

[MK] Government's subsidies for private and public media

IRIS 2014-10:1/33

*Borce Manevski
Independent Media Consultant*

The main goal of the amendments to the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media (Законот за аудио и аудиовизуелни медиуми) which were adopted by the national Parliament in October 2014, is to provide support to the public and private TV broadcasters with funds from the state budget. According to the new regulation the national Government has to establish a specialised seven member commission with representatives from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Culture, the Film Agency, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, the Central Government, the Public Revenue Office and the Ministry for Information Society and Administration. TV broadcasters have to submit project proposals for TV productions to the Commission, which, based on criteria from a Government's by-law act, will decide which broadcasters and to what extent will receive state funding.

The state funding of private broadcasters has become problematic during the past few years due to the Government's and state institutions' advertising. According to the media regulation authority, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, the second biggest advertiser on the broadcasting market in 2013 was the national Government, and the fifth biggest was the ruling political party. In 2013 these two political advertisers - the only political entities from the Top 50 advertisers - bought 447 hours airing time to broadcast in total 21,780 advertising spots. There is no public data on how much funds other states, and public institutions and agencies have spent for self-promotion. There is also no information on how much public and state money has been spent for the purpose of political advertising in the new media and in the print media outlets.

The Government's advertising was noted by the OSCE ODIHR Mission in its report on the 2014 Presidential and Early Parliamentary Elections: "Many OSCE/ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed concern about media independence, alleging that prominent media outlets are under the indirect control of the governing parties because of the state's position as the largest single advertiser. Media stakeholders also noted that self-censorship is practiced to secure state advertising and to avoid defamation lawsuits." The European Commission in its latest Country's Progress Report for 2014 also reacted to the increased state funded advertising: "There is indirect state control of media output through government advertising and government-favoured (and favourable) media outlets

(...). In September 2014, the government made data on government advertising, including partial figures, publicly available. However, it is still unclear which media outlets are the primary beneficiaries of such campaigns and according to what criteria public funds are disbursed.”

The adopted amendments offer no clear mechanisms which could ensure the general public that this state funding does not affect the editorial policy of broadcasters and that all broadcasters on the market have equal access to subsidies from the state budget.

Zakon za izmenuvanje i dopolnuvanje

http://avmu.mk/images/Zakon_za_izmenuvanje_i_dopolnuvanje.pdf

Amendments to the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services

Presidential and Early Parliamentary Elections, 2014 - OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report

<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/fyrom/121306?download=true>

