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Europe/Ex-USSR - Bulgaria

Ataka attacks

Far-right party invades state TV broadcaster

28 June 2013

Reporters Without Borders is appalled by yesterday's forcible invasion of Bulgaria's state-owned TV broadcaster, BNT, by the leader and members of the far-right party Ataka, who occupied the station for several hours.

The operation followed claims by Ataka, which supports the ruling party in parliament, of media "bias" against it.

Yesterday's events began with an improvised meeting in the morning when Ataka president and parliamentarian Volen Siderov, addressing supporters from atop a pickup, announced that he would visit all the state and privately-owned TV stations to obtain "more positive" and "balanced" coverage of his activities.

"We are going to throw stones, tomatoes and eggs at the offices of BNT, bTV, Nova TV and Canal 3," he announced.

Siderov arrived outside BNT with a group of party members in the afternoon and, proclaiming his parliamentary immunity, forced his way through the police barriers protecting the entrance.

He and his supporters occupied the premises for several hours, partially disrupting operations but without taking control of the station's broadcasting. They finally left after a short meeting with the management and verbal exchanges with staff members.

"We strongly condemn Ataka's actions," Reporters Without Borders said. "Using force to enter a TV station and abusing parliamentary immunity is not appropriate behaviour for the leader of a political party, especially one who is a parliamentarian."

"Bulgaria is a member of the European Union. Regardless of their politics, its parliamentarians cannot behave with such contempt for media editorial independence. The example they are setting is deplorable and unacceptable. They could have obtained a meeting with BNT's management through normal channels."

"We call on Siderov and his party's members to abandon their announced intention of 'visiting' all the other TV stations. Other procedures are available to them if they want to make their views known."

Reporters Without Borders is also alarmed by National Assembly speaker Mihail Mikov's comments on BNT and BTV on 26 June, when he accused "several TV stations" of fuelling a rise in social tension, called for "responsible behaviour" on the part of journalists and reminded them of "the appropriate way to cover the situation in the capital and in the country."

"We urge Mikov to rectify these comments," Reporters Without Borders said. "Such interference in the editorial freedom of the broadcast media is inconceivable in a democratic state that is a member of the European Union, all the more so when the person responsible is the National Assembly speaker."

Mikov's comment elicited a quick reaction from Bulgarian journalists, who sent him an open letter that has already been signed by more than 100 media personnel.

Bulgaria is ranked 87th out of 179 countries in the 2013 [Reporters Without Borders press](#)

[freedom index](#). This is the worst ranking of any European Union member state.

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