

V THE DIGITALIZATION PROCESS

During the month of May, the media have devoted a lot of space to analyzing the harmful consequences of the open competition for the vacant frequencies of the former TV Avala for the digitalization process. By the time this Report was completed, there is no information if anyone had applied, which is not a surprise, given that the application deadline expires on July 9 only.

The line Ministry of Foreign and Internal Trade and Telecommunications has stressed that, in the last year, more was done in the digitalization process than in the previous four combined; that the required regulations and plans (including the Allocation Plan) were adopted; as well as that the concept of social aid for the most vulnerable categories of the population, in purchasing STBs for receiving digital signal, is in the pipeline, as is the one for the digitalization promotion plan. The Ministry has also assured that there were no concerns that the EU will remove the received equipment that hasn't been installed, because that equipment will be utilized very soon. On the other hand, the media have reported that, in relation to the initiated open competition for the vacant frequencies of the former TV Avala and the delay in the digitalization process, the Ministry had received a protest note from the EU Ambassador to Serbia, Head of the EC Delegation to Belgrade Vincent Degert. Simultaneously, on May 31, the deadline expired for submitting bids in the open procedure the Ministry called for the public procurement of equipment for the needs of the system for broadcasting and distribution of the digital television signal on the territory of the Republic of Serbia (namely antenna systems, telecommunications equipment, 40 gap fillers and UPS devices with associated services). The antenna systems are procured for the broadcasting locations Subotica, Vrsac, Tupiznica, Deli Jovan and Kopaonik. Under the terms of the public procurement, the equipment should be delivered in the period between early March and early May 2014.

In order for the digitalization process to be completed, free frequencies need to be ensured and the Switchover Plan must be finished that will define the time frame of the digital switchover by distribution zones. Upon finalizing that document, under the Strategy for the Transition from Analog to Digital TV Broadcasting in the Republic of Serbia, an awareness campaign will ensue, in order to familiarize the citizens with the digitalization process and provide them with the necessary information how to prepare themselves for that process. The lack of free frequencies could disrupt these entire plans, while the concern that Serbia will be getting a negative score in the coming EC Progress Report, due to the digitalization delay, is quite realistic. This could further undermine Serbia's position in future negotiations on Chapter 10 – Information Society



and the Media – which is already problematic due to the existing delay in the implementation of the Media Strategy and the adoption of new media laws.