[LT] Retransmission of programmes of Russian-language Channels “RTR Planeta” and “NTV Mir Lithuania” suspended in Lithuania

IRIS 2014-6:1/25

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On 2 April 2014, the Lietuvos radijo ir televizijos komisija (Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania - RTCL) temporarily suspended the retransmission of part of programmes of the Russian-language channel “RTR Planeta”. The basis for the suspension was the violation of Article 19 of the Law on the Provision of Information of the Republic of Lithuania during the programme “Vesti nedeli” (Weekly News), which was broadcast by the “RTR Planeta” in the beginning of March 2014. The programme concerned recent events in Ukraine. After consulting with the Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics, the RTCL found that during the programme in question, biased and tendentious information was disseminated, which was justifying violence against civilians, instigating hatred between Russians and Ukrainians and against USA and its allies, justifying military intervention in the sovereign state and annexation of part of its territory. Publication of such information is prohibited by the Law on the Provision of Information, Article 19 paragraphs 1(3) and 2.

Paragraph 1(3) prohibits publishing information that instigates war or hatred, ridicule, humiliation, instigates discrimination, violence, physical violent treatment of a group of people or a person belonging thereto on grounds of age, sex, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, race, nationality, citizenship, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions, views or religion. Paragraph 2 prohibits the dissemination of disinformation and information which is slanderous and offensive to a person or which degrades his honour and dignity.

This decision obliged the operators retransmitting the “RTR Planeta” channel in Lithuania to suspend for 3 months the rebroadcast of programmes of the “RTR Planeta”, but only those originating from countries other than the EU member states, the EEA states or the countries that have ratified the European Convention on Transfrontier Television. The decision was approved by the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court on 7 April 2014.

A similar decision was taken by the National Electronic Mass Media Council of Latvia on 3 April 2014 against “Rossiya RTR” channel concerning the same “Vesti nedeli” and other news broadcasts (see IRIS 2014-5/25). Previously, on 19 March 2014, the RTCL suspended retransmission of programmes of another Russian-

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language channel - “NTV MIR Lithuania” - after the broadcast “The damned. A trap for the Alpha group” about the events of 13 January 1991 in Lithuania (the USSR aggression), which was judged, by the Lithuanian regulator, as containing false and offensive information. Last year, the RTCL adopted a similar decision against the “PBK Lithuania” channel.

The audience share of the “RTR Planeta”, “NTV Mir Lithuania” and “PBK Lithuania” in 2013 was 4%, 5.5% and 3.6% respectively.

Following the RTCL’s decision, all cable operators suspended the retransmission of the programmes of the above mentioned channels. However, these programmes are still available via satellite for the viewers subscribed to VIASAT service packages. VIASAT, which is licensed in Estonia and owned by the Swedish Modern Times Group (MTG), claims that it is not under the jurisdiction of Lithuanian regulator and that it acts according to the European Union law.

Following the complains of the Lithuanian Cable Television Association and Lithuanian Telecommunication Operators Association concerning the provision of satellite services to Lithuanian customers by VIASAT without the licence from the RTCL, the Prosecutor General’s Office has started an investigation on the basis of Article 202 paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code (“Unauthorised engagement in economic, commercial, financial or professional activities”).

Lietuvos radijo ir televizijos komisija, KS-59, 2/04/2014

http://www.rtk.lt/files/15_1396509989_1867.pdf

Decision of the Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania No. KS-59 of 2 April 2014

Lietuvos radijo ir televizijos komisija, KS-46, 19/03/2014

http://www.rtk.lt/files/15_1396509989_1867.pdf

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