

# 3. Experience and Lessons learned?

## Case studies.

### c) Serbia

Serbia suffers the toughest legacy of state oppression on the media. For more than ten year, media were servile tools in the hands of the ruling socialist party and its allies, but all too often also under the control of opposition parties and leaders. This time of control and manipulation however came after a very promising development in the 1980s. Journalist Ivan Torov characterizes the decade of 1980-1990:

“In the first half of the ninth decade, after Tito disappeared from the scene, there began what many considered to be an encouraging liberation of the journalistic profession’s activities from its previous staunch political embrace. As political disputes in the federation grew and political confusion along with them, the number of media multiplied that bravely went forth to demystify the political and ideological concepts prevailing in Yugoslavia. It was even believed that journalism in Serbia and in some other republics, Croatia and Slovenia in particular, was on the right path to freeing itself from political restraints, and doing so more painlessly than expected, while also breaking away from the position of mere political-ideological transmitter. Unfortunately, in the mid-1980s this initial upsurge was roughly stifled and the leading media rushed full steam into the political gristmill that simply ground them up.”<sup>1</sup>

1987, the then head of the Serbian Alliance of Communist started the “anti-bureaucratic revolution”, freeing nationalism as a tool of political mass control and manipulation. Journalists were the first to bear the brunt, being victims indeed, but often also serving as willing participants. The media space was divided up and consolidated as key strategic position.

Professor Miroljub Radojkovic comments the changes:

“Citizens were packaged and delivered to their local government’s media like a semi-finished mass of group of consumers that was supposed to accept their message, and only their message, without question or importunity.”

And Dragos Ivanovic, former journalist with the once upon a time highly recognized daily Politika, analyses:

“Instead of creating public opinion that would control the government, the arrogant government stifled public opinion and took the obedient citizens under their own control. The artificial production of injurious opinion began with the spreading of lies, hatred, intolerance and all other kinds of evil.”<sup>2</sup>

The most important tool in the hands of the ruling regime was the TV. Ivanovic describes the system and its changes:

“In the previous socialist system, founding radio and TV stations was the jurisdiction of the Socialist Alliance organisation, which also took care of appointing the editor-in-chief and determining the station’s program plan. During the 1990s a large number of radio and TV stations were founded in towns throughout Serbia, but they were all part of the RTS family, thus component parts of the ‘united radio broadcasting system of the Republic’. With the collapse of this ‘family concept’, local stations

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<sup>1</sup> Republika, No. 172, 1997

<sup>2</sup> Ivanovic, Dragos, Plot against the Public, Republika, Belgrade 1999, p. 8

scattered like baby crabs from under their ‘mother’s’ skirt. Starting in 1992, they all began to receive their own channels and build their own, new studios. A real boom ensued in Serbia’s electronic media. An average of one new RTV was founded every week. By mid 1994, the number of private radio and TV stations, with temporary permits from the Federal Administration of Radio Communications, has grown to 80.”<sup>3</sup>

But the mere number of stations did not express any development towards pluralism, as the regime did its best to keep the control over the spreading number of outlets. Most of stations outside the direct RTS-control however were established by people close to the ruling elites, as TV Politika, TV Pink and TV Palma (politically affiliated to the Yugoslav United Left JUL, run by Mira Markovic, the wife of Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic), TV Kosava (established and run by Marjia Milosevic, the daughter of the Mira Markovic and Slobodan Milosevic) or BK TV (established as commercial enterprise by the brothers Karic, as international traders always depending on a good understanding with the authorities).

The most direct and obvious political manipulation however happened inside the RTS-family. Already in 1988, during the so-called “Yogurt revolution”, when a mass movement manipulated by the Socialist Party under Milosevic overthrew the local government in Novi Sad (Vojvodina), journalists were collectively divided up in a professional and a “patriotic” bloc. TV Novi Sad (TV NS) resisted for almost two years against the new local authorities and its attempts to take the station over. In March 1989, Slobodan Milosevic breached the constitution of the state of SFRY and de facto annulled the status of the autonomous provinces Vojvodina and Kosovo (and Methoija) with immediate consequences for the media.

The situation in Vojvodina got tense at the beginning of June 1990, heading for a referendum on Serbia’s new constitution, legalising the constitutional violations from the previous year. The executive council, headed by Radoman Bozovic at the time, decided to dismiss all directors and editors-in-chief working in stations founded by the Vojvodina Provincial Assembly. TV NS with its new director Petar Ljubojev and the new editorial team was transformed into the front-line of the “anti-bureaucratic revolution”, that was soon to spread all over the country with propaganda and ethnic hatred to assure the power of the new strong man Slobodan Milosevic.

In Kosovo, the police burst into the premises of RTV Pristina at the beginning of July 1990, forcibly interrupting the program in Albanian language. Around 1300 ethnic Albanian journalists and technicians were fired from their jobs.

But also in Belgrade, the regime cracked down on the media. On March 28, 1990, the television station Studio B, established by the city council of Belgrade, started operating. After barely 10 minutes on the air, an inspector from the Federal Inspection for Radio Communications rushed into its premises and stopped the broadcast. Only seven months later, the station started working again, just to be the first target again in spring 1991.

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<sup>3</sup> Ivanovic, p. 22f

On March 9, 1991, demonstrations broke out in the streets of Belgrade, confronting the biased reporting on state-run television. The demonstrations turned bigger and bigger and the government was afraid to lose control, sending for the first time army tanks against its own people in the streets of Belgrade, months before they started their warfare against Slovenia and Croatia. While it was relatively easy to enter the National assembly these days, the Belgrade radio and TV buildings were surrounded by compact cordons of police forces. RTS was renamed by the people at that time to "TV Bastille".

NTV Studio B, reporting on the events from the streets of Belgrade in professional way, was invaded by a group of armed policemen. They interrupted the program and started to remove and damage equipment.

As a result of the March 9 demonstrations, RTS director general Dusan Mitevic and his closest associates were replaced and it did not take long to start the first important purge. Mid 1991, right at the beginning of war against Slovenia and Croatia, Milorad Vucelic, the new acting RTS-director issued an order regarding "operations in circumstances of the immediate threat of war".

Dragos Ivanovic comments the situation:

"It was an excuse to impose new management by decree, incompetent people for the most part. A clear division of journalists was made into those who were patriotic and unpatriotic, into Serbs and anti-Serbs. People who were interested in presenting the 'Serbian cause', not the profession and objective reporting, took over the jobs of editors and main reporters."<sup>4</sup>

One year later, everybody was surprised by the decision of RTS to have a live broadcast of the anniversary of the March 9 events. But in the middle of the live broadcast Dobrosav Bjeletic, acting director general of RTS, and Dragoljub Milanovic, editor-in-chief of the News Program, burst angrily into the control room and imperiously cut off the broadcast with the push of a button, leaving several million viewers before blank screens without any explanation.

Another month later, Vojislav Seselj, leader of the Radical Party, read a list on Belgrade Television with the names of twelve journalists from the station who should be fired as soon as possible. He did not have to wait for long and all his wishes were more than fulfilled.

On January 11, 1993, journalists of Belgrade Television in the building's foyer were taken away their entrance passes. 1103 employees, 15.8 percent of the station's staff, was sent on paid "leave", i.e. permanently removed from their jobs. Prepared in secrecy and carried out in a flash, this action of purge cleansed the station from all its potential of critical journalism. Goran Percevic, a high official in the ruling Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) implicitly announced the action in the official state newspaper, stating that no one could work in a state institution "unless they think like we do".<sup>5</sup>

As many local radio and TV stations were established and controlled by the local authorities, this gave way to oppositional broadcasting when in the fall of 1996 a coalition of democratic opposition parties took over the local governments in 40 towns in Serbia. In the first half of 1997,

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<sup>4</sup> Ivanovic, p. 11

<sup>5</sup> Politika, January 7, 1993

the Council of the Association of Free Towns and Municipalities founded a TV Pool to parry the biased reporting of state-run TV. Unfortunately, this initiative failed owing to a lack of resolve and perseverance. While some of these municipality stations developed professional attitudes and some even joined the Association of Independent Electronic Media ANEM, others suffered the political attitudes of the ruling (oppositional) parties, behaving all too often not much better than the Socialist Party. Especially the Serbian Renewal Movement SPO of Vuk Draskovic got famous of its aggressive stands towards the local media in towns the party controlled. In September 1997, the party even joined the Radical Party and the ruling Socialist Party to oust the management of the Belgrade TV station Studio B.

A new round of media oppression started with the threat of Nato to bomb Serbia because of the regimes policy on Kosovo in the first half of October 1998. The Serbian government passed a regulation with new sanctions against journalists and merchants. The media were prohibited from "receiving or broadcasting parts of programs or programs and texts from foreign news media that act against the interests of our contry, spread fear, panic and defeatism or that have a negative effect on the citizens' readiness to preserve the integrity of the Republic of Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia". This regulation was formalised in a new Law on Public Information on October 20, 1998 by the Republic Assembly.

Especially the prime-time news on RTS 1 were during these years a firm half-hour propaganda tool for warfare or "peace negotiations", always following in the very moment the political needs of the regime and its president. With all the changes in management and journalist staff, the stations was adopted perfectly to serve the changing interests of the ruling parties. Mysticism was also used to deceive and delude the people. For a while, RTS 3 broadcast the series "Horoscope" by actress and prophetness Milja Vujanovic. It was sworn once a week during primetime and was very popular. The show was structured around the constant dissemination of hatred for the rest of the world, while glorifying the Serbs. On the July 14, 1994 program, Milja Vujanovic said that "war is a normal phenomenon; through war territories are occupied and borders established". When the political leaders of Serbia shifted towards a policy of peace negotiations at the end of 1994, the need for Milja's services came to an end and her program disappeared.

Especially the South of Serbia and the rural areas with its low-educated population is exposed to the monopol of the state broadcaster. In its 1998 World Press Freedom Review, the International Press Institute states:

"Access to unbiased information is particularly difficult in Serbia's rural areas where very often the state-owned RTS, which follows the strict Milosevic line, is the only station available. RTS is seen to be among those fomenting hatred through propaganda. On October 8 it carried a programme referring to the bombing of Belgrade during World War II and to the Nato bombing campaign against the Bosnian Serb Army in 1995. The programme alleged that during the Second World War the

Americans were bombing Belgrade targeting ‘maternity wards and kindergartens’ and not Germans. ‘Did they really want to kill Germans, or were they actually trying to kill Serbs’, asked the presenter.”<sup>6</sup>

No wonder the regime of Slobodan Milosevic and his Socialist Party was elected for years by a majority of the rural Serbia. RTS was the tool to control this electorate.

Marko Kekovic, main and responsible editor on the Novi Sad TV News Program, said 1993, expressing the “professional” standard at the RTS system: “I as a journalist, am not ashamed to lie in the interests of the Serbs.” “War is a continuation of Primetime News using other media”, the well-known aphorist Filip Mladenovic commented the developments in the state-controlled media. Asked, how all this was possible, Milos Vasic, journalist at the independent weekly Vreme, stated at a press conference in Washington already in 1993: “Give me just six months as editor of the three largest TV networks in America, and you will soon have not only civil war, but thermonuclear war as well.” The list of manipulations and violations of professionalism at RTS is endless and fortunately in the meantime well documented in scientific research and documentaries.<sup>7</sup> The Court of Honor of the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia (NUNS) summarizes the situation:

“The right of Serbia’s citizens to receive timely and comprehensive information about all important domestic and international events is considerably restricted, above all by the fact that a number of media act outside the professional and ethical standards of journalism, in particular Radio Television Serbia which is financed by all the citizens. These media are the propaganda tool of the parties and circles in power and completely adhere to the formula of propaganda: they distort and fail to disclose important information; they manipulate information which is often the equivalent of lying; they disseminate national and religious hatred and intolerance, as well as intolerance towards every differing political and other conviction, and any critical view of the government’s actions.”<sup>8</sup>

During the Nato-war against Serbia in March 1999, the regime declared the RTS-news program a must for all stations, obliging them by directive from the ministry of telecommunications and information to rebroadcast the central news program daily. This imposed “cooperations” disseminated the central propagandist pillar of the regime all through the country almost without alternative, as the independent stations were either closed or censored in their reporting.

The role of the state-controlled media was by western powers considered so strategic that RTS became a target of warfare. Sixteen employees were killed when a bomb hit the central RTS-building in Belgrade, interrupting the program in the middle of the news program on April 23. But also TV Novi Sad and 13 radio and television transmitters and 42 radio and TV repeaters were destroyed by Nato, estimated a value of around 100 million US-Dollars. Even if there is no doubt about RTS being a tool of propaganda, the fact of making it a target for warfare was and is considered by many journalist organisations as a violation of international laws, i.e.

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<sup>6</sup> 1998 World Press Freedom Review.

<sup>7</sup> See for example Mark Thompson, Forging War. The Media in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, published by Article 19, London 1994, or the Video documentaries “Images and Words of Hate” by the independent production house ARHITEL (Isidora Sekulic and Lazar Lalic).

<sup>8</sup> Right to information and professional and ethical standards in journalism, in: Documentation of the NUNS Court of Honor, Belgrade 1998.

the Geneva Convention. Nato-Spokesman Jamie Shea explained the decision of Nato to bomb RTS like this:

“RTS is not media. It’s full of government employees who are paid to produce propaganda and lies. To call it media is totally misleading. And therefore, we see that as a military target. It is the same thing as a military propaganda machine integrated into the armed forces. We would never target legitimate, free media.”<sup>9</sup>

The answer caused Terence Smith, leading the interview, to the question, if then schools could become a target too, as there work government employees educating people who might fight... The difference between blaming RTS being an unprofessional propaganda machine and making it a target as part of the military structure was for Nato at least not seen as essential.

A special merit has to be given here to the stations providing real public broadcast in Serbia during all these years. While the state controlled media were serving as partisan media for the ruling regime, being privatised by particular interests of the power holders, some independent stations kept up under harshest conditions their professionalism and their dedication to the freedom of the media. Heart and brain of this media freedom was and still is the Belgrade B92, once only a radio, in the meantime also TV, internet provider, publisher, network hub and much more. The attacks on this station during the 90s are all to many to even start listing them here.<sup>10</sup> There is a very comprehensive book written about the station in the meantime, explaining the outstanding role of B92 in the struggle for the freedom of the media.<sup>11</sup> Beside its own merits as an independent station and a dynamic factor for social and political changes in the country, the function as a hub for the Association of Independent Electronic Media ANEM was particularly important. Serving with its news program and its networking private broadcasters, but also radio and TV stations held by local (oppositional) authorities all over Serbia and Montenegro, ANEM reached out with its services to more than half of the citizens all over the country. Dragos Ivanovic praises the independent media:

“After our wide variety of experience all these years, it is easy to conclude that the independent media have played an important role in accurattely informing the public, or at least what there is of it in Serbia. If it were not for Nasa Borba and Danas, B92 and the entire ANEM family, to mention only a few, much less would be known in Serbia about how the terrible war in the former Yugoslavia came about, who carried out ethnic cleansing, how the economy and the livelihood of millions of people was destroyed, and why, living in the middle of Europe, we have remained isolated from the entire world. The question raised by the independent media and the information they published were a true nightmare for the regime that has been hiding the truth from the people all along.”<sup>12</sup>

The stories of the state-controlled daily Politika and the state-run news agency Tanjug during all these years would deserve another longer description about the state and its media.

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<sup>9</sup> Nato-Spokesman Jamie Shea in an interview for Online NewsHour on May 4, 1999. see [www.medienhilfe.ch/News/Archiv/1999/KosoWar/newshour.htm](http://www.medienhilfe.ch/News/Archiv/1999/KosoWar/newshour.htm)

<sup>10</sup> For comprehensive reports on the violation of media freedom in Serbia, see the annual World Press Freedom Review, issued by the International Press Institute IPI. For more detailed information on single attacks and repressive measures, see the Weekly Report on Media Repression in Serbia, later Weekly Media Update, provided by the Association of Independent Electronic Media ANEM.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew Collin, This is Serbia calling: Rock 'n' Roll Radio and Belgrade's Underground Resistance (London: Serpent's Tail Press, 2001). ISBN: 1852426829

<sup>12</sup> Ivanovic, p. 86

With the elections of September 23, 2000, the picture started changing. The all too obvious election fraud by the ruling Socialist Party caused harsh protests. On October 1, the staff of Radio Belgrade's third channel, of RTV Novi Sad and a group of 50 journalists of the state-run Vecernje Novosti daily demanded editorial policy changes. Dragoljub Milanovic, RTS director, fired all members of the state TV strike committee. On the evening of October 4, state TV carried an announcement by the Interior Ministry saying that "individuals from the ranks of Djindjic's pro-NATO party, many of whom are known criminals, violent persons and drug addicts, are inciting, organizing and perpetrating violence against citizens". But that was about the last message of this regime. Local stations around the country suddenly refused to re-broadcast RTS news. Especially in the municipalities where the DOS-coalition won the elections, local media rebelled and the state-imposed system of forced statewide rebroadcasting of the RTS-news program fall apart. Many local stations instead started rebroadcasting the B92-news and information programs.

On October 5, 2000, the regime finally was overthrown in an mass-mobilisations mainly from the countryside – unexpectedly after ten years of ruling without bloodsheet. DOS had called for protest rallies to demand the recognition of the election results. At the RTS building, some 30 policemen in full riot gear entered the station and about the same number was deployed in front of the building. Demonstrators, after taking the federal parliament, moved on to the "TV Bastille" in Takovska Street and set the building ablaze. The office rooms were destroyed by the angry people and director Dragojub Milanovic and Milorad Komrakov, editor-in-chief of the news program, were almost lynched for the years of distortion they imposed on the people.

Nebojsa Covic, one of the leaders of DOS, appeared as the first guest of the "New RTS" shortly after 9 p.m., after taking over the building in Kosutnjak. The strike committee with former director Nebojsa Ristic and Gordana Susa, president of the Independent Union of Journalists NUNS, took over the duty to run the station till some legal procedures would appoint the new leadership. Zoran B. Nikolic describes the situation at RTS and its own program just days after the changes:

"The shows produced by RTS are still quite poor from a professional viewpoint. Every evening, for instance, RTS airs the Open Studio talk show, and numerous DOS leaders have appeared in it in the past weeks. Their hosts, however, are too humble and conspicuously frightened, they pose leading questions, and they get angry when viewers inquiring about controversial issues, doing their best to help their guests avoid answering them. The same is the case when a guest is not a DOS member, but is in a high position. Thus Yugoslav Army Chief of Staff Nebojsa Pankovic and head of the State Security Service, Rade Markovic, were given the full treatment: admiration, fawning and assistance in avoiding slippery ground. On the other hand, representatives of the outgoing regime are frequently subject to very humiliating treatment. Thus senior Socialist official Ivica Dacic could not finish a single sentence because he was constantly interrupted by his host, a mouse unexpectedly turned into a lion. The entirely unprofessional attitude of all the hosts of this show is so obvious that even some DOS leaders demanded that it end. But to no avail. They are so used to such practices that they do not

know another way to do it. It is interesting to add that except for Milorad Komrakov no other RTS official has resigned, and Dragoljub Milanovic is formally still its director.”<sup>13</sup>

The state-controlled media opened to the former opposition leaders and NGO activists, who had been denied access for a whole decade. But the changes were more opportunistic than fundamental. Zoran B. Nikolic comments:

“Some, as the federal TV station Yu Info, BK TV and the Tanjug news agency, for instance, liberated themselves without any outside help. It was shocking to hear on Radio Belgrade the same voices that until a day ago had denounced the opposition as foreign lackeys and traitors, now incessantly quoting Vojislav Kostunica”<sup>14</sup>

The parliamentary elections in the Republic of Serbia on October 23 were the first test for the new federal government and the behaviour of the media. The campaign coverage in the state media was regulated by the Law on Elections (9 October) and the ensuing Rules of the Election Coverage (13 November). The state-controlled media therewith were obliged to provide fair and objective coverage of all parties. There was a huge coverage on television, with several hours of direct access programming daily. The amount of election programming came close to a media-overkill, as people after the October events were not too interested of following hourly long political debates. The main problem however was again with the state-broadcasters and the direct political influence of the parties, as the election monitoring by the European Institute for the Media (EIM) shows:

“While deliberate distortion in the RTS political coverage is now a thing of the past, a number of important problems remain. Throughout the election broadcasts on RTS, the main problem was not unfairness to any of one political party, but possibly ‘exaggerated coverage’, through excessive direct-access electoral programming. This appears not to have been the fault of the television editors, but of the political parties themselves, who shaped the coverage. (...) Four to five hours of daily party messages failed to serve the main purpose: to inform the voters of the existing political options, while they seemed likely to alienate audience from politics by the viewer-unfriendly format.”<sup>15</sup>

EIM also states, that RTS was – unlike other television stations – not covering the campaign in the news programmes, but as most critical point writes:

“It was also noted that RTS sometimes shied away from discussing subjects potentially embarrassing for the new government, i.e. power cuts, which were covered by TV Politika and Studio B.”<sup>16</sup>

The RTS stuck to the way it had learned to do political journalism for more than ten years: with obedient court reporting. More prosaic, the EIM-media monitoring states in its conclusions and recommendations:

“It should be however noted that the election coverage on the state media, specifically on television, was inadequate to the task.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Nikolic, Zoran B., Post-Electoral Serbia: Setting the Media free. AIM Belgrade, Oct. 29, 2000. See [www.medienhilfe.ch/News/Archiv/2000/AIM\\_SER1029.htm](http://www.medienhilfe.ch/News/Archiv/2000/AIM_SER1029.htm)

<sup>14</sup> Nikolic, Zoran B., Post-Electoral Serbia: Setting the Media free. AIM Belgrade, Oct. 29, 2000. See [www.medienhilfe.ch/News/Archiv/2000/AIM\\_SER1029.htm](http://www.medienhilfe.ch/News/Archiv/2000/AIM_SER1029.htm)

<sup>15</sup> European Institute for the Media: Media Monitoring of the Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Serbia (between December 13 and 20), Preliminary Report, published 23 December 2000. see [www.medienhilfe.ch/Projekte/SER/MediaReports/EIM-Monit.htm](http://www.medienhilfe.ch/Projekte/SER/MediaReports/EIM-Monit.htm)

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*

The vision of a rapid and successful media transition proved soon to be all too optimistic, as the depth of the inherited problems lasts much longer than the old regime did. And it became obvious that the new regime rather followed the old one keeping the RTS as a system in its continuity of a state-controlled broadcaster instead of building a new system. While the winning coalition of oppositional parties started immediately freeing the state-run media from the control of the Socialist Party and its allies, it did not free the media in general, but tried to impose its own rule. Ljiljana Smajlovic, Media Advisor to IREX ProMedia, assesses the situation:

“Independent media found themselves competing against an array of ‘newly liberated’ state outlets whose journalists, well versed in the art of political submission, were eager to ingratiate themselves with the new authorities and win a political rehabilitation of sorts. That urge coincided favorably with the new authorities’ desire to overtake all channels of communication with the electorate that had formerly been closed to them, as well as to recommend themselves to constituents in anticipation of December 2000 Serbia parliamentary elections, which the DOS (Democratic Opposition of Serbia) eventually won in a landslide. On October 5, for instance, President Vojislav Kostunica expressly chose to make his presidential TV debut on Serbia’s state television channel that had just been ‘liberated’. The same night, the new star of ‘newly liberated’ Television Politika openly wore a Kostunica campaign badge during her interviews with protagonists of what would become known as Belgrade’s October Revolution.”<sup>18</sup>

Zoran B. Nikolic comments on the manipulations by the old and the new regime:

“Serbian state TV (RTS) and the papers published by the Politika company have not changed much in that respect save for the names of politicians whose activities they cover. For over a decade they have been systematically purged of anything that even resembles professionalism.”<sup>19</sup>

RTS as a free and professional service for all citizens was one of the campaign promises of the broad election-coalition Democratic Opposition of Serbia DOS. But soon it became obvious that the 16 parties in the coalition were less than clear, how that should be achieved. Snezana Stefanovic, Belgrade journalist with the daily BLIC, writes:

“The problem is how to realize that ideal, and how the DOS would define the idea of a ‘citizen’s service’. It seems that almost every party has its own vision of this service. That was how the decision on who was to be appointed editor of information and other programs – as well as who was to be director of Radio-Television Serbia – fell apart before it even got underway.”<sup>20</sup>

The basic problem however was the inability to find a common strategy for fast changes. The existing situation of frequencies for example, allocated to the stations according to political criteria during Milosevic’s rule, survived his presidency. The International Press Institute states about the state-controlled and regime-loyal broadcast media,

“which established vast national coverage thanks to privileges granted during that period, still enjoy these privileges. The former regime did everything possible to pack the spectrum of frequencies with loyal stations and there are now no frequencies available for any new stations, independent or otherwise.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Smajlovic, Ljiljana, The Current Media Situation in Serbia. March 2001. [www.promedia.org/countries/serbia-montenegro/media.htm](http://www.promedia.org/countries/serbia-montenegro/media.htm)

<sup>19</sup> Nikolic, Zoran B., Post-Electoral Serbia: Setting the Media free. AIM Belgrade, Oct. 29, 2000. See [www.medienhilfe.ch/News/Archiv/2000/AIM\\_SER1029.htm](http://www.medienhilfe.ch/News/Archiv/2000/AIM_SER1029.htm)

<sup>20</sup> Stefanovic, Snezana, Radio-Television Serbia: Servant without a Master. Media Online, 10-08-2001.

<sup>21</sup> World Press Freedom Review 2000. See [www.medienhilfe.ch/Reports/ipi2000/ser.htm](http://www.medienhilfe.ch/Reports/ipi2000/ser.htm)

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This privileged position gives the former state-loyal media the chance to keep their influence and opportunistically convert to the new situation, profiting even from foreign capital coming into the media market of Serbia today. Foreign investors started buying into the pro-Milosevic media, perpetuating the distorted media landscape further. Some private-owned pro-regime media managed to keep themselves alive like that, developing their broadcast capacities even further without any changes in the professional attitudes. The state-media on the other side got stuck in their non-critical attitude to state officials and organs, just exchanging the former ruling parties with the new ones. The International Press Institute comments:

“Although there is no doubt that this habit developed because of the internal repression of the former regime, it is now clear that the practice has taken root and exists even when there is no more political control.”<sup>22</sup>

The procedure to find a new editor-in-chief for the RTS-news program during summer 2001 was up to now just the worst example of a whole range of political manipulation by the former opposition and new ruling coalition. Gordana Susa, president of the Association of Independent Journalists NUNS and one of the candidates for the job, describes:

“Aleksandar Crkvenjakov (President of the Board of Directors of Radio Television of Serbia RTS) was trying to dissuade me from my intention to apply for that position until the last moment, saying that I did not have the support of the Democratic Party of Serbia, which was analogous to the fact that he had the support of the Democratic Party. The emphasising the story that the key positions in Radio Television of Serbia had been secured by a prior arrangement for the members of the Democratic Party, and for the Democratic Party of Serbia means that the idea of Radio Television of Serbia becoming a public service that would serve the interests of the citizens were abandoned.”<sup>23</sup>

Milorad Petrovic, editor of the Second Edition of the news program Dnevnik at RTS and also candidate as editor-in-chief, resigned from that position and all other mandates in that media organisation, explaining on July 25 about the influence the Democratic Opposition of Serbia tried to exert ever since October 5, 2000:

“There is no important difference there, both in their approach to those things, and in general, between the era of Milosevic and this now. The television is a powerful medium, and in spite of their proclamations, the authorities want to take the job of the journalists, that is, to do the editorial job. (...) Each political party has tried through their man, who has been in some way in connection with Radio Television of Serbia, immediately after October 5, to edit the news, events, or to present the public figures in relation to other political parties, or to the leaders within the Democratic Opposition of Serbia.”<sup>24</sup>

Snezana Stefanovic comments the struggle for new top staffing:

“The foregoing case demonstrates the fragility and non-independence of big television stations. They are big only perhaps in numbers of people they employ, or maybe in the size of their ruins. (...) Even though the broadcaster employed over 8000 people last year, and 7300 this year, it's hard to find a young new face.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> World Press Freedom Review 2000. See [www.medienhilfe.ch/Reports/ipi2000/ser.htm](http://www.medienhilfe.ch/Reports/ipi2000/ser.htm)

<sup>23</sup> Candidates protest closing of RTS editor-in-chief competition; in: ANEM'S weekly Media Update, July 28-31, 2001. See [www.medienhilfe.ch/Projekte/SER/MediaReports/Reports.htm](http://www.medienhilfe.ch/Projekte/SER/MediaReports/Reports.htm)

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Stefanovic, Snezana, Radio-Television Serbia: Servant without a Master. Media Online, 10-08-2001.

The issue of “Serbian guilt and responsibility”, facing the public in Serbia with war crimes committed by Serb forces, shows well the difference in professionalism and dedication to social and political values between the old-new state-run media and the independent ones that stick to the professionalism they were fighting for all these years. Miovan Mracevich, Canadian journalist living in Belgrade, comments:

“In terms of catharsis and the media, some things have changed and some haven’t. Reporting or referring to war crimes committed by Serbs in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo is no longer taboo in the state media, readily apparent in all the coverage given to the recent discovery of the mass graves of ethnic Albanians in Serbia. But while the state media continues to be limited essentially to reporting, it is the independent media (to use the Milosevic-era term) who lead the way in the discussion of the issues of guilt and responsibility for these crimes. Belgrade’s B92 media house deserves special mention in this regard.”<sup>26</sup>

Instead of contributing to the building up of professional media and a public broadcast system, the state-controlled media continue distorting the media landscape. Ljiljana Smajlovic describes:

“In the end, state media were not successful in presenting the independent media with a credible market challenge. Instead, the short-term result of their entry on the market under the guise of ‘newly liberated’ media was muddying the professional waters, or rather blurring the already murky lines between professionalism on one side, and political activism on behalf of ‘democracy forces’ on the other. The fall of the old regime also exposed the extent to which all state media had become pauperized and neglected during Milosevic’s final years. State media are technologically backward, its journalists are politically inexperienced, professionally untrained and nearly computer and/or Internet illiterate. Under the present circumstances, they have as yet precious little to offer in terms of journalistic excellence in Serbia. When tasked to at least give a good impersonation of impartial, unbiased reporters, they fail demonstrably. Milosevic era constraints upon them may have been lifted, along with the climate of intimidation and fear, but dismantling Milosevic’s negative legacy in the media will require an altogether different kind of effort than the October 5 burning of the Federal Parliament building. (...)The struggle to build and promote professional standards in Serbian journalism will thus largely fall on independent media alone, at least for the present time.”<sup>27</sup>

Immediately after the political changes of 5 October 2000, the Belgrade Media Center together with the Independent Association of Journalists in Serbia NUNS, the Association of Private TV Stations, the Yugoslav Lawyers’ Committee and other relevant organizations started working on providing the expertise for a systematic transition of Serbia’s media by producing a comprehensive survey of transition models. Problems of legal ownership, law regulations, frequency management, codes of ethics a.s.o. at RTS were assessed, the subject, objectives and functions of the new PBS project were identified and several conferences with international participation were organized. The objective is “to establish a PBS observing the world solutions and standards, scaled up and adjusted to the specific needs of citizens and their economic possibilities”. In a report by June 2000, the situation of RTS is assessed. The report says:

“The findings of these analyses indicate the need for urgent and radical changes in the economic-financial status of Radio Television Serbia such as it is now. (...) The media scene in Serbia reflects a chaotic and suspended society. Media functions have been mixed up and the rules of operation of electronic media, along with the yardsticks for the justifiability of their existence completely disregarded and trampled on. Absolute abuse of state RTV on the part of the former regime equated

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<sup>26</sup> Mracevich Milovan, Serbia’s reluctant Path to Catharsis. Transition Online, 16-08-2001.

<sup>27</sup> Smajlovic, *ibid.*

this house with inconceivable fascist propaganda. The shadow of a doubt that the RTS or a similar national 'state' house - the democratic change notwithstanding - actually cannot be anything but a tool in the hands of the authorities, has not been dispelled as yet."<sup>28</sup>

The changes for this transformation however are bleak. RTS employs today some 8500 people, many of them engaged in a wide range of secondary activities such as producing records and cassettes or renting out its own folk and entertainment orchestras, but many also personally to be held accountable for disseminating hate-speech and open war-mongering for years.

Technically the TV is in very poor situation, mainly due to the damages caused by the war-bombings, while the radio was kept short all the time, producing three all-day programs using only ancient typewriters and not a single computer.

In their February 2000 newsletter, NUNS states on the RTS-transformation:

"Ever since its establishment, the IJAS has been insisting on RTS being disposed by the model of a public utility, serving all citizens. Following October 5, this association has renewed this call and Democratic Opposition of Serbia, the current power-wielder, has accepted it as a part of its platform in the September and December 2000 elections. We are convinced that the RTS cannot 'serve all the citizens' unless it were genuinely transformed, since 'to serve all' hardly implies meeting 'a little' the daily political demands of all parties and groupings in Serbia, but building an autonomous outlet controlled by the public which should most importantly observe high standards in professionalism and ethics. This would especially be valid for this media house, widely remembered as an epitome of the most brutal, totalitarian propaganda.

The projects not committed to advocating an essential professionalization of RTS are merely rendering vulgar the very notion of a public service and make it a mere tool in defending "the positions of work" at the house."<sup>29</sup>

Two months later, by the end of May, Aleksandar Crkvenjakov was appointed to the post of (New) Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) General Manager. NUNS describes the problems he faces there, quoting Branka Prpa, a historian and journalist:

"The heaviest burden upon the RTS is the situation of all the same old people being still retained by the house, while on the other hand true professionals, even for average pays, would be glad to take their place provided the RTS ranks were really purified. There is no cause for maudlin sessions on this as some of the employees should not only be dismissed but sent to jail direct, too. The elaboration made by the Managerial Board is a superficial survey, as the financial malversations and criminal acts that there were took such proportions that they require to be tackled by investigative organs."<sup>30</sup>

Svetlana Djurdevic-Lukic goes on commenting for NUNS:

"There is never a shortage of salutary solutions, though. The hot potato the Government passes on to Managerial Board, it to General Manager, he to politicians and it goes all over again in a vicious circle and it could be done away with by landing it in the hands of a foreign editor. Being chewed upon is the notion of a consulting firm abroad on the payroll of international community being tasked with the condition research and drawing up of all detailed plans for scaling down the personnel numbers, technological requirements and capabilities and eventual training. Logical enough as this plan is, there

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<sup>28</sup> Media Center and the Independent Journalist Association of Serbia: TRANSITION PROCESS IN THE MEDIA. COMPLETION OF STAGE 1 - WORKING GROUP FOR MEDIA TRANSITION. Public Broadcasting Service Project. Project Coordinator: Nikola Mirkov, June 2001.

<sup>29</sup> Independent Journalist Association of Serbia NUNS/IJAS, Newsletter (Serbia File) No. 8, February 2000. see <http://www.nuns.org.yu/english/dosije/8/>

<sup>30</sup> Djurdevic-Lukic, Svetlana, Who'll Handle the Hot Potato - Awaiting Transformation of Radio Television of Serbia? In: Independent Journalist Association of Serbia NUNS/IJAS, Newsletter (Serbia File) No. 10, April/May 2000. see <http://www.nuns.org.yu/english/dosije/10/>

is a problem of our having to continue to finance propagandists until that unspecified future moment and not receiving many of the answers that the RTS employees must have and owe us.”<sup>31</sup>

In the same issue, Jovanka Matic analyses the content of the RTS-news reporting, focussing almost exclusively on state politics. She states:

“By allotting the political news most of the time and central place on the news agenda, the RTS editors are keeping high the degree of the society's politicization and sustaining an interest in the public in what the political elite does, whereas all other activities of the country are held less significant. The least present as segments of the image of the daily routine offered by the RTS are the most problematic ones - the economic and social ones. Of 70 news reports in the said news, mere four were on business affairs while on more broadly understood social issues, barring the pollution in Kosovo, there were none. Never-changing speakers address the viewers through the RTS window onto the world: Kostunica - Svilanovic - Djindjic - Covic - Djindjic - Djelic - Covic - Kostunica - Djindjic - Svilanovic - Covic. Interlarded may be a minister, his deputy or an army general and colonel. (...) There is no journalistic research to be found on the RTS, it accepts and gives to the viewers just what the politicians have prepared for publicising, at the time they think fit and on subjects they pick out...”<sup>32</sup>

Vladan Radosavljevic, Editor at the Belgrade Media Center, comments on the transformation of RTS:

“The future radio and television services cannot resemble the current RTS in any way. Establishing a true public service will not, however, be possible without decisive, even courageous action on the part of the government and the Serbian Council. It looks uncertain. Instead of demonstrating their responsibility and vision for the future public television by jumping on the opportunities that are now opening up, the Serbian authorities are having a hard time resisting the privileges that their undisputed ownership of RTS offers. Instead of demonstrating their sense of democratic responsibility by delegating independent experts, the new government intends to appoint mostly DOS members to the Administrative Council of Radio and Television.”<sup>33</sup>

On December 7, 2000, a round-table with representatives of the Serbian Government, media and non-government organisations was held to discuss the future of RTS. As a main task, the depoliticisation and reorganisation of the state broadcaster was addressed. Information Minister Biserka Matic stated:

“There is no precedent anywhere in the world for a television station with more than eight thousand employees to be unable to form a team to produce news. They are behaving as though they had spent a long time in prison and are now unable to cope with freedom.”<sup>34</sup>

Veran Matic, chairman of the Association of Independent Electronic Media in Serbia (ANEM) stressed, that the reconstruction of the state television depends on the reconstruction of the entire broadcasting system. He added that there were independent radio stations which were a public service in the former period and state television, which was a propaganda service, as well as private stations which played the same role for the ruling parties.

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<sup>31</sup> ibid

<sup>32</sup> Matic, Jovanka, What Is New on New Radio Television of Serbia. Reading Television. In: Independent Journalist Association of Serbia NUNS/IJAS, Newsletter (Serbia File) No. 10, April/May 2000. see <http://www.nuns.org.yu/english/dosije/10/>

<sup>33</sup> Radosavljevic, Vladan, On the Ruins of TV Bastille: The development of a Public Broadcasting Service in Serbia. Media Online 2001. [www.medienhilfe.ch/Projekte/SER/MediaReports/MediaOnline/2001-RTS-PBS.htm](http://www.medienhilfe.ch/Projekte/SER/MediaReports/MediaOnline/2001-RTS-PBS.htm)

<sup>34</sup> quoted in: ANEM weekly report on Media Repression in Serbia, issue December 2 – 8, 2000. see [www.medienhilfe.ch/Projekte/SER/MediaReports/ANEM/2000-12-01.htm](http://www.medienhilfe.ch/Projekte/SER/MediaReports/ANEM/2000-12-01.htm)

In a written contribution ten months after the political changes, Matic analyses the lack of changes since:

“Ten months after the political changes it appears that more substantial system changes have bypassed the media sphere. Even more worrisome is the suspicion that utter absence of any changes in the media field is not the result stemming from the concurrence of adverse circumstances but conscious determination of the new people now wielding political power in the country to retain certain mechanisms formerly used as a convenient vehicle by the Milosevic regime to exert pressure on the media.”<sup>35</sup>

As a specific problem, Matic stresses the lack of progress and changes in the legal framework. He explains this delay with the political pressure:

“What is certain, though, is that there has been some political opposition to the adoption of the new regulations, particularly in the part envisaging that the powers pertaining to decision-making and regulation of the media field are to be transferred from the government to an independent regulatory body as well as that the Serbian Government is to be stripped of the right to exert direct influence on the state radio and TV broadcaster which is supposed to be transformed into a public broadcasting service.”<sup>36</sup>

Addressing the situation of the state-broadcasters ten months after the change of government, Matic describes:

“Even though state broadcasters opened up to all political options after the October changes, they have not managed to solve the majority of the problems inherited from the past. However, it seemed that the most pressing problem of the state radio television broadcaster, namely, direct political influence on its editorial policy, was resolved, and that only financial and personnel-related issues needed to be addressed in the upcoming months. However, ten months later, the situation with Radio Television Serbia (RTS) is even worse, apparently, than immediately after the changes. Namely, there are, once again, apparent signs of the intensifying political pressure on RTS and its editors. (...) Local media, controlled by the local authorities, which also fall in the category of state broadcasters, are under an ever-increasing pressure of the local branches of the ruling parties. In addition to this, these broadcasters cannot be privatised without prior consent of local governments which is why their position does not fit the role of watchdogs for the public at the local level.”<sup>37</sup>

The OSCE, starting its mission to the FRY early in 2001, defined restructuring of the media landscape in the country as one of the core tasks. The organization states:

“Creating self-sustainable, professional and objective media outlets that perform according to the internationally accepted professional standards turned out to be a huge task, but the biggest challenge of all was to transform ‘Radio Television of Serbia’ (RTS) into a Public Broadcasting Service. RTS, the former Milosevic regime’s main propaganda tool, with over 7000 employees, is tottering continually on the verge of bankruptcy, needs its professional standards to be raised, uses obsolete technology but still has an extremely influential role on the local scene when it comes to shaping the general public opinion.”<sup>38</sup>

We could discuss the notion of “objective media”, but even more doubtful is the way the OSCE started implementing its mission: The OSCE office was opened inside the RTS premises and

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<sup>35</sup> Matic, Veran, MEDIA IN SERBIA – TEN MONTHS ON - brief analysis. see

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*

<sup>38</sup> OSCE Support to the Transformation of Radio Television Serbia. A Challenging and Gratifying Task. OSCE Media Department, Belgrade, February 2002.

the organization concentrates fully on the RTS in its political lobbying and financial requests. For the technical updating of RTS only, the OSCE states a need of 2 Mio. €:

“It is estimated that, to achieve the news desk reconstruction and raise the level of professional skills and standards, a total of 500’000 € is needed to purchase the necessary computer network and database equipment and 1,5 million € to buy cameras, editing room and audio / lighting equipment.”<sup>39</sup>

This sum would for sure make RTS a technically sophisticated station, but there is little hope that it would make it a good PBS... And there is little the private, independent media in Serbia may expect from this one-sided intervention by the OSCE.

The plans to transform RTS to a western style PBS does not only have to face the very problematic professional legacy in journalism and management, but also debts of millions of Euro or Dollars. To the state electricity company alone, RTS has open bills for millions of German marks. And by August 2001, Eurovision’s delegates at a visit to Belgrade came up with another bill to Aleksandar Crvenjakov, director general of RTS: 5 million Swiss francs in order to continue cooperation broken during the period of sanctions. To add to this bills are open court procedures by former employees, fired for political reasons back in 1993 and the legacy of high salaries and privileges for the former RTS-leadership.

The lack of real political will and decisions on behalf of the new government for transformation of the old state-controlled media during the first one year after the changes of October 5, 2000, is more than obvious and commented from all different sides during the year. This lack of strategy and appropriate action allowed the state-controlled media to survive as dinosaurs. Private media on the other side faced other consequences due to this non-activity by the new government concerning the media regulations. Matic goes straight when commenting the consequences:

“Independent broadcasters have been brought to the verge of existence by the new authorities’ measures (i.e. the absence of adequate measures in the media field). Due to the moratorium, the broadcasters which did not possess licences in the Milosevic era because they were treated as the enemies of the state have remained ‘pirates’, while other stations do possess some broadcasting licences, but valid only for extremely small areas of coverage. Consequently, their potential for substantial revenues from advertising is extremely restricted. On the other hand, media moguls who created their empires thanks to close ties with the Milosevic-Markovic family have retained their broadcasting licences for national coverage; they have become closer to the new people now in power and thus maintained a lion’s share of advertising market which is the main source of income for radio and TV broadcasters. Moreover, the stations of the swiftly ‘converted’ media moguls from the Milosevic times have drastically enhanced their position on the media market by purchasing for the next couple of years the rights to the most attractive foreign TV shows for the territory of Serbia, and they have been able to do this owing to privileges inherited from the past. Delay in adoption of the new Public Broadcasting Act and the announcing of the public competition for broadcasting licences makes it impossible for independent broadcasters to work on development plans as no one knows what the conditions of the public competition for frequency allocation will be nor whether the independent media will be granted any licences at all. Finally, the major defect of the existing media system is that the independent media are not allowed to expand to national area of coverage which has been, up to now, reserved for the state television and Milosevic media ‘converts’.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *ibid*

<sup>40</sup> Matic

Unfortunately, the consequences of the new regimes media policy Matic is drawing, we have to share:

“Neglect of independent electronic media and mutual rapprochement of the quasi-state media and the new authorities is a reason good enough for serious concern and it is unpromising in terms of further democratic media system development in Yugoslavia. Judging by the quality of content and the degree of critical stance towards the authorities, only the independent media possess the potential for an adequate social function which the media in a democratic society should have.”<sup>41</sup>

Matic goes for concrete recommendations to “improve the media situation in Serbia both in short and long term, thus contributing considerably to the desperately needed social stability in the transition period”. Under the recommendations to the authorities of the FR Yugoslavia and Serbia he mentions as point 4:

“The Government should prepare a report on the situation in the media: what it has actually inherited from the former regime and what its plans intended to eliminate chaos and confusion are. This is also important with respect to the new laws and regulations which are bound to be introduced sooner or later, but this is also a way to make a clean break with the past to bring to an end bitter discussions about injustices and how to redress them as well as to propose the measures necessary for the reforms, if there is a general consent about it already in place.”<sup>42</sup>

In his recommendations towards the international community, Matic lists as point for the Public Broadcast Service:

“Provided that the state media are indeed eventually legally transformed into public service broadcasters, it is necessary to support the process of their transition, above all, through the training courses for journalists and by helping them advance their technical resources and equipment. Transformation into public service broadcasters will entail the necessity to provide autonomous financing for these stations so it will be necessary to provide support for the training of managers in order to optimise the use funds raised through subscription.”<sup>43</sup>

For the local broadcasters in the municipalities, up to now still property and under control of the local authorities, Miroljub Radojkovic sees by assessing the “twilight zone” of Serbian state media three directions these stations can be transformed:

“Those that make sufficient revenue may be re-registered as limited liability companies. Local authorities will only have some influence on them equal to their previous investments or amounts of donations, which will be expressed through the number of their representatives in steering boards. Complete privatization of local broadcasters of this type is also possible if there are any interested financiers who will offer fresh capital. Those who cannot expect to survive from their own revenues, but still do not want to continue to be financed from the municipal budget, have a third option: To become public, non-profit foundations of the local authorities and citizens, and open society media – the so-called third sector. A non-profit character does not mean that they would work for free, but only that profit would not be placed above the interests of local community and citizens. Private owners of national and local radio and television channels would face verification of status according to new rules of the game regarding allocation of concessions, conditions of financing, and forms of association.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> ibid

<sup>42</sup> ibid

<sup>43</sup> ibid

<sup>44</sup> Radojkovic, Miroljub, Coming out of Golem’s Shadow: Media Transition in Serbia. See [www.medienhilfe.ch/Reports/SER-mediTRANS.htm](http://www.medienhilfe.ch/Reports/SER-mediTRANS.htm)

There was much evidence one year after the changes on the top political leadership on the level of the FR Yugoslavia as well as at the Republic of Serbia, that there is very little understanding and maybe even less will for real changes – not only in the media field. The transformation of the whole media system is a key factor for real changes reaching the whole economy, society and politics and not just putting new faces on an old system.

When by April 4, 2002 the Serbian government finally adopted a draft broadcasting law<sup>45</sup> to be tabled in July to the Parliament, this was the 9<sup>th</sup> draft version – and it still got rather sharp reactions from professional side. Karol Jakubowicz lists in his Analysis and Comments on the law, written as expertise for the Council of Europe, three fields of concern: Issues concerning the freedom of speech and political interference into broad-casting, Need for fuller or improved regulation of some areas and the structure of the law.<sup>46</sup> Especially the first point on political interference is relevant here. Jakubowicz states as major concerns:

“The double licence/registration system (see Art. 43) which means that a state body might overturn the licensing decision of the Republican Broadcasting Agency; (...) the continued existence of stations of Regional and Local Authorities (Art. 96), whereby public authorities have direct control of broadcasting establishments.”<sup>47</sup>

Jakubowicz argues with Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights<sup>48</sup> against the danger of political control. While these local stations have obviously little to do with so called Public Broadcast Service, there are also concerns related to the Public Broadcast Service (Art. 76ff) mainly on the legal form and status as well as on the role and staffing of the governing bodies.

There was about no week since that RTS did not hit the headlines with some negative events. Strikes by the employees, resignations from important positions due to political manipulation<sup>49</sup>, questioned decisions about elections and assignments as with the new RTS programme editor-in-chief Bojana Lekic, former star journalist at TV B92. Appointed unanimously on October 10, 2001 together with Petar Jovanovic as director of Radio Television Novi Sad, Milovan Nedeljkov as editor-in-chief of the News Programme Novi Sad, Karel Turza as editor-in-chief of the Third Programme of Radio Beograd and Aleksandar Grujic as editor-in-chief of the Programmes in Serbian at Radio Novi Sad, these appointments were immediately competed. The Executive

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<sup>45</sup> The Draft Broadcasting Law can be downloaded at [www.medienhilfe\Monitor\SER\ser-law9.pdf](http://www.medienhilfe\Monitor\SER\ser-law9.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> Jakubowicz, Karol, Analysis and Comments on the Serbian Draft Broadcasting Law. See [www.medienhilfe\Monitor\SER\ser-coe.pdf](http://www.medienhilfe\Monitor\SER\ser-coe.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Art. 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and opinions without interference by public authorities and regardless of frontiers.”

<sup>49</sup> see as example the resignation of Branka Prpa, representative for the Independent Alliance of Serbian Journalists in the executive Board of RTS. In her letter to the Serbian government vice president Zarko Korac, responsible for the media, Prpa writes: “I want to inform you that I am resigning the position of a member in the executive Board of Radio Television of Serbia. I feel that both the new general director and certain political parties within DOS are unfairly minimising the Executive Board’s role. In circumstances when Executive Board members are not making decisions on strategic issues connected to the house, but are only recognising previously made decisions, I am not personally ready anymore to take the responsibility for the function that the Serbian government gave to me.” In: ANEM Weekly Media Update, September 8-14, 2001, <http://archiv.medienhilfe.ch/Projekte/SER/MediaReports/ANEM/2001-09-02.htm>

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Council of Vojvodina recommended the province's Parliament to reject the appointments. Lekic promised that

“she would give her best in order to regain the lost confidence of the viewers in Radio television of Serbia, and to influence the donors from abroad who promised their support in order that that state-run media begin to function in a professional manner”.<sup>50</sup>

But trying the best might simply not be enough in the context of a state-controlled station.

Mid May 2002, a new scandal broke out when the editor-in-chief of RTS culture and entertainment division, Ivona Zivkovic, published a letter titled “Parallel Worlds of Change in Radio Television Serbia” in the daily Glas Javnosti (May 16, 2002), criticising Bojana Lekic for attending meetings of the Democratic Party's Main Committee and getting two salaries. She was suspended 24 hours later from her position on suspicion of damaging the reputation of the state media by committing the crime of libel and programme editor-in-chief Bojana Lekic, denying any accusations, sued her personally. Rade Kalik, official of the Independent Union in RTS, states:

“Ivona Zivkovic is a typical victim of wilful behaviour and her suspension is a signal to everyone that they must be obedient. A personal opinion, regardless of the form in which it is expressed, can only have positive effects, like any other criticism. We are of the opinion that, in line with Articles 109-113 of the Labour Act, people should not be suspended for writing in the media, but the representatives of the media concerned should be able to rebut the report.”<sup>51</sup>

Mica Orlovic, retired pioneer of TV-journalism in Serbia and called to the state broadcaster in the days after the October 5 revolution, commented mid February 2002 on Bojana Lekic as follows:

“RTS was once a giant of European proportions but has been destroyed by the team which served the Milosevic family. Bojana Lekic's weird game and some of her ‘wise’ decisions have turned out to be an expression of vanity. She is a good interviewer but the position of editor-in-chief calls for a different kind of personality. She is acting as if she were the RTS boss, she's simply craving power.”

Aleksandar Crkvenjakov, general director of RTS, who signed the suspension of Ivona Zivkovic, was accused that he put himself in the position of a judge. Instead of replying on the accusations, Crkvenjakov stated that several hundred employees of the RTS would soon be made redundant:

“So far, 1,500 people have left and we will define the number of redundant personnel within the next month. This will reduce the number of RTS employees to between 3,500 and 4,000, as many as there were in the seventies, when we were a successful company.”<sup>52</sup>

Pointing out that there is no censorship of the RTS program, Crkvenjakov said that the company lacked experienced, capable people, explaining that the those employed over the past ten years were not selected through open competition but through connections. The problem with individuals however only reflects the structural problems of media in Serbia and the relation between the state-controlled RTS and the private stations in particular. By the end of May 2002, 20 months after Milosevic's departure, not one of the media laws has passed the procedure and is in place. As Media analyst Snejana Milivojevic puts it:

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<sup>50</sup> Lekic: I'm outside politics. Quoted in ANEM Weekly Media Update, October 6-12, 2001, <http://archiv.medienhilfe.ch/Projekte/SER/MediaReports/ANEM/2001-10-02.htm>

<sup>51</sup> ANEM Weekly Media Update, June 1-7, 2002. see <http://www.medienhilfe.ch/Monitor/SER/ANEM/0601.htm>

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*

“The fact that the laws which should regulate the media field still haven’t been adopted tells us that either the authorities have abandoned the media or that they like the inherited system.”<sup>53</sup>

The ongoing difficult situation of independent, private media is the best proof for the government’s lacking will to resolve key legal and structural issues. Building up a Public Broadcast System out of the ashes of the still state-controlled RTS can therefore be hardly a task the actual government can fulfil. Instead of hoping for this transformation and putting money into the pockets of the authorities, the international community should remember the media that made the bit of changes up to now possible to find them as partners in an ongoing process of structural changes. Also for the transformation of RTS, independent and professional media are a much better partner and guarantee than the state authorities or the RTS itself.

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<sup>53</sup> Snjezana Milivojevic in the daily BLIC, quoted here from ANEM Weekly Media Update May 18-23, 2002

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