

Klubrádió – Die Geschichte einer Zerstörung

Gastkommentar von Mihály Hardy

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Please find below a short timeline of events which happened over the last couple of months. I do not want to go back as far as 2010 when the Orbán government started its crusade against the media, how it distorted the advertising market, how it closed down all financial channels for the independent media in order to weaken their position, how it bought up the thus weakened radios, newspapers, publishers and TV stations across the country and pushed them into one single mega-holding, called KESMA, or Central European Media and Press Foundation, with more than 470 units in one group.

September 2020 The Hungarian Media Council refuses to extend the broadcasting license of Klubrádió on 92.9 MHz for another 7 years referring to some minor bureaucratic irregularities.

Klubrádió says it will appeal to the court stating that the refusal is against the law and Klubrádió has an important role to play in the diversity of the Hungarian media.

November 2020 The Hungarian Media Council announces a new tender for the frequency 92.9 MHz for another 10+10 years despite the fact that the future of the frequency depends on the outcome of the court case. Klubrádió, Spirit FM (belonging to a „new Baptist” religious church called Church of Faith – in good relations with the government) and a third yet unknown group also linked to the government.

December 2020 Two applicants are disqualified from the frequency tender, both for failing to meet formal requirements. Both say they will seek justice in court. Klubrádió seems to be the only competitor in the tender for the frequency. In the meantime Klubrádió files a court case against the denial of the extension of the frequency license in September 2020.

January 2021 Spirit FM withdraws its court case saying that they will run for another frequency (95.3MHz in Budapest) thus leaving Klubrádió as the only competitor for 92.9 MHz, as the third competitor has also stopped the court proceedings. The Parliament amends the Media Law in order to allow broadcasters to be granted „temporary” frequency licenses for a period of 6 months, even on disputed frequencies. The change in the law goes almost unnoticed as it is hidden in a series of amendments to the laws. The government secures a stable 2/3 majority in parliament which allows it to change any law within 24 hours.

February 2021 On 9 February, the Court of First Instance rules in favour of the Media Council, although without any argument for not extending the extension. Klubrádió’s frequency license runs out on 14 February and the radio station. However, Klubrádió

continues to „broadcast” on the internet, after a month-long campaign to educate listeners about listening to the music on the internet. The transfer is successful, with listeners continuing to listen to Klubrádió now on the internet without a major drop in numbers.

March 2021 The Hungarian Media Council cancels the tender for the 92.9 MHz frequency, where Klubrádió is the only competitor, saying that they do not see a strong economic case behind Klubrádió. Indeed, Klubrádió has been crowdfunded for more than 10 years now and has received voluntary donations from its supporters/listeners of up to 450 000 Euros and thus could survive.

On March 17 Spirit FM applies for a temporary license for 92.9 MHz and duly receives it for six months from the Media Council on 30 March 2021. The frequency is under two parallel court proceedings, one for the non-extension and the second for direct exclusion of Klubrádió and the cancellation of the tender by the Media Council.

May 2021 On 3 May Spirit FM starts broadcasting on 92.9 MHz. They also returned their earlier frequency 87.6 MHz to the Media Council, thus demonstrating their long-term commitment to the frequency formerly belonging to Klubrádió.

Though we succeeded until now to survive on the internet, the future of Klubrádió is at stake. First, we will have to move out from our current building since we are unable to pay the rent and we will move to cheaper place in July.

I have written a timeline of events for everybody to see that there was a malicious “master plan” to close all the doors for Klubrádió and open up new opportunities for a media that is openly friendly with government. The whole process is designed to deny independent Klubrádió of broadcasting opportunities ahead of the parliamentary elections due in spring 2022. Klubrádió remains the only major “normal” or independent broadcaster in the Hungarian media market, where not only government-controlled messages are offered, the only radio station where opposition politicians are allowed to talk. I believe that we do need every possible support we can get from the EU or the Commission.

Gastkommentar von Mihály Hardy

He is currently-Head of News and Current Affairs at Klubrádió. He joined Klubrádió in February 2020. Previously, he spent 26 years in the television industry, working as news director for commercial television channels ATV and TV3. During his six years in Moscow, Mikhail Gorbachev was a foreign correspondent for the public service

broadcaster MTV. He also hosted evening news and political programmes and travelled extensively in China, Afghanistan, Cambodia and the US.

Anmerkung von FREIRAD

Der regierungskritische ungarische Sender Klubrádió verlor seine Sendelizenz. FREIRAD setzt ein solidarisches Zeichen für Medienfreiheit und strahlt wöchentlich eine Stunde aus dem Programm von Klubrádió aus: terrestrisch, frei und ungestört. Jeden Mittwoch um 07:00 Uhr ist die Nachrichtensendung Esti gyors, engl. Evening Express in ungarischer Sprache zu hören.