
The panelists concluded that Kosovo media outlets are not doing enough to guarantee security for their journalists.



KOSOVO

The overall 2016 MSI score shows that Kosovo may be characterized as a near-sustainable media environment. Certain issues nonetheless delay further progress, including the violation of journalism ethical standards in the new online media. The rapid growth of online news portals in recent years is no longer seen as a positive indicator contributing to the plurality of media. Within a loose legal infrastructure having no registration requirement and low ownership transparency, such news portals have emerged with the intent to denigrate targeted political figures, individuals, or even fellow media organizations. Public naming, public shaming, single-source reporting, defamatory language, and breach of copyrights have become the new standard among certain online portals.

Another setback in the Kosovar media sector was the failure to meet certain milestones, with at least two major deadlines missed in 2015. The first concerns efforts to identify a sustainable financing source for public media. As stipulated in the law on Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK), the three-year transitory financial period from the state budget ended in early 2015. Unable to find an alternative financing solution, the government continued to finance RTK. For media experts, this further jeopardizes both the institutional and editorial independence of the public media. RTK's top management and top news editors were accused, by their own staff, of misusing the budget and censoring stories that were critical of key political figures. Despite this, both the head of the board and the general director of RTK were reappointed for another term. The other failure was attributed to the Independent Media Commission, which despite managing to adopt the new strategy and law on digital broadcasting, was unable to meet the deadline for transitioning to a digital broadcasting system by June 2015.

A hindering factor to the overall political and economic developments in Kosovo this year was the instability of public institutions. The new government coalition faced enormous pressure from the opposition parties to withdraw from certain commitments related to the Kosovo-Serbia agreements, which aimed to normalize relations. The demands from the opposition coalition to reconsider the agreement on the border demarcation with Montenegro and to cancel the agreement with Serbia for creating the Association of Serb Communities, led to street protests and tear gas being released by opposition members of parliament (MPs) during a session in Parliament chambers.

Several protests were organized during 2015, most of them triggering great attention from local and international media. In clashes between the police and demonstrators, some journalists were caught in the middle and sometimes suffered injuries at the hands of the police. The panelists concluded that Kosovo media outlets are not doing enough to guarantee security for their journalists. Therefore, they suggest that media organizations invest more in organizing special trainings and provide unique identification for journalists while covering unrest and demonstrations.

KOSOVO at a glance

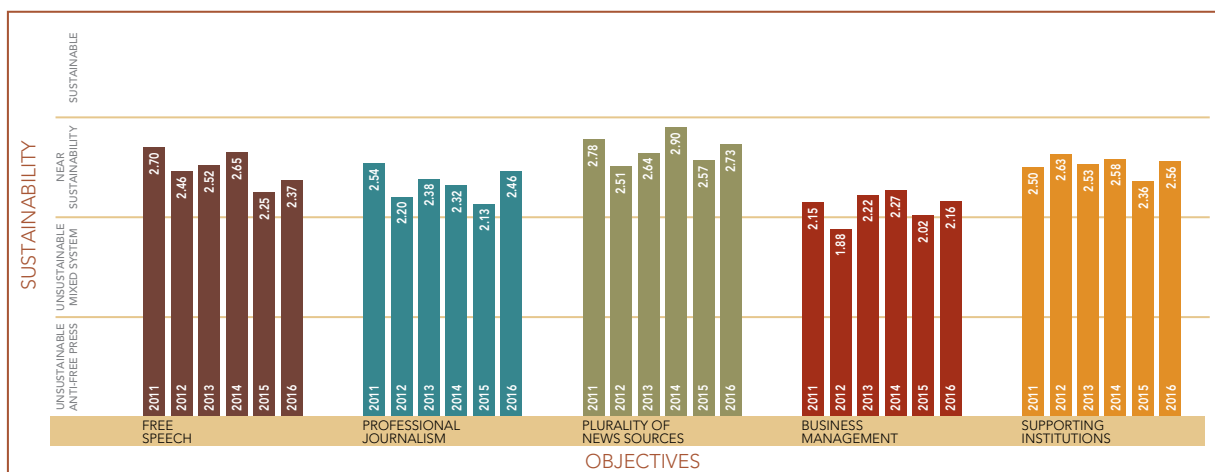
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 1,870,981 (July 2015 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Pristina
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Albanians 92.9%, Bosniak 1.6%, Serbs 1.5%, Turk 1.1%, Ashkali 0.9%, Egyptian 0.7%, Gorani 0.6%, Roma 0.5%, Other 0.2% (2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions:** Muslim 95.6%, Orthodox 1.5%, Roman Catholic 2.2%, Other 0.07%, None 0.07%, Unspecified 0.6% (2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** Albanian 94.5%, Bosnian 1.7%, Serbian 1.6%, Turkish 1.1%, Other 0.9% (includes Romani), Unspecified 0.1% (2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2014-Atlas):** \$7.275 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2016)
- > **GNI per capita (2014-Atlas):** \$9,300 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2016)
- > **Literacy rate:** 91.9%; male 96.6%, female 87.5% (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Atifete Jahjaga (since April 7, 2011)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

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

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: KOSOVO



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2016: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES



CHANGE SINCE 2015

▲ (increase greater than .10) □ (little or no change) ▼ (decrease greater than .10)

Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1): Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2): Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3): Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4): Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

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

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Kosovo Objective Score: 2.37

There was a slight increase from last year for Objective 1, which shows that Kosovo continues to support an environment where the legal and social protection of free speech exists, although it is not always enforced to the highest level. It also shows that the registration and licensing of media protects the public interest, to a certain degree, and is competitive and apolitical; it also shows that there are no extra requirements for media organizations to register as a business, compared with other industries. Further, there are no legal restrictions for access to and use of local and international news and news sources. Also, there are no restrictions whatsoever from the Kosovar government for entry into the journalism profession. However, no progress has been made with regard to the wellbeing of journalists, as threats against them remain wide and present; though, besides threats, no known serious crimes have been carried out against journalists this year. Lastly, according to the panelists, the financing of public media remains a top concern, which, again, directly affects the institutional and editorial independence of Kosovar media.

Kosovo is in good standing with regards to the legal protection of free speech. Both freedom of expression and freedom of media are guaranteed by the constitution

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.

of Kosovo; Article 40 states, "Freedom of expression is guaranteed. Freedom of expression includes the right to express oneself, to disseminate and receive information, opinions, and other messages without impediment." Meanwhile, Article 42 specifically addresses freedom of media, holding that "freedom and pluralism of media is guaranteed [...] Censorship is forbidden. No one shall prevent the dissemination of information or ideas through media, except if it is necessary to prevent encouragement or provocation of violence and hostility on grounds of race, nationality, ethnicity, or religion." Moreover, the constitution endorses all the international standards set by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

However, the current legislative framework does not necessarily guarantee its implementation. The panelists say that in Kosovo, freedom of expression and freedom of media are threatened by weak implementation of the law, dysfunctional judiciary and police services, highly politicized public institutions, and editorial newsrooms that lack independence and are subject to political and business-vested interests. Besa Luci, editor-in-chief of the blog Kosovo 2.0, says that the ineffective implementation of labor laws, in particular, has affected freedom of expression for journalists, who, due to irregular work contracts, have become vulnerable to internal media pressures.

Although confidentiality of sources is guaranteed by a 2013 law on protecting news sources, a court's recent ruling against a whistleblower has led the panelists to wonder whether a special law to protect whistleblowers is needed. Last year, a bank employee named Abdullah Thaci disclosed bank transaction details showing a misuse of the public money by Prizren municipality's top officials. Prizren is the second-largest municipality in Kosovo. Although such information led to the arrest of several people who are now facing trial for corruption, the whistleblower was also sentenced to six months in prison by the Basic Court of Prizren for disclosing bank transaction details. Kreshnik Gashi, an investigative journalist at the Balkan Investigative Research Network (BIRN), says that sentencing a whistleblower is a discouraging example for citizens and journalists to report corruption and stand against dubious practices. With regard to journalism, no case has been reported of journalists being punished for protecting their sources and not disclosing names.

With regard to the licensing procedures, the Kosovo legislation is fairly flexible, and apart from radio stations, television stations, and cable providers, other media outlets, such as newspapers, blogs, and online portals, do not need

licensing permits. According to the panelists, this has negative impacts as well. The lack of specific legislation has led to the emergence of many online news portals, some lacking basic ownership and financial transparency. Gashi believes that this has created an environment in which fictive online portals are being created and used for political propaganda and to exert pressure on professional media outlets.

Apart from a flexible licensing procedure, media organizations also enjoy a simple registration process, whether as a business enterprise or as a NGO. Furthermore, the government took a positive step a few years ago when it exempted media organizations from taxes for product purchases related to the industry. However, the tax-exempt policy is not valid for other business expenses or non-media products, such as tables, chairs, and other office supplies. Also, it is still unclear whether media-related product purchases are taxable for media outlets registered as NGOs.

Media outlets access to and use of local and international news and news sources is not restricted by law, just as there are no government restrictions on entry into the journalism profession.

Although no journalist fatalities have been reported in 2015, threats against journalists remain present. When such incidents happen, they are covered by all mainstream media, but the coverage does not necessarily generate a substantial social debate. Most of the crimes committed against journalists are threats, blackmails, and insults. According to Zekirja Shabani, the head of the Association of Kosovo Journalists, 27 death threats against journalists were registered in 2015, and many others were blackmailed or censored. Journalists who work on investigative stories involving public officials, government ministers, and even private businessmen are mostly targeted; these threats come directly in-person or over the phone.

If a crime is committed against a journalist and the case is taken to court, the trial can take months and even years to commence, creating a climate of mistrust in the whole justice system. However, the panelists say that other standards are used when it comes to processing cases that defend key public officials. The panelists mentioned the express trial of the 23-year-old who wrote a threatening Facebook status against the Minister of Labor. The Basic Court of Pristina promptly arrested, tried, and sentenced him to three months in prison for his message. In the same court, tens of cases with threats against journalists are still waiting, according to Gashi.

Overall, the panelists agree that journalists are safe to carry out the activities of their job. They are not directly persecuted by authorities or criminal groups; however, indirect threats and intimidation do exist. Personal safety on the job could still be improved, especially when covering

street demonstrations. This issue emerged in 2015 when a group of journalists was caught between police and demonstrators; some suffered injuries by the police. Many of the panelists suggest that media organizations have a responsibility to provide special trainings that focus on personal safety for journalists while covering unrest and demonstrations. The panelists also discussed the need for media organizations to provide special identification vests so that the journalists are not confused with demonstrators.

Kosovar law protects the editorial independence of public broadcasts, even though they are directly financed by the state budget. However, members of the RTK board are much more politicized, as they are appointed by PMs according to their political affiliations. Ardita Zejnullahu, executive director of the Association of Kosovo Independent Electronic Media, stated that the Kosovo parliament and the management and board of RTK have been reluctant to find a sustainable financial source for RTK, hence violating the law that called for the state financing to transition by early 2015. The current funding method is considered problematic even by the RTK representatives. Anamari Repic, deputy general director of RTK, stated that although the law called for parliament to allocate the budget for RTK at the beginning of every year, in practice, the budget allocation is happening every three months, which invites varying political and institutional pressures. RTK currently has four television channels: the traditional RTK1, RTK2 in Serbian, RTK3, the 24-hour informational channel, and RTK4. The law favors public broadcasts in the sense that they are able to generate income from commercial activities. However, it restricts the time allowed for commercial broadcasts.

Libel is a civil offense, and it is not uncommon for journalists to face such charges. Repic explained that most judges are not educated or informed in the field of media law and, therefore, do not show much sympathy for the freedom of journalism. Remzije Shahini-Hoxhaj, a professor of journalism, also criticizes the justice system, saying that journalists are discouraged from suing perpetrators due to very long trial proceedings; the public is also discouraged from suing the media for libel.

The law guaranteed access to public documents. However, there are many cases demonstrating weak implementation of this right. In September 2015, the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) won a court case against the Office of the Prime Minister for the Office's refusal to provide access to records of official trips from 2012. The positive ruling from this three-year trial was a victory for the Kosovar media. However, the Office of the Prime Minister has yet to comply with the court's decision, which ruled that such information is considered public and therefore should be available to the public. Access to public documents

remains a challenge, especially for new media outlets and new journalists, as not all of them have equal access to public officials for interviews and information. Luci said that this issue of equal access came up several times during research conducted with media organizations. This mostly affects smaller media organizations, including blogging platforms, which are sometimes considered inferior and undeserving of access to key public officials. According to the panelists, this idea also relates to the ongoing discussion of who is considered a journalist and who is not. While such definitions are not applied, some government officials also occasionally choose who should be granted interviews and who should not, depending on audience and anticipated publicity.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Kosovo Objective Score: 2.46

Most media organizations in Kosovo tend to adhere to certain ethical standards, whether self-imposed, as in the case of the public media, or standards put forward by the Press Council of Kosovo, to which most print and online media subscribe. Traditional media, like television stations and print newspapers, provide better reporting than the online news portals. Although journalists cover all key events and issues, the practice of self-censorship remains present. As the interconnectedness of politics and business deepens, uncovering sensitive information may jeopardize financial gains. The average salaries for journalists are low, which is also a contributing factor to self-censorship, as well as a common reason why many journalists have left the profession for politics or other fields. On the other hand, the technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are quite modern and efficient. They produce quality entertainment and informational programming, as well as substantial niche reporting, such as business and investigative reporting.

The panelists expressed concern over a common practice among most online media, in which the majority of news and articles tend to be based on a single source or constructed as single-quote articles. The panelists mentioned a number of cases when online portals published stories attacking individuals, including editors of other media, in a biased manner and without attempting to get any comments from all parties involved. Newspaper articles tend to be more balanced when it comes to the number and relevance of sources, usually capturing all sides of a story, although context and background research often tend to be lacking instead.

Documented codes of ethics in Kosovo align with recognized international ethical standards, including RTK's own code

of ethics. The Independent Media Commission, which oversees the broadcast media, also has an ethics code, as does the Press Council of Kosovo, a self-regulatory media body to which most newspapers, news agencies, and news portals subscribe. The panelists say that although the Press Council has a code of ethics, in general, there tends to be little application of those ethical standards; instead there is still sexism, nationalism, and general prejudice. In recent years, the number of ethics-related complaints against online media has increased. According to official reports of the Press Council, in 2012, from a total of 28 complaints, 23 were directed to print media, and three were for both newspapers and online; only two were directed to online portals. In 2013, from a total of 25 complaints, 21 were directed to print media, and four to online portals. In 2014, from a total of 30 complaints, 15 were directed to print newspapers, and 15 to online portals. The data for 2015 are not yet available, but this trend over the past three years points to a continuous shift toward online media.

The Press Council has been publicly criticized by the head of BIRN Kosovo, Jeta Xharra, after an article published by *gazetaexpress* attacked the executive producer of BIRN's investigative show "Life in Kosovo." Xharra complained that the article was full of defamatory language and lies and included no facts. Only three out of 13 members of the Council voted in Xharra's favor that the article violated the code of ethics.

The panelists note recent progress regarding hate speech, particularly in the comments section of online forums. The majority of online portals have recognized the need to responsibly handle comments on their websites, and as a result some are now requiring users wishing to comment to first verify a valid e-mail account. Some websites have

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).

added language at the end of articles stating that comments inciting hate are prohibited, and some have even completely turned off the comments section.

Self-censorship is widely practiced, both by editors and by journalists. According to the panelists, when journalists join a specific media outlet, they know that they can report, write, and cover in a way that fits the editorial and political agenda of their organization. Self-censorship is practiced both for economic reasons, as well as safety reasons. Some media owners are connected to business companies and political parties and, therefore, never expose negative information related to their financiers.

However, this does not mean that key events are overlooked. The plurality of media in Kosovo provides an opportunity for all key events and issues in Kosovo to be covered, although the depth of reporting may differ from one media outlet to another. Reporting from the north of Kosovo, which is a territory mostly dominated by Kosovar Serbs, still remains a challenge due to substantive security threats for mainstream media. Any event coverage in the north must be under the protection of local police, due to criminal gangs operating there.

The entry-level pay for journalists is low, and only after years of building a career do journalists receive better pay. In general, journalists' salaries are average for Kosovo, with the exception of public media employees. There is a great discrepancy between public media salaries and the majority of private media salaries; RTK journalists have some of the highest salaries in this field. One panelist suggests that this financial security justifies their obedience and encourages more journalists to aspire to a position in public media. The working hours for many journalists are long as well, and most are not compensated for the extra hours.

In general, entertainment programming does not eclipse news and informational programming. The majority of coverage tends to focus on national politics, political parties, and political leaders, but there are no major constraints on the coverage of certain topics. Meanwhile, a couple of blogging platforms even encourage debate on specific issues. Social media websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are also used to disseminate newsworthy information. This is also due to the widespread popularity of the Internet in Kosovo, with 88 percent of households having access to the Internet.

Facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are more modern at the national media level than at local media outlets. Quality niche reporting is present in Kosovo, and traditional media often have special investigative stories. However, new online media outlets mostly report quick news segments that do not require in-depth research and analysis.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Kosovo Objective Score: 2.73

In past years, Objective 3 has received the highest score for Kosovo. This year, the objective score is even higher than in previous years. This could be a result of the expansion of Internet penetration throughout the country, the existence of multiple news sources that allow citizens to check one against another, and the widespread access to cable television that carries a variety of both domestic and international channels. However, what remains unchanged is that public media are not independent of the ruling parties, as most of their funding still comes from the state budget. Another low-scoring indicator is the limited transparency of media ownership, especially with regard to online news portals.

In general, there is plurality of media in Kosovo, including print, broadcast, and online media. The panelists agree that Kosovo media outlets differ in terms of editorial policies, and as such, certain media organizations are perceived to be affiliated with certain political agendas. These can be either government- or business-vested agendas. Entry into media is open to all citizens, and there are no reported government attempts to restrict access in this regard. However, people in more rural areas and smaller towns may not have access to cable media, so their only sources of broadcast media are the three national television channels.

As long as RTK continues to receive financing from the state, it cannot be immune from government influence, the panelists explain. Some RTK editors and journalists have

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.

expressed that they see their role of serving the public in a non-partisan way as being jeopardized by their supervisors. For this reason, 12 editors from an RTK newsroom, along with RTK journalists, organized a public protest to speak out against political interference in editorial policies. In another case, the head and the deputy of RTK's independent trade union were both fired for damaging RTK's image by providing unauthorized information to the public. The day they were fired, the two were scheduled to report to the members of parliament on RTK's financial troubles that result from poor management. As a result of public outcry, both individuals were later returned to their posts. The panelists agree that public media are not prioritizing in-depth reporting on corruption and misuse of public funds. In fact, as one panelist emphasizes, RTK has not won any awards for investigative reporting in recent years.

Kosovapress is the largest news agency in Kosovo and provides services based on subscription fees. However, there are certain news organizations that continue to violate Kosovapress's copyrights. The agency has made several complaints to the Press Council of Kosovo that some media outlets are citing the work of Kosovapress, thus infringing on their authorship and editorial rights. Many media outlets also use international news sources; however, the majority of these organizations do produce their own news and informational programming. National media outlets often rely on international news agencies, such as AP, AFP, and Reuters, while most community and local media organizations typically produce their own news, due to the cost of international news agency services. Also, the majority of online news portals republish news and stories from other media organizations.

Media ownership is transparent throughout broadcast media, which must provide business information to the Independent Media Commission. Print media ownership is also known by the public, despite few media outlets actually including such information on their websites. The problem remains with online portals, where transparency of ownership is lacking.

With regard to the diversity of topics covered by different media organizations, stories on national politics tend to receive greater attention than those pertaining to social welfare, religion, and sexual orientation. However, the number of reporters focusing on religious extremism has increased, while the topic of sexual orientation is still considered taboo and is underreported.

Overall, there is balance between local, national, and international issues presented in the Kosovar news, but national issues generally tend to dominate. Community media typically cover issues pertaining to their own areas and local governments. A few blogging platforms and media-focused NGOs are also making contributions toward fulfilling the gaps in media reporting by focusing on issue-based content. A new

blog called *Sbunker*, created in 2015, has managed to attract many users and foster collaboration and conversation on various emerging social topics.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Kosovo Objective Score: 2.16

The slow economic growth of Kosovo directly affects the media industry. In fact, many media organizations are struggling to make ends meet. For this reason, Objective 4 has received the lowest score. Larger media organizations, including national radio and television stations, as well as a few newspaper organizations, operate as efficient and well-managed business enterprises. Smaller, local media outlets and especially online media groups struggle to secure proper financing. Although advertising in Kosovo is developing, the limited pool of alternative revenue sources, such as government subsidies, subscriptions, and user fees is still problematic. The lack of market research in addition to unreliable broadcasting ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are other factors that contribute to an overall unfavorable business environment for media organizations.

Financial sustainability remains a problem for most media organizations. The majority depend on advertising revenues, which most likely will come from businesses that are connected to political structures. Moreover, certain businesses are interested in advertising only in certain media. Public media have an advantage, since approximately 80 percent of their budget is secured from the state; the rest comes from their own revenues, including commercial

MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED ENTERPRISES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets operate as efficient and self-sustaining enterprises.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards.
- > Government subsidies and advertising are distributed fairly, governed by law, and neither subvert editorial independence nor distort the market.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor the product to the needs and interests of the audience.
- > Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are reliably and independently produced.

The major newspapers are also trying a new subscription method to bring in revenue from their online edition, but this is not generating a substantial profit, according to Arbana Xharra, editor of the daily *Zeri*.

activities. Nevertheless, RTK has accumulated enormous financial debts. Speaking on behalf of commercial broadcast media, Zejnullahu explained that the fact that public media have been operating for at least 15 years shows that most of them are efficient enterprises that prepare and follow business plans.

Most of the revenue for major newspapers, as well as other major media organizations, is generated by advertisements. The major newspapers are also trying a new subscription method to bring in revenue from their online edition, but this is not generating a substantial profit, according to Arbana Xharra, editor of the daily *Zeri*. One reason, she explains, is that other online portals are copying all the news titles and headlines to their website early in the morning, providing a place for users to find all important stories in one place, for free.

Cable providers generate income based on subscription, as well as on direct advertising. Print media do not rely as much on subscriptions and instead rely on advertising. Online media generate profit from advertising, where the number of hits or clicks is advantageous for attracting more advertisers and additional sponsors.

Advertisers can influence the editorial policies of media outlets because the outlets depend on advertisers for financial support, according to the panelists. Last year, BIRN had two investigative stories, one about commercial banks and one about private hospitals, and most media outlets refused to broadcast the stories out of fear of losing bank and hospital advertisers, says Gashi.

Although advertising in general is still developing, the panelists have concerns about the messages and language being promoted. They believe that the ads of the national telecommunications company Vala are unprofessional, offensive, and sexist. Vala is one of the biggest advertisers in Kosovo.

There is a lack of market research on the media industry that would enable efficient and financially savvy media growth. The same applies to broadcast ratings and circulation figures. Internet statistics are easy to generate; therefore, each online organization produces its own traffic data.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Kosovo Objective Score: 2.56

Overall, trade associations are active in Kosovo and represent the interests of media owners, similarly, professional associations for journalists work to protect journalists' rights. NGOs support media organizations by supporting freedom of speech and media independence. Journalism degrees are offered in Kosovo; however, there is a need for more professional training. There are also no political restrictions on importing media equipment, just individual financial constraints.

The Association of Kosovo Independent Electronic Media represents the majority of broadcast media in Kosovo. This association is registered as an NGO and, apart from membership fees, operates based on grants. Executive director Zejnullahu says that in 2015 the organization managed to contribute to two important documents: the digitalization strategy that was adopted by the Independent Media Commission (IMC) and the law on digitalization of broadcast media that was adopted by the Kosovo parliament. Although the IMC promised in 2014 that Kosovo would meet the June 2015 deadline for switching from analog to digital broadcasting, the switch did not happen.

The Association of Kosovo Journalists is the largest and most active organization representing the interests of journalists. The head of the organization, Zekirja Shabani, says that apart from organizing trainings and condemning crimes

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.

against journalists, the organization cannot do enough to improve the working environment for journalists, especially with regard to working hours and securing working contracts for all.

NGOs support free speech and independent media; however, the number of NGOs monitoring and providing assessments on the freedom of media has decreased. One particular case that drew significant civil society support this year was the case of the whistleblower Abdullah Thaci, detailed in the Objective 1 discussion.

Journalism programs are offered by both public and private universities in Kosovo. However, there are no prominent student media outlets, and students generally lack the necessary skills to enter the market. Many new graduates are joining online portals, which tend not to be as credible nor adhere to the highest standards of professional journalism.

In general, certificate and short-term training opportunities have decreased, but some NGOs organize effective trainings. The Organization for Democracy, Anti-Corruption, and Dignity organizes an investigative journalism training, which has resulted in a number of highly regarded articles. BIRN also organizes several trainings on investigative journalism and, each year, also offers 10 fellowships for outstanding journalists through its Balkan Fellowship for Journalistic Excellence. A special training organized in 2015 by the NGO Kosova Live and the Association of Independent Journalists of Serbia, brought together journalists from Kosovo and Serbia to explore such issues as investigative journalism, transnational justice, and Pristina-Belgrade economic relations and dialogue.

List of Panel Participants

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Zekirja Shabani, president, Association of Professional Journalists of Kosovo, Pristina

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