

DIGITAL RADIO IN SWEDEN

Digital radio has again been on the agenda in Sweden. The Government decision, taken last summer, to delay the introduction of digital radio is not affected. However, the Liberal Party's spokesperson on Cultural Affairs has argued in Parliament that Sweden should proceed with DAB+.

In June 2015, the Government decided not to proceed with the transition from FM to DAB+ which had been proposed in a report published in December 2014¹. This followed the publication of a report into digital radio by the National Audit Office in April 2015.

On Wednesday 3rd February, Swedish Parliament discussed digital radio – with the Parliamentary Constitutional Standing Committee (KU) issuing a formal response to the Government's letter about the National Audit Office's April 2015 report into digital radio.

As a result, the decision taken last summer remains unaltered. However, both the Government and the Committee have said that this decision may be reviewed, depending on the development of digital radio in the rest of Europe - especially in neighbouring Norway.

The Constitutional Committee issued the following statement:

"As the government argues, it cannot be ruled out that the issue of the digitization of terrestrial radio may arise again in the future. The Committee therefore believes that it is good that the government intends to follow international developments."

During the discussion in Parliament the Liberal Party's spokesperson on Cultural Affairs, MP Bengt Eliasson, argued that it was important to proceed with digital terrestrial radio. He said the government's position has led to a "pretty untenable situation" for radio. He argued that digital terrestrial radio offers greater choice for listeners and allows a stronger public service offering; DAB is therefore the most important issue for the future of radio in Sweden. Eliasson stated that today's analogue technology "has reached its limits" and that it is essential that Band III spectrum remains protected for the use of digital radio.

¹ A report by Nina Wormbs for the Ministry of Culture proposed a launch of DAB+ in 2016/17 and Digital Switchover in 2022/24 <http://www.government.se/contentassets/4eebac321bf44dcfa5b118aab39ad127/sou-201477>

MP Annicka Engblom from the Moderaterna party, which led the previous Government, says the announcement made it clear that Government will continue to review the international development of DAB and the implications for Swedish radio. At the same time, she insisted a proper investigation of the issues raised by the National Audit Office report was required.

What happens now in Sweden?

The government continues to follow developments in Europe. Swedish Radio cannot, for the time being, launch DAB+. Private radio has received licences (October 2014) to broadcast 21 national channels in a digital terrestrial network, but has asked for permission to delay the launch.

Mats Åkerlund, digital radio coordinator at Swedish Radio comments:

“Nothing has changed in Sweden since the Ministry of Culture's decision last summer. The plan for digital radio is stopped and the Government decision has been confirmed by Parliament.

However, the recent discussion in Parliament shows that it is wrong to say that digital radio is dead in Sweden. All political parties agree on the importance of following developments in Europe. Norway begins the transition to digital terrestrial radio in less than one year, so it will not be so long before we can evaluate the results.”