

Summary

the Minority Ombudsman's General Comment 2/2021 on the current situation regarding the availability of national minority public service radio broadcasts

The Minority Ombudsman pays particular attention to the situation of the broadcasting of public service radio programmes in the mother tongue of the nationality communities, which is an essential element in the enjoyment and exercise of nationality cultural autonomy. With this in mind, the Minority Ombudsman had issued in 2018 the General Comment 3/2018 on the implementation of national minority cultural autonomy in the field of public service media services, in which she had dealt in detail with the situation of nationality radio programmes, including the difficulties of receiving. The present General Comment has been drafted specifically to conclude the follow-up of the latter issue.

The bodies responsible for public service radio broadcasting had already in 2005 and subsequently in 2018 considered the implementation of the digital terrestrial broadcasting system (DAB) as the solution for the broadcasting of nationality radio programmes with adequate quality and availability, but in September 2020 Antenna Hungária switched off in Hungary the digital radio broadcasting using the so-called DAB+ technology.

In the course of the current follow-up investigation, the Minority Ombudsman has addressed a request to the President of the National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH) and the CEO of the Media Services Support and Asset Management Fund (MTVA). In her General Comment, the Minority Ombudsman reiterated that in order to preserve and nurture the cultural identity of the nationalities in Hungary, their mother tongue and their right of access to national minority media content, it is essential that the technical conditions for receiving public service radio programmes in the nationality languages should be available to nationality listeners at the same level as radio programmes broadcast to the majority population. Due to the habits of listeners in Hungary and the lack of technical equipment for reception, broadcasting via the internet is merely a supplementary service and cannot be regarded as an alternative to terrestrial broadcasting of an adequate technical standard.

Given that the management of the public service media provider had previously indicated that the introduction of digital terrestrial broadcasting could have been a long-term solution to remedy the above situation, the discontinuation of the introduction of DAB in Hungary is a cause for concern, as MTVA has no strategic vision on how to remedy the decades-old complaints regarding the receiving of national radio programmes in the absence of DAB.

On the basis of the above, the Minority Ombudsman recommends that MTVA take concrete steps to improve the technical conditions and receiving standards for nationality public radio broadcasting in Hungary. As part of this process, she considers it appropriate to develop a long-term strategy for the broadcasting conditions of nationality radio programmes, based on a real dialogue between the management of the public service media provider and the elected representatives of the nationalities in Hungary.