

VI THE PRIVATIZATION PROCESS

The management of the company “Politika novine i magazini” (*Politika Daily Newspapers and Magazines*) has announced that the Government of Serbia is discussing the future relations in this company with the new co-owner of “Politika”. The management of “Politika” NPM issued the afore-cited press release after the Journalists’ Association of Serbia (UNS) said that the former representative of “Politika” Goran Ilin, who performed that function on behalf of the foreign co-owner, was deleted from the register on October 15. The Managing Director Mira Glisic Simic, who is representing the predominantly state capital in “Politika”, remained as the only representative. UNS has concluded from these changes that the East Media Group, which purchased the share of the German WAZ in “Politika” last summer, renounced the rights to manage the company, under the principle of the agreement of both owners on important business decisions. That means that the East Media Group has become the passive partner of the state of Serbia in managing “Politika”, namely that the state is now running “Politika” without any restrictions whatsoever. We remind that, previously, the First Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic said that the East Media Group, a company registered in Moscow, was actually controlled by Miroslav Bogicevic, the owner of the Sabac-based concern Farmakom. Vucic told RTS that Farmakom “was forced to participate in the purchase. He was not genuinely interested in the transaction and it was merely a favor he did to the biggest political party in the previous government. We will find a way to protect the state and reclaim what belongs to it, while at the same time avoiding a crackdown on Farmakom, which employs 3500 people and has 5000 subcontractors,” Vucic said. However, it remains unclear what the First Deputy Prime Minister meant by saying “protect the state and reclaim what belongs to it”, since the East Media Group has acquired 50% of the shares of “Politika”, which were already privately owned by the German media group WAZ. Even before WAZ pulled out, the state already had 50% in “Politika” and it is now clear that the only difference that has emerged after the change of the private co-owner is that the new private co-owner, as opposed to the old one, is not taking part in managing the company. UNS has rightfully pointed to the fact that the state is now running “Politika” without any restrictions. Consequently, while the official Media Strategy of Serbia provides for the withdrawal of the state from the ownership in media, nobody is discussing the privatization of the state share in “Politika”. On the contrary, the state, which has retained an equal share in “Politika”, will obviously continue to control it completely autonomously. The developments related to “Politika” are shedding a new light on the statement made by the Culture and Media Minister Bratislav Petkovic that the Media Strategy will not be altered but that “it is not excluded that the state will remain a partial owner”. Such statements and actions are evidence of the reality that Serbia did get a new government, but not a new policy, since the new authorities



have continued with the practice of publicly opting for a certain concept, while implementing a completely different one in practice. Until that changes, it is unfortunately unlikely to expect any positive developments on the Serbian media scene.