

V THE DIGITALIZATION PROCESS

Announcing the priorities of his ministry in the coming period (broadband Internet Access, greater participation of entrepreneurs in the process of adoption of strategic documents, improved e-trade, facilitating the access of the scientific community and SMEs to EU funds and establishing functional e-government), Stefan Lazarevic, State Secretary in the Ministry for Internal and Foreign Trade and Telecommunications, also mentioned digitalization. Lazarevic said that television signal in Serbia was currently broadcast from 15 initial network locations, stressing, however, that it was a low power broadcast for the purpose of testing the distribution network. "In the final network, the signal will be broadcast from many more locations and the first switch-off of the analog signal in certain coverage zones is expected in mid-next year", Lazarevic said. The new state secretary also expects Serbia to finish the digitalization process in the course of 2014. "We currently lack a project of the network, which is the first step we need to undertake; it will allow us to bring about a plan for the digital switchover. That plan will define in detail the term and the switchover for individual zones". Lazarevic also said that the Government of Serbia was seriously considering modalities for helping disadvantaged families to purchase equipment for the reception of digital signal. "The timing of the purchase of STBs should be linked to the switch-off of the analog signal in each particular region, although these devices are already available on the market", Lazarevic said. "Since their price will fall with time, the citizens should buy them immediately before the switchover to digital broadcasting. They should not even consider buying one until further notice".

It seems that the statements of the new state secretary carry a slightly different message than the ones we were used to hear from his predecessor. The message is still optimistic; according to Lazarevic, Serbia will finish the digitalization process in the course of 2014, although the Strategy was more cautious predicting 2015 as the end date for the digital switchover. On the other hand, instead of itemizing the advantages digitalization will bring to the citizens, Lazarevic very openly talked about what the state still had to do and what it should have done a long time ago – adopting a project of the network, followed by the passage of a digital switchover plan, which would determine the timeline for the switch-off of the analog signal and the switch-on of the digital signal in phases in each region.