



Report on ANEM PRESS CONFERENCE held on October 21, 2009

### **A Four-month Analysis of the Impact of Government Emergency Measures to Assist the Media in Condition of Crisis**

On October 21, 2009, ANEM organized a press conference dedicated to analysis of the implementation of the Government's intervention measures to assist the media in conditions of economic crisis. The conference, as a part of its advocacy activities to improve the position of broadcasters, was held in the Media Center in Belgrade, with support of USAID and IREX Serbia. At this conference, ANEM informed the public about the results of government measures implementation after four months of their adoption. Beside ANEM representatives, the representatives of other media associations – IJAS (NUNS), JAS (UNS), Local Press, the Association of Media and APRES also addressed the attendees.

At the beginning of the conference, **Sasa Mirkovic, ANEM President**, reminded all attendees of what preceded the adoption of the Government's intervention measures, particularly the requirements of broadcasters, as well as the measures that were adopted on June 25, 2009. He pointed out that, when they were passed, such reduced measures were expected to be beneficial if implemented, and that their implementation would be relatively easy, because they were not numerous and complicated. Unfortunately, four months later, it ought to be declared that only a small part of the measures had been implemented, said Mirkovic. He pointed out that, out of all adopted measures, **only two had been realized**: the reduction of RBA tariffs and co-financing projects in the field of information – through the competition of the Ministry of Culture, for which the Government provided for the additional funds (60 million). However, the reduction in the RBA fees by 5% was almost symbolic and did not have the same effect for all broadcasters, especially for those in larger cities. As for the second implemented measure, allocated funds of 80 million dinars have been insufficient, as can be seen from the fact that of 355 submitted projects only 125 have been supported. Also, although the results of the competition were announced exactly a month ago, the contracts have not yet been signed and the money not transferred to the media whose projects were approved. Mirkovic further said that another measure, the reduction of RATEL fees, **could have been implemented**, but did not. On July 21, 2009, RATEL had decided to reduce fees for broadcasters for 5%, valid for 2009, but the Government has not yet approved it. He further stated that the measures of support and assistance of the Government and its ministries, primarily the Ministry of Interior, to RBA and RATEL to disable the work of illegal broadcasters **had not been implemented**, so currently even more pirate broadcasters are operating, particularly in local communities. The measure given as the recommendation to the collective organizations to examine the possibility of reducing tariffs for broadcasters and to equalize tariffs for commercial broadcasters and publicly owned media was yet **another measure that had not been realized**. The OFPS approved some stimulating measures for broadcasters and started negotiations. SOKOJ did not show willingness to negotiate, but from July 1, 2009, started with the implementation of previously adopted, by 12.5% higher tariff for minimum rate fees, which affected the poorest broadcasters and could only be considered as disregarding of the Government's recommendation. Representatives of these organizations, but the competent state authorities as well, considered that these were only recommendations, not decisions of the Government, so that they did not need and have to be respected, which proved that there was *a great liberty in the interpretation of Government measures*, said Mirkovic. Also, **there were no indicators** that other Government measures had been applied (advertising of Government activities through the media; the possibility to use the European Investment Bank loans and other funds to support the media in Serbia).

Based on the above it is clear that the Government measures are not sufficiently realized and that the Government has not shown enough willingness and interest to ensure their implementation.

Media is in even more difficult situation and improvement is not expected in the coming year; therefore it is necessary that the Serbian Government and the Ministry of Culture develop, in the shortest possible time, a strategy to assist the media in 2010, said Mirkovic.

**Slobodan Kremenjok, ANEM lawyer**, said some of the ministries also ignored the Government action, not respecting their obligations. For example, the Ministry of Science and Technology Development never informed and gave to the collective organizations of copyright and related rights, the Government recommendation that regards their relationship with broadcasters and therefore reduced the prospect for the implementation of these measures. Regarding the linear reduction of RBA fees of 5%, it does not solve the essence of the problem. The problem is that the fees, which should serve as a financing source of independent regulatory bodies and as such allow the body to be truly independent from the Government, are treated here, for some vague reason, as a concession, which by law they are not. The fees double the expenses of the RBA and are equal for all broadcasters, because it still does not use the criterion of quality program content. This implies that a clear media policy does not exist or even desire of the state to promote one type of program in relation to another; the state is acting as it is completely unconcerned what kind of program will be broadcast, whether it is a quality drama, children's, scientific program or 24 hours of entertainment and commercial programs. Our expectations for the reduction of fees were higher because half of the fees went into budget, said Kremenjok.

**Jelka Jovanovic, vice-president of the Independent Journalists Association of Serbia (NUNS)**, said that, despite some positive things done, like last week's decision to separate the broadcast tower services department from the state radio and television RTS and to form a separate company for this purpose, the Government did not get a positive mark when the intervention measures to help the media were concerned. She warned of grave consequences of the economic crisis, such as more frequent, illegal and legal, dismissing of media workers. As an illustrative example of severe crisis in the media, she confirmed the shutdown of another newspaper, that is, this week's termination of publishing of the national daily "Borba." She also announced the beginning of operations of NUNS' Fund for media assistance, especially media workers.

**Vladan Filipcev, President of the Local Press Managing Board** said that he believed that the Government measures would be sincere, efficient and rapidly implemented, however, they were not, and that the local media, already in a bad position, were counting on that support. Local media were not regarded as equal to the strong media in front of the state bodies and institutions, so in practice, the small and the weak, instead of being protected, were rather faced with enforced collection of debts, while the big media enjoyed certain facilities by the state. A positive step, said Filipcev, was the Government's competition of the Ministry of Culture, but stressed that they still did not come to contract signing, and therefore no transfer of funds for the media.

**Zoran Papic, executive director of the Association of the media**, focused on the results of the Ministry of Culture's Competition for co-financing of projects in the field of information. He pointed out that the funds were insufficient; that the small number of media outlets received funding in relation to the number of applicants and that the criteria of choice of projects remained an issue. He particularly stressed the fact that public companies made up almost a third of the media who had received support for their projects, and were on budget as well. He pointed out, on behalf of the Association, that the only help of the state was the development of the system solutions package, reduction of VAT, fees for licenses, etc... The state could help the media with relaxed, quality legislation and hastened work on development of the strategy for the development of the media sphere, said Papic.

**Nino Brajovic, Secretary of the Journalists Association of Serbia (UNS)**, reminded that the Government had not adopted any measure proposed by professional associations and trade unions as members of the Working Group of the Ministry of Culture. This competent Ministry and the Government did not deserve a pass when it comes to the media support. He pointed out that the year 2010 would be full of challenges and temptation and that the media would face the situation of 20% of workers remaining without jobs. He regarded as positive the amendments to the Criminal Code which strictly sanctioned threats, attacks and killings of journalists. In

conditions of economic crisis, Brajovic believes that it is quite justified that the surplus in the financing of the RBA and RATEL does not go to the state budget because it is the media money and not a concession that the state should be collected from the media.

Ruzica Krdzic, representative of APRES and BARS, particularly stressed the problem of illegal broadcasting in Serbia that most threatened the local broadcasters. She stressed that the Government was agile regarding the amendments to the Law on broadcasting because it was directly interested in their passing, and failed to act the same when some provisions of the law that would allow preventing illegal broadcasting needed to be amended. She also said that the collective organizations, especially SOKOJ who increased their tariffs, did not in any way help broadcasters, although it was one of the measures the Government.

***All participants of the press conference agreed that, even after four months of their adoption, the Government's intervention measures to help the media had not been fully realized, and to the extent they had been realized so far and how they were defined, they were insufficient to stem further deterioration of the media. They also stated that the Government had not shown readiness or willingness to enforce its measures. For the media to sustain it is necessary to immediately initiate the development of concrete approaches and real measures to help the media in 2010, and to adopt the media sector development strategy as soon as possible, concluded the participants.***