

In the context of the freedom of media as a chair to the Association of ISPs of Tajikistan I would like to address the following two issues:

- Internet blocking that are violating the national and international laws
- Monopolistic approach in transition from analog to digital broadcasting

1) Internet continues to be blocked without any legal basis. For example, Youtube.com has been blocked twice during this year. First time for a week from June 9 till June 18 2014. Second time it was blocked on July 9 and, as of today, it has been unblocked yet. The problem is that it is not only violates the national and international laws that Tajikistan is binded to, but this uncertainty in regulation of telecommunication market brings a range of economic challenges. Loosing current and potential local and international investors, and remaining in the periphery of the region's telecommunication market are two of them. This is a paradox for a country who worked hard for 11 years to achieve membership of WTO.

At the same time this norms-violating regulation makes members of Association and other telecom operators look as scapegoat. From one hand they are ordered by regulator to block websites and from the other they are blamed by the same regulator on violating rights of customers/citizens. This approach of the state regulatory authority, besides economic loss, undermines rather than strengthens the rule of law in society.

2) Second issue is about threats of the monopolistic approach that the state regulation has been implementing for migration to digital broadcasting in the country.

The digital switch-over process is not of the sole interest of authority in TV and Radio broadcasting that abuses of its monopoly position. The total monopoly in this process and content production leads to unhealthy situation not only politically but also economically.

What Tajikistan has been doing so far within this process is leading to

- reducing the number of broadcasters by preventing private TV channels to participate in this transformation and to exist in post-switch-over period;
- tightening control of spectrum;
- restricting the national content by both quality and volume;
- weakening the national information industry.

In short, we are missing this time of increased opportunities.

Ladies and Gentlemen! My fellow compatriots! As a landlocked country who is neighbouring with landlocked countries we have to take actions that breaks any kind of monopoly in any economic and political relations. Time of monopoly is over. At least this is what the independent Tajikistan is interested in and has been investing for since the beginning of its independence. Mentioning strategic actions for expanding the network of roads within and outside of the country is best proof to that. Digital switch-over process is a new opportunity to do the same in the information space. This process is meant to increase the capacity and number of local broadcasters, to use scarce resources like frequency spectrum more efficiently and effectively, to develop national market of high quality content, to strengthen national information industry, and to build more robust information society.

In order to use the advantages of these opportunities, we have to understand simple principles that

- operating with the tools of yesterday to manage today's opportunities does not work;
- we, as a landlocked country, need Internet more than Internet needs us, at least at this stage of historical development;
- we need digital switch-over to strengthen our broadcasting capacity and build the information society that is a strategic goal of Tajikistan.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that the Internet and digital broadcasting are not the end. They are means to the end, which is development of the country. To be successful we need to:

- Establish independent regulation of Internet market that is in line with the national law and international obligations of Tajikistan as a member to WTO
- Accept multi-stakeholder approach in promoting the digital switchover process that are inline with international obligations of Tajikistan, in particular as a member of OSCE and signatory of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Thank You!

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