[BG] Legislative amendments for a transparent and competitive media landscape

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On 23 January 2015, the Bulgarian Government adopted a programme for the stable development of the Republic of Bulgaria for the 2014-2018 period. One of the priorities as outlined under paragraph/section 18.1, which concerns the media landscape, is the: "[d]evelopment of a public landscape and legislation that guarantee media independence and pluralism as well as transparency and public disclosure of media ownership and media supervision".

The Government's aim over the next four years is to adopt legislative amendments that will help "to achieve a transparent and competitive media landscape". The measures set out in the programme cover three areas. Firstly, draft regulations will be drawn up to prevent mergers and/or the acquisition of media companies by certain people if they would obtain a "considerable influence" on the media landscape as a result.

Secondly, a debate will be held on whether public tendering procedures should be restricted to media companies that are prepared to abide by the provisions of an ethical code for Bulgarian media and the National Ethical Regulations on Advertising and Commercial Communication. There are currently two parallel ethical codes in Bulgaria that regulate media self-regulation: the Bulgarian Media Ethical Code, signed in 2004, and the Professional Code of Ethics of the Bulgarian Media, which was adopted in December 2013 by the Bulgarian Media Union (Български медиен съюз). The Government programme therefore uses the neutral title of "an ethical code".

Thirdly, discussion will focus on the adoption of legislation under which public funding would only be made available to media that had met their legal obligations regarding the transparency of media ownership. As far as the print media are concerned, these obligations are laid down in the Act on the compulsory notification of information on print and other works (Закон за задължителното депозиране на печатни и други произведения). According to Article 7a, every publisher of a printed periodical is obliged to publish information about its "actual owner" in the first edition each year. The same obligation applies if the ownership structure changes during the year, in which case the latest information must be published in the next edition. Electronic media are not subject to such a legislative obligation. The Govenment programme therefore

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states that electronic media may only receive public funding if, on their websites, they "provide users with easy, direct and permanent access to current information about their actual owners".

The Council of Ministers is the public institution responsible for implementing this part of the Government programme.

Програма на правителството за стабилно развитие на Република България за периода 2014 -2018 г. , 23 Януари 2015 г.

http://www.government.bg/fce/001/0211/files/Government%20programme%202014-2018_.pdf

Government programme for the stable development of the Republic of Bulgaria for the 2014-2018 period, 23 January 2015

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