

MEDIA

SUSTAINABILITY

INDEX

2004



IREX

AMONG THE CHALLENGES NOTED BY THE 2004 MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX (MSI) PANEL WERE THE ATTEMPTS BY POLITICAL GROUPS TO MANIPULATE MEDIA OUTLETS, THE UNCERTAIN MOTIVATIONS AND ORIGINS OF COMPANIES TRYING TO BUY INTO THE INDUSTRY, AND THE URGENT NEED FOR SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS TO DEFEND THE ECONOMIC AND LEGAL RIGHTS OF JOURNALISTS—90 PERCENT OF WHOM ARE EMPLOYED WITHOUT LABOR CONTRACTS.





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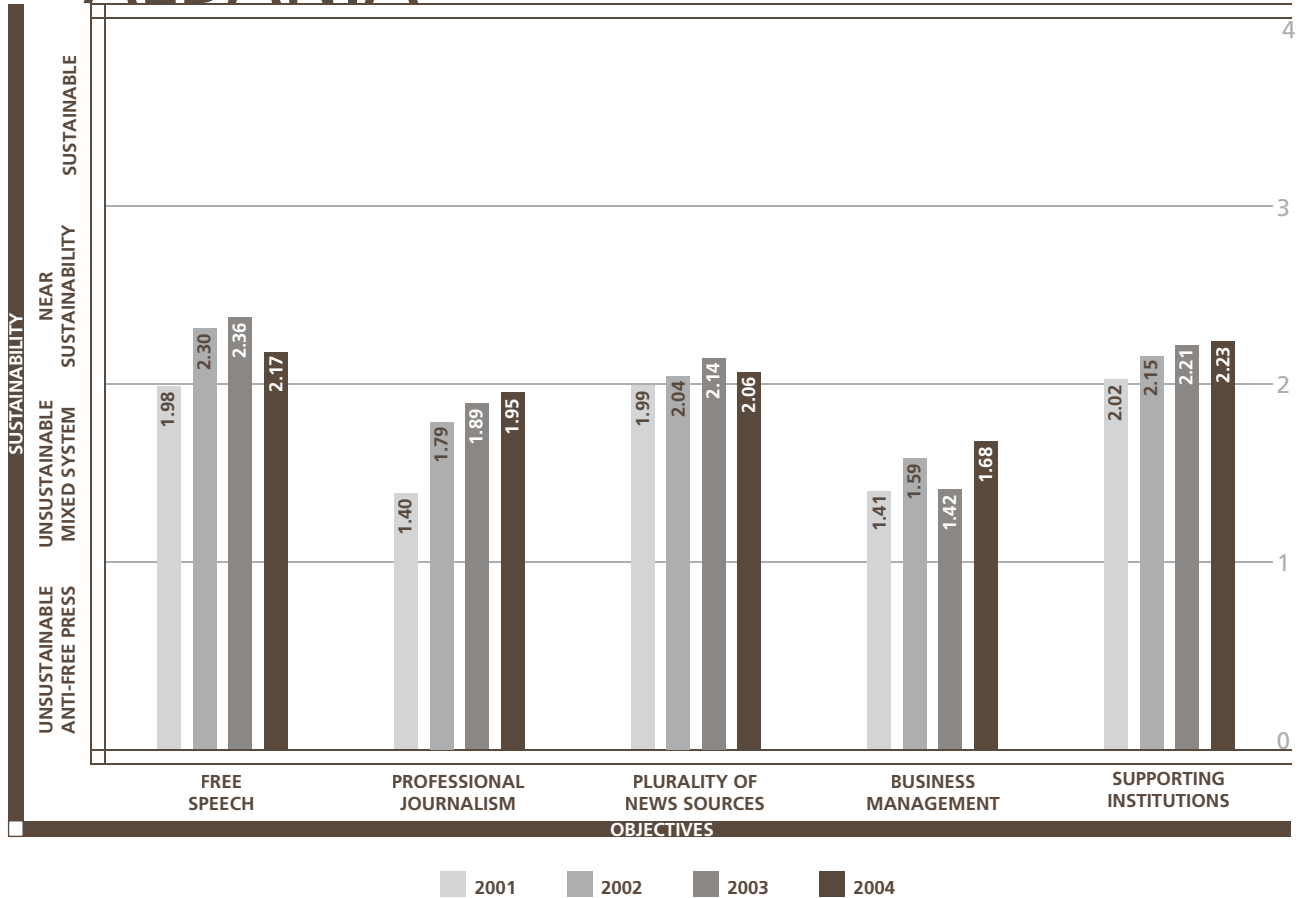
lbania remains the poorest country in Europe, with the weak economy further undermined by political struggles and endemic corruption. Although Albania's economy has grown at an average of 6 percent per year for the past four years, this expansion has been generated by construction, transportation, and other industry sectors that do not sizably increase employment. By contrast, industrial and agricultural production sectors are still declining, exacerbating joblessness while corruption polarizes society and the country's overall stability is under threat. The political warfare that has plagued Albania since its totalitarian government crumbled more than a decade ago continued through 2004. The two biggest parties and their respective leaders failed to create the climate for reform, and animosity built in anticipation of mid-2005 parliamentary elections.

Albanian media were attentive to the events unfolding in Georgia and Ukraine, where ruling factions fell after constricting free expression and failing to build true popular support. Many of Albania's editors, journalists, and independent media advocates identified threats to the freedoms that had followed the collapse of communism. Among the challenges noted by the 2004 Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel were the attempts by political groups to manipulate media outlets, the uncertain motivations and origins of companies trying to buy into the industry, and the urgent need for supporting institutions to defend the economic and legal rights of journalists—90 percent of whom are employed without labor contracts.

Panelists reported advances from 2003 in only two of the MSI objectives: the professionalism of journalists and the businesslike management of media outlets. Freedom of speech protections and the plurality of news sources available to citizens were considered to have deteriorated somewhat, while development in the supporting institutions for the media was static. As a whole, therefore, the Albanian media environment progressed little during 2004, and what movement was recorded came despite the lack of government commitment to sustainable media independence.

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.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

Albania Objective Score: 2.17 / 4.00

Nothing improved the rights of media outlets, journalists, or even those who became the subjects of media coverage during 2004. The MSI panel noted the continued contradictory relationship between the constitutionally guaranteed protection of freedom of expression on one hand and the lack of clarity about privacy rights on the other. As a result, the civil code, under which lawsuits claiming damage to reputations are filed, and the penal code, which makes defamation a criminal offense, become tools in attacks on freedom of expression. The panel noted friction between media outlets that used the Constitution's protection of free speech as cover for unethical journalism and officials who tried to exact revenge by taking advantage of real or alleged lapses by the media. In one case, Prime Minister Fatos Nano filed suit against the daily *Koha Jone* because of a February 2004 reporting criticizing a Cabinet decision that awarded a sizable financial

Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information.

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal/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 the offended party 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.

bonus to the prime minister and some members of his staff, presented as a reward for the successful privatization of the country's largest public bank. *Koha Jone* reported the story and condemned it as an abuse of power. Although it was widely viewed that the editorial did violate some ethical standards, the court ruling fining *Koha Jone* \$20,000 was criticized by media-support organizations in the country and abroad. One of these organizations, the Albanian Center for Media Monitoring, characterized the decision in its Albanian Media Monitor 2004 report as "influenced by the authority of high officials in power" and said "it aims to limit through economic sanctions the critical thinking of journalists with regard to the government's disputable decisions." This suit was one of about a dozen by ranking government officials against media outlets or journalists that set the tone for the year. The MSI panelists said that although there were few cases of jailed or physically assaulted journalists in 2004, the suits and resulting trials numbed some of the media and promoted self-censorship. They noted that the higher burden on journalists in court cases, compared with that of the plaintiff, who

"I think there are no crimes against investigative journalists, because there are no investigative journalists," noted Rezear Xhaxhiu.

might be a government official, discourages journalists from undertaking investigations, especially regarding trafficking and corruption. They also noted that misinformation sometimes stems from the difficulties reporters have in accessing information, rather than their ill will. The panel said there is an urgent need for the completion of a press law that would decriminalize defamation and the adoption and implementation of a media ethics code.

Drafting of a press law was completed at the end of 2004 after two years of work. As the draft was prepared for debate during 2005 in the Parliamentary Media Commission, it was anticipated that the hottest debate would center on an amendment offered by two members, Socialist Erion Braçe, editor-in-chief of *Zëri i Popullit* (the Socialist Party daily), and Christian Democrat Nikoll Lesi, owner of *Koha Jone*. The amendment sought to prevent "dumping" by establishing minimum prices for all newspapers, and to stop media owners and their businesses from participating in public tenders that could be subject to corruption.

However, this initiative was not backed by international organizations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Reporters Without Borders because it unfairly limits competition. In other regards, the panelists said the draft includes important changes that decriminalize defamation and ensure that press law is no longer addressed by the penal code. Some changes in the civil code were also expected to address the standards of privacy for public and private citizens, and issues regarding damage to reputation. Some MSI panelists considered these steps to merit an improved ranking for this objective, but others said the situation should be evaluated as it stands in practice. Musa Ulqini, head of the Parliamentary Commission on Media, noted in particular the ineffective implementation of existing legislation regarding the media.

An ethics code was drafted and approved some years ago by the Albanian media community but has been largely ignored by journalists and their employers. Several journalism associations such as the League of Albanian Journalists and the Albanian Journalists Association, which exist in name only, have not

“Public television in Albania is not yet public television,” said Lutfi Dervishi.

attempted to implement this code. Meanwhile, an IREX-supported project that aims to establish a trade-union

of journalists has emerged. This trade-union aims to legalize labor relations between journalists and media owners, as well as resuscitate the ethics code and work on its implementation.

The broadcast licensing process, although generally fair, competitive, and apolitical at the start, did give rise to some suspicions during 2004. MSI panelists were critical of the National Council of Radio and Television (NCRT) for tolerating license abuses by some operators and said this led to doubts about its impartiality. Noted particularly were cases in which outlets had local licenses, allowing them to broadcast in no more than three bordering counties, but nonetheless extended their signals over most of Albania. This practice resulted in part from the announcement in 2003 that a third national license for a private television station might be issued, leading some broadcasters to extend their frequencies in anticipation. The NCRT’s decision to revoke the license of TV Shijak, the largest station with an opposition bent, also was debated and was very political. The NCRT withdrew Shijak’s license because the station insisted on broadcasting pirated movies and programs, but raised suspicions by not acting as quickly to implement the law vis-à-vis other stations that

engage in piracy. The station was off the air at the end of 2004 as the courts considered the case.

After impressive initial success with October 2003 laws to fight the rampant piracy that plagued the media industry as it expanded rapidly without regulation after the fall of the Communist regime, implementation lost ground later in 2004. This happened because of the creation of a new terrestrial digital broadcasting platform by the owner of Top Channel, Albania’s highest-rated station. Because this investment did not have any legal foundation—there was no law on digital broadcasting in Albania—and because it used pirated movies and documentaries, the Digitalb platform gave other stations a pretext for returning to piracy practices. MSI panelists said that although not yet again an epidemic, piracy could stage a quick comeback without urgent action and that the role of the NCRT in this is very important. However, according to panelist Suela Shala, although the regulatory body is politically nonpartisan, the “NCRT does not have the authority and the appropriate powers to be independent.”

Re-assuming control of broadcast piracy and licensing digital broadcasting technology were key challenges for the NCRT in 2005, the MSI panelists said. A draft law prepared under the auspices of the owner of the Digitalb platform and signed by about 120 members of the Albanian parliament also worried members of the panel. This bill stipulated that the digital broadcasting technology belongs exclusively to one company. NCRT experts opposed that approach and drafted a competing bill that addresses not just the licensing of the digital platform, but also other issues associated with digital broadcasting in general.

Establishing new outlets is not restricted, and the press enjoys somewhat privileged treatment with regard to fees such as electricity, telephone, and value-added tax (VAT), with an exemption for paper. However, although the license fees and other business taxes are comparable to rates in other Balkan countries, the levies coupled with a relatively poor advertising market make survival for Albanian media far more difficult. According to some panelists, media taxes can be decreased to improve the outlets’ chances, especially the smaller and local media outlets. “The current tax level is threatening not just the survival of media, but also their freedom,” said panelist Leonard Gremi. The burden of the taxes is coupled with politicized enforcement, with greater scrutiny for outlets that criticize the government while tax police give those that support the government a certain amount of leniency, panelists said.

There have been no violent crimes against journalists. However, many of the panelists said that the lack of attacks hardly equates with more media freedom but rather serves as a sign of ever increasing self-censorship. Journalists simply may be tired of pressure and threats and have decided to avoid investigating dangerous topics. "I think there are no crimes against investigative journalists, because there are no investigative journalists," Rezezar Xhaxhiu explained.

In March 2004, the General Prosecutor closed the investigation of the suit that the editor-in-chief of Vizion Plus Television, Ilir Babaramo, filed against the ex-Minister of Public Order Luan Rama in which he charged that the then-minister and his bodyguard had beaten him in revenge for a story written about the politician. The prosecutor said there was no evidence of a criminal act that merited further investigation, but free-press advocates questioned this finding because the attack, which was reported in the media, had sparked protests by journalists' associations that were followed by the resignation of the minister.

MSI panelists agreed that Radio Televizioni Shqiptar (RTSH) has a difficult mandate in filling its role as a true public broadcaster. To do so, it must rely more on the parliament and less on the executive branch, obtaining financing through public levies rather than only the state budget, and meet its obligations in terms of programming. None of these goals were reached in 2004, and RTSH carried on as a mouthpiece for the prime minister, the government, or the ruling party without covering social problems largely ignored by the private stations. "Public television in Albania is not yet public television," Lutfi Dervishi said. According to several panelists, the responsibility to ensure that the law creating a public broadcaster is implemented lies not only with the directors of RTSH but also the entire media community. Although debate over RTSH has cooled, public broadcasting tends to become a hotter issue as elections approach—precisely when political pressure on the media increases.

Panelists were divided over whether the television station under Radio Televizioni Shqiptar, known as TVSH, retains a privileged position. Some noted TVSH receives a much larger share of the annual advertising market than the 15 percent limit it should according to the law. This happens because the government can decide in which media the public companies have to

advertise or make announcements, as well as produce news exclusively for state-run television, excluding other outlets. However, other panelists said there were cases in which powerful private television stations have been able to broadcast programs that the law dictates should belong solely to the public television channel. For example, the national soccer team matches were sold by the Albanian Soccer Federation to a private television station. Meanwhile, the financial management of TVSH remains less than transparent. Attempts by international media-support organizations to implement transparency mechanisms to monitor the broadcaster's income and expenditures have not been welcome. Late in 2004, the State Supreme Audit Control filed suit against the general director of RTSH, charging him with mismanagement of employee funds.

Many government officials select only those media deemed appropriate for certain information, panelists said. There is little transparency regarding many government decisions, especially those related to tenders and significant financial transactions. Although the access-to-information law protects the right of citizens to obtain public information, the long procedures involved in gaining access to documents make it very difficult, if not impossible, for journalists to receive the data. These bureaucratic delays lead journalists to lose interest and familiarity with the law. "Media and journalists have not yet been able to get the ripe fruit from the tree of law of access to public information. And these fruits are for the good of public transparency," Iris Luarasi said.

Thanks to the spread of the Internet, media have increasing access to international sources of news and information. However, although there are no legal restrictions, access to this kind of information remains a problem for some rural areas. Also, financial problems may make it impossible for some outlets to have sufficient access to available information sources, such as buying the services of news agencies like the Associated Press or Reuters.

Entry into the journalism sector in Albania is free, without limitation, and no licensing is required. On the other hand, the fact that people without the necessary skills or professional standards can be involved in journalism is disturbing, panelists said, and this phenomenon is fueled by media owners who seek to decrease operating costs by lowering wages.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Albania Objective Score: 1.95 / 4.00

MSI evaluators saw the professionalism of journalists advancing somewhat during 2004, although the range of problems faced remains the same as in prior years. Gossip may less frequently serve as the basis for news,

“What has caused the continuous decline of newspaper circulation is not just the difficult economic situation, the small advertising market, or the competitiveness of electronic media, but also the relatively weak quality of reporting,” said Rezear Xhaxhiu.

but it still tends to contribute in the guise of “sources who do not wish to be identified.” Reporting news without receiving confirmation from other sources continued to undermine the objectivity of the reporting. “What has caused the continuous decline of newspaper

circulation is not just the difficult economic situation, the small advertising market, or the competitiveness of electronic media, but also the relatively weak quality of reporting,” said Rezear Xhaxhiu.

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).

There are taboo topics that everyone in Albania, journalists included, knows not to address. Some are in the media’s own backyard: In January 2004, the Minister of Public Order publicly accused the media of using illegal funding, but no journalist investigated this problem. This self-censorship, combined with the pressure frequently exerted by media owners on their staff, leads to poor or superficial media coverage of key issues, panelists said. Many important issues are only touched lightly by the media, and outlets do not go to the root of problems. The increasing time and space dedicated to sensationalism and over-politicized coverage appear to represent an effort to make up for the lack of professional determination. For example, considerable coverage during 2004 was given over to speculation about secrets involving the Communist-era regime, an issue that generated a good deal of public curiosity but could not be considered among the most pressing for the nation nearly 15 years after the regime’s demise.

Many journalists are relatively well paid in Albania, especially those working at large television stations, but there is a wide salary range. A reporter at a regional television station can earn up to \$250 per month, but an editor-in-chief at a television station based in Tirana might receive \$2,500 per month. For some journalists, especially reporters, wages are not high enough to discourage corruption. Some general news and business news stories broadcast by public television appear more targeted toward advertisers than news consumers, and this phenomenon leads some to believe that such stories are secretly prepaid reports.

News and information programming continues to have the dominant place in the schedule, but the October 2003 initiative by NCRT to block broadcast piracy forced some of the major television stations to produce other programming, such as entertainment shows. Alternatively, the high cost of foreign programs and the need to fill broadcast schedules with licensed programs led some outlets to buy multiple Latin-American soap operas. These have become so ubiquitous that electronic media have begun to be perceived as more of an entertainment tool than a source of information. The kind of weekly programming produced by national television channels, including shows for children, music and other entertainment, and documentaries, is extremely rare at stations outside the capital.

“Heroes of Albania,” a programming initiative under the media-development project implemented by IREX, was designed to help the Albanian media shift its focus from scandals and political conflicts toward positive examples of civil-society actions by showing how local

people helped their communities. Over three years, 120 episodes of "Heroes" have aired via a network of 25 local stations and, more recently, on public television. As the program grew more popular, several stations such as Vizion Plus, Koha, and Top Channel replicated it by producing similar shows under names like "Tunnel," "The Invisibles," and "Outside Boulevard."

With regard to technical equipment for broadcasting and producing news, Albanian media based in Tirana may have nearly state-of-the-art equipment, some of it even digital. But outlets have fewer resources the farther they are from the capital, and in some areas, one can still encounter stations using VHS format.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES
Albania Objective Score: 2.06 / 4.00

The plurality of media and information sources constitute some of the most undeniable successes in Albania. However, optimism is dampened if one considers that people struggle to afford these services. The price of a newspaper starts at about 20 cents, so many retirees are unable to buy papers on their monthly pensions of \$80. Many foreign newspapers and

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.

magazines are sold, but even fewer Albanians can afford their prices, which can reach \$2.50 per newspaper.

It is difficult to find newspapers or broadcasters that have no affiliation to political parties or businesses. During the early transition period of the 1990s, the emergence of media outlets resulted from pure journalistic initiative.

The current emergence of new newspapers (*Ekspres* and *Integrimi* entered the market in late 2004), however,

is more a reflection of an increasing desire by political or businesses groups to have their own say in the media market. The poor advertising market and the weak business management of many outlets have also increased media susceptibility to shady financing deals that limit their editorial independence and the quality of information they offer citizens. The law on public and private broadcasting has not helped transparency, even though it demands in theory that the NCRT verify not just ownership, but also the nature of investments in the media industry.

When Prime Minister Nano alleged in May 2004 that "dirty" money was being invested in the media industry, no inquiries or attempts to institute financial transparency of ownership were initiated apart from an inconclusive investigation by the directorate of competition. This led to strong suspicions about the credibility of the content of many outlets. A 2004 European Union report on Albania stated that an "increase in the transparency of media ownership is vital."

Although state television has become somewhat more accessible to the main opposition party, the station has been unable to disguise its pro-ruling-party bent. Fatos Baxhaku noted the irony of this situation: "While the Democrats were in power, we used to watch only then-President Sali Berisha on public television. Now that the socialists are in power, we see more of Prime Minister Nano, but little of Berisha, now the chairman of the largest opposition party." Public television, in spite of the legal provisions for its existence, cannot escape the influence of the executive branch or political

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pressure in general, the MSI panelists said. This results in editorial policies that allot significant time to government propaganda and minimal time to points of view expressed by the opposition, the public, or civil-society groups.

As a result of the self-censorship practiced by journalists and the pressure of media-outlet owners who have special interests, the public does not benefit from a strongly investigatory press. International organizations have attempted to encourage probing and in-depth programs, including through "Hapur," an investigative program based loosely on the American "60 Minutes" model that looks into cases of corruption in Albania and is broadcast by 26 local stations.

The state news agency ATA operates in Albania, as well as the private agency TIRFAX, which operates on a limited basis. A website, Balkanweb, was recently created and provides news. However, most print and broadcast outlets still produce news editions based on information they generate on their own, and the lack of an independent and established news agency in Albania has provided ample room for the spread of inaccurate daily reporting. A satirical program called "Fiks Fare," made by Top Channel television, even uses media inaccuracies, often multiple contradictory ones, to poke fun at various political developments.

Another unresolved problem is the poor print media distribution in rural areas, where nearly 50 percent of the population still lives. The local newspapers have almost entirely disappeared, and the Tirana-based press cannot reach the distant rural areas. There are currently 21 daily newspapers in Albania, the two largest of which have an average circulation of no more than 15,000 copies per day, a rather minimal number for a country of 3 million.

In Albania, there are some newspapers that serve the Greek minority, about 2 percent of the population, but there are no such radio and television stations. Other minorities are even less represented by the print media, with the Roma community issuing a monthly magazine sporadically. Issues about and of concern to minority communities are rarely and randomly covered in the mainstream media. These limitations are not political in nature, panelists agreed. Instead, they are due to the inability of minorities to invest significantly in the media, and disinterest on the part of established outlets.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Albania Objective Score: 1.68 / 4.00

The relatively small advertising market in a weak economy is a continuing challenge for Albanian media, one that undercuts whatever business and management skills media leaders are developing. Officially, there are 167 newspapers and magazines, 56 television stations, and 32 radio stations in the country, probably more than can be supported by the market, especially when the advertising market is estimated at \$15 million per year. The Albanian Center for Media Monitoring stated in a 2004 report that "only a limited number of stations in the country would be able to absorb the advertising necessary for survival."

Paradoxically, while forecasts called for some media outlets to shut down, it did not happen in 2004. On the contrary, more newspapers were established. Panelists explained that the increasing number of financial sources for media, such as the business ownership, different political parties, or even unknown individuals keep some outlets afloat. Only in Tirana is it possible to find outlets (mainly national television stations) that can break even. Other media outlets, mainly in districts far from the capital, operate despite continuing losses,

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.

managing to survive only because of cost-cutting measures that allow a minimal level of quality.

The poor economic environment has significantly influenced the debate on the new press law. Some owners and directors of newspapers who are also members of parliament and/or members of the Parliamentary Commission on Media included an amendment that mandated that newspapers could not be sold below their cost of production. Their aim was to block competition by low-cost publications—the very ones that have had success against the newspapers put out by the members of parliament who sponsored the draft. After a colorful debate, this initiative was criticized by the Authority on Competition in Albania, which stated: “The owners have the right to set prices as they like. In many countries in the world it is common practice to offer free newspapers, independent of the high cost of their production.” The report also noted international criticism of members of parliament being media owners at the same time, a situation that creates conflicts of interest and is a dangerous epidemic currently threatening the media landscape.

Albania’s underdeveloped advertising market does not distribute ad revenues proportionately, with the shortfall most intense in the northern districts. This situation has been continuing for years and has led to the virtual disappearance of local newspapers. Now it is also posing a serious threat to local electronic media. This threat contradicts government decentralization strategies, which are intended to give more weight and power to local government. At a time when the role of local media in informing the public on local government decisions should improve, it could instead fade away, MSI panelists noted. The disappearance of local media would seriously threaten media plurality in Albania. Furthermore, the fewer local outlets that exist, the greater chance the central government has to control them. To enable local media to become competitive in the local advertising market, the media-development program implemented by IREX has supported establishment of a network of eight private television stations, nurturing them with management expertise and technical support.

In Albania, only a few advertising companies secure broadcasting time through media buyers. Only recently have some of the larger television stations begun using media buying agents from selected advertising agencies to administrate and manage their television advertising time. For example, Albvizion manages advertising for Top Channel, while another Tirana-based agency, Java Publicity, administers some television ads for TV Klan.

According to one panelist, international advertising agencies have started to open branches in Albania.

Private media do not receive any direct subsidies from the government. However, certain agencies or state enterprises provide preferential treatment to some media outlets in the form of advertising contracts. “In Albania, in most cases, the advertisements that large public enterprises (like the power and telecommunications companies) distribute to the media are in fact an alternative form of government subsidies or part of the

“In Albania, in most cases, the advertisements that large public enterprises (like the power and telecommunications companies) distribute to the media are in fact an alternative form of government subsidies or part of the government’s secret attempts to control the media,” said Kreshnik Spahiu.

government’s secret attempts to control the media,” said Kreshnik Spahiu. Traditionally, opposition media have received less advertising from the public enterprises than the media that support the ruling party. As soon as power changes hands, this element of the ad market also shifts, with the privileged outlets discriminated against while the previously ignored outlets receive new contracts.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Albania Objective Score: 2.23 / 4.00

In the early years of the transition, some media associations were established in Albania that did not distinguish between owners and journalists. This happened because journalists established the first private media. Although the dual role of the journalists/owners had some drawbacks for the media outlets, especially with regard to their management, the associations established at that time were very active in lobbying the government and political forces on issues related to the survival of newspapers. However, these associations became less active as the interests of media owners started to diverge from those of the journalists. In fact, existing associations such as the League of Journalists, the Association of Professional Journalists, the Forum for Free Media,

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 private, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

and the Association of Electronic Media, although claiming to represent "journalists," were dominated by the founding media owners, while the interests of the next generation of journalists were ignored. Panelists rated the work done by the associations of publishers more highly than the job done by the associations of journalists.

Meanwhile, there is no association or union that protects the interests of journalists and promotes and encourages professional ethics. MSI panelists were disturbed that most journalists in Albania work without contracts and are subject entirely to their owners' whims. There are numerous cases of editors-in-chief and entire groups of journalists being fired by the owners for completely subjective reasons. It is even more disturbing that the community of journalists in Albania has been unable to react in an organized manner against these practices. In an attempt to protect the economic rights of journalists as a basis for preserving and developing their professional independence, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), through IREX, has supported a project to establish an active union of journalists. Some nongovernmental organizations, including the Helsinki Committee or the Albanian Group of Human Rights, also have been active in protecting journalists and working on free press issues.

The University of Tirana established a journalism

department several years ago that is one of the main institutions providing journalism training and education. Another department opened during 2004 in the city of Elbasan, as part of the University of Elbasan. Newly established, these journalism programs do not suffer from some of the entrenched old-style practices of those in neighboring countries, but MSI panelists said considerable development remains to be done. There are also a series of programs financed by international organizations that organize short-term and specialized training seminars.

The large number of private printing houses in the country protects against monopolization of the print sector. The same is true for newsprint companies and the ownership of private distribution agencies.

Panel Participants

Musa Ulqini, chairman, Parliamentary Commission on Mass Media

Genc Ymeraj, director of programming, Public TV

Leonard Gremi, manager, TV A1

Lutfi Dervishi, journalist

Bashkim Hoxha, owner, TV Teuta, Durres

Edi Paloka, vice chairman, Parliamentary Commission on Mass Media

Kreshnik Spahiu, director, Civic Advocacy Office

Rezear Xhaxhiu, news director, TV Arberia

Iris Luarasi, co-owner, Radio Ime; professor of journalism, University of Tirana

Fatos Baxhaku, journalist, Vizion Plus

Adlei Pici, executive director, Institute of Statistics and Opinions

Genti Ibrahim, lawyer

Suela Shala, assistant to press officer, OSCE

Andi Tela, editor-in-chief, *Gazeta Shqiptare*

Moderator

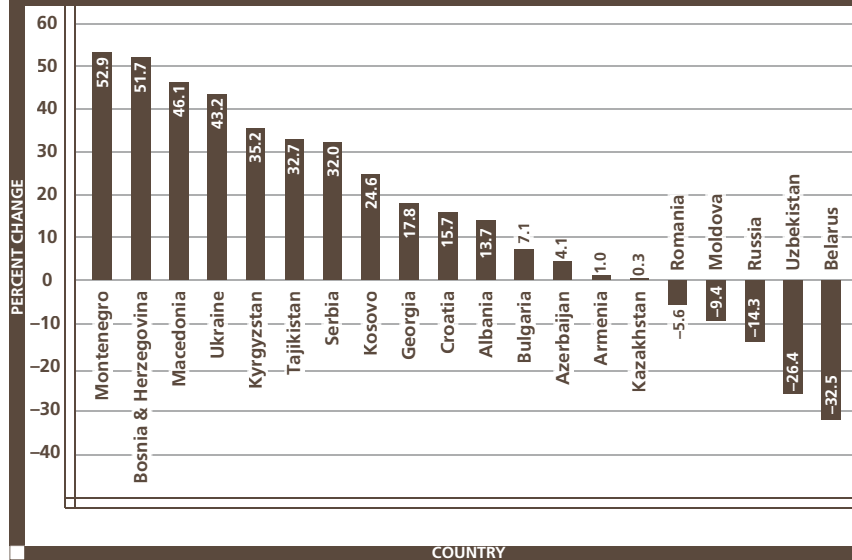
Andrea Stefani, senior media advisor, IREX

ALBANIA AT A GLANCE

GENERAL

- **Population:** 3,400,000
Demographic Atlas of Albania
- **Capital city:** Tirana
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Albanians 97.79%, Greeks 1.95%, Macedonians 0.23%, Montenegrins 0.03% *Demographic Atlas of Albania*
- **Religions (% of population):** Muslims 68.5%, Christians (Catholics and Orthodox) 28.5%, Bectashi 2% *Demographic Atlas of Albania*
- **Languages (% of population):** Albanian 97.79%, Greek 1.95%, Macedonian 0.23%, Serb 0.03% *Demographic Atlas of Albania*
- **GDP:** US\$8,360 million *IMF*
- **GDP/GNI per capita:** US\$2,459 *IMF*
- **Literacy rate (% of population):** 86.5% *CIA World Factbook*
- **President or top authority:** President Alfred Moisiu
- **Next scheduled elections:** Summer 2005

MSI AVERAGE SCORES—PERCENT CHANGE 2001–2004



MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Newspaper circulation statistics (total circulation and largest paper):** Approximately 75,000. *Shekulli* is the largest paper, with 20,000 copies daily. *Albanian Media Institute*
- **Broadcast ratings (top three ranked stations):** Top Channel, TVSH, TV Klan *Institute for Statistics and Opinions*
- **Number of print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** There are approximately 150 print outlets and 120 radio and television stations. *Albanian Media Institute*
- **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** Approximately US\$15 million *Albanian Media Monitor 2004*
- **Number of Internet users:** 30,000 (2003) *CIA World Factbook*
- **Names of news agencies:** ATSH (Albanian News Agency), ALNA, ALP *Independent News Agency*

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: ALBANIA

