

VII CONCLUSION

In our prior reports, we often stressed that, if a thorough reform of the media sector was again stopped, the regression of the media landscape would continue, both in the public and in the commercial sector. The way the media report will continue to be affected by the financial duress. The media would increasingly give up their role of providing forum for a wide range debates about public matters, becoming mere conveyors of information that is not in the interest of the public, but are benefiting the ruling oligarchies and instruments of manipulation for the purpose of the latter holding on to power. How much this concern is real is evidenced on one hand by the news from Cacak, where people, supposed to decide about the allocation of state aid to media, have openly stated their decisions would be guided by the concerned media's reporting about their political parties and that they would have a restrictive position towards those criticizing the officials appointed by those parties. On the other hand, the public debate about the Draft Law on Public Information and Media ended on March 22 and there is still no information as to what will happen with the Draft, if any recommendations have been accepted, whether some concepts have been abandoned, when the Draft Law will be tabled to the Government for review and to Parliament for approval. Meanwhile, any further postponement of the adoption of the Draft Law threatens the viability of the deadlines for changing the system of budget financing of the media and the completion of privatization.

However, even more than by the standstill in the media reforms, the month of April was marked by the calling of the tender for yet another analog national commercial television. That tender seriously threatens to undermine the digitalization process. Firstly, it deprives Serbia of a genuine simulcast (simultaneous airing of the analog and digital signals), which is vital during the fine-tuning phase of the new digital network. Secondly, it threatens to create a problem in the relations with the European Commission, since it postpones the use of about 8-million Euros worth of equipment, received from pre-accession EU funds. Thirdly, the postponement of the switchover by calling a tender for analog television immediately before the expiration of the agreement on the protection of analog frequencies increases the danger of having digital signals from the region obstruct the reception of analog signal in Serbia, which would deprive Serbian citizens of the analog signal they currently enjoy before the digital signal is even put in operation. Fourthly, the deferment of digitalization would also defer the licensing of the part of the frequency spectrum freed by the switchover – the digital dividend. Serbia could generate substantial profit by licensing the dividend. At the same time, Serbia and its citizens and the economy could be deprived of modern mobile broadband access, since the part of the spectrum freed by the switchover would be licensed precisely for mobile broadband services. On the other



hand, no matter how hard we try, we are unable to discern a single positive change on the media scene that could result from the licensing of a new commercial national television.