# [BY] Amendments to media law further restrict freedom of Internet

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Major changes in the 2008 Statute “On the Mass Media” (see IRIS 2008-8/9) were adopted by the Belarusian Parliament on 14 June 2018 and signed by the President on 17 July. They mostly deal with the changes in online media regulation.

Following the Russian Statute “On the Mass Media” (IRIS 2011-7/42), the Belarusian amendments introduce the notion of the “network publication” defined as “an Internet resource that has gone through the state registration along the procedure established by this Statute”, as well as related notions such as “owner of network publication,” “Internet resource” (defined as “Internet site, page of an Internet site, forum, blog, mobile app, other Internet resource (or its part), located in global computer network Internet, being used to disseminate mass information”) and “owner of online resources”.

The owners of online resources and of network publications shall be obliged to “analyse” all content as the law introduces their responsibility to prevent the dissemination of untruthful information that may harm state or public interest or defame individuals or legal entities, or information using curse words or on suicides. The owners are also liable if their resources are used to disseminate information or comments by Internet users who have not gone through prior identification, as defined by the state.

Additionally, the amendments provide the Ministry of Information with the power of strict control over all online media. In particular, they allow it to block access to any online resources without a court decision, while a prior court decision is still required to stop all registered media (broadcast and print).

OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Harlem Désir, made a statement on the Statute, saying: “No Ministry should have the exclusive power to block access to any online resource without a court decision. Content removal should require judicial oversight... The adoption of these amendments sends a worrying signal about media freedom and pluralism - online and offline - in Belarus”.

Among other things, the amendments include a general ban on foreigners, foreign legal entities, Belarusian entities with at least 20 percent stock belonging to foreign or international entities, and stateless persons establishing media outlets

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in the country. In addition, the current law in Belarus already forbids citizens to contribute to foreign media without special state accreditation. The statute enters into force on 1 December 2018.

***О внесении изменений и дополнений в некоторые законы Республики Беларусь***

http://pravo.by/document/?guid=3961&p0=H11800128

*Statute of the Republic of Belarus of 17 July 2018, N 128-Z "On amendments and additions to certain statutes of Republic of Belarus"*

***Legislative amendments further restrict media in Belarus, says OSCE media freedom representative. Press release of 18 June 2018***

https://osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/384786

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