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Ukrainian parliament approves very dangerous draft law on first reading

12 August 2014

It would allow the government to close media and block websites on national security grounds without a court's permission

Reporters Without Borders condemns the draconian restrictions on freedom of information envisaged in a [draft law](#) that the Ukrainian parliament approved on first reading today.

If adopted, the proposed law would allow the National Security and Defence Council (RNBO) to suppress the dissemination of any national or international media or block any website on the grounds of protecting "security and national interests" without referring to a court.

The sanctions envisaged by the bill – whose second reading is scheduled for later today – include "limiting or banning the activity of media or other sources of information, including on the Internet" and "banning the production or dissemination of any printed product or other informational content."

It also says "the broadcasting of television or radio stations" and "the use of Ukrainian broadcast frequencies" can be banned.

Drafted by the government, Draft Law No. 4453 was only registered with parliament on 8 August, four days before today's first reading. Its laconic impact study tersely says: "The bill does not require consultation with civil society."

Neither parliament's freedom of expression committee nor any of the working groups created with media and NGO representatives was consulted.

"This bill's definitive adoption would represent a major setback for freedom of information in Ukraine," said Johann Bihl, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk. *"It gives the RNBO exorbitant powers to order the broadest forms of censorship on the basis of extremely vague criteria and with no safeguards."*

"We urge parliamentarians to reject this bill on second reading, as it is incompatible with the government's obligations to protect freedoms. International conventions ratified by Ukraine stress that any restrictions on media activity must, under all circumstances, be necessary and proportionate."

Bihl added: *"The major challenges that the Ukrainian authorities are facing and their legitimate concern to defend national security do not, under any circumstances justify such an attack on the constitutional right to freedom of expression."*

The RNBO, which would be given the power to impose, modify and lift the sanctions envisaged in the bill, is chaired by Ukraine's president and consists of the leading cabinet ministers and the heads of the various security institutions, including the intelligence services, the armed forces and the prosecutor-general's office.

The bill says the sanctions can be imposed to "protect security and national interests," "Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and its economic independence," to "prevent violation of the rights, freedoms and interests of Ukrainian citizens" and to "restore them."

The sanctions would be issued in the form of a presidential decree after approval by the RNBO.

(photos : Sergei Supinky / AFP)

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