

ALBANIA



Vibrant Information Barometer

2 0 2 1



Highly Vibrant

Somewhat Vibrant

Slightly Vibrant

Not Vibrant

OVERALL SCORE
22

Albania’s main challenge in 2020 was addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, naturally leaving aside other political topics and debates. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government passed a state-of-emergency act that, among other restrictions, banned public gatherings.

In March 2020, the Council of the European Union opened accession negotiations with Albania. Nevertheless, it introduced further conditionality by requiring additional institutional reforms, specifically judicial reform and ensuring the Constitutional Court is functioning, before Albania would be granted its first Inter-Governmental Conference, a key step in continuing the accession process. After numerous attempts and debates, the Constitutional Court became functional again at the end of 2020.

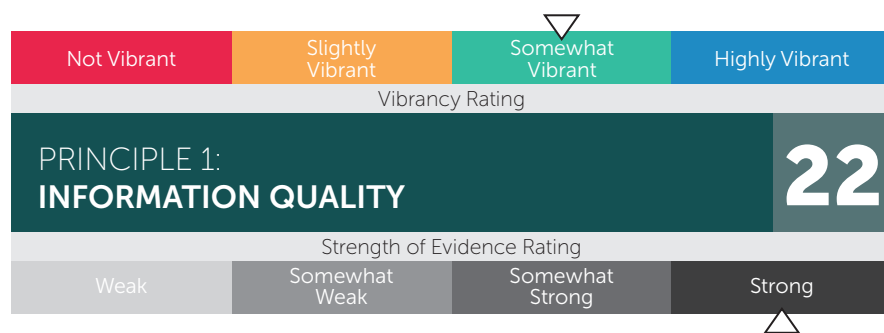
Following the establishment of the “Political Council,” a cross-party platform for negotiations, the political parties ended the political stalemate on June 5, 2020, striking a deal for electoral reform. This agreement paved the road for the opposition to return to the electoral process. However, after achieving this agreement, the ruling majority approved some constitutional changes that affected the electoral system--including but not limited to gradual electronic identification of voters, and appointment of a deputy commissioner for elections--drawing strong criticism from the opposition.

In May 2020, the government demolished the National Theatre building in Tirana, an act that amassed a strong resistance from part of the community of artists, civil society, the opposition, and Tirana citizens. The demolition in the midst of a pandemic led to strong protests and was widely criticized abroad. In December, several hundred protesters clashed with police for several days after a police officer killed an unarmed civilian who had violated a COVID-19–related curfew.

On September 6, 2020, President Ilir Meta called parliamentary elections for April 25, 2021. Despite the pandemic, the imminent elections polarized the political situation even more, which was reflected in an extreme polarization and militant partisanship in most media outlets.

While Albania’s media landscape enjoys a satisfactory infrastructure, fact-checking and verifying information, along with the quality of information, are not at the same level, leading to the spread of misinformation--especially in online media. The economic effects of the pandemic shrank the advertising market even more, leaving media outlets even more vulnerable to economic pressure and undermining the quality and independence of their reporting. While Albania’s legislation generally guarantees the right to freedom of expression and freedom of media, in practice journalists are vulnerable and often resort to self-censorship.

There are multiple sources of information available, but problems with the quality and independence of information persists, while concentration of the media market has also further intensified. The level of media literacy skills among the population was assessed to be rather low, and direct engagement and responsiveness with their audiences was not ranked among the main priorities for Albanian media outlets. Although multiple channels of information exist in terms of access and technology, the information provided is rarely qualitative or independent. Professional and independent reporting lays mainly with media established by civil society organizations, which are not under political or economic influence, while the government’s failure to use quality information in decision-making was another criticism voiced by the panel.



Although the infrastructure in place for producing quality information is satisfactory, the quality of information conveyed to the public is not necessarily high. Fact-checking and verification of sources is inadequate, and articles are often densely laced with politicians' statements presented without any further probing. Online media are especially problematic, given their tendency to run stories immediately without verifying their accuracy. In this context, and without any repercussions for the people driving the problem, misinformation flows freely. In general, journalists do not voluntarily engage in spreading disinformation or hate speech but sometimes fall prey due to professional neglect or external pressure. The panelists gave their highest scores to the indicator on inclusiveness and diversity of content, pointing to attempts to cover different groups and describing how new technology has also enabled vulnerable groups to establish their own media. On the other hand, the panelists gave their lowest scores to the indicator on the sufficiency of resources for content production. The pandemic shrank the advertising market even more, leaving media outlets more vulnerable to economic pressure and undermining the quality and independence of their reporting.

The panelists shared a generally unified opinion Indicator 1 (quality information on a variety of topics is available). They agreed that the infrastructure in place for producing news and information is very sound. In addition, there are a variety of institutions and organizations offering training for journalists and other content producers, although opportunities tend to be rather concentrated in the capital, Tirana, and might not extend to all parts of the country. At the same time, the

panelists heavily criticized the quality of information produced, and especially the decline of editorial independence in the news conveyed to the public. In general, the panelists agreed that editorial independence has weakened steadily in the past years. "The problem is in the treatment of news, as most of the media do not produce real content, do not verify sources, do not check the facts, and appear content to merely report statements of institutions and government officials," said Ornela Liperi, director of *Monitor*. One of the panelists also noted a growing phenomenon: rather than journalists reporting from the field, officials report on the events themselves, turning media into a mere conveyor belt. Furthermore, with the advent of the pandemic, another panelist noted that conspiracy theorists—previously just a peripheral presence in the media—now get airtime on prime-time television to spread disinformation.

The problem seems to be more acute with online media. As Anila Basha, founder of an online media outlet, said, "Online journalists are more prone to quick publication of news, and often rely on social networks or reports from citizens, while the importance of field reporters and verification of information has lost priority—weakening the quality of information." Furthermore, another panelist added, those journalists who behave unethically and unprofessionally are never punished.

The panelists were highly critical of the media's performance on the indicator that examines misinformation, noting that most media fail to offer independent and fact-based reporting. Apart from one fact-checking organization, there are no other websites or organizations that focus on accuracy of information.

Information Quality Indicators

- There is quality information on a variety of topics available.
- The norm for information is that it is based on facts. Misinformation is minimal.
- The norm for information is that it is not intended to harm. Mal-information and hate speech are minimal.
- The body of content overall is inclusive and diverse.
- Content production is sufficiently resourced.

One panelist mentioned the existence of donor-funded media that deliver qualitative investigative reporting, but it is unclear whether they will be sustainable if the support is cut.

Journalists noted that recent events, such as the deadly 2019 earthquake and the pandemic, fueled the spread of inaccurate information in the media. “Here we have a very dramatic and serious situation, dealing with an ecosystem flooded by disinformation, whether it is intentional or not. I believe we have reached a situation where the axiom of journalism—that the facts are sacred, whereas opinions are free—has flipped in Albania,” said Remzi Lani, director of the Albanian Media Institute. Other panelists also confirmed that misinformation and disinformation has become a norm in the country, and there are no professional consequences even when there are cases of inaccurate reporting from journalists.

Journalists do not deliberately aim to disinform or engage in hate speech, some panelists maintained, although the panel recognized cases of professional neglect or journalists bowing to pressure. However, one panelist noted that a few media outlets attempt to use information to blackmail certain businesses and face no professional consequences.

The panelists hesitated to assess the extent of the spreading of information and propaganda by foreign governments in Albanian media. Journalists on the panel admitted that their e-mail addresses are constantly filled with propaganda from several countries, though only a few of the messages eventually appear in the media. Compared with other countries, the influence of other states in Albanian media is much lower, they said. Although proxy news portals engage in the propaganda of countries such as Turkey, Iran, and China, a flagrant, coordinated effort in this regard is not highly visible.

The panelists differed on whether the content produced is sufficiently

inclusive and diverse. Some panelists noted that online media provide more opportunities for marginalized groups and specific minorities to launch their own media. “Now we also have some media for disabled people, and media in different languages for linguistic minorities,” said Aleksander Cipa, chair of the Union of Albanian journalists.

However, some panelists also noted a need for improvements related to representation. One noted that most media focus heavily on politics and rarely try to be more inclusive of different groups, while another emphasized the tendency to focus on celebrities rather than different vulnerable groups of the society. The panelists also disagreed somewhat on the representation of gender issues and on the presence of women in the newsroom. Although they emphasized that gender is not an issue in newsrooms and most journalists are, in fact, female, some panelists noted pointedly that few women hold leadership positions.

The advertising market in Albania remains relatively small to sustain the large number of media outlets present. According to data collected

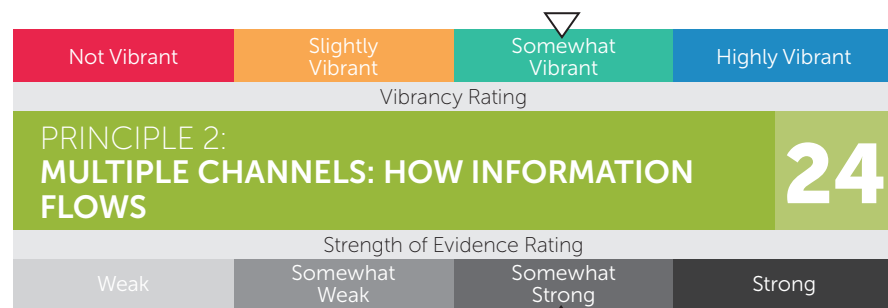
by *Monitor*, the market is estimated to be at about €35 million (\$42.8 million), with more than half going to the three national television stations. Liperi described a paradox in the market developments: “The pandemic drastically reduced marketing budgets of companies; at the same time, new online media pop up frequently, and also news television channels have started broadcasting, which would not make much sense.” The panelists agreed that advertising revenue for print media has

been reduced almost to zero, shifting mostly to online media and social networks. However, one panelist noted the need to also consider the investments that the main television stations have made in their online and social media teams. These investments constitute another source of income for these stations, though they are still quite low, considering the substantial budgets necessary for the operation of television stations. At the same time, the panelists noted the tendency for increased spending on social media over traditional media, especially from politicians on the

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eve of electoral campaigns, given the attraction of the lower costs and the direct and targeted marketing opportunities.

The panelists expressed doubts on whether state advertising is still distributed to media outlets. While most recognize a significant reduction in public spending on advertising, they pointed out the phenomenon of state institutions and media partnering on specific projects. “Even though there is no longer state advertising, there are new methods in this respect, such as partnerships between state institutions and media; these are selective and spend public money, both in the central and local governments,” said Cipa. While the panelists had contrasting perspectives on whether these initiatives could be enough to distort the market, they agreed that the procedures of allocating the money are selective and not transparent.



The situation regarding the right to create, share, and consume information is complex. On one hand, the legislation generally guarantees these rights, but in practice, journalists in the field are vulnerable and often resort to self-censorship due to the dynamics within the Albanian media scene. The panelist gave the highest scores to the indicator gauging the accessibility of multiple sources of information, judging that there are numerous resources and that people are able and free to access and use these sources of information. Although the infrastructure for channels of government information is satisfactory, the implementation of the law on public information has worsened, and information provided by the government tends to be one-sided. Albania’s media landscape features an abundance of outlets, but they

tend to be heavily concentrated in certain sectors, especially television. The panelists gave their lowest scores and sharpest criticism to the independence of information channels. Faced with persistent pressure from politicians, companies, and media owners, editorial independence is extremely rare in traditional media, most often limited to donor-funded media better equipped to resist such influences.

Multiple Channels Indicators

- People have rights to create, share, and consume information.
- People have adequate access to channels of information.
- There are appropriate channels for government information.
- There are diverse channels for information flow.
- Information channels are independent.

Overall, the existing legislation guarantees freedom of expression and media freedom. The panelists called the parliament’s decision to pass regulation considered restrictive for online media at the end of 2019—against the opinion of the media community—a step backward, although, for now, the law is still under review. Even though journalists were not arrested or physically assaulted, they reported heightened levels of intimidation. Cipa noted that lawsuits against journalists at

the Court of Tirana multiplied steadily in 2020—a point that Aleksandra Bogdani, an investigative reporter for BIRN Albania, confirmed. “There is a series of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), against me and other journalists, from powerful individuals and companies engaged in public contracts with the state, who do not tolerate any probing or reporting from the media in this regard,” she said. Overall, the panelists agreed that political pressure exists, but they feel it is exerted through the owners, rather than applied directly to journalists. One panelist also mentioned cases of government officials being displeased by unfavorable reporting, depriving journalists of official information.

The panelists concluded that the situation is rather complex, ranging from a generally positive legal framework to the *de facto* vulnerability of journalists in the field. “There is no open censorship, but rather self-

censorship. There is also considerable pressure from media owners, politicians, and businesses, amounting to a serious trend that has worsened recently. At the same time, though the laws are considered good, the court's interpretations are not always favorable to the journalists, leaving us in a gray area, but the tendency seems to grow darker," said Lani.

With literally hundreds of television and radio stations and newspapers, and a boom in online media, Albanians have access to plentiful news sources. 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 rising, along with people's use of social media—especially Facebook. The number of subscribers to Internet broadband connections has increased steadily in recent years. Overall, the panelists agreed that information sources are numerous and highly accessible.

People with hearing impairment also have more options now. "Public television and three other television stations have started broadcasting news for this group of people, which marks an improvement in the access offered in this respect," said Cipa.

The panelists considered the situation regarding government information channels rather complex. Albania has a strong public information law; however, the panelists agreed that the law's implementation has steadily worsened in the past few years. "We notice that in the period 2014–2021, the implementation of the law weakened, whereas there is a stronger tendency to control the information," said Lutfi Dervishi, a journalist with Albania's public broadcaster. The panelists agreed that rather than failing to reply altogether, official institutions tend to provide general information—which is typically not very valuable for specific reporting initiatives. "It is a very rare event to

receive the information you demand. Since the institutions have not faced any particular punishment from the respective commissioner, they do not feel the pressure to provide the information, often giving ridiculous excuses," said Bogdani.

The panelists had no positive feedback related to the role of spokespeople on the channels of information, either. They agreed that the main role of spokespeople is not providing information for the media and the public, but rather promoting public relations for the institutions they represent. "Spokespeople just convey propaganda and make sure the media receive and distribute it. During the pandemic, especially,

in some cases there has been a total blackout of information from particular spokespeople," Bogdani added.

In general, media can be established freely in Albania. Most of the licenses for audiovisual media had already been allocated, according to the panelists; hence, the transparency or fairness of the process is no longer a heavily contended issue. Efforts to prevent ownership concentration regressed notably after a 2016 amendment removed ownership

limitations for national licenses of audiovisual media. As a result, the panelists underscored the increasingly strong monopolistic tendency of some media players in the market. "The regulation on media ownership concentration has been lethally wounded by the decision of the Constitutional Court, leading to a *de facto* concentration of the television market in the hands of a small group of families," Dervishi explained. Regarding the transparency of ownership, the public can consult an open database of business companies to determine media ownership, but the transparency of online media remains problematic. At the same time, the transparency of funding for media outlets is even more problematic.

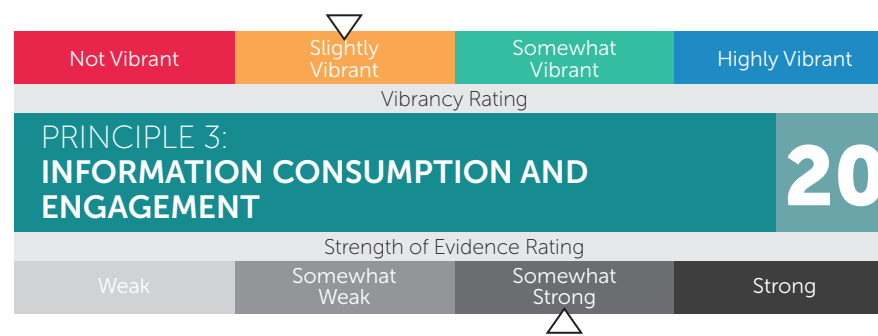
The panelists shared a more positive opinion on the current situation of the public service broadcaster, highlighting improvement in the offerings of educational and entertaining programs, and more important, a

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stronger commitment to neutrality in its news programs. In addition, there were no signs of any discrimination in the services of Internet providers.

Media are largely and significantly affected by the interests of owners and by their financial sources, mainly advertising. Economic interests heavily impact editorial independence, and the panelists emphasized that a real division between the newsroom and marketing department is missing. Editorial independence slipped even further out of reach during the pandemic. “Given the marked absence of advertising, media sought alliances with big business, such as pharmaceutical companies. Even though in Albania there are numerous complaints on the quality of medications in the market or the level of reimbursement, you never read about these in the media, because they are our advertisers, and you cannot publish bad press about them,” said Basha. Overall, the panelists agreed that the lack of advertising revenue and the small media market leaves media wide open to the influence of their owners, compromising their editorial independence.

On the other hand, the public media’s financing is guaranteed by law. “However, financing of the public media should not be confused with the license fee, which is paid by Albanian households. While the funds have gone mainly toward investing in technology and broadcasting, the funds for the production of programs are far from adequate,” said Dervishi. The public broadcaster does not seem to show preferential access to certain information or government sources. Regulatory authorities are elected through the parliament. Thus, their election, to some degree, is politically influenced. However, since most licenses have been awarded, there is no current debate or controversy on this process at the moment.



The population is generally not highly prepared to assess the quality and truthfulness of information and media consumption. The panelists heavily criticized the population’s media literacy skills, giving their lowest scores to the related indicator and flagging it as both an urgent need and a challenge for the moment. Additionally, while there are laws and regulations in place regarding privacy protection and security tools, only a small subset of the population seems to be well versed in their protections. Although media consumption is relatively high, and interactive formats in traditional media, online media, and especially social networks are available and used, they also tend to reinforce the existing communication bubbles. On the other hand, Albanian media’s main priorities do not include responsiveness to audience needs and efforts to build relationships rooted in trust with the public. Although community media remain underdeveloped, the panelists gave this indicator their highest scores for this section, mainly due to the opportunities these media represent for marginalized and vulnerable groups and minority groups in general.

Albanian legislation does protect digital security and data privacy, through several laws and safeguarding institutions. Media companies also take steps to protect themselves from digital attacks and other similar interventions, through the services offered by specialized companies. However, citizens’ awareness on these risks and the measures they can take for protection seems rather low. Basha cited a recent case involving many reports of citizens claiming their phone data had been hacked through WhatsApp, indicating the population’s lack of savvy in this respect. “We have laws that seem to reflect high standards,

but no one seems to have educated the public, which remains largely unaware in this regard—and I must say that even we, as organizations, have not started to take these matters seriously yet,” said Lani.

Media and information literacy fall outside the scope of government policies. The educational curricula also fail to cover these concepts specifically, although certain subjects, such as civics, Albanian language and literature, and ICT, address some related elements. Most of the trainings and other initiatives in this field originated from civil society, including the Albanian Media Institute, which is currently working with educational institutions to draft pre-university curricula, expected to be piloted in some schools next year. “This has not been part of the ministry’s priorities, but they welcomed the idea and have shown goodwill to test this initiative,” Lani commented. However, the panelists agreed that the outlook for improving the population’s media literacy skills looks poor, and there are no data on current use of fact-checking or investigative websites, or on overall knowledge and appreciation of professional reporting traits. “Media literacy remains one of the most formidable challenges for the country’s future. People do not seem capable of differentiating between what they read on Facebook and what they read from a professional team of journalists,” said Dervishi. Open Society Institute Sofia’s 2021 Media and Information Literacy Index ranked Albania’s preparedness in this field 33 among 35 states in Europe, indicating the citizens’ poor awareness of the concepts and skills of media literacy.

There are no data on the actual use of the right to information by journalists or by the population in general. The right to free expression is generally exercised by the population in media or other public forums. Many television and radio programs provide opportunities for the public to interact with their platforms by phone or through their social media profiles. The regulation on public consultation requires public sessions with stakeholders before certain laws can be approved, but some panelists said these are only a formality and do not always lead to

meaningful reflection on the draft regulation.

The panelists were especially critical of the quality and level of exchange and debate on online media and social networks. “People view digital space, unfortunately, as a platform for venting, be it in online media, social networks, or even more professional media,” Dervishi said. Another panelist noted that complaints by citizens to institutions such as the People’s Advocate and the Commissioner for Data Protection have multiplied. However, in most cases these complaints deal with personal offenses or data protection and are not particularly focused on addressing hate speech.

“Interaction of the media with the audiences is only in the function of monetization, not focused on gaining their trust, and this harms the quality of the programs offered,” said Dervishi.

Major television media companies do measure television ratings, but the data’s reliability are disputed. Furthermore, the industry players do not share the information with one another or discuss ways to improve audience measurement. The panelists also questioned the commitment of media companies to ethics. “We have ranked these indicators, having in mind a certain moral and ethical standard that media should respect. However, media do not necessarily focus on reliability of their content, but on audience numbers. Unfortunately, trust is not a priority for our media, apart from NGO media,” said Cipa. Other panelists also agreed that there is a tendency to produce programs that are far from educational and focused on being the most viewed, often resorting

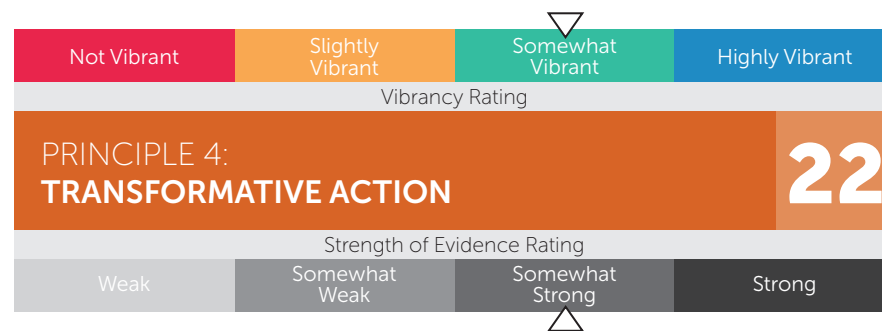
Information Consumption and Engagement Indicators

- People can safely use the internet due to privacy protections and security tools.
- People have the necessary skills and tools to be media literate.
- People engage productively with the information that is available to them.
- Media and information producers engage with their audience’s needs.
- Community media provides information relevant for community engagement.

to unethical or scandalous behavior. “Interaction of the media with the audiences is only in the function of monetization, not focused on gaining their trust, and this harms the quality of the programs offered,” said Dervishi.

Another trend the panelists noticed is the absence of special departments or sections within the media that deal with audience engagement. “Unlike trustworthy media, like BBC or CNN, which have audience engagement departments, such standards do not exist in our media. Programs for youth and children are neglected, which tells us that the main aim is to grab as many views as possible,” said Valbona Sulce, a civil society activist.

The development of community media appears to be slow in the country. However, a few panelists said that community media do exist and have demonstrated diversification and development in recent years. The audiovisual media law allows communities to apply for audio licenses. “So far, four audio licenses for community radio stations have been awarded to the four main religious communities in the country,” said Arben Muka, director of programming at the audiovisual media regulator. Other panelists also pointed out that other communities or minorities have their own online media, with LGBTQ activists especially active in this regard. “There are also community media for people with hearing impairment, online and audio, as well as specific media for the health community, for specific regions, or for Albanian emigrants,” said Cipa. However, there is little information on the way these media operate and on how successfully they cater to the needs of their communities.



Although multiple channels of information exist in terms of access and technology, the information provided is rarely qualitative or independent. Qualitative reports are not easily found, and media reports are often influenced by political propaganda. Civil society organizations generally engage in providing qualitative and trustworthy information, but their influence may be limited. There are media that engage in professional and investigative reporting; however, the response of the authorities to reports is selective, and the information published does not necessarily affect the voting process or prevent corruption. The panelists gave their lowest scores to the indicator measuring the government’s use of quality information in decision-making; their highest scores went to the indicator assessing the news producers and channels of dissemination that enable the distribution of information through ideological lines.

The environment of information production and the situation with dissemination channels is quite vibrant. Technological developments have enabled a broad variety of channels that make information available. Social networks, especially Facebook, are very popular in Albania, with more than 1.6 million accounts, or almost 60 percent of the population. This, along with the public’s opportunities to provide feedback on some radio and television programs, and in most online media, provide several streams of interaction between the public and the media.

When it comes to the quality and independence of sources of information available, the panelists agreed that there is a broad range of

sources, although only a few can be considered independent. “We have a polarized and politicized media environment, very vibrant and also cacophonous,” said Lani. Iris Luarasi, lecturer at the University of Tirana, said that media are generally divided according to political lines, which means that often the public must access different sources of information to determine the truth. At the same time, the panelists noted that the social networks, while allowing for a greater exchange of opinions, also tend to reinforce existing bubbles or echo chambers, where people tend to follow media that reinforce their existing beliefs and preferences, rather than being open-minded to exchanges of opinions.

The panel had very little confidence that individuals use quality information to inform their actions. Quality information is scarce in most media outlets, making it difficult for citizens to make use of such information to inform their actions.

The panelists said that most of the information is, in fact, derived or shaped from propaganda, with only a small amount reflecting fact-based reporting by journalists, or by citizen journalists. “The fact that 46 percent of Albanians do not believe in vaccines and 60 percent prefer to believe in conspiracies means that they do not base their beliefs on accurate information, and that the public often tends to believe disinformation without any major doubts,” said Lani. The panelists agreed that this is a situation that is also largely influenced by the low level of media literacy education in the country.

The panelists were divided on the role of civil society organizations in Albanian society. The large number of NGOs registered in the country does not always match the work done in the field, as many groups are inactive or get involved only in specific cases. However, most panelists highlighted the existence of a group of organizations that are now almost 30 years old, indicating that they tend to do serious, valuable work and are influential in the country. In addition, the panelists agreed that when it comes to serious civil society organizations, they do contribute significantly in terms of research, expertise, and advocacy, and they steer away from disinformation. “Many influential organizations are not in any way a source of disinformation, although some of them might

“We have a polarized and politicized media environment, very vibrant and also cacophonous,” said Lani.

have a particular bias. The fact that they are funded by donors makes them very careful not to engage in any disinformation,” said Lani. One of the panelists also highlighted the fact that there are several NGOs that have their own media and have been influential in informing the public in a qualitative and independent manner, like BIRN Albania, Faktoje.al, Citizens Channel, and the Albanian Center for Quality Journalism. “It may seem a paradox that civil society has established its own media; although it does not constitute a business model, it has produced very positive results, bringing the public quality journalism,” said Dervishi.

The contributions of civil society organizations in terms of information, activities, monitoring, and advocacy initiatives are constantly shared with the public, thanks also to the high use of social networks in this respect. However, the panelists agreed that more needs

to be done to increase their cooperation with the media. “I know of organizations that do a very good job and offer social services but find it difficult to gain media attention, as there is a prejudice that NGOs are only there to receive funds and do not do anything else,” said Luarasi.

Even though there are mechanisms for the government to interact with civil society and the media--such as press conferences, press meetings, communication on the media space or on social networks--the panelists were highly critical of the idea that any of these efforts are done in the public’s interest. “Government institutions tend to provide information and issue press statements very often, but the problem is the fact that the information they publish is often one-sided and is not aimed at informing, but rather manipulating the public for electoral purposes,” said Liperi. Government officials have their own media channels through which they communicate with the media and the public further, which further supports this point. “Government has become a medium on its own, and in this respect it dictates the agenda of the rest of the media,” said Dervishi.

In general, the panelists considered political parties and government officials to be the biggest source of disinformation in the country.

Transformative Action Indicators

- Information producers and distribution channels enable or encourage information sharing across ideological lines.
- Individuals use quality information to inform their actions.
- Civil society uses quality information to improve communities.
- Government uses quality information to make public policy decisions.
- Information supports good governance and democratic rights.

Furthermore, they agreed that with few exceptions, serious media investigations often face a wall of silence and indifference from the government. Even though, in some cases, reports from investigative programs spurred a reaction from the government, the norm is usually to ignore these concerns. According to the panel, government actors rarely base their decision-making on credible media reports, and there have been only a few limited cases when the government has had to react, such as the case when a tender on building the capital's new highway was won by a fictitious company. Furthermore, rather than proactively using media reports and other credible

data and information to inform policies, the government usually reacts to potential reports and incidents that emerge.

In general, the level of reaction and responsiveness of the government to reporting that exposes corruption is low. The panelists mentioned recent examples of corruption among hospital staff for COVID patients to which the authorities reacted, leading to prosecution. However, it did not escape notice that this reinforced the impression that the authorities were more comfortable reacting given the low positions of the staff, which is not the case for more important officials. "The reaction of relevant institutions is stronger in cases of individual threats, but not in high-stakes corruption cases," said Liperi. In these cases, the panelists agreed that official institutions tend to ignore the media reports, or even try to attack their credibility or ridicule them.

The panelists indicated that there is no evidence that quality information can affect election results or reduce or prevent corruption. "Experience so far has shown that the result of elections is not affected by quality information, but by the vote of the electorate that is polarized by political rhetoric," pointed out Emirjon Senja, editor-in-chief of online section of ABC News Albania. The long stagnation of Albanian society, where rhetoric is fierce, with mutual exchanges of charges on wrongdoing from multiple actors, has lowered the public's sensitivity to media reports on corruption. "In Albania, there is the banalization of corruption, where everyone has accused everyone for 30 years now; everyone is corrupted, and no one is corrupted. In this context, the public is less sensible, and sometimes disinformation has proved to be more attractive for the public," said Lani.

LIST OF PANEL PARTICIPANTS

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Remzi Lani, director, Albanian Media Institute, Tirana

Aleksander Cipa, chair, Union of Albanian Journalists, Tirana

Aleksandra Bogdani, investigative reporter, BIRN Albania

Lutfi Dervishi, journalist, Radio Televizioni Shqiptar, Tirana

Valbona Sulce, civil society activist, Tirana

Arben Muka, director of Programming Department, Audiovisual Media Authority, Tirana

Iris Luarasi, lecturer, University of Tirana

Emirjon Senja, editor-in-chief of online section, ABC News Albania, Tirana

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