

## V THE DIGITALIZATION PROCESS

The Ministry of Domestic and Foreign Trade and Telecommunications said in February that the key prerequisites for digitalization had not been realized and hence it was not possible to foresee the date for the completion of that process. In order to resume digitalization, a working group has been set up (consisting of the representatives of RATEL, the Public Company Broadcasting Equipment and Communications – ETV and the Ministry), tasked with speeding up the activities of this process, ensuring greater coordination among the participants and responding to all open issues creating confusion in the overall process. The Ministry said that the preparations for drafting the Network Project had already started and would probably be finished within three months. In addition to working on the design of the network, a new action plan accompanying the Digital Switchover Strategy was agreed on, with clearly defined tasks and deadlines. The action plan is expected to be adopted as early as in March 2013. The first stage of switching off the analog and switching on the digital TV signal is expected in the course of 2014, while the Switchover Plan, as the key document, will specify the period of the switchover by regions. As for the need to purchase STBs, the Ministry said the citizens did not need to rush with it until they got specific information about the switching off the analog signal. The Ministry is currently working on finding a model of assistance to some categories of the population with the purchase of STBs and the funds in question will be allocated in the 2014 budget. In the scope of its part of the job, on February 12, RATEL ended the public consultations about the Draft Rulebook on Establishing the Frequency/Location/Region Allocation Plan for Terrestrial Digital TV Broadcasting Stations in the UHF Range for the territory of the Republic of Serbia. After the public hearing, this document was sent to the Ministry of Domestic and Foreign Trade and Telecommunications for adoption. The Rulebook determines the allocation of digital frequencies after the completion of the digital switchover. As such, the enforcement of this document will begin only after the digital switchover is completed, in accordance with the Switchover Plan. The Digital Allocation Plan is aligned with the relevant international regulations and it constitutes one of the most important regulatory documents concerning digital broadcasting.

The digital switchover process is continuously late relative to the plan. The activities of the Ministry, RATEL and the Public Company ETV in the previous period provide hope that the process could still rebound and accelerate and perhaps be completed until June 17, 2015, as a deadline embraced by Serbia in keeping with ratified international treaties. In the meantime, it is necessary to create all regulatory and technical conditions for that to happen. First and foremost, the Design

of the digital network needs to be adopted, which will open the door to the adoption of the Switchover Plan, so as to regulate in more detail the time periods and other issues relevant for the digital switchover. In view of the complexity of the process, collaboration must exist between all stakeholders, particularly state authorities, and regulatory bodies on one hand and broadcasters on the other, in order to enable all prerequisites for a smooth switchover.