# [LV] Turmoil over Public Service Broadcasting still Going On

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While the competition for the new Director General of the public television channel in Latvia is still going on (see IRIS 2002-4: 8), the discussion on the role of the public service media heightens.

A group of private media seized the chance by writing a letter addressed to the President, the Prime Minister, the National Radio and Television Council, political parties and various mass media, stating that according to the existing legislation a public service media organisation may sell advertising time well below the market price. As the authors of the letter pointed out, the public Radio and Television often benefits from state financial aid. Therefore the private media call for the de-commercialisation of the public media either by the introduction of a fee for public service broadcasting or by setting up minimum limits for advertising prices.

However, the prospects of independent financing for public media in Latvia are quite uncertain. The Prime Minister has already announced that to him the draft project concerning the introduction of licence fees handed in by the National Broadcasting Council of Latvia is not convincing. The draft envisages the establishment of a new Licence Fee Centre (with 37 employees) that would create a database of licence fee payers and issue and dispatch invoices. Furthermore, it would develop control mechanisms. In the Prime Minister's view, it would be a very expensive reform whose fruit were to be harvested only in the future because the effective introduction of a completely new system would naturally take a long time. Instead the Government is ready to discuss additional state financing for the public mass media in Latvia.

As a response to the open letter from the private media, a parliamentary discussion is going to be organised by one of the major parties in order to find solutions to the problems of public service broadcasting in Latvia.

### *Privātie mediji atklātā vēstulē sūdzas par negodīgu konkurenci, 8. aprīlis 2002*

*Press Release on the Letter from the private media of 8 April 2002*

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