EBU: Appeal to Bosnia and Herzegovina

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The Executive Board of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) in Geneva has written to the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina expressing its concern at the deteriorating state of public service broadcasting in the country.

The EBU Executive Board called on the country's president to ensure that the government used its power and influence to safeguard the future of the national broadcaster Bosanskohercegovačka radiotelevizija (BHRT). To this end, immediate reforms of the national media laws were necessary.

The EBU warned that BHRT risked imminent closure, having been deprived of stable funding for many years; it was in substantial debt, was unable to pay salaries or bills, and could not meet contractual obligations. Its energy provider was also threatening to cut off its electricity supply because of unpaid bills.

In its letter, the EBU stated that the existence of public service broadcasters that were independent of the government, which lay at the heart of democratic societies, was of particular historical and strategic importance in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was therefore vital to preserve public service broadcasting not only to keep the population informed, but also to promote the cohesion of the country by reflecting its cultural diversity.

The EBU concluded by saying that itself and its members were willing to provide every possible assistance and expertise to help the authorities concerned to secure BHRT's future.

In recent years, several attempts by the Bosnia and Herzegovina parliament to reform BHRT have failed due to disagreements. The broadcaster receives virtually no state funding for its programmes and has been operating at a loss for many years. It cannot guarantee a general interest channel or a reliable news service. One reason for the rapid decline of the heavily indebted broadcaster's economic situation is the inadequate collection of licence fees over recent years. Too many citizens fail to pay any licence fee at all, even though this is the broadcaster's primary source of income. Moreover, there is no system in place to actively collect the fees.

The broadcaster's current financial problems are due, in part, to an old conflict that continues to simmer in the background. Political representatives of Bosnian Croats recently repeated calls for the creation of a separate broadcaster for

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Bosnia and Herzegovina's Croatian population. The United Nation's international representatives had specifically tried to strengthen BHRT as part of the reconstruction of the country's broadcasting system in order to counter the disintegration of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

European Broadcasting Union press release of 23 April 2017, "EBU joins international community in plea to save PSM in Bosnia and Herzegovina"

https://www.ebu.ch/news/2017/04/ebu-joins-international-community-in-plea-to-save-psm-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina

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