

A stylized world map composed of a grid of dots in various shades of gray, with several dots highlighted in red. The map is centered behind the title text.

Major Trends of Media Development During Post-Communist Transition

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- Even though the Albanian media is relatively young, it went through a dynamic and fast development. Unlike other countries in the region, the change of the political system in 1991 not only led to the end of media monopolization by the government, but also to the disappearance of nearly all existing media and the emergence of a range of new ones. Since 1991, the media landscape in Albania has been under a constant evolution, in most of its components.
- What is the current media situation in Albania? Have all the developments been positive for it since 1991? This study seeks to answer these questions through the examination of several criteria and the circumstances that affect the development of independent media. Thus, some of the considered factors turn out to be the legal regulation of media, the development of media landscape, the economic conditions affecting the development of media, the role of regulatory authorities, transparency of media ownership and financing, editorial independence as well as media ethics and education of journalists. Naturally, all these factors have been considered in terms of the impact they do have on the strengthening of media independence and freedom of expression in the Albanian society.



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1. Media Legislation

Since 1990, following decades of government control over media, the Albanian media faced horizons of freedom. The advent of independent media, quite naturally, was duly characterised by the mounting political pressure on them and a severe lack of professionalism among the journalists. These phenomena, to a considerable extent, were due to the absence of a regulatory framework.

The first legislative interventions that attempted to regulate the conduct of media professionals were carried out in 1993 when Law no. 7756 »On Press« was adopted. The Albanian law was modelled after the law of the German state of Westphalia and was hardly adjusted to the Albanian context. The views of the most affected persons by this law, the media community, were not taken into consideration while drafting the law. As a result, the media community soon faced what they considered to be a repressive legislation.

Law no. 7756 was entirely repealed by the new legislature in 1997. At present, the print media is regulated by the *Law on Press*, which comprises only two general statements: »The press is free. Freedom of press is protected by law.« The Parliamentary Commission on Media, the community of journalists, legal advisors and other stakeholders have often debated the need for a detailed press law and the consequences it might have on media development and on the consolidation of democracy, since 1997. However, the trend of *laissez-faire* in the field of press has triumphed so far vis-à-vis the detailed legal regulation.

In contrast to the press, the legal regulation of electronic media is made through a detailed law, Law No. 8410 »On Public and Private Radio and Television«. The law, which has been amended seven times since its adoption in 1998, aims to regulate the activity of electronic media in detail, including the public broadcaster, and the analog commercial media, cable and satellite television. In 2007, the Parliament also passed the Law on Digital Broadcasting. Meanwhile, a new amendment to the electronic media law is being drafted in parliament for more than three years, as part of the efforts to standardize it with EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMS).

The Law on Radio and Television established the *National Council of Radio and Television* (NCRT) as the main regulatory body and *Steering Council of Albanian Radio and Television* (SCART) as the highest ruling body of the public broadcasters. Another important law on electronic media sector is the Law on Electronic Communications, which established another regulatory body, the *Authority of Electronic and Postal Communications*.

Another law that is directly related to the regulation of electronic media includes sections of media in the *Electoral Code*, which impose the criteria of accuracy, fairness, and balance upon both public and commercial broadcasters.¹ The law also sets limits on the percentage of time allowed to each political subject in news coverage on public and private broadcasters. The law also regulates the transmission of political spots during election campaigns. During election periods, a monitoring board of seven persons is set up, appointed by the main parties, in order to monitor the election campaign coverage.

Last but not least, some articles of the Penal and Civil Codes concern the provisions on defamation and libel. Articles in the Penal Code contain two main characteristics which run counter to the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights. Penal Code provides special protection for the public officials because of their position. Moreover, public officials who are defamed because of duty need not litigate their case to court, because the prosecution will do so in their stead.

In practice, only the Civil Code is used against the media in recent years. However, the problem with this code is that alleged defamation is not subject to any limitation period. Also, bringing the action in court has not always been in favor of freedom of expression. Since November 2004, two draft laws prepared by Justice Initiative and Albanian Media Institute for amendments to the Penal Code and the Civil Code are awaiting consideration at the Albanian Parliament. These amendments propose to repeal insult and libel as an offence.

On the other hand, the amendment to the Civil Code seeks to establish a statute of limitations, a causal connection between the alleged crime and the perceived damage to reputation, and also establish a mechanism that ensures the proportionality of the compensation to

¹ Law no. 10019, Electoral Code 29.12.2008.

the suffered damage. Although both the government and MPs have expressed support for these changes, the bill has not been approved in parliament yet.

2. Media landscape in the country

2.1 Print Media

Albanian media has made enough progress since late communist period. The vast majority of the current Albanian media emerged in the market after 1990, with the birth of the newspaper of the Democratic Party, Democratic Renaissance (1991). So during the years 1991-1997 almost all the newspapers and magazines controlled by the communist state (except for the People's Voice newspaper, leading newspaper of the ruling communist party) disappeared from circulation, replaced by new papers which functioned mainly as private businesses. The New media businesses radically transformed the landscape of the Albanian media. Before the year 1990 only two national daily newspapers were published in Albania: Voice of the People and the Union; in 1991 there were published four daily papers, in 1994 it was doubled to eight, increasing progressively. Currently there are 26 national daily newspapers published in Albania, a significant number, compared to countries with a greater population than Albania.

From the political perspective, the spectrum of the press is complete, including even the left and right political beliefs. However, few papers have got a considerable public audience. Even though the number of daily newspapers increased from two in 1991 to 26 in 2010, the circulation of all these newspapers does not exceed the circulation of the first opposition newspaper in 1991. For instance, the best selling daily paper has a circulation of just over 20,000. Currently, the total circulation of all daily newspapers is though not to exceed 100,000 copies, while many newspapers do not sell more than 1,000 copies a day.

One explanation for this consists in an expanding range of electronic media and there is no doubt that this media has advantages over print media. In this context, the existence of 26 dailies in a country with no more than three million people is beyond economic logic. It still stands to reason if we consider that the press in Albania is hampered by a distribution system that does not al-

ways work and poor infrastructure, and an almost negligible subscription system.

In conclusion, the poor infrastructure of press distribution, the subscription system, along with high prices and the rising competition from the television stations, should have brought the closure of many newspapers. However, the opposite happened. In this regard, the development of print media is no different from other sectors of the media, resulting in a defragmented and deformed market, with little or no transparency about its dynamics.

2.2 Radio

Until 1994 Radio Tirana, state radio, established in 1938, was the only source of radiophone information for Albanians. The first commercial radio was Radio Vlora, paving the way to other radios that followed. Currently there are 63 local radio and two analog private national radios, except public radio channels and its four regional branches.

Even though the radio had an impetuous beginning, very soon they were overshadowed by the development of commercial televisions. However, when it comes to coverage of the territory, national commercial radio stations are more prevalent than the national televisions. Top Albania Radio, the first commercial national radio, established in 1998, covering 87 per cent of the territory, while Radio +2, also established in 1998, covers 72 per cent of the territory. Radio Tirana, a public radio, broadcasts two national programs, which cover 80.5 per cent of the territory.

Although there are a great number of radios all over the country, it can be said that radio has become an alternative media in lack of television. Radiophone broadcasts did not have that seriousness and investment in the professional development that the mainstream television in the country do have. Music and entertainment programs occupy the largest percentage of the broadcast time. Although most radio stations regularly broadcast news, people's daily news attention is low as compared to the news on television.

On a more positive aspect, the radios turn out to be a more accessible forum for the people, who can more



easily share their views on the radio rather than on TV and newspapers. Almost all radio stations broadcast programs that allow listeners' involvement in the program.

2.3 Television

The current TV market situation in Albania and the evolution of this panorama in recent years has been impressive. State Network, Albanian Radio and Television (ART), was the only Albanian broadcaster until 1995, and the first commercial television was Shijak TV, which started broadcasting from an apartment. Commercial channels were proliferated in the years ahead.

According to the official data, the current list of televisions is long: 76 local analog televisions, 75 cable television stations, two national analog commercial television channels, two satellite televisions, in addition to public television, which currently broadcasts on two channels. In recent years there has been noticed an increase of cable operators, spread across the country.

Lack of systematic and scientific studies of the audience makes it difficult to assess the rates of the television operators in the market. It remains difficult as well to assess TV coverage based on population. However, it remains an acknowledged fact that Albanian Radio Television (ART), the public broadcaster, covers 73 per cent of the territory in the country.

Commercial television has had a delayed, but rapid increase, initially characterized by chaos and lack of respect for law, due to the lack of legal framework. Even after the law was set, regulatory entity has not always been able to be authoritative, even though significant progress has been achieved. Although the television market, as well as the entire media market in the country, is deformed by a series of televisions that the small market of advertisements is less likely to support; only a few stations have been closed down. There are two commercial national television analog stations: TV Klan, which covers 70 per cent of the territory and Top Channel TV, which covers 62 per cent of the territory. However, there is still no information on the percentage of each television market, since the audience monitoring is sporadic, limited and not always reliable.

The importance of television has been increasing, partly due to the lack of strong competition from the public

broadcaster. Another reason is the high profile of some commercial television stations in the capital, which have made huge investments. However, the most popular TV channels are not yet safe from the economic viewpoint, a situation which shows that the Albanian TV market is still far from being stable and independent.

2.4. Public broadcaster

ART broadcasts in two national television channels TVSH and TVSH2, and also Radio Tirana, with two national programs. Both Radio Tirana and TVSH have their own regional centers, four for Radio Tirana and three for TVSH. In recent years, RTSH claims to have made many changes and progress in reforming the program. It managed to produce more than 80 per cent of the total². TVSH has also reported that the reform of the program has helped meet the needs of a range of social groups, and has also established a regular and systematic program for the viewer³. Some media experts have acknowledged that there is an enrichment of the ART program and efforts have been made by the staff of ART in this regard⁴.

Meanwhile, news and political bias have been constantly criticized. »TVSH in recent years has served to the interests of the government, openly running counter to the law, which requires the respect of the editorial independence of public media.«⁵ In fact, one of the main problems related to the transformation of TVSH from the state media into public one is political influence and the poor editorial independence. This has been a continuing debate over the years. Political pressure is felt especially during elections. According to monitoring of media during the elections in 2009, 45 per cent of news coverage and actuality programs of TVSH were dedicated to the majority, while 25 per cent to opposition parties⁶.

Another constant source of concern was the financing scheme of ART.

2 KDR TSH, Annual report 2010, pg.12.

3 KDR TSH, Annual Report 2009, pg.15-16.

4 IREX, »Index of Media sustainability,« 2009, pg.10.

5 IREX, »Index of Media sustainability,« 2010, pg.6.

6 OSCE/ODIHR Report 2009, pg.17, http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2009/09/39545_en.pdf

The public broadcaster

Funding trends have been more or less stable: there was an increase in funds from the state budget, as well as in the funds and revenues of ART. Thus, in 2009, these revenues amounted to 60 percent of the budget of ART, and 40 percent covered by state budget.⁷ According to ART, a more efficient collection of the license fee in recent years has brought the revenues increasing of ART⁸ itself. In 2009, this figure reached up to 300 million, or 37 per cent of revenues obtained by ART. In 2010, license fee occupied 38 per cent of ART revenues or 359.8 million Lek.⁹

The next challenge of ART, but also of all electronic media in the country will be switching to digital broadcasting. So far ART has made investments for the digitization of the equipments. Although the plan to begin the transition to digital broadcasting has been prepared since 2007, the funds have not been found yet to make this transition. This will be a very important step for ART, but also for the Albanian public, since it will be a test for meeting the public interest, by ART, as well as by the government.

The regulatory entity

The main regulatory authority in the field of electronic media is NCRT. The independence of the regulator has been a constant topic of debate since its establishment. Regulatory decisions are often considered controversial and the most frequent charges have been on lack of establishing authority and application of double standards. For instance, a case greatly hammered out was the decision to fine News 24 TV, 800.000 lek in 2008. The fine was exacted for broadcasting a political advertisement by G99 group, an advertisement that scoffed at the cabinet. NCRT made two warnings, claiming that the political parties or associations are not allowed to broadcast commercials, but for the period of election campaigns. This decision was seen as too politicized¹⁰.

A constant concern of NCRT functioning and independence has to do with the profile of its members. The elec-

tion formula of NCRT members has been the political representation of both sides. Even an attempt to change the formula claiming a non-professional National Council, not a political one, didn't work. The election of the members of NCRT has consistently led to controversy. Thus in the current Council, the fact that the previous chairperson has been an advisor to the Prime Minister, while another member has been an advisor to the Speaker of Parliament, and another member was a spokesman in a ministry, was suspiciously seen regarding the criteria used for the election of the Council members. »These assignments show a disturbing politicization of the National Council of Radio Television.«¹¹

They also reveal that the formula for the assignment of the members of the National Council of Radio Television considering the professional experience and not the political balance, has not worked. Also, the application of this formula has been difficult. As a result of the boycott of the parliament by the opposition, NCRT members' election has been postponed. Consequently, for a long time NCRT has not functioned normally since there was no majority needed to make decisions.

Another ongoing challenge of NCRT has to do with the implementation of decisions, since some of them depend on cooperation with other bodies, such as the tax police. National Council of Radio Television claims that most of its decisions are not executed by the Directorate General of Taxes, which leads to the weakening of its authority.¹² This situation has prompted former Speaker of the NCRT acknowledge the fact that the regulator's main battle is against television and against the courts.¹³ A member of the NCRT has also explained the NCRT decisions implementation with political motivation: »When the NCRT decisions are in harmony with the interests of the government, police or tax officials execute such decisions; if they run counter to these interests, the decisions will not be applied.«¹⁴

7 Ibid.

8 KDRTSH, Annual Report 2009.

9 KDRTSH, Annual Report 2010, fpg.5.

10 OSI, »TV in Europe: Following reports, Albania« 2008, pg. 24.

11 Preç Zogaj, quoted in IREX, »Media Sustainability Index,« 2009, pg. 5.

12 NCRT, Annual Report 2009, pg. 17.

13 Ilva Tare, »The commercial Tv channels upsurge in post-comunist Albania«. Polis, No. 8, Winter 2009, pg. 31.

14 Gent Ibrahim, quoted in IREX, »Media Sustainability Index«. 2009, pg. 5.



2.5 New Media

Digital Television

Digital broadcasting in Albania kicked off as an uninvited and unexpected guest, neither by law, nor by the regulator. The first digital terrestrial platform, Digitalb, started broadcasting on July 15, 2004, amid strong objections both from the regulator and other television stations. However, Digitalb has carried on its activity for more than six years, with a growing number of subscribers, in and abroad as well. Immediately after Digitalb, another company, SAT+, stepped in the market, but it did not last long. The second multiplex, Tring TV, entered the market in 2008.

Although the number of the subscribed families is not known, terrestrial platforms cover the area of the capital and major cities, namely administrative areas with a more densely population. Rural and remote areas are not included in the coverage area, because of the difficulty in the coverage of the entire territory, and due to the low economic level of the population living in those areas. However, since 2010, several television and cable platforms have distributed Digitalb and Tring programs, thus enlarging their coverage area. Tring TV claims of having more than 250.000 subscribers in terrestrial, satellite and cable platforms in Albania and abroad. Digitalb, which appeared in the market four years ahead, and is thought to have even more subscribers. However, accurate figures for the penetration of these platforms and the number of users are still missing.

The development of digital broadcasting has had a special character: despite the numerous attempts and hot debates to adopt a law on these reports, it took four years to the involved parties to agree upon this. In fact, the discussions that anticipated the adoption of the law, focused on the impact the law would have on the existing market. Digitalb representatives persisted that they required nothing but the legalization of their activity, asking from the law not to claim a-ground zero start, because it was not true.

The existing law regulating the issuance of licenses for digital broadcasting was adopted as an amendment to the Law on Public Radio and Television in 2007. Under this law, the National Council of Radio Television is responsible for granting licenses for digital broadcasting.

The law singles out three types of licenses: service providers, network operators and content providers. Parallely with this law, there is a draft strategy for Digital Transmission switchover, while the final version has not been approved yet.

Cable and Satellite Television

Cable channels came out relatively late and were not significant until the amendments were adopted on piracy. In recent years, cable television across the country has had a notable development. The number of cable televisions reached to 75 across the country as compared to 31 in 2005 thus overpassing the number of local analog televisions. Only a small number of them are found in the capital.

These cable stations are available in almost all cities of the country. They do not broadcast their own products, but offer mixed Albanian and foreign packages, with relatively convenient prices from ALL 300 to ALL 800. In many cases, these televisions have become a controversial question regarding software piracy, especially for digital multiplexes, since they often broadcast numerous pirated channels for free or without permission. Digital operators have constantly protested at the regulator due to unfair competition and the piracy of their programs.

Even though the regulator is aware of the problem, it has declared that it can do nothing about this problem. The monitoring of cable television stations outside Tirana is made through periodic visits of the regulatory staff, which is ineffective. The regulator has set the sights on a studio establishment that will monitor from the capital all television stations in the country, but is not yet clear when this studio will start functioning.

The process of sanctions execution against law violators turns out to be another problem with regards to cable stations piracy solution. Although piracy sanctions against cable stations have been increased from 22 in 2009, to 52 in 2010, including the license duration restriction up to 50 per cent, it has not changed the situation for better. Televisions can complain and go to court, thus kicking off a long process. After this process, the execution of sanctions, from fines up to confiscation and closure of the television, must be performed by the tax authorities. National Council of Radio Television claims



that the bulk of its decisions are not executed by the tax police, consequently bringing the undermining of its authority. This situation has made the former chairwoman of the National Council acknowledge that the regulator's main battle is not only against the Televisions but against the courts as well.

Satellite broadcasting situation is somewhat different. Although no data on the penetration of satellite television, satellite disks are omnipresent in the Albanian landscape, especially in the remote and isolated areas. The first Albanian Satellite Television, ALSAT, news channel, now Albanian Screen, a general channel, kicked off broadcasting in 2003. There is also a second satellite channel, Vizion +. Meanwhile, both multiplexes also broadcast via satellite, covering not only the remote areas, but even the Albanians living abroad.

Online media and blogosphere

Most of the traditional media have their own online sites. Some of the most visited on-line media are¹⁵: Top Channel TV, Balkanweb, ICub, Telegraph, NOA, Shekulli online, Latest news, Tema newspaper, etc. Top Channel TV and Balkanweb turn out to be the most online visited, in constant competition with each other. According to Google Ad Planner, Top Channel TV has about 200,000 visitors, while Balkanweb more than 120.000¹⁶. Balkanweb and Top Channel TV are estimated to have received more than half of online media advertisements¹⁷.

Blogs are not present in ten most visited sites in the country. Blogger.com is ranked in the 14th position. Blogs are not so much applied, although some intellectuals and journalists do have their own blogs. Among the best known are Fatos Lubonja with <http://perpjekja.blogspot.com>. This blog has editorials or comments of the author published in the traditional media or in the journal »Perpjekja«. Another blog is that of Ardian Vehbiu, <http://xhaxhai.wordpress.com/>. This blog focuses on topics such as history, politics, culture, linguistics, etc.

Other blogs are: <http://diaryoftirana.blogspot.com/> by Gjergj Erebara, <http://edliragjoni.wordpress.com/> by Edlira Gjoni, <http://urbasurvivor.blogspot.com/> from Sokol Shameti, <http://saktivista.com/>, by a group of young people, <http://gjeneralmegafoni.com/>, with editorials and opinions mainly from politics, etc.

What these blogs have in common is the duplication of the content: almost every article that appears on-line is also published in daily newspapers. However, on-line publication of these articles has increased the possibility to opinions' exchange and readers' on-line forums, something that the traditional media lacks. The topics are mainly political and to a small extent, related to cultural issues.

Despite the novelty brought by online media, one of the problematic aspects is that it has paved the way to any comment, without any filter. »The birth of on-line media has enabled the flow of thoughts, reactions and unethical communication in these sites, often with a negative and populist content¹⁸.« Most of the forums or on-line discussions do not use a moderator or filter. Consequently, comments, opinions and discussions in these sites are rarely cleared of discrimination, hatred speech, defamation, or any breach of ethics. »New media, social media and blogosphere are used by different people for personal attacks and to spoil the others' image¹⁹.« Although the discussions and on-line forums are intended to broaden the public debate, they are mostly used as a space for variance, where the main topic is not the article, but the author²⁰.

3. The media market

Even though there is a perception in the country about the major media, there is no accurate way to determine which ones are the most important and best *followed*. There is no systematic study on the audience or the market, which can rank the media popularity, or the one gained in the market. So there is no information even about the shares of the media market.

15 Ranking of Alexa.Com, January 2011.

16 Google Ad Planner, January 2011, https://www.google.com/ad-planner/planning/site_profile?hl=en#siteDetails?identifier=top-channel.tv&lp=true.

17 MC Monitoring, »Special: Advertisements 2010.«

18 Interview with Arben Muka, reporter of Deutsche Welle, December 2010.

19 Albanian Institute of Media, »Social Media Landscape,« January 2011.

20 Interview with Lutfi Dervishi, media expert, December 2010.

This situation makes a precise, clear and continuous outline of the Albanian media development impossible. All the media themselves do carry out the market research and present these data to the advertising customers, thus creating a highly subjective overview of market situation and the audience measurement.

In fact, the managers of print and electronic media have often had allegations about the circulation and audience, which could not be verified by independent sources. The main reason is that there are no legal mechanisms to provide documentation and to analyze the popularity of the media. Also, in the absence of legal regulation of print media, there is no obligation to declare print media circulation or sold copies, except for tax purposes. Moreover, these circulation figures can not be obtained from printing, since they are considered as confidential.

In this context, while the media continues to grow in number and in some cases even getting improved in quality, there is still no way to know the percentage of each media market, as there is no systematic and reliable study of the media market. Consequently, the practice of advertising is unclear, so is the economic sustainability of media and in this aspect it becomes even more suspicious.

3.1 Advertising in media

In this context, the recognition of the advertising market, schemes and percentages in the market is very important, to see how this market will develop in the future. However, this is a difficult task. Given the lack of market transparency, all the figures are estimates and approximations. Even these estimates are made continuously on sporadic basis.

The Albanian law does not specify the provision of state aid to protect media pluralism. However, the provision of public advertising has been a controversial issue in the field of the Albanian media. Until 2006, most of the advertisements and announcements that were part of national advertising went into the public expenditures and as such were divided by the public procurement law. In fact, national advertising delivery has not been a transparent process. Lack of specified laws on this delivery has made it easier for the government to exchange advertising for a more favorable coverage of

government.²¹ In the past, the decisions to publish State advertisements on some certain media, which are supposed to be the best followed by the public, in lack of transparency of circulation and audience measurement, have raised questions about the hidden interests of the government to these media.

In this context, in March 2006 the government decided not to deliver state advertising and decisions to the media anymore, but to publish them in the »Bulletin of Official Announcements.«²² Yet the distinction between advertising and announcements is not quite clear in this decision and does not create the possibility for a complete separation of the state advertising distribution to the media. In fact, there is still a concern that the government gives advertising or sensatizing campaigns to the media that are closer to the government. »Notwithstanding the promise of Prime Minister, he has allowed the financing of spots production that are distributed through the media in a clientelistic way.«²³ One of the major media owners in the country also confirms this trend: »Media owners have used televisions to support the government, in order to receive a greater share of government advertising, among others.«²⁴

There is no information on income from advertising, including public advertising weight as compared to other advertisements. However, the trend seems to be continuing reduction of state advertising in relation to the rest of the advertising.²⁵ According to estimates, in the year 2010, among the 10 biggest advertisers, who provide 43 per cent of all funding for advertising only one was state advertising, the Ministry of Interior.

In this group, the ministry had a double spending as compared with 2009, but still was among the few funders in the group of ten leading advertisers.²⁶

Studies and surveys show that print media is losing the public constantly. Monitoring of the estimated advertis-

21 OS/EUMAP »TV in Europe: Regulation, policies and independence,« 2005, chapter on Albania

22 VKM Nr.176, »On the publication of the bulletin of official announcements« 29.03.2006.

23 IREX, »Index of Media Sustainability,« 2010, pg.13.

24 Ilva Tare, »Ilva Tare, »The commercial Tv channels upsurge in post-communist Albania,« Polis, No.8, winter 2009, pg.26.

25 Ibid.

26 MC Monitoring, Special: Advertisement 2010.



ing shows that revenues from ads in daily newspapers fell 3 to 3.5 million euros, or 5 - 7 per cent of the overall advertising market, compared with ten per cent three years ago.²⁷ Competition of television and online media together with the lack of continuous qualitative improvement, have brought in reporting a decline of popularity, especially among the young.

According to the National Council of Radio Television in 2009 advertising for broadcasting fell by eight per cent, representing 58 per cent of the income.²⁸ This figure was even lower in 2010, taking 30 per cent of the revenues of broadcasters. Meanwhile, other data denote that as compared to 2006, the data from advertising have been increased for television stations, respectively 31 per cent in 2007, 25 per cent in 2008, and 48 per cent in 2009.²⁹ The same can be said for radio advertising, which grew by 52 per cent, 48 per cent and 58 per cent respectively in each of the years mentioned above.³⁰ This discrepancy in data is another element that indicates the uncertainty of the figures and data on the media market.

Besides uncertainty about the actual size of the market and financing sources of the advertising market in the media, another major problem is the lack of guarantees of separation of advertising from editorial content. The most obvious example of this influence is that of mobile phone companies.³¹ The major broadcasters acknowledge that most of the advertising revenues come from mobile telephony.³² According to the estimates, in 2010, these companies spent a total of 17 million euros for advertising, where 60-70 per cent of the amount goes to television. According to the Media Sustainability Index, »these companies are closely linked with the media as advertisers and have a huge editorial influence, hampering, for example the efforts to report on the high tariffs they do apply.«³³ The most notable case was reporting for mobile companies, which, according to a parliamentary inquiry, have the highest rates in the region. Although this was a clear case of public interest, reports

on this subject were very few and faded completely after a certain time by the media themselves.

«Interference of cellular phone companies in the media serves as a good example showing how large businesses exert their influence on editorial policy. These companies have managed to block the critical stand about them in the print and electronic media, even though the Albanians do pay the highest fees for mobile in Europe.«³⁴

4. Transparency of media ownership and funding

In this context, transparency of ownership, or more precisely, the transparency of media funding, remains an unresolved issue and a topic of constant debate. Lack of transparency of media funding has been one of the main problems in the field of media for many years. »The problem of transparency is shifted from the transparency of ownership to the transparency of media funding.«³⁵

It is difficult to see the economic performance of private media in years. First, not all of them submit the annual accounts to NCRT. Secondly, the reported data as well are not entirely reliable. Thus, all data received from the National Council reports in recent years would not create a complete and correct picture of media sustainability.

Indeed, few media outlets have been closed down through years, whilst new media have emerged, a phenomenon whereby a media expert calls »capitalism without bankruptcy.«³⁶ According to another analyst, from 20 newspaper titles, none of them is able to provide equal incomes to expenditures.³⁷ Subscriptions remain extremely low, where newspapers with the on top circulation, 23,000 copies a day, have only 400 subscriptions.³⁸

It can be said that in general »there is no real financial diversification of the Albanian media that can prevent the impact of an advertiser on the content of a financial

27 Ibid.

28 NCRT, Annual Report 2009, pg.95.

29 Open Society Institute, »Footprint of Financial Crisis in the Media: Albania,« by Thanas Goga, 2009, pg.10.

30 Ibid.

31 Ilva Tare, »Ilva Tare, »Ilva Tare, »The commercial Tv channels upsurge in post-comunist Albania,« Polis, No.8, winter 2009, pg.30.

32 MC Monitoring, Special: Advertisements 2010.

33 IREX, »Index of Media Sustainability,« 2010, pg.13.

34 IREX, »Index of Media Sustainability,« 2009, pg. 8.

35 Ibid, pg.12.

36 Remzi Lani, quoted by Ilva Tare, »The commercial Tv channels upsurge in post-comunist Albania,« Polis, No.8, winter 2009, pg.28.

37 Bardhi Sejdarasi, »Media Crisis, observations and solutions,« Shqip, 24/08/2008, pg. 11.

38 IREX, »Index of Media Sustainability,« 2010, pg.13.



source.«³⁹ Consequently, the funds that feed the constant emergence of the media turn out to be a speculation. Usually the answer lies in the ownership scheme. It is difficult to find a media whose owner is not involved in other businesses, mainly construction, trade, or other audiovisual services, telecommunications, etc.. In this scheme, these media, which bring no profit, but do have losses, are used by their owners to protect the interests of other businesses; while these businesses help the media survive. According to an analyst »Media is not profitable, but indirectly it seems as such. Media becomes profitable only as a tool to obtain building permits and other favors from the government. In other words, the last account balance of the owners turns positive.«⁴⁰

The transparency of the official ownership of media has been increasing, mainly thanks to the digitalization of the Commercial Registry and the establishment of the National Registration Center. Ownership of the joint-stock companies can be found online, free, from this center. As for the data that can not be found on-line, an application can be submitted to the center and a fee of approximately 1 euro for extract is paid.

In addition, electronic media should report the ownership close to the National Council of Radio Television. They also must report all changes of ownership to the regulator no later than 15 days after the change. These data are at NCRT, which has a record of all licensed media, including the ownership. This register is not available online, but, in principle, by request, information can be obtained for certain media ownership.

All these have created an opportunity for greater transparency of official owners of the shares of media companies. However, there are cases of hidden ownership speculation. »You can go to the center and find the owner's name, but his silent partners are not there.«⁴¹

In fact, the question does not lie on the ownership as such, but the financing of the media and its transparency. Precisely for this reason, the question of how such a great number of media operate in a so small market remains unanswered in the Albanian media area. In this sense, the large number of newspapers and television

do exist mainly thanks to the financing from parallel businesses and lack of transparency of these financial resources.

Finally, there is a trend of consolidation of ownership, evident especially in cross-ownership, where the same group sets up a print, electronic and sometimes even on-line media. Lack of legal restrictions on cross ownership facilitates the creation of this phenomenon.

Due to lack of market research, it is impossible to return each media group market, popularity into percentage. However, it is clear that there are some concentrations, in the form of some media groups. Even though it seems that media pluralism is not a problem for the moment, »hidden monopolies are likely to seriously endanger media pluralism in the near future.«⁴² Furthermore, the concentration of the important media in fewer hands, may lead to the bankruptcy of the weakest local media at a time when the media of the capital fosters.⁴³

Also, parallel businesses of the media owners are another reason to worry about. While these businesses made the basis for the major investments in media, parallel media ownership and other businesses made the media vulnerable towards economic and political interests. Given the existence of a largely informal labor market, that sets the journalists in an unsafe position leading them to self-censorship; it is not at all difficult for the media owners to use the media for their own purposes. This is how an analyst describes the situation: »Many of the media have only one owner, who usually comes from the fields of construction, the strength of our capitalist economy. Unlike journalists, who were owners of several newspapers in 1992-1997, these businessmen are much more influenced by the incumbent government. They orient the media packed with soldiers and officers to take protective or blackmail positions against the governors, depending on the business they run.«⁴⁴

In fact, when business interests are involved, the media is used as a way to make pressure or to seek favors for the protection or development of these businesses. As one analyst puts it, televisions in Albania serve as a shield and arrow, to relatively protect a business from the gov-

39 Ibid.

40 FRIDE, Democracy Monitoring Report, Albania, 2010, www.fride.org

41 IREX, »Index of Media Sustainability,« 2010, pg.9.

42 Ibid.

43 IREX, »Index of Media Sustainability,« 2009, pg. 12.

44 Mentor Nazarko, »On Media Crisis,« Shqip, 23/08/2008, pg. 11.

ernment, while at the same time they are arms against the financial pressure, taxes, or customs' authorities in a country with high level of informality.⁴⁵

This kind of media landscape certainly leaves its traces on the information forwarded to the public, where the owner's interests and not the public ones are determining for the priorities. Consequently, the transparency of media ownership, its activity, and the impact it has on the public remain a crucial need for the development of media pluralism and especially the strengthening of its independence.

5. Independence of the Media

The independence of the editorial policy is protected by law. However, while editorial independence and professionalism in media is estimated, it should be taken into account that qualitative journalism is difficult to be achieved in situations where journalists themselves are often deprived of the rights they do have. Labor relations continue to be the main problems of journalists. About 90 per cent of the journalists work without contracts and the owners can easily exert pressure, which leads to self censorship.⁴⁶ After several failed attempts to organize a journalists' trade union, one such was established in 2005. The weak tradition of organizing the media community itself does not facilitate the respect of the reporters' rights. As the chairman of the union explains it »The only gesture of solidarity between us is the reaction, when a reporter is threatened by crime or politics or in cases when a media faces politics, government, or the major parties.«⁴⁷

In the recent years, some of the main private media have agreed to sign contracts with employees, while in the public broadcaster, the employees have contracts. Despite the work done in these years, it is clear that complete formalization of labor relations in the media will be a long process. It is equally clear that without formal protection, guaranteed by the Labor Code, journalists will remain exposed to the interests of owners and the self-censorship practice will carry on.

45 Ibid.

46 Aleksandër Çipa, quoted in IREX, »Index of Media Sustainability«, 2010, pg. 6.

47 Aleksandër Çipa, »Power deprived of dignity«, Shqip, 26/08/2008, pg. 9.

Another factor that affects the quality of journalism is the workload. Most newsrooms, especially those of print media, suffer from a lack of staff and workload. »You can not speak of a fair, objective and wellinformed reporting when the biggest newspaper in the country has only 15 journalists and when the journalists and editors have never time to realize what has happened, but just forward what politicians say in press conferences.«⁴⁸

The Union of Journalists speaks about 5,000 employees in the media across the country, including technical and administrative staff.⁴⁹ However, there is no accurate data on the number of reporters at each newspaper or on the level of wages of journalists in different media. The general opinion is that salaries remain low, even though journalism is not included among lower-paid occupations. Journalists' salaries are above the average level of approximately 250 Euro and journalists in Tirana are rarely paid less than 300 euros per month, while the overall average salary of journalists is estimated to be 300-600 euros, while the editors and presenters of the programs are better paid.⁵⁰ The situation seems more difficult for the reporters outside the capital, where, according to the Union of Journalists, about 60 per cent of the journalists do not even reach the average level of wages, as determined by government standards.⁵¹

So, yet again, the decisive factor in the quality of produced journalism remain the owners of the media, their business models and what is most important, the relationships they have with other actors.

6. Ethics in Journalism

Currently media field is dynamic in Albania. Despite the undeniable progress over the years, ethical violations still exist. A part of journalists has perceived freedom of expression as a hunting permit. Although it seems that journalists are aware of the situation, they do lack the interest, and initiatives to make the situation better. Given the volatile nature of the labor market and working conditions of journalists, ethics is not ranked as priority in

48 Lutfi Dervishi, quoted in IREX, »Index of Media Sustainability« 2010, pg. 8.

49 Interview with Aleksandër Çipa, 15/10/2010.

50 IREX, »Index of Media Sustainability«, 2010, pg. 8.

51 Ibid.

the agenda of Albanian media. Similarly, media owners, with few exceptions, do not seem particularly interested in improving the ethical side of their media.

Attempts to self-regulate the media have been weak, fragmented and rarely have they been a priority for the Albanian media. Code of Ethics was drafted in 1996 by two existing associations of journalists and the Albanian Media Institute. However, there has never been a commitment or formal support by the media. Consequently, there has neither been any self-regulatory body that will supervise the implementation of the code.

In 2006, the Albanian Institute of Media started a new process, the review of the existing code, along with the efforts to facilitate the discussion of the possibility of creating a self-regulatory mechanism, which will supervise the implementation of the code. The participants in the consultation process expressed in general their consent to revise the existing Code and willingness to discuss the creation of a self-regulatory mechanism. Consequently, now there is a revised Code of Conduct, adopted in September 2006 and supported by four main associations of journalists. However, there have been no other attempts by a designated body to officially get engaged to respect the Code.

Self-regulation as a process has to kick off, despite the good will expressed by the media in this regard. Although the journalists as well as media executives have expressed the need to have a self-regulatory mechanism, it remains to be seen if they will join to set up and sustain such a body.

Meanwhile, the NCRT the Council of Ethics, former Board of Appeals do operate at NCRT. The primary mission of the Council is to address moral and ethical aspects of programming in electronic media. However, it should be born in mind that the decisions of the Council of Ethics have no legal force.

7. Associations and media organizations

There are several associations of journalists in the country, but most of them remain weak. Journalists have not been able to organize a movement or set up an organization, or to protect their rights or for professional pur-

poses. The two main associations of journalists in the country are the League of Albanian Journalists and the Association of Albanian Journalists.

There are also other associations of journalists, set up on geographical grounds or according to specific interests, such as the environmental journalists, medical journalists, the Union of Journalists North etc. However, the activities of these associations are sporadic and have not been able to create a tradition of organization or a sense of community for journalists. Journalists' associations become active in the cases when they protect a journalist or in similar flagrant cases, preserving a low profile at all times.

After a failed attempt, in 2005, with the support of IREX, the journalists' trade union was established. The union has set up branches in the major cities in the country and currently has about 800 members. The Union turns out to be the most active association of journalists in the country, although the process of labor contracts negotiation and creating a sense of community among journalists appear to be a long process.

Meanwhile, media owners' associations are also underdeveloped, mainly due to the lack of organization and division on political and economic grounds. »The owner of the largest pro-government television in the country lobbies for its own interests, not for the interests of all media. Similarly, opposition media organizations call on the opposition directly, in hopes of benefiting if government changes.«

8. Freedom of expression

Press freedom and freedom of expression are protected by law, from the constitution to the most specific laws. Free press is perhaps the most obvious achievement of the new Albanian democracy. The role of media in the lives of Albanians has become increasingly powerful. Public perception of media's role has improved significantly. In 2009, the media was regarded as the most trusted institution in the fight against corruption by 63 per cent of respondents according to a public opinion poll.⁵² Also, according to a Gallup poll in 2010, 71 per

⁵² Gallup Balkans Monitor 2010, pg. 29, http://www.balkan-monitor.eu/files/BalkanMonitor-2010_Summary_of_Findings.pdf

cent of the Albanians trust in the media, a much higher percentage than that of trust in other institutions.⁵³

Although the constitution and legal framework guarantees freedom of expression and press freedom has been improved significantly since the fall of communism, problems still exist. The intertwining of powerful economic, political and media interests, affects the development of independent and objective media.

In spite of the significant progress Albanian media has made, concerns about free and independent media still remain realities. While a few years ago there were cases of direct pressure and even violence against the media by politics, now the pressure is indirect, mainly financial.

Currently the media face »capitalistic trend and financial pressure,« such as distribution, transparency of funding, ownership, labor relations and corruption in the media. Albania already has a new phenomenon – »media proletariat.« Threats against journalists now do not come from the government but mostly from media owners. The latter tend to dictate editorial policy, given the political and economic ties, which, along with employment insecurity faced by the reporters, cultivate a culture of self-censorship. In this context, the prospect of editorial independence is not promising at all.

Although press freedom rankings show a steady decline, there is open and visible pressure from the Government against the media. Crimes against journalists and media are quite rare, unlike the cases of the most refined forms of pressure, which include efforts to control the editorial policies through owners or indirect exercise of indirect pressure against critical journalists.⁵⁴ Obviously such a climate does not help create a sound environment for the investigative journalism. The complex and co-dependent relationship among media, business and politics, together with the unsafe situation of journalists, can hardly produce sound investigative journalism, which often runs counter to the interests of the owners themselves. Consequently, journalists often take refuge in self-censorship, as the easiest way to save the job. According to the director of one of the largest newspapers in the country, »self-censorship is a wound for the Alba-

nian journalism and its biggest problem, which they will suffer for many years.«⁵⁵

Another factor that explains the trend of continuous decline in ranking regarding the freedom of press is also the delay the removal of libel and defamation as a criminal act after so many years that the draft laws are ready in the parliament. In 2005, the country's prime minister ordered the administration officials not to sue journalists for libel and insult and only require refutation. Although the administration has complied with this order, this does not mean that intervention in the law is inevitable. In 2010, former minister Ylli Pango sued Top Channel TV after being fired due to a video broadcast by this television. The court made a decision that Top Channel should pay 400.000 Euros to ex-minister in damages for breach of privacy. So even in the absence of claims by the administration, it is clear that Albanian courts are orientated to evaluate more the privacy rather than the freedom of expression and investigative journalism.

In general we can say that Albanian media can be defined more as an extension of politics rather than as a representative of public opinion. Also, it remains part of the businesses rather than the mouthpiece of certain public interest. Albanian media can be described as free but not independent, as a pluralistic, but not independent.

Work with legal intervention in areas such as transparency of media ownership and financing, defamation and insult, and the status of journalists remain key problems. So, although it must be admitted that the country has made progress in the field of freedom of expression, international reports highlight the need to improve implementation of existing laws and to carry out the reform in this area in a more coordinated way, in collaboration with stakeholders and experts.


9. Education of Journalists

Along with the boom of media outlets after 1990, a new generation of journalists emerged in 1990, filled with passion and ambition, but insufficiency in terms of professional skill. Proper education for journalists in

53 IDRA, »Corruption in Albania: Perception and experience 2009,« pg.13.

54 IREX, »Index of Media Sustainability,« 2009, pg. 6.

55 Andi Tela, quoted in IREX, »Index of Media Sustainability,« 2010, pg.8.



Albania was absolutely absent during the communist period. The first school of journalism was the one established within the Department of Law- Political Science, established under the Soviet model. This school worked for ten years. The Department of Journalism was closed down in 1973, but this curtailed education was much more ideological rather than professional at that time.

The current school, part of the Department of History and Philology, was founded in 1992. Its establishment was seen as a necessity given the growing number of newspapers with different orientations and the employment of a great number of young journalists.

This school, the only school of journalism in the university system until the recent years, has already 19 years of experience and has produced 15 generations of journalists or about 1200 journalists. In fact, since the first year of its foundation, the department of journalism in the public university has undergone significant changes in the curriculum. From the classic 4-year diploma, it has already adopted the system with two periods, according to the Bologna system. The Department already pro-

vides two degrees: the first level and second level. First Diploma offers four levels of journalistic profiles from which students can choose: arts and culture journalism, political journalism, economic journalism and general journalism. Even second- level offers the opportunity to get further qualified in the desired profile of journalism. Besides the public university, there is another private university that offers bachelor of journalism. The only organization that provides after school training in the country is the Albanian Media Institute, which trains about 300 journalists every year. Thanks to various offered thematic and professional courses, the journalists have received new practical and technical skills.

A good part of the students work in various editorial offices of print and electronic media, which has its own advantages, but also leads to certain deficiencies. On one hand, the students get acquainted with the practical work and various techniques of the profession, gaining experience and skill. On the other hand, the risk of acquiring the deformed, ill-founded knowledge does exist in the theoretical foundations of knowledge.



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The Albanian Media Institute (AMI) was established by the end of 1995. After more than a decade AMI has been consolidated, constituting at present one of the main actors of civil society in Albania and one of most important journalistic training institutions in the Balkan region.

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