

Serbia - Media Landscape

Author(s): Larisa Rankovic

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Overview

The democratic transformation of Serbia started as late as year 2000, after an entire decade of rule by Slobodan Milosevic and wars that followed the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The transformation of the media system in the last 17 years has been

slow, incoherent, and incomplete. Its pace and range have depended greatly on the political will of the political elites. Democratisation of the media system has failed to become a factor in the democratisation of society as a whole, which was a widespread hope in 2000 based on the achievements of the decade-long struggle against media repression during the Milosevic regime.

In recent years, the media environment shows signs of new decline, particularly in the fields of media freedom, security of journalists, and financial sustainability of many media outlets.

Systematic problems present in Serbian media include a weak media market, media ownership which is often hidden, and regulations that are sometimes adopted with delays and followed inconsistently. A major shift in media ownership occurred in 2015 when the State withdrew from direct ownership over media through a privatisation process.

The new Law on Public Information adopted in 2014 stipulated that the state should dismantle its ownership in the media sector. The process of privatisation was often controversial and some privatisation contracts were broken only a year later. Through the latest wave of privatisation, particularly at a local level, large media groups were created around specific economic and political interests.

In the Serbian media system, pressure on media is exerted by political and economic parallelism. Pressure on media usually comes from the authorities and political parties, editors, and advertisers. Public broadcaster *Radio Televizija Srbije* (Radio Television of Serbia - RTS) remains subject to significant government influence. There have been dire examples of political bias, politically orchestrated campaigns in political tabloids aimed against political opponents of the ruling party and against independent media outlets and journalists. There is a noted deterioration in the quality of reporting, especially of informative programs: serious talk shows have been cancelled, critical voices regarding government performance can hardly be heard in traditional media. The EU has reminded prospective member Serbia several times that freedom of expression is an important value of the Union – and that Serbia's respect for it will be examined closely during its accession process.

Due to all the constraints and pressures, coming from politics, finance, or directly from newsrooms, and advertisers, the journalistic professionalism is, with some bright exceptions, at an unsatisfactory level. As media expert Jovanka Matic (2014) wrote: "Journalists in Serbia are still occupied with finding solutions for problems typical of the 20th, not the 21st century." In a survey she carried, the majority of journalists pointed to "poor economic position and weak (or no) social protection as the key factor limiting performance of their societal roles." According to a 2016 survey, around 40 percent of journalists wanted to leave the profession, while 75 percent of them believed there was self-censorship in the profession (Mihailovic, 2016). A survey published at the beginning of 2018 showed that of all the journalists polled, 69 percent said they encountered at least one form of pressure from the authorities. Over half of them – 56 percent – encountered pressure from political party representatives (BIRN, NUNS, SCF, 2018).

For years, the state has been the biggest advertiser in the country. Public money has been spent through different state institutions on national and local level in an untransparent way. In addition, under every government so far, owners of media buying agencies had close ties with the ruling party and politics. These connections have helped accentuate growing economic and editorial pressure on Serbian media. Attacks on journalists by governmental officials at different levels worsen the situation both of individual media professionals and their newsrooms. Pressures include: harassment, different forms of pressures exerted by state officials, politicians and other persons in positions of power, cases of restricting attendance or selective invitations of journalists to various public events, as well as pressures from the pro-government media on journalists and media outlets seen as critical of the authorities.

The total number of registered media outlets is high - at the beginning of 2018 it is 2,034, according to the data from *Registar medija* (Media Register) of *Agencija za privredne registre* (Serbian Business Registers Agency - APR). There are 863 print

media – daily and periodic papers, 309 radio stations, 211 TV stations, 432 Internet portals, and 57 “editor-formatted websites.” In the Register there are 23 services of news agencies (while the number of news agencies is three, each of their specific services is listed as a separate media outlet due to the requirements of the Media Register format). There are 123 media outlets which are registered as “undefined” and 16 under the category “other.”

A small and impoverished media advertising market, worth approximately 160m euro annually, is not capable of sustaining such a large number of media outlets. Intense competition for limited advertising pushes media towards government funding, making them an easy target for various forms of pressure and even censorship. Nontransparent and partisan allocation of public money is used as an effective means to favour or punish media through subsidies to supportive media outlets, selective government advertising, public enterprises contracting directly with media outlets without competition or monitoring, and preferential treatment of tax obligations, loan repayments and debts of media close to government.

Media

Print

The field of print media in Serbia in the last ten years is characterised by declining readership and revenues on one hand, and high fluidity of media outlets on the other, with new titles appearing and disappearing quickly.

Daily newspapers have experienced the biggest decline in the overall consumption compared to other types of media. Only one out of twenty Serbians uses it to obtain news and information. Some of its readership has moved to the Internet, where most dailies are increasing efforts to survive. Total circulation of daily press has dropped from 800,000 sold copies in 2007 to less than 500,000 in the mid 2010s.

In 2016, according to surveying agency Ipsos, the average weekly reach of television was 6.9 million, while radio and Internet reached 3.5 million and 4.2 million, respectively. Print media had the lowest reach at four million.

There are ten daily papers: *Politika*, *Novosti*, *Danas*, *Blic*, *Alo*, *Kurir*, *Informer*, *Srpski telegraf*, *Dnevnik* and *Magyar Szo*. In 2007, however, there were 21 of them.

Serbian daily print media market shows high concentration of media ownership and readership share: 63.27 percent of the audience is shared between the Ringier Axel Springer company, that publishes daily *Blic* (and until 2017 *Alo* and *24 sata*), then Adria Media Group, that publishes the daily *Kurir*, Insajder Tim, which publishes the pro-government paper *Informer*, and *Novosti*, a company in which the state remains the largest individual shareholder.

Most popular daily papers are tabloids, which are also among the cheapest national newspapers – some of them being sold at a hardly sustainable copy price of less than 20 cents. These same tabloids are the ones that, almost on a daily basis, undermine or break ethical and professional media codes. Monitoring data produced by the *Savet za štampu* (Serbian Press Council) show that the biggest number of breaches, more than thousand per paper in 2017 (March-November), made tabloids *Srpski telegraf*, *Alo* and *Kurir*. Most often violations involve making assumptions, presenting opinions as facts, and violating the presumption of innocence.

Political tabloids are a specific feature of the Serbian media environment since 2000. They appear and disappear in line with the dictates of mainly hidden, business-political networks. The market has seen the appearance and disappearance of

around twenty daily papers in that period, most of which were tabloids.

Although formally the owners of most print media are known, in practice there is considerable debate as to who is really behind these proxy owners of certain outlets, as shows the Serbian edition of the Survey of Media Ownership Monitor carried by the Reporters without Borders and Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN). The most problematic examples in terms of transparency of ownership are the traditional daily newspapers *Vecernje Novosti* (also known as *Novosti*) and *Politika*, which were privatised under murky circumstances and where the state still has a dominant role. In other cases, while individual journalists and editors may be the formal founders and owners of certain publications, behind the scenes there are thought to be hidden links to influential businessmen or politicians. The exceptions are two big media groups - Ringier Axel Springer and Adria Media Group – where ownership is relatively clear. Ringier owns *Blic*, *NIN* and until 2017 daily *Alo* and free paper *24 sata*, while Adria Media Group owns *Kurir* and a range of glossy magazines. It also published *Newsweek* Serbia until its closure in 2017.

There are seven weekly news magazines in the country: *NIN*, *Vreme*, *Pecat*, *Novi magazin*, *Nedeljnik* and *Ekspres*. The number was the same ten years ago, but some of the titles folded in the meantime, and new ones appeared.

In the field of glossy magazines leaders are Adria Media Group and Color Press Grupa, each publishing a range of weekly and monthly magazines.

A weak economy and a large public sector creates a situation in which the state is a big advertiser in the Serbian media world, especially in the printed press. This creates a fertile ground for exercising control over the media which are faced with the constant threat of the loss of state advertising if they criticise the ruling political elite.

Daily newspaper *Blic* has an audience share of 6.5 percent. It was founded in 1996 and was considered an "opposition" newspaper in Serbia. After it was acquired by Ringier in 2004, the paper became much more profit oriented, which was also reflected in its style, content and editorial policy. The ultimate owner of *Blic* is a Swiss company – Ringier Axel Springer Media AG, which was founded through a merger of Ringier AG from Switzerland and Axel Springer SE from Germany.

The *Informer* daily newspaper was founded in early 2012. *Informer* quickly became popular, primarily due to the sensationalist, tabloid content (audience share 6 percent) The newspaper is widely perceived not just as being close to the ruling *Srpska napredna stranka* (Serbian Progressive Party – SNS), but also frequently serving as a tool for attacking opponents and critics of the party, both in the political world and among independent media, journalists, and civil society groups and activists.

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Leaders among independent papers in the 1990s (daily *Danas*, established in 1997, and weekly *Vreme*, established in 1990) met numerous obstacles since year 2000. The paradox in the status of the Serbian quality press is that the papers that

contributed most to the democratisation of the country are the poorest and still have a limited influence on the public. Technological changes and migration of public to the digital media contributed to their difficult position. The major problem of the high quality press is economic sustainability.

The situation is particularly difficult for local media outlets critical of the authorities. In September 2017, the founder of magazine *Vranjske* and former head of *Nezavisno drustvo novinara Srbije* (the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia - NUNS), went on hunger strike after being forced to close his newspaper after 23 years of continuous publishing. He accused the Serbian authorities of using state institutions to suffocate the independent media via bodies like the tax authorities and the courts. In reaction to that and the worsening situation of the free media in the country, about 150 Serbian websites and NGOs participated in a "blackout" campaign called "Stop Media Darkness".

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Leaders among independent papers in the 1990s (daily Danas, established in 1997, and weekly Vreme, established in 1990) met numerous obstacles since year 2000. The paradox in the status of the Serbian quality press is that the papers that contributed most to the democratisation of the country are the poorest and still have a limited influence on the public. Technological changes and migration of public to the digital media contributed to their difficult position. The major problem of the high quality press is economic sustainability.

The situation is particularly difficult for local media outlets critical of the authorities. In September 2017, the founder of magazine Vranjske and former head of Nezavisno drustvo novinara Srbije (the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia - NUNS), went on hunger strike after being forced to close his newspaper after 23 years of continuous publishing. He accused the Serbian authorities of using state institutions to suffocate the independent media via bodies like the tax authorities and the courts. In reaction to that and the worsening situation of the free media in the country, about 150 Serbian websites and NGOs participated in a "blackout" campaign called "Stop media darkness".

Radio

Radio has a long history in Serbia. The oldest station, *Radio Beograd* (Radio Belgrade), has been operating since 1929. Today, it is the fifth most listened radio in Serbia. *Radio Beograd 1* is mostly an informative channel, with news airing every full hour. It remains most famous for its rich cultural programs. In the 1990s, a number of radio stations grew dramatically. More than 500 stations (about 700 or even more, according to some estimations) operated across the country, most

established and run without licenses. While a number of radio stations were launched for commercial purposes and broadcast music only, information-oriented radio stations, like other types of media, were divided in regards to their relationship with the ruling regime.

Ever since the Internet won the race of becoming the fastest news media, Serbian radio has sought to commercialise by broadcasting mainly music and light entertainment content. With a total advertising budget of €7m per year, over 300 licensed stations and a number of pirate radio stations broadcasting at the time of writing, radio production has little space for creativity and quality programming.

Regardless of the number of stations, only four major players reach half of the total audience in a highly concentrated radio market. Two channels of the Public Broadcasting Service – *Radio Beograd* (9.4 percent audience reach) and five commercial radio stations - *Radio S* and *Radio S 2* (19.6 percent), *Radio HIT FM* and *Radio TDI* (11.9 percent) and *Radio Play* (10.3 percent) are among the top 10 ranked stations in the country.

In the current context of strong political influence and even control of the media, radio has lost the important role it had during the 1990s. *Radio B92*, which became an iconic symbol of media independence, and was renowned for its news and current affairs output, after being sold, has been transformed into a music-only radio station. It was renamed *Play* radio in 2015.

Some of the best ranked radio stations in the country (*Radio S*, *HIT FM*) are linked to the current political establishment.

On the small and controlled market, radio stations largely resemble one another, broadcasting mainly popular music and light talk shows, leaving no space for alternative voices. Some popular hosts and journalists found shelter podcasting on platforms such as soundcloud.

Several online radio stations have been launched in recent years. Among them most popular is *Radio Aparat*, launched in December 2016. During its first year of existence, *Radio Aparat* gained wide recognition and an international audience, as it dispersed the voices of Belgrade's biggest music enthusiasts, as well those from the NGO sector.

Television

Television is by far the most popular type of media in Serbia. In 2015, a typical Serbian TV viewer spent an average 315 minutes per day in front of a TV set according to data from AGB Nielsen. However, according to the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) report from 2017, citizens of Serbia generally do not trust the media. The lowest trust is in print media, followed by TV, radio and social networks. People in Serbia tend to trust the Internet the most. Across all segments of the market, trust in media is showing a decreasing trend.

Today, there are more than 200 TV stations: five national TV stations, around 100 local and regional stations, over 100 cable stations, with a weekly reach of 6.9 million people.

Regulatorno telo za elektronske medije (Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media - REM) is in charge of issuing broadcasting licences. The first national licenses were issued in 2006, while local and regional ones were issued in 2007 and 2008. The licenses were extended in 2015 and 2016 and will last until 2024. Some media professionals warn that the extension of broadcasters' permits was done without any analysis of media performance in previous years.

The high number of TV stations relies on a relatively small amount of advertising revenue while licensing fees paid to the state are high. Since 2008, when it reached its peak, the TV market has been recording a constant decrease. In 2013 a significant decrease of the TV market value of around 16 percent was recorded in comparison with the preceding year; in 2014 this level was maintained, while in 2016 a slight increase (8.3 percent) was recorded.

In TV advertising, as high as 89 percent belongs to TV stations with a national reach. The biggest part of the advertising market, according to data from 2015, belongs to *Pink* (36.4 percent), followed by *Prva* (22.9 percent), *RTS 1* (13.6 percent), then *B92* (12 percent), and *Happy* (4.4 percent).

The TV sector is financially unsustainable and highly competitive, forcing broadcasters to favour cheap entertainment programs over high-quality news production. According to the EBU survey from March 2016, Southern European countries (Serbia included) show the lowest degree of trust in TV.

Digitalisation of the television signal in Serbia was completed in 2015, putting an end to an almost 10-year-long process. It gave citizens an unlimited selection of television channels, with clearer and sharper image (HD), higher quality of sound, and a number of additional services, such as subtitles, delayed program viewing, and electronic shopping. This issue has been discussed in Serbia since 2006, when an agreement was signed and the state committed to carry out a transition to digital broadcasting. The process took as long as nine years and Serbia - due to a shortage of free frequencies, legislation, as well as modest funding - remained one of Europe's last countries with an analog signal.

The biggest threats to media pluralism in Serbia are the concentration of audience and political influence over the media, according to research conducted by BIRN and the German branch of Reporters Without Borders. According to the research, 62.3 per cent of the audience in Serbia is shared between four broadcasters that own seven channels. These are the national broadcaster, *Radio televizija Srbije* (Radio Television of Serbia – RTS), and its regional subsidiary in Vojvodina, *RTV*, *TV Pink*, then *TV Prva* and *B92* (now renamed *O2*), both owned by Antena Group, and *TV Happy*.

RTS 1, the country's main public broadcasting channel, is the most watched electronic media in Serbia. *RTS* (with its three channels) is obliged by the Law on Public Broadcasting to produce a program for a wide audience, paying special attention to the public interest and minorities. During 2015 the average viewer spent two hours a day watching *RTS 1*. Most watched were either TV series domestically produced by *RTS* or live coverage of sports events. News and political debates make up to 30 percent of the entire production. Reports warn that public broadcaster is often biased towards the government and president, shows imbalance with regard to political affiliation, location, gender, the neglect of marginalised groups. *RTS 2* and particularly *RTS 3* are devoted to programs in culture, history, and documentaries.

TV Pink started operations in 1994. Today, it is second most watched TV station in the country (after public service broadcaster *RTS*) with 14.91 percent audience share, according to a Nielsen survey covering the period from April 1, 2016 to March 31, 2017. Its broadcast reach extends globally through *Pink International's* licensing arrangements for two satellite television brands, *Pink Plus* and *Pink Extra*. Programming for these satellite channels is supplied by *Pink International* (*TV Pink*) and *Pink BH* (Bosnia and Herzegovina). In addition to this, there are 60 *Pink* cable channels ranging from *Pink kids* and *Pink music* to *Pink erotika*.

In 2017, the legendary *B92* station, which became synonymous with resistance to Slobodan Milosevic's regime during the 1990s, was rebranded as *O2* television. *B92* was founded in 1989 as a radio station. Today, it includes television with national coverage, a cable television channel, a news website, and a radio now called *Play Radio*. Its programs are after transformation predominantly entertainment oriented.

The regional television network *N1*, CNN's cable affiliate news channel, was launched in October 2014, and airs from Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia. It has become known for its professional journalism and provocative questions. While *N1* journalists win numerous awards for their work, Serbian officials are often hostile to them. *N1* is owned by Adria News, part of United Media, which is a member of United Group – the same as SBB, a cable television and broadband internet service provider in Serbia. Majority shareholder of the United Group company is the KKR investment fund based in New York. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development holds a share in the capital of the broadcaster.

Digital Media

In 2016, Serbian citizens spent an average of 175 minutes on the Internet per day, compared to 87 minutes listening to radio, 24.2 minutes reading newspapers, and 14.5 minutes reading magazines. They only spent more time watching television. They also trust Internet the most.

According to 2017 data of the *Republički zavod za statistiku* (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia) 68 percent of Serbian households has Internet connection, which is a 3,3 percent increase compared to 2016 and 4.2 compared to 2015. Broadband connection reaches 61.9 percent of households. Internet is most used for reading online media (75.6 percent), gathering information about products and services (75.5 percent) and accessing social networks (67.8 percent).

The report for 2018 published by We are Social shows that 64 percent of citizens use laptop and desktop in accessing Internet (a decrease of nine percent compared to January 2017). Mobile Internet access is on the rise of 25 percent – it is now 34 percent of total users. Most visited web sites are Google (international and Serbian version), Facebook, YouTube and digital editions of Serbian commercial mainstream media: *Blic.rs* and *Kurir.rs*.

The 2014 Law on Public Information and Media implies under the term media, among others, electronic editions of other media, as well as independent electronic publications (editorially designed internet sites or internet portals), and which are registered with the Media Register. The Law states explicitly that internet browsers and aggregators, platforms, such as internet forums, social networks and other platforms, or any other individual electronic publications, like blogs, web presentations and similar electronic presentations, are not classed as media unless registered with the Media Register. Registration in the Media Register is not mandatory, but media companies that are not registered do not have the opportunity to participate in project-based co-financing carried by public authorities at local and national level.

Revenues for online media grew in the last couple of years. In the Serbian advertising market, TV still has the largest part - 56 percent, print is now at 19, while radio and Internet are 11 percent each. The biggest growth of investments in 2015 was recorded in segments of video advertising (128 percent) and mobile advertising (43 percent), with estimated market values of €1.05m million Euros and €1.89m respectively.

Blic online media outlet was first launched in 1999. It is the leading news portal in the country and is ranked number one by many audience research agencies (Alexa, Similarweb and Gemius). Its audience share is of more than 2.5 million users in January 2018. *Kurir.rs* is the second most visited news website in Serbia (more than 2 million users). This news portal was founded in 2009 by Adria Media Group in Belgrade. It has a daily production of news and articles based on its print edition. The editorial policy follows the sensationalist and tabloid rhetoric that characterises the print edition. *B92.net* has around 1.4 million monthly users. It was founded in 1996 as an alternative source of independent news in the era of late Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic. Since *B92* radio station was banned several times, the news portal was seen as a more secure and stable platform for critical voices. Its target audience were intellectuals and cosmopolitan, urban youngsters, opposed to the authoritarian and nationalist regime. Ever since it has been among the top three most popular news portals in the country. As it was growing over the years, it introduced a variety of sub websites and pages, but it was also among the first to launch a

mobile application. In the past few years, following the sale to Antenna Group, its content shifted more towards entertainment.

Critical coverage of political, social, economic and media issues in the country, and investigations of corruption and organised crime are mostly present in online media. Alternative journalistic online publications such as *CINS*, *BIRN*, *KRIK*, *Istinomer*, *Insajder*, *Cenzolovka*, *Južne vesti*, *Pescanik* and *Voice* have been launched over the last years. They publish investigative reports, fact-checking journalism, and critical analysis absent in mainstream media. Currently, these are predominantly funded by donations and grants from abroad, which frequently raise accusations against them of being “foreign mercenaries”. At the same time, they are recipients of a number of prestigious national and international journalistic awards.

There are also hundreds of local portals across Serbia. Their work is often marked by a lack of money, a lack of contributors and, if their work is critical of authorities, political and administrative pressures.

Social Networks

According to a January 2018 report published by We are Social, Facebook continues to be by far the most popular social network in Serbia. Around 3.6 million people, roughly half of the total Serbian population is on this network. More males than females use it: 53 percent of men and 47 percent of women. The growth compared to January 2017 is six percent. Most users (one million) are in the 25-34 years-old category, followed by age group 18-24 (830,000) and 35-44 (790,000).

According to data from 2014, most Facebook users were in the 18-24 years-old category (31 percent), followed by the age group 25-34 (28 percent).

Instagram engages 1.7 million people, more women (51 percent) than men (49 percent).

Professional network LinkedIn is according to available data used by 380,000 people and Twitter by 280,000 people.

Not only media outlets, but also individual users of social networks sometimes come under pressure from the authorities.

As freedom in Serbia's mainstream media shrinks, independent or critical voices move to social networks, in particular Twitter, which often provokes leading politicians. Serbia's President, Aleksandar Vucic, went as far as to bring printed tweets of his critics on to live TV, calling some of the posters “haters” and “liars” who only want to bring him down.

In 2014, following floods that heavily hit the country, a number of social media users were called in by the police for questioning. They were threatened with charges for “spreading panic” by posting rumours about the scope of the disaster and consequences of the public officials' incompetence. As research by SHARE Foundation on the topic concludes, arresting individuals because of their blogs, comments, or other forms of writing online has a chilling effect not just on the journalists and online media organisations, but on the general population of online users in Serbia. SHARE has registered 422 cases of violations of digital rights and freedoms in its public register since 2012.

An official Twitter report shows that since 2015, the Serbian government has sent the company 38 account information requests, 12 of which were sent between January and June of 2017. Neither Twitter nor the Serbian government would reveal exactly what information was sought, or what information the social networking platform provided to the government.

Opinion Makers

While blogs in Serbia were popular and lively places of discussion during the second half of the last decade and at the beginning of the 2010s, they are now most often platforms related to fashion, cooking, IT and marketing, usually with

advertising deals. Public discussion of current issues now mostly moved to Twitter. On this social network, politicians, journalists, people from the public sphere and citizens exchange information and opinions and often participate in heated discussions about politics and other daily affairs.

Some of them have tens of thousands of followers, including journalists Slobodan Georgiev, Dusan Masic, Slavisa Lekic, Antonela Riha, Stevan Dojcinovic, Tibor Jona, and others. "Twitter is the hub of resistance to the regime of Vucic. Unfortunately, sometimes it seems to be the only place of resistance against the dilettantism of the government," the head of *Nezavisno drustvo novinara Srbije* (the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia - NUNS), Slavisa Lekic, told *Balkan Insight* in December 2017. Every day since June 2016, journalist Ana Novakovic posts a question addressed to the former Prime Minister and now President Aleksandar Vucic, asking him who is behind the demolition of Savamala, a part of an old Belgrade district that was brought to ruins in the night after the 2016 Parliamentary elections under murky circumstances, for the sake of the controversial project Belgrade Waterfront.

Since 2010 portal *Njuz.net* takes a satirical stance on Serbian politics and has constant popularity. Their Facebook page has over 215,000 likes. Its team members are also behind acclaimed satirical TV program *24 minuta sa Zoranom Kesicem* (24 minutes with Zoran Kesic) and are individually popular and influential on social networks.

Supporters of the political authorities also have their following and influence public discourse. Such is the case with former pop star and marketing specialist Nebojsa Krstic or TV host and politician Vladimir Djukanovic.

Sources

Newspapers

- [Alo](#)
- [Blic](#)
- [Danas](#)
- [Ekspres](#)
- [Informer](#)
- [Kurir](#)
- [Magyar Szo](#)
- [Nedeljnik](#)
- [NIN](#)
- [Novi magazin](#)
- [Pecat](#)
- [Politika](#)
- [Srpski telegraf](#)
- [Vecernje novosti](#)
- [Vreme](#)

Publishers

- [Adria Media Group](#)
- [Color Press Group](#)
- [Ringier Axel Springer Serbia](#)

Radio

- [Hit FM](#)
- [Play Radio](#)
- [Radio Aparat](#)
- [Radio Beograd](#)
- [Radio S](#)
- [TDI](#)

Television

- [Happy](#)
- [N1](#)
- [O2](#)
- [Pink](#)
- [Prva](#)
- [RTS](#)
- [RTV](#)

Opinion makers

- [Njuz.net](#)

Organisations

Trade Unions

According to some estimates, in Serbia there are around 6,000 journalists. Trade unions do not have a strong tradition among Serbian journalists and, as a rule, in Serbia they cannot rely on support and protection from the unions. The fragmentation and ineffectiveness of the unions makes the self-organisation of journalists rather inefficient (Matic, 2014). "Most journalists are not members of trade unions, due either to fear of employers' retribution or distrust of trade unions' effectiveness in protecting their rights" (Matic et al., 2012).

Sindikata novinara Srbije (Trade Union of Journalists of Serbia - SINOS) was established in 2002 with the goal of legal and professional protection of journalists. The organisation gathers around 1,400 journalists. According to SINOS, half of them were left without jobs after the privatisation.

Journalist Associations

Several associations represent interests of thousands of journalists and media outlets in Serbia. Some are more than a century old; others only couple of years, established as a response to current technological and media environment.

- *Udruzenje novinara Srbije* (The Journalist Association of Serbia – UNS) was formed in 1881 and has been active ever since.
- NUNS was formed in 1994, mainly by journalists who either left or were purged from the media controlled by the regime.

- *Nezavisno drustvo novinara Vojvodine* (Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina – NDNV) is a regional journalist association that was formed in 1990.

All journalistic organisations have in the scope of their work the protection of the journalistic profession, including its legal and social aspects, promotion of free journalism and media pluralism, and development of professional norms and ethical standards. The associations, especially NUNS and the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina, are often under attack by tabloids. As panellists in the Media Sustainability Index 2017 noted, because of the current political, economic, and media situation in Serbia, including permanent pressure on media and journalists, associations concentrate all their capacities and activities exclusively on daily “firefighting” and on the resolution of daily problems. Such an environment keeps media associations from executing strategic activities in media and journalism development.

- *Asocijacija medija Srbije* (Association of Serbian Media - ASMEDI) was established in 2003. It gathers some of the biggest commercial publishing companies, as well as print and online media outlets and news agencies.
- *Asocijacija onlajn medija* (Online Media Association - AOM) was established in 2015 and gathers 19 independent digital media outlets. Its goal is to develop and promote ethical standards of reporting on the Internet as well as strengthening the role of online media in the democratisation of society.
- *Asocijacija nezavisnih medija* (the Association of Independent Electronic Media – ANEM), a group of radio and TV stations from across Serbia, was founded in 1993, in an attempt to strengthen independent broadcasters in a period that was very difficult for the media which opposed the regime. Their activities in the post-Milosevic period included lobbying for the media laws, education of media staff, legal help, and technical support for its members.
- *Lokal pres* (Local Press) is a media organisation gathering local print media. It was established in 1995, and currently there are around 40 members. Its activities include representing the professional interests of its members, joint marketing and business initiatives, staff training and so on.

News Agencies

Serbia has three national news agencies: state-run agency *Tanjug*, and private agencies *Beta* and *FoNet*.

State news agency *Tanjug* is still producing news and receiving money from the budget even though the government closed it down in October 2015 (in accordance with Article 146 of the Law on Public Information and Media) after failing to find a private buyer. In December 2017, responding to *Grupa za slobodu medija* (the Group for Media Freedom), which had demanded that the *Tanjug* cease operations, Serbian PM Ana Brnabic said the best solution was being sought for the national news agency that would fulfil the public interest of the citizens to the largest extent.

Tanjug was established by the resistance movement to fascist occupation of Yugoslavia in 1943. During its peak in the 1970s, *Tanjug* ranked among the top 10 largest news agencies in the world and disposed with a network of 48 correspondents abroad out of more than 900 employees. With the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, *Tanjug* lost its significance and its credibility. Based in Belgrade, it was put under control of Serbian authorities and became a propaganda tool of Slobodan Milosevic's regime.

Private news agencies *Beta* and *FoNet* were established in 1994. They enjoy a reputation as independent and credible sources for citizens. Their market position is not favourable however, since they have to compete with the government-supported *Tanjug*, they are not paid regularly for the services rendered, and many small outlets simply copy and paste content from news agencies.

Audience measurement organisations

Ipsos Strategic Marketing carries a range of audience and public opinion surveys in Serbia and the region.

Since 2002, Nielsen Audience Measurement has been providing Television Audience Measurement (TAM) data to the Serbian market based on people-meter systems.

Gemius is a part of an international online research agency that studies the Internet users' behavior, the Internet audience profiles and online advertising campaign effectiveness.

Interactive Advertising Bureau Serbia (IAB) is an association that is working in the field of measurement and promotion of the digital and interactive marketing in Serbia.

Audit Bureaux of Circulations Srbija (ABC) which worked on reporting print data of its members froze its activities in Serbia in June 2015.

Sources

Trade Unions

- [SINOS](#)

Journalist Associations

- [ANEM](#)
- [AOM](#)
- [ASMEDI](#)
- [Local Press](#)
- [NDNV](#)
- [NUNS](#)
- [UNS](#)

News Agencies

- [BETA](#)
- [FoNet](#)
- [Tanjug](#)

Audience measurement organisations

- [ABC Srbija](#)
- [Gemius](#)
- [IAB](#)
- [Ipsos Strategic Marketing](#)
- [Nielsen Audience Measurement](#)

Policies

Media legislation

In 2014, three new media acts, namely *Zakon o javnom informisanju i medijima* (the Law on Public Information and Media), *Zakon o elektronskim medijima* (the Law on Electronic Media), and *Zakon o javnim medijskim servisima* (the Law on Public Service Media) were adopted by the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. The adoption of these acts was one of the main goals set in *Medijska strategija* (the Media Strategy), which the Government adopted in September 2011.

The Law on Public Information and Media is the general media act. At its promulgation it included the mandatory privatisation of then remaining publicly owned media. The law defines the common interest in the field of media, allowing the co-financing of media projects, which are of common interest, as a permissible form of state aid. It also aims to improve the transparency of media ownership by introducing *Medijski registar* (Media Register). *Medijski registar* started its activities on 13 February 2015, pursuant to Article 141 of *Zakon o javnom informisanju i medijima*. It is an integrated, centralised, electronic database on media. The Law has also liberalised media concentration benchmark to some extent.

The Law on Electronic Media regulates the alignment with the EU regulatory framework (“Audiovisual Media Services Directive”) with respect to the categories of services and their providers, as well as the new licensing regime. It also redefines restrictions aimed at protection of media pluralism and mandatory privatisation of media in public ownership.

The Law on Public Service Media is harmonised with the Communication of the EU Commission on the application of state aid rules to public service broadcasting. It recognises a national public service broadcaster (*RTS*), and a provincial one in the Province of Vojvodina (*RTV*). Amendments to the Law on Public Service Media and the law regulating the temporary regulation of the collection of the fee for the public service media were adopted in December 2015. This temporary solution causes uncertainty about the editorial independence and stable financing of RTS and RTV, as is noted in the 2016 EU country report for Serbia.

Zakon o oglasavanju (The Law on Advertising) was adopted in 2016.

Defamation was decriminalised in 2012, and is now a civil offense.

Despite the existence of the 2004 *Zakon o slobodnom pristupu informacijama od javnog značaja* (the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance), authorities often obstruct the media’s efforts to obtain public information.

Although media legislation is generally considered good and in line with European standards, the EU Commission in its 2016 Country Report noted that more consistent efforts are needed to ensure full implementation of the media laws. It stressed that privatisation of state media outlets had not led to greater transparency of ownership or funding sources, including state funding and that co-financing of media content to meet public interest obligations needed to be implemented in line with the legislative framework, using transparent and fair procedures.

Previous Media Strategy expired in 2016 and *Ministarstvo kulture i medija* (the Ministry of Culture and Information) has begun work on the new one, which should frame and strategically position the development of the Serbian media sector in the upcoming five years. In the summer of 2017, the ministry assembled a working group to draft a proposal which could be publicly presented and discussed, before being adopted by the government. However, the working group has been dogged by controversy, culminating with four of its members quitting.

Accountability systems

Although institutional framework is in place and the issue of improving self-regulation of journalistic profession has been high

on the agenda in debates about media for almost two decades, the level of accountability in Serbian media is low.

Savet za štampu is a self-regulatory body that has been established in 2009 for monitoring the observance of *Kodeks novinara Srbije* (the Journalist's Code of Ethics), solving complaints made by individuals and institutions related to media content. The Press Council also has a mediating role in cases of conflicts.

A Code of Ethics of Serbian Journalists was drafted in 2006 and adopted in 2009 by both NUNS and UNS. This gave the green light to the introduction of media self-regulation in Serbia. Following this adoption, the major Serbian media organisations established *Savet za štampu* (Press Council).

However, the code is ignored on a daily basis. Monitoring data produced by the *Savet za štampu* shows that from March to November 2017 eight daily papers breached the ethical code in almost 5,300 texts. The number of breaches of the code is growing in the last three years: 2,962 in 2015, 4,402 in 2016, 4,717 in 2017.

Representatives from the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), the International Press Institute (IPI), and the South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO) visited Serbia in January 2018 after concerns about the state of media freedom in Serbia. In the statement following the visit they encouraged all media outlets and journalists to join Serbia's journalism ethical code and to respect the self-regulatory body, the Press Council including the Council's Complaints Commission, and to publish the Council's decisions in accordance with its regulations.

AOM adopted its internal Code of Conduct in 2017. This Code supplements the existing Serbian Journalists Code of Conduct, adding the solutions applicable specifically in online media.

In December 2017 investigative portal *KRIK* launched project *Raskrikavanje* which works on debunking fake news and showcasing media propaganda, as well as analysing and exposing media finances, ownership structure and state aid they receive.

Regulatory authorities

Ministarstvo kulture i informisanja (Ministry of Culture and Information) has the role of ensuring the implementation of existing media legislation, preparing new draft laws, organising consultations and working groups in the process, carrying media content co-financing calls, and allocating funds for the chosen projects. The Ministry of Culture and Information is in charge of controlling and assessing the state of media pluralism and concentration in printed press.

The Law on Electronic Media, among other provisions, changed the name of the former *Republička radiodifuzna agencija* (Broadcasting Agency - RRA) to *Regulatorno telo za elektronske medije* (the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media - REM) and broadened its competences. Besides the issuing of reprimands and warnings and the revoking of licenses, the REM now has the power to temporarily prohibit the transmission of certain types of content in cases of serious violations of the law. Under the Law on Electronic Media, REM is responsible for measuring concentration in broadcasting media.

Sources

Laws, regulations and institutions

- [Media Register](#)
- [Ministry of Culture and Information](#)
- [REM](#)

Education

Universities and schools

Despite the increase in the number of journalistic schools within universities in the last 15 years, some of the biggest weaknesses of journalism studies remained. They include small number of profession-oriented courses, low levels of practical instruction, absence of specialisation for different kinds of media, lack of technical equipment, large groups of students, inadequate teaching staff, and traditional teaching methods.

Academic journalism studies are carried out at state and private universities. These are the following: Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade, which has the longest tradition, Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, Faculty of Philosophy in Nis, Faculty for Culture and Media (Megatrend University) in Belgrade, Faculty for Media and Communication (Singidunum University) in Belgrade. There are also studies of sports journalism at the Faculty of Sport in Belgrade.

Professional development

Media and journalistic associations organise educational and training programs, in addition to trainings offered by non-profit organisations and investigative media centers, and commercial programs usually organised by TV hosts in entertainment and sports programs.

In-house training for journalists and media professionals already working are less often a practice, in part because of the economic situation in the media. The Novi Sad School of Journalism exists since 1996 and its activities are related to increasing the professional capacities in the media sector, monitoring and analysis of media content, media literacy and so on. BIRN and CINS focus their training programs on investigative journalism

Sources

- [BIRN Summer School of Investigative Reporting](#)
- [CINS School of Investigative Journalism](#)
- [Faculty of Political Science](#) – Department of Journalism, University of Belgrade
- [Faculty for Culture and Media](#) – Megatrend University
- [Faculty for Media and Communication](#) – Singidunum University
- [Faculty of Philosophy](#) – Department of Media Studies, University of Novi Sad
- [Faculty of Philosophy](#) – Department of Journalism, Nis
- [Faculty of Sport](#) – Journalism in Sport, Belgrade
- [Novi Sad School of Journalism](#) (NSSJ)

Conclusions

Conclusion

In recent years, the media environment in Serbia shows signs of decline, particularly in the fields of media freedom, security of journalists, and financial sustainability of many media outlets. This situation was observed by most leading organisations monitoring media developments.

Serbian media are numerous and financially unsustainable and dependent on the authorities for advertising. Lack of protection and financial security for journalists allows politicians to exert control over media.

Threats, violence and intimidation against journalists are rising.

The legislative package in the media sector is aligned with EU standards but still needs to be fully implemented. Political will for that is on declining path, as well as political use and obstruction of regulatory bodies.

Independence in editorial policy of both public broadcasters (RTS and RTV) is endangered which hinders their capacity to provide reliable and unbiased information to all citizens.

Functioning institutions and respect of laws by all stakeholders, including the government, together with the pressure from international institutions, primarily EU, to adhere to the principles of media freedom as a condition for future integration, is what media professionals see as tools to improve poor situation in the media field in Serbia.

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