

Does anybody care about RTVS?

Together with Reporters Without Borders and Transparency International Slovakia, we appeal to the Ministry of Culture not to give up on important reforms of public broadcaster (RTVS)

MEMO 98, together with other Slovak and international NGOs, welcomed the efforts of the Slovak Ministry of Culture to reform the public broadcaster Radio and Television of Slovakia (RTVS) announced this summer. The comprehensive reform was intended to strengthen the editorial and financial independence of the public broadcaster, as well as the internal pluralism of its editorial offices. The adjustments were supposed to lead to changes in the appointment and functioning of the RTVS controlling bodies as well as in the RTVS's financing setup, following the approved [Programme Declaration of the Government 2021-2024](#):

- *The Government of the Slovak Republic considers RTVS to be a guaranteed source providing broad public access to verified information, culture, and education, which, however, is underfinanced in the long term, and especially in the European context.*
- *The Government will therefore adopt legislative measures that will stabilize RTVS's fulfillment of its statutory tasks, including opportunities to develop its infrastructure, produce its own content, increase the quality of its programs and penetrate the field of new media services.*
- *The Government will consider introducing a new model for the financing of RTVS while preserving the public service and independence of RTVS.*
- *At the same time, the Government will review and possibly propose a new mechanism for the election of the RTVS's Director General in the future so that the selection process is as apolitical as possible.*

MEMO 98 pointed to the possible negative consequences of the election of Jaroslav Reznik as Director General. Unfortunately, the developments at RTVS after his election in June 2017 proved that our concerns were justified - the appointment of former spokespersons of various ministries as news directors in 2017, the open letter, and later the departure of editors due to the threat to the independence of the newsroom, as well as the internal document of the public broadcaster [Short News - a reminder of the principles](#) in 2018, [the favouritism of the coalition SNS ahead of the 2020 parliamentary elections](#), and the overall situation in RTVS ([summary report](#) in 2021).

In accordance with the agreement reached at the conference titled "RTVS for the 21st century", which was organised on 8 July 2021 by the Ministry of Culture (with the participation of the Culture Minister Natália Milanová and the State Secretary) in cooperation with the Committee for Culture and Media of the National Assembly of the Slovak Republic (with the participation of its chairman Kristián Čekovský), we, together with the organisations Reporters Without Borders and Transparency International Slovakia, submitted to the Ministry a position paper on the concept of the reform in August. At its core were the following proposals:

- *Reform the membership, selection process, and competencies of the RTVS' Council with the aim of making it an expert body supervising the functioning of RTVS;*
- *The number of its members must be high enough to have the potential to represent different parts of Slovak society;*

- *The nomination and selection process should be carried out in a transparent and inclusive manner, allowing for the appointment of experts of value and standing;*
- *The Director General, as the sole executive body, should be elected by a reformed RTVS' Council. Indeed, we believe that the current selection process (election in the plenary of the National Assembly) actually contributes to exposing the leadership of the public broadcaster to political influence.*

Unfortunately, in November 2021, the reform process came to a halt due to the fact that one of the ruling parties, SME Rodina, did not agree with the reform. Stopping the reform process in this situation is gambling with the future of RTVS, not only because of the urgent need to reform its long-standing underfunded setup (the monthly concession fee of EUR 4.64 has not been changed since 2003) but also because of the upcoming election of the Director General (summer 2022).

We, therefore, appeal to Minister Milanová, the Ministry of Culture, and the entire coalition not to give up on important reforms related to RTVS and also to all parliament MPs to support the process of long-term recovery of the public media. A strong and independent public service broadcaster contributes significantly to an educated and well-informed citizen, as well as to a plurality of views, freedom of expression, and, as a result, to an open and prosperous democratic society.

The respect for freedom of speech (not its criminalization), media literacy, quality journalism with credible information represents the best response to the current information disorder and the malignant disinformation challenges to which a significant part of the Slovak population is unfortunately exposed. RTVS needs resuscitation to become a respected broadcaster in the reference and cultivating point of the changing media environment.

You can find the position of Reporters Without Borders [here](#) and the position of Transparency International Slovakia [here](#).