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Montenegro opposition wants broadcaster's management sacked over Amfilohije film



Opposition MPs have called for the dismissal of the managers of RTCG over a documentary about the top bishop in the country that they called inflammatory and 'shameful'.

Parliamentarians in Montenegro from the main opposition Democratic Front, DF, have demanded the resignation of the management of the public broadcaster, RTCG,

They made the call after RTCG broadcasted a documentary about the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the country, Metropolitan Amfilohije.

DF leader Andrija Mandic called on the broadcaster's Council to dismiss the leadership within 24 hours.

"Such shows seek to sow evil seeds and spark a fire that no one can put out. That is why we invite the CEO of RTCG and all the executives to resign, especially those

who signed up to be the editors and organizers of this shameful show," Mandic said on Wednesday.

At the centre of the storm was a documentary on the the bishop aired on prime time on Tuesday called "*Witness to the Love of God"*, which called him "an envoy of a foreign church" and "a fanatical follower of the Great Serbian project". It featured archival footage of Amfilohije and some footage that had never been released in public.

The bishop has long been a thorn in the side of the pro-Western government, opposing the country's independence from Serbia, its more recent membership of NATO and progress on gay rights, among other things.

More recently, he has been at the forefront of street protests against a new law on religion that his Church says could be used to target its assets.

The editor of the church radio station, Svetigora, Fr Nikola Pejovic, accused the broadcaster of running a media campaign against the Church, and said the documentary "buried objective and investigative journalism".

"We will soon translate the documentary and send it to all relevant international addresses, who are already concerned about the state of the media in Montenegro. We thought about doing this before, but with this project you have made our job easier," Pejovic said in a letter to the RTCG management.

In its 2019 progress report on Montenegro, the European Commission expressed "serious concern" about "continued political interference" in the work of the public broadcaster.

Earlier, in 2018, the media watchdog Reporters Without Borders warned of pressure from the authorities on RTCG to alter its editorial policy, and noted the replacement of several key managers with supporters of the main ruling Democratic Party of Socialists, DPS, which has been in power for three decades.

The appointment of new management in March 2017 that tried to distance itself from the ruling party and produce more balanced content created hope that things would change – but civil society organisations and the opposition have since said that those initial gains were rapidly lost.

After sacking two members of the broadcaster’s managing council, drawn from the ranks of civil society, citing alleged conflicts of interest, in March 2018 parliament appointed successors who were seen as closer to the ruling coalition.

The documentary about Metropolitan Amfilohije was broadcasted while protests led by the Serbian Orthodox Church continued across Montenegro over the Freedom of Religion law.

Since parliament passed the law on December 27, tens of thousands of Serbian Orthodox clergy, believers and supporters have been protesting twice-weekly, demanding its withdrawal.

On Sunday, Metropolitan Amfilohije called on the government to withdraw the law, claiming people would not have voted for the government if they had known it would pass such legislation.

The law calls for the creation of a register of all religious buildings and sites the Government claimed were owned by the independent kingdom of Montenegro before it became part of the Serb-dominated Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918, later renamed Yugoslavia.

If faith groups cannot prove ownership of the sites, they risk being forfeited to the state. The Church says this could be used to dispute its right to many churches and sacred sites.

— Source: balkaninsight.com