

Hungary: Fidesz is taking over the state media

On 23 July, the Hungarian parliament voted for an adjustment of the media law, in effect of which the Media and Telecommunication Authority (NMHH) will be established in order to supervise the state media. The governing coalition, which holds more than two thirds of parliamentary seats, will fully control the newly established institution and thus subordinate the state media. However, the adopted amendment is just part of a package of changes in the media law, which Fidesz is pushing through. These changes are also expected to cover legislation regarding the private media.

The amendment first of all provides for the establishment of the Media and Information Authority which will take over the competences of two organisations which to date have been operating in parallel: the National Radio and Television Board and the National Information Authority (these will be liquidated). The authority to supervise the NMHH will be a media board whose chairman will be appointed by the prime minister for a 9-year term, while its other members will be elected by the parliament by a two-thirds majority of the votes. This means that the government coalition will be able to decide the composition of the NMHH as it wishes.

The adopted amendments to the media law are only part of a broader package of proposals by Fidesz. A bill regarding the private media will be presented along with other proposals this autumn. The changes being pushed through raise concerns about restricting freedom of the media in Hungary and have been met with very strong opposition from representatives of both Hungarian and foreign journalist circles. Reservations against Fidesz's legislative proposals have also been expressed by an OSCE representative for the freedom of the media. <boc>