

# [CS] Amendments to the Law on Broadcasting Proposed

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*Miloš Živković*  
*Belgrade University School of Law - Živković Samardžić Law offices*

One year after the last amendment of the 2002 Broadcasting Act (see IRIS 2002-8: 11 and IRIS 2004-8: 6), the Government of Serbia adopted the proposal for new amendments and passed it to the Parliament.

The proposed amendments deal with several issues, the first being the length of term of the Council members (see IRIS 2005-4: 7).

Namely, the length of term of the first convocation of the Council, now determined at two years for three members, four years for another three and six years for the last three members (each three to be decided by draw), should be changed to four, five and six years, whereas the length depends on the nominator, not the draw. Apart from that, successive terms for Council members should be allowed.

Another issue dealt with in the amendments is the revocation of the veto power now vested in the Council member from the region of Vojvodina. When the Parliament changed the 2002 Broadcasting Act in 2004, the number of Council members nominated from the province Vojvodina was reduced. As a compensation the veto power by the remaining member for all Council decisions affecting Vojvodina was introduced. Now the Government proposes that this veto power should be revoked.

The proposed amendments also envisage the extension of the deadline for the privatization of local media now controlled by municipalities and towns, as well as the extension of the deadline for the transformation of the state radio-television station RTS into a public service broadcaster.

On top of that, the amendments provide for the right to collect the licence fee for RTS even before the transformation. Furthermore, the fines for administrative offences provided by the law have been significantly increased.

Public reactions to the proposed amendments have not been supportive.

Partly there has been a call for abandoning the proposed amendments, because they diminished the institutional independence of the Council by changing the length of term and defining which Council member shall have a longer, and which one a shorter term of office, based upon the proposer of each respective member (and giving the state nominees the longest tenure of 6 years). The decision to

allow the collection of the licence fee even before the transformation of RTS into a public service broadcaster has also been broadly criticised by the public. It has been argued that the management of the state TV was directly appointed by the Government and thus dependent upon its policies, and a licence fee, as a vehicle of public broadcasters' independence from the Government, could not fulfil its purpose in these circumstances.

