

Statement by The Society of Journalists (Towarzystwo Dziennikarskie)

Poland's media regulator, the Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji (KRRiT) (National Broadcasting Council) has fined TVN, a privately owned television broadcaster, 1,48m Polish złoty (348,632 euro) for „propagating unlawful activities and encouraging acts which threaten security”. The penalty was imposed for the TV station's reporting of events which took place in the Polish Sejm, the lower parliamentary chamber and in front of the parliament building, between December 16th and 18th 2016.

This is the biggest fine ever to be imposed on a TV station in Poland for live coverage of an event. No previous penalty levied by the KRRiT has directly served any political party in this way. The fine was imposed for reports on events which depicted the government in a bad light. The footage covered protests against the failure of Poland's parliamentary majority to respect the constitution. This horrific penalty against TVN brings the campaign by the state authorities against critical media to a new level. Up till now private media have been cut off from advertising by state controlled companies as well as government information campaigns. Critical media have also been criticised. Now the authorities have reached for censorship as a tool of pressure and are attempting to terrorise the independent media with penalties.

Everything points to the fact that confiscation of broadcast licences will be the authorities' next step. Undemocratic regimes cannot co-exist with free media. The governing Law and Justice (PiS) has taken control of Poland's prosecutor's office as well as the law courts and is now moving to destroy the free private media.

Democratic states and societies cannot exist without free and independent media. They can only be defended by the citizens protesting in solidarity and by courageous journalists.

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