

2 September 2025

To: vaadatglz@gmail.com

Advisory Committee Members,

Subject: Response to Call for Public Input on Operation of IDF Radio

Introduction

This submission is sent to you on behalf of Zulat for Equality and Human Rights in response to your call for public input from 25 August 2025 inviting citizens to submit their opinions in writing about the operation of IDF Radio (Galei Tzahal) for the purpose of formulating recommendations to Defense Minister Yisrael Katz with regard to the station's "appropriate operational models" and "optimal operation mode," the content that should be broadcast on a military radio station, and the impact of IDF Radio and its music/news affiliate Galgalatz on the radio market in general.

However, recent reports in the press give rise to concern that the subjects on which the committee was asked to formulate recommendations to the defense minister are broader than those spelled out in the call for input from the public and touch upon the possible closure of IDF Radio, its transfer under civilian management, and its merger with an external media body.¹

The subjects that are supposed to be addressed by the committee largely pertain to a legitimate issue that has been discussed by various committees over the years. However, the current circumstances (to be elaborated below) raise serious concern that the creation of the committee is yet another link in the chain of efforts by the government to dismantle public broadcasting in Israel **and to pave the way for the realization of its political objective of**

§ All references in this document are in Hebrew.

¹ Walla Branja, [IDF Radio's Closure Again on the Agenda, Channel 14 Commentator to Head Katz's Committee](#), *Walla*, 8 June 2025.

harming the free media and handing over the frequencies used by IDF Radio to private operators it holds in favor. Fulfillment of these goals will substantially harm the democratic regime in Israel.

This being the case, the advisory committee must refrain from discussing the closure of IDF Radio and from lending its hand to the realization of political goals that would harm Israel's free media and democracy.

Government Set to Harm Public Broadcasting, Shift Frequencies to Private Entities

The current government is set to harm the free media in general and public broadcasters in particular and to transfer the radio frequencies used by them to private commercial entities. This is not a matter of interpretation or opinion, but rather a fact openly declared by government officials and by numerous MKs effectively acting as its agents.

Upon his appointment, Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi made numerous statements to the effect that "the public should not fund a particular channel," and therefore "there should be no public broadcasting."² Referring to the Israel Public Broadcasting Corporation (IPBC), he asserted that it should be shut down and that "public broadcasting is improper."³ This declaration of intent is particularly troubling in light of the importance of public broadcasting in democratic states and its longstanding existence in Israel. Already in August 2023, Zulat published a comprehensive document about the country's public broadcasting service, analyzing the Communications Ministry's general perception of its role and warning of what was to come.⁴

Indeed, as part of the efforts to terminate public broadcasting, quite a few private member bills designed to realize this goal have been submitted to the Knesset, all under the auspices of the government and with its support. Following are the main ones:

² Refaella Goichman, [Karhi Submits Bill on IPBC Privatization: 'There Should Be No Public Broadcasting'](#), *Haaretz*, 6 December 2022.

³ Editorial Desk, [Karhi Declares War on IPBC: 'No Diversity, A Failure'](#), *ICE*, 9 January 2023.

⁴ Aya Yadlin and Dr. Oranit Klein Shagrir, [Harming the IPBC: False Claims and Misquided Motivations](#), *Zulat*, 29 August 2023.

- **Bill on Privatization of IPBC-2022** (P/176/25),⁵ submitted by Likud MK Tali Gottlieb, proposed to completely terminate the IPBC's operation in a way that would end the public character of its broadcasts and turn it into a fully commercial entity, subject to the control of a politically affiliated regulator. The bill proposed to allocate the radio frequencies used by the IPBC to private radio stations with nationwide coverage.
- **Bill on Privatization of IDF Radio-2024** (P/5059/25),⁶ submitted by Likud MK Nissim Vaturi, proposed to close it down and launch a bidding process for its frequencies in order to set up a private radio that would broadcast nationwide.
- **Bill on Restructure of Public Broadcasting and Regulation of National Radio Broadcasts (Legislative Amendments)-2025** (P/5585/25),⁷ submitted by Likud MK Galit Distel Atbaryan, proposed to eliminate the IPBC's Hebrew-language news services, cut down the number of its radio stations, operate Reshet Bet as a private station, and grant licenses for national radio broadcasting.
- **Bill on Amendment of Second Authority for Television and Radio Law (Expanding Diversity in Radio Broadcasting)-2024**,⁸ submitted by Likud MK Eli Dallal, proposed to empower the Communications Minister to give his approval to regional radio stations to expand coverage beyond their licensed franchise areas, without a tender or any other fair procedure.
- **Bill on Amendment of Israeli Public Broadcasting Law (IPBC's Budget)-2024** (P/4736/25),⁹ submitted by Likud MK Avichai Boaron, proposed to stipulate that the IPBC's budget would be approved as part of the state budget to ensure political control over its operation and broadcasts, thereby enabling government influence over the content of programs.

⁵ [Bill on Privatization of IPBC-2022](#), *Knesset National Legislation Repository*, 12 December 2022.

⁶ [Bill on Privatization of IDF Radio-2024](#), *Knesset National Legislation Repository*, 15 July 2024.

⁷ [Bill To Change Format of Public Broadcasting and Regulate National Radio Broadcasts-2025 \(Legislative Amendments\)](#), *Knesset National Legislation Repository*, 3 March 2025.

⁸ [Bill on SATR Law-2024 \(Amendment: Expanding Diversity of Radio Broadcasts\)](#), *Knesset National Legislation Repository*, 17 June 2024.

⁹ [Bill on Israel Public Broadcasting Corporation Law-2024 \(Amendment: IPBC Budget\)](#), *Knesset National Legislation Repository*, 15 July 2024.

Thus, we are talking about a series of bills intended to bring about the complete elimination of public broadcasting, both the IPBC and IDF Radio, and substantially infringe on the independence of the media operating in Israel. Given that the frequencies used for nationwide radio broadcasts are known to be a highly limited and scarce resource, the aforementioned array of legislative proposals plainly shows that the government is aiming for an integrated move where public broadcasting would be completely eliminated and all the frequencies used by it would be allocated to private radio stations, which for the first time in Israel's history would enjoy nationwide coverage. This is a dramatic and historic change, which is bound to cause irreversible damage to Israeli democracy.

Status of IDF Radio Cannot Be Discussed Apart from Other Actions Against Public Broadcasting and Free Media

As stated, this is not the first time that the possibility of changing IDF Radio's operation mode, and even of shutting it down, has been examined. Since its establishment in 1950, the issue has come up for discussion more than once, as has the question of whether it is appropriate for the army to operate a radio station dealing with civilian issues, and in particular with current affairs that may be the subject of public controversy.

The issue resurfaced only recently, in 2023, when then-Defense Minister Yoav Gallant established an advisory committee headed by current Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir to look into the matter.¹⁰ Upon completing its work, the committee's recommendations not to close the station, not to remove it from the defense establishment, and to preserve its status as a military unit were accepted. The committee went on to note IDF Radio's enormous contribution to the Israeli media market and opined that its closure would risk the loss of a cultural cornerstone.¹¹

Nevertheless, despite the short time that elapsed since the aforementioned recommendations, the current Defense Minister is once again seeking to put the issue on the agenda, this time with the excuse that such a move is necessitated "in light of the protracted war borne by

¹⁰ Jasmin Gueta, [Closure or Takeover? Defense Minister Sets Up Committee to Determine IDF Radio's Fate](#), *TheMarker*, 17 April 2023.

¹¹ Jasmin Gueta, [Committee's Report on IDF Radio: Station To Remain Military Despite Objection of Chiefs of Staff](#), *TheMarker*, 4 February 2024.

regular, career, and reserve soldiers," as if the station's operations were harming the war effort or the soldiers themselves.

Beyond the fact that the ongoing war clearly has nothing whatsoever to do with the operation of IDF Radio, a real concern arises that the current intention to revisit the matter does not stand on its own, but is another link in the government's chain of moves to harm the free media. The true purpose of establishing the committee appears to be to prepare the ground for the elimination of public broadcasting in order to strengthen the government/political echelon's control and oversight over the media in Israel. Since the governmental-political echelon cannot currently control the broadcasts and content of either the IPBC or of IDF Radio, it seeks to abolish public broadcasting altogether. **This is an improper purpose, which threatens to cause grievous harm to democracy in Israel and to the fundamental rights of freedom of expression and freedom of the press.**

Given these circumstances, a discussion about the optimal operation of IDF Radio cannot possibly be conducted in a vacuum. The issue must be examined in light of the broader efforts to harm the media and with full consideration of their impact on the Israeli media market in general and on public broadcasting in particular.

Importance of Public Broadcasting in a Democratic State

IDF Radio is a public broadcasting service to all intents and purposes, and its importance to Israeli culture and public discourse is indisputable. The significance of a free and independent media in a democratic state as an essential tool safeguarding freedom of expression and freedom of the press requires no further elaboration. In this context, it bears noting Justice Hanan Melcer's remarks in **Supreme Court Ruling HCJ 2996/17 Union of Journalists in Israel-Histadrut Labor Federation v. The Prime Minister**:¹²

"The media serves as a counterbalance to the power of government, and guarantees that the latter does not harm democratic principles. Besides the ability to monitor the government, the media ensures a free flow of information

¹² [Ruling on Supreme Court Case HCJ 2996/17 Union of Journalists in Israel-Histadrut Labor Federation v. The Prime Minister](#), *Supreme Decisions*, 23 January 2019.

and regular expression of different and diverse opinions. It allows more citizens to participate in the democratic process by providing them with the information necessary to do so.... Finally, the media is a platform that plays a key role in safeguarding the public and political discourse. Even these days, when a significant portion of that discourse takes place on the Internet, the strength of 'traditional journalism', radio, and television, and their role as platforms for much of the public discourse, remains essential and must be respected. Therefore, a free media is the stage upon which the public discourse takes place, and as such, it is a factor that preserves, promotes, and enhances that discourse."

This applies tenfold to public broadcasting, which is primarily important for its ability to air news and current affairs programs. The Supreme Court ruling went on to say in this regard:

"Public broadcasting, including news and current affairs programs, must be independent and free from political interference and interests, which is a principle that also reflects the people's right.... A robust and independent public broadcasting service is an important tool for maintaining a diverse, vibrant, and critical media market that does not curry favor with the powers-that-be, wealth, or special interests. By being such, it upholds democracy and ensures the participation of the country's citizens in shaping its character.... It is easy to understand that even at an 'institutional' level, government intervention in the media aimed at 'adjusting' the media market to align with the interests of one side or another on the political spectrum, essentially constitutes an improper subordination of the media that is meant to be independent to the desires of the government. Such conduct undermines freedom of the press in its broadest sense."

Clearly, although these statements were made with regard to the IPBC, they are equally valid with respect to IDF Radio, which today is a public broadcasting service to all intents and purposes.

As for the link between a free media and protection of the fundamental right to freedom of expression, Justice Meni Mazuz noted in the same ruling:

"Public broadcasting is crucial for ensuring a true climate of free speech. Many constitutions recognize the people's right to receive information, and not just the right to share it, as part of the right to freedom of expression. Independent public broadcasting also serves as a 'watchdog' of democracy, exposing corruption within government institutions, which is why its independence is vital. To fulfill these functions, it must be safeguarded from political and economic interference."

Hence, it follows from the Supreme Court's ruling that **public broadcasting is essential for safeguarding freedom of expression and freedom of the press and for preserving the democratic character of the State of Israel. Any harm inflicted upon it will harm the free media and Israel's democratic fabric, and is unlikely to withstand judicial scrutiny.**

Conclusion

Zulat strongly opposes the closure of IDF Radio or any harm to the station's operation, and the committee must refrain from discussing this matter given the circumstances of its formation. Any examination of the station's current operation mode must take into account the political and anti-democratic interests of the current government, which is seeking to completely eliminate public broadcasting and undermine the free media, as well as the destructive consequences this will have on democracy in Israel.

Respectfully,

Einat Ovadia

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Representing Zulat