

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/russia-independent-siberian-tv-station-s-31-12-2014,47440.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Russia

Forced off the air

Independent Siberian TV station's forced closure imminent

31 December 2014

One of western Siberia's few independent TV stations, Tomsk-based TV-2, will have to end over-the-air broadcasting at midnight tonight, after covering news in the region for 23 years, because the local branch of the state telecommunications network RTRS, which has an over-the-air transmission monopoly, has rescinded its contract. Thereafter, TV-2 will be limited to transmission by cable until early February, when it will probably have to end all forms of broadcasting.

The past year has been marked by growing pressure on Russian media that are not under the Kremlin's direct control. The pressure has above all been felt at the federal level, targeting such broadcasters as radio [Ekho Moskvy](#), information website [Russkaya Planeta](#) and TV station [Dozhd](#), but regional broadcasters have not been spared.

[RTRS](#) notified TV-2 at the end of the November of the decision to end its contract – one that is tantamount to a death sentence. In a [press release](#), RTRS said the decision was taken because TV-2 had "contravened" an agreement, alluding to TV-2's reaction to a previous closure threat.

When RTRS suspended transmission of TV-2's signal for several weeks in April after a malfunction of the transmission equipment owned by RTRS, Roskomnadzor, the federal communications surveillance agency, threatened to strip TV-2 of its licence if broadcasting did not resume promptly.

A wave of demonstrations in support of TV-2 prevented the threat from being carried out. But an RTRS representative [told](#) the business daily [Vedomosti](#) on 24 December that it could no longer contemplate working with a partner that turned a technical incident into a political issue and used it to mobilize social and media support.

TV-2 said RTRS's decision was "absurd" and "legally unfounded" because it had two valid licences.

But, after RTRS's decision, Roskomnadzor in turn rescinded its previously announced decision – confirmed in November – to extend TV-2's licence until 2025, explaining that the earlier announcement had been due to a technical error.

As a result, after its over-the-air signal is turned off at midnight, TV-2 will have to terminate broadcasting by cable on 8 February if Roskomnadzor does not change its mind.

TV-2 has filed a suit against both RTRS and Roskomnadzor. The first hearing in the case is scheduled for 21 January.

"We condemn this unilateral and arbitrary decision, which threatens the existence of an independent regional news outlet," Reporters Without Borders programme director Lucie Morillon said.

"Disguised as an administrative dispute, it constitutes a grave violation of the right to information and endangers media pluralism. We urge the local authorities and the head of Roskomnadzor to stop persecuting TV-2 and to restore the necessary conditions for it to continue operating in the region."

[Protests](#) against TV-2's imminent closure have been staged in Tomsk. More than 4,000 people took part in the first one on 14 December. Demonstrations in support of the station were held again in [Tomsk](#) and in [Moscow](#) on 21 December, each with several thousand participants.

A TV-2 petition with 15,000 signatures, denouncing the station's closure, was sent to the president's office, which acknowledged receipt and undertook to respond by 21 February, thereby

violating a legal obligation to respond with 30 days of receipt.

TV-2 has received many awards – including 23 Russian Broadcasting [TEFI](#) prizes – for the quality of its regional news coverage and its respect for journalistic ethics since it began broadcasting in 1991.
