

[BA] Public broadcasting system no longer has revenue from subscription tax

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On 19 July 2016, the Parliamentary Assembly of the House of Representatives failed to pass a proposed Act amending the Act on the Public Broadcasting system, which foresaw the collection of the TV subscription tax through electricity bills.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is composed of two federal units (entities) - Republika Srpska and Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Three constituent peoples (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats) make up 96 per cent of the population. For a law to be adopted, it is necessary for representatives of all three constituent peoples in the Parliamentary Assembly of the House of Representatives to vote for it. Thus, acts may only be elected by national consensus.

The public broadcasting system consists of three TV broadcasters: two entity broadcasters, Radio-Television of the Republika Srpska (RTRS) and the Radio-Television of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (RTV FBiH); and the state broadcaster, Radio and Television of Bosnia-Herzegovina (BHRT). Croat political institutions advocate a complete transformation of BHRT into three ethnic channels (Bosniak, Serb and Croat). Media experts believe this would additionally complicate, both politically and organizationally, the already complex broadcasting system in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Croat politicians have been pointing out for years that public service broadcaster do not reflect the political and cultural interests of Croats.

Until now, the compulsory TV tax was collected through telecom operators' landline bills. However, citizens are cancelling their landline connections on a daily basis, as this communication technology is becoming outdated. According to data from the Board of the Public Broadcasting System, this has nearly halved the service's revenue in the last two years.

Therefore, an act amending the Act on the Public Broadcasting system was proposed. It foresaw the collection of the TV subscription tax through the electricity bills instead of the telecom operator's landline bills. According to the proposal, submitted by representatives of the two ruling Bosniak parties - Party of Democratic Action (Stranka demokratske akcije - SDA) and Union for a Better Future of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica Bosne i

Hercegovine - SBB BiH) - funds collected from TV tax were supposed to be divided by giving 40 per cent to BHRT and 30 per cent each to RTRS and RTV. According to the previous model for distributing the TV tax, 50 per cent of the collected tax belonged to BHRT and 25 per cent to each entity broadcaster. However, delegates of the strongest Serb party, Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Савез независних социјалдемократа - SNSD), did not support this solution, requesting that the amount collected from tax be shared equally among the three broadcasters because they believe the state television is no more important than the entity broadcasters. Delegates of Croat political parties did not support the proposal either, as they advocate total reconstruction of the broadcasting system over partial solutions. The Parliamentary Assembly did not pass the proposed Act.

Then, in the next session held on 1 August 2016, the opposition Social-Democratic Party (Socijaldemokratska partija Bosne i Hercegovine SDP) proposed continuing for another six months the old method of collecting the tax through telecom operators. However, the proposal failed to get majority support in the Parliamentary Assembly of the House of Representatives.

The discussion on issues related to the Public Broadcasting System will resume after the parliamentary summer recess. Practically, public services are left without their most important means of funding, which threatens to disrupt or discontinue broadcasting and to bankrupt them. As a first reaction, the General Director of the public broadcaster, BHRT, told journalists that the fate of the public broadcaster is uncertain: "There is a danger that we will become the only country in Europe without a public broadcasting service."

Okončana 33. sjednica Predstavničkog doma 19.07.2016

https://www.parlament.ba/sadrzaj/vijesti/2010/default.aspx?id=66619&langTag=bs-BA&template_id=5&pril=b&pageIndex=1

Further information on the parliamentary session of 19 July 2016

Okončana 34. sjednica Predstavničkog doma 01.08.2016

https://www.parlament.ba/sadrzaj/vijesti/2010/default.aspx?id=66847&langTag=bs-BA&template_id=5&pril=b&pageIndex=1

Further information on the parliamentary session of 1 August 2016

