

[RS] Serbian President Refuses to Sign Amendments to Broadcasting Act

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The Serbian President Boris Tadić has refused to sign the amendments to the 2002 Broadcasting Act of Serbia, adopted by the Parliament during its last pre-summer break session on 19 July 2006. In a statement issued on 26 July 2006 by the office of the President it was stated that the independence of the regulatory authority, the Broadcasting Agency of Serbia, would be severely threatened if these amendments were to become legally binding. As a result, the draft amendments have been returned to the Parliament for a new vote. Given the fact that the exercised veto power of the President only suspends promulgation of the amendments, if the Parliament adopts the amendments again, the President shall have to sign them.

As the issue of broadcasting is very sensitive in Serbia, on 28 July 2006 the President decided to publish an article in daily papers, explaining why he decided not to sign the amendments. Apart from weakening the independence of the Broadcasting Agency, the President stated that some procedures, depriving stations of adequate legal remedies, would be in breach of the European standards on freedom of expression, and that such policies cannot be reconciled with the intention of Serbia to move towards Europe.

Many of the professional associations, including both associations of journalists, as well as international NGOs and the office of OSCE in Serbia supported the President in his decision, whereas a smaller number complained that his decision shall only postpone the "bringing into order" of the broadcasting scene in Serbia. The opponents accused the President of working for stations that lost the recent national coverage tender, naming the banned BKTv and RTL, but these accusations were dismissed by the office of the President as completely arbitrary and groundless.

