

## V THE DIGITALIZATION PROCESS

Although the RBA Council rejected, on September 13, the complaints of both applicants on the open competition – “Kopernikus cable network” d.o.o. from Nis and “Nova.rs Television” d.o.o. from Belgrade (after having previously decided not to allocate at all the broadcasting license for national TV coverage on the network left vacant after the shutting down of TV Avala), the Ministry of Foreign and Internal Trade and Telecommunications failed to adopt by the end of September the new Plan for the Allocation of Frequencies, which was supposed to reassign the free frequencies for the expansion of the digital network for the simulcast. It is not clear if the Ministry is hesitating and whether the postponement of the adoption of the new Plan perhaps means that the battle for digitalization is still not won. However, it remains difficult to interpret the ambitions behind the aforementioned tender. Serbia is, namely, simultaneously working on two things. The first is the digitalization of terrestrial broadcasting, while the second is the adoption of the new Law on Electronic Media. The third process is the announced drafting of the new Audio-Visual Media Services Development Strategy, which is expected to precede the issuance of licenses under the new law, after the latter is passed. In the meantime, all analog licenses, valid at the moment of the switchover, shall be replaced by licenses involving the right to access to the digital multiplex and a place in it. To make things even more complicated, the current national licenses expire in August next year, on the eve of the switchover and it is still not clear if the RBA will renew them without a public competition. This leads to the conclusion that both those that have applied for the competition and those that called the competition actually anticipated the situation where the new license for the analog network of the former TV Avala shall be, at some point, the only guaranteed entry ticked for the switchover, a safer bet than the four currently valid national licenses, since these licenses expire in less than a year. That is why the decision not to allocate the license was extremely important. It allows not only to speed up the switchover by creating space for simulcast (simultaneous digital and analog broadcasting), but also equal conditions for switching to digital broadcasting for all national broadcasters, namely conditions under which no such broadcaster will enjoy a more favorable position than the other. That is why it is pertinent to ask why, instead of insisting on a tender for broadcasting with obsolete technology, the RBA does not do something else – establish clear criteria for extending the licenses expiring next August and engage in the process of adopting the new Audio-Visual Media Services Development Strategy, since the previous one has already expired (it was valid until 2013). Why is this important? Extending the licenses expiring in August 2014 would provide the possibility for national broadcasters to plan, with a greater degree of certainty, the improvement of their services after digitalization. The new Audio-Visual Media Services Development Strategy would provide an insight of the necessary content, which



would also answer the question when and for which services a new open competition should be called. Anything else would be hasty and injudicious.