Contrary to its legal obligation, the Ministry of Information Society and Administration had been transferring less funds than those legally prescribed, i.e. in the past six months, the regulator had received MKD 4,812,030.00 less than the prescribed amount. This negative practice of cutting the funds had been going on for quite some time, as the Ministry of Information Society and Administration had been transferring less funds even before the adoption of the latest legal amendments, by implementing the discretionary right granted by the previous law. Such arbitrary cutbacks of the funding constitute direct violation of the Law and bring into question not only the Agency’s independence, but also the performance of its competencies.

Following the alignment of the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services with the latest European standards and regulations, the Agency received additional obligations and, now, it has competencies over other entities on the market as well, such as the video sharing platforms and the influencers. The violation of the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services creates legal uncertainty and negatively affects the operations of the Agency, the MRT and the MRD, as well as of the entire audiovisual sector. Compliance with the Law is a prerequisite for positive progress within the European integration processes, as well as for the Macedonian media, organizations and associations’ access to the EU funds allocated for the development of the audiovisual sphere and culture, the total budget of which, under the Creative Europe programme 2021-2027, is nearly 2,5 billion Euros. This was the reason why the Agency had approached the Ministry on two occasions, however, both appeals were unsuccessful, due to which, in order to protect its rights, the Agency filed a lawsuit before the Basic Civil Court in Skopje.

On 15 January, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services held a press conference to inform the public that it had filed a lawsuit against the Ministry of Information Society and Administration, as the latter had been continuously violating the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, thereby jeopardizing the functioning of the entire audiovisual sector.

The amendments made to the Law in July last year, which had been proposed by this Ministry precisely, stipulate the exact amount of funds from the State Budget allocated for financing the broadcasting activity, for the purpose of enabling the Agency, the Macedonian Radio and Television (MRT) and the Macedonian Radio Broadcasting (MRD) Public Enterprise’s operations.

**Press Releases**

On 25 January, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services most strongly condemned the incident in the Municipality of Chashka, in which the TV crew of Alsat-M TV had been prevented from filming the protest against the introduction of an Albanian-language class in local the primary school, as well as from entering the Municipality building. The Agency pointed out in its Press Release that journalists and media outlets must be provided free and unhindered access to all events, bearing in mind their crucial role in reporting on matters of public interest and in ensuring transparency and accountability. It also reminded that any obstruction of the media’s work represents a direct threat to the freedom and the right to information.

**Expenditures Incurred by the Agency Director in the Second Half of 2023**

In accordance with its efforts to ensure transparency and accountability, and abiding by its own established practice to publish information about the expenditures incurred by Agency Director Zoran Trajchevski following each six-month period, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services informed the public in January 2024, that, in the period from 01.07.2023 until 31.12.2023, while conducting the tasks of his office, Director Trajchevski incurred expenditures totaling MKD 237,207.00, as follows: representation expenses (hospitality services for representatives of embassies, members of the Agency Council and business partners) – MKD 123,390.00; official mobile phone services – MKD 16,185.00, and expenses for the business trips abroad – MKD 97,632.00 (MKD 25,610.00 for airline tickets and MKD 72,022.00 for hotel accommodation).

**AVMU Holds Press Conference Concerning its Lawsuit against the Ministry of Information Society and Administration**

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On 26 January, the Agency issued a press release to inform the public that it had provided a donation worth 5 million Macedonian denars for the activities and content realized by the Investigative Reporting Lab (IRL), a non-profit media organization whose reporting is focused on corruption, crime and good governance. These activities match the goals and values of AVMU to protect citizens’ interests, provide quality information and pluralism in reporting and to support the existence of diverse, independent and autonomous audio and audiovisual media services. In the coming period, within the frameworks of this donation, the IRL will implement the innovative model of multimedia storytelling, to report on topics that are important to the citizens and will help them make informed decisions – political propaganda during elections and the rule of law.

**Supervisions over Broadcasters, Print Media Publishers and Operators of Public Electronic Communication Networks**

**Broadcasters**

An ad hoc administrative supervision was conducted over Kobra TV, Gurra TV, and Kaltrina TV, and the radio stations of Hit FM, Jazz FM and Balkan FM, to check the fulfillment of the obligations under Article 62, Paragraph 6, of the Law on AAVMS; Article 21 and Article 9 of the Rulebook on Minimum Technical, Spatial, Financial and Staffing Requirements for Obtaining a Radio or Television Broadcasting License. The supervision showed that Hit FM and Balkan FM radios had failed to meet the minimum staffing requirements established in the Rulebook, which was why a procedure for revoking the license was initiated for both radios. Additional ad hoc supervision was carried out over FM Radio, based on the decision of the Agency Council accepting the radio station's request to postpone the decision on revoking its radio broadcasting license, which showed that Hit FM Radio had eventually met the minimum staffing requirements established in the Rulebook. Control administrative supervision was carried out over the Balkan FM Radio, which showed that this broadcaster had also met the minimum staffing requirements established in the Rulebook on Minimum Technical, Spatial, Financial and Staffing Requirements for Obtaining a Radio or Television Broadcasting License.

Following a submitted complaint, an ad hoc programme supervision was carried out over Metropolis Radio concerning the language-use-related obligation, which showed that, in the show titled “Radio Auction”, aired on 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 January, the presenter's announcements were broadcast originally in the Croatian language, without providing a translation into the Macedonian language. For the committed violation, the radio station was issued a public warning measure.

**Operators of Public Electronic Communication Networks**

The Agency carried out regular programme supervision over the operators of Kabel DOO, Multimedia-Net, Inel International, Globalsat, Kabel-L-Net, KDS-Kabel Net, Signal-Net and Transhped Trade concerning their obligation to ensure, obligatorily and free of charge, airing of the programme services of the public broadcasting service as part of the programme packages they retransmit, as well as the obligations to register their programme services with the Agency and provide subtitling for the programmes they retransmit.The supervisions did not detect any violations.

**Print Media**

The Agency carried out a control administrative supervision over the "Naroden Lekar" print media outlet to establish if it had acted upon the Decision to impose a public warning measure, issued due to its failure to publish the precise date of print in its issue no. 591. The supervision found that the print media outlet had acted in full upon the public warning measure.

