



Highlights of GAO-04-374, a report to the Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate

U.S. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING

Enhanced Measure of Local Media Conditions Would Facilitate Decisions to Terminate Language Services

Why GAO Did This Study

In its fiscal year 2004 budget request to Congress, the Broadcasting Board of Governors (the Board) proposed the elimination of 17 Central and Eastern European language services managed by the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) in order to free resources for higher-priority initiatives such as the war on terrorism. GAO was asked to examine (1) how the Board determines which language services should be proposed for reduction or termination and (2) the extent to which local media conditions are considered before a termination proposal is made. In addition, GAO's report provides summary analysis and conclusions relating to the media conditions in three countries impacted by the Board's language service termination decisions.

What GAO Recommends

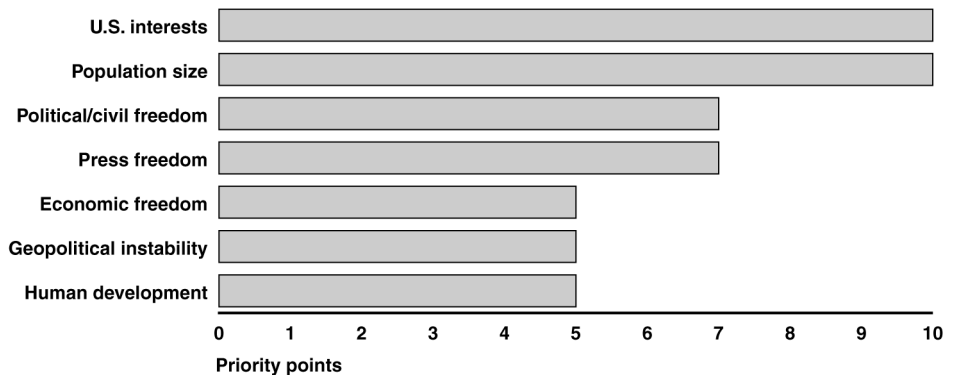
GAO recommends that the Board modify its language service review process to include an assessment of whether the domestic media in target countries provides accurate, balanced, and comprehensive news and information to the national audience.

What GAO Found

The Board identifies language service reductions and eliminations through its annual language service review process and follow-up consultations with the State Department and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The language service review process provides an analytical framework for making such decisions based on a number of decision criteria. The principal criteria used by the Board are language priority and language service impact. Other decision criteria considered by the Board include whether overlapping language services broadcast to the same target areas. Final resource allocation decisions and proposals are made after the Board consults with the State Department on foreign policy considerations and with OMB on budget-related issues.

The Board's current measure of press freedom does not adequately address the congressional concern that RFE/RL language service should not be terminated until a domestic media exists that provides accurate, balanced, and comprehensive news and information to a national audience. The Board evaluates local media conditions primarily through an annual survey of press freedom conducted by the media watch group Freedom House. This press freedom rating, along with some adjustments made by the Board, constitutes one of seven factors used to develop a priority list of broadcast languages. While the Board's press freedom measure addresses the issue of press freedom, it does not specifically measure whether domestic media provide news that is accurate, balanced, and comprehensive. GAO's analysis of relevant data sources and discussions with agency officials indicate that among the services targeted for elimination, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Romania stand out as having the most unstable media environments.

Ranking Factors for Prioritizing Broadcast Language Services



Source: Broadcasting Board of Governors.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-374.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess Ford at (202) 512-4128 or fordj@gao.gov.