[LV] Media policy basic principles adopted

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On 8 November 2016, the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers approved Basic Principles of the Latvian Media Policy (the Principles), a new policy document providing the general targets and tasks for media policy within the years 2016 to 2020. The Ministry of Culture will have to prepare an interim assessment of the fulfilment of the Principles by 1 July 2018 and submit it to the Cabinet of Ministers.

The Principles are a policy-planning document, which sets the basic principles of Latvian media policy, its targets, priorities and tasks to be accomplished within this period. Various public institutions, including the Ministry of Culture and the national media regulator, are appointed as bodies responsible for promoting the Principles. The structure of the Principles includes the general target of policy, five directions of action, the planned perspective, results and indicators, specific tasks, and an assessment on the impact of state and municipal budgets. The general target of policy is to create a positive environment for the activities of media, through the following five strategies:

1. Securing and developing plurality of media;

2. Ensuring quality and responsibility of media;

3. Improving professional education in the media sector;

4. Promoting media literacy;

5. Promoting a secure media environment for individuals and the public.

With respect to the five directions listed above the Principles provide a detailed action plan. For instance, in order to develop media plurality, the Principles provide for a clear separation of national remit and funding for public and private media. The attachment to the Principles provides a more detailed description of the status quo and the aims of the Principles.

With respect to the national remit, it is noted that currently private media receive only 8 percent of the public funding for the national remit. There should be clear principles and fair competition for this funding. On the other hand, although public media receive the largest part of the funding for the national remit, generally their budget is one of the smallest in Europe. On average, the public service

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media receive a funding in the amount of 0.2 percent of the Gross domestic product (GDP), whereas Latvian media get only 0.1 percent of the GDP. It is planned that the public service media could exit the advertisement market if their public funding is appropriately increased. This, in turn, would increase advertising revenue for private media, including regional media, which would promote media plurality. The Principles provide various quantitative indicators for measuring the results of the actions. For example, it is provided that the public funding for public service broadcasters should increase from 0.11 percent of the GDP in 2016 to 0.19 percent in 2020.

The Principles also provide that the functions of the national broadcasting regulator should be reviewed so that it is not simultaneously a general regulator and the supervisor specifically of public service media. The lack of media transparency is also indicated as a problem, as the beneficial owners of many media are not known. A reform of the media registry held by the Latvian Company Register is suggested. The Principles include many practical suggestions of actions to improve media literacy, including a suggestion to teach media in schools, and to promote life-long learning amongst media professionals.

Par Latvijas mediju politikas pamatnostādnēm 2016.-2020. Gadam

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