

5 June, 2024

To

MPs in the Parliament of Montenegro

Subject: Alarming last-minute changes to the draft Law on National Public Broadcasting in Montenegro

The International and European Federation of Journalists (IFJ-EFJ) together with their affiliate, the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro (TUMM), express serious concern over the significant last-minute changes to the draft Law on National Public Broadcasting in Montenegro.

The Prime Minister's cabinet amended the agreed text of the law, on which the working group for media legislation had worked for almost 30 months, without public consultation. We understand that there was no adequate dialogue with the relevant ministry either.

The key changes to the law relate to lowering the 'experience' requirement for the general director from 10 to 5 years, as well as allowing advertising during prime time for the national broadcaster, despite the channel being entirely dependent on state funding.

Such a move by the Prime Minister's Cabinet is inexplicable, given that the initial intention of the amendments to the law was precisely to increase the criteria for management structures in the civil service. Additionally, introducing the possibility of additional income for public service, without prior correction of the budget provided by the state, introduces unfair competition in the media sector and raises questions about the sustainability of the media.

Although media laws are part of the so-called Interim Benchmark Assessment Report (IBAR) package, we strongly believe that any substantive reform should enable effective rule of law and prioritise the representation of the public interest.

We call for clarification of the reasons for the change and urge the authorities to ensure that the text is amended to allow for the professionalisation of the management structure of the public service and to guarantee the normal functioning of the media sector. Such fundamental changes will have a significant impact on the media system and will not be easily remedied by subsequent legislative changes.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. We remain at your disposal for any further information.

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