

Head of culture oversight committee puts forth need for TVR's legislative overhaul

The Save Romania Union - Freedom, Unity and Solidarity Party (USR PLUS) alliance backs the need for the reform of the statutes of the National Public Television Broadcaster - TVR as soon as the regular Parliament session begins, chairman of the Lower House Culture Committee Iulian Bulai told a debate today on the situation of TVR with journalists and civil society representatives.

"A decision of the alliance will be needed, but we at USR PLUS agree to a legislative reform of the public television broadcaster in the shortest time, as soon as the regular session begins. Proposals have been made for coalition working groups to start this process which will be done together with the civil society," said Bulai, the organizer of the debate.

He explained that the overhaul of TVR must take into account "issues that are relevant now, not for 1994", when the statutes of the institution were devised, mentioning that it should target a variety of audience, not just the 50+ age category.

The chairman of the culture oversight committee mentioned that a profile should be outlined of the person who will be appointed to TVR president and director general.

"So, who would be the right person? Someone from inside TVR, from outside TVR but with management and journalistic experience, someone who only has experience in management, people from the civil society who have observed the Romanian media for 20 - 25 years, an experienced manager from a foreign public TV broadcaster? I don't have the exact answer," Bulai said, but emphasized that he expects TVR to be a powerful and functional broadcaster.

Asked when will TVR president - director general Doina Gradea be summoned to hearings before the Culture Committee, the USR deputy said that this will happen when the TVR activity reports will be discussed, but that the timing for this is still unknown, as the current urgency in Parliament is the adoption of the draft budget.

During the debate, Expert Forum's Sorin Ionita said that there are big issues at TVR, that the definition of the institution's mission has failed and lacks clarity, and that things are amiss also as regards the budget subsidy the broadcaster should receive.

Mircea Toma, president of the Media Monitoring Agency, considers that the Romanian media is currently adrift, and "the commercial paradigm has won the match, as most media institutions operate in an exclusively commercial key".

"Investigative journalism still resists in just two small oases. It has disappeared from public television, as censorship has also manifested itself through the disappearance of this category of journalism," Mircea Toma said.

Ioana Avadanei from the Center for Independent Journalism considers that the TVR audience mainly falls in the 50+ age category, mentioning that the vision of this institution raises serious questions.

The chairman of the Culture Committee said that debates on the statutes of the public television broadcaster will continue.