

Right-wing Polish government takes control of public media

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In the last days of 2015, the Polish parliament hastily adopted a new “National media law” allowing the Law and Justice (PiS) government to take control of public television and radio. The new bill terminates the current public media executives’ terms in office, giving the right to their appointments directly to the Ministry of Treasury, a government institution. Polish president Andrzej Duda (formerly a member of PiS) is expected to sign the bill soon. The law would then immediately become effective.

Top executives in the public broadcasting sector were previously elected through a system of open competition by the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT). The minister of treasury will now be allowed to appoint and dismiss the top officials as he pleases.

In parliament, PiS delegates stated that the bill would “civilise” the media “that ignore their own mission to the national community by propagating ideological and social trends [that are] unaccepted by the majority of the population [and] often sympathetic to opinions hostile to the Polish state.”

The “small media bill” allows for the immediate purge of current media personnel critical of the antidemocratic actions of the new PiS government.

Since winning the parliamentary elections in October 2015, the PiS government has begun an aggressive take-over of public institutions. Utilising its majority in the parliament (Sejm), PiS rapidly disempowered the Constitutional Tribunal in order to push through anticonstitutional legislation, including tightening government control over the civil service and public media.

Polish public TV reaches more than 90 percent of the country’s population daily. It offers two main national channels, a separate news (TVP Info) and a culture channel (TVP Kultura), 16 regional channels, as well as

TVP Polonia designed for the Polish population living abroad. Operating through over 200 stations, Polish Radio reaches more than half of the country’s 38 million residents.

The new media bill is said to be only the first of a series of “reforms” aimed at turning the country’s public media into a “national media system”. Other reforms will include changes to the education system that will serve to foster the propagation of nationalism among children. The government also wants to step up the surveillance and censorship of the Internet. It plans legislation that would allow the police and intelligence services to monitor the Internet as well as the private telephone communication of all citizens.

In a protest against the new media law, several top executives of the main public television stations (TVP channels) resigned on New Year’s Eve. These included Piotr Radziszewski (TVP1), Jerzy Kapuściński (TVP2), Katarzyna Janowska (TVP Kultura) and Tomasz Sygut (TV Information Agency). Several programs, including TVP Kultura’s Grand Press award-winning talk show “Hala Odlotów” (“The Hall of Departures”) and TVP2 “Tomasz Lis na żywo” (“Tomasz Lis live”) are expected to be taken off the air.

Katarzyna Janowska, the chief executive of TVP Kultura, has been very critical of the PiS proposal to subject public culture to censorship and financial blackmail. In one of the recent editions of *Hala Odlotów* entitled “Is Poland turning brown?” Janowska criticised the nationalistic and fascistic trends in Polish politics. In her goodbye Facebook post she wrote “Do not be afraid!”

Tomasz Lis, editor-in-chief of *Newsweek Poland* and host of a prominent political talk show on TVP2, announced that he would continue his work

“somewhere else”. Lis is one of Poland’s best-known public figures. His show, *Tomasz Lis live*, was watched by more than 2 million viewers each week.

Protests against the new broadcast law were also staged by the public radio program “Jedynka” (PR 1), which started broadcasting the Polish anthem followed by the hymn of the European Union, Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy”.

Several European journalists’ organisations such as the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), the Association of European Journalists and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) urged the Polish government to withdraw the bill.

The law has served to heighten already strong tensions within the EU. In an interview with the German *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the EU commissar for media, Günther Oettinger, announced that he would advocate placing Poland under EU control because of breaches of the EU rule of law at the next session of the EU Commission on January 13. If this mechanism was implemented, the EU could inaugurate proceedings against Poland on the basis of breaching “core European values”. While this has never happened before, Brussels could go so far as revoking the voting rights of Poland within the EU.

In recent months, tensions between the EU and Poland, and particularly Germany and Poland, have risen due to the policies and agenda of the PiS government. PiS is highly critical of the EU and oriented toward a close alliance with US imperialism in its war drive against Russia.

Statements by EU representatives in defence of “democracy” in Poland are utterly hypocritical and serve to cover the differences in foreign and domestic policy between Brussels and Berlin on the one hand, and Warsaw on the other. The EU has not shied away from undermining fundamental democratic rights and mechanisms when it comes to implementing austerity measures in Greece and Italy, and it collaborates closely with dictatorial regimes such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia. (See also: The shift to the right in Poland and the crisis of the EU)

The new media law introduced by PiS constitutes a direct assault on freedom of speech and freedom of the press. It is aimed at subordinating all publicly funded broadcasting institutions to the political agenda of the

government. The PiS government will use its control over the media to propagate its right-wing nationalistic views and agenda.

The party’s head, Jarosław Kaczyński, is a professed admirer of the authoritarian regime of the dictator Józef Piłsudski who ruled Poland’s second Republic in the 1920s and 1930s. He is a fierce nationalist and racist, and promotes both anti-German and anti-Russian sentiments.

The party also includes openly fascist elements. The current minister of defence in the PiS government, Antoni Macierewicz is a well-known Russophobe and an anti-Semite. Macierewicz was a leading anti-Communist figure in the opposition to the Stalinist regime and in the Solidarity movement. Macierewicz used to be a member of the far-right League of Polish Families at a point when the party openly promoted the views of Roman Dmowski, the founding father of Polish fascism.

In an interview in 2002, Macierewicz, declared that there was a Jewish world conspiracy in media and politics. He expressed his support for the authenticity of the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion”, a notorious anti-Semitic pamphlet from 1905 that historically also inspired the Russian far-right and Germany’s National Socialists. Macierewicz never distanced himself from these views. Occupied Poland was the main site of the annihilation of European Jewry by the Nazis with some 3 million out of 3.5 million Polish Jews murdered. While the Nazis organized the Holocaust, Polish fascists, although fervently anti-German, supported the Nazi murder of the Jews in Poland.

Following the example of the radio station Radio Maryja, which aggressively promotes the Catholic Church, PiS intends to now use the media to propagate Polish nationalism, homophobia, anti-Semitism and anti-Russian sentiments.



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