

[YU] Roma Radio Station Banned

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On 20 September 2001, the Federal Telecommunication Inspector imposed a ban on the operation of Nisbased radio-television station Nisava, the only Roma broadcaster in Yugoslavia. This is the first case of an actual administrative ban being imposed since the change of government in late September/early October last year.

The reasoning given by the Inspector is that the station does not possess a valid license issued by the competent authority. On the other hand, Mr. Boban Nikolić, a representative of the Roma Association that owns the station, said that the Roma community in the city of Nis considers this decision politically motivated, as part of a broader campaign to assimilate the Roma with the majority of the population. Without disputing the fact that RTV Nisava operated without a license, Nikolić stated that the vast majority of existing stations in Serbia operate in that manner, but only a Roma-run station is ordered off the air.

The Federal Inspector's decision comes in the middle of the discussion about the new broadcasting law. Namely, the Federal and Serbian authorities have (finally) decided to start the procedure for adopting draft media legislation in the Parliament (see IRIS 2001-6: 10). Drafts, made under auspices of the Council of Europe and the OSCE by local experts within the NGO community, provide for an independent regulatory authority to decide which stations may remain on the air and which are to be banned, all according to the rules set forth in the law. Therefore it is difficult to understand some of the decisions of the Federal Telecommunications Inspection, which continues to arbitrarily ban some stations, but tolerate other stations not having licenses.

One of the conclusions of the round table on the future of broadcasting in Serbia organized in Belgrade by the local NGOs, the Government of Serbia and the Council of Europe and the OSCE on 19 October 2001 stated that the chaos in the area of broadcasting cannot be put in order by individual bans - new regulation and a subsequent campaign by the authorities is necessary for achieving that goal. Given the fact that drafts of the new regulations on broadcasting contain special provisions referring to the rights of minorities, and referring to rights of the civil sector to operate local stations, one could expect that this is the last time that an administrative ban is imposed upon a politically-sensitive radio or television station in Serbia.

