

VII CONCLUSION

Most problems, faced by the media in Serbia for years, were still there in May. The Public Information Law and its provisions prohibiting restrictions to freedom of information, the free flow of ideas, information and opinions, putting any kind of physical or other kind of pressure on the media and its staff and exerting influence in order to obstruct their work, have been shown to be ineffective in practice. The above has been particularly true in relation to the penal policy and the practice of courts of law, which was unacceptably soft to those who put these freedoms at risk. It seems that the political will to change things is currently limited to the imminent bringing of the Media Strategy. While it is a step in the right direction, the state and its agencies should be proactive in implementing the regulations that are already in force. The authorities namely continue to exceed deadlines they have set themselves, such as in the case of the election of RBA Council members. The state remains inexplicably passive in fulfilling its obligations under the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance, as it was repeatedly indicated by the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection. Furthermore, the state is also slow in settling the tariff disputes between the collective organizations for the protection of copyright and related rights, resulting in the media continuing to pay the respective fees under the old tariffs, a year and a half after the adoption of the new Law on Copyright and Related Rights – the previous law was changed in 2009 precisely due to the fact that tariffs were excessive and unjust. The new law provided for new tariffs and a new principle, which remains unenforced in practice, under which the users, and not only the collective organizations, must be consulted when determining the amount of the said tariffs. Meanwhile, the media, particularly those at the regional and local level, have continued to suffer, one of the reasons being the fact that there are still too many of them, especially radio and TV stations. At the same time, the advertising market is poor and undeveloped, which situation is partly caused by a opaque and discriminatory approach to state aid. The latter typically goes to state media and those obedient or close to local authorities, resulting in seriously restricted media freedoms, lack of competition and lack of attractiveness for foreign investors. Instead of solving this problem by regulating access to the much-needed state aid in a consistent, transparent and non-discriminatory manner, the local authorities in many cities and towns across Serbia have opted to hold on to their share in media, keeping the media on direct budget financing, so as to retain and further strengthen the mechanisms of political influence and control over editorial policy, which ultimately results in restricted freedom of expression.