

VII CONCLUSION

The month of July was marked by the physical assault on Teofil Pancic, the columnist of the *Vreme* weekly magazine, in a public place and before witnesses. The attack was unprovoked, save from the opinions on various topics Pancic has been expressing as a writer, which is his job. According to the media, the attackers are members of one of the many extremist far-right organizations. The unequivocal and decisive condemnation by the Serbian public, as well as the swift reaction of the police that resulted in the arrest of the perpetrators, will hopefully be a deterrent for others who could be plotting similar actions. It also raises the hope that Serbia is finally able to find the adequate mechanisms to defend itself from extremist violence against people who hold different opinions. Virtually at the same time, almost a full year after the adoption of the Law on the Amendments to the Law on Public Information, the Constitutional Court passed a decision that hardly surprised anyone: it ruled that the said Law was mostly in disagreement with the Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. In the period in which that unconstitutional Law loomed as a genuine threat, we have witnessed a rise in self-censorship. The result was that in July 2010, for the first time in the history of Serbian media, journalists were threatened for making their opinion known on their private blogs and web portals and not because what they reported in traditional media. These journalists have often shared their views on their private blogs because, due to self-censorship, they were not able to do it in traditional media. All that happened without the unconstitutional Law being implemented at all, with the exception of one case where the Belgrade-based Prosecutor's Office filed charges against the "Tabloid" magazine for infringement of the presumption of innocence. All that was achieved, however, in that lone case, at least according to media reports, was a main hearing that was scheduled and then postponed. The draconian penalties envisaged by the controversial Law turned out to be an effective deterrent and there was no need for them to be implemented in practice. On the other hand, the Ministry of Culture claims to have initiated the process of streamlining the media scene in keeping with the requirements of democratic development. It is true that the commissioning and publication of the Media Study produced by EU experts was a positive step forward. However, it remains to be seen to what extent the Ministry will continue with its useful initiatives and whether it will consider the objections already been voiced to the said Study, but also alternative proposals and suggestions that may be expected from domestic media professionals and the representatives of the very media, whose survival and future is at stake.