spite of the decrease in circulation, several of the Danish newspapers have seen an increase in number of readers, writes Nyhedsbrevet Dansk Presse no. 10-2008, analysing the readership figures of February 2007 and February 2008. *Jyllands-Posten* has 4% more readers, *Politiken* 5%, *Ekstra-Bladet* 16% and *B.T.* 20% more readers in February 2008.

However, the free papers still lead: *Nyhedsavisen* maintains its position as the most read newspaper in Denmark, with 617,000 readers. Then follows *24timer* and *MetroXpress*, with 565,000 and 553,000 readers, respectively, writes Nyhedsbrevet Dansk Presse.

Source: Medievärlden/ Nyhedsbrevet Dansk Presse (22 February/7 March 2008)

Still strong readership figures for Finnish newspapers

[Printed media] [Finland]

Based on the latest National Readership Survey, the Finnish Newspapers Association reports that Finns still read, on average, three newspapers.

The most read newspapers in 2007 were *Helsingin Sanomat* (995,000 readers), *Ilta-Sanomat* (767,000), *Iltalehti* (675,000), *Aamulehti* (313,000), *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus* (310,000), *Turun Sanomat* (258,000), *Kaleva* (201,000), *IS Veikkaaja* (183,000), *Kauppalehti* (182,000) and *Keskisuomalainen* (180,000).

"The survey shows that the printed newspaper has a strong reader relationship. The number of newspaper readers has remained on an excellent level. If you take into account both the readers of online and printed newspapers, then the newspapers are reaching more people than ever before," states director Sirpa Kirjonen from the Finnish Newspapers Association.

Source: The Finnish Newspapers Association (4 March 2008)

Press support becomes part of support for political information activities

[Printed media] [Finland]

The Finnish press support system has been reorganized to become part of general grants to support the information activities of the political parties. 18 million euro is being distributed in 2008 to this end.

The previous system of press support must be considered corporative support under the EU legislation, to which EU regulations on state support should be applied, and that should be notified to the EU Commission. From the viewpoint of the political parties, however, their grants for communication and information activities, distributed after parliamentary approval, constitute support for political activities. The EU has no problems with this, maintains the Ministry of Transport and Communications.

In addition to these grants, there is selective press support, consisting of 500,000 euro and distributed by the Ministry of Transport and Communications. Grants are given to newspapers published in the national minority languages, and from now on also to distribution of news in Swedish.

Source: The Ministry of Transport and Communications (24 January 2008)

A prosperous 2007 for dailies in Norway

[Printed media] [Norway]

Relatively stable circulation, an all-time high income from the sale of advertisements and strong growth of new non-paper-based platforms. Altogether, this meant that 2007 was one of the best years in the history of the newspaper trade, announces the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association. The member newspapers account for about 97 per cent of total circulation in Norway.

There was a decrease of 1% in the total circulation of the member newspapers. The decline in subscriber papers was 0.3%, and it was 3.1% for non-subscriber papers. *VG*, Norway's largest non-subscriber paper, had a fall in circulation amounting to 5,939 copies (down to 309,610). The circulation figures for its competitor, *Dagbladet*, were minus 10,901 copies (down to 135,611). The morning edition of the subscriber paper *Aftenposten* had a circulation of 250,179, an increase of 1,676 copies.

The winner is *Dagens Næringsliv*, which has once again increased its circulation, this time by 6.3%, making it the sixth largest paper in Norway, with a circulation of 81,391. The next best in this race was the niche newspaper *Morgenbladet*, which has more than doubled its circulation since 2002 (up to 18,735). Eighty-six of the 170 member newspapers showed an increase in their circulation.

The readership statistics show that 32 of the member newspapers have increased their readership compared to 2006, while 89 experienced a decline. Especially the largest newspapers have lost readers, and seen as a whole, there has been a decrease.

The readership of newspapers on the Internet continued to grow. In 2007, daily reading increased by 16%. With 201,000 new readers, *VG Nett* is now the most read medium in the country, reaching 1,316,000 readers daily, according to the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association.

Source: The Norwegian Media Businesses' Association (14 February 2008)

Swedish newspapers experienced a decrease in both circulation and readership in 2007 [Printed media] [Sweden]

The decline experienced by Swedish evening papers seems to be accelerating, according to the trade newspaper *Medievärlden*. The largest paper in Sweden, *Aftonbladet*, had a loss in circulation of 26,600 copies (down to 399,400), and a fall in readership of 99,000 (down to 1,281,000). The figures for *Expressen* are minus 24,000 in circulation (down to 320,400) and a decrease in number of readers amounting to 84,000 (down to 1,066,000).

Among the morning newspapers, the large category of papers published six times a week has lost – in terms of percentage – twice as much of its circulation as the twelve papers published seven times a week: 2.1% and 1.2%, respectively. The relatively large group of papers published three days a week has held its position, while the once-a-week newspapers have lost 5% of their circulation, writes *Medievärlden*.

The morning newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* is Sweden's next largest, with a circulation of 344,200 (minus 7,600 in 2007), but when it comes to readership it is rated as the third largest, 858,000 (minus 28,000 in 2007). The next newspaper on the circulation list is *Göteborgs-Posten*, with an increase in circulation of 1,200 (up to 246,900). The decrease in readership was 18,000 (down to 558,000). *Svenska Dagbladet* increased both its circulation by 1,700 copies (up to 196,600) and its readership by 5,000 (up to 486,000).

Some regions have been hit harder by the decrease in circulation than others have: In Norrbotten, the newspaper *NSD* has lost 1,800 and *Norrbottens-Kuriren* 1,600 copies since 2006. *NSD*'s director Lennart Håkansson thinks that this depends both on general tendencies in the newspaper world and on the fact that the newspapers, as a part of the new administrative cooperation, have cleaned out the discounts given earlier, *Medievärlden* writes.

Source: *Medievärlden* (22 February 2008)

Audiovisual media

Merger between the Media Secretariat and the Danish National Library Authority [Audiovisual media] [Denmark]

The Media Secretariat and the Danish National Library Authority have been merged into one authority as from 1 February 2008. The cause of the merger is partly the expressed wish of the Ministry of Culture to consolidate small administrative units into larger ones. The merger is partly substantiated professionally; the media are converging at a growing pace, announces the Ministry of Culture.

The Media Secretariat is the Government's centre of knowledge in the field of the media. It serves the Radio and Television Board, and the handling of transmission permits is its most central activity. The Library Authority manages – in addition to its tasks stipulated by library legislation – grants for the newspaper and magazine field.

Source: The Ministry of Culture (1 February 2008)

Stable TV viewing habits among the Danes

[Audiovisual media] [Denmark]

During the past ten years, the Internet has come to consume a great deal of time, and many new TV channels have arrived on the media scene. In spite of this, TV viewing habits among the Danish population have remained strikingly stable. And – it is a myth that families watch television together: only 7% of TV viewing occurs when at least three persons are sitting together, according to a report on media development, *Medieudviklingen 2007-8*, compiled by the public service broadcaster DR's media research department.

Since 1996, the time spent per day watching television has fallen by, on average, eight minutes, to 148 minutes in 2007. Among the youngest viewers, the group 12-20 years of age, four out of five watch television in the course of one week, and they watch more than they did earlier. On the other hand, the group of non-watchers is growing.

There are clear indications that television sets will remain important in the daily life of the Danes, and that the Danish population will continue to watch television as a substantial part of their daily media usage. We are hardly witnessing a revolution, but rather a gradual and natural development of the total media usage of the Danes, says DR media researcher Flemming Hedegaard Larsen.

Source: DR (30 January 2008)

Danish films strong on the domestic market in 2007

[Audiovisual media] [Denmark]

Danish Films sold roughly 3.2 million tickets in 2007, for a domestic market share of around 27%, an increase over last year, when the Danish market share ended at 25%. Denmark once again finds itself in the European super league, announces the Danish Film Institute in a press release.

Denmark continues to stand tall in competition with Hollywood. While American movies sold an average of around 64,000 tickets in 2007, Danish films sold around 124,000.

The Danish cinema market overall is down an ever so slight 3.5% from 2006 to 12.1 million tickets, likely due to the lack of monster blockbusters such as the James Bond movie in 2006.

Source: The Danish Film Institute (22 January 2008)

Working group to consider new methods of financing public service activities

[Audiovisual media] [Finland]

A parliamentary working group has been appointed by the Minister of Transport and Communications, Suvi Lindén. The group is commissioned to put forward alternatives for financing public service broadcaster YLE's activities. The proposals must be ready before the end of 2008. According to a message from the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the alternatives should be discussed and put forward without bias. Financing through commercial advertising, however, is ruled out.

The working group is expected to make a judgment of how public service activities and their financing influence the communication market as a whole. The group is also to consider the significance public radio and television activities have in promoting the production of Finnish content.

According to svenska.yle.fi, a survey shows that representatives of the Finnish parliament are split concerning the question of the future financing of YLE. One hundred and nineteen representatives answered the question.

The favourite (36) alternative is a continuation of the TV licence and several mixed economic sources as a model of financing after 2010. Thirty-two representatives support the existing model, and 26 support financing through the sale of commercial advertising. Twenty-one representatives are in favour of financing via the state budget and several representatives will not reveal their point of view.

Source: The Ministry of Transport and Communications /svenska.yle.fi (12 February 2008/26 February 2008)

What will the future Finnish TV market look like?

[Audiovisual media] [Finland]

The Finnish TV market – and how it may look in five to ten years – has been the object of a study commissioned by the Ministry of Transport and Communications. The Ministry has not taken any decisions as to what to do with the proposals put forward in the report.

The future of the trade is particularly influenced by the control of the programme licences, the determination to maintain the quality of content distributed by the terrestrial network, the role of public broadcaster YLE and the various participators' existing structures of ownership. All these factors may be influenced by the decisions to be taken in the next few years, the Ministry of Transport and Communications maintains.

New technology, the emerging pay channels and the terms imposed on public service activities are some of the key factors mentioned in the report.

Regarding the activities of the public service channels, the Ministry of Transport and Communications states, in its referral to the report, that in countries that do have high quality public service television, the quality of programming in commercial channels is higher than that of commercial channels in countries that do not have quality-conscious competing public service companies. Examples of two extremes in this respect are the United Kingdom and Italy.

Source: The Ministry of Transport and Communications (12 February 2008)

Increased independence for the Media Authority in the field of broadcasting

[Audiovisual media] [Norway]

Last year, the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs put forward a White Paper on broadcasting in a digital future, St. meld. no. 30 (2006–2007). Now the Ministry has sent proposals for amendments to the Broadcasting Act out for a hearing. These are the main points of the hearing:

Increased independence for the Media Authority in the field of broadcasting, prohibition of advertising on public broadcaster NRK's text TV pages, authorization to compare subscriber registries with NRK's registry of TV licences and advance approval of NRK's new media services.

The Ministry writes in an accompanying letter to the hearing paper that the Parliament has endorsed the White Paper.

Source: The Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs (14 March 2008)

Declining cinema market in 2007, a promising start of 2008

[Audiovisual media] [Norway]

There was a decline of 10% in total admissions to Norwegian cinemas in 2007. The year ended with a total of nearly 11 million tickets sold. According to statistics compiled by the Norwegian Film Trade Association, FILM&KINO, Norwegian films accounted for 1.7 million admissions, equal to a market share of 16.4%. This is, with 2003 as an exception, the largest share of national productions since 1975.

While 2007 was a good year for Norwegian films at home, 2008 started even better. In the course of the first six weeks of the year, the market share rose to 26.1%, thanks to the launching of *The Kautokeino Rebellion* and *The Man Who Loved Yngve*, the newsletter of Nordisk Film & TV Fond writes.

Source: FILM&KINO/the newsletter of Nordisk Film & TV Fond (27 December 2007/29 February 2008)

Should the public service companies SVT and SR be merged?

[Audiovisual media] [Sweden]

Is there a need to amend the current conditions for radio and television at the service of the general public? Before the end of May 2008, the Ministry of Culture's special investigator, Rose-Marie Frebran, will have delivered her analysis of this question. The new transmission permit period of the public service companies Sveriges Television (SVT, Swedish Television), Sveriges Radio (SR, Swedish Radio) and Utbildningsradion (UR, the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company) starts on 1 January 2010.

The question of a merger of two or all three Swedish public service companies has been debated for quite a while.

In November 2007, Eva Hamilton and Kerstin Brunnberg, Managing Directors of SVT and SR, respectively, wrote a debate article in the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*, where they presented a strategic mode of cooperation between SVT and SR. Cooperation in the editorial field, coordination of administrative routines, technology, common premises and IT systems all over Sweden were among the most important elements. At the same time, they demanded a reform of the financing of public service activities. Among other things, people's willingness to pay their TV licence fees must have a more direct impact on activities related to the production of programmes, they wrote.

On 11 February 2008, the former Managing Director of SVT, Christina Jutterström, followed up the debate in the same newspaper, by proposing that SVT and SR must be merged into a “Public service Ltd.”, in order to create a cost-effective solution. She also proposed replacing the existing TV licence fee with a “public service fee” via the tax bill, payable by all adult Swedes.

Among others, the Chairman of the Board of SR, Ove Joanson, did not like the proposal; a merger of the two public companies in line with Christina Jutterström’s model would lead to the subordination of SR under SVT, and a subsequent impoverished public service radio in Sweden, including the closure of SR’s 27 local radio channels.

Source: Dagens Nyheter (14 November 2007/11 February 2008/12 February 2008)

Supply and demand in the Swedish TV market

[Audiovisual media] [Sweden]

The Radio and TV Authority has announced that it is possible to apply for new transmission permits in the digital terrestrial television network. An analysis of supply and demand in the Swedish TV market, carried out by the consulting company Mediavision, is an element of preparations being made for considering the applications.

The programme services that the Radio and TV Authority will approve must be of all kinds, so that transmissions will attract people with different interests and tastes. There must be room for national as well as local and regional programmes, and for services from several independent companies, the Radio and TV Authority states in its newsletter Radio- & TV-nytt.

Source: The Swedish Radio and TV Authority (7 February 2008)

2007 was an excellent year for Swedish films

[Audiovisual media] [Sweden]

Thirty Swedish films premiered in 2007, compared to 44 in 2006. Yet despite the drop in the number of films, the total number of cinema admissions for Swedish films rose from 2.9 million to 3.2 million, announces the Swedish Film Institute.

The market share for Swedish films increased from 18.8% in 2006 to 21.1% in 2007, meaning that more than one in five visits to the cinema was to see a Swedish film. This is above the average for the past ten years (20.9%), and this figure places Sweden among the top countries in Europe in terms of interest in nationally produced films.

The number of cinema admissions fell by 1%, yet at 15.5% remained roughly at par with 2006. Since the low figure in 2005 of 14.6 million, cinema admissions have increased by 4%.

Source: The Swedish Film Institute (31 January 2008)

Freedom of speech and copyright

New Copyright Council appointed

[Freedom of speech and copyright] [Finland]

The Ministry of Education has appointed a new Copyright Council, which will be in office until the end of 2009. The Council's task is to assist the Ministry in copyright matters, both of national and international importance, and to give its opinion on application of the Copyright Act.

In addition, the Ministry plans to establish a forum for copyright matters, in order to increase the flow of information and the general level of discussion on these matters. Rights holders, representatives of industry making use of material protected by copyright legislation and communication companies and representatives of consumers are among those who will be called to participate in the forum, The Ministry of Education states.

The Ministry has also appointed a working group that – by the end of May 2008 – will report on how the Copyright Act should be amended, so that different parties can agree, in a better way than at present, on how a transmission can be distributed – simultaneously – in the same geographical area via different channels.

Source: The Ministry of Education (21 February 2008)

Nine people convicted for illegal downloading via the Internet

[Freedom of speech and copyright] [Iceland]

The downloading of files from an illegal file sharing website, used by thousands of Icelanders, was recently tried before the Reykjavík District Court, the Daily News from Iceland reports, quoting the newspaper DV.

One of the nine people standing trial – who established a portal to the foreign file sharing website – was given a provisional sentence of 30 days in prison. The others were given conditional waivers of prosecution, with two years on probation. In addition, fines have to be paid: 26,000 euro to be shared among the nine convicts.

Snaebjörn Steingrímsson, chairman of SMÁÍS, the Association of Film Right-Holders in Iceland, sees the sentences as a clear message that the downloading of files, taking place in the manner described before the court, is illegal. He says, however, that he is disappointed by the lenient sentences.

A police search of the homes of the nine convicts in 2004 was the outset of the case. The police seized a large number of computers and accompanying equipment. A similar case, raised by SMÁÍS, is pending before the Reykjanes District Court.

Source: Daily News from Iceland (5 March 2008)

The copyright of film editors was violated, the Supreme Court says

[Freedom of speech and copyright] [Sweden]

The Swedish Supreme Court has passed a sentence stating that the television company TV4 infringed on the copyright of film directors Vilgot Sjöman and Claes Eriksson by interrupting the transmission of their film with commercials. The sentence is in line with sentences passed by the District Court and the Court of Appeal.

The case concerning Vilgot Sjöman's film *Alfred* and Claes Eriksson's film *Hajen som visste för mycket* has been pending in the Swedish courts for many years. TV4 would not comment, writes Dagens Media, on whether the sentence means that the TV company will stop interrupting feature films with commercials. The case has to be discussed internally before a decision is made on the consequences of the sentence, according to TV4's Director of Communications, Cecilia Giertha.

Source: Dagens Media (18 March 2008)

Electronic extradition of public documents to be considered

[Freedom of speech and copyright] [Sweden]

The Government has appointed a parliamentary committee, commissioned to evaluate the question of whether backup copies may be considered public documents. The judicial uncertainties that emerged during the investigations of the so-called tsunami tapes, made by the Swedish Tsunami Commission, constitute the background for this.

In addition, the committee must take into consideration the necessity of introducing amendments to the legislation, instructing the authorities to extradite public documents in electronic form. The questions will be evaluated in connection with the regulation on public documents in the Freedom of the Press Act.

The committee will have to finish its work on 31 December 2008 at the latest, regarding possible amendments to fundamental constitutional laws, and on 31 December 2009, regarding the other questions to be evaluated, the Ministry of Justice announces.

Source: The Ministry of Justice (13 March 2008)

Easier access to re-use of broadcaster's archive material protected by copyright

[Freedom of speech and copyright] [Sweden]

The Ministry of Justice wants to allow easier access, by collective rights management, to re-use of broadcaster's archive material that is protected by copyright. The typical case the Ministry of Justice has in mind is one in which someone wants to re-transmit an old radio or television programme and it is very difficult to find all of the rights holders.

A report on the re-use of broadcaster's archive material protected by copyright, Ds 2008:15, proposes to amend the copyright legislation in order to introduce collective rights management for the use of literary and artistic works. It is proposed that the new regulations are to be effective as from 1 January 2009.

Source: The Ministry of Justice (4 March 2008)

Report on sexually discriminatory advertising

[Freedom of speech and copyright] [Sweden]

New legislation is to be introduced to prohibit commercial advertising in which the design is sexually discriminatory in nature, and should be effective as from 1 January 2009. The Consumer Ombudsman is to supervise the way in which the legislation is complied with, and may prohibit advertising that conflicts with the law.

The proposal was put forward in a report on sexually discriminatory advertising (SOU 2008:5) by Eva-Maria Svensson, a report commissioned by the Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality.

The report surveys the development and volume of sexually discriminatory advertising in Sweden, and concludes with proposals concerning how the legislation should be formulated; it also accounts for the advantages and disadvantages of such legislation. Even other possibilities have been evaluated, such as the self-regulation systems of industry and commerce.

According to the report, sexually discriminatory design is to be defined as a description of sexual characteristics or sex roles that men and women generally perceive as an infringement. The legislation should be adapted to advertising that is meant to promote commercial objectives.

Source: The Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality (15 January 2008)

Information Society

Finland needs an information society designed for everyday purposes

[Information Society] [Finland]

The Minister of Transport and Communications, Suvi Lindén, wants to see more activity from the various participants in the drive towards an information society that offers services designed for everyday use. Lindén is concerned that Finland may fall behind other countries that are taking the lead in this development.

Lindén spoke at the Ministry of Transport and Communications' seminar Viestintäfoorumi in Helsinki on 12 February, and pointed out the importance of citizens having sufficient knowledge about and faith in the systems that are developed. Care must be taken to ensure civil rights and personal information protection during the development of a future digitized society. These factors must be taken into consideration when the Government decides whether it is necessary to amend and renew the Constitution.

What will happen to the frequencies that are released as a result of the transition from an analogue to a digital terrestrial television network? The question is being considered by a working group that will put forward a report in April 2008, describing a model for commercial utilization of the analogue frequencies. Carrying this out will require political decisions, Lindén states.

Source: The Ministry of Transport and Communications (12 February 2008)

Daily newspaper DV opens news website for Iceland's Polish community

[Information Society] [Iceland]

Minister of Social Affairs Jóhanna Sigurdardóttir recently opened the daily newspaper DV's website for news in Polish, Daily News from Iceland writes. The main news content of the Icelandic part of DV's website is continuously translated.

The Polish news section is intended for the approximately 6,000 Poles living and working in Iceland. Easy access to news from Icelandic society strengthens the position of people trying to gain a foothold in the country, because the language barrier is seen as foreign, says the editor of DV, Thórarinn Thórarinsson, according to a press release. The website may also be used for special information to the Polish community in Iceland, and news from Poland may be incorporated in due time.

Helga Ólafsson, information officer at Althjódahús, the intercultural centre of Reykjavík, praises the initiative, pointing out that a third of immigrants to Iceland are Poles. In total, immigrants now constitute 7% of the Icelandic population.

Source: Daily News from Iceland (19 January 2008)

New efforts for full broadband coverage

[Information Society] [Norway]

The Government has granted 158 million NOK to the county council districts to achieve the aim of full broadband coverage in Norway. In counties that already have full coverage, the grants may be reallocated to develop other infrastructure.

The development of broadband coverage all over Norway is part of the efforts being made to allow people to settle wherever they wish, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development announces in a press release. The new grants will help in reaching the 1% of the population that has not been reached by the broadband development covered by plans already under implementation.

Since 2006, the total grants for broadband development amount to 754 million NOK. The Ministry assumes that other participants have invested the same, implying that 1.5 billion NOK has been invested in total during the period 2006-2008.

Source: The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (15 March 2008)

Governmental initiative for more and better Norwegian computer games

[Information Society]

In a White Paper – Stortingsmelding no.14 (2007-2008) – The Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs proposes to grant funds to launch Norwegian computer games and to strengthen the support scheme for the development of more games of Norwegian origin. A system to support libraries' lending of computer games and a purchasing programme for libraries will be evaluated. The Nordic Game Program should be continued (see more in the section "Nordic cooperation"). The authorities must acquire more knowledge about the ways in which computer games create dependency and about the problems associated with computer gaming.

These are the main points of the White Paper, presented by the Minister of Culture and Church Affairs, Trond Giske. The basis for the White Paper is the fact that less than 1% of computer games distributed in the Nordic countries offer Nordic languages and Nordic content. At the same time, 96% of children between three and thirteen years of age have access to a computer.

Source: The Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs (7 March 2008)

Increased competition on the broadband market

[Information Society] [Sweden]

In a proposal to the Parliament, the Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications calls for amendments to the legislation in order to give the Swedish Post and Telecom Agency (PTS) the authority to take measures that will increase competition on the broadband market. The new regulations will be effective as from 1 July 2008.

The Post and Telecom Agency may decide to act if it is evident that the dominant operator still has an unmotivated upper hand in comparison to other operators in the market, and that the other operators do not have sufficient overview of the network activities of the dominant operator, despite other measures taken by the PTS, the Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications announces.

Source: The Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications (18 March 2008)

Media ownership

The Appeals Board for Media Ownership approves of the establishment of Media Norge

[Media ownership] [Norway]

Media Norge, the merger of the regional newspapers Aftenposten, Bergens Tidende, Stavanger Aftenblad and Fædrelandsvennen, has now been approved by the Appeals Board for Media Ownership – on certain conditions, the Media Authority announces.

The conditions are that the owner of Aftenposten, Schibsted, is to sell its block of shares (34.3%) in the regional newspaper, Adresseavisen, and to reduce its block of shares in newspaper group Harstad Tidende Gruppen AS to 40%.

The Media Authority is satisfied that the Appeals Board pointed out that the Media Authority followed the Ownership Act when it intervened against the merger, even if the Appeals Board reached another conclusion in the end. The Media Authority will study the decision of the Board carefully, and states that the decision will serve as an important clarification for further application of the Ownership Act.

Source: The Media Authority (26 February 2008)

The Parliament has decided to investigate concentration of media ownership

[Media ownership] [Sweden]

The Parliament has decided in a close vote (138-137) that an investigation of Swedish media ownership should be conducted. The spokeswoman for the opposition, Helene Petersson (Social Democratic Party), was surprised, but very satisfied with the outcome; she expects that the Ministry of Culture will now commission a report on the matter, the newspaper trade journal *Medievärlden* writes.

The debate in the Parliament was in reference to the report from the Committee on the Constitution (2007/08:KU15), on Freedom of the Press and Freedom of Expression. The Committee recommendation, supported by the majority (the Government coalition), was that the motion expressing a need for a report on concentration of media ownership should be turned down.

The earlier votes had followed the strength of the political parties in the Parliament; the government coalition had thus secured the necessary "yes votes". The protocol from the parliamentary proceedings from 12 March 2008 shows that two representatives from the Moderate party, one from Liberal People's Party and one from the Christian Democrats had intended to vote "yes" to the majority recommendation, but had been marked as absent.

In the motion from the opposition parties (the Social Democratic Party, the Left Party and the Green Party), the media development in Sweden is described, the development since the report on media concentration was published in the late 1990s.

Today, a small number of very strong media corporations have ownership interests in large parts of the media market. They own newspapers, cinemas, printing houses, film production units, publishing houses, magazines, distribution companies, advertising companies and websites – most of what is of interest within the media trade, Helene Petersson states during the parliamentary debate on 12 March.

The adopted motion concludes with the statement that it is high time the concentration of media ownership in Sweden be investigated, and that the totality of the market is to be taken into consideration, not only each media section in isolation.

If nothing happens, Helena Petersson intends to make an interpellation to the Minister of Culture, Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth. According to *Medievärlden*, Petersson stresses that she wants an investigation, not legislation as such.

Source: *Medievärlden* (13 March 2008)

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