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KOSOVO

Three phrases sum up Kosovo's political scene in 2016 pretty well: "tear gas," "border demarcation," and "visa liberalization." All three are interconnected. One of the preconditions for the visa liberalization agreement with the EU is clarification of Kosovo's border line with Montenegro, and the border agreement signed by the two governments in 2015 requires a two-thirds majority from the Kosovo parliament to become effective. Three parliamentary opposition parties united to oppose the legislation, claiming that the new border line cedes too much of Kosovo's land to Montenegro. They displayed their opposition through street protests and by releasing tear gas inside the parliament.

Just when, in a bid for calm, the assembly decided to postpone the border agreement's ratification, tear gas scenes returned with the assembly's election of former Prime Minister Hashim Thaci as the new president. Many opposition lawmakers were forcibly removed from the hall for releasing tear gas during the plenary session. Despite the scene, Thaci became Kosovo's fifth president, replacing Atifete Jahjaga, who was the first president to finish a full term as head of state. The border agreement was never ratified, leaving Kosovo's citizens the only ones in the Western Balkans unable to travel freely to EU countries.

These developments spoiled success stories in the sporting world, including Kosovo's first Olympic gold medal in Rio and FIFA membership.

The overall MSI country score of 2.39, down only slightly from last year's 2.46, at first glance implies little or no change in Kosovo's media development sector. However, in a sign of possible trouble ahead, scores for both Objective 2, Professional Journalism, and Objective 3, Plurality of News, both experienced modest drops (0.22 and 0.30, respectively). A majority of panelists who also participated in the 2016 study awarded lower scores for both of these objectives, indicating that they perceive a worsening situation year-on-year.

Other familiar problems persist. Most media laws are aligned with EU standards; however, although the laws are sound, implementation and enforcement remain poor and the situation is not helped by ongoing political setbacks described above. Problems also persist at the organizational level. Last year, the labor inspectorate examined at least 34 media organizations and uncovered such issues as missing work contracts, payment irregularities, and uncompensated overtime work. The lack of legal regulation for online media strains the overall professional standards of journalism; the public media remain under the government's direct control as long as they continue to be financed through the state budget; access to public information is limited; and the authorities fail to vigorously prosecute threats against journalists.

KOSOVO at a glance

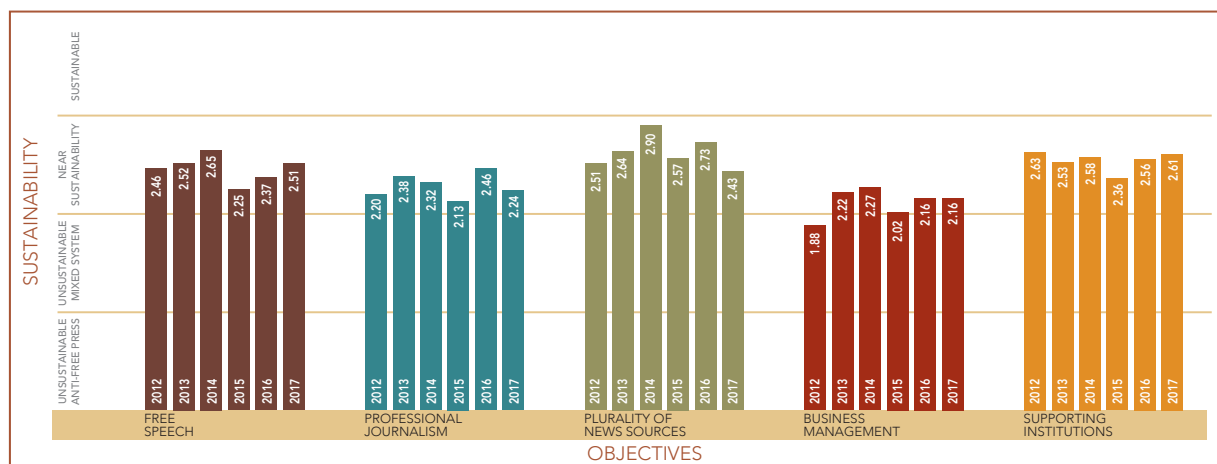
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 1,833,018 (July 2016 est., CIA World Factbook)
- > **Capital city:** Pristina
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Albanians 92.9%, Bosniaks 1.6%, Serbs 1.5%, Turk 1.1%, Ashkali 0.9%, Egyptian 0.7%, Gorani 0.6%, Roma 0.5%, other/unspecified 0.2% (2011 est., CIA World Factbook)
- > **Religions:** Muslim 95.6%, Roman Catholic 2.2%, Orthodox 1.5%, other 0.07%, none 0.07%, unspecified 0.6% (2011 est., CIA World Factbook)
- > **Languages:** Albanian (official) 94.5%, Bosnian 1.7%, Serbian (official) 1.6%, Turkish 1.1%, other 0.9% (includes Romani), unspecified 0.1% (2011 est., CIA World Factbook)
- > **GNI (2015-Atlas):** \$7.129 million (World Bank Development Indicators, 2017)
- > **GNI per capita (2015-PPP):** \$9,900 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2017)
- > **Literacy rate:** 91.9%; male 96.6%, female 87.5% (2003 est., CIA World Factbook)
- > **President or top authority:** President Atifete Jahjaga (since April 7, 2011)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active media outlets:** Print: 5 daily newspapers; Radio Stations: 78; Television Stations: 20 (Independent Media Commission, 2014)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Koha Ditore is the leading newspaper, followed by Kosova Sot (Index Kosova, December 2015)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** RTK (40%), KTV (37%), RTV21 (36%), Klan Kosova (18%); Radio Dukagjini (4.2%), Radio Blue Sky (2.1%), Radio Kosova (2%), Radio 21 (1.9%) (Index Kosova, December 2015)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in the media sector:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Kosovo Live, Kosovo Press
- > **Internet usage:** 88% of households have Internet access (Index Kosova, December 2015)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: KOSOVO



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: 2.51

Legal protection of free speech is guaranteed, backed by a significant number of media-friendly laws, but challenges with implementation and enforcement carry over from previous years. These include a lack of response from the authorities when journalists are threatened, an increasingly litigious approach to quieting journalists, an unsatisfactory degree of respect for public access to information, and a lack of understanding and appreciation by the judiciary for the spirit of free press laws.

Although Kosovo's constitutional and legal protections of free speech are harmonized with most EU regulations and international standards, it is difficult to obtain full information on practical enforcement of legal protections. For example, courts do not provide any details regarding the number of lawsuits related to freedom of expression, or cases that involve journalists. The data are missing from police departments as well; they tend to treat crimes against journalists just like any other incident, with no special attention.

The law on confidentiality of sources is respected, and tested by individual media outlets—such as the Balkan Investigative Research Network (BIRN), which was asked by a local prosecutor to hand over all video recordings following a violent protest. Insjaderi, another online investigative medium, never revealed the source behind leaked wiretapped conversations involving Adem Grabovci and other high officials of the ruling party;

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.

Flutura Kusari, an e-media law expert, said that she has counted at least five times that journalists were barred from covering court cases involving a high official charged with corruption. They were denied access on the grounds of protecting the privacy of the defendant, and public interest in this matter was not taken into consideration.

Insjaderi published a series of the leaked conversations in 2016. The recorded phone calls revealed his influence in employing people in public institutions and in appointing party members in key positions. Although he sued Insjaderi for damaging his reputation and breaching his privacy, the Basic Court in Prishtina ruled against him.

The Independent Media Commission (IMC), the body responsible for registration and licensing of television, radio, and cable providers, is also responsible for managing the transition from analog to digital broadcasting. Apart from organizing a public hearing on certain regulations related to the digitalization process, the commission missed the international deadline for switching to digital broadcasting. The panelists highlighted the IMC's adoption of a new regulation on the Code of Ethics for Media Service Providers in Kosovo as an achievement; however, the politicization of its board, whose members are appointed by the Kosovo Assembly, continues and constitutes a major setback that the MSI panelists point to almost every year.

Licensing is not mandatory for print and online media. Nevertheless, each media organization must go through an official registration process. They are registered as a business enterprise under the Kosovo Business Registration Agency within the Ministry of Trade and Industry or as a NGO within the Ministry of Public Administration. Media outlets face the same registration process as other businesses, and they are not burdened with heavier taxes. However, they still have to pay corporate taxes.

Threats are the most common form of crimes against media professionals; no deadly crimes were committed against journalists in 2016. Among the most serious incidents that occurred last year were hand grenade attacks against Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK)—one on the property of the general director and one on RTK's main studio office, although there were no casualties or arrests for the attacks. Police investigations into the case of Adriatik Kelmendi, a KTV television host whose car was damaged by unknown people, also proved unsuccessful.

Another investigative reporter claimed that the prime minister personally called him and threatened him after he reported that the prime minister's brother requested asylum in Germany for medical treatment.

Although each year around 20 cases of threats against journalists are reported, the perpetrators never face legal repercussions. The Association of Kosovo Journalists is quick to condemn any threats against its members, who often enjoy the public's sympathy. But public outcry is usually confined to social networks. Furthermore, the panelists say that direct threats against journalists are being replaced with a more sophisticated form of intimidation: lawsuits that impose a huge financial burden on the media. For the panelists, when politicians or businessmen sue journalists, it is obvious that they want to influence the media and impoverish them, because the court cases are too expensive for most media outlets to fight for a long period, especially so for individual reporters.

The judicial system treats cases involving the media or journalists no differently than other cases. The panelists suggested that this should change, believing that judges should be trained regarding the sensitivity of media freedom. Kreshnik Gashi, an editor with BIRN, pointed to the example mentioned above, a local prosecutor asking BIRN to hand over the original filming of demonstrations, as a case where judicial actors are not aware of the law.

Furthermore, when the freedom of speech is under attack, journalism associations rely on international institutions present in Kosovo, expecting them to exert pressure on the offending institutions. On the other hand, citizens also rely on the Kosovo Press Council, a self-regulatory body, which rules on citizen complaints against the media.

The Law on Public Broadcasting protects the editorial independence of the public media; however, the ruling political parties heavily influence RTK. The panelists believe that direct state funding is the main hindrance to full editorial and institutional independence. Each year, RTK is allocated around €10 million from the state budget in addition to the revenue it generates through marketing. Although the law says that government funding is only a temporary mechanism, and not a replacement for subscriptions, no subscription mechanism has been found yet. Some RTK board members and representatives of the trade union have criticized the government's interference in employment and editorial policies, and the RTK board and the IMC board is regarded as highly politicized overall. The panelists believe that all members are appointed based on their political support in parliament. One panelist suggested that the law be changed to require a two-thirds majority rather than a simple majority, believing this could bring more democracy and professionalism to the RTK board.

Libel is a civil code issue in Kosovo. However, Kosovo courts have repeatedly ignored libel cases, which often go unsolved. In fact, there are not enough court rulings to allow a proper analysis on implementation of the civil law against libel and defamation.

The law guarantees access to public information. However, one panelist referred to a study showing that only 30 percent of requests for public information have been answered. Citizen requests are more easily ignored than those from established media and civil-society organizations. Last year, several focus groups were organized with journalists from local and national media outlets. According to Besa Luci from Kosovo 2.0 blog, an organizer of the focus groups, poor access to public documents was one of the main problems raised by the participants. The law on access to public documents specifies that certain information may be limited or denied, especially in matters of national security, business secrets, or matters of privacy. However, this is not further explained, leaving the officials to judge the sensitivity of the information.

Access to information is particularly limited with regard to the Brussels Agreements—decisions reached in negotiations by the Kosovo government and the Serbian government. Very often, the negotiating teams from Kosovo and Serbia provide contradictory explanations to their respective media about specific agreements.

Most government institutions have internal regulations that bar officials from speaking to the media without obtaining permission from the highest levels. Flutura Kusari, an e-media law expert, said that she has counted at least five times that journalists were barred from covering court cases involving a high official charged with corruption. They were denied access on the grounds of protecting the privacy of the defendant, and public interest in this matter was not taken into consideration.

In September, BIRN won a case on appeal against the prime minister's office for access to financial details about spending by the prime minister's cabinet on official trips. Regardless of this decision, the government has not yet provided BIRN with the requested documents. This case has been in courts since 2012, showing the slow progress of Kosovo's judicial system.

Language barriers present another problem, especially regarding the translation from Albanian to Serbian during government events.

The law does not restrict access to international news and news sources. Entry into the journalism profession is free, and the government imposes no licensing restrictions. However, the government limits the number of journalists from each outlet to cover government events. This is troublesome, as it forces the same reporter to attend the government events all the time, and no one else can fill in when the registered reporter is not available.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Score: 2.24

Giving Objective 2 low scores, the panelists emphasized major concerns, such as the threat that online media pose to the quality of journalism. Many news portals display unfair, subjective, and single-source reporting, they said, and many lack basic editorial or ownership information, sowing confusion on who is behind the new media.

The panelists expressed concern about the new trend of reporting in newly established online portals that falls shy of fairness and objectivity. Very often, these outlets publish news that is based only on superficial sources, without any background information about the story. In many cases, the Facebook status of a politician or a Tweet from a public figure becomes the story. And if that message is directed toward a political opponent, usually one will not find a comment from the other side. The online media have created an expectation that news should be short and quick. The race to speed leaves a lot of room for error, sometimes even about basic facts. Due to the blanketing of smart phones, many Kosovars prefer to get their news online and often end up more misinformed than informed, the panelists fear.

However, a growing number of online media are applying for membership at the Kosovo Press Council, which the panelists view as a positive sign, as members are bound to adhere to the council's code of ethics. However, online plagiarism runs rampant. Very often online media copy-paste the exact article from one medium and share it, sometimes with a very brief line mentioning the original source, and sometimes without even that. Gazmend Sylja, the news director of Klan Kosova TV,

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).

Due to the blanketing of smart phones, many Kosovars prefer to get their news online and often end up more misinformed than informed, the panelists fear.

mentioned an article written for Klan Kosova's website that seven other online portals copy-pasted in a matter of a few minutes, without even mentioning the source. Some panelists said, however, that they blame employers and chief editors, not the journalists, for the massive ethical breaches in online media.

In traditional media (print and television), reporting is more balanced, incorporating opposition and citizen views. Still, even traditional media fall short when it comes to in-depth reporting, explaining the context and finding a human angle to the story, according to one panelist. They also tend to rely on the same technical experts across different subjects. Other panelists cited a lack of inter-ethnic reporting, considering that Albanian media rarely present reports on the lives of Kosovo Serbs, and vice versa.

Both the IMC and the Kosovo Press Council have developed written codes of ethics—and RTK has its own code of ethics, too—but implementation is poor. It has not been proven that media professionals accept payments or gifts in exchange for certain types of coverage; however, online media do not inform the public when a particular article is advertorial or sponsored marketing.

Self-censorship is present in most media outlets in one way or another, but it is linked more to financial interests than perceived threats to safety. The panelists link the media's choice to avoid reporting on some of the biggest advertisers (such as insurance companies, telephone companies, private banks, and public companies) to self-censorship. The panelists suspect that media owners often dictate editorial policies, a trend that is compromising objective reporting and contributing to self-censorship. The panelists say that editors use a softer approach on self-censorship toward their reporters, by discouraging them to take on certain topics.

Self-censorship may also result from the poor working conditions in most private media. Labor inspections of 34 Kosovo media organizations confirmed missing work contracts, payment irregularities, and uncompensated overtime work. Junior reporters often complain about discrimination at work. In the first two years, most junior reporters in private media work on three- or six-month trial contracts, before being offered annual contracts. One journalist complained to the Association of Kosovo Journalists that her contract was not extended for the next year because her employer found out that she is pregnant.

Her case drew broad sympathy in online media. According to the law, the employer is required to pay 70 percent of the salary for six months of maternity leave; a typical monthly salary in her position is €200.

Pay levels for journalists are relatively low overall in private media, unlike the public media, which compensate their staff generously thanks to their secure financial funding from the state budget. Journalists receive lower pay than civil servants and teachers. However, even within the private media there is quite a difference in income between entry-level journalists and editors. Despite the low income, and no compensation for overtime work, which is typical in Kosovo media organizations, the panelists believe that overall corruption among journalists is not widespread. “Why corrupt a journalist when you can easily corrupt the media owner,” one panelist commented.

Journalists usually cover key events and issues. The situation, however, differs in the north, an area dominated by Kosovo Serbs who reject the Kosovo institutions. The panelists say that their reporters travel to the north only if accompanied by the Kosovo police.

Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming in television. News editions contain sufficient information on daily local, national, and international news. The problem, however, is that most quality niche reporting is scarce and most media organizations do not provide investigative stories.

The public media—and those media that receive international grants—enjoy more modern and efficient facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing the news than their private counterparts. For example, the number of television stations offering programming in HD is increasing. The local media, however, are less developed in terms of technology, a fact reflected in the quality of their programming.

Most journalists do not specialize in covering specific kinds of issues, especially in investigative reporting, although there are exceptions—such as the Grabovci wiretapping scandal mentioned above, which revealed a public official’s distribution of jobs in public institutions to party members. But one panelist blames media owners for the lack of long-term investigative journalism, saying they have little interest in investing more in training their staff to specialize in specific kinds of issues, especially education, health, and security. In general, reporters and editors are educated, but the overall poor quality of education at the national level is reflected in the quality of reporting.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Score: 2.43

Kosovo is a small country, yet it is rich in terms of media outlets. A variety of public and private media allows citizens to check news sources against each other. The public media consist of four television channels, in addition to two radio stations and a web portal. Direct funding from the government, however, casts a shadow over their objectivity. Cable providers have created new opportunities for new television stations to open. Tribuna channel, for example, switched from a daily newspaper to a television station.

A plurality of news sources exists, and citizens’ access to national and international media is unrestricted. In fact, the most popular media, the online media, have created mobile user-friendly websites, and with the widespread embrace of the Internet, they are available even to rural audiences. Limitations exist in terms of cable services, and despite the broad reach of cable providers even in rural places, the financial constraints pose an obstacle for many families, especially in rural areas and small towns. There are many cable service providers in the country, with basic service including cable and Internet starting at €15 per month, and they carry hundreds of local, national, and international television channels. The main problem is still in the northern part of Kosovo, a territory mostly dominated by Serbs and heavily under control of the Serbian government. RTK 2, for example, which is a public television station in the Serbian language, is not available in the north because cable providers there reject the prospect of carrying a television station financed by the Kosovo state budget.

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.

Around 88 percent of households are connected to the Internet, and 3G and 4G services are on the rise. This has increased the people's reliance on social networking tools, especially Facebook and YouTube, for their daily news. Even traditional media now offer an online version and are very active on Facebook and YouTube. Television programs are posted on YouTube, and many media now provide a live stream of their news and other important activities. Some blogs enjoy a solid reputation and strong readership. Sbuker, for example, continues to attract commentaries by academics and public figures on issues of national importance. Kosovo 2.0, which started as a magazine, now operates as a blog with its own reporters, as well as several guest contributors of different nationalities.

Public media have faced heavy criticism by opposition parties for turning into a government mouthpiece, and the panelists believe that state funding is jeopardizing public media's editorial and institutional independence. Although RTK tends to balance its coverage on government and opposition evenly in terms of time, news on the government and ruling parties always seems to be placed at the top of the news, even when other stories seem more significant (such as, for example, the street protests organized by the opposition parties). The quality of social programming is also very poor in the public media; one panelist explained that RTK's educational and cultural programs are unintentionally funny and invite public sarcasm.

Ekonomiaonline, another newly established news agency, joins the traditional independent news agencies Kosova Press and Kosova Live. Ekonomiaonline, which focuses on economic news, launched in 2010 as an online medium but developed into a news agency in 2016. The panelists believe that the agencies offer solid service; however, they focus mainly on daily and protocol news and rarely on investigative reporting. In general, they tend to be independent in their reporting, and many local media subscribe, paying a subscription fee. However, most private media produce their own news, with the exception of online news portals, which produce their own news occasionally but mostly copy-paste from other media. For instance, one portal might offer you all the major headlines of the morning newspapers.

This is not to say that online media never produce groundbreaking news. Insajderi.com and kallxo.com are two online media that specialize in investigative journalism; Insajderi originally published the wiretapped conversations of Grabovci that almost all other media picked up and republished.

In terms of transparency, people do not generally know the owners of various media. Nevertheless, private broadcast media are required to register their owner's data at the IMC. The list is not fully transparent but can be accessible. That is not the case with online media, which do not provide any information at all regarding ownership. Most do not even present any

However, Luci pointed to the modification of the Statute of the Kosovo Press Council, which now makes it mandatory for each council member to provide editorial data on its website, as a positive step taken this past year.

sort of information regarding the names of their journalists, editors, or directors. However, Luci pointed to the modification of the Statute of the Kosovo Press Council, which now makes it mandatory for each council member to provide editorial data on its website, as a positive step taken this past year. The other good news is that the number of online portals registering at the council is increasing.

Although the mainstream media are based in the capital, they do offer local news as well—some even employ local correspondents. Additionally, the daily news editions always include international news. But some panelists expressed concern that in general the media fail to represent all branches of the society, such as children, youth, women, LGBTI, and ethnic minorities. Women are less likely to be presented in the media as experts or voices on politics, which is still seen as the realm of men. Reporting on minorities is mainly limited to their political situation and rarely touches on their social and cultural life.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Score: 2.16

Ongoing financial strain is the reason that the panelists gave Objective 4 the lowest score of the five objectives. The majority of media are suffering financially. Even the public media, which receive a generous income from the state budget, have added to their debt. While accusations of mismanagement cloud the public media, private media suffer from low advertising revenues. This is especially true of local television and radio stations.

Nonprofit media enjoy slightly better financial status, as they operate based on grants from the European Commission and other international sources. There are no government subsidies for private media. The case with online media is mixed, as some are very efficient and self-sustaining enterprises, due to the high number of page clicks they attract, while others can barely generate any income.

Public broadcaster RTK prepares business plans, but private media are not legally required to do so. The same goes

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.

for marketing, which is not very transparent, especially in private media, while by law the public media are obligated to provide audit reports. Public media receive their funds from the government in three-month cycles, and at the same time they report on their financial plans and expenditures to the Parliamentary Committee on Media. The opposition parties have criticized RTK for inappropriate planning and expenditure reports; however, private media are secretive about their own business plans, as well as all audit and financial reports. Overall, media management falls short of generally accepted levels of good governance.

Typically, the same slew of companies provide advertisements to most of the media. As a result, it is rare to see any criticism toward those advertisers, such as private banks, insurance companies, etc. Again this year, the panelists flagged as a problem the fact that private media, which rely solely on advertising, must compete with RTK for the same advertising opportunities, although RTK receives state funds as well.

Local media tend to be editorially favorable toward local governments, which they depend on for advertisements. The panelists believe that local reporters are often affiliated with local public officials or local political parties.

Subscription fees are a major income source for cable providers, and more and more online media produce video content as a revenue-generating activity. There are no government subsidies for the media, hence advertising remains the main income. Although Kosovo's advertising market is limited, the number of advertising companies is increasing and the quality of advertisements depends on the client. International companies operating in Kosovo, such as banks and insurance companies, produce advertisements superior to those of local companies. Nevertheless, all commercial spots must comply with the rules

established by the IMC and related laws. Nonprofit media that obtain international funding do not face such market pressure and can report without any political or economic obstacles.

Market research is underdeveloped and rarely used to enhance advertising revenues. The same goes for broadcast ratings and circulation figures, which are mostly conducted individually by media organizations and mostly reserved for internal use and attracting advertising companies, despite their inherent unreliability. Some private marketing agencies conduct such research, but other media often dispute their data, insisting that those who pay the service always come out on top. The most-visited online media cite online circulation numbers. However, they present only the number of clicks.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Score: 2.61

Traditionally for Kosovo, Objective 5 has received the highest score, and this year is no exception.

There are two well-established, active organizations that influence the positive evaluation. The first is the association that represents the interests of private broadcast media owners (the Association of Kosovo Independent Electronic Media), and the second, the Association of Kosovo Journalists, represents the interests of Kosovo journalists and is very quick to react when freedom of media is concerned. Media outlets and NGOs tend to cooperate; very often NGOs provide good sources for journalists who are seeking third-party comments on various political and economic issues. NGOs, too, use the media to make their voices heard.

The Association of Kosovo Independent Electronic Media is the main body representing broadcast media, including Serb community media. It operates as an NGO and depends on subscription fees. The Association of Kosovo Journalists, on the other hand, is the main body representing the interests of Kosovo reporters. Although the association has over 470 members, it is not a trade union; only RTK has its own trade union. Apart from the Association of Kosovo Journalists, there is also the Association of Serbian Journalists, which represents journalists working for local and national media in the Serbian language in Kosovo.

As private media do not have trade unions, their journalists and editors take any complaints to the Association of Kosovo Journalists, which is funded by international donors rather than through membership fees. The association is now a member of the International Federation of Journalists and the European Federation of Journalists. Its main mission is to organize journalists to promote and protect rights surrounding the freedom of expression. Apart from different trainings

organized for Kosovo journalists, the association has published a guide on staying safe while reporting on protests and unrest—an essential document, considering the number of protests, sometimes very violent ones, in recent years. Last year, the Association of Kosovo Journalists organized internal elections for a new board and a new director. In contrast with previous elections, it went very smoothly; the journalistic community did not contest the newly elected director and board members. The organization also became a partner of the regional online platform safejournalists.net, which advocates for media freedom and the safety of journalists.

Local and international NGOs organize a number of short-term trainings, including some that address sensitive topics, such as how to report on gender equality and the LGBTI community, stereotypes on ethnic minorities, and organized crime. These free trainings often bring high-profile and very experienced international experts to Kosovo. Despite the availability of training opportunities, many journalists find it difficult to attend, blaming management for not allowing them to leave the office for a few days.

NGOs support free speech, especially in cases where the government is trying to impose restrictions on the freedom of expression. However, there are no NGOs that focus exclusively on free-speech issues.

At least three different universities in the country offer journalism degree programs, mostly focused on theoretical and inefficient practical training. Universities often face criticism for their teaching methods, which have not kept pace with new media and evolving technology. Many fresh graduates in journalism start their careers in online media, as interns or full-time employees in short-term contracts.

There are no restrictions on importing and purchasing the materials that media and journalists need to do their work,

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.

apart from financial constraints. Transmitters are not politicized, but many private media have criticized the digitalization process, saying the process has handed public media more privileges.

There is also no government pressure to control or monopolize media distribution. A problem, however, arose over the channel numbers on cable providers when private television station KTV, one of the three national television channels, disputed its placement with a cable provider. To resolve the issue, the IMC passed a regulation that shows which channels should be in the top 10. Otherwise, the existing information and communications technology infrastructure meets the needs of the media industry.

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