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Suspension of Bulgarian National Radio Broadcasts Points to Vulnerability of Editorial Independence

SOURCE OF THREAT ▶ **State**

CATEGORY  ▶ **Other acts having chilling effects on media freedom**

PARTNER: AEJ, RSF

Management at Bulgarian National Radio (BNR) switched off the station's transmitters for five hours on the morning of 13 September 2019 after journalists at the station refused to accept the suspension of Silvia Velikova, an anchor of the prime-time morning talk show at the station.

The case points to the vulnerability of the public broadcaster's independence from political pressure. The abrupt order to interrupt transmissions including those of the main public radio news channel Horizont is seen by critics as an arbitrary and disproportionate interference with media freedom and the independence of the public broadcaster.

Ms Velikova, who specialises in judicial independence and corruption issues, was suspended on the previous day amidst controversy over the circumstances of the appointment of Ivan Geshev as the new prosecutor general. An official proposal to appoint Mr Geshev without a public and transparent selection process sparked protests by members of the public. On the day of the suspended broadcast another protest was held by journalists outside the BNR headquarters building in Sofia.

After the break in transmissions the Prime Minister Boyko Borisov intervened and demanded that Ms Velikova be reinstated, and she has reportedly returned to her duties. The editor who suspended her handed in his resignation in the wake of the Prime Minister's move.

The unprecedented halt to all broadcasts by the station in prime time was due to 'technical reasons', the management claimed. The broadcasting regulator, the Council for Electronic Media, has begun a full investigation into the episode. The Prosecutors' Office is also reported to be engaged in an inquiry into responsibility for the suspension of broadcasts.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION



 **Statement by RSF: "Grave threat to public media independence in Bulgaria"**

STATE REPLIES



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➔ Letter from the Permanent Representation of Bulgaria to the Council of Europe