[LV] Amendment of the Radio and Television Law Planned

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Saeima, the Parliament of Latvia, is planning to make a short, but important amendment to the Radio and Television law, stipulating that the prohibition of harmful content is in force in the period between 07.00 - 24.00, instead of the current period of 07.00 - 22.00.

The existing regulation is as follows: Article 18 section 4 of Radio and Television Act envisages that ”[B]roadcasting organisations may not distribute programmes and broadcasts with such content as may be harmful to the normal physical, mental and moral development of children and adolescents, except in cases when a specific broadcasting time is designated for such broadcasts (between the hours 22.00 and 07.00) or technical blocking devices are used (coding of broadcasts) (..)”, and Section 5 of the same Article stipulates that ”[B]etween the hours of 07:00 and 22:00, broadcasts containing physical or psychological violence (in visual or verbal form), bloody or horror scenes, as well as scenes relating to the use of narcotics, may not be distributed. The text may not contain vulgar or rude expressions and must not refer to sexual acts. This provision is not applicable to cable television if technical blocking devices are used.” So, after the amendment instead of ”22.00” it would read ”24.00”.

On 26 May 2005 the Saeima adopted the amendments in the first reading (there are three readings necessary). In addition, amendments to the Latvian Codex of Administrative Violations are proposed envisaging the increase of maximum penalties that may be imposed on broadcasters. These events were immediately followed by fierce criticism by the broadcasting organizations. An NGO Association of Latvian Broadcasters sent a letter to Saeima and to the President claiming that the proposed amendment would hinder the development of electronic media in Latvia and cause unfair competition. The Association also objected to the fact that the amendments to the existing law are proposed instead of adopting the new Radio and Television Law, the draft of which had not even been officially submitted in Parliament.

As a response, in the following days one of the Parties at the Saeima submitted the prepared draft of the new Radio and Television law, as well as the draft Public Service Broadcasting law in the Presidium of Saeima. On 9 June 2005 the Saeima voted for transferring the drafts to the Committee of Human Rights and Social

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Issues of Saeima in order to prepare them for the first reading.

Currently it is difficult to assess whether the amendments to the existing law will be submitted for the second reading despite the broadcasters' criticism and the new drafts. There is a possibility that the amendment will be integrated directly into the new law.

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