

V THE DIGITALIZATION PROCESS

At a session held on July 2, 2010, the Government of the Republic of Serbia passed a decision appointing Vladimir Homan for Director of the public company “Broadcasting Equipment and Communications”. We hereby remind that on July 2, 2009, the Government adopted the Strategy for the Transition from Analog to Digital Television and Radio Program Broadcasting in the Republic of Serbia. One of the basic pillars of that Strategy and the realization thereof in the prescribed time periods was the separation of the transmission system from RTS into a new public company and the full operationality of such company that will assume the role of future operator of the network and multiplex. The public company “Broadcasting Equipment and Communications” was established late last year, but until now, it was headed by an Acting Director only, with limited powers. The failure to appoint a Director has resulted in a situation in which the “Broadcasting Equipment and Communications” was unable to fully contribute to the preparations for digitalization or to use the designated EU pre-accession funds. With the absence of a functional operator and partner in the preparations for digitalization, the media are unable to plan their activities in the transition process. In view of the above, the appointment of the Director is good news, but it comes six months too late, which is putting in jeopardy the sustainability of the deadlines laid down in the Strategy for the transition from analog to digital broadcasting.

VI THE PRIVATIZATION PROCESS

6.1. The Independent Journalists’ Association of Vojvodina called the Government of Serbia and the city of Sombor to urgently find a way to help avoid the shutting down of Radio Sombor. Radio Sombor has obtained a regional frequency for broadcasting in the area of the Western Backa District in the Serbian, Hungarian, Croat, Bunjevci languages and occasionally in the Roma language. The responsibility of difficult position of the said radio station, in the opinion of the The Independent Journalists’ Association of Vojvodina, lies with the state authorities and the local self-government. Radio Sombor was sold at an auction on November 2, 2007. However, in mid-2008, the Privatization Agency terminated the contract with the new owner for failure to fulfil his obligations towards the employees and the state. After the privatization was scrapped, Anita Beretic, the former Director of the radio station and currently the assistant to the Provincial Secretary for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality, was appointed, at the proposal of the trade unions, to the position of temporary representative of state capital, while the shares have been transferred to the State Equity Fund. The employees of Radio Sombor have been paid their last salary (minimum salary) in

August 2009. They are nonetheless still coming to work and discharging their daily duties. At the same time, the city authorities claim that their hands are tied due to vague media regulations and that, save the assistance received from individual competitions, they don't have other options at their disposal.

The example from Sombor is just one of the several cases reflecting the situation of the media whose privatization has failed. The competent authorities have failed to offer any systemic solution that would provide a minimum of hope for the survival of these media and for the sustainable development of local media in Serbia. Even the Media Study, that was produced by experts engaged by the European Commission and which should represent the basis for the drafting of the Media Strategy, has failed to offer these media more than a mere recommendation to either transfer the equipment and staff in the regional public broadcasting service and thus practically disappear – whereby this regional public broadcasting service would not be broadcasting on a separate frequency but only in limited time slots on RTS channels – or to continue broadcasting until the expiry of the license, without the possibility to renew it.