[ME] New Model of Financing for the Public Broadcasting Service

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The Montenegrin Parliament adopted the amended version of the Law on Public Broadcasting Service which significantly changes the way the national public broadcaster Radio Televizija CRNE GORE (RTCG) will be financed. According to these amendments passed by the national parliament in December 2008, a fixed amount of 1.2 % of the annual budget of Montenegro will be redirected to fund the core activities of the radio and television of Montenegro (Article 16).

After the country's main telecommunications operator stopped collecting the license fees for the national public broadcaster in August 2007, RTCG had no source of income. An agreement was negotiated with the electricity enterprise Elektroprivreda Crne Gore AD Nikšić (EPCG) which started collecting the license fees together with its electricity bills as from 1 July 2008. This system was able to generate only 30 % of the full income. This was mostly because the license fee part of the electricity bill was optional, meaning that persons could choose not to pay it. The draft Law came into force after a public debate involving the civil society, media representatives, the public service broadcaster and international media experts. During the debate the criticism was made that such a provision would undermine the independence of the public service broadcaster and would mean the establishment of a State television. On the other side, promoters of the amendments pointed out that such a system of financing by the allocation of a fixed percentage of the budget is a widely accepted practice in Europe and beyond.

According to an OSCE report on the State of Media Freedom in Montenegro, the key factor in assessing the success of the Law will be the extent to which it contributes to the sustainability of the radio and television in Montenegro precluding possibilities for political interference. The draft Law also proposes a new mechanism for the prompt appointment of the members of the RTCG-Council according to which a list of nominees will be submitted to parliament for approval.

Amended version of the Law on Public Broadcasting Service, available at:

http://www.rtcg.me/images/biblioteka/dokumentacija/zakon_o_JRDS_2008.pdf

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