

VII CONCLUSION

The expected calling of the elections on all levels additionally complicates the situation on the media scene in Serbia. Tasks that have been started remain unfinished, while the government either loses interest or cannot afford to make any systemic moves. In such a situation, the only good news is the fact that the Appellate Court in Belgrade has continued to reverse the first-instance verdicts in cases of attacks against journalists, by sentencing the attackers to stricter penalties. After two such decisions passed late last year, in the case of the attack on Teofil Pancic and Vladimir Mitric, verdicts were reversed in the cases of the attack of TVB92 Bosko Brankovic. While the decisions of the Appellate Court in Belgrade remain closer to the legal minimum prescribed for the criminal acts in question, they are at least above such minimum, unlike in most similar cases in recent years. It remains to be seen if such stricter penalty policy will act as a deterrent for attackers against journalists, but it is good that the courts seem to have finally understood that their earlier practice has become unsustainable. Unfortunately, when it comes to damage claims, the Serbian judiciary is still lagging behind the aspired principles and there remains a great deal to be done in this respect before any changes start to emerge.

When it comes to the implementation of the Action Plan accompanying the Media Strategy, in spite of the optimism expressed by Predrag Markovic, the Minister of Culture, Media and Information Society, who said that everything was going as planned, uncertainty remains over the insufficiently transparent work on the announced amendments to the Law. In the same vein, one may rightfully lament the belated adoption of the Strategy (at the end of the current government's term of office), which has compromised the implementation thereof. Addressing the key issues continuing to plague the position of the media in Serbia – such as the withdrawal of the state as a media owner, putting order in state assistance to media or, better to say, the manner in which the state supports obedient media thereby undermining competition on the media market and freedom of expression – will obviously be the task of the new government. Meanwhile, the crisis and the current market conditions have continued to decimate Serbian media, with the biggest victims being small local media. The economic downturn did not spare national media either, as evidenced by the strike on TV “Avala” and the accumulated debt of that station.