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ALBANIA

More than two years after becoming a candidate for membership in the European Union, Albania began entry negotiations with EU officials in November 2016. That delay was due largely to the country's sluggishness in reforming its judiciary and tackling widespread corruption—both priorities of Brussels. Complicating the reform process is bitter and longstanding political conflict within the country.

At the urging of European and U.S. officials, the government gathered foreign and Albanian experts to craft a vetting process for judges, prosecutors, and employees of the judiciary. The screens include an examination of assets and an assessment of professional integrity. Albania's deep political divisions, however, threatened to derail the process, which the opposition parties boycotted. Eventually, parliament passed the centerpiece of this reform in July under pressure from the country's Western allies. Nevertheless, the reform was held up again by the opposition's objections as it unsuccessfully tried to have the Constitutional Court overturn the vetting requirement.

In late 2015, parliament banned those convicted of crimes from serving in public office for certain periods of time. In December, two members of parliament and a mayor became the first officials to be ejected from office for having concealed criminal convictions. Another member of parliament is on trial in Belgium on murder charges, and yet another is serving a prison sentence for assault.

The political feuding has overshadowed debate on the country's economy, and consequently it is difficult to get a clear picture of Albania's economic health. The government declared that growth has picked up, even in the absence of major investments. Central bank governor Genti Sejko said that the economy grew by 3.1 percent in 2016.

Ahead of general elections set for June 2017, the government increased salaries and pensions for educators, members of the military, and some other civil servants.

Far from improving over the past year, Albania's media environment has degenerated in some respects. The major story was the Constitutional Court's nullification of Article 62/3 of the Audiovisual Media law, which had prohibited any single owner from holding more than 40 percent of an outlet's shares. The decision, which was blasted by the Independent Union of Journalists, the Institute of Media, and independent experts, paves the way for the rich and well-connected to tighten their grip on the country's broadcast media. Meanwhile, *Shqip* newspaper, one of the country's biggest, ended its print version, becoming an early casualty of online media's emerging dominance and plummeting print circulation trends.

Reflecting these developments, Albania's MSI score indeed fell slightly, losing 0.11 points compared with last year. All objectives fell somewhat, led by Objective 1, Freedom of Speech, which dropped from 2.82 to 2.63.

ALBANIA at a glance

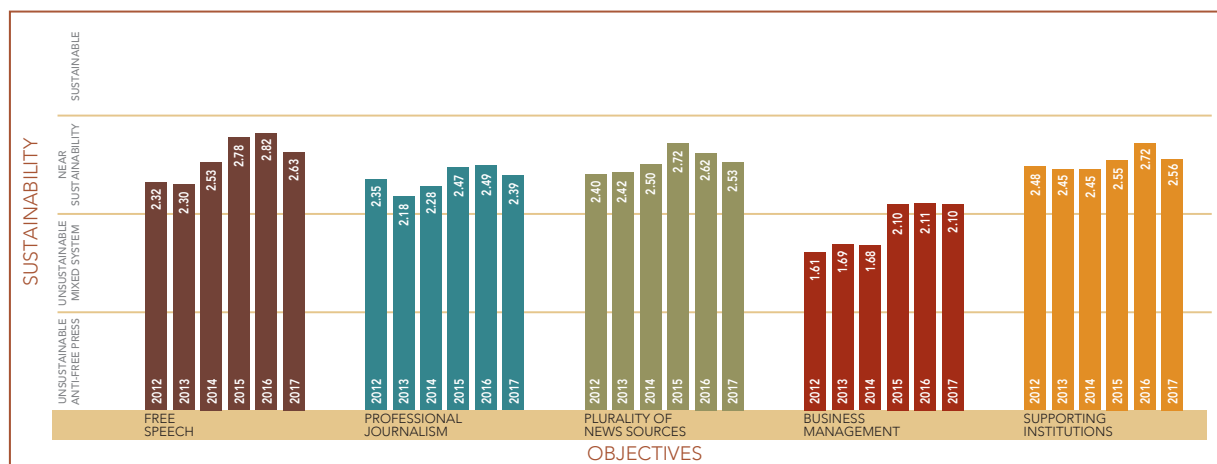
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 3,038,594 (2016 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Tirana
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Albanian 82.6%, Greek 0.9%, other 1% (including Vlach, Roma (Gypsy), Macedonian, Montenegrin, and Egyptian), unspecified 15.5% (2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 56.7%, Roman Catholic 10%, Orthodox 6.8%, atheist 2.5%, Bektashi (a Sufi order) 2.1%, other 5.7%, unspecified 16.2% (2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** Albanian 98.8% (official - derived from Tosk dialect), Greek 0.5%, other 0.6% (including Macedonian, Roma, Vlach, Turkish, Italian, and Serbo-Croatian), unspecified 0.1% (2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2015-Atlas):** \$12.36 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2017)
- > **GNI per capita (2014-PPP):** \$11,090 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2017)
- > **Literacy rate:** 97.6% (2015 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Bujar Nishani (since July 24, 2012)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active media outlets:** Print: 25 daily newspapers (2015, Albanian Media Institute); Radio Stations: 2 national, 69 private (2016, Audiovisual Media Authority); TV Stations: 1 public, 2 national, 67 private, 5 satellite, 113 cable (2016, Audiovisual Media Authority)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** N/A
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Albanian News Agency (state)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** €38 million (2015, *Monitor*)
- > **Internet users:** 1,916,000 (2015 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: ALBANIA



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.

Scores for all years may be found online at <https://www.irex.org/msi>

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Score: 2.63

Albania's constitution guarantees freedom of speech and its laws safeguard human rights. Journalists are not forced to divulge their sources. The media have no legal obstacles to investigative reporting on corruption, organized crime, or other wrongdoing.

Several panelists cited the loss of Article 62 as the most serious threat to free speech. Remzi Lani, director of the Albanian Media Institute, called the decision a step backward, and his colleague Ilda Londo said that it conflicts with other laws that protect freedom of speech.

The slow licensing of digital platforms was another problem taken up by the panel.

Albania is among the last countries to complete the process of switching from analog to digital transmission. The delay is due to legal challenges, political flux, and the late introduction of the public broadcaster, Radio Televizioni Shqiptar (RTSH), into the process. RTSH will host local and regional broadcasters on two national digital networks, while regulators will issue five additional licenses to private operators.

Those broadcasters who opt to use RTSH's network will have to pay a tariff that, by one report, was first proposed to be as high as €2,700 per month. Luftim Vani, owner of the local Mati TV station, said that local media owners are concerned about

Ilir Yzeiri, a journalist and lecturer at the University of Elbasan, said that Albanian media have investigated cases connected to criminality, but other panelists said that the press has been reluctant to confront organized crime.

how much they could have to pay under the new broadcasting regime.

The panelists agreed that no political restrictions apply to starting new broadcast outlets, although the government issued no new licenses in 2016. Zylyftar Bregu, a member of the broadcast media regulatory body, said that local operators will not have to request new licenses to complete the conversion to digital transmission.

Albanian tax law eases the way to opening new media outlets. In 2016 the government reduced the tax rate on small businesses, thus lessening the tax burden on most media. Aleksander Çipa, who leads the Union of Albanian Journalists, said that compared with other business sectors, the media industry enjoys more privileges and fewer financial constraints. The breaks include VAT exemptions for media equipment, newspaper sales, and advertising services. Vani said that local media nonetheless face a tax rate that—given their financial means—is still problematic.

Albania has a plethora of newspapers and television stations, most of which are subsidiaries of other businesses. The media market is reckoning with competition from online media. Internet outlets are taking market share and pushing aside traditional print and broadcast media.

The media environment is relatively restive and marred by occasional violence, fed by a long and difficult transition and political enmity. The media's approach to organized crime has been bolstered by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), which has reported on corruption; and *Monitor* magazine. Ilir Yzeiri, a journalist and lecturer at the University of Elbasan, said that Albanian media have investigated cases connected to criminality, but other panelists said that the press has been reluctant to confront organized crime. Alqi Koçiku, deputy editor-in-chief of the *Dita* newspaper, said that the media have limited themselves to reporting events instead of conducting thorough investigations.

Private media editorial independence suffered a potential blow with the demise of Article 62. As for public media, changes to the law on RTSH's steering council threatened its independence. As a result of the amendments, RSTH elected for its general

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.

director the former editor-in-chief of the ruling Socialist Party's official newspaper, Yzeiri said.

After the government's unsuccessful attempt in 2015 to recriminalize libel, no journalists faced libel accusations in 2016.

Lawyer Iva Seseri said that the government is working to create a legal framework to regulate online media. Lani commented that Albania's media legislation is among the best in Europe, but the country needs a law to address problems that have arisen with the development of Internet media outlets and social networks—particularly insults and attacks in online comments sections.

Albania has a robust law on the release of public information, but Anila Basha, editor-in-chief of the News Bomb website, said that journalists face bureaucratic obstacles in obtaining documents. Some agencies make up their own regulations, regardless of what the law states. Freelance journalist and lecturer Enerestina Halili said that government workers often drag their feet in responding to journalists' requests. The law's permitted 10-day response time is not useful for most reporters working on a deadline.

Albanian law does not restrict the consumption of information or news from outside the country. Indeed, the real problem is domestic media's use of foreign news without compensation, according to Milton Nushi, a media expert with the Office of the People's Advocate.

Albania has no legal or financial bars to entering the journalism profession.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Score: 2.39

The middling quality of reporting in Albania did not improve in 2016. The European Commission annual report on the country's progress toward EU membership stated that Albania made no marked progress in the areas of freedom of speech and media.

Reporting tends to be superficial and somewhat unprofessional. Multi-sourced reports on social, safety, education, or technology issues are missing from the media sphere.

Albania's traditional and public media are in crisis, but the panelists said they have observed a slight improvement in the quality of online media and social forums. They lamented that the insults fly freely on online media, but noted that this problem is hardly unique to Albania.

The panelists estimated that 80 percent to 90 percent of reports in the print media are unattributed. Several panelists commented on the problem of reporters not writing strictly original content. Bregu, who lectures on journalism at the

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).

University of Tirana, said, "Editors-in-chief I've talked to told me that journalists don't write their names because they're just writing down an elaboration of the institutions' press announcements." Yzeiri agreed, saying, "The print press, in most cases, doesn't put out its own product, but it prints out ready-made reports. We continue to not have specialized journalists. Even the big media, such as public TV or other television channels, don't have specialized reporters and professionals." Halili said TV stations' lack of resources essentially forces overworked reporters to be little more than spokespeople.

"I think that reporting suffers from the mirror syndrome," freelance journalist Lutfi Dervishi said, explaining that the media do not report but rather reproduce ready-made materials served up by the political parties. "Politics reports on itself," he added.

There was debate in the panel about the preparation of journalism students, with Halili saying that Albanian students are specialized, but Lani saying that this is only partly true.

The deficiencies in news reporting will become more acute in the run-up to the elections this year, Nushi said. The political parties have fed the unprofessionalism by not allowing media to cover their events, and instead preparing materials on the events themselves and distributing them to outlets.

Journalist ethics are in a critical state. The Albanian Media Institute has drafted a code of ethics, Çipa said, but considering that some journalists do not get paid for up to four months at a time, compliance with the code is low. The broadcast regulator has a functioning ethics council.

Journalists in Albania suffer from the industry's faulty business model. Private media ownership by a relatively small group of entities has led to widespread self-censorship, and RTSH is beholden to the party in power. "Although we keep paying

Bregu, who lectures on journalism at the University of Tirana, said, “Editors-in-chief I’ve talked to told me that journalists don’t write their names because they’re just writing down an elaboration of the institutions’ press announcements.”

taxes, the public RTSH doesn’t fulfill the mission of providing accurate, prompt, and impartial information,” panelist Koçiku said. Londo agreed that RSTH is falling short of serving the public. “If the public media were better managed, it would be a big source of employment for journalists and it would help them in their professional growth,” she said.

Panelists said the development of online media and the expansion of social media have lessened slightly the problem of self-censorship. Still, according to Lani, “The problem of self-censorship has long been a plague on the Albanian media. The Albanian media find it difficult to broach dangerous topics.” All the panelists agreed that Albanian media do not produce independent reports about organized crime because the journalists lack financial and editorial independence.

The crisis in journalists’ compensation was on full display in 2016, when the A1 TV station opened and closed without paying its journalists for months. As the Union of Independent Journalists frequently notes to no avail, editors and reporters in Albania typically work without contracts.

As in the previous year, in 2016 broadcast programming was imbalanced, with news and political shows crowding out cultural programs. Generally, broadcast journalists have the necessary equipment to do their jobs, and the quality of media productions is satisfactory.

The panelists agreed that the media sector has seen a slight improvement in the investigation of economic, social, and sports news. It is broadening also with the innovation of online media and BIRN, an increase in satirical-investigative programs, and the addition of Top Channel’s *Fiks Fare* and TV Klan’s *Stop*.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Score: 2.53

Albania’s communications technology is well developed and covers much of the country. About one-third of the population lives in the central Tirana-Durres-Kruja area, while other big

cities such as Shkodra, Korça, Vlora, and Gjirokastra have blanket Internet coverage.

Indeed, the panelists said Albania is overloaded with Internet services. Basha said that it is in the vanguard of communications technology in the region, although Nushi underscored that the technology is too expensive for some residents. Still, most Albanians have access to various information sources. As Lani described, “There is a diverse assortment, starting with new media, blogs, online newspapers, television. We can say that we have a variety of viewpoints, too.”

However, the panelists said there is a gap between the rapid development of communications technology and the content provided.

The traditional media are some steps behind and no longer have a monopoly on information.

Albania is an open society and its citizens are free to access domestic or foreign media or use the Internet. Digital platforms and satellite antennas are available to everyone and they have never been subject to censorship, restriction, or signal interference. The government does not block Internet pages of the Albanian diaspora. Voice-over-Internet-protocol services such as Skype and social networks such as Facebook and YouTube are used without restriction, and the government has liberalized the market for Internet service providers. As stated, most people have access to the Internet.

The main problems in electronic media have to do with RTSH, according to the panelists. They questioned its independence and relevancy for Albanians. “Considering the way the general director and the steering council were elected by the government, RTSH was put into the hands of a certain group that does not reflect the public interest,” Yzeiri said. “This is obvious in its product as well. No one can see themselves in that

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.

“Considering the way the general director and the steering council were elected by the government, RTSH was put into the hands of a certain group that does not reflect the public interest,” Yzeiri said.

product. The selection of programs or staff does not represent the public interests.” Nushi attributed the low quality of public television productions to the politicized hiring process for journalists there.

Halili also noted RSTH’s shortcomings, saying, “Public TV doesn’t offer quality information or programs; it hasn’t served the public interest and its ratings are very low. Emigrants keep their Albanian language alive thanks to [private digital channel] DigitAlb. So it’s the private media that have performed the public functions, whereas the public media are not. If no one is watching it, what purpose does it serve?”

The panelists noted that RTSH has not even broadcast international sporting events in some cases. “It’s amazing that the public TV doesn’t transmit a national match,” Koçiku said.

Panelists said public TV abuses the fees collected from every household; all of the revenue goes to RTSH.

Albanian media widely use the products of foreign news agencies, with or without permission. The panel noted that the state-owned Albanian Telegraphic Agency has stagnated and plays a limited role in the domestic media market.

There has long been public debate and speculation about media ownership in Albania, especially in cases where outlets’ financing is difficult to determine. “Theoretically the owner can be found on the National Center for Registration website... But it all depends on the way it has been registered and to what degree the registration is fictional,” Londo said.

The spread of social networking and online media has reinforced the public’s perception that well-connected groups of financial interests stand behind them. “It’s more difficult to identify the ownership of the blogs because they’re informal. However, they continuously produce information and news,” Nushi said.

Bregu commented that one argument used by opponents of Article 62 is that its limitations on ownership encourages real owners to hide their identities, and that with the provision now abandoned, “according to them, transparency will increase.”

The media in Albania shed little light on social issues or those connected to gender or social conventions. Even though the country enjoys a centuries-old tradition of religious harmony, public speech has recently become harsher and less tolerant of difference. This phenomenon is not political and does not arise from any governing policy; it is mostly a result of traditional Balkan machismo.

Even though there has been an increase in inter-Balkan exchanges, the media sometimes take on a fractious, national-romantic tone. One example is the clash that took place at a football match for the qualifying phase of the European Championship between Serbia and Albania. The media’s language about minorities, however, has not regressed.

Except for programs by Radio Tirana, minority media do not exist in Albania and the government invests nothing in this sphere.

With regard to Albanians abroad, panelist Bajram Peçi, director of the *Shqip* newspaper, said Greeks frown upon the many Albanian immigrants using their own language there. But according to Lani, “In Greece and Italy, the government finances journals of the Albanians, who don’t even belong to a minority but to an immigrant community; whereas we don’t finance [media for] the minorities.”

The media in Albania cover local, national, and international news.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Score: 2.10

The media business in Albania has long been a paradox. During the long transition period, it has been a puzzle that such a small and poor country would produce so many newspapers and television stations.

Last year saw a marked expansion of online social networks. An online version of the *Tema* newspaper became the country’s most popular media outlet, founding its own Internet TV channel. However, the print media’s daily circulation declined. Even though most have created online versions, their influence is waning steadily.

A notable business success in Albanian media is the Top Media company. It owns Top Channel, Top News, and DigitAlb, although in 2016 its *Shqip* newspaper, one of the country’s largest print outlets, closed in bankruptcy. Meanwhile, the print

newspaper *Dita*, which entered the market in November 2012, has achieved respectable circulation thanks to its hiring solid professionals.

In television, the media groups Klan, Vizion Plus, and Top Media dominate. In recent years, however, other companies have become contenders. They include the regional Ora News channel, the media group that owns the Report TV regional channel and the Shqiptarja.com online newspaper, and the owner of the major newspaper *Panorama* and the regional News24 TV station.

In contrast, RTSH, which receives 70 percent of its funding from the television tax and has more staff than private channels, has the lowest ratings.

Some daily journals, such as *Sot*, *Telegraf*, *Mapo*, and *Standard*, are financed by their owners' other businesses. In the case of *Sot*, its owner is also editor-in-chief.

Lani said he thinks none of the Albanian media outlets "operates as an efficient enterprise. This is due to the fact that we are a country with a small market that doesn't sell much and surviving is difficult. Management also leaves much to be desired."

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Peçi, who has worked for more than 20 years as finance director in daily newspapers, said daily sales have fallen by 75 percent in the past 25 years, from 200,000 or 220,000 to no more than 50,000. "That means one-fourth of the income," he said. "The advertising market has seen a drastic fall, too. The [drop in] income from advertisements has severely damaged the income structure. Newspapers go bankrupt if there's no financial support from some conglomerate or some specific business person propping them up." Vani, the Mati TV owner, said, "It's difficult to survive just counting on the TV business. You can't make it if you're not being supported by other business incomes."

The panelists said these various media income sources have not canceled out free speech. The Top Channel and Vizion Plus and, to a lesser extent, Klan media groups have achieved a fragile editorial independence, while online media such as Tema and the Internet-based Tema TV derive incomes from their products and maintain independence. The most regressive model remains the public broadcaster, RTSH, which uses its considerable guaranteed income stream to toe the political line of the government in power.

Bregu said more media should be liquidated, citing a study by the University of Tirana's journalism department that showed many make no profit. Bregu said media owners told him "they could benefit from the television station. As a conclusion, they use the television station as a way of protecting their business."

That approach appears to work sometimes. The panel mentioned that the government had turned a blind eye to illegal construction in a tourism resort by the owner of TV Klan, even as it prosecuted others for the same offense. Likewise, they noted, the previous government had given a public building to the owner of the *Panorama* newspaper for private use, when critics said it could have been converted to a school to ease crowding in Tirana's classrooms.

Albania has a small advertising market, which shrank further during the past year. Koçiku, of *Dita*, said that the market generates "no more than ALL 40 to 42 million in turnover per year," which Lani said amounts to one-sixth the value of Croatia's market—while Albania has three-quarters of Croatia's population.

The panelists agreed that most advertisements are bought by businesses that are seeking to forestall critical coverage. The panel mentioned the case of a deadly fire in July at the private Spitali Amerikan hospital. Initially, all the media reported on the

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.

tragedy, but then most began to omit the name of the hospital and later stopped reporting on it and removed mentions of the fire from their websites. Only Report TV continued to report on it fully. According to Shqiptarja.com, hospital officials then threatened to remove their advertising from Report TV if it did not stop covering the fire. When Report TV officials refused, the hospital's advertising disappeared.

And then "on the other hand, the media blackmail in order to get advertising," Dervishi said.

Peçi said that advertisements come primarily from service businesses, such as banks, which are also having a difficult time. "Therefore, the banks aren't buying ads anymore. The mobile phone operators have started to decrease their advertisements and they are now advertising selectively," he said.

The panel mentioned that some broadcast media violate rules on the allotment of advertising time. Instead of the 12 minutes of advertising time allowed per hour, Bregu said an analysis showed that two national private stations have gotten away with showing 24 minutes each hour.

During the last year, the government did not seem to use direct or indirect financing in order to pressure critical media or reward favorable coverage. "The public funds for advertising have been gradually diminishing and actually make up a negligible share of total income," Koçiku said.

Instead, there has been a rise in "new mediators," Londo said: "Marketing agencies or agencies that produce publicity campaigns that dedicate a part of their budget to the media. But we don't have any kind of information about the way it gets transferred to the media."

Yzeiri pointed out that the government does channel billions of lek from the state budget toward broadcast media in order to produce concerts or festive events serving the government propaganda.

The panelists said that two companies measure ratings, and companies plan their advertising based on these measurements. However, Koçiku characterized these as unreliable, and said that media buys are made based on perception.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Score: 2.56

In Albania no law hinders the registration and activity of associations of publishers or media owners. Albania does have a few associations. The groups' focus has not been on professionalization or safeguarding media independence. They lobby for or against government actions that affect their businesses.

And according to Koçiku, "The low level of organization and the absence of such institutions for journalists have led to the fact that journalists are not protected and sometimes their dignity is threatened."

Panelists are also skeptical of their professionalism. "I was appointed vice chairman of one of the associations in 2003, but I've never been called to a meeting," Bregu said. And according to Koçiku, "The low level of organization and the absence of such institutions for journalists have led to the fact that journalists are not protected and sometimes their dignity is threatened."

Media owners, and one or two hosts of political shows who are close to the owners, are paid handsomely, whereas the rest of the journalists remain unprotected from job loss. Most journalists continue to work in newspapers and televisions without contracts, and no collective bargaining agreements are in place.

The Union of Albanian Journalists is the only organization that defends journalists' jobs, compensation, and professional rights, but Yzeiri said the group has not been able to formalize labor arrangements. Although its membership has expanded nationwide, the union's finances are precarious, as only a small percentage of members pay their dues, which are in any event minimal. The union has most impact when reacting to violence or threats against journalists or wrongful firings.

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.

In private media, different programs establish their own criteria for hiring journalists, whereas the public broadcaster uses political criteria in recruitment, the panelists stated.

With regard to journalism education, universities such as those in Tirana and Elbasan offer academic journalism programs that teach basic skills. In the past three years, more students of journalism are pursuing graduate and postgraduate courses; these now include practical exercises.

Training opportunities are financed primarily by international organizations, though Halili said universities also organize postgraduate training. RTSH has also started to offer academic training for its journalists. Lani said the Albanian Media Institute organizes short-term training for journalists, although fewer than in the past, as the number of donors has fallen. The panel agreed that staffing limitations and large workloads keep many journalists from attending training programs.

Albanian media print many newspapers and magazines, and the market in general is liberalized. The government places no limitations on the import or purchase of necessary materials for the work of media and journalists. Printing houses remain the weakest link in the distribution chain because of their outdated technology.

Peçi said most printing houses in Tirana are held by one owner, and only the *Shekulli*, *Tema*, and *Mapo* newspapers have their own presses. As a consequence, printing fees for media are high.

Albania's press distribution is antiquated. "Newspapers are still sold on the street just like 20 years ago, even in Tirana," Peçi noted.

The panel discussed plans by the Tirana municipality and Durrës to build news kiosks. Lani praised the idea but warned that the kiosk concessions must be awarded in a transparent process. That standard would be important for overall media conditions, but "nevertheless, the newspapers won't ask whether there is transparency or not. The conditions in which the newspapers sell and their prices are crucial to them," he said.

List of Panel Participants

Aleksandër Çipa, chairman, Union of Albanian Journalists, Tirana

Alqi Koçiko, deputy editor-in-chief, *Dita*, Tirana

Bajram Peçi, director, *Shqip*, Tirana

Erenestina Halili, freelance journalist and lecturer, Tirana

Genci Demiraj, owner, Amantia TV, Vlorë

Ilda Londo, specialist, Albanian Media Institute, Tirana

Illir Yzeiri, journalist and lecturer, University of Elbasan, Elbasan

Iva Seseri, lawyer, Albanian Parliament, Tirana

Luftim Vani, owner, Mati TV, Mat

Lutfi Dervishi, freelance journalist, Tirana

Milton Nushi, media expert, Office of the People's Advocate, Tirana

Remzi Lani, director, Albanian Media Institute, Tirana

Zylyftar Bregu, member, Audiovisual Media Authority; lecturer, University of Tirana, Tirana

Moderator & Author

Andrea Stefani, project coordinator, freelance media analyst, Tirana

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