



Number 31 – February 2005

IN THE NEWS THIS MONTH...

ZOOM

Equatorial Guinea: Print media threatened

1. DIARY

International meeting of French-language radio stations

2. PRINT MEDIA NEWS

Cameroon: *Diapason*, a new newspaper

Cameroon: New director for national radio and television

3. TELEVISION AND RADIO NEWS

Cameroon: RTVL, a new television station

DRC: Phone-in programmes suspended

Chad: Radio DJA FM suspended

4. LEGAL AND FINANCIAL FRAMEWORKS FOR THE MEDIA

Central Africa: High Communication Council set up

Equatorial Guinea: Government dismisses twenty media workers

5. STRUCTURING AND PROFESSIONNALISATION OF THE MEDIA

DRC: National press strategy being drafted

DRC: Congolese journalists advocate code of practice days

ZOOM

Equatorial Guinea: Print media threatened

For the past three months, the government's monthly newsletter, *Ebano*, with a print run of 500 copies, has disappeared from the newsstands of the capital, Malabo. According to its editors, speaking on 7 January, the Ministry of Information stopped paying its 540,000 Fcfa (831 euros) subsidy "with no explanation." The newsletter, on sale at 300 Fcfa (0,47 euros), was once a familiar feature of bars and cafes.

Meanwhile, *Ebano's* sister publication, *Poto-poto*, which usually appears in the country's second largest town and financial centre, Bata, on the mainland, has only been coming out spasmodically.

El Tiempo and *la Opinion*, the two main independent newspapers, have also not been seen for several years because of financial difficulties. The only paper available is now the pro-government monthly, *Gaceta*, published in Spain with a print run of over one thousand.

The only foreign papers read in Malabo and Bata come from the French and Spanish cultural centres, or on international flights. When an international flight arrives at Malabo airport, Equatorial Guineans grab all the copies they can find of these complementary papers and then sell them for 1000 to 2000 Fcfa each (1.60 or 3.20 euros).

RAN / IPP

1. DIARY

International meeting of French-language radio stations

The next international meeting of French-language radio stations (RIRAF) will be held in Mons (Belgium) from 26 June to 2 July with the theme of "citizenship, civil society and radio".

RIRAF is a forum for discussion and exchange on the use of radio to tackle the preoccupations of civil society. It brings together stakeholders from francophone radio stations (both men and women) such as journalists, broadcasters, technicians and heads of stations. During the meeting, participants will draw up common strategies and suggest ways to cooperate.

Contact

RIRAF, 700 av du parc, 201

Montreal, Quebec, H3N 1X1, Canada

Yvon Beauchamp, President: riraf-president@francophone.net

Press officer: Willy Colin, rsf@voilà.fr

Web Site: www.riraf.org (for downloadable registration forms and details on participation; closing date for registration: 25 February 2005)

2. PRINT MEDIA NEWS

Cameroon: *Diapason*, a new newspaper

Diapason, a new weekly paper, appeared on Cameroon's newsstands on 15 January. The paper's 12-pages come out in Yaounde, with an editorial line oriented towards employment, the economy and the financial world. Directed by François Mboke, the first issue featured articles on the counterfeit and illegal merchandise currently flooding the Cameroon market.

JW / IPP

Contact:

Diapason, BP 20349 Yaounde - Cameroon

Tel: 00237 777 73 53

E-mail: journaldiapason@yahoo.com

3. TELEVISION AND RADIO NEWS

Cameroon: New director for national radio and television

Since January 26, Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) has had a new director, the journalist, Amadou Vamouké. He takes over from Prof. Gervais Mendo Ze, who, after 17 years in the post, has been appointed Minister responsible for Communication in the new government, formed on 8 December 2004.

After studying at the *Ecole supérieure internationale de journalisme de Yaoundé* (ESIJY) in the early 1970's, Mr Vamouké went on to work on the State daily, the *Cameroon Tribune*, becoming Editor-in-Chief in the early 1980s. He also directed the national printing enterprise. As head of CRTV, Mr Vamouké will have to find ways to compete with independent radio and TV stations.

JW / IPP

Cameroon: RTVL, a new television station

Since 15 January, residents of Yaoundé and surrounding areas have been able to receive television broadcasts from *Radio télévision lumière* (RTVL) between 4 pm and 11 pm. At present, RTVL mainly broadcasts entertainment and music programmes but, according to Joseph Ndi Samba, instigator of RTVL, the channel aims to concentrate more on education in the near future. RTVL is one of ten other independent television channels currently broadcasting in Cameroon.

JW / IPP

DRC: Phone-in programmes suspended

In a "circular" dated 18 January 2005, the Minister of Information and Press has decided to suspend all live phone-in programmes. The Minister explained that this decision had become necessary following a number of rows that had broken out on the air on radio and television. The decision comes as a serious blow to two very popular broadcasts - Top Congo FM's "*Libre antenne*" and Télé Kin Malebo's "*Télé chat*".

With the same reasoning, the Minister has ordered religious and specialist radio and TV stations to "abstain from broadcasting political and news programmes, or acting as a platform for political propaganda, or face the penalties laid down by the law".

In a communiqué published on 20 January 2005, JED (*Journaliste en Danger*) called on the Minister of Information and Press, as well as the High Media Authority (HAM) to "set up a representative negotiation framework to examine and standardise the terms of reference for radio and television". The NGO also suggested that the two bodies examine the question of phone-in programmes on a case-by-case basis "so as not to deprive the public of its right to free, responsible expression". The Minister considered that those taking part in a discussion forum should identify themselves, so that they can be called on to defend their statements if necessary.

FB / IPP

Chad: Radio DJA FM suspended

On 17 January, Chad's regulatory body, the High Communication Council (HCC), decided to suspend the non-profit radio station *DJA Fm* (96.9 Fm) for one week, and indefinitely if it did not pay its annual license fee.

Mrs Zara Yacoub, Director of the station and President of the Chad Union of Private Radio (URPT), only learned of the HCC decision through an official communiqué that appeared a few days after it came into force. "Radio DJA FM broadcasts are suspended for 8 days from Monday 17 January to Monday 24 January inclusive, for non-settlement of sums

owing, in conformity with the terms of reference for independent radio stations" says the communiqué. According to Mrs Yacoub, the annual license fee being claimed by the HCC is 500 000 Fcfa (765 euros). In a communiqué of 16 January, Mrs Yacoub explained that "the non-payment of the license fee is not in any way a refusal to conform to the law, but simply due to a dire lack of funds". She goes on to point out that "DJA FM had promised to pay the license fee as soon as it received the government grant accorded to independent radio stations". This is the first time HCC has suspended a radio station for non-payment of the license fee since it was set up in 1995. Mrs Yacoub claims it is "a determined effort by HCC to shut down DJA FM for reasons it has not admitted".
MPL / IPP

4. LEGAL AND FINANCIAL FRAMEWORKS FOR THE MEDIA

Central Africa: High Communication Council set up

The Republic of Central Africa's President signed a decree authorising the creation of a national High Communication Council (HCC) on 19 January 2005. The decree removes the final obstacle to setting up this institution, which is mentioned in the Constitution and was approved by the National Transition Council in November 2004. The HCC will be an independent media regulatory body, mainly involved in guaranteeing equitable and appropriate use of the public sector press, radio and television, while providing necessary arbitration as required.

An official list of HCC members was published on 28 January 2005, following an annual general meeting in Bangui, with delegates from the Union of Central African Journalists (UJCA), the Independent Press Publishers Group (GEPPIC) and the Central Africa Association of Independent Press Publishers (ACEPI). At present, members of the team include Mrs Fernande Sackanot (journalist), Mrs Delphine Zouta (journalist), Mr Joseph-Vermond Tchendo (journalist), Mr Magba-Totama (journalist), Mr Hilaire Guitongo (journalist), Mr Jérôme Dounian-Doté (journalist), Mr Tita Samba Solé (broadcaster - journalist), Mr Philippe Manga Mabada (telecommunications engineer), Ms Opalagna (lawyer). The Head of State also has to designate a further two persons.
FS / IPP

Equatorial Guinea: Government dismisses twenty media workers

Equatorial Guinea's Minister of Information, Mr Alfonso Nsue Mokuy, has decided to "permanently let go of" over twenty employees in radio, television and the government paper, *Ebano*, for "irregular and ill-intentioned behaviour". The measure affects twenty staff of Equatorial Guinea Radio and Television (RTVGE), including journalists and technicians, some with over 20 years' employment at the channel, as well as three journalists from *Ebano*.

The decision followed a meeting on 25 January of the Minister of Information and all staff from these media. According to an official source during the meeting, "an exhaustive analysis has shown that the poor operation of this department is due to the irregular and ill-intentioned behaviour" of these state employees, who are also accused of "various irregularities, such as indiscipline, incompetence and insubordination".

At a 27 January cabinet meeting, the president, Mr Teodoro Obiang Nguema also deplored the "poor operation" of the Ministry of Information and the "lack of coordination" on the part of its directors.

RAN / IPP

5. STRUCTURING AND PROFESSIONALISATION OF THE MEDIA

DRC: National press strategy being drafted

During a workshop in Kinshasa from 18 to 21 January 2005, with support from UNESCO, the Minister for Press and Information set out the main lines of his strategy for the press. Participants at the workshop recommended changes to the law, notably concerning decriminalisation of infringements of laws governing the press and revisions to the law on the professional status of journalists in DRC. They also called for the protection of union rights for media workers as well as insisting on the need to promote a high-quality public information service, especially allowing the public radio and TV station, RTNC to exercise independence in its editorial line.

As well as calling for free access to information sources, participants suggested ways to inject new energy into the private-sector press, which it says is beleaguered by slavish ties to the politics of those in power, small circulation, short-lived publications put together by poorly paid staff lacking training in new information technologies, with amateur management and out of date equipment, etc.

The workshop recommendations will be incorporated into the Minister's strategy for the press, which is due to be finalised at a working group meeting scheduled for February.

Participants at the workshop came from professional press associations (SNPP, UCOFEM, UNPC, ANECO, APAC, UPF, ARCO, ANEAP, AJPF, ANEP) as well as the Minister for Press and Information and the High Authority for the Media.

FB / IPP

DRC: Congolese journalists advocate code of practice days

Around thirty journalists and representatives of professional media organisations meeting in Kinshasa on 22 January on the initiative of *Journalistes en Danger (JED)*, recommended that special "code of practice days" be organised. The aim is to increase journalists' respect for of their professional code of practice, and encourage them to be more responsible in the way they handle and disseminate information.

The participants recognised that recent lapses were due to "political interference in the media in run-up to the elections". They also criticised the hold that politicians have over the media that they own, thus compromising their independence. Participants also criticised a Ministry of Press and Information circular banning religious and specialised stations from broadcasting political programmes, as well as suspending phone-in programmes. The participants felt this was evidence of "the open intention of the Minister to gag the independent media and prevent them from offering the public a forum for free expression". Participants also considered that journalists were responsible for putting out "inflammatory political slogans, messages of hate and incitement to violence and disorder", according to a JED communiqué at the end of the meeting.

FB / IPP

Africentr@lemedias

Media's Pluralism Newsletter

Africentr@lemedias is published monthly by the Institute Panos Paris (IPP) as part of its **DRIM - Central Africa programme (DRIM - "Rights and Institutional Strengthening of the Media")**. This monthly newsletter on media pluralism is prepared by journalists from the nine Central Africa countries (Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic (RCA), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Chad), with the support of CORDAID (Netherlands), the European Commission and DFID (UK).

Editor-in-chief

Pascal Berqué, Director of the **DRIM AND MPA ☆ CENTRAL AFRICA** programmes, "Rights and Institutional Strengthening of the Media", Panos Paris Institute, pascal.berque@panosparis.org

Coordination

Domitille Duplat, Coordinator of the newsletter, Panos Paris Institute, domitilled@panosparis.org

Associate editor

Marie-Pierre Liénard, project officer of the **DRIM ☆ CENTRAL AFRICA** programme, Institute Panos Paris, mariepierre@panosparis.org

Correspondents

Burundi: Damien Ntiranyuhura

Cameroon: Joel Wadem

Central Africa: Fernande Françoise Sackanot

Congo: Solange Kibelolo

Gabon: Achille Ngoma

Equatorial Guinea: Rodrigo Angue Nguema

Democratic Republic of Congo: Franck Baku (Kinshasa), Rose Lukano (South), Déo Namujimbo (Goma), Flory Ngongo (Kisangani), Dieudonné Malékéra (Bukavu), Michel Aveledi (Bas Congo).

Chad: Laoro Gondjé

Distribution

Séverine Le Ridant, Communication officer, Panos Paris Institute, communication@panosparis.org

Translation

Peter Coles, mail@petercoles.net

Contact

Institut Panos Paris, 10, rue du Mail - 75 002 Paris (France)

Tel. (331) 40 41 05 50 – Fax (331) 40 41 03 30

mariepierre@panosparis.org

This newsletter is published with the support of



& de

