

## VII CONCLUSION

We have concluded several times in our reports that the state has become the dominant player, which, in the backdrop of the financial downturn and shrinking advertising budgets, amid poor competition on the media market and other related markets (primarily advertising market and media content distribution market), by awarding state aid in an opaque way, is in the position to decide which particular media are going to survive on the market and which ones are going to disappear. At that, the state does not have the interest of the public in mind, but merely that of the ruling oligarchies, which support those media that will manipulate the citizens in order to promote the interests of these oligarchies, enabling them to remain in power. Key evidence of that was heard during the public debate on the Draft Law on Public Information and Media. Namely, 80% of the public money, spent by different levels of government on the media, actually ends up in a circle of less than 10% of “privileged” media. These privileged media are currently advocating for the status quo, standing out as the fiercest opponents of privatization and transition to a new model of state financing of media (under which model only clearly-defined projects will be privatized, overpayment would be prevented and effective mechanisms will be introduced to control the expenditure of allocated state aid). Failure, once again, to introduce thorough reforms would plunge the media even deeper into despair, both in the public and in the commercial sector. Reporting would continue to be “fine-tuned” by squeezing the money supply from the budget. If the latter is not enough, we will see overt threats of dismissal, something that the President of the Provincial Board of the SPS for Vojvodina Dusan Bajatovic is already doing in the case of RTV. If such threats fail to discipline disobedient media, their managers and editors will be sacked, with the help of armed security guards where appropriate, as it was the case with the commercial station TV Jedinstvo from Novi Pazar. Meanwhile, the media have increasingly ceased to operate as a forum for the broadest debate about matters of public interest, failing to adequately address (if at all) these topics. Instead of showing a wealth of content and resorting to a plethora of sources, we see significant topics, such as the public debate about the Draft Law on Public Information and Media, being superficially reported about, without tackling the core of the story. In such an environment, the only good news restoring optimism were certain court decisions, typically passed by the Appellate Court of Belgrade, which have continued to raise the standards of protection of freedom of expression in Serbia; or information about joint projects by journalists’ and media associations with anti-corruption bodies; or the expectations that, although reluctantly and under international pressure, the state will prevail in its intention to thoroughly and genuinely reform the media sector.