



PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA
TO THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Ref. ID-02-283

Strasbourg, 11 November 2018

Dear Mr Gruden, *Dear Matjaž,*

I am writing you regarding an alert, published on the Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists on 17 September 2019 – “Suspension of Bulgarian National Radio Broadcasts Points to Vulnerability of Editorial Independence”.

Please allow me to convey to you the following information, provided by the authorities of the Republic of Bulgaria:

On September 13, 2019, the Council for Electronic Media (CEM) observed an interruption in the broadcast of program “Horizont” of the Bulgarian National Radio (BNR) in the time frame 06:00:02 – 10:34:11 and 10:38:38 – 10:41:49 h. CEM immediately requested a statement from BNR regarding the reasons for the interruption as well as a clarification whether the Commission for Regulation of Communications (CRC) had any knowledge of a planned broadcast interruption.

On September 16, 2019 a meeting between representatives of the Council for Electronic Media (CEM), the Bulgarian National Radio (BNR), and the Commission for Regulation of Communications (CRC) took place. BNR informed that the interruption of the broadcast was due to planned technical check of its transmitters. CRC informed that it hasn’t been notified of the planned broadcast interruption and after a thorough examination didn’t find any technical reason for it in the transmitter network.

On September 17, 2019, the Supreme Prosecutor’s Office of Cassation began examining the case and confirmed the findings of CRC.

On September 19, 2019, a meeting between representatives of CEM and the editorial team of program “Horizont” took place. The team reported that it had been the target of undue pressure, which aimed at the removal of the journalist Silvia Velikova from the program.

CEM issued an official statement the same day, condemning the resulting broadcast interruption and stressing the fact that such an undue intervention presents a breach of the right of access to information as well as a violation of the provisions of BNR’s state-issued license.

Subsequently, CEM referred the case to the State Prosecutor’s Office for further examination, while also imposing monetary penalty on BNR as a result of an administrative procedure.

On October 17, 2019, the mandate of the director general of BNR, Mr. Svetoslav Kostov was terminated. The responsibilities of the office are temporarily performed by acting director general Mr. Anton Mitov until the conducting of new elections, which according the legal requirements need to be concluded within 3 months.

The reasons for the steps, taken by CEM, are the undue nation-wide broadcast interruption of program "Horizont", which violates values, guarded by the Constitutions and the state laws – including the right to information, right to expression of opinion, as well as the immediate protection of the life and health of the citizens in a case of emergency.

I would like to request your kind assistance in forwarding the above information to the relevant partner organisations and in keeping me informed about their position and reaction.

I am looking forward to our future fruitful cooperation and remain at your disposal for any further clarifications.

Sincerely yours,



Katya TODOROVA

Ambassador

Mr. Matjaž GRUDEN
Director
Directorate of Democratic Participation
Directorate General of Democracy
Council of Europe