

*A growing number of media outlets have succumbed to dependence on political parties, mainly the ruling party. Now independent media and journalists are a rare species, near extinction.*



## ALBANIA

Albania's MSI scores improved in every objective last year, but three out of the five objectives slipped in 2012. This trend, reflecting the erosion of prospects for media sustainability in Albania, did not escape the notice of foreign observers and international institutions. In spite of warnings on the importance of preserving and strengthening media independence to further democratic processes, the opposite is happening. A growing number of media outlets have succumbed to dependence on political parties, mainly the ruling party. Now independent media and journalists are a rare species, near extinction.

The political and economic crisis that started in 2010 deepened in 2011, and this climate has not favored media freedom. Three events marked the peaks of political crisis last year. On January 21, soldiers of the Republican Guard killed four citizens who were peacefully protesting against corruption in the government headed by Prime Minister Sali Berisha. The tragic event, which the opposition considers a massacre, caused political battles to heat up after local elections in May.

Second, the rather dubious victory of the ruling party's Lulzim Basha in the capital city's mayoral contest intensified the crisis even further. The opposition charged that the election was stolen, while the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights cast doubts on the procedures followed by the Central Electoral Commission and declared that local elections fail to meet all international standards.

As a final blow, Albania failed to receive candidate status for European Union membership. In its annual progress report on Albania, issued last fall, the European Commission (EC) detailed the causes behind the decision. The report stated that political conflict blocked the development of reforms, while the independence of the judiciary and the politicization of the public administration remain a problem. With only very limited progress in the struggle against corruption, the culture of impunity surrounding visibly corrupt high government officials prevails.

The EC report did not neglect to point out how the growing political pressure threatens media independence. The bitter political struggle between the ruling majority and the opposition, the galloping pace of corruption, and a declining economy created a rather difficult social context that influences the sustainability of independent media. While political struggle drives political camps to try to capture as many stations and newspapers that favor their propaganda as possible, the economic crisis, the impoverishment of the advertising market, and sinking newspaper sales tempt some media owners to enroll in the services of political camps in exchange for compensation. Naturally, the government, possessing not only public funds, but also the ability to offer media owners corruptive privileges, enjoys the upper hand in this "competition." It is not at all a coincidence that most media, some of which used to be independent or neutral (such as *Panorama*, *Gazeta Shqiptare*, and News 24), now align with the media that serve the government. According to a European Parliament delegation that visited Albania in December last year, only two independent media outlets remain in the country.

# ALBANIA AT A GLANCE

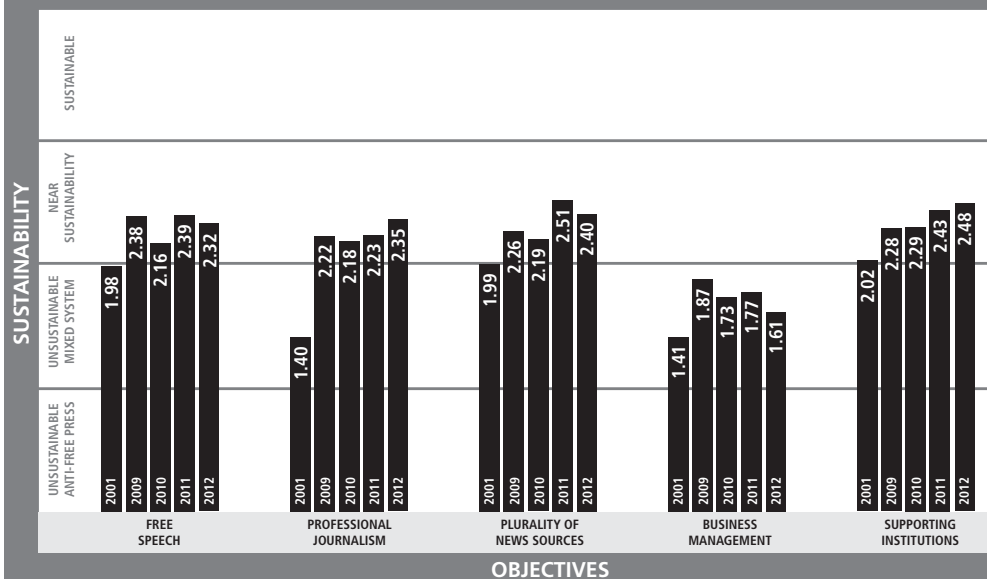
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 3,002,859 (July 2011 est. *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Tirana
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Albanian 95%, Greek 3%, other 2% (Vlach, Roma, Serb, Macedonian, Bulgarian) (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 70%, Albanian Orthodox 20%, Roman Catholic 10% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** Albanian, Greek, Vlach, Romani, Slavic dialects
- > **GNI (2010-Atlas):** \$12.7 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **GNI per capita (2010-PPP):** \$8,840 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **Literacy rate:** 98.7% (male 99.2%, female 98.3%) (2001 census, *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:** 160 print outlets; 58 radio stations, (56 local, 2 national); and 77 television stations (71 local, 3 national, 2 satellite) and 83 cable TV stations (Albanian Media Institute and National Radio-Television Council)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Approximately 30 million (Albanian Media Institute)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** €55 million (R&T advertising company estimate)
- > **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\\_mscores.xls](http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE_mscores.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: 2.32

Social and legal norms, particularly the failure to implement them, do not sufficiently protect or promote freedom of expression and access to public information. According to the panelists, the law on the media is stagnating, while more journalists are being sent to court.

At this moment, Albanian press law consists of just one article in the constitution, stating that the press is free. Demand for a more complete law on the press began percolating in 1998, when the socialist government abolished the former law on press immediately upon gaining to power. Yet Genti Ibrahimi, a lawyer with the Institute for Legal Studies, said that attempts to revise the law on the press, aiming to clarify the right of reply and the media's responsibilities to avoid violating personal privacy, etc., did not find political support. For several years now, Albanian politicians have shown little interest in breaking the impasse. Civil-society organizations, with help from the international community, composed a draft law, but there is no political will to approve it in the parliament.

Regarding the law on access to information, the panelists emphasized that there is a large deficit in its implementation.

#### 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 of public media.
- > 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 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.

*Leskaj said one needs only to see how the NCRT is composed in order to understand that it is not independent, and that factor is the cause of the favoritism that appears in the process of licensing.*

According to the panelists, this shortfall results partially from incomplete formulation in the law on one hand, and from political and cultural resistance to openness and transparency reflected in the bureaucratic administration on the other hand. According to Ibrahimi, the deficiencies in the law were addressed very well in a project that proposed amendments to the current law, but like the press law, it did not find any political support.

Other laws that have a considerable effect on free speech include the penal and civil codes (the part related to defamation) and the law on protection of personal data. But Valentina Leskaj, chair of the Media Commission of the Albanian Parliament, noted that the most critical point is not just the legal framework and its quality, but rather the functional quality of the judiciary power. "You can have good laws, but when the judiciary is not independent, salvation can hardly come from better laws," Leskaj remarked. Meanwhile, said Ilir Yzeiri, a journalism professor at the University of Elbasan, "Even though at first sight we have good laws, which do not restrict freedom of speech, in practice we are in a situation similar to a legal vacuum, and journalists are not protected."

However, the panelists pointed to positive developments with the implementation of the law on the protection of personal data, with parliament's appointment of a commissioner. However, the new institution is still in the stage of signing memoranda with public institutions that administer personal data; it has not yet raised any individual cases.

Regarding the process of licensing commercial broadcasters, political pressure, combined with pressure from private operators, often succeeds in influencing decision-making of the National Council of Radio and Television (NCRT). The latest NCRT appointments have had a strong political nature. To freelance journalist Fatos Baxhaku, the licenses continue to be used as a tool "to buy" the media. "If a license is given by NCRT, which is dominated by government appointees, it is automatically expected that the media that benefit should favor the government in their broadcasting. This is now a historical trend, and I do not believe that has changed at all this year," said Baxhaku.

*Çipa explained that for more than one month Shqip reporters failed to receive the project details and plan for the university campus of Student City from the head of urban planning at the Municipality of Tirana, even though their requests followed all legal terms and deadlines.*

Other panelists agreed. According to Leskaj, it is difficult to say today that the licensing authority, which is not independent and apolitical, bases its decisions on public interest. Leskaj said one needs only to see how the NCRT is composed in order to understand that it is not independent, and that factor is the cause of the favoritism that appears in the process of licensing. Even though 2011 did not see significant licensing activity, the panelists said favoritism is also present in the way the NCRT reacts to the administration of licenses. According to the panelists, when a media outlet close to the ruling party violates its licensing terms, the NCRT generally looks away, but when a media outlet linked to the opposition violates licensing terms, the NCRT tends to slap it with heavy fines.

Regarding market-entry barriers and the level of taxes for media, the panel said that in general no discrimination is visible. In fact, according to Thanas Goga, a marketing analyst with A&R Advertising, matters are even more simplified than necessary, especially regarding local media, which sometimes receive licenses without verification that they match the technical capacities mandated by the license requirements. Other financial benefits for the media include the value-added-tax (VAT) exemption for newspapers.

The panelists observed that crimes against journalists are not frequent, though journalists face sporadic obstacles in the course of their work. However, in cases when the perpetrators are state employees, the sanction often remains just administrative (such as the dismissal of the state employee from work), and the legal penal sanction is not always applied.

Regarding the Albanian public's reaction to cases when the government undermines the freedom of expression, it can be said that even though the public now values the freedom of expression, more frequently than not it is difficult for the public to grasp the truth (and react accordingly), due to competing noise in the media. However, Aleksandër Çipa, journalist and president of the Union of Albanian Journalists, believes that citizens are showing more clear signs of outrage

when journalists are harmed. They react using a diverse array of methods, ranging from letters to the newsroom to civic reactions in blogs or human rights organizations. "There was a case in the city of Gjirokastra where a journalist was taken to the police, and the reaction from the whole network of government organizations was immediate. The cities of Durrës or Kukës also displayed a strong sense of civic solidarity with journalists," Çipa noted.

Meanwhile, Yzeiri raised the issue of journalist Fatos Mahmutal of ABC News, who was wounded by a bullet during protests on January 21. According to Yzeiri, this journalist did not find support in Albania and was forced to seek political asylum in Belgium. Yzeiri said a similar thing is happening to investigative journalist Artan Hoxha. Hoxha's broadcasts are credited with showing the public that the four protesters killed on January 21 were unarmed and were not, in fact, attempting to enter the building of the government, as Berisha claimed. Precisely "to escape the vengeance of the government for exposing the truth, and without support from anyone, Hoxha was forced to hide in the mountains for about a month," said Yzeiri.

The International Federation of Journalists reported other attacks on journalists on the day of the protests; Ened Janina, a reporter for *Dhekulli*, was beaten by a policeman. Police officers also seriously wounded two other journalists: photojournalist Feliks Bilani and reporter Elton Dono; they are still working for their respective media outlets.<sup>1</sup>

Leskaj agreed that public support for the protection of journalists is still weak; she emphasized that a distinction must be made between the reaction of institutions, such as the People's Advocate or the UAJ, and solitary and spontaneous citizens' reactions. The panelists observed that even from an institutional viewpoint, only associations of journalists react to protect journalists, while other nongovernmental organizations do not display the same sense of solidarity. Lutfi Dervishi, a media specialist for Transparency International Albania, feels it is clear that public reaction to the protection of journalists remains apathetic at best.

The only public media in Albania are the Public Radio and Television (RTSH) and the Albanian Telegraphic Agency (ATA.) The law on radio and television creates a favorable position for the RTSH, as it grants a second frequency for national broadcasting at a time when some commercial operators are seeking desperately to expand their broadcasting areas. Public media are significantly skewed in favor of the government. The process of appointment of the Steering

<sup>1</sup> "IFJ condemns press freedom abuses against journalists." IFJ/IFEX, February 2, 2011. Available at: [http://www.ifex.org/albania/2011/02/02/journalists\\_attacked/](http://www.ifex.org/albania/2011/02/02/journalists_attacked/) (Accessed February 27, 2012.)



Council of the RTSH remains political, contrary to the terms stipulated in the law. The election of the general director of RTSH to the Council only deepened the politicization. "The law for the protection of editorial independence of public media exists, but this law is not implemented," said Iris Luarasi, professor of journalism at the University of Tirana.

Regarding implementation of libel and defamation laws, the panel expressed the view that the courts continue to implement the law on defamation (both in the penal and in the civil form) in a distorted way, overemphasizing the complementary rights, such as the right to intact reputation and the right to privacy, at the expense of freedom of expression. On this basis, grave decisions against media and journalists have been made, giving more fuel to individuals and companies contemplating filing lawsuits against journalists for insulting them or damaging their reputation. For example, in one 2010 case, a minister sued a major national television station for taping and broadcasting a conversation of a sexual nature involving a former minister and a job applicant in the minister's directorate. The court ruled in favor of the plaintiff, ordering the defendant to pay €400,000 (an absolute record for Albanian law in this area) for damage of dignity and invasion of private sphere. Even though the decision was rejected and is being examined in the Court of Appeals, the chilling effects of such decisions on freedom of expression are emerging, as seen in the increasing number of journalists being taken to court.

Yzeiri discussed his experience as a journalist embroiled for some years now in a trial. A religious foundation brought charges against him after he broadcast an investigative story on potential corruption involving the funds of a hospital. "I have learned how a journalist can end up in court based on the law on Public Radio and Television, which contains an article that states that the journalist is responsible, along with the editor in charge," said Yzeiri. According to him, this article, along with the fact that it is totally unclear in the civil code what constitutes defamation and libel when you are a journalist, has left considerable room for speculation. Therefore, he feels that even though the constitution states that the press is free, the civil code, with its articles on defamation and libel, allows anyone with ill intentions against the media to turn journalists into their victims.

In this context, for many years now defamation and libel have been a part of the penal and civil codes. The panelists explained that while penal sanctions for defamation and libel bear a heavy political cost due to public echo, the same cannot be said about sanctions imposed under the civil code. Therefore, politicians prefer to punish journalists by fines, which, although heavy, do not ignite the same spirited public protest as arresting or imprisoning journalists. Still, these

fines play a considerable role in encouraging self-censorship among journalists. Therefore, for some time media advocates have proposed a law on the press that not only decriminalizes defamation and libel for journalists, but also proposes lower fines under the civil code—punishing journalists not with fines amounting to 20 years worth of their salaries, but five months. Why has this law not been passed? Leskaj provided this explanation: "The process has stuck in the Parliamentary Commission on Laws, because they think that if journalists are exempted from penal sanctions for defamation, every citizen in the republic should be exempt as well, as the law cannot differentiate" between journalists and citizens.<sup>2</sup>

In general, the panelists said this situation must be corrected as soon as possible, partly because of some developments related to the realm of Internet. According to Remzi Lani, director of the Albanian Media Institute, "While we criticize newspapers and stations, which are not perfect but in general do observe ethical standards, we must not forget what is happening in blogs and in online forums, which are a true horror."

According to Çipa, in 2011 alone there have been 22 trials against journalists and media in court, whereas several years ago there were no such lawsuits. Even though lawsuits of politicians against journalists are very rare, there is a suspicion that some other lawsuits against journalists filed by businesses or companies mask the involvement of politicians tied to the businesses.

Meanwhile, according to Lani, it is the amount of fines against journalists that is alarming, rather than the number of lawsuits in the court. Comparing the situation to neighboring Macedonia, Lani stressed that many more journalists are taken to court there, but the level of fines is much lower. "Macedonia has currently 267 trials, but what is worrisome is that in Macedonia the heaviest punishment consists of €15,000, while the punishment here starts at €150,000. Hence, the increase in the number of cases is not concerning, but the disproportionality of fines is," said Lani. Çipa expressed support for this observation as well, noting that the court issues sanctions against journalists that are higher than two years of salary for a journalist.

As indicated above, implementation of the law on access to information remains weak and problematic. The reasons remain unchanged: a lack of internal administrative interest in supporting the implementation of the right to information in practical terms, and a lack of political will. A directive from

<sup>2</sup>As this edition of the MSI went to press, the Albanian parliament passed amendments to both the civil and criminal code in relation to libel laws that are intended to limit damages and reduce criminal penalties. See [http://www.freemedia.at/index.php?id=288&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=6077&cHash=e685bb7573](http://www.freemedia.at/index.php?id=288&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=6077&cHash=e685bb7573).

Albania's state ombudsman, the People's Advocate, aimed to guarantee a uniform understanding and implementation of the right to information from all public institutions, but it has been completely forgotten. The Law on Information gives Albania's Office of the Ombudsman the right to supervise the implementation of this law.

Meanwhile, the panel stressed that journalists themselves should also learn how to obtain public information from the administration. According to panelist Andi Tela, editor-in-chief of the daily *Panorama*, it is not that the information journalists seek is not available. However, Çipa, editor-in-chief of another daily, *Shqip*, as well as UAJ president, expressed a different perception. Çipa explained that for more than one month *Shqip* reporters failed to receive the project details and plan for the university campus of Student City from the head of urban planning at the Municipality of Tirana, even though their requests followed all legal terms and deadlines. Collecting information from websites of public institutions is not much easier; according to Luarasi, information on ministry websites is frequently unavailable.

The panelists largely agreed that favoritism skews implementation of the law on access to information. Some press outlets are granted access to information, while others are denied access to the same material. "I want to say that the issue of information is a very serious problem for media and journalists, and, even we, who are members of the parliament of the opposition, send written requests for information and do not receive any information," said Leskaj. Other panelists also expressed their dissatisfaction on obstacles that journalists face to receive information from public administration offices. Valbona Kurti, a journalist with Vizion + television station, explained her low scores for this indicator, saying, "If you send an official a fax, or even go and knock on the doors of the institutions to receive information related to a certain project or tender proceedings, nobody answers."

Meanwhile, Dervishi insisted on the argument that in spite of the lack of transparency that is evident in the offices of public administration, the journalists themselves do not take advantage properly of the rights they are entitled to under the law on access to information. Dervishi asked, "Are the journalists familiar with the procedure for obtaining official documents, and, if so, why have no media or newspapers filed administrative complaints for denial of access to documents or information, or any lawsuit, for that matter?" In response, Çipa, offering his experience as president of UAJ, admitted that denial of access to information or official documents was never followed up by any newsroom and sent to court. However, Çipa, offering his experience as

editor-in-chief of *Shqip*, admitted, "From the newspaper's newsroom, only in the last semester we have sent more than 20 requests for public documents, and we have succeeded only in one case. In the other cases, we have received the routine reply, "We are considering your requests."

Other panel participants stated that receiving information and public documents according to the law on access to information is even more difficult for journalists who work in cities other than the capital, where connections and patriarchal and political relations of the people are stronger.

All panelists shared the conclusion that in Albania, there are no restrictions on receiving and using domestic and international news, and that no laws limit these sources. Additionally, the panelists said again this year that there are no obstacles to enter the journalism profession, from the political, gender, ethnic, religious, or demographic viewpoints.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Albania Objective Score: 2.35

The panelists' opinion of the professionalism of media and journalists improved over last year's MSI. The public-opinion polls for 2011, conducted by the Albanian Institute for International Studies and the Institute Development Research and Alternatives, support this view, revealing that the public considers the media to be among the most trusted sectors. The panelists also feel, for the most part, that the media are one of the most successful sectors of society, with a significantly distinct contribution to furthering and protecting

## 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.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exist (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

human rights, compared with other sectors. According to Lani, “The most important thing we have in this country is that journalism continues to be better than courts, the parliament, hospitals, or schools of this country.”

Even for Kurti, the media appear to perform better than most other sectors. Kurti brought up the example of the tragic events of January 21, when the Republican Guard killed four protesters. The incident might have had more severe political effects if media had not intervened, she said, as the government and Berisha publicly accused the opposition in relation to the killings of protesters—claiming they were killed from inside the crowd, using guns masked as umbrellas. The media’s accurate, live reporting of the murders refuted such claims, eliminating any possible opening for the political circles in power to manipulate public opinion in order to strike the opposition. The public clearly saw from media broadcasting that bullets fired by the Republican Guard killed protesters.

The panelists observed that the ethical standards of corroborating information and obtaining more than one source are taking root among Albanian journalists. Luftim Vani, owner of the local television station in Mati, said, “Journalists try to avoid subjectivity and bring all sides into reporting, including their comments.” Vani added that journalists do not hesitate to consult specialists of the relevant fields when covering economy, health, or education, rendering their reporting increasingly professional and reliable. The panel said that even though there are still doubts on the hidden commercial content of some news, in general media coverage preserves a satisfactory balance between news and commercial content.

However, the panel stated that in media dominated by political parties, the above-mentioned standards are frequently neglected. According to Leskaj, the quality of reporting is related not only to the journalists’ professionalism, but also to their independence. Leskaj said that journalists are often still forced to report news that their owners pass on to them, which affects the accuracy and quality of reporting. She noted also that journalists risk losing their jobs if the business interests behind their media are affected, but also in cases of political interference, and added, “There is censorship, and there is also self-censorship, due to the fear of losing a job.” Some other panelists supported these observations. As far as Goga is concerned, “With the exception of a small group of journalists and newsrooms, there is still a lot to do regarding the honesty and objectivity of reporting.” Tela agreed, adding that only about a quarter of all newspapers, and an eighth of all television stations, follow the criteria of accurate and objective reporting. According to Dervishi, only a few media present honest,

*Luftim Vani, owner of the local television station in Mati, said, “Journalists try to avoid subjectivity and bring all sides into reporting, including their comments.”*

objective, and well-informed reporting. Dervishi said that the newsrooms of the largest newspapers lack a sufficient number of reporters to ensure higher-quality work. Hence, while there might be coverage reporting what various actors say, well-informed, in-depth reporting is a lot harder to find.

In terms of ethical standards, the idea is that the media should regulate themselves. Yet the panelists credit competition in the media market, more than any attempts at self-regulation, with encouraging compliance with ethical standards. The Code of Ethics, approved in 2007 by the associations of journalists and the Press Council, has not worked. As the body in charge of overseeing media ethics and solving conflicts of an ethical nature between the media and the public, the Press Council is supposed to take some measures when journalists violate the Code of Ethics. But the Press Council does not respond to cases of hate speech, slander, and defamation that exist in the media. However, to Vani, this deficiency is compensated by the fact that media outlets generally have their own ethical codes and efficiently implement them—although he feels that journalists should be more careful in implementing the conventions on copyright.

The panelists noted that self-censorship is media’s constant companion. According to Baxhaku, a journalist with 20 years of media experience, in the Albanian context, where reporters are poorly paid and ill supported, the tendency toward self-censorship is stronger than in other countries in the region. The other panelists supported this statement. Lani commented, “Journalists censor themselves due to the general social and political atmosphere, their owners, the government, and the tradition.” For the panelists, one of the causes of self-censorship lies in the fact that most journalists continue to lack work contracts, and as a result they are totally unprotected from pressure of their owners on the editorial policy or their reports.

The panelists debated whether media and journalists succeed in covering key issues and topics. Luarasi insisted on a lower score for this indicator, since investigative journalism is very vague and underdeveloped. The panelists acknowledged that the cost of covering key issues related to abuse or corruption of political power is considerable—as seen in the case of investigative journalist Artan Hoxha. (After broadcasting the murders during the January 21 protest, he was forced to hide for almost a month as a result of the threats he received from



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*“The trend of journalists abandoning their profession when they see an opportunity for a more profitable job is growing stronger,” said Dervishi.*

the circles in power.) Another illustration of this pressure is the case of the director of the investigative program *Fisk Fare*, the journalist Filip Cakuli. The prime minister, angry over critical reports in *Fisk Fare* publicly labeled Cakuli a Jackal.

The topic of journalists' salaries generated more debate. The current financial crisis has led many media to increasingly shrink the number of journalists on staff. Also the panelists say that thanks to the dynamics of gradual price increases through the years, journalists' salaries are no longer superior to those in other professions, as they were just a few years ago. According to Dervishi, the take-home wages of many journalists are no longer considered satisfactory compensation. It is no longer enough to inspire loyalty to their profession. “The trend of journalists abandoning their profession when they see an opportunity for a more profitable job is growing stronger,” said Dervishi. Çipa underscored the financial difficulties that media outlets are experiencing and how it is affecting journalists. According to him, 17 out of 23 daily newspapers have not respected the timely payment of salaries in the second semester of 2011. In the same period, according to UAJ data, about 47 out of 86 radio and television stations delayed journalists' salaries for a period of two to five months.

The system of salaries in the Albanian media still remains a rather informal relation. According to UAJ information, there are levels of salaries. The minimum wage for a reporter working in the districts outside the capital is about €200 per month. The other level is that of the editors-in-chief and columnists, which can range from €800 to €2,500 per month. To Lani, this is an unacceptable difference. “The market means for us to have some rules and not to have a media ‘proletariat’ on one hand and a media ‘bourgeoisie’ on the other hand; hence, it is not normal that some journalists are underpaid, while others are better paid than journalists in Denmark,” he said.

Leskaj also stressed that while the market regulates salary levels, another alarming problem in the media is informality. He declared that according to media monitoring, there are also newspapers whose payrolls had only one journalist.

According to Çipa, there are two different versions of media payrolls. One is valid for the fiscal administration and, due to

tax evasion, does not present the real level of payment. Only the other payroll, secret and valid for internal administration of media finances, mirrors the real level of salaries.

Taking a broader look at the problem, the panelists pointed out that in Tirana, the capital, the salaries in the media are comparable to those of other sectors, such as, for example, health and education. However, the situation is completely different for media in the districts. According to Luarasi, “In the districts, the salaries are miserable, and journalists cannot live and maintain their families with the salaries they receive in the local stations.” Luarasi noted that the not-so-satisfactory salaries are prompting journalism students to shift their studies toward programs such as economics or law that promise to be more lucrative.

As in previous years, the panelists observed that in general, all television stations have news programs in well-established schedules (four to five editions per day,) as well as shows once or twice per week. In Albania, television stations provide relatively good-quality news for free, while you have to pay for good movies or other serious entertainment content. According to Lani, “The problem in the Albanian media is not a lack of information or democratic debate on television, but the fact that entertainment or cultural programs in general are banal or marginalized.” Luarasi confirmed the perception that news and political debates eclipse entertainment programs in Albania. “There is so much information, debate, and politics that people are fed up with this,” she said. Dervishi agreed, saying, “We have reached a point when news entertains us.”

The panelists stressed that in the rural areas, where, due to technical as well as financial reasons, subscribing to a digital platform is even more improbable, news overshadows entertainment.

The panelists agreed that the premises and equipment for collecting, producing, and distributing news tend to be modern and are efficiently used by a small group of media organs, based in Tirana, while the situation in the provinces needs major improvement. Another problem is also RTSH, the public television station, which for years has not had a budget that would support the renovation of technology.

As noted above by Luarasi, investigative journalism is still not very well developed in Albania. Journalists do cover cases involving corruption, but often only if a member of the opposition goes on record denouncing it first. However, other panelists presented facts that support the opposite view. Yzeiri reminded the panelists that *Tema* first discovered corruption related to hydropower plants; the opposition then took up the cause and included it in the political battle agenda.

## OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

### Albania Objective Score: 2.40

The objective measuring the plurality of news and viewpoints decreased slightly. The panelists' discussions clearly revealed that electronic media coverage, in general, tends to be regional rather than national, guaranteeing coverage of just the largest part of the population (about 80 percent) living mainly in the Western Plain of the country. National media have failed to cover the whole country's territory. The small towns, which are not covered by national or regional television stations, receive service from cable operators, who rebroadcast and often pirate programs of large national and regional broadcasters, or those of foreign broadcasters.

Average income is another obstacle hindering the public's access to pay-per-view media, for terrestrial and satellite digital platforms, or even cable broadcasters' services. Rural populations face greater difficulties, as incomes are even lower, and the lack of infrastructure poses another challenge. For example, there are a relatively large number of daily newspapers in the country, but none reach the rural areas yet. The same can be said of the Internet; penetration in the national range remains rather low, not higher than 13 percent. The less-covered areas are, of course, the rural ones. The unstable electrical supply also poses significant problems for rural areas, although urban areas are not immune to this problem, either.

#### 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) exist 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 nonpartisan, 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.

*Leskaj brought to the panel figures from an NCRT monitoring carried out during October 2011; these figures document the editorial bias of TVSH in favor of the government.*

Aside from problems of cost or Internet penetration, there are no legal restrictions related to public access to international media. Some panelists suggested, though, that the NCRT has approached broadcast licensing as an indirect way to restrict public access to domestic media that oppose the government. Cable television is limited, but it seems to be growing. Recently, the NCRT approved the expansion of the coverage area for a large number of cable broadcasters after they suffered a series of sanctions imposed by the NCRT last year for piracy.

Meanwhile, the public broadcaster (RTSH) remains rather closed to opposition viewpoints on the political spectrum. The interpretation of government activities as something unrelated to political sides remains problematic. Goga feels that public television continues to be deeply politicized, betraying favoritism of the government in its news programs, but he added that there are some programs, such as sports programs, that are better in quality than those of private stations. Furthermore, in terms of serving the public interest, the panelists concluded that public media are not able to compensate for the vacuum created by commercial broadcasters.

Leskaj brought to the panel figures from an NCRT monitoring carried out during October 2011; these figures document the editorial bias of TVSH in favor of the government. The results showed that during this one-month period, the government and the ruling majority appeared in a total of 467 minutes of TVSH's news programming, while the opposition appeared in only 63 minutes. Regarding the two major parties (DP, the ruling party, and SP, the opposition party), 421 minutes were devoted to DP, while only 30 minutes went to SP. Other panelists also expressed strong criticism on the work of public television. Lani said that TVSH behaves like a ministry of propaganda. However, according to Lani, the biggest problem is not the influence the government has on this television, as that phenomenon is evident in states far more advanced than Albania. Lani is most troubled by the fact that public television often assumes anti-opposition attitudes, which is unfair in a country where all voters—left or right, in opposition or in power—pay a tax that finances the activity of TVSH.

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*“I think the media have created two countries, and the second Albania is outside the capital and it appears on the news only when there are car accidents, floods, or feuds,” said Baxhaku.*

Yzeiri, a former member of the Steering Council of RTSH, was also very critical. According to him, a sole person commands public radio and television: Berisha. Yzeiri also criticized the opposition’s passivity, as it has not demanded firmly that public television become depoliticized in order to become a truly public media and not a government one. “By capturing public television, the prime minister has destroyed and captured many institutions and seeks to manipulate a significant part of the public opinion in the rural parts of the country, which remain unreached by television and private media,” said Yzeiri.

Regarding the news agencies, the panelists said that in Albania there are no independent agencies that produce and sell news, just the Albanian News Agency (ATA), a legacy of communist times. This agency, similarly to public television, remains rather politicized in favor of the government, and none of the newspapers, not even the pro-government ones, buy its news bulletins. According to Tela, newspapers get their news mostly from certain agencies (such as NOA or DEA) that distribute their news for free. Baxhaku said, though, that these are not genuine news agencies, but rather news portals. At any rate, most media prefer well-known international agencies and media as information sources. Meanwhile, ATA continues to serve as a source of information and sells news to media abroad.

All panelists agreed that independent media, local and national, produce their own news programs—and that is directly related to the fact that there are no independent and genuine news agencies. It was also noted that news produced in the private media for the same event differs from news produced by the public media, to the degree that they seem to be produced in two different countries.

The link to politics and business is still visible in some media. Media ownership is formally more transparent after the establishment of the National Center of Registration of businesses, but problems linger. The truth is that in Albania, the person who owns a media outlet is no longer a mystery. The mystery, which needs to be revealed, lies in the roots of media ownership: who pays the media owners. “From issues of ownership, the need for transparency has been

transformed to issues of financing,” said Lani. Another panelist raised the problem that in Albania, newspapers are not yet required to publish their financial balances each year, which would better illustrate their sources of financing.

The law imposes terms on ownership of electronic media. Recently electronic media owners have taken steps to sidestep legal restrictions by using “puppets” who may legally own new media; however, these “puppets” are suspected to be under the control of existing media owners who are forbidden by law from owning other media outlets. There is strong suspicion that this is true in the cases of Ora, Telenorba, and ABC televisions.

According to Luarasi, the media situation regarding minorities has worsened, as some minority newspapers and radios have closed down. “Radio Prespa, broadcasting in Macedonian, has shut down; so have some newspapers in Greek, published in Gjirokastër and Sarandë, due to lack of funds from the Greek government,” said Luarasi. Other panelists agreed that the situation of minority media has become worrisome; Lani noted that Albania now lags behind neighboring countries in that respect, adding that “in Macedonia, the public television broadcasts in 10 languages, while the second channel of our television does not broadcast in any minority language, which is unacceptable for a democratic country.” According to Yzeiri, there is a kind of undue nationalism in this aspect, which ruins the country’s image. For the other panelists, the weakening of the situation of minority media is more a consequence of fewer financial sources, also due to the crisis. Some panelists expressed the opinion that government should find a way to support minority media financially and keep it alive.

Some panelists criticized the media’s tendency to focus their news production on events based in the capital—parliament, elections, and political charges—neglecting a wide array of social problems that, even though they are present in a large part of Albania, do not appear in the media. “I think the media have created two countries, and the second Albania is outside the capital and it appears on the news only when there are car accidents, floods, or feuds,” said Baxhaku. Even to Dervishi, over 99 percent of the cases are not about the people or problems that affect them, but about political leaders and institutions, be it at the local or central level. “The leaders of the country and the institutions are the center of the news, a psychology that is typical for news that originates from reporters in the districts. The reports are on acts by the mayor or some institution or association. Hence, the philosophy of information does not revolve around the people and their problems, but around the leader and institutions,” Dervishi concluded.

However, other panelists challenged this view. According to Kurti, television stations and newspapers post a significant number of correspondents in the districts. "Our news editions cover daily news from the districts," said Kurti. Even to Tela, the problem of what appears to be discrimination in coverage of some social problems in the districts is not a consequence of the neglect from capital media but is related to the absence of local newspapers or television stations that can address such issues of their district in detail—issues that might not be as interesting to broader audiences outside the district or region. "Meanwhile, there is news coverage from Tirana newsrooms for most Albanian cities and provinces, as on every television station we have daily reports on news editions from newsrooms in the districts. Every newspaper also has pages devoted to what happens in different districts in the country," said Tela. Vani said that in some cases, even though reporters of the area send news to Tirana, only the sensational stories are broadcast. "If a correspondent sends two news stories to a Tirana newsroom—one on crime or an accident and the other on social issues of great relevance to the area—in general the news on crime or an accident is broadcast," said Vani. Shkëlqim Bylykbashi, the owner of a television station in the city of Lushnja, confirmed that this phenomenon exists. "National media, mainly newspapers, have a lot of space for local events, while visual media usually have access to 'scoop' events, such as crimes and accidents, and usually do not address issues of social character reported by the districts," said Bylykbashi.

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### Albania Objective Score: 1.61

Objective 4 scores also decreased from last year's MSI. The panelists feel that these results cannot possibly just mirror the weakening of the financial situation of the media due to circumstances of the crisis, which are increasingly visible in Albania, too. As in previous years, media bodies remain far from acting as efficient businesses and continue to tolerate long-term losses, which are compensated by companies that function as genuine businesses and support the media. Perhaps only some of the largest media, based in Tirana, have managed to cover their expenses with the revenue they generate, but even then without significant profit.

Goga feels that the media bodies are far from efficient, professional, and profitable businesses. According to him, most media are supported by other businesses of the media's main shareholders, which display a strong tendency to use these media as a tool to promote and protect their interests. Even to Goga, only a small group of mainstream media

*"If there is any criticism on Albtelekom or mobile companies in any media, this is only because the media are aiming to obtain some financing," said one of the panelists.*

outlets, mainly in the capital, have managed to transform into profitable companies.

The panelists also cite the informality of the advertising sector as one of the reasons why most media remain inefficient businesses. The prices at this level are still not regulated on the basis of television audience sizes, at a time when the experience of other countries in the Balkans has shown that once audience size was clarified, television income increased by 40 percent.

The media's supportive businesses, such as advertising agencies and press distribution, have not managed to consolidate and establish a unique market. For the most part, media organizations take care of their own advertising—and their own distribution, in the case of newspapers.

The panelists feel that commercial newspapers and television stations have two main sources of revenues: the publisher or television owner, as well as revenue from advertising, subscription, and sales. Sources of financing for the media are not sufficiently diversified, and the great commercial sponsors, such as mobile-phone companies AMC, Vodaphone, Eagle Mobile, etc., continue to be very significant for

#### 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.

*“Some media owners have entered the media market, and in the public’s opinion they have been perceived as government supporters,” said Yzeiri.*

the survival of the media. Consequently, they are able to affect the media’s editorial policies; for example, having been the main source of advertising for the media in the country, they are not criticized in the media for charging very high mobile-telephone fees. “If there is any criticism on Albtelekom or mobile companies in any media, this is only because the media are aiming to obtain some financing,” said one of the panelists.

Excluding the television stations that run by subscription, which generates revenue, other television stations and newspapers depend on the classical sources of financing. According to Tela, out of about 24,000 copies his newspaper sells each day, only 400 are subscriptions. Now that the crisis has caused the advertising business to dwindle, the main financial resource for the media remains finances by the owner. Aiming to stress the great political influence in this sphere, Leskaj said, “Subscription of newspapers in the parliament changes each time the director of the parliament’s relations with different media change.”

All media organizations currently have business plans and finance offices that plan expenses and revenue for every program or publication. However, financing from media owners remains vital to the survival of television stations and newspapers because they have not succeeded in financing themselves through revenues from advertising, sales, or subscriptions. This is a financial dependency that is impossible to avoid in editorial policies. Also, according to panelist Vani, “Apart from advertising, there are few other sources of revenue that support media—and even advertising revenue does not match widely accepted standards.”

Meanwhile, to Yzeiri, the emergence in the past several years of new media owners in the market with a pro-government tendency has increased the risk that the government might capture independent media, using precisely these private owners as Trojan horses. “Some media owners have entered the media market, and in the public’s opinion they have been perceived as government supporters,” said Yzeiri. In fact, some dramatic changes took place in the ownership of some media last year. The most distinct case is that of a media group founded in the early years of transition and financed by an Italian media company. The group in question owned News 24 television, which is rather influential in

Tirana and Central Albania; a daily, *Gazeta Shqiptare*, one of the most prestigious in the country; and radio “RASH,” also very successful.

During this year, these media were bought from a financial group very close to the government. Only a few months after this transaction was carried out, the whole editorial posture of the television, newspaper, and media arena completely changed from favoring the opposition and criticizing the government to the opposite. The panelists presented this as proof that political preferences of the owners continue to be decisive, almost a veto, on the editorial policies of the media. In fact, licensing in the past few years by the NCRT of some stations, such as Ora News or ABC, have resulted in their favoring the government. Combined with the emergence of some pro-government newspapers, these changes have significantly shifted media balance in favor of the government.

The panelists noted that owners of these media have become rich, mainly through privileges obtained by the government in processes of tenders and privatizations of different public assets. This collection of riches leaves these media owners in debt to the government and thus willing to leave their media at the government’s disposal. “These businessmen, who during the period of the socialist government were construction contractors, have become in some cases bank owners and are aggressively entering the media market with a bias that in the near future will create problems for media freedom,” Yzeiri warned.

The panel noted that in the electronic media, advertising tends to exceed time limits imposed by the law. There are often forbidden forms of advertising, as in the case of the program *Zonë e Lirë* on Vizion Plus, where the host advertises products that are not included in the announced publicity slots. Çipa reported another abnormality in the advertising market. According to him, advertising agencies absorb the greatest part of advertising funds that companies and businesses plan. These agencies, being closer to those in power, then approach the media in a more selective way based on the political attitude, favoring media that are closer to those in power. “This phenomenon discriminates in a scandalous way against the opposition media,” said Çipa. Goga agreed with this observation and noted that almost 60 to 70 percent of the advertising market is managed by two or three advertising agencies, which have shares in the so-called distribution agencies. Goga also criticized the absence of transparency in this regard: “In western countries there are continuous reports regarding the clients and funds on advertising, while in Albania there is no publication or informative edition that specializes in the advertising industry,” said Goga.



There have been cases of subsidies for print media from the government and cases of government advertising placed in electronic media. In general, the policies on subsidies (the most typical of which is the subsidy for the price of paper) have been long-term and complete in their expansion, affecting all media of the same category. Meanwhile, there is a tendency for the government to grant its advertising to the media that support and carry out propaganda for government policies. According to Tela, the three newspapers closest to the government benefit from almost all government notifications for the press, while on television, a Ministry of Defense ad can be broadcast about 40 times on TV Klan and only once on Top Channel.

Market research is used only sporadically and is generally contested by “the losers.” The panelists admitted that all mainstream media continue to carry out market research on consumer behavior and audience preferences, but adopting a system that is accepted by all remains a problem. Hence, there is no common measure for media audiences. Vani admitted, “Market research is used very little for formulating strategic plans, improving advertising revenue, and adapting the media product to the audience’s requests and preferences.” However, Kurti gave a slightly different perspective on this matter. According to her, “There is a serious effort from the media to carry out market research and adapt their products to consumers’ taste; however, this market research is numerous, not specialized, and not accepted by all media.”

Media rankings remain sporadic as well. Every newspaper publishes its own circulation, and each television station reports its own audience. The panelists expressed the view that newspapers’ publication of daily circulation should be regulated by law, while services measuring electronic media audiences must be developed, as they are still in an experimental phase in Albania.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Albania Objective Score: 2.48

Objective 5 scored nearly the same as last year; panelists did not notice any visible change in this regard. Albanian media owners do not yet have a more professional and representative organization that lobbies on the interests of private media owners. Panelists could think of only one case when the ad hoc union of some large broadcasters provided an impetus for the war against piracy in electronic media. Hence, Albanian media owners continue to lack unity, even though there are no legal restrictions against establishing such associations.

*The main obstacle to consolidating a representative media institution seems to be a lack of solidarity in the media community, mainly traced to the severe political climate of conflict and the media’s affiliation with one camp or the other.*

The main obstacle to consolidating a representative media institution seems to be a lack of solidarity in the media community, mainly traced to the severe political climate of conflict and the media’s affiliation with one camp or the other. The panelists agree that the lack of trade associations is a hindrance to media sustainability, and Goga said that one of the services that such institutions must guarantee for their members must be the council of supervision and the standards of assessing media audiences by self-regulation. He said, “Such an organization would guarantee continuous audience measurement, securing objectivity, reliability, professionalism, and accuracy of these data. This would also enable the sustainable development of the media market, putting an end to the informality of advertising fees and the strengthening market positions of the most advanced actors.”

Regarding the professional associations of journalists, the panelists expressed the opinion that they are not representative and hence inefficient. It seems that the

## 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 (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.

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*Meanwhile, to Luarasi, “The fact that there are continuous training sessions and that there is desire to participate in these courses shows that training sessions are efficient.”*

Union of Albanian Journalists (UAJ) continues to make the difference here. According to Lani, “UAJ has constructed an agenda and has raised problems related to the freedom of the media and the protection of journalists’ rights against the different forms of pressure that have emerged.”

As noted last year, the Albanian Helsinki Committee continues to be among the most active of the NGOs that support media freedom. It reacts with public statements every time journalists are harmed. Meanwhile, for Ibrahim, it is certain NGOs, rather than the media themselves, that are seriously committed to drafting basic laws for the press and for defamation, contributing to the gradual establishment of conditions that will allow Albania’s media to function smoothly. There are also some NGOs that sporadically monitor media ethics violations, but this is sporadic, upon donors’ requests. For example, the Albanian Media Institute and UAJ have monitored and covered media violations. UAJ also approved a memorandum to honor the ethical standards of media, signed by all newspaper editors-in-chief.

As previous MSIs have noted, although journalism departments at Albanian universities have steadily increased, the quality of training at these institutions is relatively low, and the lack of practical training students receive is especially problematic. The panelists again praised the efforts of the Albanian Media Institute (AMI) in this respect, as it offers specialized training with the support of international donors and has helped journalists to develop new practical and technical skills. AMI programs are weekly or, at most, monthly programs, dealing with reporting techniques, digital editing, CAR, Internet journalism, investigative journalism, etc. Thanks to AMI, the panelists agreed that high-quality programs to train journalists now exist.

According to Lani, AMI has focused over the past year on providing practical knowledge to journalists. “Last year, we focused on what is called online journalism and on new technologies,” said Lani. Other panelists expressed the thought that AMI represents one of the best practices. “There is continuity, and a standard has been established in Albania, familiar to all—to media and to journalism students—who are at the Media Institute each time there is a training,” said Yzeiri. Meanwhile, to Luarasi, “The fact that there are continuous training sessions and that there is desire to participate in these courses shows that training sessions are efficient.”

Regarding the sources of media equipment, printing houses, and their premises, the panelists agreed that they are not politicized and that their activity is guided by their business interests and not by any political trend or interest. They generally feel the same about the channels of media distribution, broadcasters, cable, or Internet service providers. In spite of political affiliations that the owners of the companies that provide these services might have, there has been no tendency so far to (negatively or positively) discriminate against media clients as a consequence of politicization.

The panelists held opposing views, though, regarding the press distribution network. In general, the panelists recognized the classical absence of newspapers in the rural areas. Meanwhile, some panelists thought the network of kiosks for selling the newspapers is monopolized, and some others thought the opposite. However, they all agreed that in spite of this, there are still no phenomena of delaying or obstructing distribution of a newspaper for political reasons.

For all participants, the infrastructure of information technology has developed in the past year, and even though it is not at maximum levels, it meets the media’s needs sufficiently. However, it was also emphasized that there is a huge difference in this regard between urban areas and rural ones, which continue to lag behind significantly.

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## List of Panel Participants

**Lutfi Dervishi**, media 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

**Fatos Baxhaku**, freelance journalist, Tirana

**Genti Ibrahim**, lawyer, Institute for Legal Studies, Tirana

**Shkelqim Bylykbashi**, owner, TV Lushnja, Lushnja

**Aleksandër Çipa**, president, Union of Albanian Journalists;  
editor-in-chief, *Shqip*, Tirana

**Thanas Goga**, marketing analyst, A&R Advertising, Tirana

**Ilir Yzeiri**, professor of journalism, University of Elbasan,  
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**Valbona Kurti**, journalist, Vizion+ TV, Tirana

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

**Valentina Leskaj**, chair, Media Commission of the Albanian  
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## Moderator and Author

**Andrea Stefani**, media consultant, Tirana

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*The panel discussion was convened on November 22, 2011.*