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KOSOVO

The year 2008 was politically and economically dynamic for Kosovo. By the beginning of the year, the two major political parties (Democratic Party of Kosovo and Democratic League of Kosovo) agreed on the creation of a joint coalition government after the elections of November 2007. The coalition formed by the two parties created a strong government and an opposition severely disadvantaged in its attempts to raise its voice and become a constructive critic.

After year-long negotiations between the Kosovar and Serbian authorities failed to result in an agreement on Kosovo's final status, the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General Martti Ahtisaari presented his *Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement*. The proposal recommended supervised independence for Kosovo as the most viable solution. On February 17, 2008, the Assembly of Kosovo declared the republic's independence, pledging state building and the protection of minority rights as envisioned in the proposal.

In the period between February and June 2008, the Assembly of Kosovo used a fast-track procedure to pass more than 40 laws as outlined by the Ahtisaari Proposal. The laws came into force simultaneously with the ratification of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo on June 15, 2008.

In April 2008, Ramush Haradinaj, former prime minister and an ex-leader of the Kosovo Liberation Army, was found not guilty by the Hague Tribunal. His return to the political scene was seen as a boost for the opposition; moreover, Haradinaj made clear his intentions to once again become the prime minister of Kosovo.

The European Union Rule of Law Mission was envisioned to replace the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) after almost nine years of administration. The UN secretary general proposed a Six Points Plan, which foresaw double standards regarding police, justice, customs, etc. Although the Serbian government approved, the plan was strongly opposed by Kosovars and two massive protests in Prishtina were organized by NGOs.

Overall, the political developments of 2008 had positive implications for the media sector in Kosovo, according to the MSI panelists. In contrast with the Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government in Kosovo, which did not include any paragraph on free speech, the Constitution of Republic of Kosovo guarantees free speech (Article 40), the right to access official documents (Article 41), and freedom of media (Article 42).

With an overall score of 2.38 in 2009, the Kosovo MSI score increased slightly from 2.26 in 2008. As in 2008, this year panelists gave their highest rating to Objective 3, plurality of news sources, increasing the score to 2.59. Objective 1 and Objective 4 also received higher scores this year. The increases can be attributed to better management of media and greater opportunities for advertising, with further development of the banking and telecommunications sectors especially. Objectives 2 and 5 dropped slightly this year, however.

KOSOVO AT A GLANCE

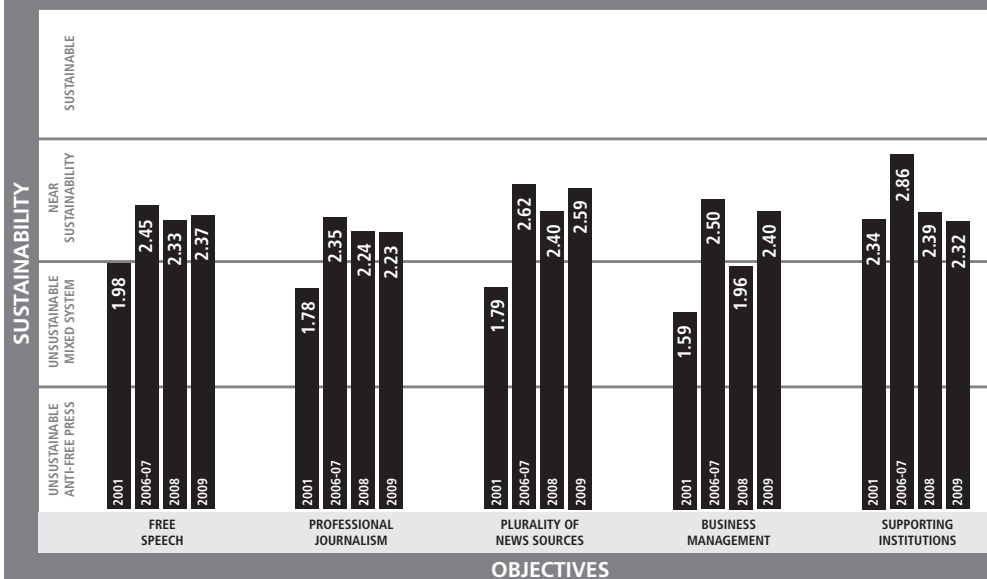
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 2,126,708 (2007 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Prishtina
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Albanians 88%, Serbs 7%, other 5% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim, Serbian Orthodox, Roman Catholic
- > **Languages (% of population):** Albanian (official), Serbian (official), Bosnian, Turkish, Roma
- > **GNI (2007-Atlas):** N/A
- > **GNI per capita (2007-PPP):** N/A
- > **Literacy rate:** 94.2% (UNDP, 2004)
- > **President or top authority:** President Fatmir Sejdiu (since February 10, 2006)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 8 daily newspapers; Radio: 95; Television Stations: 21 (Independent Media Commission (IMC), 2008)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** N/A, *Koha ditore* is the leading newspaper (Index Kosova, 2008)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top three television and radio stations: RTK 49%, KTV 34%, RTV21 33%; Radio Dukagjini 7%, Radio Kosova 4%, Radio 21 3% (Index Kosova, 2008)
- > **News agencies:** Kosova Live, Kosova Press, Info Sot
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** Households with Internet access 46%; people claiming daily use of Internet 28% (Index Kosova, 2008)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: KOSOVO



Annual scores for 2002 through 2005 are available online at http://www.irex.org/programs/MSI_EUR/archive.asp

Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):

Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3):

Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4):

Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Kosovo Objective Score: 2.37

The objective for freedom of speech experienced almost no increase, rising from 2.33 to 2.37 between 2008 and 2009. Indicator scores showed little change and most indicators scored close to the objective's average. The exceptions are Indicator 5 (legal guarantees of independence and preferential legal treatment for public media), which scored about .5 less; and indicators 8 and 9 (media access to international news sources and free entry into the journalism profession), which scored .75 and more than 1 point higher, respectively. Overall, legal foundations have been enhanced to protect freedom of speech, and media have somewhat better access to public information, but recent changes made in conjunction with independence have yet to make a significant impact.

The panelists agreed that the June 2008 adoption of the constitution, and specifically Article 40, have augmented the legal protection of free speech. The Constitutional Framework (which governed Kosovo based on UNSC 1244 since 2001) did not have an explicit statement on the issue. Moreover, the constitution stipulates the creation and support for the Independent Media Commission (IMC), which is responsible for issuing licenses and has transparently elected members.

Panelist Argjentina Grazhdani, director of the East West Management Institute, acknowledged the positive impact of the legal basis in protecting freedom of speech, but said that implementing practices after they have officially been laid out on paper takes time. Panelist Mifail Bytyqi, managing director of TV Prizreni, noted that the new legal framework has a positive psychological effect on both the media and institutions by raising their awareness. Overall, the panelists were satisfied with the current legal framework.

The panelists were unanimous that the public does not react in any way in cases where freedom of speech is violated. This is something to be decried, since it perpetuates an environment of a civil society uninterested in media affairs.

Panelists had opposing views on the issue of licensing broadcast media. The IMC is responsible for granting and renewing licenses. The commission is required to be apolitical and its members can be elected from civil society. Panelists said that they value the work of IMC, but emphasized the need to ensure fair competition. Bytyqi expressed his concern with the high number of licenses being given to new broadcasters. He said that this practice makes longtime broadcasters feel that their efforts to date are unappreciated.

The tax code does not make a distinction between the media industry and other types of businesses—the media pay the same amount of VAT. Ardita Zejnullahu, executive director of the Association of Kosova Independent Electronic Media (AMPEK), told the panel that since the association is a business, it has been lobbying for a lower VAT rate. However, other panelists pointed out a potential problem: tax evasion would follow as a consequence, because various businesses would declare themselves as media enterprises in order to avoid higher VAT rates.

Panelists could recall no incidents of crimes against journalists, but they debated what is considered a serious threat. Voice of America journalist Besim Abazi said that sometimes journalists exaggerate threats, even in the case of simple criticism. But vague, intimidating assertions can lead to serious attacks against journalists.

It seems as if journalists avoid trouble in general by understanding which lines not to cross. But when they do choose to write about a dicey issue, any threat is diffused when more than one media outlet reports on the subject. Berat Buzhala, editor-in-chief of the *Express* daily newspaper, said that members of the media have a kind of silent coalition in this regard. "When five or six newspapers write on a hot topic, the threat against the journalists is minimal," he said.

Panelists also mentioned the *Progress Report 2008 of the European Commission on Kosovo*. They pointed out that this report identifies politicians and political parties in general, not the government, as the ones who intimidate journalists.

LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

The public broadcaster Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK) is the lead media outlet in both reliability and viewership rates. However, many people believe that RTK is controlled by the Democratic Party of Kosovo. In addition, RTK is criticized by other national television stations because it receives revenue both from subscription fees and commercials. Although this puts RTK in a privileged position, some panelists claimed that this actually promotes its political independence.

In 2008, however, RTK faced economic and organizational problems. Until 2006, RTK received funding from the state budget and donors. But RTK has not received funds from the budget since then, and its donor contributions have almost disappeared.

The collection of subscription fees is regulated through an agreement with the Kosovo Energy Corporation (KEK). RTK is under constant threat of KEK terminating the agreement, however. According to panelists, this situation had an impact on the financial stability of RTK and the quality of programming, as RTK airs commercials during prime time. However, according to Mentor Shala, RTK Albanian program editor, "If the subscription issue is regulated for a longer period, then dependence on commercials will slowly fade."

In addition, RTK faces management problems. Its current board of directors is functioning on a mandate that has been extended for six months, contributing to the sentiment that the government is pressuring RTK to become state-run. Opposition parties and Kosovar citizens also have accused RTK of biased and pro-government reporting. Given these challenges, Grazhdani said, RTK has an uncertain future. "A public institution that does not have a clear managing structure and financial source is definitely more vulnerable," she said.

The Law on Access to Official Documents, ratified in 2003, is an important component in supporting legal means for the freedom of speech. Section 6 of the law addresses the processing of initial applications for access to certain documents. The institution must either grant access to the document within 15 working days or state the reasons for total or partial refusal.

However, the administrative instruction no. 3/2006, on implementing the Law on Access to Official Documents, passed by a previous minister, extends the time limit and is too specific about when a document can be accessed, thus making it difficult for applicants to access official documents. Shala voiced the concern that the administrative instruction belittles the law. "The administrative instruction not only decreases institutional transparency, it was also an attempt by the government to limit people's access to official documents," he said.

Public institutions and the media have not yet had major clashes between them that would result in a contentious case of accessing public documents. "The media and the civil society operate on separate playing fields from the government," said Buzhala. "The latter has still not felt the need to make serious efforts to hide information." Buzhala said that he expects conflicts to arise between institutions and the media as they both continue to improve.

Regarding international media, journalists have unrestricted access to foreign news agencies, websites, newspapers, etc. The government does not hamper in any way the flow of information from abroad. No licensing requirements are imposed on individuals entering journalism.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Kosovo Objective Score: 2.23

Most panelists agreed that in general, professional journalism is practiced but not at ideal levels. Objective 2 received a score nearly the same as last year, with most indicators remaining static and scoring close to the overall objective score. The one exception is Indicator 8, niche and investigative reporting, which suffered both a lower score and one about a half-point lower than the objective average.

Given that approximately 89 percent of the population uses television as its main information source, misleading reporting is a serious issue. Journalists are now tending to present sensational and bombastic news. An everyday news item or event is often unnecessarily presented as something colossal. Many journalists prefer quick, one-source reporting as

JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

opposed to inclusive, detailed work. Shala called on editors to be more careful in screening journalists' approaches to stories. "With a single and often unverified argument, journalists try to attack someone in order to damage [him or her]," he said. "This tendency of journalists to report sensational news is especially evident in the electronic media."

However, other panelists actually supported the development of sensational reporting in the country. "Pompous news and speculations are part of the culture in a democratic society," Buzhala said. He said that he believes that tabloid-like media serve as guardians that make the environment secure for serious information outlets. Yet, a weak judicial system leaves a vacuum for journalists to intentionally attack someone with impunity.

Panelists indicated that there are general ethical standards that journalists recognize and strive to uphold. However, some journalists do not seek to gain a broad, comprehensive view on a given issue, and are reluctant to follow an event until its conclusion and gather different opinions along the way. In addition, reporters often consult the same professionals over and over again. "Each TV station has its own experts," said Zejnullahu.

According to panelist Isak Vorgucic, manager of Radio Kim, "The biggest problem in journalism in Kosovo is self-censorship from journalists themselves, as well as from editors." All other panelists agreed that journalists practice self-censorship to a considerable extent. Despite complaints to their editors about censorship, journalists in fact often censor themselves and do not pursue certain topics due to fear. They also may choose to ignore certain subject matters. They are more willing to report on political issues than social ones. Shala gave an example: "Lack of electricity in a remote village is seen as a marginal problem and not deserving attention, because it is not likely to bring fame to the journalist."

Media outlets' financial dependence on different donors and outside investors can dictate their editorial policies. Furthermore, some panelists viewed advertisements as a potential tool of the government and other political actors to influence the editorial content of a newspaper. The threat of the withdrawal of such advertisements can prove detrimental for the media's financial sustainability.

Moreover, the low level of professionalism among many journalists affects their capacity for fair and unbiased reporting. Journalists that work closely with politicians feel as if they have befriended them and are less likely to criticize them. New journalists are eager to have good relations with public figures in order to advance professionally. Some see journalism only as a starting point for a possible future career in politics.

Overall, pay levels for journalists are reasonable, especially compared to salaries in the public sector. A journalist is likely to earn twice as much as a teacher or a doctor. Panelists noted the need for high salaries in order to prevent journalists from leaving the profession and joining corporations or firms in search of better wages.

As reported last year, entertainment programming surpasses news and information. Some broadcast media are able to air entertainment programming supported by cheap advertising rates that would not sustain serious newsgathering. Although citizens are able to access regularly scheduled newscasts, sometimes there is a lack of timeliness in these reports.

The donor community has provided a variety of equipment to members of the Kosovar media. However, panelists noted that some of the equipment is coming to the end of its service life, and that donors do not seem to have any plans or efforts underway for replacements or upgrades.

Panelists maintained that the conditions have not been met yet for real investigative reporting. The procedures for journalist protection are lengthy and bureaucratic, forcing journalists to ponder whether or not the risk is worth taking.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Kosovo Objective Score: 2.59

Panelists gave Objective 3 their highest scores, and it experienced a modest gain. Most of the indicators showed minor improvements, although Indicators 3 (public media reflect the views of the political spectrum and interests of society at large) and 6 (transparency of ownership) received somewhat larger increases. Indicator 2, citizen access to media, received a score slightly more than a half-point higher than the overall objective score; the rest of the indicators were close to the objective score.

According to panelists, there is no place in Kosovo where citizens cannot access information. Shala said that through cable television, RTK now covers a wider area of Kosovo, even in parts where RTK does not have a terrestrial or satellite signal. However, some parts of Kosovo still do not receive RTK broadcasts, such as the Dragash region in the south.

News sources increased this year, easing citizen access to information from multiple sources with different viewpoints. National media and most newspapers have allowed more space for news from municipalities. This year also witnessed an increasing trend of websites that publish online news—a form of information distribution

that is continuously gaining more readers. "Kosovo has the greatest Internet coverage in the region, because many of its citizens are living abroad and keeping connections with people in Kosovo," said Buzhala.

Forty-six percent of households in Kosovo have Internet access, which Buzhala said has helped motivate media outlets to launch or improve websites. He told the panel that the *Express* newspaper launched its website on November 17, 2008. The website features the same information as the print newspaper. The *Express* has already benefited greatly, through increases in advertising revenue and exposure to more readers.

Citizens of Kosovo, especially those who speak foreign languages, have unlimited access to all online news portals. Everyone can now view the world's major television channels through cable, which is spreading quickly across the country. The price for Internet installation and use is at an affordable level for a Kosovar family.

Foreign print media are being introduced directly in Kosovo. Citizens can now read the *New York Times*, which in Kosovo is published once a week as a collection of articles and distributed together with the national daily newspaper *Koha Ditore*. Private companies distribute international newspapers, but with some time delay and higher prices.

Kosovo does not have a state television station, but it has one public broadcaster and two public radio stations whose editorial and economic independence are regulated by law.

Kosovo has only three news agencies (KosovaLive, Kosovapress, and InfoSot), and their reports are not used often. They transmit their information only through the Internet, without using video or other multimedia materials. They have not shown any noticeable improvement in the content quality of the information distributed; thus, the appeal of news agencies has dropped.

Local and national media do have subscriptions with international news agencies. According to Shala, RTK can more easily use information acquired from international news agencies because it has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the European Broadcasting Union. The memorandum enables RTK to pay only for the agency stories that it broadcasts.

National and local media in Kosovo either produce their own news or link with other media in order to use their news programs. Around 80 percent of local media news content covers local events; the rest consists of national and international news. The news content of private media is largely similar to that of the public media. However, local media news quality is not satisfactory, due to the lack of professionalism by journalists, the shortcomings of technical facilities, and financial problems. Moreover, not all Kosovar media broadcast news; many of them focus on entertainment and musical programs.

Media ownership in Kosovo is transparent. The state's media regulator demands reporting of every change in ownership or shareholder of 10 percent or more. An owner can sell up to 49 percent of media shares.

No media outlet in Kosovo is suspected of having oligarchic owners, engaging in money laundering, or selling its image. Although Kosovo has no law regulating media ownership or concentration (monopolies), these issues have not arisen to date. There is still no foreign private investment in Kosovar media or acquisition by foreign conglomerates. "Media ownership seems to be quite spread out between media owners, making it rather difficult for conglomerates to control it," said panelist Fisnik Ismaili of Ogilvy Kosovo.

Slovene Telecom owns the *Express* newspaper, which it uses to advertise the products of IPKO, the Slovene telecommunications company operating in Kosovo. However, neither IPKO nor Slovene Telecom influences the editorial independence of the paper.

RTK transmits programs in five of the languages of the ethnicities living in Kosovo. Thirty-nine percent of the licensed media in the country broadcast programs in languages of ethnic minorities.

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Kosovo Objective Score: 2.40

Objective 4 significantly improved its score this year, increasing from 1.96 to 2.40. One explanation for the improvement is the trend of increasing commercials in the media market. Most of the indicators received higher scores and were clustered close to the overall objective score. The sole exception is Indicator 7 (audience and circulation measurement), which suffered both a decline in score and a final score of more than three-quarters of a point lower than the overall objective score.

Media companies have started to engage marketing professionals and create business plans for better financial stability. Media are interested in increasing readership, listenership, and viewership through high quality, objective articles and programs (even if, as reported above, they often fall short of this goal), with the expectation of expanding the commercial market.

Some threats to the business environment include the prospects that foreign investors will enter the market. Nevertheless, several panelists argued that more competition will lead to an increase in the quality of programming, weeding out the lower-quality broadcasters. Zejnullahu said that liberalization is about more than the possession of frequencies, because competitors come from other sources as well, such as cable television.

Private media are financed from several different sources. Media subscription is not a normal practice for Kosovars, so the main source of funding for media remains advertising.

INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED BUSINESSES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

Despite the generally underdeveloped economy, Kosovo has healthy markets in banking, cellular technology, and insurance. Corporations in those industries have built an active, competitive environment through their advertisements—to the benefit of Kosovar media.

Ismaili said that in many cases, clients buy the advertising space directly from media in order to avoid agency fees. This practice seems to be embraced by the media and affects the revenues of agencies.

Due to Kosovo's high unemployment rate, the publication of job vacancies at private companies and government agencies seems to influence the sale of daily newspapers. In addition to boosting revenue, marketers incorporate this factor into their strategies.

Government publications can influence the editorial policies of media. According to Abazi, some of the media that always criticized the government have now "softened" their language and already started posting various government publications on their websites. Buzhala pointed out that ministries allocate specific funds for advertisements and tend to publish these in media that are not critical of the government. If the medium begins to criticize the government, however, the advertisements are withdrawn.

The number of newspapers' pages fluctuates depending on commercial demands; usually during holidays, the number of pages dedicated to advertisements is doubled. However, broadcast media are restricted on the percentage of air time dedicated to advertisements. As predetermined by international standards, only 20 percent (12 minutes per hour) may be used for commercials. Grazhdani predicted that the limit might increase due to the financial crisis.

Neither independent nor public media in Kosovo receive government subsidies. However, according to Grazhdani, media outlets cannot afford to risk their relationship with the state. "In a country like Kosovo, where the economy is still weak, it is the government that is the biggest advertiser," he said. "Media try to benefit as much as possible from these commercials, always keeping in mind the use of language toward the government."

To build advertising revenue, national media use polls to measure popularity rates. The polling company Group of Electronic Media Industry in Kosovo serves the three national television stations and some advertising agencies. Media outlets use a polling company's diary panel results to determine audience preferences and respond by improving their broadcasting schedules. This in turn allows the outlet to increase prices for commercials. Although polling companies in general are becoming more professional, newspapers and

local media do not have reliable measuring mechanisms to allow them to benefit more from the advertising market.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Kosovo Objective Score: 2.32

The score for Objective 5 is nearly the same as last year. Only Indicator 7, sources of media distribution, had a drop in score, while the other indicators remained static. Indicator 7 was also the only indicator to fall well short of the overall objective score, doing so by almost three-quarters of a point. All other indicators were close to the overall score, except for Indicator 6, access to printing facilities, which was slightly more than a half-point higher.

AMPEK is an association of electronic and private media in Kosovo that advocates for commercial media. It has been active and efficient in intervening to modify antagonistic laws towards the private media and monitoring the work of the Independent Media Commission (IMC), which regulates the audio and visual content of Kosovar media.

Most panelists said that they are not satisfied with the work of other associations responsible for protecting journalists' rights. The Association of Professional Journalists in Kosovo (AGKP) was criticized as keeping silent recently and not being responsive enough. AGKP is perceived to be non-inclusive, working solely for the interests of its members. Shala lamented the weak cooperation between journalists and AGKP and the association's poor election procedures for its leadership.

Kosovo has NGOs that support free speech but often they do not have a defined focus. Various organizations fight for free speech by ensuring that their stances are properly conveyed

in the media. The Union of Regional Kosovo Television Stations works to protect the rights of both the journalists and the media.

With regard to journalism education programs in the country, various media institutes offer trainings and workshops for journalists. It is also common for media outlets to individually hire foreign experts to train their staff. This practice was praised by Shala, because it exposes journalists to global standards.

Several private universities in Kosovo offer degrees in journalism or related fields. According to the panelists, however, the programs require significant improvement in terms of both the practical and theoretical material covered. "The schools for journalism are a farce," Buzhala said. "A good journalist does not need to have a degree in journalism; he/she can come from various academic fields."

In addition, the panelists said that practical work is crucial in the professional development of a journalist, and that good writing skills and a solid work ethic are valued more than a university degree.

Panelists unanimously agreed that sources of newsprint and printing facilities in Kosovo are apolitical, private, and independent. But most panelists expressed doubt that channels of media distribution are truly apolitical and unrestricted. Kosovo has only one distribution network, Rilindja, for printed media. The company is effectively a monopoly, owning nearly all kiosks in Kosovo. Although many private companies have sought to enter the distribution market, they have withdrawn due to technical difficulties such as transportation, sales points, etc. Buzhala said that private companies would be better able to gain a foothold in Kosovo by entering the market en bloc and also serving Albania and the Albanian part of Macedonia.

Panelists made a clear distinction regarding the Internet, however; its far-reaching capabilities were appreciated and seen as imperative to the free flow of information. Internet providers are in general private and cover a substantial area of the country.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

List of Panel Participants

Ardita Zejnullahu, executive director, Association of Kosova Independent Electronic Media (AMPEK), Prishtina

Argjentina Grazhdani, director, East West Management Institute, Prishtina

Berat Buzhala, editor-in-chief, *Express* daily newspaper, Prishtina

Besim Abazi, journalist, Voice of America, Prishtina

Mentor Shala, Albanian program editor, Radio Television of Kosova (RTK), Prishtina

Mifail Bytyqi, managing director, TV Prizreni, Prizren

The opinions of the following research participants, who did not take part in the panel discussion, were used in preparing this report:

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