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<http://www.rsf.org/koweit-government-rescinds-licences-of-07-08-2014,46773.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Kuwait

Arbitrary closures

Government rescinds licences of newspaper and TV station owned by opposition supporter

7 August 2014

Information ministry gives two reasons for closures

Announcing the [decision](#) to rescind the licences of the *Alam Al-Youm* newspaper and *Al-Youm* TV on 22 July, the information ministry cited failure to respect the conditions for obtaining licences.

Owner's nationality

One of the reasons given by the ministry was the fact their owner, **Ahmed Jabr Al-Shemmari**, was [not a Kuwaiti citizen](#), in violation of the press and broadcasting code. Article 3 of the code says that anyone seeking a media licence must have Kuwaiti citizenship.

The cabinet had stripped **Shemmari** of his citizenship the day before in what former opposition parliamentarians called an act of "[political revenge](#)" and an example of how the authorities persecute the opposition.

The cabinet paved the way for this decision a week earlier when, on the grounds of combatting instability, it adopted a [decree](#) allowing it to withdraw the citizenship of any naturalized Kuwaiti deemed to pose a threat to national security.

Adoption of the decree was based on sections 4 and 5 of article 13 of the 1959 [Nationality Law](#), which says citizenship may be withdrawn from any naturalized citizen endangering the state's political, economic or social interests or belonging to a "foreign political entity."

Four other naturalized Kuwaitis, including former opposition parliamentarian [Abdullah Al-Barghash](#), were also stripped of their Kuwaiti citizenship on 21 July. Human rights lawyer Mohamed Al-Hamidi [said](#) it was the first time in Kuwait's history that citizens has been deprived of their nationality without a court order.

The legality of the move is clearly [questionable](#). Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says: "*No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.*" And article 11b of Kuwait's Nationality Law says a naturalized citizen automatically abandons any other nationality.

"By arbitrarily stripping Shemmari of his Kuwaiti citizenship, the authorities have also withdrawn his ability to have media licence," said Reporters Without Borders assistant research director Virginie Dangles. *"We condemn the unjust nature of this decision and the Kuwaiti government's persecution of this opposition [figure](#)."*

Dangles added: *"It seems that any pretext will suffice to gag opposition outlets. It is vital that the Kuwaiti authorities rescind these measures, which are a flagrant violation of the country's obligations to respect fundamental freedoms."*

Failure to reorganize

Another reason given by the ministry for closing *Al-Youm* TV was its failure to carry out organizational changes [requested](#) by the ministry two months earlier under article 4 of the 2007 press and broadcasting law (Law No. 61).

However, [article 10 subsection 4](#) of the same law states that, while a news media's licence may be withdrawn if the appointment of its CEO does not satisfy the stipulated legal criteria, the news media is allowed two months to bring itself into compliance.

The information ministry already tried to rescind *Al-Youm* TV's licence in 2012 under article 10 subsection 4 on the grounds that **Shemmari** was not a full-time CEO. The company that owns the station [appealed](#) against the decision and a court ruled in its favour on the grounds of procedural irregularities.

Alam Al-Youm and *Al-Youm TV* were [previously suspended](#) in April and June for defying a ban to carry information about possible coup preparations in Kuwait.

Kuwait fell 13 places in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index and is now ranked 91st out of 180 countries.
