

VII CONCLUSION

Physical attacks on journalists, threats, throwing stones at a television studio, destruction of a company vehicle, filing an indictment without prior investigation, endless court proceedings in cases where journalists were attacked... All this has cast a shadow on the fact that Serbia has recently adopted a Media Strategy, a document everyone agreed was badly needed, after two years of hard work, arguing and back-and-forth negotiations. It is already evident that the implementation thereof will be everything but an easy task, due to several reasons. First, the Media Strategy is a conciliation incorporating certain incoherent concepts, which will undoubtedly result in divergent interpretations. As of the first reading, one inevitably concludes that it is impossible to both advocate the withdrawal of the state from media ownership and introduce new exceptions to the mandatory privatization. Furthermore, it is logically impossible to avoid making key changes in the evidently failed model of financing of the existing public service broadcasters and at the same time introduce new public broadcasters with an even less understandable financing scheme. Or to believe that, in a situation where the national and the provincial public service broadcasters have been unable to satisfy the needs for information of regional relevance, new regional public service broadcasters, set up in the same mould, will somehow manage to fulfill the same objective? There is, however, one obvious thing, which represents a change of the focus laid down in the Strategy. While it may be true that it was produced to a certain extent clumsily and sloppily, the Strategy marks the first time in Serbia that the media sector is treated not only as a field where freedom of expression – as a fundamental human right – ought to be achieved, but also as a market where competition is protected and financial interventions by the state are considered as illicit interference, which may be allowed only if they are transparent, non-discriminatory and pro-competition. The experience of other countries in the region who have started – some even already finished – their EU accession talks before Serbia, teaches us that the key issues for the media sector in these talks were not those related to human rights and freedom of expression, but, paradoxically maybe, items concerning the protection of competition and control of state aid. The conclusion could be that the entire region, including Serbia, has changed in the sense that overt oppression and violence, although still being a concern, have ceased to be the dominant way of pressuring the media. The predominant instruments for muzzling the media are more subtle today and involve different, equally dangerous challenges. The changed circumstances have compelled the media community to introduce additional priorities. These priorities concern ownership, the protection of competition and, most importantly, the control of state aid. Precisely for that reason, as much as the Strategy has disappointed many, the success thereof will be measured by the results in the implementation of the new model of project-based financing of media content and a more effective control of state aid. Failure in these two areas would

mean that the Serbian media space has become even poorer, while being placed under even tighter control.