



DEFENDING AND PROMOTING
FREE EXPRESSION

Ban on foreign radio stations broadcasting via FM frequencies to remain in effect

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Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (<http://www.irfs.az>)

(IRFS/IFEX) - The Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (IRFS) and Media Rights Institute (MRI) have condemned the government's announcement that the ban on broadcasts by foreign radio stations via local FM frequencies in Azerbaijan will remain in effect.

On 30 December 2008, Radio Liberty, Voice of America and BBC radio stations were banned from broadcasting via the FM frequency in accordance with a decision issued by the National Television and Radio Council (NTRC). The government's answer to calls from local and international organisations to restore the radio stations to full broadcasting capacity has always been definite. The head of the Presidential Administration Socio-Political Department, Ali Hasanov, and NTRC chairman Nushiravan Maharramli, both of whom are high ranking officials in the government, said that broadcasting of foreign radio stations via the FM band would not be allowed.

IRFS and MRI consider this stance to be contrary to public interest and call on Azerbaijan's government to make immediate changes to the legislation and restore the full broadcasting capacity of the Radio Liberty, Voice of America and BBC radio stations.

IRFS and MRI also remind the government that recommendations concerning this problem were proposed in the report of the UN Human Rights Council's Working Group on Azerbaijan. In item fifteen of the document, a recommendation was issued to fully respect freedom of expression, as well as the freedoms of both national and foreign independent information sources, including the print media, Internet sites and radio or television stations. Item seventeen contains recommendations to improve media freedoms, especially broadcasting opportunities, to execute the OSCE's recommendations regarding the banning of foreign radio stations via the FM band, and to immediately amend the Law on TV and Radio Broadcasting in order to renew the licenses of international radio stations.

IRFS and MRI call on the government to carry out these recommendations and put an end to the practice of holding onto TV and radio frequencies that are unused. The organisations also call for the removal of obstacles to the creation of new radio and television channels, including legal and administrative barriers that curb domestic and foreign investments, science and technology in this sector, and for the broadcasting of foreign radio stations via FM frequencies to be restored.