

## V THE DIGITALIZATION PROCESS

After the Government adopted a decision on March 1 amending the Strategy for the Switchover from Analog to Digital Broadcasting in the Republic of Serbia and after the Ministry of Culture, Media and Information Society adopted in February Annex 4 of the Allocation Plan allocating the frequencies for the initial network for testing the digital TV signal, with its Rulebook on Determining the Plan for the Allocation of Frequencies/Sites for Terrestrial Analog FM and TV Broadcasting Stations for the Territory of the Republic of Serbia, the conditions for the start of digitalization in Serbia have finally been met. Namely, the amended Strategy provides that the switchover to digital terrestrial television broadcasting will start by switching on the Initial Network for testing the digital TV signal from 15 sites indicated in Annex 4 of the Allocation Plan. The infrastructure and equipment of the Initial Network shall be included in the final digital network, gradually and simultaneously with the shutdown of analog transmitters and complete digital switchover. In line with the Strategy, on March 15, RATEL issued to the public company "Broadcasting Equipment and Communications" (ETV) a single license for the use of frequencies laid down in Annex 4 of the Allocation Plan, while the test broadcasting began on March 21. ETV says that the Initial Network is intended, in the experimental phase, for testing the system, transmitters, receivers, various parameters, as well as range and reception. The real situation will be known only after detailed measurements that the ETV experts will carry out in the coming months, but it is to be expected that about 40% of the population will be able to receive the digital signal from the Initial Network. Unfortunately, although the Ministry of Culture, Media and Information Society adopted the Specification of Minimum Technical Requirements for the Equipment for Receiving Digital Terrestrial TV signal in the Republic of Serbia and the Instructions on the Manner and Procedure of the Testing of Devices (STB and digital TV sets), aiming at assessing compliance with the requirements for receiving digital terrestrial signal in Serbia, set top boxes (devices decoding digital signal and allowing it to be received on a standard TV set) still cannot be found in shops. Hence, the ratings of the programs aired in the digital network are still small. The network airs channels that were cleared by the RBA from the legal point of view, in line with coverage zones laid down in the valid broadcasting licenses. These channels are RTS 1, RTS 2, RTS digital, Pink, B92, Prva, Avala, Hepi, RTV1 (on the territory of Vojvodina), Studio B (in the Belgrade region) and RTS HD.

In keeping with the Action Plan for the implementation of the Digitalization Strategy, the end of March was supposed to have seen the adoption of the Digital Broadcasting Switchover Plan and the new Rulebook on Switching Over from Analog to Digital Broadcasting of Radio and Television Program and Access to Multiplex in Terrestrial Digital Broadcasting. The Rulebook



was tabled for public discussion in late 2011 and early 2012, but is yet to be adopted. The aforementioned Digital Broadcasting Switchover Plan, which aims at determining the sequence order of regions for a phased switch-off of the analog signal, the deadlines for a complete switchover to digital broadcasting in each of these regions, as well as the tasks and duties related to informing the public and the plan of assistance to the most vulnerable categories of the population, is visibly late, in the situation where the parliamentary elections are called and with the probability that the outgoing government will not pass it at all. In any case, March 2012 is a big month for television digitalization in Serbia. It will have seen the putting into operation of the seed of the new digital network in Serbia and the start of the simulcast as the first stage of digitalization in the country.