

COUNTRY REPORT, REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA
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Legal amendments

The Law on Amending and Supplementing the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services came into force on 8 January 2019. The key change made will result in electing new members to the Council of the Agency and a new Director, in accord with the criteria and deadlines set up by the new Law.

In case of violations, the competencies for imposing measures have been transferred to the Agency Council. Regarding the Agency's financing, 0.8 % of the Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia will be allocated to the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, the Macedonian Radio and Television and the "Macedonian Broadcasting" Public Enterprise, for their operations in 2019 (previously, this percentage was 0.5%).

The new amendments opened up a possibility for the radio stations to voluntarily broadcast certain percentage of domestic music, i.e. music in the Macedonian language or the languages of the ethnic communities and, in turn, they will be granted a reduction of the license fee ranging from 10% to 30%, depending on the amount of broadcasted music. A total of 26 radios voluntarily reported certain percentages of domestic music they would air and the Agency reduced their license fees accordingly.

The above-mentioned amendments brought into force other legal solutions as well – a provision envisaging that the public institutions must not allocate any funds for informing or acquainting the public with their services via the commercial radio or television stations; an article regulating retransmission of the programming services and envisaging, among other things, that each broadcaster should submit a statement that it has regulated the retransmission rights in another state.

The Agency has reacted several times, pointing out, among other things, that amendments to the law should not be used to interrupt the mandate of the Council members with the aim of replacing them by new candidates, as previous practice has shown. Instead of this, a genuine reform in this sphere would require placing the focus on issues such as media professionalization; strengthening of the labour and professional rights of journalists and other media workers; improving the conditions for the performance of this business activity and, in particular, promoting the dignity of this profession, improving the safety and security of all media workers, ensuring adequate education for the journalists and strengthening media self-regulation.

Monitoring of Media Coverage during the 2019 Presidential Elections

In anticipation of the 2019 presidential election campaign and the local elections in the municipalities of Debar, Novo Selo and Ohrid, at its First Public Meeting in 2019, the Agency reminded the broadcasters of

the rules applying to electoral media coverage, emphasizing in particular the implementation of the provisions for paid political advertising (PPP).

In line with the latest amendments to the Electoral Code, on 7 February 2019, the Agency adopted a Methodology for Monitoring Electoral Media Coverage by the Radio and Television Programming Services during Electoral Processes. The Methodology defines the goals, periods, scope and subject of monitoring, as well as the methods of its realization.

The Agency began to monitor broadcasters' media coverage of the elections on 9 February 2019. The monitoring process covered 13 (thirteen) television stations that air programme at the state level (here including the television programming services of the MRT) and the first and the second radio programming services of the MRT. Once the election campaign started, the monitoring was expanded to cover a total of 32 programming services, i.e. 15 national programming services (13 TVs and two radios), and 17 regional and local televisions. During the monitoring period, four broadcasters were found to have violated the Electoral Code – two by exceeding the limit for paid political advertising, one by broadcasting paid political advertising within a special information programme and one by violating the election silence. Base on the findings the Agency initiated a misdemeanour procedure.

Regulatory Strategy

The Agency's Council adopted the 2019-2023 Regulatory Strategy for the Development of Audio and Audiovisual Business Activity on 14 March 2019. The Agency had prepared this Strategy to outline the directions of its activities between 2019 and 2023, with the aim of improving a number of aspects in the media sphere in the forthcoming five-year period.

The Agency has identified six aspects of the media industry that call for improvement: professionalism and editorial independence of the media, protection and development of media pluralism, protecting human rights in media content, encouraging the development of the market and competition, providing a regulatory framework that enables the development of the media and further development of media literacy. The needed improvement is to be ensured by the activities that the Agency has envisaged to take up in the following five-year period as part of the Strategy.

In order to ensure that the document should cover and adequately address all the issues of key importance for all stakeholders in the media sphere, in the course of 2018, the Agency conducted in-depth interviews with representatives of the television and radio broadcasting industry, as well as with representatives of the advertising agencies. It also held several meetings with relevant stakeholders in this business activity.

Media Literacy

Led by its legal obligation to promote the development of media literacy, after having conducted a public hearing, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services adopted a paper on “Media Literacy Policy” on 29 March 2019. This document built on the Programme on Promoting Media Literacy, the relevance of which expired at the end of last year. The “Media Literacy Policy” is sufficiently general and comprehensive to incorporate within itself the novelties that keep appearing in the field of media literacy, which is why its validity is not limited. The document was drafted by EAVI Secretary General Paolo Celot, within the frameworks of the project on “Enhancing Judicial Expertise on Freedom of Expression and the Media in Southeast Europe” (JUFREX).

This policy paper contains the new, upgraded concept of media literacy, which implies not only a set of skills that need to be acquired, but also a number of more comprehensive personal stances and approaches that need to be developed. This vision is structured into four different components: critical consciousness, awareness of emotions, digital wellness and full citizenship.

The paper on “Media Literacy Policy” is available in the Macedonian, Albanian and English languages. It has been published in these languages in the form of a booklet.

http://mediumskapismenost.mk/media/2019/04/Media-Literacy-policy_online-version.pdf

Gender and the Media

On 20 December 2018, the Agency published, on its website, the 2019 Operational Plan it had prepared for the purpose of implementing the 2018-2020 National Action Plan on Gender Equality. The Operational Plan incorporates the concrete activities that the Agency is to carry out in 2019, such as organizing trainings for media workers on the key concept of gender equality and gender-sensitive reporting and public debates; conducting of an analysis of gender and gender perspectives in the television programmes aired by the national television channels; gender analysis of the public broadcaster’s programmes; conducting of promotional activities on the part of the competent authorities in charge of taking action upon citizens’ complaints on grounds of discrimination.

At its Fourth Public Meeting, which took place on 26 December 2018, the Agency presented the results of its Research into the Portrayal of Gender in the Television Programmes in 2018. The research consisted of two analyses: one about the participation of women and men behind the screen at all levels (from owners to support personnel), and the other one about the presence and treatment of gender-related topics, and the portrayal and depiction of men and women in the morning/noon shows.

The first analysis showed that, in the case of national television broadcasters, just as with all other television channels, the editorial policies are tailored in environments where men prevail (as owners, directors, editors, etc.). Those responsible for carrying out the decisions are the journalists (predominantly

female), and the production staff (predominantly male). These data have highlighted the need for changing the awareness of the media about the situation behind the screen as well, and about the importance of including women in all levels of the decision-making processes.

The other analysis showed that it was necessary to tackle gender issues more often and offer gender-relevant data related to everyday topics, at the same time debunking gender stereotypes and prejudices, while avoiding gender-profiled questions.

The research will be published in a book form, and the Agency will have it printed in the Macedonian, Albanian and English languages.

Access to the media for people with sensory impairments

As part of its efforts to promote certain activities among the broadcasters so that the latter would make their programmes accessible for persons with vision and hearing impairments, in December 2018, the Agency held a working meeting with representatives of the national television broadcasters. The purpose of the meeting was to look into the ways and possibilities of broadcasters' adjusting their programmes for the persons with sensory impairments, and to present the benefits that the television broadcasters may receive from this process.

The Agency presented to the attendees a booklet titled "How to Provide Information for Persons with Sensory Impairments – Approach, Services, Programmes, Materials and Alternative Formats", which it had prepared and printed into Macedonian, Albanian and English. (<http://avmu.mk/en/booklet-on-how-to-provide-information-for-persons-with-sensory-impairments-approach-services-programmes-materials-and-alternative-formats/>)

The booklet highlights the needs, ideas and considerations of those severely and less severely sight- or hearing-impaired living in the Republic of Macedonia. It explains, in an easy-to-understand way, through graphs and pictures, how the media can ensure easier communication, depending on the type of impairment – hearing, vision, physical or mental disability – by means of subtitled videos, open or closed textual descriptions, sign language or audio descriptions.

Hate speech

In January 2019, The Agency became part of the Network for Fight against Hate Speech in the Media, formed on the initiative of the Macedonian Media Ethics Council, with the support from the OSCE Mission in Skopje. The primary goal of the Network is to prevent the spread of hate speech in the public sphere, strengthen professional and ethical performance of the journalist profession and raise the awareness of the broader public.

As it has been doing to date, the Agency will continue to note all instances of hate speech in the media contents and sanction the same, in line with the competences granted to it by the latest amendments to the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services. At the same time, the Agency remains dedicated to the efforts to support and protect journalists and media representatives who are targets of hate speech.

Apart from the Agency, the list of signatories to the Declaration against Hate Speech in the Media and on the Internet also includes the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Information Society and Administration, the Minister of Communications, Accountability and Transparency, the Ombudsman of the Republic of Macedonia, the Academy of Judges and Public Prosecutors, the Journalists' Association of Macedonia (ZNM), the Independent Trade Union of Journalists and Media Workers (SSNM), Institute of Communication Studies (IKS), Macedonia Media Institute (MIM), the Media Development Centre (CRM), the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia, the MARGINI Coalition, the Metamorphosis Foundation, the Social Development Research Institute (RESIS) and the Centre for Intercultural Dialogue (CID).