**PRESS RELEASES**

In the month of January, the Agency reacted against verbal insults and instances of disparagement addressed at journalists on several occasions.

On 17 January 2023, the Agency strongly condemned Prime Minister Dimitar Kovachevski’s labeling of certain media outlets’ editorial policy and underlined that public office holders should refrain from expressing personal, subjective views that undermine freedom of the media. Instead of using narratives that discredit and exert pressure on the media, they should give examples of responsible and professional behavior. At the same time, the Agency reminded that media’s role was to inform and raise questions concerning matters of public interest, which was why all relevant stakeholders in the state should invest maximum efforts to ensure favorable environment for strengthening media freedom and editorial independence.

On 16 January 2023, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services most strongly condemned the threats directed against employees of Kanal 5 TV by a natural person on the “Facebook” social network. In its press release it underlined that attacks and threats against journalists were unacceptable and all competent authorities must take the necessary measures to create an enabling environment for professional, free and independent media. In order to ensure democratic development of the state, it is essential for journalists to be safe at all times and to be allowed to carry out their tasks uninterruptedly, i.e. to be able to inform the citizens in a timely manner about various public developments, without any threats or intimidation.

**Expenditures Incurred by the Agency Director in the Second Half of 2022**

In accordance with its efforts to ensure transparency and accountability, and abiding by its own established practice of publishing information about the expenditures incurred by Agency Director Zoran Trajchevski, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services informed the public on 5 January 2023, that, in the second half of 2022, until 31 December inclusive, in performing the tasks of his office, Director Trajchevski had incurred expenditures totaling MKD 309,245.00, as follows:

* Representation expenses (catering services for hosting representatives of embassies and business partners) – MKD 53,990.00
* Official mobile phone – MKD 15,883.00
* Expenses for travelling abroad – MKD 239,372.00 (MKD 126,838.00 for airline tickets, and MKD 112,543.00 for hotel accommodation and travel expenses).

Тhe Delegation of the European Union and the Ministry of Information Society and Administration launched the “EU for Freedom of Expression: Alignment of National Media Legislation with EU Acquis and Media Standards” Project on 25 January 2023. The project’s objective is to facilitate the alignment of national media legislation with the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive and the European media standards

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# **“EU for Freedom of Expression: Alignment of National Media Legislation with EU Acquis and Media Standards” Project Launched**



EU Ambassador David Geer, Minister of Information Society and Administration Admirim Aliti, Minister of Culture Bisera Kostadinovska-Stojchevska and the Director of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media, Zoran Trajchevski, held introductory speeches. As AAAVMS Director Trajchevski pointed out, the rapid development of technology and the emergence of new media had drastically changed the way information and other content were received, while differences between traditional and new media were diverse to an extend where one could not apply the same regulatory framework to both. Consequently, in line with the new European regulation that addresses these issues, he stressed it was necessary to amend the Macedonian laws regulating the media sphere. After the harmonized laws would be adopted, the AAAVMS would amend the existing bylaws and adopt new ones according to the needs.

Ms Emilia Janevska, M.Sc., Head of the Programme Affairs Department, spoke at the debate dedicated to the current media landscape in the country and the requirements imposed by the European regulation. She pointed out the challenges ahead for the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services following the national media laws alignment with the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive, the Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act.

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On 16 January, the Agency also most strongly condemned the statement by DUI president Ali Ahmeti labelling Telma TV and Alfa TV channels as enemies of the Albanians. The Agency stressed that public figures, presidents of political parties in particular, should be aware that the freedom of expression also implies responsibility. Instead of using inappropriate communication, they should lead by example and manifest the highest level of respect for one of the key pillars of democracy – the media.

With regard to the attempts at hindering the reporting crews of “Lider” Radio and “Kurir” from covering the government representatives’ visit to “Pekabesko” Plant, the Agency emphasized in a press release of 11 January 2023, that hindering the work of journalists jeopardizes the freedom of and the right to information. Media workers must not be hindered for a single moment in the performance of their work tasks, but should be provided with free access to all events, considering their role in raising questions of public interest and ensuring transparency and accountability of the public bodies.

With reference to the decision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to spend Euro 100,000 on campaigns aimed at promoting the OSCE chairpersonship, on 5 January 2023, the Agency pointed out, among other things, that the use of budget funds for advertising in the media constituted violation of Article 102 of the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services. Citizens not only have the right to but **should be** informed about and similar events of major importance for the state, but this should be done by other means and not by spending budget funds.

**Supervisions conducted over Broadcasters and Operators of Public Electronic Communication Networks**

**Broadcasters**

Regular programme and administrative supervisions concerning several legal obligations, such as compliance with the rules on broadcasting audiovisual commercial communications, protection of juvenile audience, use of value-added telephone services and televoting, broadcasting of games of chance and the provision of quizzes or other forms of prize-winning participation, broadcasting of at least 12 hours of TV programme daily and broadcasting of at least 40% of originally created programmes daily, publication of an Impressum, information that should be made available to the users and publication of the broadcaster's identification, were carried out over the TV programmes of the Public Broadcasting Service (MRT 1, MRT 2, MRT 3, MRT 4 and MRT 5). The supervisions established that, contrary to Article 55, Paragraph 5 of the LAAVMS, part of the MRT 2 programme broadcasted on 4 January, products had been placed without it being clearly indicated that the programme contained product placement.

After the legal deadline for alignment with the imposed public warning measures had expired, control programme and administrative supervisions were conducted concerning various legal provisions over Dibra TV, Plus TV, Protel TV, Shutel TV, Iris TV and Kanal Festa TV. The supervisions established that Dibra TV had continued to broadcast less than 30% of programme originally created as Macedonian audiovisual works, nor had it aired at least half of the legal minimum in the period from 7:00 hrs until 19:00 hrs, while Kanal Festa TV had not provided the information that should be made available to its users.

**Operators of public electronic communication networks**

Regarding the obligation of the operators of PECNs to provide, obligatorily and free of charge, as part of the programme packages they retransmit, the programme services of the public broadcasting service, as well as regarding the obligations to register their programme services with the Agency and provide subtitling of the programmes they retransmit, regular programme supervision was conducted over the following operators: Inel International, Telekabel, Pet Net and Global Sat. The supervisions detected no violations. Control programme supervision was carried out over the Cablecall operator from Kichevo, which showed that the latter had fully acted upon the previous measure imposed due to non-compliance with the obligation prohibiting retransmission of programme services without first regulating the copyright and related rights.

**Imposed public warning measures**

At its 1st session held on 9 January, the Agency Council adopted seven decisions to impose public warning measures against Spectra TV, Student FM 92.9 Radio, Uskana Media TV, Maria Radio and UGD FM Radio. Spectra TV has been issued two public warning measures for broadcasting a programme service at an inappropriate time and using the wrong warning signals and for failing to broadcast at least 30% of programme originally created as Macedonian audiovisual works. Student FM 92 Radio received two public warning measures due to failure to air its own identification sign and failure to provide information identifying the authors and editors of the broadcasted radio news, and the origin and date of their production. Uskana Media TV was issued a public waqrning measure for not broadcasting at least 30% of programme originally created as Macedonian audiovisual works, while Marija-Blagovest Radio and UGD FM Radio were issued public warning measures for not having provided information that should be made available to the users.

