

CONSULTATION RESPONSE
PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

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OFCOM

PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING REVIEW

This consultation response sets out the Alliance Party's stance related to the principles set out in its response to the *Programme for Government and Budget* in January 2008.

Response

The Alliance Party believes in a strong Northern Ireland, and in broadcasting dedicated to Northern Ireland. The arrival of multi-channel, digital television and radio has internationalized broadcasting in a way which brings many advantages, but also threatens dedicated regional programming. This must be countered.

As such, some of the recommendations put forward in the *Second Public Service Review* put at risk the high quality public service television we receive in Northern Ireland from both the BBC and Channel 3.

We are wary of any proposal for a single licence for Channel 3 across the whole UK. *Northern Ireland has distinct regional broadcasting needs, particularly with regard to current affairs and politics.* This distinct service, currently offered by UTV, is highly valued by the audience (as the most watched regional news programming) and its place in Northern Ireland's broadcasting future should be guaranteed. Indeed, without this distinct regional service on Channel 3, we believe that the BBC service would not be as competitive as it currently is.

The Northern Ireland parties represented in the devolved Assembly need competition among local broadcasters to analyze and scrutinize the legislature. A UK-wide licence would take local accountability away not just from programme makers, but from law makers too. A single licence would not benefit viewers as it would potentially lose all the regional strengths and lead to a homogenised service across the UK which would be inappropriate to the needs of Northern Ireland (and likely also Scotland).

We would further argue that the sense of ownership a locally accountable and branded service provider adds to the audience loyalty is something that a single licence holder could never achieve.

We understand the commercial difficulties facing all ITV licensees, but there remains a clear case for licences for the devolved regions to be separate.

Cllr Ian James Parsley (Policy)

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