

Cuba publishes new media law



Newspapers in Cuba: Will the Communications Act soon bring more quality and variety to reporting? (Source: [EINuevoHerald](#))

Just over a year ago, Cuba's parliament passed a new media law ([Cuba Today reported](#)). President Miguel Díaz-Canel announced that the "Ley de comunicación social", or law on social communication, was intended to make the public relations work of the state media "more effective, broader, and more transparent". However, after the law passed the National Assembly, the issue remained quiet for a long time. The reform was effectively put on ice for a year - until now, when [the 68-page text was published](#) in the law gazette on Wednesday.

A large part of the law's innovations include the provisions on the working methods of state journalists. Cuban Journalists have long complained about poor working conditions such as low pay, outdated equipment in bad shape, and authorities that are reluctant to provide information. Now, journalists are now explicitly required to react quickly to events and are also allowed to use unconfirmed information from social media. In the past, protests, important announcements, and crises in particular have repeatedly led to delays due to a lack of approvals; in many places, processes are still designed for analog times. Today, however, 7.6 million out of 11.2 million Cubans use the internet, and two foreign broadcasters, Telesur from Venezuela and RT from Russia, are now broadcasting, meaning that the state media have de facto lost their monopoly. This has led, for example, to a situation where many Cubans saw the announcement of the 2021 currency reform on Telesur several hours beforehand, while Cuban television was still silent on the subject. One of the aims of the law is to release internal brakes and strengthen journalists in their work, including by extending the obligation of state authorities to provide information. The "Ley de comunicación social" also represents a novelty insofar as there has been no legislation in many areas up to now, whereas now all processes are mapped, which will help journalists by extending the autonomy of the respective editorial offices, [emphasized](#) Cuban media representatives in a special broadcast on Thursday.

Another innovation: In order to put the financing of the state press landscape (and the wages paid there) on a broader footing, "radio, broadcasting, online, and print media" are allowed to place commercial advertising for the first time (§76ff.). This is intended to promote "responsible consumption" and may propagate "brands, products, cultural assets, and tourist destinations". Another new feature is that the media will be allowed to receive donations in the future. This should enable them to generate additional income that remains in the respective organization. It will also be possible to open their own accounts, e.g., to purchase equipment or carry out repairs. Up to now, Cuba's media have been exclusively dependent on the limited state funding allocations.

As part of the law's additional provisions, various forms of advertising are now also permitted outside the media in public spaces: in addition to "absolute advertising", advertisements, sales promotions, advertising in electronic commerce, advertising at the point of sale, and advertorials can be placed. The prerequisite is always "respect for national symbols" and "recognition of the diversity and representation of Cuban society". The "depiction of women in a degrading or humiliating manner associated with stereotypical socio-cultural patterns", for example, is explicitly prohibited. Alcohol and tobacco advertising as well as advertisements aimed at children are also strictly regulated. In addition, advertising blocks on radio and television should only be broadcast between programs, but not during ongoing programs. The minimum length of commercials must be three seconds so that commercial advertising can be clearly distinguished from content. Representatives of the Cuban journalists' association UPEC explained that a look had been taken at the legislation of various European countries when drawing up the advertising rules.

Although the law will only come into force 120 days after its publication (on October 3), the first attempts have already been made for several months. For example, the state news portal "Cubadebate" now regularly publishes sponsored articles, most of which advertise products from private companies and joint ventures. The large billboard next to the ice cream parlor "Coppelia" in the heart of Havana can now also be booked for advertising messages.

In order to put the press on a more modern institutional footing, a new "Institute for Social Communication" is to be set up to replace the existing facilities. The state media monopoly itself remains untouched. However, the press is to become more of a "public control body", as UPEC President Ricardo Ronquillo Bello explained. "We want to be united but at variance," said Ronquillo. This could mean that the days of all major daily newspapers opening with the same articles could soon be over.

It remains to be seen how the new law will actually be implemented. What is certain, however, is that the "Ley de comunicación social" is the biggest reform of the state media landscape in the history of socialist Cuba. ([Cubaheute](#))