

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/slovenia-government-pressure-on-public-03-08-2012,43162.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Slovenia

Alarm

## Government pressure on public broadcasting

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Reporters Without Borders is very disturbed by the government's illegal and arbitrary dismissal of four members of the state-owned broadcaster *RTV Slovenija*'s supervisory board. Appointed for four-year terms by the previous social-democratic government in January 2010, they were fired by the current conservative government last week.

"Their dismissal is contrary to the letter and spirit of the law and constitutes unacceptable political interference in *RTV*'s operations," Reporters Without Borders said. "If the government could dismiss the supervisory board's members, they would be independent only in theory. Respect for public broadcasting's institutions and independence are essential conditions for the rule of law. If the government does not reverse this decision, it will be accused of dealing a very dangerous blow to media freedom in Slovenia."

The four supervisory board members who were dismissed by Prime Minister Janez Janša's conservative government on 26 July – **Nataša Koprivšek**, **Marjan Sedmak**, **Aljoša Štampar** and **Matjaž Medved** – were appointed by Borut Pahor's social-democratic government on 21 January 2010 for four-year terms ending in 2014.

Candidates have been invited to apply for the newly-vacant positions.

The government appoints four of the supervisory board's 11 members but there is no legal provision for their dismissal before their four-year terms are over. Their terms can only end prematurely if they resign or are unable to continue fulfilling their duties as a result of death, illness, imprisonment and so on.

The government's decision is in line with a recommendation by the parliamentary committee for education, science, culture, sport and youth, which is dominated by the ruling coalition. The committee "rejected" the *RTV* supervisory board's annual report in April and called for the replacement of the four members named by the previous government.

In so doing, the committee exceeded its powers. According to law, it is supposed to take note of the report but not to issue recommendations or vote on it.

In defence of their actions, the parliamentary committee and government accused the supervisory board of lacking authority and transparency. The board's chair, Lenart Šetinc, described the accusations as "fabricated and unverified" and said the committee and government had acted in an "illegitimate and illegal" manner out of "purely political motives."

"It does not bode well for the rule of law when the government violates legislation," Šetinc said. "One of the pillars of *RTV*'s independence is the article of the law that says that its staff and the members of its supervisory bodies cannot be arbitrarily dismissed by the government."

Concern about growing government influence over the media has been heightened by the announced creation of a new TV station in the next few months by Telekom Slovenije, a telecommunications company that is 72 per cent state-owned.

TS is one of the country's biggest companies and has a near monopoly of telecommunications and Internet access. Many journalists fear that the new TV station, to be called *TSMedia*, will be subservient to the government, which is at the same time trying to exercise more and more control over *RTV*.

According to Slovenian law, a telecommunications company cannot own a TV station. TS nonetheless expects to get the green light from the Postal and Electronic Communications Agency (APEK), and the future TV station has already bought the broadcasting rights for the next three seasons of the UEFA Champions League.

