[RS] SBA Reverses its Order for Live Broadcasts of Parliamentary Sessions to Recommendation

IRIS 2008-1:1/26

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In its session held on 20 November 2007, the Council of the Serbian Broadcasting Agency (SBA) has decided to reverse its Mandatory Instruction of 24 September 2007 by which it had ordered the public service broadcaster RTS to broadcast all sessions of the Serbian Parliament (see IRIS 2007-10: 19), and instead establish it as merely a Recommendation that the RTS should broadcast live the parliamentary sessions.

This decision came after representatives of the RTS and of some other media associations and NGO's dealing with freedom of media issues protested against the Mandatory Instruction. They claimed that it violated the editorial independence guaranteed to the public service broadcaster under the 2002 Broadcasting Act (see IRIS 2007-10: 19) of Serbia. A further issue that had an impact on this was that the general manager of RTS announced during the session of the Parliamentary Committee on Culture and Information, which is competent for media issues, held on 14 November 2007, that RTS has lodged a formal appeal against the Mandatory Instruction to the Supreme Court of Serbia. The fact that over 700,000 citizens had signed a petition requesting the RTS to broadcast live the trial against Vojislav Seselj, an alleged war criminal and leader of the biggest political party in Serbia that attracts conservative nationalists which commenced in early November at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), might have also played a role in reversing the decision. The schedules of RTS would, in fact, be overburdened if it was to broadcast both events live.

Since the SBA reversed its decision, the RTS has revoked its Supreme Court appeal.

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