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<http://www.rsf.org/uruguay-media-law-we-hope-parliament-will-16-12-2014,47394.html>

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Americas - Uruguay

Media law

## Media law - "we hope parliament will not back down"

16 December 2014

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**Uruguay's senate will debate the proposed Broadcasting Communication Services Law (LSCA) today. Submitted to parliament in May 2013 and approved by the chamber of deputies the following December, it is finally going before the senate after a long break for elections and after a great deal of criticism by media groups. Reporters Without Borders interviewed Daniel Lema, the head of the Uruguayan Press Association, about the bill on the eve of the senate debate.**

Hailed as "exemplary" by the current UN special rapporteur for freedom of expression and backed by RWB, the LSCA aims to increase media pluralism in Uruguay, allowing a fair and transparent redistribution of broadcast frequencies among state-owned, commercial and community media, as recommended by RWB.

RWB is pleased that the bill's latest version again provides for the creation of a Broadcasting Communication Council that is independent of the government, as originally envisaged. This provision had to be dropped from last year's version because Uruguay's constitution forbids the creation of new public offices during the 12 months prior to a presidential election.

The council's independence constitutes a major guarantee for freedom of information.

Uruguay's leading media groups have been hostile to the LSCA since the outset. During the presidential election campaign, the National Association of Uruguayan Broadcast Companies (ANDEBU) said, "it is authoritarian regimes that regulate the media space."

Extracts from RWB's interview with Daniel Lema:

**RWB - ANDEBU, the association that represents the private-sector broadcasters, has called this a gag law and even a fascist law. What does the Uruguayan Press Association think?**

DL - This position surprises me. Most countries have legislation regulating radio, TV and print media, either in their entirety or piecemeal, as in our case, and these countries are far from all being fascist. They include the United Kingdom, Chile, Brazil and Argentina. Our model is different from the models chosen in Ecuador and Venezuela. ANDEBU says it is a bill designed to gag the media but we know perfectly well this is not the case. There are guarantees that are clearly designed to prohibit prior censorship\* and to guarantee the existence of all the mechanisms necessary for freedom of expression.

**RWB - This bill has won the support of the special rapporteurs of the United Nations and the Organization of American States. Will this support have an impact on the parliamentary debate?**

DL - I think so. These people represent institutions that keep a close watch on freedom of expression and have mastered all there is to know about international standards. They have demonstrated a readiness to leap to the defence of freedom of expression and, for example, they questioned Ecuador's law.

**RWB - What guarantees does Uruguay's law give to journalists?**

DL - We are convinced that this law gives them the guarantees they need in order to work without being subjected to pressure. It will not limit freedom of expression in any way.

**RWB - What impact could the media groups have on the debate?**

DL - The media groups have been very active for months trying to prevent the bill from being approved. They have brandished the spectre of curbs on freedom of expression but I think this hides the real reason for their opposition to the bill – the fact that it will regulate their activities. I think they will keep lobbying until the very end in an attempt to block its approval. We hope parliament will not back down.

After the senate vote, any changes to the bill will be examined by the chamber of deputies on 22 December.

Uruguay is ranked 26th out of 180 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#).

► Article 106 of the LSCA forbids “discriminatory use of the granting or renewal of permits and licences with the aim of exercising pressure in order to punish or to reward or benefit journalists or media according to their news coverage or editorial policies.”

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