

VII CONCLUSION

The debate about the Media Study, developed with the assistance of experts engaged by the European Commission, which is to serve as a basis for developing the Media Strategy, has overshadowed everything else that took place in the media sector in September. The ambitious plan involved day-long sessions to be held week after week, aimed at brainstorming the recommendations from the Media Study in collaboration with the consultant hired by the Ministry of Culture, who would promptly prepare conclusions from the round tables and work on the draft Media Strategy. However, it proved too much of a task for the Ministry of Culture. The state showed to be incapable of tackling a single one of the inherited problems in the media sector, let alone of coping with the challenges of technological changes that are fundamentally changing the media environment. Serbia has found itself in the situation to have, as a basis for its Media Strategy, a study that has concluded that the even existing public service broadcasters are failing to do a decent job, while at the same time proposing the establishment of 10-15 new public service broadcasters. The study has acknowledged that the collection rate of the subscription fee is intolerably low, while at the same time insisting on funding the proposed 10-15 new public service broadcasters – including the programs of civil sector stations, minority media and part of the programs of commercial media – from that same fee. Instead of privatizing the existing public media, the study proposes to the owners of private media to assign their equipment and personnel to regional public service broadcasters and relinquish their investments. No wonder that even the RTS is among those that are opposed to such recommendations, since it is reluctant to share the subscription fee with anyone else or to open windows on its channels for regional broadcasters. Against are also the still-unprivatized media, which are reluctant to give up their frequencies and direct budget funding, as well as commercial broadcasters, unwilling to renounce their investments. Journalists' and media associations have proposed a set of alternative recommendations, but it remains to be seen if the state will get the message. In the backdrop of the debate about the Media Strategy, new cases of pressures on journalists occurred, particularly in the Serbian countryside. At the same time, the courts in legal proceedings against the perpetrators of attacks against journalists continued to pass sentences on the limit of the legally prescribed minimum or even below it. In cases where they were expected by media professionals to protect freedom of expression, the courts again delivered verdicts that were pushing journalists deeper into legal uncertainty and self-censorship.