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ALBANIA

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Political and economic crises in Albania made life difficult for journalists and media outlets. The Albanian opposition continued to boycott Parliament and organized massive protests across the country. Over the summer, members of Parliament from the Socialist Party began a hunger strike in front of Prime Minister Berisha's political headquarters.

In spite of international pressure and opposition concessions, Berisha maintained a rigid political stance and rejected challenges to the legitimacy of the last election. The prime minister's intransigence perpetuated the political upheaval and strengthened the opposition's suspicion that the upcoming local elections will also be manipulated.

The polarization of the Albanian political environment has increased pressure on the media as both sides attempt to co-opt the press to present their viewpoint. In this battle, the panelists reported that the government seems to have the advantage.

Hard economic times only reinforce this dynamic as advertising revenue dries up and circulations dwindle. Many media outlets have been forced to seek financial shelter in the form of a political party or business patron, which affects their ability to report objectively.

In November 2010 Albanians received the good news that they would be able to travel without visas in the Schengen Area. Shortly thereafter, however, bitter news followed. The European Commission (EC) refused Albania's application to be a European Union candidate country. The EC's response cited the level of corruption, the absence of independent institutions, and political pressure on the media as areas requiring significant improvement. All of these shortcomings were clearly evident in the panelists' analysis of Albania's media environment.

Modestly improved panelist scores for three objectives gave Albania's score a small bump compared with last year. These higher scores came in Objective 1 (freedom of speech), Objective 3 (plurality of news), and objective 5 (supporting institutions). The other two objectives remained unchanged.

ALBANIA AT A GLANCE

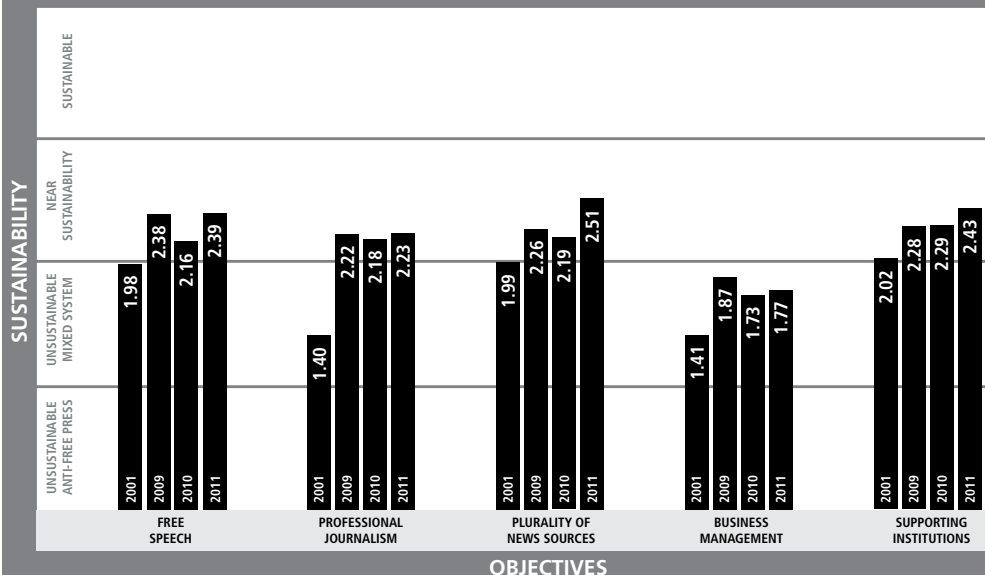
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 2,986,952 (July 2010 est. *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Tirana
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Albanian 95%, Greek 3% other 2% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 70%, Albanian Orthodox 20%, Roman Catholic 10% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** Albanian
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas):** \$12.6 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$8,300 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 98.7% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Bamir Topi (since July 24, 2007)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** 190 print outlets; 52 radio stations, (48 local, 4 national); and 72 television stations (69 local, 3 national) (Albanian Media Institute and National Council of RTV)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Approximately 30 million (Albanian Media Institute)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Albanian News Agency (state), and ALNA (private)
- > **Internet usage:** 1.3 million (2009, *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: ALBANIA



Scores for all years may be found online at http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE_msiscors.xls

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

Albania Objective Score: 2.39

Freedom of speech is protected under the Albanian constitution and the country's laws on electronic media and freedom of information generally correspond with international standards. Remzi Lani, director of the Albanian Media Institute said, "The legal framework in Albania is generally good. Fault does not lie with the legislation, but rather the failure to implement it over the past few years." The notable exceptions panelist reported are related to libel and defamation, which remain criminalized.

Multiple panelists criticized the government's failure to move forward with a law on the press. "It is true that many other countries do not have a law on the press, but given Albania's conditions, such a law is necessary. Journalists need protection," said Njazi Jaho, a lawyer at the Albanian Helsinki Committee. Lani countered, "No country has ever really benefited from a law on the press."

The panelists reported that pressure on investigative journalism increased over the past year. One of the most alarming aspects of this development was the tendency of members of the judiciary to openly side against investigative journalists. In June 2010, Albanian journalists protested

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 or registration of media protects a public interest and is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against media professionals, citizen reporters, and media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > The law protects the editorial independence of state or public media.
- > Libel is a civil law issue, public officials are held to higher standards, offended party must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily available; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media, journalists, and citizens.
- > Media outlets' access to and use of local and international news and news sources is not restricted by law.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

In June 2010, Albanian journalists protested a court decision to fine Top Channel TV €400,000 for broadcasting a video clearly showing then Minister of Culture Ylli Pango demanding a female applicant for a ministerial position undress at his private villa.

a court decision to fine Top Channel TV €400,000 for broadcasting a video clearly showing then Minister of Culture Ylli Pango demanding a female applicant for a ministerial position undress at his private villa. Months after the video was originally aired, the court decided to punish the broadcaster, a move that panelists said was likely the result of political pressure. Jaho explained that the court was likely using the case to "threaten and pressure investigative media" into silence.

The case generated significant international condemnation. Reporters without Borders declared, "This ruling is unacceptable and constitutes a serious violation of media freedom. We hope that the judiciary system will show its real independence by rescinding this harmful and unjustified ruling and dismissing the case." Top Channel TV is currently appealing the court's decision. Gent Ibrahim, a lawyer with the Tirana-based Institute for Legal Studies, emphasized that while the Pango case received a significant amount of attention because of the salacious content of the video in question, it is not uncommon for journalists investigating more mundane matters to experience similar treatment. State employees, especially the influential and well connected, are generally protected by prosecutors and the courts. "The courts have a strong tendency to emphasize the right to privacy and dignity of officials over the value of media transparency," he said.

According to the panelists, the most important positive legal development was the new bill on electronic media, which will regulate the country's switchover to digital broadcasting. A national strategy on digitalization in line with the law is also expected soon. "These are very important statutes because Albania's entire media sector will so go through a major transition from analog to digital," Ibrahim stressed.

While generally positive about the switch, the panelists said that there are still a number of issues to be resolved, most notably the transfer of licenses distributed under the analogue regime to the digital. The National Council of Radio and Television (NCRT), which is in charge of both the licensing and transition process has pledged that outlets will

Luftim Vani, director of TV Mati, explained that the crisis at the NCRT also affected television outlets. "The country is brimming with cable television channels, 40 percent of which do not have licenses," he said.

not be required to re-apply for licenses; existing outlets will simply be relocated to their new digital frequency without interference. The panelists, however, expressed concern that process could invite political meddling and thus have a negative effect on Albanian media.

In Albania, only electronic media outlets are required to apply for dedicated licenses. Print media outlets only need to register as standard businesses, a process that in general has significantly improved in the recent years. Although only a few licenses were awarded in 2010, the panelists were critical of the NCRT's activity and the Parliament's oversight of it. Parliamentarians failed to appoint new members to replace outgoing members and as a result the NCRT was inactive for six months because it did not have a quorum. Journalist, radio station owner, and University of Tirana professor Iris Luarasi said that her radio station's work was jeopardized by the NCRT's inactivity: "We have been working without a license for more than a year, as if we were a pirate radio, even though we had paid our tax obligations. This is only because the NCRT board could not convene for political reasons."

Luftim Vani, director of TV Mati, explained that the crisis at the NCRT also affected television outlets. "The country is brimming with cable television channels, 40 percent of which do not have licenses," he said. In 2010, the NCRT also failed to protect private television channels from unlicensed pirate cable channels that broadcast proprietary television shows, movies, and sporting events without permission.

The panel agreed that the NCRT remains highly politicized after a series of government supporters were appointed to its board in 2009. "If there is an opportunity to award new licenses, they are awarded based on political preferences" said Luarasi. Other panelists agreed with this assessment. Lani said, "Even compared to their colleagues in the rest of the Balkans the NCRT is an exceptionally unprofessional and co-opted organization." Anila Basha, editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Shqiptare*, added that the NCRT operates without even the semblance of transparency and often fails meet the standards set for it by law.

Most of the panelists agreed that independent media outlets are not discriminated against in comparison with other businesses and that they face the same market entry criteria. Media is not overtaxed and it continues to be exempted from several taxes including the value added tax.

The panelists agreed that crimes against journalists are rare and that the journalism profession is generally respected in Albania. The public and civil society organizations take the protection of journalists very seriously. Eni Vasili, journalist and director of TV Alsat said, "Crimes against journalists are not typical in Albanian society. The biggest reason for this is that journalists associations have decisively acted to address threats against their members."

The panelists said that over the past year the overt political bias of Public Television (TVSH) was especially problematic. TVSH closely served the ruling government's interest, openly flaunting a law that mandates the editorial independence of public media. Luarasi reported that according to a study conducted by the journalism department at the University of Tirana, 60 to 70 percent of TVSH's airtime time is devoted to coverage of the government and there are often days when the opposition does not receive any coverage at all. In parts of the country that favor the opposition, TVSH reports exclusively on failings of the local governments in an attempt to make the opposition look bad.

In 2010, the movement to decriminalize libel and defamation remained stalled in the Albanian parliament. While the prime minister declared a moratorium on government officials suing journalists, private suits are still a significant issue. One notable example was the case Ilir Yzeiri, MSI panelist, journalist, and lecturer of journalism at the University of Elbasan, who was accused of libel by a religious foundation with connections to government officials. "My trial has been dragging on for a year and a half now and I face a €80,000 fine," Yzeiri said.

The panelists repeated concerns from previous years that journalists face difficulties accessing public information. Basha said that in spite of the law on access to public information, journalists rarely receive the information they request. "We are offered only the information that serves the government propaganda, while the rest of the information is totally off limits," she said. Aleksander Cipa, head of the Union of Albanian Journalists, agreed that "There is a strong tendency to not observe the right of journalists to access the documents they request," but added that many journalists do not fill out the proper paperwork, which gives governments officials an easy way to deny their requests. Other panelists reported that the council of ministers had deliberately removed pages from its website so that journalists and the public could not access information guaranteed by law.

Media outlets have enjoyed almost unlimited access to international news and sources of information through the Internet. The panelists reported, however, that plagiarism and illegal use of articles and photographs produced by international outlets remains a significant problem in Albania.

The panelists agreed that access to the journalism profession generally remains free. Yzeiri, however, noted that this is not the case with public outlets, which tend to only employ supporters of the ruling government. Vasili said that sometimes the low entry barrier allows untrained individuals to masquerade as professionals, damaging the overall reputation of the profession.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Albania Objective Score: 2.23

The panelists reported that overall the professionalism of journalists in Albania improved over the past year. "Today, in the conditions we live in, journalists do an exceptional job; even when the government does not provide information, they try their best to verify their information with at least two sources," said Basha. This assessment was supported by a 2010 Gallup poll, which found that 71 percent of Albanians trust the media—significantly more than other institutions, including the judiciary and local governments. Panelists noted that there is a significant gap between the relatively professional work of most private outlets and the failure of the public TVSH to adopt and maintain professional standards.

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 and retain qualified personnel within the media profession.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exist (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

Despite this, the panelists reported that many media outlets voluntarily observe ethical standards, avoiding slander and taking steps to avoid invasions of privacy. That said, it was clear to the majority of the panelist that there is still room for improvement.

Other members of the panel reported that while private media is clearly better than public, there is still room for improvement. Valbona Kurti, a journalist working for the television channel Vizion+, reported that both television and print news outlets focus too much on statements made by ministers and members of parliament. Luarasi reported that the news remains politically fragmented; viewers often have to watch several outlets and then form their own opinions. "If the International Monetary Fund releases a report on Albania, one channel will focus on the positive aspects while another will focus on the negative," she said. Other panelists cited coverage of floods in the northern regions of the country and the dispute over the Albania-Greece maritime border as other examples of instances where coverage differed significantly between pro-government and opposition outlets.

The panelists reported that Albania's journalism code of ethics as written provides a good set of guidelines for journalists to follow. However, like many statutes in Albania, journalists often fail to adhere to its dictates. Panelists Ibrahim and Cipa said that the biggest problem is that there is no special organization to supervise the implementation of the code of ethics. Despite this, the panelists reported that many media outlets voluntarily observe ethical standards, avoiding slander and taking steps to avoid invasions of privacy. That said, it was clear to the majority of the panelist that there is still room for improvement.

The panel observed that self-censorship remains a serious issue for the Albanian media. According to Vani, editors, journalists, and even bloggers censor themselves because of the real or perceived threat that they could lose their jobs if they offend their boss or a powerful patron. Cipa said that in his experience as president of the Union of Albanian Journalists (UAJ), editors are regularly pressured by media owners to cover news events in a certain way or not at all. Media owners in turn take cues from powerful politicians and other business leaders. In this context most journalists resort to self-censorship instead of challenging the management's designs.

At the local level, the situation is very different, the panelists said. Outside of the few journalists who work as correspondents for Tirana-based outlets, salaries for journalists outside of the capital city are low.

The underlying issue, panelists reported, is that political leaders both in government and in the opposition keep close ties with friendly media outlets. Consequently, even when political power shifts, bias and political based censorship remain. This system is reinforced by high levels of corruption and the dependence of supposedly independent institutions, most notably the judiciary, on the ruling government.

Salaries for journalists working in Tirana range from €300 to €600 per month. Media directors and managers are paid somewhat more depending on the size of the outlet. The panelists reported that salaries are essentially commensurate with those earned by other professionals in Albania. Despite this fact, the panelists reported that some journalists accept bribes to write favorable articles. Andi Tela, editor-in-chief of *Panorama*, said that this speaks more to the character of a handful of journalists than to their economic situation.

At the local level, the situation is very different, the panelists said. Outside of the few journalists who work as correspondents for Tirana-based outlets, salaries for journalists outside of the capital city are low.

The panelists agreed that there is a good balance between entertainment and news and information programs. If anything, the panelists said that there are too many news shows on television. The quality of these programs is generally high; the majority of the Albanian press has adopted modern means of collection, production, and dissemination, although many rural outlets are still far behind their urban peers.

Coverage of niche areas varies significantly. In 2010, the first television channel devoted to financial news opened, which improved the level of reporting on the nation's economy. Expert coverage of important issues like education and health, however, lags behind. Given high levels of corruption across Albania, the panelists reported that the country needs more shows dedicated to investigative journalism. Last year *Hapur*, one of the more audacious investigative programs, ended due to a lack of funds.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Albania Objective Score: 2.51

The improvement of the plurality of information sources available was largely the result of the growing diversity of news sources available online, panelists said. More Albanians are using the Internet as a source of information and Albanian journalists are increasingly using the online space to present alternative views to the public. In 2010, independent journalist Mustafa Nano started the country's first online daily newspaper, *Respublica.al*.

The traditional media also provide a range of political perspective, although the panelists reported that there are few truly objective sources. Electoral reform carried out in 2009 established a strong two-party system in Albania by making it harder for minor parties to enter parliament. Consequently, most mainstream press outlets tend to lean toward one side or the other of the political spectrum.

The government does not use either direct or indirect means to block or limit consumption of international media. That said, there are still parts of the country that do not have reliable Internet access and international publications and cable service remain expensive. The panelists also reported that there is stark difference between the resources available in cities compared to the rural areas. Outside of metropolitan areas, the primary source of information is still television.

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE, OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > Plurality of public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, internet, mobile) exists and offer multiple viewpoints.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted by law, economics, or other means.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the political spectrum, are non-partisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for media outlets.
- > Private media produce their own news.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge the 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.
- > The media provide news coverage and information about local, national, and international issues.

In 2010, public television deteriorated to the point that the channel basically became a mouthpiece for the ruling government. Often, the channel does not even acknowledge that other political parties and their viewpoints exist. “Even private television stations close to the government try to hide their bias, but TVSH doesn’t even try to hide its open support for the government,” Valbona Kurti, a journalist working for Vizion+ TV, said. Moreover, the panelists reported that the channel also fails to provide quality educational and cultural programming to the public. This reality is the result of political pressure on the journalists and editors who work for TVSH.

Panelists described the public Albanian News Agency as doing “feeble” work and producing little relevant news for Albanians. “A real news agency should provide a range of news services and features for newspapers to purchase. This is not the case with the Albanian News Agency,” Tela said. While the agency generally leans toward the government’s editorial line, even private, pro-government outlets ignore it. Instead, international news agencies such as AP and Reuters are widely used by Albanian publications.

The panelists agreed that private media outlets are able to produce their own content without external assistance.

While ownership of media outlets is generally transparent, owners often do not disclose their financial partners. “You can go to the Center for Business Registration and find out the name of the owner, but his silent partners won’t be listed,” Ibrahim said. Other panelists said that although law forbids it, a powerful mobile operator provides funding for multiple radio stations. “Major companies are inclined to invest heavily in media. Hidden monopolies will likely seriously endanger media pluralism in the near future,” Lani said.

Albanian media address a wide array of social issues including gender, ethnicity, religion and increasingly last year, sexual orientation. After a participant in Top Channel TV’s *Big Brother* program came out, the media openly discussed the issue and invited a diverse range of commentators to share their views.

Minority language newspapers and radio stations operate in many parts of the country. Notably, in the Southern part of Albania, Greek and Macedonian language outlets exist and Albanian public media provide news in both languages. The panelists agreed that more should be done to bolster minority language programming.

Panelists bemoaned the state of local media in Albania. “Montenegro has half the population of Tirana, but there are newspapers even in its smallest city,” one said. Rural residents can access information about national and

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international affairs via television, but these channels devote little attention to local issues. As Albania continues to pursue administrative decentralization, the diminished ability of local media outlets to report on corruption and waste is a critical problem.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Albania Objective Score: 1.77

The panelists reported that most media outlets are still a long way from becoming efficient and profitable businesses. Only a small group of media have achieved the goal of financial independence and even these have struggled to survive during the global economic downturn. Most still rely on the support of shareholders who own other, more lucrative businesses. As a result, media outlets often work to promote the interests’ of their patrons.

During the past year, two daily newspapers went bankrupt, while the others have had to cut costs, staff, and salaries. It is

MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED ENTERPRISES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets operate as efficient and self-sustaining enterprises.
- > 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.
- > Government subsidies and advertising are distributed fairly, governed by law, and neither subvert editorial independence nor distort the market.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor the product to the needs and interests of the audience.
- > Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and internet statistics are reliably and independently produced.

“The media scene in Albania practices a sort of bankruptcy-free capitalism. Outlets that are subsidized do not need to play by economic rules and as a result other outlets suffer,” Lani said.

difficult to say whether any daily newspaper makes a profit. Albanian circulation figures have decreased, with the average being 70,000 copies and many publications sell less than 1,000 copies. Many newspapers have expanded to include websites, but have yet to determine how to use the Internet to make a profit, the panelists reported. Overall, print outlets, whether online or in hard copy, face stiff competition from television outlets as Albanians read less and watch more. According to the panelists media groups that own both broadcast and print outlets often have to use profits from one to make up for losses at the other.

The advertising market for media organizations is particularly poor in Albania. The market is saturated with small print outlets that are subsidized by their owners. These publications distort prices and make it extremely hard for a paper to survive based on advertising revenue alone. “The media scene in Albania practices a sort of bankruptcy-free capitalism. Outlets that are subsidized do not need to play by economic rules and as a result other outlets suffer,” Lani said.

Even the most popular publications cannot generate enough revenue to effectively sustain operation. Both of the editors-in-chief on the panel readily acknowledge that their publications receive less than 50 percent of their revenue from advertising. The panelists agreed that the situation in rural areas where businesses are few and far between is even worse.

Because of these conditions media outlets attempt solicit advertising from businesses with similar political affiliations or interests. The government participates in this system by giving public notification to small, pro-government newspapers, in violation of a law requiring these notifications be published in the three largest newspapers in the country. Basha cited 55 as an example. Despite having very low circulation, the paper runs four pages of public notifications every day. Additionally the government uses a loophole in the law governing the publication of public awareness advertising to dole out these valuable campaigns to its political supporters. According to the law, public awareness campaigns must be published in at least two newspapers with national circulation. In Albania however, all newspapers are national, regardless of circulation.

The panel confirmed that media outlets generally work with an advertising agency, rather than directly with clients. “Now agencies produce advertisements that are significantly better than those that newspapers, radio or television outlets used to produce on their own,” Yzeiri said. Thanas Goga, an analyst at a Tirana-based advertising firm, said that international advertising agencies have shown interest in the Albanian market, but that it will likely be a while before these deals come to fruition. The panelists generally agreed that the involvement of international advertising firms would help independent private media outlets, but that it is likely the politically motivated advertising would continue.

Although the number of international companies conducting market research in Albania has increased, media outlets rarely use this information to draft strategic plans or tailor their programs to a specific audience. “Even though some operators in the market sporadically try to use these services, these techniques are not very popular and media markets do not effectively use these techniques to measure audience levels and consumer behavior,” Goga said. Some outlets conduct their own limited market research to present to potential clients, but the credibility of these surveys is rather low.

The panelists said that if one of these respected firms was able to provide a complete, objective set of media statistics, it could help to reduce political clientelism greatly. The problem is that many media organizations are not willing to divulge accurate figures. This is especially true of media outlets controlled by powerful political and business interests.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Albania Objective Score: 2.43

While there are no legal restrictions on the registration or establishment of professional associations, no viable broadcast or publishing associations exist. According to the panelists this is a result of the political polarization of the media in Albania. Instead of being united by common values and interests, media outlets are divided based on political affiliation. “The owner of TV Klan, the largest private pro-government television channel, lobbies on behalf of his own interest, not on behalf of other media,” Tela said. Similarly, opposition media organizations appeal directly to opposition leaders in the hope that they will reap benefit if political power changes hands.

The panelists reported that Albania has three journalists’ associations. In practice, however, only the UAJ actively protects and represents journalists. The UAJ was initially

established with international donations but now operates effectively without donor support. The union quickly responded to various crises including the Pango case and an attack on the local head of the UAJ branch in Gjirokastra. Additionally, the UAJ has continued to work to force media outlets to sign binding contracts with the journalists they employ. Many media owners oppose this process and consequentially negotiations have been slow. According to its president Aleksander Cipa, the organization has about 800 members and continues to work to increase membership and establish connections with international associations of journalists.

The panelists agreed that the Albanian Helsinki Committee is one of the most active NGOs supporting freedom of expression. The rest of the Albanian NGO sector is relatively meek when it comes to standing up for journalists' rights and challenging government bias and corruption.

The emergence of private universities has expanded the options for students interested in becoming journalists. The panelists stressed, however, that the quality of training at these institutions relatively low. The lack of practical training students receive is especially problematic. The panelists reported that the Albanian Media Institute, which offers specialized training with the support of international donors, has helped journalists to develop new practical and technical skills.

Printing houses and distribution companies are privately held. The panel said that the printing houses are generally

efficient and apolitical. Regarding the distribution networks, the panelists reported that the system is controlled by two powerful newspapers. Consequentially, certain papers reach destinations outside of the capital early, while others arrive much later depending on the publication's affiliation.

Information and communication technology networks have consistently improved in Albania's urban areas. Most citizens are able to access media through digital platforms (terrestrial and satellite). In cities, Internet access is widely available, quick enough to stream audio and video, and is not subjected to censorship.

List of Panel Participants

Lutfi Dervishi, specialist, Transparency International-Albania, Tirana

Andi Tela, editor-in-chief, *Panorama*, Tirana

Luftim Vani, owner, TV Mati, Burrel

Iris Luarasi, professor of journalism, University of Tirana, Tirana

Njazi Jaho, lawyer, Albanian Helsinki Committee, Tirana

Gent Ibrahim, lawyer, Institute for Legal Studies, Tirana

Eni Vasili, journalist, TV Alsat, Tirana

Bashkim Hoxha, journalist, TV News 24, Durres

Aleksander Cipa, head, Union of Albanian Journalists, Tirana

Thanas Goga, marketing analyst, A&R advertising, Tirana

Ilir Yzeiri, professor of journalism, University of Elbasan, Elbasan

Valbona Kurti, journalist, Vizion Plus TV, Tirana

Anila Basha, editor-in-chief, *Gazeta Shqiptare*, Tirana

Remzi Lani, director, Albanian Media Institute, Tirana

Moderator and Author

Andrea Stefani, media consultant, Tirana

Assistant

Sokol Lilo, media consultant, Tirana

The panel discussion was convened on November 19, 2010.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of media owners and managers and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights and promote quality journalism.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs exist providing substantial practical experience.
- > Short-term training and in-service training institutions and programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of media equipment, newsprint, and printing facilities are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (e.g., kiosks, transmitters, cable, internet, mobile) are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Information and communication technology infrastructure sufficiently meets the needs of media and citizens.