

### III MONITORING OF THE PROCESS OF ADOPTION OF NEW LAWS

In August, the Ministry of Culture and Media posted on its website the Draft Law on Electronic Media and the Draft Law on Public Service Broadcasters. According to a press release of the Ministry, the aim was to “inform the public about the content of these drafts before the start of the public debate”. However, due to the pressure of the public and some controversial concepts, the Draft Law on Public Service Broadcasters was withdrawn from the website. A new working group was set up, tasked with writing the new Draft Law by the start of the month of October, after which the public debate would ensue. This coincided with personal changes in the line ministry, which are the consequence of the government reshuffle and the appointment of a new minister. Ultimately, the Government definitively decided to give up, at least for two years, the TV subscription fee as the main source of financing for PSB and opted to have RTS and RTV funded directly from the budget. The Parliament should decide on finding a new, sustainable concept for the financing of PSB, before the said two-year term expires.

It should be emphasized that in 2007, before the start of the economic crisis, more than 57 million Euros were collected from the TV subscription fee, while in 2012, that amount plummeted to about 38 million Euros. Based on the data released in the first six months of this year, the average collection rate fell to 28%, with an all-time low recorded in August – a mere 16%. This trend shows that a considerable number of citizens, emboldened by the statements made by politicians, MPs and the First Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic, that “the TV subscription fee will be scrapped, as promised to the citizens”, have ceased to pay the fee even before the Law was officially adopted (even though the fee still remains as a statutory obligation, under the Broadcasting Law). The question is how this amount (even 57 or 38 million dinars are unquestionably insufficient for the realization of the PSB functions) will be replaced from the otherwise depleted state budget. Since, apart from the financing of the PSB, some inherited problems need to be addressed, including the accumulated debts (the RTS has not paid copyright and related rights fees for years, or many other obligations), the fact that the Vojvodina PSB does not have its own building, as well as the inability of both RTS and RTV to deal with the surplus of employees without the proper social program, it is unlikely to expect better times for them, even with budget financing. The results of the public debate are pending, but it is unlikely that the Parliament will harness the necessary political will to back up the subscription fee concept. In such a situation, the provisions of the latest Draft Law on PSB, providing for a procedure for starting new programming services of the PSB, seem almost surreal. Paradoxically, it seems that Serbia rather needs proper rules on the cancellation of the existing PSB services.