[BG] Council of Electronic Media Dismisses Director General of the Bulgarian National Television

IRIS 2004-5:1/28

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On 16 March The Director General of Bulgarian National Television (BNT) was dismissed by the Council of Electronic Media (CEM). The CEM took this decision with the support of only 5 of the 9 members of the Council and it was publicly announced that the legal department of the Council did not support the decision either.

The Council based its decision on the grounds that over the last two years it had issued three valid penalty ordinances for similar cases of violation of law in the program of the BNT. The frequency of occurrence qualifies the violations as systematic violations according to section 1, paragraph 5 of the Supplementary Provision of the Radio and Television Act. The penalties, which were imposed during the course of 2002, concerned two cases of either failure or refusal on the part of BNT to provide a right of reply, which constituted a violation of art. 18 (3) of the Radio and Television Act, and one case of violating the “right of personal inviolability” by offending the Bulgarian Prime Minister personally, which constituted a violation of art. 10 (1), p.4. The latter concerned an incident that happened in December 2001, when the Director General held his position on an interim basis while the process for filling the position was still ongoing. Article 67 (1) p. 2 of the Radio and Television Act stipulates that systematic violations of the law in carrying out broadcasting activities by the national public broadcasters constitutes a reason for terminating the mandate of the General Director of the BNT ahead of term.

In addition, in February the General Director signed a contract for commercial representation with the Russian advertising company Video International. The deal was not endorsed by the Managing Board of the Bulgarian National Television prior to the signing of the contract and it was subject to criticism by competitors of Video International on the Bulgarian advertising market. It was extensively discussed in the Council for Electronic Media as well. Therefore, the official reasons of the Council as they were presented and stated above appeared to be unexpected.

The Council of Electronic Media declared that it would launch a new process for filling the position of a new Director General of BNT by mid-April. The dismissed General Director declared that he would challenge the decision of the Council

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before the courts as his predecessor, whose mandate was also terminated ahead of course, was successful in her court action against the Council.

The dismissal reopened the public debate about the need of new media law and the need to reconsider the composition of the Council, the management structure of the public broadcasters, and the way of financing public broadcasters in Bulgaria.

Decision of the CEM No. 15-00-16 of 16 March 2004

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