

[BA] Work of Parliament blocked, financial disaster for the public service

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The public broadcasting system in Bosnia and Herzegovina comprising the national broadcaster BHRT and the constituent entity broadcasters RTVFBiH and RTRS, has been brought into a dead-end situation as it is evident that the national parliament will not discuss models for its funding any time soon. This political situation has been further cemented by a formal blockade of the House of Peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the SNSD, the ruling party from the Republika Srpska. It decided not to participate in the work of the parliament's upper house as a result of a crisis created by a non-institutionally filed application for the revision of an aggression and genocide lawsuit against Serbia. Since decisions in the House of Peoples are confirmed by ethnic consensus, all legislative activity at state level has been blocked, including the funding of public services.

However, this has only institutionalised a months-long ongoing process without bringing the positions of the deeply divided ethnic constituent entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina any closer. All three public broadcasters had been funded primarily from the radio and television tax collected together with the money raised through landline phone bills. After years-long contracts with telecom operators had expired, and after several extensions, political party representatives in parliament were unable to agree on a new funding model. Serbian and Croatian parties hold opposing views regarding the funding model; the former prefer a different way of distributing the collected tax among the entity and national broadcasters, whereas the latter seek to maintain the current system of funding, but they criticize the fact that its programme does not show consideration for the cultural and political interests of the Croatian people.

The Croatian People's Assembly (HNS) and the Croatian Caucus Delegates in the Bosnia and Herzegovina Parliament's House of Peoples developed a Proposal for the Transformation of the Public Broadcasting System in Bosnia and Herzegovina so that Croatians would get their own public broadcasting service. These proposals were presented in the Bosnia and Herzegovina Parliament on 27 February. The head of HNS's Culture, Sport and Media Section said that Croatians, as a constituent people, have a constitutional right to create their own public broadcasting service in their own language. He stated that, guided by the principle of the constituency of peoples, the proposal offered "a new basic model for the public broadcasting service, better reflecting the constitutional structure of

Bosnia and Herzegovina, could include an own broadcasting service for each of the three peoples, as well as an overarching broadcasting service reflecting the shared needs of all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina".“ A second option is to keep the two entity broadcasters, but to have two channels of Bosnia and Herzegovina Federation service - in both the Croatian language and Bosnian languages. The entity televisions would be funded from the budget and the national service would be funded through tax.

The head of HNS's Culture, Sport and Media Section said that they believed this model could be acceptable to all sides and that it made all publics in Bosnia and Herzegovina equal. They had to accept the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina was a highly plural society in terms of identity and that each of these segments had specific social, national and political characteristics, and that the public service should be a space within which each of these publics can make itself visible.

Immediately after the proposal was presented, a number of Bosnian political representatives rejected the proposed construction, considering it an additional division of the country. A parliamentary session to discuss this issue is uncertain due to the political crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Of the three public broadcasters, BHRT is in the direst situation: some of its accounts are blocked, salaries are late and claims by suppliers are accumulating. On multiple occasions, the management has warned that there is a danger of a total programme shutdown. The public services' trade union announced that there would be protests in front of Parliament and that the building's exit would be blocked.

Javna rasprava: Četiri kanala: HNS spremio prijedlog za reformu RTV-sustava

<http://www.bljesak.info/rubrika/vijesti/clanak/cetiri-kanala-hns-spremio-prijedlog-za-reformu-rtvsustava/188192>

Public hearing: Four channels: prepared HNS proposal to reform the broadcasting system

