[LV] Developments at the Latvian Public Television

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Lelda Ozola
MEDIA Desk Latvia Riga

As the new Director General of public Latvian television introduced some changes to the organisational structure and programme taking effect in 2003, the discussion on the financing of the public service broadcasting raises again.

The Latvian public television operates two channels which have been renamed (LTV 1 and LTV7) and whichafter the reform - shall integrally supplement each other by defining their programmes more clearly. LTV1 shall be the national channel, while LTV7 shall be dedicated to sports and minorities. Bearing in mind the large Russian-speaking minority in Latvia, a regular slot has been introduced on LTV7 every day from 20:15 - 22:15 with current affairs programmes and films in Russian. Changes also apply to broadcasting times, as LTV1 broadcasts 16 hours per day every day at an average (without a break in the middle of the day as previously), LTV7 from now onwards 7.5 hours on weekdays and 16 hours at weekends.

These changes may cause - according to an announcement by LTV's Director General - the necessity of additional financing. As to the status quo, the budget of the LTV comprises approximately EUR 12 million (around 7 million from the state budget and around 5 million commercial income). According to the announcement it is estimated that Latvia Television urgently needs additional EUR 3 - 4 million. Therefore its planning offers two options: LTV takes a loan of LVL 1 million (around EUR 1.61 million) to invest in the production of programme to increase the income from selling commercial air time (the advertising market - amounting to LVL 20 million, approximately EUR 33 million - is split between the aforementioned public channels and three private ones); another option is to introduce a new tax on the sale of new TV sets - LTV estimates EUR 12.5 (LVL 7.77) from every TV set sold to total the sum of LVL 1 million.

The Chairman of the Nacionálá Radio un Televízijas Padome (National Radio and TV Council, the regulatory body under the supervision of Parliament - NRTP) stated that the discussion regarding the introduction of broadcasting fees will go on even if the political scene has been sceptical and the mechanism of collecting these fees would be very costly. Thus, he favours an increased share in the Gross National Product.

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