

## THE DEVELOPMENT AND INDEPENDENCY OF THE MEDIA IN REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA (1990-2015)

**Abstract:** This paper concerns the development of written and electronic media in Republic of Albania over the period from 1990-2015 year. The purpose of this research is to depict the evolution of media through an analysis of its development.

In this context, following a detailed study and empirical inquiry of the written and electronic media, the development of these types of media will be depicted.

The findings of the completed research will chronicle the evolution of media throughout the period of 15 years in Republic of Albania, thus providing a realistic illustration of its current state, as well as highlighting the key changes and advances which occurred in the history of the information media in Albania.

**Key words:** *Media, Radio, Television, Newspaper, News, Information, Republic of Albania, media market, web*

**Нико КИТАНИ**

## РАЗВОЈОТ И НЕЗАВИСНОСТА НА МЕДИУМИТЕ ВО РЕПУБЛИКА АЛБАНИЈА (1990-2015)

**Апстракт:** Истражувањето во овој труд се однесува на развојот на печатените и електронските медиуми во Република Албанија во периодот од 1990 до 2015 година. Целта на ова истражување е да се претстави еволуцијата на медиумите преку анализа на неговиот развој однесувајќи се на прогресивноста и динамичноста на медиумскиот пазар.

Во овој контекст, по детална студија и емпириското истражување на пишаните и електронските медиуми, развојот на овие видови на медиумите ќе биде прикажан објективно и детално.

Оттука наодите од извршеното квалитативно-квантитативно истражување ќе ја претстави целосната хроника на развојот на медиумите во текот на период од 15 години во Република Албанија, на тој начин обезбедувајќи реална илустрација на сегашната состојба, како и истакнување на клучните промени и напредок, што треба да се случи во идниот развој и имплементација на новинските информации на медиумскиот простор во Република Албанија.

**Клучни зборови:** *медиуми, радио, телевизија, весници, вести, Република Албанија, медиумски пазар, информација*

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## **Introduction**

Ever since 1991, there have been four daily printed newspapers in Albania, a number which by 1994, has grown to double. Today, the press in Albania counts 29 daily newspapers, which is quite well in comparison to the media publications of similar countries in transition, as well as in relation to the Albanian population. The situation is quite similar in the audiovisual market, where beside the single national radio television, RTSH; this market has been dominated by the large number of private television and radio stations, which have taken lead among the Albanian language media. According to significant research and statistics conducted in this field, Albania today has four national TV stations, 65 local stations, 33 stations with cable TV, three national radio stations and 47 local radio stations. This indicated rapid and dynamic growth and development of the private media represents the leading cause of the existing chaos present in the media market of Albania.

## **Printed media (1990-2015)**

The establishment of the communist regime and the occurring changes in the government and administration on 28 November 1944, have significantly influenced and changed the situation and the functioning of the Albanian media, introducing various restraints and restrictions of any magazine and newspaper whose perspective and content was not in favor or service of the regime, as well as banning the importation and retailing of numerous contemporary publications famous for that time.

The rights to private press were restricted and repressed in 1944<sup>2</sup>. The notion behind these actions (the exclusion of all alternative press bodies and the prohibition of private media) was to ensure that the officials in power and the political governance and machinery will not be exposed to any criticism or public disparagement, as well as to confide any opinion and idea that differs from the communist ideals from reaching the public.

The strict and unforgiving control of the regime has disabled the freedom of speech of the journalists and reporters. Newsrooms and journalists were under a constant pressure, per instance, if a reporter voiced anything in contrast to the political ideology of the regime, that correspondent would be facing prison time. Following the collapse of the communist regime in December 1990, the democratic renaissance is established<sup>3</sup>. In 1990, the newspaper "Bashkimi" secures its part in the history of the media development in Albania through the heroic maneuver of publishing the first public criticism towards the government, demanding decentralization of the economy and early elections.

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<sup>2</sup>) Mark Mark & Hamit Boriqi - History of the Albanian press, University Publishing House, Tirana 2010, pp.58

<sup>3</sup>) Jakubowicz, K. 1995. Lovebirds? The Media, the State and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe. pp.33-38

In the early 1990s, with the beginning of the Student movement, the control and the pressure over the printed media reached its peak.

The first pluralistic press is published on the 5<sup>th</sup> of January, 1991, when the first issue of the opposition's newspaper "**Rilindja Demokratike**" is published. This publishing marked the birth of a new era, the establishment of a new political system, and essentially the beginning of the freedom of press<sup>4</sup>. At first, this newspaper was greatly accepted and got great recognition among the readers, publishing up to 100k copies per edition<sup>5</sup>. Following the establishment of the Democratic Party in Albania, a large number of other parties, nongovernment organizations, groups and institutions appeared and with them, a great number of publications and press presenting and assessing the various present ideals, ideas, opinions, critics etc.

One of the first publications that took place at that time was the newspaper "Republika" representing the body of Republican Party. At the same period the newspaper "Alternativa" appeared, representing the opposition - the body of Social-democratic Party.<sup>6</sup>

During this time being, numerous independent newspapers appeared, among which the newspaper "**Koha Jone**", published in the city Lezhe at 11 May 1991, divers from the competition as one of the best. Beside the public and private newcomers at the media market, the communist newspapers "Zeri I Popullit" and "Bashkimi" were still active in the media market. However, only the newspaper "Zeri I Popullit" managed to survive at the fierce competitive media market in Albania. This newspaper falls under the ownership of the Socialist Party in 1991, and is still being published today<sup>7</sup>.

From the period 1991 - 1997 in Albania 270 newspapers and magazines were printed throughout the territory. During this period, 10 of these newspapers were daily: "**Koha Jone**", "**Rilindja Demokratike**", "**Zeri I Popullit**", "**Rilindja**", "**Republika**", "**Gazeta Shqipatare**", "**Dita Informacionit**", "**Lajmi I Dites**", "**Tribuna Demokratike**", and "**Poli I Qendres**".

The only newspapers from that period that have endured the struggles of the rapid and dynamic changes in technology and governance, and that are still published today are the following: "**Zeri I Popullit**", "**Rilindja**

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<sup>4</sup>) Barbier, F., & Catherina, L. B. (2004). *Historia e Medias*, Instituti Shqiptar i Medias, Tiranë, pp.11-19

<sup>5</sup>) Voltmer, Katrin. "Building Media Systems in the Western Balkans: Lost between Models and Realities." Working Paper Series on International Media Assistance in the Western Balkans, Working Paper 10/2013, pp.82

<sup>6</sup>) Barbier, F., & Catherina, L. B. (2004). *Historia e Medias*, Instituti Shqiptar i Medias, Tiranë, pp.22-31

<sup>7</sup>) Mark Mark & Hamit Boriqi - *History of the Albanian press*, University Publishing House, Tirana 2010, pp.92

### **Demokratike”, “Sporti Shqiptar” and “Republika”<sup>8</sup>.**

There are currently 29 daily newspapers are published in Albania, which is a significant number in comparison to other countries with much larger population than the populace of Albania.

Likewise, from 2000 year up until today there are numerous newspapers in English languages as a result of the work from Albanian Mail and Tirana Times that have paved the road of democratization of the media in Albania.

The daily informative press has great importance to the market, containing a wide specter of information from Politics, Economy, Culture, Sports, as well as informations from the Balkan and worldwide. The political developments in Albania usually are prioritized and thus occupy the headlines. The interest of the Albanian readers is also spiked by trivial information and events. The conducted statistical analysis states that the greatest portion of readers of newspapers, are the senior citizen (60%), while the daily newspapers have greatest circulation and have the largest number of copies of a publication issued<sup>9</sup>.

In modern times, the Albanian readers prefer the newspapers **“Panorama”**, **“Shekulli”**, **“Shqip”**, **“Gazeta Shqiptare”**, **“Koha Jone”** and **“Standard”** to get informed on recent matters in all fields of interest.

### **“KOHA JONE”**

The newspaper “Koha Jone” is the first private newspaper. His publishing begins after the collapse of the communist regime in 1991. This newspaper has humble origin, started off as local newsprint produced by **Nikol Lesi**. At the same year, this newspaper reaches public recognition and gains the interest of the population, thus growing in numbers and success, which lead to its publishing in the capital of Albania – Tirana. In 1992, “Koha Jone” becomes one of the most influential and successful newspapers in Albania. The newspaper reaches highest circulation and rating with the issue criticizing the then government and the president Sali Berisha in 1994 year.

In 1997 year, the newspaper played a crucial role in the rally of the revolution of the left-wing followers, reaching its peak of success by selling 60k copies per day. With the change of the government and the election Social democratic party, the newspaper ceased its antigovernment efforts which ultimately led to the break of the newspaper’s streak of successes. This inevitably resulted organizational and editorial conflicts that initiated the division among the employees. Over half of the journalists left the newspaper and formed the **“Idedepiante”** newspaper. The survival of the newspaper on the harsh competitive media market in Albania was additionally endangered with

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<sup>8</sup>) Barbier, F., & Catherina, L. B. (2004). *Historia e Medias*, Instituti Shqiptar i Medias, Tiranë, pp.42.

<sup>9</sup>) Marku, M. (2008). *Histori e shtypit shqiptar*, Cycle of lectures, Tiranë pg 3

the departure of Lesi's business partner - **Aleksandar Frangaj**. The entering of the newspaper "Shekulli" in the media market and the leading competitive advantage that it acquires in time as the most influential newspaper of that time, was undeniably the final factor that caused the loss of "Koha Jone" position in the media market. Following these events, Nikol Lesi quits journalism and publishing launches his political career.

### **"GAZETA SHQIPATARE"**

The newspaper "Gazeta Shqiptare" was initially published in the year 1994, in the production of **Carlo Bollino**.<sup>10</sup> The arrival of this newspaper instigated great changes in the Albanian press. The experience and expertise of Bollino as a prominent member of ANSA (the Italian national news agency), gave "Gazeta Shqiptare" the assets to distinguish itself and obtain competitive advantage among the other publishers. By introducing changes in aspect of content presentation (differencing the comments from the news; making changes in the graphics and illustrations) "Gazeta Shqiptare" introduced new standards in the publishing world and succeeded in establishing principles in the pluralistic system for the first time.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike the other press, "Gazeta Shqiptare" has a positive balance in the market, with 7-10k copies sold per day through subscription. In regards to the content, this newspaper differs from the rest of the competition on the media market by devoting only a small portion of its content to political matters.

"Gazeta Shqiptare" has a dynamic marketing policy, often giving away calendars, CDs, books etc so as to grab the attention of the readers. The newspaper belongs to the media group **Edisud**, that also owns shares of the TV channel NEWS-2, the RASH radio and the online news agency BalkanWeb.

### **"SHEKULLI"**

The newspaper "Shekulli" was first published in the year 1997, during some of the most difficult years in Albanian history when the country was under the threat of a civil war.

The initial price of "Shekulli" was 10 lek, while the other newspapers parallel to this one were sold for 30 lek. This newspaper belongs to the media group along with A-1 Radio Plus 2, the newspaper Sport, the Agency for information ALNA, the internet company Abissnet, the print agency MAX. The owner of the newspaper is Koço Kogëdhima. The newspaper is politically oriented towards the left wing, while his group of readers are generally

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<sup>10)</sup> & Catherina, L. B. (2004). *Historia e Medias*, Instituti Shqiptar i Medias, Tiranë, pp.87-99

<sup>11)</sup> Voltmer, Katrin. "Building Media Systems in the Western Balkans: Lost between Models and Realities." Working Paper Series on International Media Assistance in the Western Balkans, Working Paper 10/2013, pp.31

people that belong to the poor and middle class, as well as senior citizen. This newspaper has often come across as a strong critic of the government. The newspaper today has a circulation of thousands of copies per day.

### **“PANORAMA”**

The first issue of this daily press was in 2002 year in Tirana, while the peak of success it reaches in 2005 year when it becomes the best-selling newspaper on the market, outselling even the most popular newspaper of that time, the newspaper “Shekulli” that from 1997 to 2005 in conquers the Albanian market, by selling up to 22-30 issues per day<sup>12</sup>.

Its owner is Irfan Hasanbellius, the most successful businessmen in the area of engineering and beer manufacturing. It can be said that his strong financial liquidity managed to put the newspaper in the competitive media market even from the beginning.<sup>13</sup>

The newspaper has center oriented political stance with leftwing preferences. Its structure has a rather qualified staff that receives payments of 400-1500 euros. Its political content is what makes this newspaper the most confided in newspaper amongst the readers.

### **RADIO AND TELEVISION**

The radio Tirana has nationally started operating ever since 1938 when it had the position of the only news source via radio broadcasting in the Republic of Albania. Although the radio had a truly slow process in Albania, it was rather recently when this media developed alongside the television broadcasting. Currently, in Albania, there are 63 local radio stations as well as two analog private tv stations.

The first commercial national radio, Top Albania Radio that started working in 1998, it covered nearly 87% of the territory, while Radio +2, that started working in the same year it covered nearly 72% of the entire territory of Albania. Radio Tirana, in comparison covers total 80,5% of the countries territory<sup>14</sup>.

The music and the entertainment programs occupy the lead media position in Albania, representing the largest percentage of broadcasts. Although nearly all radio stations broadcast news with matters from politics and economy, still the interest for this type of broadcasts is rather low. The public has expressed

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<sup>12)</sup> Elvin Luku, —A Look at the Public Sphere in Talk Show Programs in Albania, Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, Vol 4, No 10, MCSER Publishing, Rome-Italy, October 2013, pp.49-72

<sup>13)</sup> Mark Mark & Hamit Boriqi - History of the Albanian press, University Publishing House, Tirana 2010, pp.33

<sup>14)</sup> Barbier, F., & Catherina, L. B. (2004). Historia e Medias, Instituti Shqiptar i Medias, Tiranë, pp.52

greater interest to acquire such news from television programs.

Thus, the radio emerged as a significant forum accessible to all people in Albania, where they can share their opinions and views on certain subjects. As a result, practically all radio stations in Albania broadcast programs that include the direct, active involvement of listeners during broadcast.

### **TELEVISION**

The appearance of the first TV program in 29<sup>th</sup> of April 1960 is documented as very important event in the history of Albanian media. The National Radio Television, better known by the abbreviation **RTSH**, marked this historic milestone by broadcasting a special program that started with children movie, and included a documentary, a concert and several films<sup>15</sup>.

In the year 1993, this TV station started broadcasting its programs via radio and television satellite<sup>16</sup>.

The National Radio and Television or RTSH, represented the only Public Multimedia Broad up until the appearance of the first national, commercial television in 1995 under the name **Shijak TV**, that broadcasted from a private apartment.

The Albanian Radio Television - RTSH, as a public service provider and program covers 73% of the territory; the Tv-Klan has coverage of 70% of the territory of Albania; while Top Channel, covers total 62% of the territory.

However, there are no valid and reliable information on the percentage of coverage of each television on the media market, because of the sporadic review and monitoring of the public, which is limited, incomplete and often inaccessible.

According to official statistical surveys, the current list of TV channels in the Republic of Albania today is quite lengthy and it includes<sup>17</sup>:

76 local, analog TV stations, 75 cable television stations, 2 national analogue commercial television channels, 2 satellite televisions, in addition to public television, which currently broadcasts two channels

### **Conclusion**

From the conducted analysis of the development of media in the Republic Albania from the period 1990-2015, it can be concluded that the media (printed and electronic) are being developed at specific dynamics. During the transition

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<sup>15</sup> Elvin Luku, —Foreign talk shows adopted in Albanian TVI, Albanological Studies VII: Cultural diversity in the media, Tirana University, Faculty of History and Philology, Department of Journalism and Communication, Tiranë 2014, pp.367

<sup>16</sup> Barbier, F., & Catherina, L. B. (2004). *Historia e Medias*, Instituti Shqiptar i Medias, Tiranë, pp.77

<sup>17</sup> Albanian Media Institute (2012), *ebute.pdf Self-censorship and soft censorship in Albanian media*. Tirana

of the Albanian society, ie the introduction of the political pluralism, the process of establishing media occurred, primary the appearance of printed media.

Today in Albania, there are 29 daily newspapers being published every day, which according to the media market it translates to about 3, 5 million readers.

Simultaneously with the development of the print media in Albania started the process of establishing radio stations, television, cable TV, and a myriad of local and regional radio stations.

According to the previous inquiries and the data collected, it can be concluded that Albania today has a wide range of different media systems and forms; whose basic function is to inform citizens about the current situation and the ongoing events in the country, at a regional and local level.

However, relative to the size of the country Albania indisputably has an excessive number of registered media. Some of them operate exclusively on commercial subjects, while other are politically affiliated with certain political parties and are registered as their supporters.

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