

## VI THE PRIVATIZATION PROCESS

As reported by the daily "Politika" on December 24, the Secretary of the working group for drafting media laws of the Ministry of Culture and Media Aleksandar Avramovic told the Tanjug news agency that the privatization of state media ought to be carefully prepared, in order to avoid a situation where Serbia would be completely devoid of such media. "The interests of the public and society as a whole must be the priority," Avramovic said, adding that the essence was that the state must not be the direct financier of the media, which, again, did not mean that it should not finance media content of public interest. "With a diligent and responsible attitude towards the currently state-owned media, the latter will survive and keep serving the people in the future", Avramovic said. "Therefore, the provision of information to the people is indispensable and must be provided for, including from state resources. It must, at the same time, be transparent, clear, based on clear criteria and professional, independent and competent decisions, without any kind of fixing or undue influence by owners' groups, political groups or any particular interests". According to Avramovic, privatization must be carefully prepared and "what has been done by now, has been done wrongly". Therefore, "the best model must be found for state, regional or local media, in order to preserve the media from disappearing in the future". In his view, in some cases, the value of assets must be assessed, shares must be distributed to employees and pensioners free of charge. As an alternative, the choice of a strategic partner should be well prepared. Avramovic announced that the working group for drafting media laws would "finish the job by the end of March at the latest", in accordance with the deadlines from the Media Strategy. He also said that, under the Law on Public Enterprises, "public companies from the field of information will continue to work as such until they are privatized".

The statement by the Secretary of the working group for drafting media laws of the Ministry of Culture and Media is significant, bearing in mind that the officials of the new government have typically avoided giving straight answers about the issue of privatization. They have avoided using the word "privatization", replacing it with ambiguous and vague terms. In his statement, Aleksandar Avramovic merely reiterated what is written in the Media Strategy – the state will withdraw from the ownership of media and such withdrawal involves the privatization or the conversion of the state's stake into shares and the distribution of these shares free of charge. This is in line with the statement (we have already mentioned in this Report) by the Assistant Minister Dragan Kolarevic in the Parliament's Culture and Information Committee that the Media Strategy will not be changed, but merely implemented in keeping with the deadlines prescribed in the Action Plan.



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