[SK] Merger of Slovak Television and Slovak Radio

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On 3 November 2010 the National Council of the Slovak Republic ("NRSR") received the Draft Bill on Slovak Radio and Slovak Television ("Bill") proposed by the Ministry of Culture according to the Government's policy statement for 2010-2014, in which the Government has committed itself to create a new frame of funding, organising and functioning of statutory media with the aim to improve the effectiveness of their work and to strengthen their statutory character. According to the relevant policy statement it is culture that can play an important role in the economic, social and environmental development of the Slovak Republic in coming years. On 4 November 2010 the NRSR agreed with the proposal of the Minister of Culture to discuss the respective Bill in a shortened legislative process. The Bill is now in the second reading.

Pursuant to the respective Bill, that shall come into effect on 1 January 2011, the Slovak Television (STV) and Slovak Radio (SRo) will merge into a new single public service institution called Slovak Radio and Television ("RTS") and the assets of STV and SRo shall be transferred to this new institution. According to Sec. 1 of the Bill the RTS shall be a national, independent, informative, cultural and educational public service institution in the area of radio and television broadcasting. The establishment of the RTS will be the first step in introducing a new model of public broadcasting in the Slovak Republic. The main aim of this step is - in accordance with the Explanatory Memorandum of the Bill - to prevent public broadcasting from falling further into debt and to create the conditions for its consolidation. In case of such merger, the expected savings should amount to at least EUR 1.65 million in 2011.

The most important changes introduced by the Bill concern the bodies of RTS. The Bill establishes new bodies, namely the General Director and the Council. The General Director being the statutory body of RTS will be responsible for the development strategy and the fulfilment of the aims and main activities of the RTS, whereas the Council will control the obligation of RTS to respect the law as well as the fulfilment of the goals of this new public service institution. In order for the quality and professional control to be guaranteed the nine-member Council shall, according to Sec. 9 of the Bill, consist of independent experts, namely two experts in the field of radio broadcasting, television broadcasting and in the field of law and three experts in the field of economy. Both bodies shall be elected and recalled by the members of the NRSR. In addition the Council will be entitled to

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suggest the particular committee of NRSR to submit the proposal to recall the General Director. It is to be noted that currently there are three bodies in both STV (Council, Supervisory Committee and Director General) and in SRo (Radio Council, Supervisory Committee, Director General) and their statutory bodies i.e., general directors are elected and recalled by the Councils.

Pursuant to the Bill the original number of 36 members of the councils and supervisory committees of STV and SRo shall be reduced to 9 members of the Council of the RTS. On the other hand it is to be noted that neither the position, aim and extent of the main activities of the RTS, nor the means of funding shall be changed under the Bill. However, in this regard it is interesting to mention that in future the payments for public services provided by Slovak Television and Slovak Radio are planned to be abolished and ought to be replaced by a single payment from the State budget.

Although public service institutions covering both television and radio broadcasting are well-known in many countries the respective Bill faced strong critique in Slovakia. It has a lot of opponents not only due to the Bill itself but also due to the short time period within which the Minister of Culture wants the two institutions, which have several hundred employees, to merge. Critics say that the decision to merge STV with SRo is aimed at gaining control over both media organisations and the Director General of STV is convinced that the Bill will restrict and reduce the number of genres in the public service programming. Nevertheless the current Minister of Culture insists that the aim of such a model is to strengthen the status of public service media and to solve the current financial problems of STV.

Vládny návrh zákona o Rozhlase a televízii Slovenska a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov

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Draft Bill on Slovak Radio and Slovak Television

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