

IRIS 2009-7:Extra

Latvia

Discussions on Merging of Latvian Public Broadcasters

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In recent months Latvian politicians have initiated active discussions on the necessity to merge the Latvian public broadcasting companies, Latvijas Radio and Latvijas televīzija.

Currently, both public broadcasters are legally independent entities with their own budgets and management. Now, the Prime Minister has requested the National Broadcasting Council, the Latvian media regulator, to draft a merger plan before 1 July 2009 and submit it to the government for discussion. The merger proposal has its roots in the sad fact that both public broadcasters are in a serious financial situation and may even face threats of insolvency. The government provided some short term solutions on 8 May 2009, by adopting a decision to grant additional financing to Latvian Radio in the amount of LVL 400,000 (ca. EUR 571,428) and to Latvian TV in the amount of LVL 1,000,000 (ca. EUR 1,428,571). However, these short term measures may not provide a sufficient remedy to the financial difficulties of the public broadcasters for which a more fundamental solution is needed. The merger is expected to provide significant cost savings both in terms of administrative expenditure and in programme production issues. The broadcasters might also move into a single building, instead of the current separate premises, which are too large for each individually.

It should be noted that this is not the first time a merger between the two Latvian public broadcasters has been contemplated. The European Broadcasting Union has already indicated that Latvian Radio and Latvian TV should be merged by 2011 to ensure their efficiency as public broadcasters.

If the merger receives the green light, amendments to the Radio and TV Law will be necessary, as currently the law provides for Latvian Radio and Latvian TV as two separate undertakings. In addition, public support for the merger will most likely depend on the economical sustainability of the merger plan and on ensuring that the public broadcasting qualities and mission will remain intact.

References

- *Radio un televīzijas likums*
Radio and Television Law

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