

# ALBANIA



## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2019

Tracking Development  
of Sustainable  
Independent Media  
Around the World



# ALBANIA

## AT A GLANCE

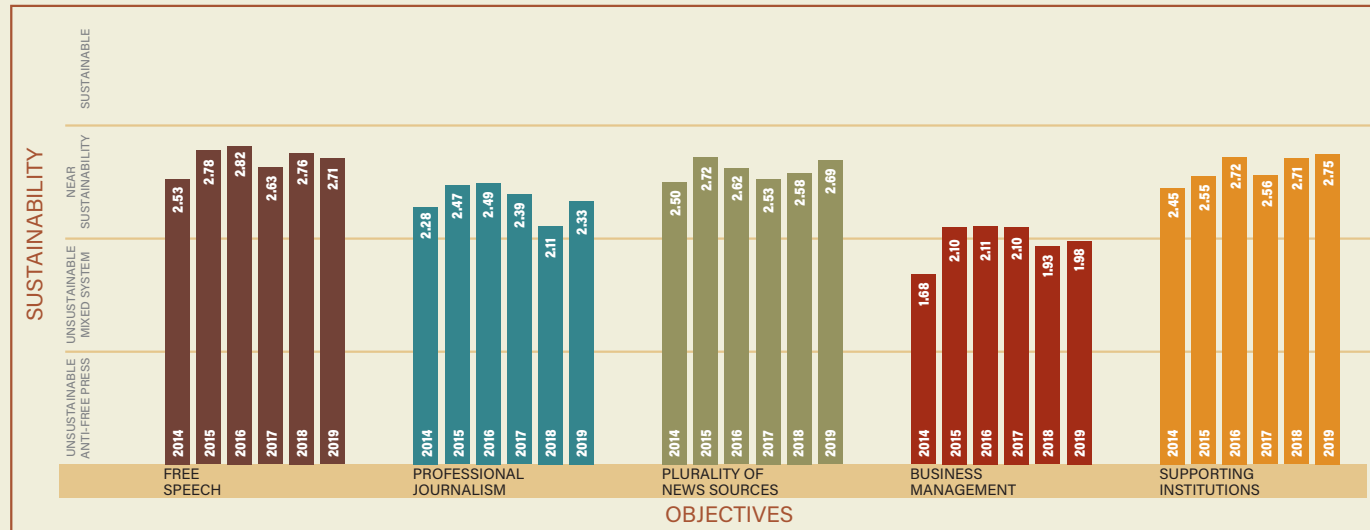
### GENERAL

- **Population:** 3,057,220 (*CIA World Factbook*, 2018 est.)
- **Capital city:** Tirana
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Albanian 82.6%, Greek 0.9%, other 1% (including Vlach, Roma, Macedonian, Montenegrin, and Egyptian), unspecified 15.5% (*CIA World Factbook*, 2011 est.)
- **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 56.7%, Roman Catholic 10%, Orthodox 6.8%, atheist 2.5%, Bektashi (a Sufi order) 2.1%, other 5.7%, unspecified 16.2% (*CIA World Factbook*, 2011 est.)
- **Languages:** Albanian 98.8% (official), Greek 0.5%, other 0.6% (including Macedonian, Roma, Vlach, Turkish, Italian, and Serbo-Croatian), unspecified 0.1% (*CIA World Factbook*, 2011 est.)
- **GNI (2017-Atlas):** \$12.42 billion (*World Bank Development Indicators*, 2017)
- **GNI per capita (2017-PPP):** \$13,050 (*World Bank Development Indicators*, 2017)
- **Literacy rate:** 97.6% (*CIA World Factbook*, 2015 est.)
- **President or top authority:** President Ilir Meta (since July 24, 2017)

### MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations, Internet news portals:** Print: 22 dailies (Albanian Media Institute, 2017); Radio Stations: 1 national, 51 local, 4 community (Audiovisual Media Authority, 2018); 1 public, in 5 channels, plus 4 local programs; Television Stations: 1 public broadcaster and its thematic channels, 5 national digital platforms and TV stations, 56 local TV stations, 2 satellite, and 100 cable (Audiovisual Media Authority, 2018); Internet News Portals: N/A
- **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- **News agencies:** Albanian Telegraphic Agency (public)
- **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** €37 million (*Monitor*, 2018 est.)
- **Newspaper circulation statistics:** N/A

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### SCORE KEY

**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.



Albania's MSI objectives on free speech, plurality of news sources, and supporting institutions nudged up a bit, while the objectives on journalism professionalism and business management fell. Albania's overall score improved only slightly, from 2.44 in 2018 to 2.49 in 2019. The only objective to see even a small decrease was on guarantees of freedom of expression, mainly due to a proposal in parliament to regulate online media. Among the challenges facing the country's media sector, panelists cited media outlets divided along political lines, declining ethical standards, lack of transparency in media ownership and funding sources, and self-censorship.

Albania's paralyzing political warfare continued throughout 2018. The opposition Democratic Party boycotted parliament and rallied repeated protests, accusing the government of widespread corruption. The Democrats allege that law enforcement and the judiciary have been captured by organized crime and that groups involved in the country's lucrative but illegal cannabis trade bribed or intimidated voters in the 2017 elections, with the government's cooperation. The Socialists, who came to power in 2013 after eight years of Democratic rule, agree that corruption permeates some state institutions, but they say they are the real reformers.

Interior Minister Fatmir Xhafaj resigned in October, with Prime Minister Edi Rama urging Xhafaj's successor to pick up the pace of ongoing judicial and other reforms. The opposition had tarred Xhafaj with charges of involvement in drug trafficking, based on his brother's 2002 conviction in Italy in a drug case.

Rama and President Ilir Meta, formerly from the opposition Movement for Socialist Integration, have locked horns repeatedly, with Meta taking the unprecedented and arguably unconstitutional steps of refusing to appoint some of Rama's chosen

cabinet ministers. Their dispute might have gone to the constitutional court, but almost all of that court's judges have been removed after failing a new anti-corruption vetting process. The court of appeals is barely functional for the same reason.

Adding to the political protests were angry confrontations between police and residents of the country's impoverished north on toll charges for a new highway stretching from Albania's capital of Tirana to Pristina, Kosovo. In addition, residents of outer Tirana neighborhoods protested plans to demolish their homes to make way for a new ring road; artists and civil society activists protested the demolition of the national theater building, saying corrupt building practices are running roughshod over cultural heritage; and massive student protests, over tuition and other fees, as well as dim career prospects and corruption, led to a reshuffle of the cabinet in December.

**OBJECTIVE 1:  
FREEDOM OF  
SPEECH**

2.71

**The Albanian constitution and relevant laws protect freedom of speech and expression. The panel praised the country's legal environment, with some exceptions, but noted problems with enforcement.**

Undermining otherwise robust legal protections for the press is a proposal to regulate online media by having them register with the telecommunications agency. In addition, the legislation would give the regulatory Council of Complaints, which hears grievances from the public about broadcast media, the power to fine or even suspend online media. "This shows a willingness by state institutions to interfere with the media sphere. When I compare the situation to last year, it's clearly worse," said Aleksandra Bogdani, an investigative journalist. Sentiments like those moved panelists to lower their assessment of this indicator, although some argued that because the proposals were still pending, a downgrade would be premature.

All of the five national digital multiplex licenses were granted in 2017, and last year saw no particular developments regarding licensing procedures. The media industry in Albania faces no undue tax or regulatory burdens. Indeed, sales of media equipment and newspapers are exempt from value-added tax (VAT). In addition, a few panelists said tax collectors are sometimes more lenient toward the press than toward other businesses. Entry into the media market is free, with no insurmountable obstacles to launching an outlet. Overall, the panelists agreed that the legal framework is favorable for media businesses.

There were several reports of assaults and

attacks on reporters in 2018. In the most serious case, someone shot at the home of reporter Klodiana Lala's parents late at night while her children were there. Lala, who covers courts and crime for News 24 TV, said the attack was linked to her work. Several days later, a local journalist was allegedly threatened by the owner of a café who was asking the media not to report on an explosion at his business. "The cases have increased, while threats are even more numerous, especially in the case of investigative journalists," said Aleksander Cipa, head of the Union of Albanian Journalists. The authorities often react promptly, but the perpetrators are rarely discovered. "Many cases have been closed without being thoroughly investigated," said Dorian Matlija, executive director of Res Publica. "There's solidarity and public reaction, which is good," Cipa said. "Institutions give lip service, but when it comes to finding the perpetrators nothing happens."

**"The cases have increased, while threats are even more numerous, especially in the case of investigative journalists," said Aleksander Cipa.**

The panelists agreed that public broadcasters do not cater to the government and do allow access to opposition viewpoints. Journalists for these outlets do not enjoy privileged access to events or officials.

The panelists had subtle disagreements over laws meant to protect the editorial independence of public media. Suggesting that enforcement, not wording, was the problem, well-known journalist Lutfi Dervishi said, "If we have a look at the law, the statute of the public broadcaster, and the editorial principles approved by this media, they are technically of a high standard." But journalism professor Iris Luarasi criticized the law's mechanism

for public media appointments, saying it parcels out the posts among political parties rather than encouraging a search for the most qualified candidates.

Several panelists said public media are raising their standards but still have a way to go. Major improvements in quality and independence will happen only when the public Radio Televizioni Shqiptar (RTSH) is funded by its audience and no longer relies on government support, the panelists said. That prospect is far off, however, given the low license fee that Albanian households pay for the public broadcaster.

**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.

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The panelists decried the political nature of appointments of media regulators, who are beholden to their patrons. As a result, Dervishi said, members of these bodies make decisions for political, rather than professional, reasons. He noted that the appointment of a general director for the public broadcaster was delayed because three rounds of voting were deadlocked along party lines.

A weakness in Albania's legal framework on free speech is its failure to fully decriminalize defamation—it is a criminal offense punishable by fines of up to \$28,000, which is extreme by Albanian standards. In addition, even though the legislation places the burden of proof on the plaintiff, “in reality, in court the defendant has to prove everything,” said Matlija, a lawyer. In arguing for complete decriminalization, Matlija said judges do not always make a distinction between commentary and reporting, and journalists do not have sufficient time to gather evidence to vindicate their work. In general, the panelists said that although the legal framework is sound, judges do not always respect the spirit of the law regarding freedom of expression.

Remzi Lani, director of the Albanian Media Institute, put some of the blame on journalists themselves. He said the defamation law was loosened in 2005 with the understanding that the media would police themselves to uphold professional standards, which has not happened.

Albania has a strong public information law that government agencies increasingly ignore. “The law started out really well, even in its implementation, but now it has started to regress, as there's no punishment for those who don't provide information,” Bogdani said. Matlija said the Commissioner on Data Protection and Access to Information has become less effective, as institutions have found new ways to avoid replying. In 2018, 71 percent of requests filed through an online platform received an answer, but

only 46 percent of those received all the information requested, according to a study by Res Publica, a non-profit legal services organization focusing on human rights and democracy development. The average response time doubled from 13 days in 2017 to 26 days in 2018.

No particular outlets have privileged access to officials, information, or official events, although many of those events—such as news conferences, where no questions are permitted—are of little use in newsgathering. On the other hand, elected officials or expert government employees routinely make themselves available for interviews. All media and journalists have access, technically, but the information provided is controlled by officials, which sometimes makes the role of the reporter redundant.

Entry into the journalism profession is not regulated in any way, with no particular credentials required. The panel also agreed that domestic media have unrestricted access to sources of international news, with usage fees the only obstacle.

### OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

2.33

**Albanian media claim to be independent, but they are clearly divided along political lines. Ornela Liperi, editor-in-chief of business and finance magazine *Monitor*, said that “links between media owners and interest groups to politicians” have hurt reporting standards, especially at large television stations.**

With a few exceptions, professional standards are lacking in Albanian media, but not because the country's reporters are particularly corrupt or incompetent. Instead, the panelists blamed staff

shortages, crushing workloads, and pressure from other actors. For example, the country's four biggest banks are among the largest advertisers. They are also under investigation by the anti-monopoly agency for anti-competitive practices, but it is very difficult to find this story in Albanian media. “I believe that in all media, without exception, the financial source is considered ‘untouchable’ and is promptly served by the media they support, including the largest media in the country,” said Valbona Kurti, editor-in-chief of TV Klan's investigative Stop program.

“Quantity prevails over quality. There's a shortage of staff, of editors, and of time to do a quality job,” Dervishi said. In addition, one panelist said journalists often cover routine or ceremonial events while ignoring stories of public interest.

The panel also decried the frequent practice of airing public relations material disguised as news. “I don't think reporting is honest or objective, especially on television, and in particular when it comes to news on the municipality of Tirana,” Liperi said, “The stories are often prepared by public relations people and are presented as news, which is a serious violation of journalistic standards.”

Ethical standards are steadily declining, hurried along by the ascendance of online media. “All you need is for one website to publish a story, whether it's true or false, and everyone else publishes it without confirmation, without any changes, and without citing it. It's the worst kind of copy-paste news or fake news,” Kurti said. Media's frequent use of social networks as sources of information, without proper checks, is also undermining reporting standards, the panelists said.

Media in Albania have a written, voluntary code of ethics, but self-regulation has been a bust. Dervishi said professionalism will remain elusive while the media have trouble accessing information or exercising editorial independence.

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"We can't expect standards from media that aren't independent," he said.

### 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).

Self-censorship among journalists has become the norm. Job insecurity and pervasive links between media owners and political and business interests pressure journalists to watch what they say and write. "Self-censorship of journalists and staff in the media exists due to lack of stable labor contracts and pressure from owners and managers. This is even more visible in local media," said Arben Muka, a former journalist who monitors programming at the national broadcast regulator. Anila Basha, director of the Newsbomb website, said self-censorship was particularly obvious in 2018. She mentioned that the violent protests in the northern town of Kukes over the toll highway quickly disappeared from the nation's television screens

"due to economic influence and interests." The well-connected company chosen to collect the toll is a frequent winner in government tenders.

Still, the panel said it is rare for news and events to be completely ignored in the media. "Given the political bias, what's not covered by one outlet will be reported on by competitors. I don't know of any issues that don't come to light, even though the purpose might not be related to journalism, but political. However, information doesn't remain a secret; it becomes public," said Alfred Lela, director of the online magazine *Politiko*. A few panelists said it is difficult to find negative coverage of big advertisers, businesses, and corporations.

Most journalists in Albania receive meager pay, and some live with irregular paychecks. Online journalists are especially poorly paid, according to Cipa, of the journalists' union, and Luarasi, the professor. Luarasi said the illegal, sub-minimum wage (ALL 26,000 [\$232] per month) of many news websites makes their reporters vulnerable to corruption. The panel said there is a huge gap between a few editors, directors, and journalists and the rest of media employees. Lani called it "a media aristocracy on one hand, and a media proletariat on the other." At the same time, according to trade union data, media companies continue to keep one set of books for the tax collector and one for themselves. Some continue to deduct social contributions from journalists' salaries without actually paying those contributions to the government. "We have denounced this continuously, but no one seems to care very much," Cipa said.

The panel said news and political shows continue to outnumber entertainment programs, thanks to several all-news channels and the prevalence of current-affairs and political talk shows almost every night. In fact, Lani noted, political programs seem to be crowding out entertainment.

Other panelists said that although movies are rarely broadcast in prime time, the main television stations invest in entertainment programming.

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Most media make an honest attempt to cover all sorts of topics, especially social issues, crime, the economy, health, and culture. Investigative reporting has grown more formidable, especially at online media, such as the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), but also on several television programs, such as *Fiks Fare* on Top Channel, *Stop* on TV Klan, and *Boom* on Ora News.

In general, journalists and their outlets have the equipment and technology necessary for newsgathering, although national media tend to have more and better technology than their regional counterparts. That gap will likely close, however, with the ongoing, nationwide switchover to digital broadcasting, when local stations will either upgrade their equipment or use public digital transmission networks.

#### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

2.69

**With literally hundreds of television and radio stations and newspapers, and a boom in online media, Albanians have access to plentiful news sources. A few panelists said the surfeit of news websites helps ensure that all news and**

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**information eventually comes to light, but it has also fueled fierce competition to get a story first and get the most clicks, with standards an afterthought, Liperi said.**

The panelists stressed that quantity of information wins out over quality, especially as more journalists scour social media for story tips and information. “There are numerous sources of news and information available to citizens, but they have to distinguish between objective and biased information, or between the truth and fake news,” Kurti said.

Albanians face no legal or technical hurdles in accessing the Internet, foreign media, or any other sources of information. The government does not block access to any online or traditional media. Internet penetration is constantly on the rise, along with people’s use of social media, especially Facebook. There are no market restrictions for Internet service providers, but the panelists said a proposal to require online media to register and to allow regulators to block those that violate ethical norms is a threat to media freedom in the country.

**“There are numerous sources of news and information available to citizens, but they have to distinguish between objective and biased information, or between the truth and fake news,” Kurti said.**

The public broadcaster’s reform and transformation into a reliable television channel that serves the public interest has proved challenging over the past 20 years. Nonetheless, some panelists said it now offers a wider array of quality programming. “Since I closely follow the programming on offer, I

can see that there is a more concerted effort—not just in quantity, but also in terms of quality—of some of the programs,” Muka said.

The panel also said the public broadcaster aims for balance in its newscasts these days. “One day I was following the protests on TV, and only the public broadcaster was broadcasting them at that moment,” Lani said. “That might seem trivial, but it’s definitely a change compared to previous years, where it was focused mainly on reporting government protocol.”

Along with the praise, however, the panelists said RTSH still has much work to do to fulfill its public mission. “I can see that the situation is clearly improving in many aspects, but it’s still in a fragile state and it still has a long way to go,” Matlija said.

Officially, the public Albanian Telegraphic Agency is the country’s only news agency. Many other portals or news sites, however, refer to themselves as news agencies. All media are free to use domestic or foreign news providers. All widely use international agencies, albeit usually without proper attribution or credit.

Almost all traditional media in the country produce their own news, while online media frequently copy news from one another, without bothering to verify it. The panelists decried the prevalence of public relations material—from political parties and figures, as well as from businesses—being passed off as news in many outlets.

Owners of traditional media are listed in the searchable database of the National Business Center, even as the sources of media funding remain hidden from the public, the panelists noted. “It’s easy for the public to see who owns most media and how this is reflected in the media’s editorial line,” Lela said. But owners of online media have no obligation to register or identify themselves. Most online media do not publish their address,

information on their staff, or any other identifying information. Albania’s media are becoming concentrated in fewer hands, especially after ownership restrictions for national broadcast media were lifted in 2016, and the five national digital licenses were granted to three owners.

### 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.
- ▶ Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- ▶ Citizens’ access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- ▶ Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- ▶ State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- ▶ A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.
- ▶ Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- ▶ Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are reliable.

Albanian media are not restricted or discouraged from reporting on touchy issues related to minorities, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. Although the media cover many such topics, the reports are often superficial. The panelists noted that public broadcaster RTSH relatively recently began broadcasts in minority languages on its second channel. Cipa, the union chairman, said

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many minority groups in Albania have launched their own online media. For example, in the southwestern region of Himara alone, with its large Greek-speaking community, there are 13 minority-owned online media outlets, Cipa said. On the other hand, the government continues to have no policy of supporting minority, or any other, media.

Media in Albania cover local, national, and foreign news, but most coverage focuses on politics and other developments, mainly in Tirana, limiting regional coverage to political activities or crime reporting. "There's an obvious emphasis on covering politics, and often this means coverage of real life in the country is neglected," Liperi said.

Two main companies measure television ratings, but the data's reliability is disputed, due to the methodology used, the small sample size, and the fact that their results usually differ. "The main television stations do receive audience data, even though we know that the way these data are collected is problematic," Kurti said. The results of the surveys are not released publicly. "The fact that the data are not public means a lot. The media have an interest in making them public, as an incentive for self-improvement," Luarasi said.

Similarly, there are no published data on circulation of newspapers, which is deemed very low, nor do online media publish numbers on page views.

### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

1.98

**Business management practices in Albanian media are too opaque to allow any assessment of their efficiency. In addition to the many outlets that were already operating, last year**

**an all-news channel launched, and another is set to start broadcasting soon. Although the country's wealth of media outlets could be a sign of dynamism, the panelists said they doubted the weak advertising market could support so many. "It doesn't make much economic sense to invest in opening new, quality television stations in an already oversaturated market," Liperi said. According to reports in *Monitor*, only the few major television stations run their businesses efficiently and make a profit, albeit sometimes from advertising by their owners' other businesses. "If we consider that advertising has been decreasing and the media numbers growing, and that not many media do have a positive balance, it leads us to think that media don't operate efficiently as a business," Dervishi said.**

Funding sources for Albanian media are hardly transparent. The budgets and balances of broadcasters and some registered online media are available in the database of the National Business Center. However, the origin of funding sources is not available, and the panelists cast doubt on the veracity of the data on the official balances. Even though data on advertising show that the market is rather small, the panelists said there are diverse sources for funding media, including commercial and public advertising, subscriptions, newsstand sales, and support from their owners' other businesses. The media's dependence on these sources, however, has given them undue influence on editorial policy. In this way, marketing and editorial staff are formally, but not practically, separate.

There are no official figures for the size of the advertising market, but *Monitor* put recent annual ad revenue around €40 million (\$45 million), with a

tendency to decrease by a few percentage points each year, Liperi said. *Monitor* estimated that the ad market shrank by six percent in 2017 to €37 million (\$41.6 million), but the decline seems to have slowed in 2018. According to the magazine, television attracts more than 70 percent of ad spending, and even the growth of advertising in online media seems to have slowed in 2018. As in most of the world, print media in particular struggle to secure enough advertising to fund their operations.

Liperi said about 40 percent of advertising spending is channeled through agencies, which tend to handle the biggest advertisers, giving agencies influence especially on television channels, the panelists said. But the real clout belongs to the big advertisers, which include telecommunications companies and banks.

### 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.



The national government does not subsidize media, and its advertising funds have dropped in the past several years. The panelists agreed that state advertising funds play a small role in the market, but they said these funds are not awarded through transparent and fair procedures. Instead, the government gives the money to advertising agencies or event planners, which, as private companies, are not obligated to disclose how they then disburse the funds to media outlets. All of this makes it difficult to draw conclusions about whether the funds influence media editorial policies. The distribution of public funds is even less transparent and more clientelistic in local government, according to Shkelqim Bylykbashi, owner of 4 Plus TV in the west-central town of Lushnje.

**“If we consider that advertising has been decreasing and the media numbers growing, and that not many media do have a positive balance, it leads us to think that media don’t operate efficiently as a business,” Dervishi said.**

The major media companies, mainly television stations, and major advertisers conduct market studies and audience research. Audience measurements, however, are widely mistrusted. Liperi said large, reputable research agencies do not find the small Albanian market worth their time. Other panelists said an obvious solution would be for multiple outlets to pay for better quality, joint research, but the national character is a barrier to that. “This isn’t only about the small market. It’s also about our culture, where everyone wants to be first and no one accepts second place,” Lani said.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

2.75

**Although publishers and media owners are free to form trade groups, there is only one. The marginally effective Association of Electronic Media rouses itself in times of need rather than functioning as an ongoing concern. With its focus on the business side of the industry, last year the association and several owners and directors of private television stations pushed to allow private broadcasters to receive a portion of the proceeds from the nationwide television license fee that funds the public broadcaster. The proposal has not yet been introduced in parliament. A year earlier, the association had unsuccessfully sought to block legislation requiring broadcasters to offer free or discounted advertising time to political campaigns.**

Several professional associations for journalists are registered in the country, but most are dormant. The most active is the Union of Albanian Journalists, which defends the labor rights of its members and draws attention to violations of press freedom. The union has a considerable national presence and local branches. The Association of Professional Journalists has also been more active recently, issuing statements regarding infringements of press freedom.

The Albanian Media Institute and civil society groups offer short-term training programs, which rely on donor funds and can be difficult for journalists to attend. “There should definitely be more training, but even when we do the current courses, we have to keep shortening the training period each day, as journalists have to produce the news for the day and do the training, which makes

it difficult for them,” said Lani, of the media institute. Media bosses themselves seem to care little about these courses. “Media operators don’t have training programs for their own journalists and aren’t particularly interested in these, and as a result only the short-term training enabled by donors is available,” Dervishi said.

Bylykbashi said most training courses take place in Tirana, putting reporters elsewhere at a disadvantage, but Luarasi and Bogdani, whose organizations host journalism trainings, disagreed. “We’ve had a different experience, where we offered training for local journalists in their cities, but sometimes they didn’t show much interest,” Bogdani said.

### 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.
- ▶ Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- ▶ Sources of newsprint NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- ▶ Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- ▶ Printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- ▶ Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- ▶ Information and communication technology infrastructure sufficiently meets the needs of media and citizens.

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The panelists agreed that although there are training opportunities for journalists, they can have only limited success when media outlets' staffs are being cut and many media owners do not care about public-interest journalism.

Several civil society groups primarily concerned with human rights also monitor the freedoms of speech and press. Lately, their statements tend to have little influence, although these groups played an important role in liberalizing Albania's defamation law and drafting an open information law. A group of civil society organizations have spoken out against the proposed registration and ethics requirements for online media.

**“There should definitely be more training, but even when we do the current courses, we have to keep shortening the training period each day, as journalists have to produce the news for the day and do the training, which makes it difficult for them,” said Lani.**

Degree programs in journalism are available at the country's public universities, while private institutions offer communications studies. The panelists said universities need to teach students more practical journalism skills, including via internships. “The media community expects working journalists from the department of journalism, and the curriculum doesn't entirely meet this need,” said Valbona Sulce, a member of the public broadcaster's steering council.

No laws or regulations limit the media's ability to buy equipment or operate printing houses. Printing facilities, distribution networks, and related infrastructure are privately owned and available

to all media, without politicization or government interference. Although newspaper kiosks are run by monopolies, no newspapers are frozen out of newsstands. Meanwhile, Internet penetration has increased rapidly, and the panelists said there are no technological barriers to access to any media source. “Supporting infrastructure is rather developed and meets media needs. It's a business and isn't affected by politics or the limitations that might come from it,” Kurti said.

### Panel Participants

**Aleksandra Bogdani**, journalist, Reporter.al, Tirana

**Shkelqim Bylykbashi**, owner, 4 Plus TV, Lushnje

**Aleksander Cipa**, chairman, Union of Albanian Journalists, Tirana

**Genc Demiraj**, owner, One TV, Vlora

**Lutfi Dervishi**, freelance journalist, Tirana

**Valbona Kurti**, editor-in-chief, Stop, TV Klan, Tirana

**Remzi Lani**, director, Albanian Media Institute, Tirana

**Alfred Lela**, director, Politiko.al, Tirana

**Ornela Liperi**, editor-in-chief, Monitor, Tirana

**Iris Luarasi**, lecturer, University of Tirana, Tirana

**Dorian Matlija**, executive director, Res Publica, Tirana

**Arben Muka**, director of programs, Audiovisual Media Authority, Tirana

**Valbona Sulce**, member, RTSH steering council, Tirana

*The following participant submitted a questionnaire but did not attend the panel discussion.*

**Anila Basha**, director, Newsbomb.al, Tirana

### Moderator & Author

**Ilda Londo**, research coordinator, Albanian Media Institute, Tirana

*The panel discussion was convened on December 20, 2018.*