

[MK] New addenda to the Law on audio and audiovisual media services

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In July 2014, the national Parliament adopted in an urgent and shortened procedure addenda to the Law on Audio and Audio-Visual Media Services (Закон за аудио и аудио-визуелни медиумски услуги). The new amendments decrease the number of representatives of the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) in the Programme Council of the Public Broadcasting Service (Macedonian Radio and Television - MRT) from two to one. One seat in the MRT Programme Council - as envisaged in the amendments - should belong to the recently established second biggest professional association of journalists - Macedonian Association of Journalists (MAJ), which is regarded as pro-government.

AJM's main remark is that the Government had proposed the addenda to the Parliament without prior public consultations with the journalists and the media community in the country.

The latest changes to the law also envisage exemptions of the social cases from paying broadcasting fee, which - according to the expectations of the Government - would decrease the financial pressure on about 34,000 families. The Minister for Information Society and Administration explained the necessity of reforming the broadcasting fee collection system as follows: "The costs (for collection of broadcasting fees), which the Public Revenue Office has, are bigger than the collected amount in the budget. That is why we made a political decision to exempt these citizens from the obligation to pay the broadcasting fee for a lifetime and continue to work on establishing a Public Broadcasting Service according to the model of the other Balkan countries." (the Minister was quoted in a press release, that was issued by the ruling political party VMRO DPMNE).

The civil society organization Media Development Centre (MDC) criticized the non-transparent and hasty procedure of amending the law without participation of the broad professional public. MDC expressed its concerns especially in regard to the lowered collection of the broadcasting fee, which could affect the reform of MRT into a professional public broadcaster (comparable with the private broadcasters). In its Progress Report for 2013, the EU Commission also noted the need for further democratisation of MRT. According to the opinion of the EU Commission in the Progress Report, "the public service broadcaster has improved its offer in terms of content, but providing pluralistic and balanced news coverage is not yet embedded in its policies and practices, as seen in the lack of balanced coverage

during the 2013 municipal election campaign”.

Закон за изменување и дополнување на Законот за аудио и аудиовизуелни медиумски услуги од 7 јули 2014

http://www.avmu.mk/images/SLUBEN_VESNIK_NA_RM_br.101_od_07.07.2014.pdf

