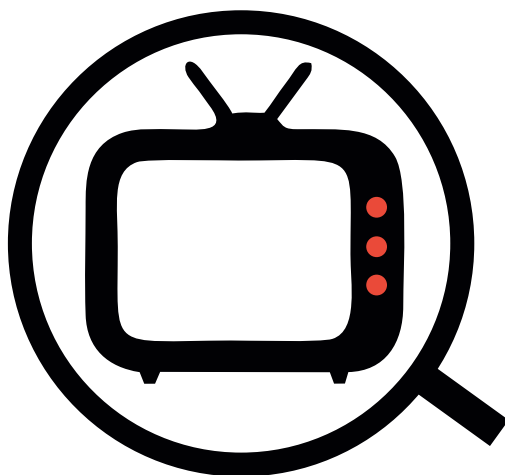

THE FIRST YEAR OF THE NEW LAW ON ELECTRONIC MEDIA


**ANALYSING THE PROGRAMME CONTENT
OF TELEVISIONS WITH NATIONAL
COVERAGE AND REM'S WORK**



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**Analysing the programme content of televisions
with national coverage and REM's work**

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In Belgrade, December 2024

Contents

Contents.....	3
Introduction.....	4
1. Methodology.....	6
2. Summary.....	7
3. The Matrix of Propaganda.....	8
4. Monitoring evening news on four commercial televisions with national coverage.....	9
4.1. The overall assessment of the evening news from 25 March to 12 May 2024.....	9
4.2. Similarity between editorial concept and selection of topics and news.....	11
4.3. The Strategies of Propaganda.....	13
4.4. Redirecting attention, stirring up emotions and making enemies.....	16
4.5. Nationally sensitive topics are exploited to boost the president's approval rating and fabricate attacks on the opposition.....	17
4.5.1. Kosovo.....	17
4.5.2. Kosovo's membership in the Council of Europe and the adoption of the Srebrenica Resolution.....	18
4.5.3. The NATO bombing of FRY in 1999.....	20
4.6. Disturbing news footage.....	21
4.7. Violation of the presumption of innocence and the obligation to protect personal data.....	21
5. The monitoring of the morning programmes on commercial televisions with national coverage.....	22
5.1. The overall assessment of the morning programme from 13 May to 25 October 2024.....	22
5.2. The manipulation strategies.....	23
5.2.1. Glorifying the leader and making enemies.....	23
5.2.2. Stirring up emotions and creating fear.....	26
5.2.3. Disseminating falsehood, disinformation and selective information.....	27
5.3. Journalists, presenters and hosts acting as instruments of propaganda.....	29
5.4. Press review – regular section of the morning programme.....	30
5.5. Attacks on journalists and media.....	32
6. Violations in the programmes of the televisions with national coverage and REM's actions.....	36
7. Recommendations.....	41

Introduction

New media laws, the Law on Electronic Media (LEM) and the Law on Public Information and Media (LPIM), entered into force on 4 November 2023.

The aim of amending these laws was their alignment with the Media Strategy 2020–2025, which offered solutions for advancement of the media legal framework to ensure improvement of public information and to guarantee freedom of expression, media pluralism, journalists' safety, developed media market and institutions that have capacities to implement legislation.¹

For over a decade, Serbia's public media space has been devoid of authentic information and media pluralism, being dominated instead by propaganda, disinformation, and hate speech. In addition to commercial televisions with national frequency, the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) plays a key role in spreading propaganda narratives within the electronic media sector. As it has had systematically neglected its responsibility to regulate, monitor, and sanction the media, this has had severe consequences on the quality of programming and public information, thereby affecting the entire public media landscape in Serbia. Rather than serving as a safeguard for independent and objective information in the public interest, REM consistently protects the misuse of media space and the violation of human rights, which has become a primary factor in the highly unfavourable media environment in Serbia.

The drafting of the new Law on Electronic Media was marked by significant uncertainty and concern, due to tight deadlines for preparation and public consultation, as well as numerous attempts to introduce provisions that contradicted the spirit of the Media Strategy. Despite these challenges, there were high expectations from the media community aspiring to create conditions that would ensure the professional operation of electronic media and the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media.

The new Law on Electronic Media (LEM) introduced several positive changes, including an amendment to the composition of authorised proposers for REM Council members, which excludes parliamentary committees. It also tightens the criteria for membership in the REM Council. Additionally, for the first time, the law includes a provision that restricts the broadcast of harmful content for individuals under the age of 12 to after 9:00 PM.² Moreover, the scope of penal provisions for

¹ Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020–2025, page 46, 2018. https://www.media.srbija.gov.rs/medsrp/-dokumenti/medijska_strategija210_cyr.pdf

² Previous versions of the law permitted the broadcast of content unsuitable for children under the age of 12 throughout the entire day.

media service providers stipulating misdemeanour liability has been extended, pursuant to which REM can initiate request for the proceedings before the court.

The provision of Article 126 added to the law stipulates that the current composition of the REM Council will remain in office for an additional year after the law takes effect, until 4 November 2024, by which time the process of appointing new members to the REM Council is expected to be completed. This provision was a result of a compromise between representatives of the Government of Serbia, members of international community and representatives of journalists' and media associations and coalitions. For the new composition of REM to be elected by 4 November 2024, the Parliamentary Culture and Information Committee must announce a public call no earlier than 4 May and no later than 4 August 2024. However, the Parliamentary Committee failed to do it in the predicted deadline. With the intention for the old composition of the REM Council to continue its work after 4 November, the members of the REM Council requested on 4 June that the Constitutional Court of Serbia examine the constitutionality of the legal provision terminating their mandate one year after the adoption of the new law, and suspend the execution of that provision. The Constitutional Court initiated a case under this initiative and the proceedings are ongoing. The members of the REM Council ceased working on 4 November 2024, when their mandate expired under the new Law on Electronic Media. However, since the new composition had not been elected, the Serbian electronic media landscape was left in a regulatory vacuum. On 25 November, the Culture and Information Committee of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Decision to launch proceedings for the nomination of candidates for the election of members of the REM Council, while the public call for the nomination of candidates was published in "Official Gazette of RS" on 29 November 2024.

One year after the new Law on Electronic Media entered into force, it is clear that the new law has not led to any improvements in the functioning of electronic media and the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media. The new legislative solutions, which could bring improvements to the electronic media sector, have not been implemented. The usual practice of media violating legal provisions and professional norms has continued, alongside REM's failure to regulate work of electronic media.

REM' silence continued regarding everyday violation of the law by the media service providers, including violations during election campaign for parliamentary (17 December 2023) and local and City of Belgrade elections (2 June 2024). To this day, REM did not publish results of monitoring on reporting of the commercial televisions (TV Pink, TV Happy, TV Prva, TV B92) during the election campaign for parliamentary elections in December, including the monitoring on media coverage during local elections in June 2024. This is a continuation of REM's earlier practice from the period 2016–2018, when this authority refused to publish reports on the work of media during the election campaign, while back in 2017 at the time of the presidential election campaign and local elections in 2018, it refused to perform

monitoring of media coverage. REM has persisted in its non-transparent handling of complaints from natural and legal persons regarding media content, i.e. its practice of failing to take action or dismissing complaints without providing any explanation. In May 2024, REM removed a provision from its Rulebook that required televisions with national coverage to dedicate at least 20 percent of their total airtime to high-quality programming (such as scientific, educational, documentary, children's, or cultural content), effectively absolving four commercial televisions with national coverage that had consistently violated this obligation.

Due to the protection of REM's planned dormancy, radio and TV stations that have long supported the ruling party's propaganda have continued to broadcast biased and misleading information, manipulation, and violate standards of media pluralism, human rights, and dignity. They have also persisted in spreading hate speech and launching campaigns against opponents of the current government.

1. Methodology

From 25 March to 25 October 2024, the monitoring team of the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation tracked the coverage on four national broadcasters — TV Pink, TV Happy, TV Prva, and TV B92 — focusing on their evening news and morning show segments. The evening news was monitored from 25 March to 12 May, while the morning programme segments of these broadcasters were monitored from 13 May until the conclusion of the monitoring period. TV B92 does not have a morning show; instead, on weekdays, the show "Fokus" was monitored, where the host and a guest discuss current political topics. On Sundays, the show "Osvrt" was monitored, which provides an overview of the week's most relevant events, with the host and a guest offering commentary together.

The main focus of the monitoring was to determine the extent to which televisions with national coverage adhere to legal obligations and professional standards in their news programmes, including evening news and morning shows, when reporting. For this purpose, the content of these television programmes was monitored, focusing on the topics of segments or shows, key actors, the tone of coverage, and any violations committed. It was specifically monitored whether the televisions complied with the provisions of laws and by-laws related to general media obligations (Article 62 of LEM and Articles 4–10 of REM's Rulebook on Human Rights Protection), respect for media pluralism (Article 6 of LPIM, Articles 31 and 61 of LEM), human rights and personal dignity (Article 70 of LEM and REM's Rulebook on Human Rights Protection), prohibition of hate speech (Article 71 of LEM), the right of reply (Article 94 of the Law on Public Information and Media and Article 8 of REM's Rulebook on Human Rights Protection), obligations during election campaigns (Article 62 of LEM), and the ban on publishing specific content (Article 72 of LEM).

Additionally, all meeting minutes available on REM's website, from the time the new media laws came into effect on 4 November 2023, until 28 October 2024, were reviewed to determine whether and how REM addressed the violations identified in the monitoring, as well as to assess REM's overall actions.

2. Summary

Four commercial televisions with national coverage (TV Pink, TV B92, TV Prva, TV Happy) consistently violate fundamental legal and professional obligations in their news programmes, serving primarily the propaganda goals of the current regime, as confirmed by several months of monitoring conducted by the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation (SCF).

Glorifying the leader and the party, vilifying government critics, fabricating enemies, censoring and manipulating information, diverting attention, inciting emotions, and fostering stupidity and ignorance remain the most common manipulation tactics employed by these broadcasters within their propaganda matrix.

These four televisions routinely violate legal obligations in their news programmes, which require coverage to be "independent, truthful, impartial, complete, and timely," while also respecting the rights of opposing viewpoints and upholding standards of media pluralism, including the representation of diverse opinions and the promotion of social dialogue. Programmes feature hate speech, disregard for human rights and personal dignity, and include smear campaigns as well.

These televisions news programmes completely lack any critical perspective on the current regime, which is only presented in a positive light. Serbia's President, Aleksandar Vučić, is portrayed as the central figure, presented as the saviour and protector of Serbia, with the narrative suggesting that everyone should rally behind his policies. This positive tone often escalates into outright glorification and even adoration of Vučić and his politics. There is a complete absence of critical opinions regarding the politics and performance of the current government, as well as a lack of exchange of diverse viewpoints on current socio-political and public issues. The news programmes guests are solely government and ruling parties representatives or public figures who openly support the current regime. Representatives of the critical intellectual community or opposition are never invited to the studio, and their views are only referenced incidentally in these television programmes, often through negative, insulting, and derogatory comments made by selected guests, including presenters and journalists.

Since this model of informing the public has been in place for years, it can be said that these televisions are responsible for promoting a planned, systemic, and deceptive propaganda that completely distorts the public's perception of political

actions and performance, as well as the actual social, political, and economic situation in Serbia. This has had, and will continue to have, far-reaching and serious consequences for both society and the state.

At the same time, Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media also systematically refuses to fulfil its duties, which include regulating, overseeing, and sanctioning media service providers. This also extends to its responsibility to address complaints from natural and legal persons regarding electronic media programmes.³ By neglecting its duties, REM provides conditions for the abuse of media space by electronic media, serving as a key factor in the dire media situation in Serbia and, indirectly, contributing to the harsh social and political crisis that the country has faced for years.

3. The Matrix of Propaganda

The foundation of the propaganda matrix is simple – news programmes broadcast only information that favours the current government, aiming to strengthen support for the incumbent president and his politics, thereby shaping the broader public's perception of it as the sole truth. That "truth" is endlessly repeated, not only by representatives of the government and ruling parties, but also by a small, carefully curated group of 'experts and independent intellectuals' who are rotated between these four televisions. On the other hand, truthful, complete, and diverse information is deliberately excluded from these media programmes, including critical opinions and social dialogue. Public figures and opposition representatives who criticise government actions and the President of Serbia are systematically attacked and vilified, often being converted into enemies of the state and nation.

The constant search for, and creation of, enemies—whom it is claimed seek to harm the president, his politics, and by extension, Serbia (equating the president with the nation)—not only serves as an effective amplifier of the core propaganda matrix but also acts as a unifying force, rallying the public around the ruling regime's politics.

Commercial national televisions constantly suggest to the public that only the incumbent president can protect citizens of Serbia from numerous enemies that want to harm it, as he is the only one working in the interest of his people, confronting the current destabilisation attempts, therefore it is necessary that everyone provides support to him. He is the only one capable of protecting and saving Serbia and its citizens, while everyone else involved in political life, according to the propaganda matrix, is depicted as bad, incompetent, and solely

³ Articles 6 and 7 of the Law on Electronic Media regulate the role and scope of work of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media.

focused on their own interests rather than the common good. Anyone who criticises Aleksandar Vučić's politics is automatically labelled an enemy of Serbia, and is thus subjected to attacks and insults in the programmes of televisions with national coverage. Any criticism of the incumbent president politics is framed not only as a struggle for alternative politics and principles, but also as a personal attack on Vučić himself and a battle for power.

This matrix is used not only in the context of domestic political topics but also in informing about the developments in the region and relationship with neighbouring countries, and when needed, in relation to representatives of the EU countries.

4. Monitoring evening news on four commercial televisions with national coverage

4.1. The overall assessment of the evening news from 25 March to 12 May 2024

All commercial televisions with national coverage use their news programmes primarily as a tool for propaganda, aimed at glorifying the current regime and discrediting any critical opinions.

The evening news on all four commercial national broadcasters (TV B92, TV Prva, TV Pink, TV Happy) are characterized by a dominant focus on the actions and activities of government representatives and the ruling party, primarily of highest government representatives (President, Prime Minister and National Assembly, ministers, etc.). They are consistently portrayed in a positive light, their decisions and achievements glorified, with an emphasis on how their actions are strengthening Serbia and improving the quality of life for its citizens. The headlines (breaking news at the start of the broadcast) consistently feature information about the activities of the President of Serbia and top government officials, and this also applies to the most significant stories presented at the beginning of the news bulletin. On days when the President of Serbia engages in significant foreign policy activities or meetings (such as a visit to France, the arrival of the Chinese President in Serbia, or his address to the UN General Assembly regarding the Srebrenica Resolution⁴, etc.), the evening news, as well as all other news programmes on these televisions, focus exclusively on the president's appearances and statements. These are accompanied by comments from selected guests,

⁴ President of Serbia Vučić visited France from April 8–9, Chinese President Xi Jinping was in Serbia from May 7–8, and President Vučić travelled to the UN in New York on April 22 to urge UN members to vote against the Srebrenica Resolution.

supporters of the current regime, who praise the president's politics and achievements.

Contrasting with the positive tone and glorification of government leaders and the ruling party, negative rhetoric targeting opposition party representatives, civil movements, and any public figures or activists critical of the current government is continuously broadcast. This segment includes campaigns aimed at discrediting and smearing politicians, as well as the promotion of hate speech.

The opposition figures are never given the opportunity to speak directly or express their views in these television news programmes: the viewers only get negative and distorted interpretation of the opposition activities and opinions, almost without exception, presented by government representatives,⁵ political commentators aligned with the current regime, and also journalists and show hosts.

One common tactic used to manipulate the statements of opposition leaders in the evening news and other news programmes was to take their remarks out of context and edit them to convey a different meaning from the original. Afterwards, the edited statements would be aired during the appearances of high-ranking government representatives, typically when the President of Serbia was a guest⁶, who would then comment on them in a negative and judgmental manner.

News coverage of opposition figures' actions is incomplete, biased, and, as a rule, taken out of context. This reflects the editorial policy of these televisions, which not only fail to inform on the activities and political opinions of the opposition leaders, but also mention them only when government representatives respond to their actions. Thus, the public only receives negative government

⁵ For example, in April 2024, government representatives engaged in discussions with the opposition in the Serbian Assembly regarding the conditions for organising local and Belgrade elections. All four commercial televisions covered this topic exclusively through statements and interviews with Speaker of the Assembly Ana Brnabić, who conveyed the details of the meeting and the behaviour of the opposition. Meanwhile, representatives from opposition parties who participated in the discussions at the Serbian Assembly were not given any opportunity to share their views with the audience. Brnabić largely portrayed the opposition in a negative light, describing them as those imposing ultimatums and refusing to implement the ODIHR recommendations, while the government was depicted positively, as making efforts to meet the opposition halfway and working for the common good (TV B92, TV Prva). The discussions between the government and opposition lasted for months, yet the televisions coverage followed the same pattern, interviewing only government representatives.

⁶ President Aleksandar Vučić consistently refused to engage in conversations with opposition leaders in the television studio, despite numerous requests from opposition representatives, especially during moments of crisis for Serbia. He did not accept such invitation from the then President of Serbia, Boris Tadić, who was in office from 2004 until 2012. He opted to "have such dialogue" in a studio only with edited i.e. falsified statements from the representatives of the opposition.

reactions to the opposition's actions without original information regarding the opposition's politics and actions. It is common for news bulletins of the commercial television with national coverage to report on the government's negative reactions to the actions of opposition parties. However, such reports do not provide viewers with prior information about the specific activities or opinions that prompted the government's response.

A key aspect of these televisions' propaganda strategies is the complete exclusion of news and topics that do not benefit the ruling coalition or that highlight the mismanagement and abuses by current regime representatives in public enterprises, state institutions, and similar.

This approach constantly violates legal obligations on the respect of media pluralism, the rule on representation of the other side, right of reply, prohibition of discrimination based on political beliefs or membership in "political, trade union and other organisations"⁷, as well as basic obligations of all media to report "truthfully, impartially, completely"⁸.

4.2. Similarity between editorial concept and selection of topics and news

It is noticeable that there is a huge similarity in the editorial concept of news bulletins on all four commercial televisions, i.e. striking similarity between information and topics published in the news and those excluded, including the manner of processing selected information.

There is a special similarity in content and selection of news between TV B92 and TV Prva, which share the same owner. These two televisions not only broadcast the same news but identical stories, suggesting that the news may be coordinated through some form of centralised news desk.

The main difference between the evening news on these two televisions is that the news on TV Prva does not solely consist of bulletins made up of statements, announcements, and activities of government and Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) representatives, as is the case with TV B92, which consistently follows this approach. The first two or three stories in the news bulletin on TV B92 are typically focused on President Vučić, followed by coverage of the activities of other high-ranking officials, ministers, and so on⁹.

⁷ Law on Electronic Media, Article 71

⁸ Law on Electronic Media, Article 61

⁹ The news broadcast on TV B92 on 22 April 2024, serves as a typical example of such coverage—13 out of 20 stories in the news bulletin were dedicated to the statements and activities of top government representatives, including the president, ministers, the

Out of 10 segments broadcast in the news bulletin on Sunday, 7 April 2024 on TV B92, only 3 did not refer to President Aleksandar Vučić. In the first six stories, President Vučić was the central figure, both the subject and object of the coverage. Topics included his upcoming official visit to France, his discussion agenda for the visit, his proposal for the Serbian government to introduce the death penalty in cases like the murder of little Danka Ilić, concerns about threats to his safety — a planned attack by the Kavač gang, and an analysis of his security from the perspective of security services. The final story, the tenth in the bulletin, featured his tweet congratulating the newly elected President of Slovakia. On 9 April 2024, the entire news broadcast on TV B92 was dedicated to President Vučić and his meetings during his visit to France, including discussions with French President Macron and other officials. The news segments featured the president's statements recounting the details of his conversations and meetings, and concluded with a quote from his Instagram post. On 14 April, the TV B92 news bulletin consisted solely of unedited statements from the president, lasting almost 30 minutes, covering his appearance at the ceremony marking the Day of Cobras. In those statements, he touched upon many topics – letters he had sent to the Council of Europe members, arresting of a Serb national at Kosovo, the Srebrenica Resolution, Middle East situation, relations within the opposition, etc. On 23, 24, 25 and 27 April 2024, the majority of the broadcast news was dedicated to Vučić's appearance before the UN Security Council regarding the Srebrenica Resolution.

Unlike TV B92, TV Prva news included other topics in addition to the information on government and party activities and announcements. However, in these televisions' news the obligation of impartial, truthful and complete information is not respected, including the standard of media pluralism and rule of the other side right of reply. This television also takes biased, negative and critical approach when presenting all actors who do not support the government.

For TV Happy evening news, the stories are carefully curated to align with the narrative of glorifying the current government's policies and the president, while negative commentary on the opposition is reserved for studio guests from the ruling structures or those who are closely aligned with the government. It is typical of TV Happy that discriminatory rhetoric against the opposition and its views is more prevalent in other programmes, such as the morning show and talk shows, than in the evening news. One of the regular guests on TV Happy's morning programme is Vojislav Šešelj, the leader of the Serbian Radical Party (SRS), who was convicted by the Hague Tribunal for crimes against humanity and sentenced

president of the SNS parliamentary group, and the mayor of Belgrade. The remaining segments covered global news (5 stories) and issues related to public utilities (2 stories).

to 10 years in prison. He is notorious for his frequent and public hate speech. On 29 March 2024 in the morning programme he was reading a list of traitors of Serbia, while on 3 April 2024 in the same show he used hate speech to talk about journalist and professor Dinko Gruhonjić.¹⁰

Besides obvious similarity between news and topics on four national televisions covered in evening news bulletins, there is a similarity between the news they chose not to publish. For instance, at the end of March, these televisions did not report on the BIRN investigation uncovering fraud in the Ministry for Family Care and Demography's competitions, which resulted in five million EUR being disbursed to a network of phantom organizations¹¹, while they also failed to cover the attack on opposition members in Kač on 6 April 2024, when two members of the Party of Freedom and Justice (SSP) were assaulted while distributing brochures. Members of the SSP were knocked on ground and kicked, and one of them got visible bodily injuries.¹²

4.3. The Strategies of Propaganda

On days when the president appears live or makes statements as part of his presidential activities¹³, his appearance is broadcast in full, without any editorial intervention, across all four commercial televisions. The duration of the programmes is extended to match the length of the president's TV appearance. Depending on the nature of the president's address, news bulletins are extended by 15 minutes to an hour and a half. In addition to these appearances, the president frequently appears as a guest in evening news programmes, most commonly in the TV Pink news bulletin.

¹⁰ On 3 April 2024 during TV Happy's morning programme, Vojislav Šešelj, the leader of the Serbian Radical Party, directed hate speech at journalists Ana Lalić and Dinko Gruhonjić, the latter of whom also teaches at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad. Šešelj claimed that Dinko Gruhonjić's 'Ustasha orientation' was the reason for his removal from the Faculty of Philosophy, adding that "students in Novi Sad are quite adept at recognising it and are persistently addressing it". He added that he would kick out all professors supporting Dinko. He accused Gruhonjić of 'committing criminal acts of hate speech multiple times,' asserting that 'he should be immediately arrested and prosecuted for the undeniable crime of spreading national and religious hatred on several occasions,' and added that 'Ana Lalić should face the same'. For Ana Lalić he said that "she is no one and nothing, a scum". Šešelj read every single name from the list of journalists and public figures who signed a letter of support to Dinko Gruhonjić and said that all of them are "Serbian traitors, every single one".

¹¹ <https://birn.rs/prevare-u-ministarstvu-za-brigu-o-porodici>

¹² <https://beta.rs/content/203057-ssp-tuceni-predsednik-i-potpredsenica-gradskog-odbora-stranke-u-novom-sadu>

¹³ According to data from the CRTA organisation, as of 5 November 2024, President Vučić addressed the media directly 289 times this year.

For instance, on 29 March 2024, the news broadcast on the monitored televisions was interrupted to air a live address by the President of Serbia, which lasted for over an hour. This happened again on 31 March (president went live for 15 minutes); on 4 April (president spoke at the government of Serbia sitting, for somewhat less than half an hour); on 8 April during visit to Paris (more than 20 minutes); 9 April (almost 20 minutes); 11 April, etc. The same practice was noted on all monitored televisions with national coverage during the entire period of monitoring.

TV Pink's "National News Bulletin" stands out for its frequent use of the propaganda matrix, glorifying the current regime while discrediting opposing and critical viewpoints.

The evening news on this television is longer than on other televisions, often featuring more than 30 stories, and serves as a direct propaganda platform for promoting the incumbent president and his political party. The central actor in TV Pink news is without exception the incumbent President of Serbia whose statements and activities attract the most attention. In addition to statements and media appearances, the news often quotes Aleksandar Vučić social media posts, as well as announcements of his planned activities.

One of TV Pink's regular propaganda tactics is to air stories almost every day in its evening news about infrastructure projects—such as roads, bridges, and the construction and renovation of hospitals and kindergartens—often crediting these achievements directly to the president. He is portrayed as the mastermind behind all infrastructure projects, the driving force behind construction, and the individual motivating workers while setting deadlines. The statements such as, "These works are carried out under the direct orders of Aleksandar Vučić"¹⁴; "Great, extra, well-done Vučić", "Everything Vučić has done is outstanding"¹⁵; "Many thanks to our President Vučić for taking care and for fulfilling his promises"¹⁶; "We are eternally grateful to President Vučić"¹⁷, are commonly heard in TV Pink's news. On the eve of the local elections in Serbia, held on 2 June 2024, this practice intensified, leading to an increase in the number of such segments in the news.

Since dates for Belgrade and local elections were announced (held on 2 June 2024), TV Pink introduced the section "Belgrade News", in addition to "2024 Elections" that presented an additional propaganda tool to motivate the viewers to vote for

¹⁴ TV Pink, National News Bulletin, 21 April 2024, these are the exact words of the presenter in the story on works in Prijepolje municipality.

¹⁵ TV Pink, National News Bulletin, 31 March 2024, citizens' statements in the survey regarding the roads' construction in Eastern Serbia.

¹⁶ TV Pink, National News Bulletin, Belgrade News, 8 April 2024, one citizen's statement regarding 4 traffic lanes construction in Smederevski road.

¹⁷ TV Pink, National News Bulletin, Belgrade News, 10 April 2024, one citizen's statement regarding the Ritopek settlement connection to the city water utility.

current government in the local elections. This section typically featured between four to nine segments highlighting various activities of the municipal and city authorities, including works projects in Belgrade's municipalities, where the current government and the president received all the credit. The broadcast stories repeatedly emphasise that, under the previous government until 2013, everything was neglected and deteriorated. In contrast, the current government, led by President Vučić – who, despite having no competence over local community matters – is portrayed as the one repairing, reconstructing, and improving everything, therefore Belgrade and Serbia's future progress is only possible with the current government.

TV Pink newsroom frequently repeats the same segments in its news bulletins, often re-broadcasting statements of admiration and gratitude towards the president, without exception. In March and April 2024, TV Pink aired and repeatedly reran numerous stories focused on various infrastructure projects, with President Vučić taking credit for them. One such story, broadcast multiple times, featured a statement from a citizen who said: "I do not want to praise any of the parties, but well done, Vučić."

In addition to news about the activities of the President of Serbia, TV Pink very often has long stories in news that deal with the promotion of the activities of the owner of this television, Željko Mitrović, or the promotion of his company. Such stories are also repeated in the news every day, representing the misuse of the evening news bulletin on the television with national coverage for personal promotion and the promotion of the company within which this television operates. On 7 May 2024, TV Pink broadcast a birthday post from the television owner Instagram account that he made to wish his wife a happy birthday.

In March, there was extensive coverage of Željko Mitrović's visit to children without parental care, whom he paid for winter holidays, while in April, the television reported on Mitrović's company PR-DC (operating in the scope of the Pink Media Group), as this company successfully tested a drone swarm kamikaze in this period, and then again that Željko Mitrović was trained to drive drones and that the Pink company bought the shares of the company Google, etc. The same stories are rerun every day in the news on this television.

In addition to TV Pink, other commercial televisions with national coverage also have a similar principle of propaganda reporting in which they glorify the performance of the current government. TV B92, for example, typically covers stories about high-ranking officials and global news first. After that, almost every day, it reports on various ministries making investments, the reconstruction of various structures and endowed buildings, new technologies, and other related topics. These segments often feature appearances by mayors, ministers, and other representatives of the ruling government, etc.

4.4. Redirecting attention, stirring up emotions and making enemies

One of the most frequently used manipulation strategies in the news programmes of four commercial televisions is redirecting attention and stirring up emotions. In this case as well, the main figure is typically the President of Serbia, whose public appearances are designed more to evoke emotions in the audience than to present facts or articulate ideas and viewpoints that could foster public dialogue on matters of broad social importance.

With the aim of stirring up emotions and redirecting attention, mainly fabricated threats to the president's safety are broadcast through news in propaganda media, which then becomes the main topic in news and is exploited for days, accompanied by blocks of news and stories in which ministers and the closest party associates are fiercely defending their leader and at the same time fighting their political opponents. In this way, the narrative of the president's security being threatened becomes a dominant and recurring topic with boundless potential for consuming significant airtime allocated not only for news bulletins but also for other news programmes. As a result of the prominence of this issue, all other information is either cropped or omitted, successfully redirecting the public's attention from pressing matters in the country to the president and his inner circle, which is once again used to glorify his character and political actions.

Threats to the president's security, as well as to his family, remain a constant topic across the programmes of the four televisions with national coverage. However, the individuals or groups deemed responsible for these threats change periodically, ranging from the opposition and anonymous social media profiles to the Kavač criminal gang and the fugitive leader of that group, Radoje Zvicer.¹⁸

So, for example, on 26 March 2024, and in the following days, the main story in the news on commercial televisions with national coverage was the alleged death certificate bearing the name of the President of Serbia, which surfaced in Mladenovac and was later shared on a Facebook profile. All pro-regime media outlets extensively covered the story, quoting statements and posts from the Instagram accounts of several ministers who condemned the alleged attack on the President of Serbia. At the same time, they harshly criticised the opposition, accusing it of being behind these attacks.

¹⁸ On 12 April 2024, TV B92 and TV Prva broadcast news included reading a statement of the former Minister of the Interior and the SIA director, Aleksandar Vulin: "They are after Vučić. They want a change of government in Serbia, but one *that* won't arrest them. Some have vowed to kill Aleksandar Vučić, whether from prison or as free men, and there's one more target – me. Aleksandar Vučić is the one who declared war on the mafia, and that battle is being fought not only in Serbia, but across the entire region. And they know it. Vučić won't be safe as long as Zvicer remains free."

While pro-government media outlets bombarded citizens with reports about the alleged death certificate, there was no coverage of the evidence showing that the government continued to move phantom voters and lay the groundwork to secure victory in the upcoming June 2024 elections. This, however, was the main topic covered by media outlets not under regime control.

The government, with the support of its media, often uses posts from anonymous accounts on social media that are critical of the government and the president, to create a narrative about the threatened security of the president. If such anonymous posts also contain elements of hostile and threatening speech, they are often attributed to the opposition, which is then accused of the intention to fight the president and government officials by violent means.

4.5. Nationally sensitive topics are exploited to boost the president's approval rating and fabricate attacks on the opposition

4.5.1. Kosovo

Significant attention is given daily in all television evening news to topics related to events in Kosovo and Metohija¹⁹. The news and stories exclusively feature statements from representatives of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of Serbia, typically including the director, Petar Petković, and representatives of the Serbian List, the political party of Kosovo Serbs backed by the Belgrade government. Other political factions within the Kosovo Serb community are not represented.

The Pristina authorities are consistently portrayed in a negative light. Prime Minister Albin Kurti is particularly singled out, often being described as someone who "terrorises" the Serbian population of Kosovo and Metohija. His politics are repeatedly criticised through daily statements and announcements from the Office for Kosovo and Metohija and the Serbian List, which dominate the news coverage.

The coverage model used for the Brussels dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina mirrors the approach taken for reporting on the meetings between the government and the opposition regarding the election conditions. Only one side is given a voice in these reports — the Serbian side — which recounts the course of the conversation with the Kosovo delegation.

The information and news broadcast on national televisions regarding the position of Serbs in Kosovo do not aim to clarify the situation or foster dialogue to

¹⁹ Kosovo is referred as "so-called Kosovo".

find a solution. Instead, they serve to maintain constant tension around the threats to Serbia's and Kosovo Serbs' interests. This underpins the propaganda narrative of these televisions, portraying the necessity of current government led by President Aleksandar Vučić remaining as the sole protector of Serbian interests and the Serbian people in Kosovo against these ongoing threats.

This topic is regularly used for confrontation with the Serbian opposition. This is achieved by equating the opinions of the Serbian opposition with those of Kosovo politicians, labelling the opposition as traitorous and positioning them as enemies of Serbia. For example, in the TV Pink news broadcast on 26 April 2024, the journalist linked the views of the opposition to those of Kosovo politicians, such as Prime Minister Albin Kurti and President Vjosa Osmani, as well as regional leaders "witnessing that they are not friendly towards Serbia". After such an introduction, Dragoslav Bokan, a guest in the studio, otherwise one of the government's apologists, states: "Everything ultimately comes down to one simple idea—opposing and acting in contrast to everything Aleksandar Vučić does—aligning with the interests of those who despise our country, who are not mere opponents, but enemies."

4.5.2. Kosovo's membership in the Council of Europe and the adoption of the Srebrenica Resolution

During the monitoring period, the topics of Kosovo's membership in the Council of Europe (CoE) and the adoption of the Srebrenica Resolution at the UN General Assembly were prominent. Regarding these two nationally very sensitive topics, only the statements of those who were against the Kosovo membership in the Council of Europe and the adoption of this resolution, which was the position of the current government, were published. The negative tone was always present when speaking about the initiators and supporters of the adoption of the Resolution on Srebrenica or the membership of Kosovo in the CoE. Both topics were used to stir up emotions and divert public attention from other burning issues. The news and stories on these topics were charged with emotions built on the narrative of injustice against Serbia, pressure exerted on it and the struggle of the Serbian authorities and President Vučić to protect Serbian interests.²⁰

A similar style of reporting was evident when the decision was made regarding whether the Assembly of Kosovo would be granted associate membership in the Parliamentary Assembly of NATO. Regarding the monitored televisions, only the views of the interlocutors who condemned NATO's move were

²⁰ For example, in the news of 12 April 2024, a TV Pink journalist described how the conflicts between major powers spilled over us, increasing pressure over issues related to Kosovo and Metohija, as well as the Republic of Srpska. The journalist mentioned efforts to label Serbia as a genocidal nation, while Finance Minister Siniša Mali and other speakers emphasised that only Aleksandar Vučić could save Serbia in this critical moment.

represented, while NATO, the UN Security Council and Pristina were accused of "collaborating all the time", questioning the "intentions of the West" and dubbing this decision "scandalous"²¹.

The adoption of the Resolution on Srebrenica in the UN General Assembly, which declares 11 July as the International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the Genocide in Srebrenica and condemns the denial of genocide and the glorification of war criminals, has been a top story on news programmes of commercial televisions with national coverage for weeks. The news of these televisions created a narrative about threats to Serbian people and the intention of "marking the Serbian people", constantly repeating that "the goal of the Resolution is to label the Serbian people as genocidal", "to come up with an initiative for the abolition of the Republic of Srpska after the adoption of the Resolution", "to demand war reparations from the Republic of Serbia", etc., whereby such qualifications were made by the highest government representatives and suitable political analysts.

The commercial televisions that promote such a narrative can be seen as disinforming the public, spreading fake news, and manipulating national sentiments of Serbian citizens, who are led to believe that their people are under threat, that the international community is against them, and that, despite the absence of such language in the adopted Resolution, there are efforts to label them as genocidal.²²

It is necessary to indicate that this topic was constantly used for additional attacks on the "traitorous" opposition²³, even though the opposition parties did not participate in the preparation and adoption of this Resolution in any way. In the four commercial televisions news, the opposition was constantly attacked because it did not make any statements on the text of this Resolution and did not condemn its adoption. The opposition was accused of supporting the position that genocide was committed in Srebrenica, as well as upholding adoption of a resolution with this content from the beginning.

The opposition champion Marinika Tepić was specifically targeted in the attacks, being labelled a traitor, a driving force behind the adoption of the Resolution, and a person who supported the notion that the Serbian people were genocidal. The smear campaign against Marinika Tepić due to the Resolution on

²¹ The National News Bulletin, TV Pink at 18:30, 25 March 2024.

²² The final version of this Resolution contains provisions underlying "that criminal accountability under international law for the crime of genocide is individualized and cannot be attributed to any ethnic, religious or other group or community as a whole," mentioning that "the unwavering commitment to maintaining stability and fostering unity in diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina".

²³ See section: Example 1: Attacks on opposition

Srebrenica was based on her old statement from 2016, which was recorded by the camera at the time when a group of MPs in the Serbian Assembly submitted a proposal for the urgent adoption of the Resolution on the Genocide in Srebrenica, which was not discussed in the Assembly at the time.²⁴ In TV Pink news of 5 and 6 April 2024, Tepić was accused of being a leader behind inspiring the adoption of the Resolution on the Genocide in Srebrenica²⁵. Attacks on Marinika Tepić in this context continued for weeks.²⁶

In addition to the opposition leaders and parties, anyone else supporting or initiating the adoption of the resolution was also targeted in the commercial television news. This included Germany, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro, also journalists from Bosnia and Herzegovina who reported on this topic.

4.5.3. The NATO bombing of FRY in 1999

At the end of March 2024, as in previous years, news segments recalling the NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which took place from 24 March to 10 June 1999, were broadcast. Recalling the events of the specific dates in 1999, footage and statements from 25 years ago were broadcast in the news as if they were current events and footage. This meant creating the impression that Serbia is still at risk and under threat from all sides.

²⁴ On 31 March 2010, during the time of the democratic government, the National Assembly adopted the Declaration of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia on the condemnation of the crime in Srebrenica. At the end of June 2016, two smaller parliamentary groups in the Serbian Assembly submitted a proposal for the urgent adoption of the Resolution on the Genocide in Srebrenica, which "condemns the genocide in Srebrenica, and any denial of the genocide and declares 11 July as the Day of Remembering the Genocide in Srebrenica", but this proposal was not included in the agenda of the Serbian Assembly.

²⁵ TV Pink, National News Bulletin, 5 April 2024: Journalist: Some people from our country added to the issue. Back in 2016, Marinika Tepić, then an MP, signed the proposal for the Resolution on the genocide in Srebrenica, stating during her speech at the Assembly that the genocide had been committed in our name.

²⁶ TV Pink, 12 April 2024: Journalist: "To this day, no one has been held accountable for the crimes committed against the Serbian people, while on the other hand, efforts are being made to put the label of genocide on Serbia. Before the UN General Assembly, a proposal for a Resolution on Srebrenica will be presented, with Germany, Great Britain, and Croatia, among others, expected to share their positions on the matter". Dragan Palibrk, a lawyer: "The sick desire to demonise the Serbian people by some great global powers, which, unfortunately, throughout history have caused a lot of harm to the Serbian people." The journalist said that Croatia was also expected to uphold the Resolution. "And in their NDH camps, thousands of Serbs, Jews and Roma perished." Journalist: "However, this resolution was also supported by representatives of the opposition in Serbia, those who have never condemned crimes against Serbs." (playing background footage of Marinika Tepić from 2016 speaking about the Srebrenica Resolution in the Serbian Assembly). Dragan Palibrk: "There will always be those who, for the sake of relieving their personal frustrations, find it more important to stigmatise and demonise their own people."

News segments reminding viewers of the 1999 bombing are broadcast alongside stories about the international community's intention to condemn the Serbian people for genocide through the Srebrenica Resolution. These segments include footage depicting the difficult situation of Kosovo Serbs and the intention of the international community to let Kosovo join the Security Council and other international organizations. They also recall the suffering of the Serbian people during the wars in the former Yugoslavia, such as in Operation Flash (1–3 May 1995). The audience watching the evening news on these televisions is left with a stronger impression that the Serbian people are under general threat, which serves to justify calls for national unity and rallying around the incumbent president's politics, with claims that he is the only one capable of protecting Serbs and addressing the piled-up problems.

4.6. Disturbing news footage

Monitored televisions do not warn their viewers in advance of any disturbing footage when they report on global conflicts or terrorist attacks and broadcast footage showing the effects of violence on the victims. This type of behaviour on television has been observed on several occasions, such as during the terrorist attack in Russia or when a man killed six people in a shopping centre in Sydney (13 April 2024, TV Pink).

The newsrooms also unprofessionally covered the case of the missing little girl Danka Ilić, broadcasting unverified and inappropriate information. In the news, they presented not only inappropriate and redundant information but also highly disturbing details from the investigation into the search for Danka and her murder, revealing gruesome specifics about how the young girl was killed, all without giving prior warning to the audience.

4.7. Violation of the presumption of innocence and the obligation to protect personal data

Televisions frequently violate the obligation to uphold the presumption of innocence by publishing the names and photos of individuals who are merely suspects and have not yet been formally charged (e.g. during the investigation of the murder of the little girl Danka Ilić or during the trial of the criminal group known as "Vračarci" at the end of March 2024). Televisions report on the suspects as "perpetrators" and attribute the commission of the crime to them, thereby violating the presumption of innocence.

On 5 April 2024, at the time of the investigation of Danka Ilić disappearance, Ninoslav Čolić, the head of the Crime Investigation Police Department was a guest of TV Pink news, and among other things, talked about how the girl was killed,

about the details of the investigation and the statements of the suspects, showing photos of suspects, so afterwards the lawyers intervened, accusing him of "serious violation of the law" for sharing information from the preliminary investigation, demanding criminal proceedings against him.

Newsrooms do not uphold their obligation to protect personal data, often publishing names, surnames, and other personal data without necessity, making it possible to clearly establish the identity of individuals. They also publish information with high level of confidentiality in the means of general security. On 19 and 20 April 2024, TV Prva published the address of a safe house in Niš several times in the news, as part of the report that the residents of a part of Niš were notified to evacuate urgently because of a bomb.

5. The monitoring of the morning programmes on commercial televisions with national coverage

5.1. The overall assessment of the morning programme from 13 May to 25 October 2024

The same propaganda matrix is present in the morning programmes of commercial televisions with national coverage as in their evening news, resulting in the same types of violations. They fail to uphold the standards of media pluralism and the principle of presenting opposing views. Instead of reporting truthfully and in a timely manner, they disseminate propaganda, disinformation, and hate speech.

The information presented is one-sided and biased, promoting the current government's politics while only highlighting positive aspects of its performance. Any information that could harm the government's rating is either ignored or manipulated. Additionally, for what it is responsible, the government shifts the blame onto the opposition, activists, and other societal groups critical of the ruling regime. There is no representation of diverse opinions and ideas; representatives of the critical public and opposition are never given the opportunity to express their views or discuss their activities. The programme guests consist solely of government representatives and its supporters — on-duty political analysts and commentators.

Regarding the commercial television reporting on foreign policy topics, there is an ambivalent attitude towards the EU: They claim that this is the only path for Serbia, while simultaneously criticising the EU in the context of its relations with Belgrade and Pristina. In contrast to the criticism directed at the EU, advocating for Serbia to turn towards BRICS is obvious, presenting it as an alliance that is expanding. These televisions programmes include a positive and biased speech towards China, which

culminated during the visit of the Chinese President to Belgrade on 7 and 8 May 2024, when there was extensive reporting on cooperation with this country and Chinese investments in Serbia. The tone is positive when talking about Russia, while NATO and the USA are most often presented negatively, with the exception of Donald Trump's presidential campaign, which was mentioned as positive, and TV Happy in particular broadcast visible support for the Republican candidate. There is occasional hate speech towards neighbouring countries, especially towards Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the morning programmes of these televisions, which was particularly visible at the time of the adoption of the Resolution on Srebrenica.

On the monitored televisions, except for TV B92, which does not have this type of programme, the morning show lasts several hours and is structured as a live TV magazine show. It consists of multiple segments in which presenters engage with studio guests, and at least once every hour, the news is read aloud.

Unlike the evening news, when the presenter reads the prepared news and usually talks to a guest, the multi-hour morning news in dialogue format include several programme guests, who are, as a rule, government defenders, commenting on daily political events and the press every morning, so the propaganda blade of the morning programme is even more pronounced than in the evening news. All kinds of weapons are used to fire at the opposition and critics of the government, with hate speech and smear campaigns against opponents of the current regime becoming even more pervasive.

5.2. The manipulation strategies

The same manipulation strategies employed in the evening news are also used in the morning programmes of commercial televisions: distribution of disinformation, fallacies and selective information; using the strategy of glorification; redirecting attention and stirring up emotions; using nationally sensitive topics to increase the president's rating and engineering attacks on the opposition; using the accusatory mirroring strategy (accuse the enemy of everything you do yourself); constant attacks and campaigns against opponents of the regime.

5.2.1. Glorifying the leader and making enemies

The shows constantly promote and glorify the politics of President Aleksandar Vučić and his closest associates, while criticising and attacking the opposition, and all other opponents perceived by the government as enemies, including the authorities in Kosovo, representatives of the countries of the region, Europe and the world, primarily Western countries. The intolerance and spreading hatred towards neighbouring nations are present. Professional media and journalists are frequent targets of attacks, accused of attempting to destabilise the state and working against Serbian interests.

If necessary, those perceived by the regime as its political opponents are linked with and accused of joint action against the incumbent president and the government. The politics and actions of the Kosovo authorities are linked with the actions of the opposition in Serbia, the reporting of critical media and the activities of criminal groups. It is not uncommon that the opposition, including professional journalists and media, is accused of destabilizing Serbia in cooperation with the authorities in Kosovo, countries in the region, the West, foreign services, and even with criminal groups.

On 10 August 2024, during the TV Pink morning programme *Novo jutro*, host Jovana Jeremić stated: "Albin Kurti, the person funding these protests (against lithium mining) that will take place in Belgrade today – how is that in any way beneficial?" Albin Kurti who slaughtered our people and who totally supports the independence of Kosovo...", and her guest Dejan Miletić answered: "...the violence in Kosovo and Metohija has been recently intensified as well as illegal activities used to cover up all these activities...This is the reason for the funding — it serves to divert attention from the growing and increasingly dramatic risk to our people. We are on the verge of the armed conflict in Kosovo and Metohija".

On 13 July 2024, during the morning programme on TV Prva, Prime Minister of Serbia Miloš Vučević: The continuity of this "propaganda is evident, with its origins traced back to Sarajevo, Zagreb, parts of Podgorica, and certainly Pristina". And some media "in Belgrade, i.e. Serbia, tycoon ones, know exactly how to spin the same topic" and to get involved as one well-coordinated team.

On 10 August 2024, during TV Pink morning programme *Novo jutro*, host Jovana Jeremić read headlines from the newspapers *Srpski Telegraf*: "Moscow warns that the West is involved in the protests and wants to wreak chaos in Serbia, and *Srpski Telegraf* mentions that three centres are preparing for violence, the opposition was supported by Pristina and Zagreb", so she comments: "It totally makes sense, Serbia has given Croatia inferiority complex because we have made a lot of progress as a country... We are already better than Croatia, but just imagine what we could achieve with lithium".

On 15 August 2024, TV Happy, SNS member and an MP Dejan Bulatović said in the show "Good Morning Serbia": "...and people are now getting the insight into who these opposition politicians are." They are in service of foreign intelligence agencies, and the countries that only wish the worst for Serbia".

On 24 June 2024, during TV Happy morning programme, the former state secretary in the Mol, Dijana Hrkalović, accused professional media (portal KRIK and United Media Group) of cooperation with the criminal Radoje Zvicer, who, in her words, was giving them instructions what to publish.

Every activity and request of the opposition for the current regime to change its politics, as well as every protest by citizens and the opposition, is always condemned and interpreted exclusively as an attempt to overthrow the current regime and its leader Aleksandar Vučić. Thus, the representatives of the government, accusing the opposition of its only goal being toppling the President of Serbia, placed in the same context the protests against lithium mining throughout Serbia in the summer of 2024 with the protests of 2023 after the mass murders in the Elementary School "Vladislav Ribnikar" and the villages near Mladenovac.

During the summer of 2024, daily protests against the opening of lithium mines were held throughout Serbia, and a huge rally was held on 10 August in Belgrade. Monitored television programmes put systemic effort into discrediting the organizers and participants of civil protests against lithium mining. Televisions Pink, Happy, Prva and B92 pushed the agenda that the protests against lithium were instructed by the Albanian and Croatian lobbies, while events in Kosovo and protests in Serbia were presented as synchronised actions aimed at destabilising Serbia and overthrowing the government of Aleksandar Vučić.



This is a print screen from the morning show "Novo jutro" on TV Pink of 10 August 2024, as its host Jovana Jeremic shows an article from the daily Srpski telegraf, claiming that Pristina and Zagreb support the Serbian opposition and the protests of citizens and the opposition against lithium mining in western Serbia, with only one aim – to violently overthrow the government of Aleksandar Vučić.

5.2.2. Stirring up emotions and creating fear

In these televisions morning programmes, there is a positive and biased narrative about Serbia as a country that is always on the right side of history, despite the fact it had suffered, and which is unfairly robbed of the culture of remembering the victims and imposed with a label of a genocidal nation. This was a dominant narrative especially at the time of the initiative of the international community to adopt the Resolution on the genocide in Srebrenica in the United Nations General Assembly. Side by side with this narrative, Serbia and the Serbs are presented as victims of unfounded attacks and accusations, with emphasis on the thesis of Serbia being constantly threatened. It is often resorted to intimidation of citizens from possible conflicts and war. When it comes to Serbia's interests, they say that both domestic factors – the opposition and "opposition" media, criminal groups, and external factors — countries in the region, European countries, the international community, etc. work against it.

Many factors are working against Serbia, but it has only one saviour – the incumbent president, Aleksandar Vučić. He presents himself as the protector and guarantor of peace and stability in the region, the central figure working in the interests of his people and fighting attempts at destabilisation. This is the narrative broadcast from commercial television screens. He is the only one with political strength and wisdom to protect and save Serbia. The whole nation must gather around his successful politics to support and defend him – such messages could be heard daily on programmes of commercial television with national coverage.

The atmosphere of fear and uncertainty is created by periodically giving statements about the threatened security of the President of Serbia and his family, accusing members of criminal clans of it, as well as supporters of opposition parties and activists. The pro-regime media pushed this topic for years, and it is most often promoted through tabloid newspapers, and then elaborated on in the morning and other news programmes of commercial television with national coverage.

On 22 May 2024, during TV Pink *Novo jutro*, in the section of skimming the newspapers, the headlines from daily newspapers are read and commented on: *Srpski telegraf* – "They want Vučić dead because he is fighting for Serbia", "Sick minds threatening to Aleksandar Vučić after the assassination attempt of Fico (Prime Minister of Slovakia), *Informer* – "Scums want Vučić to die", and host comments: "They are trying to outdo each other with statements of something bad happening to Vučić". TV Pink, 22 May 2024, morning news footage: "The dehumanization of Vučić by the so-called elite intellectuals and the media for years now created an environment in which supporters of opposition parties send him death threats via social media that he will end up like the Slovak Prime Minister Fico or the Iranian President Raisi..."

In the morning programme on TV Prva, on 16 June 2024, Dejan Vukelić, deputy editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Informer* comments the correspondence of the Kavač clan: "...At the end of the day, it is quite obvious that the only problem, I will say it out loud, the only problem in the entire Western Balkans, for that whole clan and for Radoje Zvicer and Milo Djukanović, again, I repeat, all these tentacles from this octopus have a problem with Aleksandar Vučić", and that they were building this criminal group with the only aim to remove Vučić... "so Aleksandar Vučić was for years systematically presented as a criminal, the media literally made preparations for his murder and it was supposed to culminate in his murder, let's just recall the opening of the monument..."

TV Prva, morning programme, on 26 July 2024. Presenter Milica Savić: "We can see hatred and threats overflowing the front pages and no one is stopping that. *Kurir* newspaper reported that they placed Vučić on the gallows and said "let him die, at least, if nothing else." What is your comment on that? Who is behind such threats? Some individuals or it is organized? Director of *Srpski Telegraf* newspaper Saša Milovanović: "Well, it is certainly organized because of its constant repetition, day after day. We are witnessing daily threats to Vučić and his family, not only from anonymous people on Twitter, that is, the X network now, but also from public figures. Professor Biljana Stojković also threatens, MPs, too, threatening that his son and brother should end up in the shaft like Gaddafi. Milivojević, known for making burgers in Kruševac from dog meat, is now positioning himself as a moral authority on other issues. Yet, he is also willing to target and call for the murder of Vučić, though they would prefer that someone else carry it out, not themselves. But that's how they are instigating people and sowing division, essentially wishing for some kind of civil war or fratricidal conflict, believing that's their chance to seize power since they know they can't win it through elections."

Stirring up emotions and creating feelings of fear and vulnerability is used as an effective tool to divert public attention from other burning issues in Serbia. The threatened security of the president becomes a dominant and prevailing topic, so all other topics that the current regime wants to hide or cannot resolve are pushed to the background or omitted from these television programmes.

5.2.3. Disseminating falsehood, disinformation and selective information

A great indicator of the connection between commercial television and the current authorities and the manner of the propaganda machine functioning could be seen in these media coverage of the Jadar project, i.e. on the intention to allow the company Rio Tinto to mine for jadarite ore in the most arable land of western Serbia.

At the beginning of July 2024, TV N1 announced the news ²⁷ that it had come into possession of a message sent by the government to the editors of pro-government media, providing them with a list of people, primarily faculty professors, whom they should invite to their programmes every day in order to promote lithium mining. As N1 reported, in the same message, the Government of Serbia advised the media to arrange a guest appearance with a person who is also a Rio Tinto consultant as a guest, and to start the campaign on that day. The Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation monitoring demonstrated that in this period, TV Prva, in accordance with the instructions from the Government of Serbia, exclusively invited to the morning programme the guests from the academic community who promoted the Jadar project, sharing selective information and disinformation. The guests of the morning programme underlined the positive economic aspects of the opening of the lithium mine, spoke about a great developmental opportunity for Serbia that should not be missed and claimed that the mine will not have a negative impact on the environment because all environmental standards will be observed and, as in this case, it is an underground mine, which, they claim, is a big difference compared to surface mining.

Working on the topic of lithium mining, all monitored commercial televisions with national coverage used the usual matrix of propaganda – the news programmes were broadcast exclusively for the purpose of promoting the views represented by the President of Serbia and other highest officials, while, on the other hand, critics and opponents of lithium mining were declared mercenaries and thieves (Vojislav Šešelj, 4 July 2024, TV Happy), professional protesters (Vladimir Djukanović, 8 July 2024, TV B92 and Ana Brnabić, 26 June 2024, TV Happy), extremists, fake environmental activists and environmental terrorists (Vladimir Djukanović, 1 July and 8 July 2024, TV Happy), and their goal is to seize power, while using this topic for political struggle. These television programmes guests would repeat the same concepts and formulations day after day, as if they had all received the same script with instructions on what to say in the media about the Rio Tinto company's jadarite ore mining project and those who are against this project. Any mention of challenging the Jadar project in the programmes of these televisions is primarily placed in the context of the struggle for power and overthrowing of President Vučić.

"The only goal is to oust Aleksandar Vučić and the current government, there is absolutely no other agenda, and the people can see that clearly," said Dubravka Djedović Handanović, the Minister of Mining and Energy on TV Happy talking about protests against Rio Tinto and lithium mining on 2 July.

The guest of these televisions shows uphold the position that the opponents of the Jadar project are instructed and paid from abroad to work against the interests of

²⁷ <https://n1info.rs/vesti/n1-saznaje-pro-vladinim-medijima-stigao-spisak-sagovornika-za-kampanju-podrske-iskopavanju-litijuma/>

their country. On 1 July 2024, during the morning programme on TV Happy, SNS member and MP Vladimir Djukanović equated activists advocating for environmental preservation and those opposing the Jadar project with Wahhabis and terrorists. He described their methods as identical, labelling them as "violent and terrorist tactics", and suggested they shared the same mentors: "the Americans."

Some representatives of the government and pro-government political commentators even intimidated citizens that if Serbia does not give its consent to lithium mining, it will be done by force. So, on 8 July 2024, during TV B92 *Fokus* programme, SNS MP Vladimir Djukanović reminded that the European Parliament passed a law on critical minerals that also concerns lithium mining, and that Europe could not survive without it, after which intimidation of citizens ensued: "I'm telling you now, if we make a decision to opt out, I'm telling you now, I'm convinced, that someone will attack and occupy us in order to excavate it from here." And on 13 July 2024, the director of the daily *Srpski Telegraf* Saša Milovanović said on TV Pink: "The wars will be fought for this critical mineral, some are already waged for it... those countries that have that mineral are attacked and that mineral will be excavated from Serbia, it's just a matter of time."

5.3. Journalists, presenters and hosts acting as instruments of propaganda

All four commercial television morning programmes are characterized by presenters who, in violation of professional codes, standards, and media laws, openly support the current government while criticizing the opposition.

On televisions with national coverage we have monitored, the morning programmes hosts do not stick to the usual role of neutral mediators who manage and direct the conversation in order to shed light on a topic of public importance from various perspectives. Instead, they push the conversation towards creating a narrative that favours the current authorities and demonstrates unapologetically positive tone regarding opinions of the representatives of the ruling structures and their supporters who are guests in the programme, while, on the other hand, without any reservation and often harshly, they attack the opposition and the professional media. It can happen that they openly take the role of promoters of the current government politics and criticize those who think differently. The line between the host in the studio and the guests gets lost, and the hosts shift "to the other side", so the morning programme, as a rule, takes after a meeting of like-minded people who have gathered to glorify the government and attack and vilify the opponents of the government, and depending on the topic – also officials of neighbouring and European countries, as well as representatives of the EU institutions.

On 19 June 2024, for example, in TV Pink morning programme, host and presenter Predrag Sarapa says: "Imagine if the opposition came to power in

Belgrade, in Serbia – we would be counting bodies.” In relation to the guest's statement, Aleksandra Tomić, a member of the Presidency of SNS, that “opposition does not care about the citizens, their primary goal is to take power and sit in that armchair, it is essential for them to get hold of those positions”, and host Predrag Sarapa replies: “But who will support them – there is no Viola von Cramon (referring to the opposition)”.

On 25 June 2024, on TV Happy, host Milomir Marić states: “But, on the other hand, we have the paid opposition working against lithium.”

On 15 August 2024, on TV Happy, in the show “*Dobro jutro Srbijo*”, with Dejan Bulatović, an SNS member and MP, as a guest, the presenter Andjela Erkočić loudly supported her guest critical views, which were aimed at the opposition:

Dejan Bulatović: “They wanted to destabilize us, but, as I told you, when you invest in infrastructure, the people respond. For example, when they blocked *Prokop*, so they would say ‘they didn’t build it, it was built by Aleksandar Vučić, his government’ (*the host adds “True!”*). So, what they did? Why they do not block something they have built? They didn’t make anything (*the host adds: “because they did nothing”*)..

Presenter and host: “Our opposition seems to be working against our people. As far as I understand.”

Dejan Bulatović: “They are an outpost of foreign intelligence services.”

Host: “They are friends with all the “countries that do not wish us well, those that imposed the genocide resolution”, and they want to “take our southern province.”

On 18 June 2024, in the show *Fokus* on TV B92, after a guest, pro-government “analyst” Nebojša Krstić, stated that the media were trying to stir up panic among citizens and destroy institutions, the host of the programme, Oliver Jakšić, said: “What about the politicians? It is also a fact, unfortunately proven often, that the opposition is using the tragic events in Serbia to fight both Vučić and his family?”

On several occasions, it has been noted that the hosts were more resolute in their views than the guests in the studio, and in such situation, their effort was visible in directing guests to express views that support the pro-regime propaganda narrative.

5.4. Press review – regular section of the morning programme

All morning programmes have a section called “press review” or “browsing through the press” in which headlines and articles from pro-regime daily

newspapers are being read and commented on, and these are mostly tabloids, which along with the regime's electronic media, represent key drivers of the propaganda machine, such as *Alo*, *Srpski telegraf*, *Informer*, *Kurir*, *Večernje novosti*, etc. The headlines and articles in tabloids mostly contain disinformation and manipulative content, including insults and threats, which are read and commented on in the morning programmes of national televisions. Their toxic influence is thus spread and increased. In their conversations, the hosts and studio guests further elaborate disinformation and spins from pro-regime tabloids and aggravate campaigns against opponents of the government. The function of fake news, spins and smear campaigns, on the one hand, is glorifying the government, and, on the other, devaluing and discriminating against critics and dissenters of the government.

The headlines of articles from the daily newspaper *Danas*, which is a part of the United Media Group and not in the cult of the pro-regime newspapers, are not read each day in the morning programme of commercial televisions. When reading such headlines, those that are not beneficial for the government are clearly avoided. These newspapers are frequently targeted by smear campaigns, labelled as "treasonous", and accused of supporting the Kosovo authorities while currying favour with Albin Kurti, the Quint countries, and the EU. One such example occurred on 15 May 2024, on TV Pink, when they commented on an article that led them to label the newspaper *Danas* as "treasonous", despite the article not containing the claims they attributed to it. In the TV Pink morning programme, the headlines from the newspaper *Danas* are primarily read with the aim of criticizing the content of published articles and the editorial concept of this daily newspaper.

TV Prva is an epitome of a television whose journalists in the morning programme section "Press review" avoid reading headlines from daily newspapers that have critical approach towards the government. There are many examples of such practice. For example, on 24 June 2024, during morning programme of TV Prva, a secondary, barely visible headline was read from the front page of the newspaper *Danas*, "What is the offer of fruit and vegetables in the green markets in the countries of the region – great selection, but high prices turn away customers", although the main headline read "Vučić is paying the West a favour with lithium". On 27 June 2024, they read the headline "Piksi is history, even if he was not replaced", not reading the main headline "Who is paying for the president's son's travels?" A few days after the local elections in Serbia, which were marked by major irregularities, on 7 June 2024, the headline from *Danas* "Phantom lists did the job for SNS in Belgrade" was not read, but the headline related to sports "Scandalous finals of Serbian Super League play-off between eternal rivals...". The same method was noted on TV Prva, for example on 13, 20, 24, 30 May, as well as on 6, 7, 20, 21, 28 June, etc.

5.5. Attacks on journalists and media

It is a common practice of commercial television shows to discredit other media and journalists who report with professionalism and high quality and who are not a part of the pro-regime propaganda machinery. As a rule, the high-quality media are named "pro-opposition", "tycoon", "Šolak's", often "traitorous" and are accused of "spreading lies and hatred" and attempts to destabilise the state and act against Serbian interests. The professional media, along with the opposition, are accused of cooperation with domestic and foreign "enemies" of Serbia, with foreign intelligence services, and even for cooperation with criminal clans, all with the aim of allegedly undermining and overthrowing Aleksandar Vučić.

So, for example, on 24 June 2024, during TV Happy morning programme, the former state secretary in the MoI, Dijana Hrkalović, accused professional media and journalists of continuing with the "campaign of lynching president's family – in particular his son", and glorifying "Albanian extremists and others", cooperation with criminal Radoje Zvicer, who, in her words, was giving them instructions what to publish.

Dijana Hrkalović: "So, the point is that for us to know, that what we read in KRIK, what we read or hear in Šolak's media, what we hear from the opposition, always the same stories – those are Zvicer's words. Do you understand, Zvicer, Belivuk's, their words". The former Prime Minister and incumbent Speaker of the Serbian Assembly, Ana Brnabić, supported the same thesis in the morning programme of TV Happy on 10 June 2024. Speaking about the threats to the life of President Vučić coming from the leader of the criminal clan Radoje Zvicer, Brnabić accused the media that are not pro-government of disseminating information originating from criminals and of carrying out "continuous media attacks and attacks on Aleksandar Vučić and his family". Ana Brnabić: "What is particularly interesting is that it always done by those who are somehow connected to some Western funds and who are, in particular, protected as investigative journalists, investigative media. They do not hide it, also at the time when Belivuk and Miljković were arrested, they did not hide that their source of information was either Belivuk's lawyer or Belivuk himself, and they disseminate such information through their investigative media, which the tycoon media then take over, and those stories are then being set up as complete and undeniable truth, ultimately shared via the opposition MPs in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia."

On 18 July 2024, during the morning programme of TV Prva, the same accusations against the critical media were made by the Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vulin, on the communication between criminal clans and professional media: "You can see their communication with the journalists in the Sky correspondence. They communicated with some

journalists from the so-called independent media, to whom they gave away certain information that should have served as a pressure on the government. In some of those communications, one of those scumbags wrote how much it costs to make a newspaper. Thus, they wanted to buy newspapers, then to have their portal, and they also supplied information to certain independent media. So called independent media... they fed them the idea of creating the pressure that would eventually create an atmosphere of toppling the government in the streets, and then they will, of course, bring some who would not arrest them, some who would show understanding for them, some who would allow them to let loose and do whatever they want. The main obstacle to such a country, such a state, is Aleksandar Vučić."

On 23 July 2024, in the *Fokus* show on TV B92, speaking of critical media, nearly regular guest in the pro-regime media, Nebojša Krstić, said that certain media are "in charge of destroying both the state and society", and that "their agenda is to somehow, maybe, overthrow Vučić and destroy Serbia". Criticizing the coverage of TV N1, Krstić said that the media "are the heaviest polluters of the living space in Serbia." He also accused TV N1 that they had, after the mass murder in the Elementary school Vladislav Ribnikar in Belgrade, in May 2023, "directly organized protests that should have enabled them, the fighters against violence, to counter the President of Serbia and the government, because a child killed children in Ribnikar".

During his guest appearances on commercial televisions, Krstić shares the same negative narrative about the media that are not pro-regime, primarily N1 and the newspaper *Danas*. As a guest in the morning programme of TV Prva on 31 July 2024, Nebojša Krstić said: "Take *Danas* and read their op-eds, it is like a contest to see who can write more perverse crazy phrases about Vučić or a falsehood or an accusation or a swear word... This is yet another hate campaign implemented in a planned way, not only carried out by the so-called independent media in Belgrade, but also by all media outlets in the region owned by the same man: in Zagreb, Sarajevo, Podgorica and Pristina. And there is at least a dozen of those media outlets in Belgrade. So every day we have a frontal attack on Serbia and its president."

On 14 August 2024, during the morning programme on TV Pink, critical media outlets were described as entities that lie, manipulate, poison the public, and destabilise both the state and society. On that occasion, Krstić said: "Some of those media act as if they have their brain removed, surgically removed. Are you not ashamed for lying so much? ...So much dirt and lies, not to mention the insults, slander, satanization of Vučić directly, the family... You will not find it anywhere in Europe."

Krstić's characterization of critical media, along with the statements from other government supporters and representatives who appear daily across commercial television shows, exemplifies manipulation and spin. This reflects the

mirroring strategy, where critical media are accused of engaging in the very tactics—such as misinformation and manipulation—that pro-regime media, including national commercial televisions, actually employ. Not only do pro-regime media polarize society and foster an atmosphere of fear and violence through this and other media manipulation strategies, but they also manipulate public opinion, leaving citizens unable to distinguish truth from falsehood.

Not only do guests on the morning programmes of commercial televisions, but also hosts, presenters, and journalists from pro-regime media, attack critical media outlets. Thus, during TV Pink programme *Novo jutro*, on 11 September 2024, host Predrag Sarapa, in reference to the N1 and Nova S cable televisions, said that “you cannot find journalists there” but “political commissioners, they are required to say what they (bosses) want to hear, and as soon as they get off track and do not say what they should – they will immediately get a message from their bosses”.

One day later, on the same show, the same host said about his colleague in *Danas*: “*Danas* editor is, how to say it, a strange character. He insults people if they have a smaller head, a smaller brain or do not support Djilas or Šolak. And he... I would never say that, because it's a shame to say it – he could advertise condoms in a sex shop with the shape of his head, just pull it on (*mocks pulling it over his head*)... But I would never say that, because that is not nice. I would never say that, but that is so, that's a fact. Although it is a fact, it should not be said.”

Insults and smear campaigns against journalists who do their job in accordance with professional standards are common in the programmes of pro-regime media, and at the end of May, there was a campaign against the journalist of the weekly newspaper *Radar* Vuk Cvijić, and at the end of July, against the deputy editor of the Fonet news agency, Tamara Skrozza.

Reporting on the attack on Vuk Cvijić, the journalist of the *Radar* newspaper, who was assaulted and hit by Milan Ladjević, the editor of the *Srpski telegraf* newspaper, on 29 May 2024, in Kosovska Street, Belgrade, TV Pink stated numerous falsehoods in its morning programme and their section news of the day, claiming the opposite of what had really happened, thereby misleading the public that journalist Vuk Cvijić was the one who attacked his colleague from another weekly. “The *Radar* journalist attacked Ladjević in the middle of the street,” stated Svetlana Grubor, the presenter of the morning programme of TV Pink, on 30 May 2024. The morning programme hosts and their interlocutors repeated for days that it was Vuk Cvijić who “provoked” and “staged” Ladjević pushing him away, “that Cvijić did not see a doctor”, “that he did not call the police”, although the attack was immediately reported through the mechanism of the Standing Working Group for the Safety of Journalists and he had a medical examination. They relativised Cvijić's injury with claims that “there is no injury”, “that there is no evidence”, “that Cvijić made everything up”, that Vuk Cvijić “was untouched”.

From 29 to 31 July 2024, TV Pink conducted an orchestrated campaign against journalist Tamara Skrozza in the morning programme shows and in the National News Bulletin, presenting a series of incorrect information and manipulating her statement that Skrozza made in the TV N1 show "*Da sam ja neko*" (Eng. "If I were someone") almost two months earlier²⁸, putting at risk the safety of the journalist herself.

The TV show "*Da sam ja neko*" on TV N1, with Tamara Skrozza, a journalist, as a guest, was broadcast as two episodes, on 3 and 4 June 2024. Speaking about October the Fifth and the overthrow of Slobodan Milošević, Skrozza said: "If that night had been different, and if we had woken up in a different Serbia, a Serbia without certain people, I believe today would be entirely different. But in reality, we are still living in the nineties." At the end of July, because of her statement in this show, an orchestrated smear campaign was launched against Skrozza. Televisions with national coverage and tabloids manipulated and twisted Skrozza's statement, making it sound as if she believed that Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić "should have been killed on the night between 5 and 6 October 2000." Tamara Skrozza – although representatives of the authorities and pro-regime media and analysts tried attributing it to her – did not mention Vučić's name or anyone else's name in the aforementioned show, nor did she urge for violence or murder. As she explained to the Cenzolovka portal, she meant that all the representatives of the previous government, who were responsible for the events of the 1990s, should have been brought before the judicial authorities and held accountable for their actions.

In the TV Pink news, the journalist's statement was called monstrous, and used in a false context which inferred that she wished for the murder of political opponents. At the same time, TV Pink did not, in compliance to its legal obligations, allow the other side to be heard, i.e. for Tamara Skrozza to state her defence against the insults, accusations and false information about her in TV Pink programmes made by both presenters and journalists as well as high-ranking officials, government officials and analysts. On 27 August 2024, the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation filed a complaint against TV Pink to the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media because of the hate speech, false information, violation of the right of the other side to reply, unilateral attacks and running a campaign against Tamara Skrozza. At its 249th regular session, in item 51, REM considered this case and decided that there were no grounds to launch the proceedings, failing to publish the explanation of such decision.

²⁸ <https://www.slavkocuruvijafondacija.rs/koordinisana-kampanja-vlasti-i-prorezimskih-medija-primer-tamare-skrozze/>

6. Violations in the programmes of the televisions with national coverage and REM's actions

The monitoring of evening news and morning programmes on commercial televisions with national coverage, conducted by the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, revealed that the four monitored televisions consistently and flagrantly violate media laws, regulations, journalistic codes, and professional standards on a daily basis. There is a consistent pattern of violations observed across all monitored news and morning programmes. Given their prevalence, it can be concluded that the editorial approach of these televisions directly conflicts with the law, serving to misinform the public and implement planned, systematic propaganda. The following violations made by commercial televisions were established:

- 1) **Violation of general obligations of the media** – Four commercial televisions persistently and relentlessly broadcast one-sided and false news, disinformation, and manipulation, providing selective and incomplete information to the public, which is contrary to Article 61 of the Law on Electronic Media. That article prescribes the general obligations of media service providers in relation to programme content, which, among other, include the obligation of the media to “provide independent, truthful, impartial, complete and timely information”. This type of coverage also violates Articles 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9 of the REM's Rulebook on Human Rights Protection in relation to provision of media services.
- 2) **The absence of media pluralism** – The programmes of broadcasters with national coverage solely represent opinions of a single political option, without any room for diverse and different opinions and critical voices of citizens, opposition, activists, public figures, etc. This means there is no respect of the media pluralism, which is contrary to Article 6 of the Law on Public Information and Media, which states: “In order to enable citizens to form their own opinions of occurrences, events and persons, the versatility of sources of information and media content shall be provided”, and also Articles 5 and 61 of the Law on Electronic Media, which, inter alia, oblige media to ensure “diversity of content regarding possibilities of free expression, political and critical opinion”.
- 3) **Violation of the other side right of reply** – The programmes of the four commercial televisions exclusively feature the positions of the ruling political faction, while consistently expressing falsehoods and insults towards representatives of opposing political views and their supporters. The fact that the other side is consistently denied the opportunity to reply to insults and falsehoods in these media shows, and to express their views, constitutes a

violation of Article 94 of the Law on Public Information and Media, as well as Article 8 of the REM's Rulebook on Human Rights Protection. This rule mandates that the media must "enable the other side to reply to the published information and participate in discussions on equal terms".

- 4) **Violation of human rights and personal dignity** – In the news programmes of the monitored commercial televisions, discriminatory and offensive speech towards individuals and groups whose opinions and attitudes differ from the narrative of the ruling regime is present, as well as hate speech. Moreover, it is true that, when reporting on tragic events, the dignity and privacy of victims and anyone close to them are not respected, which is contrary to the media obligations under Article 70 of the Law on Electronic Media, which prescribes a ban on broadcasting programmes "that promote violence, discrimination, hate speech, disrespect for human dignity, violation of privacy, abuse of viewers' gullibility", as well as Articles 19, 20, 21, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32 of the REM's Rulebook on Human Rights Protection.
- 5) **Violation of the ban on publishing hate speech** – In the news programmes of four commercial televisions, hate speech is present, most often due to political beliefs and affiliation to political organisations, but also on the grounds of nationality, while extended campaigns against some persons and groups are getting frequent, which is contrary to Article 71 of the Law on Electronic Media, which prohibits the publication of "information that provoke, openly or covertly, discrimination, hatred or violence due to race, colour, ancestry, citizenship, nationality, language, religious or political beliefs, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, property status, birth, genetic characteristics, health status, disability, marital and family status, criminal records, age, appearance, membership in political, trade union and other organizations and other actual, i.e. assumed personal characteristics", where all of the above is considered "a particularly serious violation of the law" (Article 40 of LEM). Publishing content that includes hate speech is contrary to Article 27 of the REM's Rulebook on Human Rights Protection, while "running extended or repeated campaigns" is a violation of Article 8 of the same Rulebook.
- 6) **Violation of obligations during the election campaign** – Propaganda reporting in favour of one political option is constantly represented in the news programmes of the monitored commercial electronic media, with the situation being the same during the election campaign, when opposition candidates and lists are not represented evenly along the parties in power, which is a violation of Article 62 of LEM, imposing "a ban on political advertising outside the election campaign" and the media's obligation during the election campaign "to provide registered political parties, coalitions and candidates representation without discrimination in the election programme". Moreover, televisions violate the provisions of REM's Rulebook

on the manner of fulfilment of public broadcasters' obligations during election campaigns, in particular, Article 4, which prohibits "disguised broadcasting of election programmes in the form of news, entertainment or other type of programme", as well as "coverage that provides a privileged status to representatives of the authorities – public officials".

- 7) **Violation of the obligation of not broadcasting programme that reports on violence, in a sensationalistic, simplified and unethical manner**, which was often seen in coverage of the disappearance and murder of the girl from Bor, Danka Ilić. When they cover tragic events, televisions refer to unverified sources and unofficial findings and speculate about the cause and course of tragic events, while presenting morbid and unverified information that the public has no legitimate interest to know. They also violate the presumption of innocence, naming the suspects "perpetrators" and attributing a criminal offence to them, which is contrary to Article 72 of the Criminal Code, and Article 19 of the REM's Rulebook on Human Rights Protection.
- 8) **Violation of the obligation to mention all relevant data when stating the results of the public opinion poll** – author of the poll, client, time and method, sample, in accordance with the obligation under Article 16 of the REM's Rulebook on Human Rights Protection. Monitored televisions often publish poll results without publishing any information on the poll itself.

All of the mentioned violations are also in contradiction with the programme papers of commercial televisions with national coverage, which were the basis for these televisions being granted with broadcasting licenses for another eight years in August 2022, after REM's public call. The analysis of the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation²⁹, published in November 2023, showed that TV Pink does not meet even 16 out of 23 promises that this television stated in its paper and that were analysed, and that it continuously "violates professional and ethical standards, as well as laws and by-laws". Moreover, contrary to the statements in the programme paper that it will introduce diverse and high-quality programmes (children's, art and culture, science and educational, documentary), and that it will significantly reduce the presence of reality shows in the total broadcast time (to 20%), this television did not meet those, on the contrary, it increased the representation of reality shows and news programmes, which in total make up more than 80%. The same applies to TV Happy³⁰, which, in reference to its programme paper, did not fulfil its obligations regarding the representation of diverse shows, broadcasting

²⁹ Analysis of the TV Pink programme paper realisation, https://www.slavkocuruvijafondacija.rs/tv-pink-za-prvih-godinu-dana-dana-nije-ispunila-vise-od-polovine-navoda-iz-elaborata/#_Toc149728316

³⁰ Analysis of the TV Happy programme paper realisation, https://www.slavkocuruvijafondacija.rs/uz-ambiciju-da-bude-javni-servis-srbije-tv-hepi-nesmetano-nastavlja-da-krsi-zakonske-obaveze/#_Toc151555164

quality programme and introducing many new formats. News programme on TV Happy is represented by 57%, while entertainment, music and reality programmes together make up about 40% of the total programme on this television, not leaving any room for other programme genres. Good quality programme (documentary, children's, art and culture, science and educational) on TV Happy is either a statistical error or does not exist, as showed by the analysis of the SCF.

Despite everything abovementioned, the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media, responsible for the regulation and supervision of the work of electronic media, as well as for imposing measures in the event that media service providers violate the law, failed to react. When it comes to imposing measures on the media violating the law, REM failed to act *ex officio*, while it either rejected the complaints by natural and legal persons with the explanation that "there were no grounds to initiate the proceedings", or after initiating proceedings based on some complaint, REM would suspend it without explanation.

By refusing to regulate, control and sanction media violating the law, the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media violated the Law on Electronic Media and the following: Article 7, which defines the scope of work of the Regulator (especially paragraphs 9 and 10, 11, 15, 18, 20), Article 31 – Supervision of the work of media service providers, Article 32 – Monitoring and analysis of the situation in the area of media service provision, Article 34 – Preventive action, Article 35 – Supervision, Article 36 – Initiation of investigation, Article 38 – Consideration of complaints, Article 39 – Imposing protection measures, Article 51 – Public nature of work, Article 70 – Obligation of respecting human rights, Article 71 – Ban on hate speech, Article 72 – Ban on broadcasting certain programme content, Article 73 – Protection of the rights of persons with disabilities.

Although the mandate of the last composition of the REM Council ended on 4 November 2024, the minutes of their last regular session held on 1 November 2024 were not published on the website of this regulatory body – because the minutes are adopted at the first succeeding regular session and then published – the public therefore has no insight into the decisions made by the REM Council on that occasion.

At its penultimate session on 28 October 2024, the REM Council dismissed more than seventy complaints as unfounded or suspended further proceedings. Those dismissed included a large number of complaints related to television offences committed during the election campaigns – on the eve of the national and local elections in December 2023, and just before local elections and Belgrade elections in June 2024. There is no explanation on REM website why it dismissed all these complaints, nor what specific theme of those complaints was, but it is clear that the dismissed complaints, or those for which the proceedings were suspended, were related to reporting in news programmes of TV Pink, TV Happy, TV Informer, TV Pančevo, Novi Sad TV, Studio B, etc.

Based on the minutes of the REM Council sessions published so far, in the first year after the entry into force of the new Law on Electronic Media (4 November 2023), REM Council imposed the following measures to commercial televisions with national coverage:

- At the 243rd regular session, held on 20 November 2023, one reprimand was imposed against TV Happy and two reprimands against TV Pink;
- At the 247th regular session, held on 7 June 2024, REM Council adopted the following decisions in the cases of TV Prva and TV Pink:
 - Imposing temporary ban on broadcasting advertising messages in the period of one day.
 - The MSP is prohibited to broadcast advertising messages in the period of one day from 18.00 hours until 21.00 hours uninterruptedly during television programme.

At its session of 20 November 2023, it was also decided to “have a letter sent” to TV Happy, but there are no details mentioned in the minutes about the reasons and the subject of that letter. At the session of 7 June 2024, REM Council decided to suspend the proceedings against TV B92 in reference to the programme “Vesti” and to send a letter to this television “warning them that during the election campaign thirty days before the voting day it is not allowed for media to report on opening of not only infrastructural but also any other project with participation of public officials, in line with the LEM and Law on Prevention of Corruption”.

REM has a long history of non-transparent processing of complaints on programme content of electronic media filed by natural and legal persons. Despite multitude of requests over the past years to improve such practice, REM has done nothing to make this process more efficient and transparent. In the documents REM publishes on its website, regarding the processing of filed complaints on media content³¹, almost as a rule, REM fails to state the reasons for its decisions, as well as the nature of the violation, the date and time when the violation was committed, which makes it impossible to follow trace of the filed complaint and establish how REM makes its decisions, which are mainly reduced to suspending the proceedings or not even initiating them.

It is also necessary to examine the responsibility of previous members of REM Council, as during their term of office there were records of negligent and improper performance of duties and drastic violation of legal obligations, which led to severe disturbances in the work of the Regulator, and if there were grounds for that – to initiate criminal proceedings before the court.

³¹ Minutes from REM Council sessions.

7. Recommendations

- In accordance with its legal obligation to control and supervise the work of media service providers and to ensure the consistent implementation of the LEM, the new REM Council should examine the legality of the REM Council decision from July 2022, when it renewed the national licenses of four commercial televisions, despite particularly serious violations of the law that they were continually committing in the course of their earlier work, and which they continued to do after the renewal of the national licence in 2022.
- Under law regulations and by-laws, it is necessary to specify the mandatory types of programmes, as well as their share in the total airtime (at least 20% of the so-called quality programme – news programme; science and educational programme; art and cultural programme; documentary programme; children's programme and programme for minors), including minimum requirements for national broadcasting licences.
- By amending the Law on Electronic Media, it is necessary to oblige REM to publish on its website, no later than March 31 of the current year, reports on compliance with the requirements that are an integral part of licenses for the provision of media services, as well as compliance with the minimum programme requirements for the provision of media services by commercial televisions with national coverage. It should take into consideration an option of introducing misdemeanour liability for a responsible person in the Regulator who fails to publish reports in a timely manner.
- For the purpose of protecting the interests of electronic media services users, amendments to the Law on Electronic Media should explicitly stipulate that persons who believe that their personal interests have been violated by the content broadcast by the media service provider, must be granted with the capacity of a party to the proceedings. The same capacity should be guaranteed to the associations that have the authority and duty to nominate members of the Council in accordance with Article 12 of the Law on Electronic Media, in the event of reporting a violation of the law by media service providers.
- For the purpose of ensuring the transparency of REM's work in deciding on filed complaints, by amending the Law on Electronic Media, it is necessary to oblige REM to publish the decision on imposing measures, i.e. the decision on the suspension of the proceedings imposing measures, on its website no later than within 15 days from the day when the decision on imposing measures or on the suspension of the proceedings was adopted at the Council's session. It should take into consideration an option of introducing misdemeanour liability for a responsible person in the Regulator who fails to publish decisions in a timely manner.