



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Margrethe VESTAGER
Executive Vice-President

Věra Jourová
Vice-President

Slovenska tiskovna agencija
Slovenian Press Agency
Tivolska cesta 48,
SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

Brussels, 12 /01/2021
ARESSv(2021)290716

Dear representatives of the Slovenska tiskovna agencija (STA),

Thank you for your letter in which you draw our attention to the urgent matter concerning the absence of State financing of the Slovenian Press Agency STA.

The Commission is well aware of the recent developments in Slovenia, including the Government Communications Office's suspension of payment for work performed in the last three months of 2020 and its refraining from signing a new public service agreement for 2021. Please be assured that we consider this to be a matter of utmost importance.

It is crucial for democracy and for our common EU values that media should be able to work freely and independently everywhere in the European Union – this lies at heart of media pluralism. Public media play a special role in the European Union and Member States should refrain from attempts to put pressure on them. The Commission is also aware of and supports the important role of independent news agencies for the media environment.

For that same reason, Member States may support news agencies as entities performing a service of general economic interest (SGEI) under EU state aid rules if they so wish.

We note that the Slovenian State continuously financed STA during the past decade without requesting the Commission's State aid approval. Indeed, Member States are entitled under the so-called SGEI Decision¹ to grant public service aid without prior notification to the Commission, provided the conditions of these rules are fulfilled and the annual aid amount is not higher than EUR 15 million. These rules apply also to the public services of a news agency.

¹ Commission Decision of 20 December 2011 on the application of Article 106(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to State aid in the form of public service compensation granted to certain undertakings entrusted with the operation of services of general economic interest.

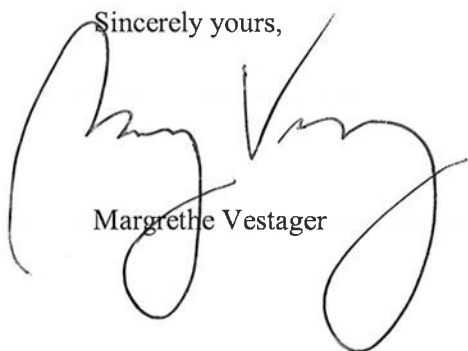
This means that the Slovenian authorities are themselves competent to verify the relevant rules and implement the aid without the Commission's approval, as they have been doing for almost ten years. An additional assessment by the Commission is not necessary under the provisions of the SGEI Decision. In light of the urgent need for funding, the Slovenian authorities are therefore well-placed to proceed with the granting of aid without notification. The services of the Competition Directorate General have already drawn the attention of the Slovenian authorities to this fact.

Let us recall that media freedom and media pluralism are enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. We attach a great importance to those fundamental values, as expressed in the European Democracy Action Plan and Media and Audiovisual Action Plan where media freedom and pluralism is one of the core elements.

Given the serious impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission called on Member States to give extra attention to support the media in a way that respects and promotes media independence, freedom and pluralism.

We will continue to monitor the situation very closely in Slovenia as well as in all other Member States.

Sincerely yours,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Margrethe Vestager

A smaller, more fluid handwritten signature in black ink, with a distinct loop and a trailing stroke.

Věra Jourová