

VI THE PRIVATIZATION PROCESS

The process of privatization of public media in Serbia remains completely blocked for the last year and a half. Four public radio and television stations from Kragujevac, Novi Pazar, Nis and Pancevo (RTV Kragujevac, Niska TV, TV Novi Pazar and TV Pancevo) officially requested in early August from the competent institutions to be definitively exempted from privatization and allowed to establish public services. At the same time, in Radio Sombor, whose privatization contract was terminated last year, there are different positions about the manner in which the status of this media should have been addressed. Sinisa Stricevic, the representative of Radio Sombor's "Nezavisnost" trade union told the daily "Pravda" that the only solution was to return his station under the umbrella of its original founder, the city of Sombor. On the other hand, Anita Beretic, the representative of the shareholders, believes that privatization is imminent, but that the said radio station needs the assistance of the city of Sombor and the municipality of Apatin. Of particular concern is the fact that the opponents of the privatization of public media have failed to mention the most serious consequence of stalled privatization – the lack of systemic mechanisms for protecting the program of public media from the influence of government, political organizations or economic power brokers. The said opponents of the privatization have failed to offer any solution to ensure such protection. Furthermore, the mere concept of public service is unthinkable without a generous financing model that would be predictable at least on the mid-term – which would allow for the making of development plans – and that would be independent from unwarranted influence by the state. The current model of budget financing of local and regional public media is precisely the one whose abundance and mid-term predictability will be impossible to rely on, considering the general need to cut public expenses. At the same time, this model brings local and regional public media in the position to be completely dependent of the good will of ruling politicians, which opens the door wide, if not to sycophantic reporting, then at least to conformist journalism and self-censorship. It remains to be seen what kind of funding model will be proposed by the proponents of regional public services. Until then, in the vacuum created by the privatization blockade, the editorial and HR policy of local and regional public media, as well as their financial position, shall remain under the direct control of local authorities.