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### **Open petition questioning broadcasting NTV News in Russian programming schedule of SBS**

Svoboda Alliance SA petitions SBS to revisit the decision of broadcasting NTV news program on SBS in Russian as the only media channel as it is fully controlled by Russian authoritarian government. NTV does not reflect diversity of views and perspectives and does not provide accuracy, impartiality, and balance in news broadcasting, which contradicts current *SBS Codes and Practices*.

Svoboda Alliance SA is a not-for profit association that shares Australian values, respect democratic freedoms and promotes universal human rights among the Russian-speaking residents of South Australia in line with Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and related international agreements ratified by Australia. Australia has wide and growing community of Russian speakers estimated as over 50 thousand people in 2016 by the ABS. We here express our concern that the only program available in Russian for the Russian-speaking community in Australia is represented by NTV news on SBS.

While SBS started broadcasting NTV news in Russian when it was independent and unbiased media channel, the situation has drastically changed after affiliation of NTV with Russian authoritarian government. NTV was founded by Vladimir Gusinsky in 1993 and for several years provided independent and unbiased coverage of major Russian news, including the First Chechen War, and because of that was highly criticized by the Kremlin. As a result of those accusations, Vladimir Gusinsky was forced to leave the country. In 1996 NTV was bought by the Russian state-owned gas producer Gazprom and since then became one of the key tools of pro-Kremlin propaganda in Russia. NTV is now fully controlled by the largest Russian media group, Gazprom media, owned by Gazprom bank and Gazprom. The CEO of Gazprom, Alexei Miller, has been included in the U.S. sanctions list since 2018 in response to a range of Russian government activities, including alleged meddling in the 2016 U.S. election. In our view, the continued broadcasting of its news program contributes to the popularisation of Putin's autocratic regime here in Australia and undermines pro-democracy values.

We believe, the current NTV content is in breach with the following sections of *SBS Codes and Practices, 2019*:

**1.2 Diversity of views and perspective.** Showing NTV as the only source of information in Russian does not provide diversity of opinions in Russian society.

**1.3 Prejudice, racism, and discrimination.** We believe current views expressed by pro-Kremlin media do not support equitable and harmonious society but in opposite create grounds for prejudice, discrimination and hatred to opposition and minorities. NTV news content also contains anti-Western propaganda that builds an image of Australia as hostile to the Russian nation due to its alliance with the US and other Western countries.

**2.2 Accuracy, impartiality, and balance.** Misinformation and outright false facts are regularly included in news programs, including a very distorted portrayal of the hostilities in Eastern Ukraine. With the Russian government unconditionally denying the results of the JIT investigation that indicates MH17 was shot down by the pro-Russian separatists, NTV stands by the official Kremlin line, reporting on purported Western conspiracy against Russia. In recent years, the persecution of opposition politicians as well as ordinary people expressing their discontent with the Russian government has increased dramatically. Meanwhile, the Kremlin-affiliated media, including NTV, continue to depict the opposition as “servants of the West who want to collapse and destroy Russia.”

As such, the broadcasting NTV news program as ‘the only Russian news’ breaches the *SBS Codes and Practices* and the core principles of impartial news reporting. By broadcasting NTV news program, SBS breaches its commitment to contribute to an inclusive and cohesive society in Australia.

In March 2021, SBS suspended the broadcast of Chinese TV news services CGTN and CCTV after it became aware of serious human rights concerns surrounding the channels. This decision demonstrated SBS’s commitment to share credible news and steer away from propaganda channels. Based on this precedent and that NTV has a strong record of spreading anti-Western propaganda, we believe, it is time for SBS to turn its attention to the NTV news program.

We call on SBS to:

- Either replace NTV immediately with a unbiased news program. Such a program shall be aligned to Australian values and shall truly serve the purpose of SBS international news programming. It shall inform and strengthen cultural connections instead of promoting animosity and hate towards Australia and other pro-democracy countries. As a substitute for NTV news, we recommend TV-Rain (Dozhd), an independent broadcaster funded via subscriptions and donations from the public. TV-Rain exemplifies impartiality and a high level of professional and journalistic ethics. In July 2018, SBS journalists visited TV-Rain and interviewed the then-Chief Editor, Alexandra Perepelova. The Russian translation of that interview was broadcast by SBS Russian radio but was also taken up by SBS News TV (<https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/audio/we-permit-ourselves-everything-says-tv-rain-editor-in-chief>); or
- Keep NTV news on SBS programming schedule in less extent and add alternative independent and unbiased media channel such as Dozhd recommended above. This will provide the opportunity for members of Russian community to choose and compare the content in line with *SBS Codes and Practices*.

We trust the concern we have raised will be given your most urgent and careful attention.

Kind Regards,



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