

AN INVESTIGATION

KOSOVO STILL NOT TOO LATE FOR PRESS FREEDOM...



//////////////// INVESTIGATION MADE BY **OLIVIER BASILE**

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**REPORTERS
WITHOUT BORDERS**
FOR PRESS FREEDOM



AFP photo / Jack Guez

More than two years after declaring independence, on 17 February 2008, Kosovo is facing a host of challenges in all major sectors of activity. Alongside unemployment, the absence of health and social insurance, a dilapidated electricity and water system and inefficiency in medical treatment, freedom of the press looks like a secondary problem, almost a luxury.

However it has become more urgent than ever for the ills that are undermining Kosovo to be explained and exposed. Only a few journalists have managed to report on the endemic corruption in the administration and the uncontrollable penetration of organised crime into most areas of the economy. And yet the people need the media to act as safeguard.

Few countries are home to such a large number of international institutions: More than a score have or have had offices in Pristina: The United Nations, Nato, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union, as a delegation, but also through its new mission, Eulex. But even in this environment and despite the sums invested in re-launching the media, freedom of the press is struggling to develop. Neither financial nor editorial independence is yet guaranteed. There is still no press centre in the capital to serve as an influential reference free press point and provide a location for improving ethics and professionalism through meetings and exchanges.

The Prime Minister, Hashim Thaçi has prioritised joining the European Union. And this will only be achieved by observing certain criteria, including having a free and independent press. Even though the prime minister has made frequent positive statements on the issue, government policy has so often conflicted with this. His influence and that of his party Partia Demokratike e Kosovës (Democratic Party of Kosovo - PDK) are obvious and increasing, particularly in public television which remains the country's leading media both in terms of its sheer size and the influence it has over the population. Although a fledgling Internet sector does offer opportunities for independence and pluralism, as elsewhere in the world, this sector is still financially fragile.

PRACTICAL GUIDE TO THE "RESTRAINTS" ON KOSOVAR JOURNALISTS

THREATS AND VARIOUS FORMS OF RETRIBUTION

Violence is a real threat to the press in Kosovo. It is experienced through a wide range of gang-linked intimidation and reprisals.

Although the political and judicial classes do not take the risk of openly threatening journalists, they have found an even more terrifying weapon in patriotism. Those who venture to criticise government actions or who expose corruption can find themselves publicly accused of "unpatriotic activities", of being "traitors to the nation" and "Serbian spies", or more simply of being "anti-Kosovo". These accusations are designed to wreck the credibility of journalists in the eyes of public opinion, which is always highly sensitive to Kosovar identity, but they also serve as an indirect signal to extremist of all colours, in particular to nationalist militants who emerged from the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK) among others, by pointing them out as potential targets. "Governments don't threaten us, they send messages that we unders-



Veton Surroi

But the most telling threats are those that the authorities exert on the families of journalists. A number of them have been advised to "discipline themselves" or risk seeing one of their family members losing a job or not having a contract renewed, or their children threatened. In a country in which unemployment stands at 40%, threats like these are particularly dreaded. The state is still the biggest employer and its reach even extends into some private companies where many managers were trained in public companies in which they have still have contacts. Only those working for international organisations can consider themselves temporarily safe from this kind of reprisal.

« Under cover of the fight against corruption, newspapers seen by the Thaçi government as "too independent" find themselves coming in for regular tax investigations »

tand very well – and we are not the only ones to understand them", one journalist, who asked for anonymity, confided to us.

In one such case, posters went up overnight on 12-13 May 2010 outside the home of journalist Veton Surroi, founder of the daily Koha Ditore and Koha Vision TV, and his sister Flaka Surroi, the group's director, saying, "UDBA street - Veton and Flaka Surroi". UDBA is the acronym of the former Serbian secret police that carried out particularly brutal attacks on the Kosovo Albanian community during the war in the 1990s.

Although the authorities we met during our visit assured us that they condemned such practices, in reality those behind them are very rarely punished and are more often encouraged. The silence of the many international delegations on the issue is hard to understand since they know better than anyone the potential consequences of this kind of behaviour.

Under cover of the fight against corruption, newspapers seen by the Thaçi government as "too independent" find themselves coming in for regular tax investigations. Koha Ditore has already had no fewer than 20 such tax probes while newspapers that are closer to the government have had none. Administrative hitches can also be deployed as a useful tool to push a journalist towards self-censorship. Holdups in renewing papers, overbilling for some public services, access hampered to major public data and funds, etc.

Finally, pressure can also be brought to bear on news sources. Kosovo is a small country and both in the provinces and in the capital, Pristina, everyone is known to everyone else, as are their friends, families, and colleagues. Kosovars shy away from providing information for fear of exposing themselves to a raft of consequences. The authorities thus can feel perfectly secure in justifying and vaunting their policies due to the "lack of witnesses" to expose or question them.

« Kosovo is a small country with a very closed market for journalists. The government has put its stamp on a large section of the profession and thus feels comfortable. The few remaining independent journalists are seen as a minor irritations that can be dealt with through financial pressure or simply by bidding their time and relying on the fact that, as they believe, everyone has their price”, said one freelance journalist, who requested anonymity so as “not to close off the very few chances that remain open to him”.

ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION IS NOT ALWAYS GUARANTEED

In the eyes of the law, access to public information is guaranteed without any registration or restrictions, aside from information that is genuinely sensitive (as practised across Europe). But in practice, the public is not informed of more than 1% of the real substance and reliability of the data.

“In an apparent show of transparency, the authorities say they want to ‘provide a service to the press’ and ‘show their goodwill’, by providing us with a whole range of unverifiable data. None of these documents can be used in a reliable way except by a certain section of the press that does not go to much trouble to make any checks”, said one journalist, who asked for anonymity.

So journalists seeking access to public information such as what make of vehicle is used by a particular town hall, how tendering is carried out, allocation of budget etc. rarely get any reply. Financial data, water management, electricity, land development, building permits, new business premises are all areas that are completely closed

The reasons for this mercenary journalism can be found in the particularly precarious nature of journalism. Most of them work without any employment contracts and without insurance coverage and thus without legal rights. Koha Ditore is the only paper that sets out working conditions with two days off and insurance cover. Zëri also does its best to provide decent contracts. Journalists are however for the most part badly or not paid and thus open to exploitation.

In Europe’s poorest country, professional standing is more often measured by cars, apartments and lifestyle than by the quality of work or independence. Many journalists also begin an apparent career in the media as a stepping stone towards administrative or diplomatic careers. They have their eye on advisory and ambassadorial positions that they hope to see opening up around the world. The political class also has a tendency to offer opportunities for government press attaché positions, but open only to those journalists who have demonstrated their allegiance.

“PRESS FREEDOM EXISTS BECAUSE IT IS IN THE CONSTITUTION”

Kosovo’s constitution safeguards press freedom, through articles 40 and 42 that guarantee “freedom of the press and media pluralism. Censorship is banned. Nobody can block the right of each person to receive, research and disseminate news and information.” Press freedom

can however be limited by law in cases where it would encourage violence and hostility linked to race, nationality, ethnicity or religion. Kosovo does not have a media law.

However the justice system does not have the means it requires to operate properly. Judges, who have little or no training in media problems, are badly paid and with little independence, are not inclined to introduce jurisprudence into national law that would protect the press from widespread pressure. The political class which has real influence over the magistracy has transmitted to it the low regard in which it holds the press. Judges also know that some journalists can make or wreck their careers with articles “commissioned” from various powerful quarters. Caught between long established corruption and absolute patronage, the independence of judges on press issues, is questioned by almost all the profession.

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off to inquiry in direct violation of the promises made by the current government.

WIDESPREAD CORRUPTION THAT ALSO IMPACTS ON THE PRESS

The media world is not spared corruption. Although Kosovo does have some good journalists, a section of the profession has given itself over to a mercenary journalism by writing to order or from a particular viewpoint. They are commissioned not so much for a political party, business or individual to secure positive coverage of their activities but rather to provide the most negative coverage possible of their enemies. This can prove particularly profitable. Since the average journalist’s salary stand at around 250 euros a month, it is difficult to explain how some of them, ordinary editors or department heads, drive luxury cars or live in apartments in Pristina’s most pricey neighbourhoods.



Bureau de Koha Ditore

ADVERTISING DEALS BOTH BIG AND SMALL.

The organisation of the advertising market is one of the major challenges to press freedom in Kosovo. Despite frequent official statements and repeated promises from the government on the subject, there has still been no genuine liberalisation of the advertising market and it still operates as it likes.

The country has no independent advertising authority. The first communications agencies are very recent and have only developed a minimum service to the broadcast industry. Companies do not in general have any intermediary between themselves and media outlets. Moreover the findings of fledgling bodies producing viewing or readership figures have been insufficient to establish a conclusive commercial strategy based on reliable data.

No newspaper or broadcast media can live by sales alone. But unlike the rest of the European press, the problems created by this dependence are not only financial. The lack of clear regulation allows political unfairness, corruption and the grip of blackmail, sometimes stemming from the criminal underworld.

“WELL TARGETED” USE OF INSTITUTIONAL ADVERTISING

The Kosovar administration, the government and most national political parties have significant advertising budgets (job advertisements, official tendering, public inquiries, promotions or electoral announcements and so on) that constitute one of the national media's major sources of income. This manna is not however inexhaustible and is more frequently subject to the interests of political parties than the causes or subjects that the campaigns purport to highlight.

Even though the prime minister theoretically has a contract with the entire national media some titles do not benefit from the same “goodwill” as their competitors. Titles close to the majority parties (particularly the PDK) are clearly favoured in the allocation of recruitment or tendering notices, helping themselves to a share of them in passing. While the prime minister's office sets the tone, each ministry has freedom of action in assigning its department's information or awareness campaigns. Media close to the majority parties are the direct beneficiaries.

This “indirect subsidy” also allows profits to be made by a number of influential decision-makers or company bosses who have turned part of the press into their “public relations officers”. “These companies do not really expect financial viability directly from the titles they hold, but they know that by accepting and putting out a particular advertising campaign they can get their hands on a project that could prove more directly lucrative. It's a type of chicanery which gets round healthy competition in the market”, said one former financial manager on a daily newspaper, now working for an international organisation.

It is partly due to this system that a large number of titles (such as Info-Press or Express) can survive and find a place in an already saturated market. A si-

« there has still been no genuine liberalisation of the advertising market and it still operates as it likes »

gnificant number of political decision-makers from all parties also rely on this system to “keep a hold on” the press by maintaining it in a state of obligation.

A LIMITED PRIVATELY-RUN MARKET PARTLY DEPENDENT ON THE INSTITUTIONAL

Very few companies can afford to be major and regular advertisers. Though privately owned firms try to be more professional in the distribution of their advertising budgets, they remain at the mercy of indirect pressure from local authorities. Economic activity is largely dependent on permission and exploitation licences, which can be delayed or quickly approved according to the advertising campaigns that these private companies agree to “invest” in support of one or a number of titles. In the media as in other sections of Kosovar society, corruption is ever present and “commissions” can also transit through a part of the advertising.

Mobile phone companies and cable operators who have greater financial resources strive to achieve visibility across the media spectrum, leaving out no potential target and ensuring an impartiality that is not always easy to uphold in such a restricted market. However, as owners of some media, they are naturally tempted to favour these media in distributing certain campaigns, thus getting back sums paid out for the promotion.

THE WRITTEN PRESS

Kosovo boasts eight national daily newspapers and a few Albanian-language weeklies, chiefly circulating in the capital Pristina (population around 400.000). But the existence of a large number of newspapers does not automatically translate into pluralism of news. Only Koha Ditore and its chief rival Zëri enjoy genuine credibility. This is not by chance however. Koha Ditore is the only daily to have complete control over every stage of its production. The Koha group has its own printers so it does not have to depend on an intermediary that could give way to pressure from some of its favoured customers. Apart from the extra financial resource of having its own printing house, Koha Ditore can also control its



Rédaction de Koha Ditore

own publishing timetable, giving it greater editorial flexibility and extra time to check out the accuracy of its articles. Even though the official press distribution network enjoys greater independence than during the Milosevich era, public networks remain somewhat limited. Koha Ditore has now set up a complementary distribution network, particularly in food mini-market food stores, through which it achieves 40% of its sales. The Koha group also has a television station, Koha TV and a radio that go out on cable.

While Koha Ditore is one of the biggest newspapers in Kosovo with nearly 200 contributors, journalists, and correspondents in the provinces and neighbouring countries, the daily's strength resides in having set up its own marketing service that makes direct contact with advertisers in a professional manner and without going after "influence networks".

New newspapers occasionally burst onto the written press market with lavish funding the origin of which is difficult to trace. These new papers make extravagant offers to attract the most professional journalists. Relatively few take up these offers



Agron Bajrami

"The position of Koha Editore is certainly a privileged one but it is not the outcome of chance. A huge amount of work and constant investment goes on across the production chain. In Kosovo, as everywhere else, this is something that has to be earned. Our main problem resides above all in this market which has almost no rules and no regulation. I don't think there is room for more than three national dailies and we already have eight and new ones can be launched very quickly. We have nothing against this, but these facts need to be taken into account when one wants to create a quality press".

"If it really wanted to, the government could achieve independence for the press through regulation and by regulating the market. Some newspapers are kept going artificially and are more to serve some cause than serving the public interest. I know our margins and our costs, but I can tell you that it is impossible for some titles to survive on the basis of their sales alone or extra work that can be done at their printers. There is clearly something that is not working

fearing rightly that the forthright tone vaunted at the beginning will quickly change into an editorial line locked into a particular political position.

Strangely these newspapers appear to have hardly any need for advertising, even though they have to face the same production costs (estimated at 0.17 euro per copy for a circulation similar to that of Koha Ditore) most of them selling at 0.10 euros. Unless advertising revenue is making up the difference who is doing it and how? Few journalists attempt to answer this question because it is a sensitive issue. While it is easy to find out the "official" owners of these newspapers, it is next to impossible to discover who their real backers are. As in most of the Balkans and some central European countries,

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criminal gangs invest in the media sector not for the financial return but for the direct influence it can bring.

THE BROADCAST LANDSCAPE

Technical and legal constraints have limited the number of terrestrial television stations to three at most: one public television channel (Radio Televizioni i Kosovës – RTK) and two privately owned ones KTV and RTV 21. The three national TV channels can be readily picked up with a low-cost television aerial. There is no subscription charge and someone on an average salary can afford to buy a television. In addition there are more expensive television stations available on-line through cable connection and for the better off there is satellite TV, the equipment for which is expensive but often linked to free offers on a television set.

The switchover from analogue to digital will allow a further expansion, but no progress has been made on this since 2009. Kosovo which is still not a member of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) only has one frequency and will not be able to make up for this deficit in the next few years.

Television remains incontestably the main purveyor of news for nearly 70% of the popula-

tion which sometimes tops up by reading a part of the written press.

THE HEGEMONY OF RADIO TELEVISION KOSOVAR (RTK)

Radio Televizioni i Kosovës (RTK) which was supported financially by the Albanian majority during the conflict that pitted them against Serbia, provides a very strong symbol of Kosovo's identity. RTK followed the armed conflict very closely and people developed an emotional connection with the channel.

The international community that set itself up in Pristina in 1999 after NATO ousted the security forces of Serbia and the UN took over administration over the territory supported creation of the public channel, providing aid worth 20 million euros. A management committee was constituted drawing on some of the best broadcast journalists. But the grand project of creating a quality public service media quickly clashed with the ambitions of the political establishment and especially cadres of the former UÇK which despite international monitoring, quickly established firm political control.

Seen as a public channel by some, as a state channel by others, RTK is today under tightened government control and in particular that of Prime minister, Hashim Thaçi. The biggest employer in the media sector, RTK has a near monopoly on broadcasting of football matches. The channel shows a large number of foreign sitcoms, traditional and international music programmes. Apart from news bulletins, RTK produces almost no huge political programmes or debates with clashes of different political points of view and does not go in for deep and sensitive investigative journalism especially no about the political elite.

THE "SECURE MEDIA SYSTEM"

The RTK management however began work in April 2010 on a rapid shakeup of programming that introduced political programmes and debates. But this reform was limited in scope since viewers and listeners had no opportunity to put questions directly to participants. Pressure brought to bear on RTK staff also meant that the journalists had little room for manoeuvre, given their awareness that while interviewing a minister, they were also questioning their employer.

Several RTK journalists also drew attention to the existence of editorial meetings known as "SMS Meetings" or "Secure Media System", terms used to describe how most daily editorial decisions are

taken on the public channel. One radio journalist told us, "Virtually all government members and party heads have the mobile phone numbers of our managers, whatever their level, and send SMS messages informing them of their conferences or official visits. This 'invitation you can't refuse' gets sent to us and that is how our crews' agendas are fixed. We try to include other filming in our 'organised trips' but we know very well that we are wasting our time. We do these other interviews so as not to get out of practice in the hope that one day we will have real editorial meetings", she said.

APPOINTMENT OF MANAGERS

RTK's board of directors, renewed on 13 October 2009, was appointed by parliament under a procedure with all the appearance of democracy. An ad hoc parliamentary committee was given

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responsibility for proposing possible candidates. The final but still extended list contained numbers of journalists and analysts who were well known in Pristina. However, the committee led by deputy Prime Minister, Hajredin Kuçi, did not leave the room for electing prominent journalists or member of civil society or leading opponents to the government as members of the board of directors. The committee gradually ousted all the serious and independent candidates and in violation of the procedure, finally appointed nine members of RTK'S management. To make things worse no one of them comes from Kosovo's main media or work as an active journalist.

Interviewed by Reporters Without Borders, Rrahman Pacarizi, president of RTK's board, denied the politicising of the procedure and the manipulation of advertising. "Commercial logic dictates that advertisers make use of the most visible and effective medium. The RTK ratings justify the fact that our channel gets preference from advertisers, even when they are ministries".

Pacarizi also rejected the suggestion that editorial decisions were taken via SMS by the government and defended RTK's editorial independence. "When we give airtime to a member of the



Studios de Life in Kosovo

government we do the same for the opposition. You can check and you will find this alternation and balance". The RTK president considers the near constant presence of the head of state on its TV news bulletins is linked above all to respect of protocol that a public television station must follow. "Our television's financial resources come from the contributions of individual Kosovars and it is therefore our responsibility to inform people about what the government is doing. You apply the same kind of standards in public media within the European Union. Why expect anything different from us?"

There are indeed alternate reports between the official position and the opposition but not in the automatic way described and although RTK does sometimes try to give a voice to the political opposition it is rarely on the same subjects as those raised by the majority parties. And although public television channels in EU countries do give airtime to "protocol activities", they also put out investigative programmes and debates, which are sadly lacking on RTK.

A WINDOW OF INDEPENDENCE ON RTK: LIFE IN KOSOVO

For the past several months, the law has obliged RTK to invite tenders for purchase of programmes made by independent production agencies. Eventually, 20% of programmes should be produced in this way and it could open the door to programme formats less based on protocol and on "the permanent defence of Kosovo".

Some news programmes have already managed to get onto RTK broadcasting. The programme Life in Kosovo, produced by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) is one of the very few independent news feature programmes. BIRN also supports the English-language monthly Pristina Insight. This is not without risk however.

During local elections in May 2009, members of a film crew from Life in Kosovo were physically attacked by thugs as they covered the campaign in Skenderaj of the mayor, Sami Lushtaku. They were threatened and prevented from filming. Police, who were present throughout, did not intervene except to escort the journalists from Life in Kosovo to the edge of town.

The day after their report was broadcast on 28 May 2009 the daily InfoPress, close to the prime minister's party, the PDK, launched a virulent campaign for the programme to be taken off air permanently and calling indirectly for the murder of its director, Jehtra Xharra, accusing her of "es-

pionage to the benefit of Serbia", of "cooking up her programme in the kitchens of Belgrade" and of being "the sworn enemy of Kosovo". The campaign escalated over a 12-day period. Although a section of the profession offered principled support to Jehtra Xharra, the association of journalists was all but silent. The international community, which reacted intolerably slowly, did not go so far as to openly criticise the actions of InfoPress, to the bewilderment of the profession, deepening the mistrust felt by the population.

"Beyond the InfoPress campaign, what is also revealing is the attitude of the justice system. Of course we tried to lay a complaint against the police and demand that the case be referred to the courts. But the prosecutor refused to take the case, claiming that if he opened proceedings, he would expose himself to the same treatment from InfoPress and others linked to them. The justice system itself can fall prey to these campaigns even though it had nothing to do with the issue", said Xharra.

The Kosovar political class with the majority parties of the government at their head, let several days go by before starting what deputy prime minister, Hajredin Kuçi, called a "mediation mission" aimed not at condemning the stance of InfoPress and Sami Lushtaku, but rather to promote "a possible dialogue between the authorities and the media who must be responsible". During an interview with Reporters Without Borders, Kuçi stressed his government's commitment to freedom of the press, assuring us that all coalition members shared this viewpoint. He however condemned press defamation campaigns against the political class. Kuçi accepted that calls for journalists to be killed were unacceptable.

But this official point of view is difficult to swallow when one learns that the mayor of Skenderaj is still a member of the prime minister's party, the PDK, and that the management of InfoPress continues to receive the same political and financial backing from the government's circles. It is a bizarre concept of journalism when a section of the national press can shamelessly call for the death of a colleague and which urges "independence for the justice system" on its pages while at the same time putting this system in fear of defamation.

PRIVATELY OWNED CHANNELS KTV AND RTV 21

When they were founded in 2004, KTV and RTV 21 each received grants of 8,000,000 euros (half in practical support and half in financial backing). These funds came chiefly from USAID but also from some private foundations. These funds allow



the two channels to launch effectively but were not sufficient to ensure their financial viability. They were quickly in competition with one another to attract the biggest share of the private advertising market estimated to stand at between 4,000,000 and 6,000,000 euros.

Both channels are well equipped and are trying to develop good quality programmes. But they still have trouble competing with RTK and have not managed to offer a genuine alternative to the protocol-based format in news produced by the public chain on which they model themselves. Their financial viability will depend on institutional and private advertising. The regulatory void in this area effectively forces these two privately owned channels to lapse into editorial lines often too close to their public competitor in order to have a chance of winning the same advertisers.

These two private channels also do not get the same opportunities for access to the most profitable programmes. For example football matches and foreign sitcoms are mostly reserved for RTK. Strangely, the roles generally taken by public service radio and television and privately owned television appear to have been inverted.

RROKUM TV OPENS THE DOOR TO WEB TV AND PAYS THE PRICE

The creation of Rrokum TV in 2003 came in response to the need to break the monopoly of RTK and to address the absence of sufficiently independent news. Behind this plan was Migjen Kelmendi, who had been appointed head of RTK's board after the Nato intervention of 1999, Kelmendi tried to put into effect at RTK the kind of role that should be played by public service television. But the internal practices and the pressure promptly applied to keep the management under direct government control did not appear to him to be compatible with the idea of a public service mission.

After resigning from his position as director of RTK, Kelmendi in 2003 established a partnership with a private English company to launch Rrokum TV. The new channel then began to target one of the analogue licences still available for Pristina alone. Oddly, even though these licences had been free for a number of years, the three national television channels actively opposed this application, taking a hostile view of the arrival of a private competitor in the media chiefly based on the capital.

Rrokum tried for more than two years to secure one of these two licences. It threw in the towel in 2004 having received no reply from the authorities. In 2010, these two local terrestrial licences are

strangely still available and none of the three national channels have attempted to base any plans on them. These licences could in the next few months become the object of an apparent tendering offer but the project is behind schedule. The authorities may be taking their time to make certain that they do not fall into "unfavourable" hands.

The cable market was in December 2006 divided between two companies: KUJTESA and IPKO. Internet started to become available in a very limited market, but expanding to cover nearly 10,000 families, cafés and public places. In collaboration with the cable operator KUJTESA, Rrokum created the first cable TV, initially confined to a music channel to test the financial viability of such a project Rrokum is now available only on the KUJTESA network.

Here too, the three national operators acted together to sabotage the project, taking numerous cases to the regulatory authorities, including to Robert Gillette, who at the time was the director of the media regulation agency. In March 2007, Rrokum came under ever greater pressure from the regulatory agency to stop broadcasting. But current legislation does not allow the regulator to intervene and the agency began a legislative marathon which only three months later legislated for the organisation of the cable operating market. The law that was passed in July 2007, did not really come into force until December 2007. During the second half of 2007, no fewer than ten other TV channels were installed on KUJTESA opening the door to other productions than those of the three national channels RTK, KTV and RTV 21.

Cable operator IPKO in 2008 won the second mobile telephone network licence in a battle with KUJTESA amidst high political and economic tension. Anton Berisha then head of the regulatory authority and whose job it was to decide on the granting of the licence escaped three attacks against him, one with a bazooka fired at his car.

Encouraged by its success, IPKO opened up its cable to television channels, leading Rrokum to sign a five-year contract with it, while retaining the musical platform with which it had launched, opening up a major space for news programmes – news magazines, political talk shows, political analysis allowing viewers to put their questions live which had never been done before. It meant a revolution in the national television market, where news programmes had been highly formalised. Rrokum saw its viewing figures increase and despite recurrent financial problems linked to state control over advertising, Rrokum went from strength to strength on cable.

IPKO switched from analogue to digital in 2009 and on 1st April 2009 suspended Rrokum TV from its network even though Rrokum had a five-year broadcast contract. Rrokum TV has since then been excluded from the 80 local, regional and international relays that make up the network. IPKO invoked technical problems and maintenance work on the network but the real reason for their conflict more probably lies in the calling into question of the initial contract and the determination of IPKO to make Rrokum TV pay up again.

Rrokum TV finished the financial year 2009 in profit. A miracle? Almost. Elections were held that year and during the election period, Rrokum TV had access to only a tiny share in electoral and institutional advertising. “At election time we receive a little of the institutional benefit – it would be too flagrant if we didn’t and the government does not neglect any possible votes”, added Kelmendi. But this did not happen again in 2010 and the small independent channel is today a shadow of its former self. The editorial staff has been reduced to around 20 and journalists must multi-task for low monthly salaries of around 150 to 300 euros. Rrokum is relying on young journalists who attend their university courses in the morning and work as journalists in the afternoon. The same is true for technical staff. Rrokum has reduced its costs to the minimum and cannot offer more to its journalists, who however continue to work for it.

KLAN TV: A NEWCOMER THAT HAS YET TO PROVE ITSELF

KLAN TV is one of the media phenomena that have sprung up like mushrooms. It grew out of the Albanian group KLAN, close to the government of Salih Berisha, and rapidly established itself in Pristina. Clearly enjoying generous financial circumstances, KLAN TV has imported all its equipment from Albania, incidentally created a first debate about customs charges which it seems to have been exempted from.

KLAN TV has almost 110 staff member employed from the start at attractive salaries on the media market, getting around 600 euros a month when most journalists have to live on an average salary of up to 300 euros. But these costs very quickly weighed on the financial viability of KLAN TV and the new TV has apparently already needed to look for major financial backing. One possible solution to its development could come from broadcasting on one of the two analogue licences for Pristina, thus allowing Albania to boost its presence on the Kosovar airwaves. Some journalists believe this plan of its Albanian neighbour was on the cards for a very long time and explains

why these two analogue licences were left open for so many years.

The KLAN project is causing concern to a large part of Kosovo’s media because the exporting of the “Albanian model” in the media world is not being met with enthusiasm.

URGENT RE-LAUNCH FOR THE ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS

This association was founded in 2002 by Kosovo’s best known journalists enjoying the greatest credibility. The Association of Professional Journalists of Kosovo was established as a non-governmental organisation (NGO). Partly backed by the international community, particularly by IREX and Balkan Trust of Democracy which gave financial aid and major logistical help, the association enjoyed respect from the profession and international bodies. Solidarity was established with the profession and the association set itself the goal of tackling as many problems as it could. It set up monitoring of press freedom and provided an effective gauge of problems that existed at the time. It held regular meetings between journalists to discuss its undertakings, ethics and professionalization, organising training sessions. However 2009 saw the beginning of a long and agonising downward spiral.

The association’s board was re-elected in January 2009. Mentor Shala was voted in as president, an important but unremunerated position. As Shala kept his job as editor in chief of RTK his policy enjoyed less and less support from the board which through lack of funds was able to hold carry on fewer of the activities that had brought it such approval. Under his presidency some cases were not taken up. The association for example took about ten days to react to Info Press’s call for the murder of the journalist working on the Life in Kosovo programme.

The start of 2010 brought a temporary halt to the association that was facing growing financial difficulties. The association’s difficulties and the lack of clear and robust policy towards abuses of the press freedom did not help attract new patrons, either local or foreign. Shala was moreover promoted to deputy director of RTK and he resigned in March 2010 as did a large number of the board, thus leaving the association without any management and in a difficult financial position. Under its NGO status, the association is considered as dormant and will need a budget and a sufficiently independent board to get back on track in the way many journalists hope it will.



Bul Salihu

THE EMERGENCE OF THE KOSOVAR BLOGOSPHERE

The second national daily Zëri has opened a platform that is beginning to show good results. Bul Salihu has a news blog on it <http://www.zeri.info/blogi/teksti/bul-salihu/45/> that has seen significant growth. Salihu has total editorial freedom since Zëri is not responsible for content and does not read the articles and comments that are posted. He has attracted serious interest from bloggers and on Facebook after posting an article about Mimoza Kusari, a young individual who embodied the hopes of young Kosovars who suddenly joined the political party Alliance New Kosovo at the most recent 2009 local elections in Kosovo. The new party is headed by businessman, Behgjet Pacolli, whose funding comes from within the construction industry in Russia. Facing proceedings in Switzerland launched by the prosecutor Carla Del Ponte in the framework of organised crime, Pacolli has never been convicted of anything but remains a controversial figure. The creation of this new party came at a convenient time for Prime Minister Taci, whose parliamentary majority remains fragile and spread over several political groupings.

The article was a big success scoring 5,000 hits, and was put up on Facebook's accounts wall. It also received comments from about 60 people which amount to a success in the light of the fact that blogs are still new to Kosovo.

THE MEDIA AND THE SERBIAN MINORITIES

In January 2009, after two years of inactivity, a fund dedicated to support minority media (the Minority media Fund) was re-launched and 14 media were able to benefit from it. Some 110 local publication licences were granted, 41 of them for minorities (32 Serb, 3 Turkish, 3 Bosnian, 2 Gorani and one Roma). All official information is translated into Serbo-Croat and there is no serious problem for the Serb minority to get access to these translations. This information is rarely of real interest to Serbian minorities and their media who find they do not really respond to their chief preoccupations.

RTK does not fulfil its obligation to broadcast 15% of its programmes in minority languages. Programmes put out in Serbian, Bosnian, Turkish and Roma languages are generally translations of programmes in Albanian on subjects that are very rarely of interest to the minorities.

Although there is a lot left to do in relation to television, the Serb minority are on the other hand well served for radio. Around 40 local radio stations are operating on the network today and between

them cover most of Kosovo. Some journalists active in these radios try to work with editorial independence that is not always welcome.

Serbia however retains huge influence over the Serb minority enclaves. Belgrade invests, as in most sectors, a good deal in supporting the Kosovo Serbs' media, through advertising, but also through making Serbian productions available, such as films, various programmes, news and so on. While this is appreciated by a section of the profession, this support can have ramifications for the independence of journalists who experience similar difficulties to those of their Albanian speaking colleagues.

Although Serbo-Kosovar journalists can work more or less freely in the southern enclaves, the situation is still very complicated in the north, in Mitrovica. "The state of Serbian minority media in the south of Kosovo has nothing in common with that in Mitrovica. Even as ordinary Serbs of Kosovo we encounter problems when we go to the north of Kosovo, but all the more as journalists. People are still very reluctant to have anything to do with the press. They want to know where we come from, who we work for, our point of view and so on. It is not just a community problem. It is a kind of rejection of the Kosovar press as a whole. We get the impression that the Serbian media are the only legitimate organs. It is possible to work there but conditions are difficult even for us", said one radio journalist.

The financial situation of the Serbian minority, which is just as worrying as that of the Albanian speakers, does not leave many alternatives. A campaign on the part of some journalists could of course make a difference, but it would require major and sustained financial backing on the part of the international community.

INTERVIEW WITH ADEM DEMAÇI

1991 Sakharov Prize laureate and member of the Sakharov Network

Adem Demaçi, who was born in Pristina in 1936, has spent the largest part of his life in prison. From 1958 to 1990 he was detained for defending the basic rights of Albanians in Kosovo. After his release, Demaçi took over the management and the presidency of the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms. During the conflict between Kosovo and Serbia in 1998-1999, he was the political representative of the Kosovo Liberation Army. He then devoted himself to the issue of the return of refugees and ethnic reconciliation, particularly through the presidency of the Committee for mutual comprehension, tolerance and coexistence.

Reporters Without Borders (in partnership with the Sakharov Network): Adem it is a big honour for us to see you again. It is probably the first meeting of two Sakharov prize winners in Pristina and it is a great pleasure for us. You are undeniably one of Kosovo's most respected figures. How do you see the state of press freedom in this young and new country.

Adem Demaçi: It is quite simply in keeping with the image of the country, chaotic. The newspapers are not, cannot be independent. Koha Ditore is certainly the most serious of the dailies, but we cannot be satisfied with just one title to inform us and it's not all perfect there either. The other titles are for the most party linked to political parties close to the majority or the government. The rest are in the camp of a sterile opposition and are of just as bad faith. The press is in the hands of companies or political parties. There is no real quality space, but that does not mean to say there are not some good professional journalists. There is simply not a landscape conducive to the emergency of a quality press. Nothing can grow in a barren field and as in most sectors we still do not have any fertile soil in which to grow something solid.

But I can understand a good number of these journalists as I understand some of my fellow citizens who have to deal with daily problems. The country is in bad shape. There has been no real progress in the past ten years. We are known to be Europe's poorest country and unfortunately it is true. A small elite lives extremely well in Kosovo, but for the rest of the Kosovars, from whichever community, life is very hard. Our education system is not working, our administration is corrupt as is our justice system. Freedom of the press has all my attention and my sympathy but there is an urgent need for the most basic requirements, which means, and one can understand it, that for Kosovars freedom of the press is not always the first thing they have on their minds. Moreover, the people see how little credibility is deserved by some of the media. Some journalists are swanning about in luxury cars while the majority of these people do not earn more than 300 to 400 euros a month. A gap has been opened up and a loss of credibility that could turn out to be very dangerous in time.

RSF: What could we have done to avoid this travesty?

A.D.: At the end of the war, I had two interviews with Dan Everts, head of mission for the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). He wanted my opinion on how to manage the running of Kosovo. At the time I suggested that Kosovo should become a sort of protectorate of the European Union, to organise the response to the urgent needs of the people: restore the sanitation system, electricity, education – in fact all the areas essential to its

management. The international community did not take up this option and they opened the door to criminal gangs which had already infiltrated the future political class. I saw Dan Everts again a few years later and he recognised that this option might have the better one. But is one of those unique moments when we could make our suggestions. There were certainly urgent things to do at the time and that is why Kosovo should have been taken in hand.



Adem Demaçi

RSF: What can we do to ensure that things really change?

A.D.: That is becoming more and more difficult. Yesterday the international community had considerable clout. It was running Kosovo and could have imposed democratic standards. Today, we have had to hand over as many keys as possible and as fast as possible to this government. They are making the same mistakes as ten years ago, rushing ahead without checking if the basics are in place. Nothing has been resolved from the point of view of basic needs. As for the media we are not ready and what is not set to European standards now will probably not be for at least ten more years.

I remain optimistic but the improvements in the area as in others should come very quickly. It is not as hard as all that but the international community is proving to be so over-cautious. Very few people understand the situation here. People see the efforts at communication from international bodies – they see above all the money that is spent by a bunch of different institutions which are now hard to figure out. There are communications budgets to tell us how the EU is important in the region. But most Kosovars are already convinced of this. We want to rejoin Europe, and we are still very largely grateful to Nato for its intervention. So why spend so much money to tell us that the European or international community is doing here? This money would be so much more useful elsewhere.

CALLS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS:

REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS URGES:

1. hat access to public information guaranteed in Article 41 of the Constitution be effectively offered to all journalists, without administrative or protocol obstacles, with direct physical access to news sources;
2. That Parliament initiates a draft law guaranteeing protection of sources to all journalists based on European standards;
3. That the EULEX mission includes in training of judges information about the major challenges linked to specific rights of the press and of new media;
4. That members of the executive should not be engaged in the process of appointment of members of RTK's management board. This process should be the responsibility of parliament alone. The committee responsible for appointments should also include representatives of the written press, web radio and television, as well as individuals from the academic world, recognised for their professionalism and independence. The ideal situation would be if the half of the committee for appointment comes from media and civil society;
5. That digitalisation should be speeded up and carried out with greater transparency, with consistent follow-up information for all those involved whatever their status or their size. We call on the international community to keep a close watch on this process and to guarantee that it is carried out with full respect for international norms, ensuring fair chances to all;
6. That private and institutional advertising market be liberalised and that the rules of this liberalisation be established in partnership with all sectors of the media including new media;
7. That all institutional advertising be shared out in a fair and transparent manner across television, radio, the written press and news websites, whether public or privately owned. We call on the Kosovar government to provide a public monthly report on the share-out of institutional campaigns that they put in the press specifying the price and the titles that benefited;
8. That the two analogue licences still available in Pristina be compulsorily and quickly made the subject of public tendering clearly defined and open to all. We ask that the international community should be able to observe the allocation process of these two licences which should be done with the utmost transparency;

9. That the government ensures that legislation is drawn up that is clearer and more permissive on radio and television transmission on cable. Web-TV and Web-Radio should not in any case be subjected to licensing and should be encouraged in the process of starting up and transmitting;

10. That a press centre be opened as quickly as possible in Pristina. We urge the international community to switch part of the funds it spends on campaigns promoting their activities in Kosovo to a fund set aside for this project;

REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS RECOMMENDS:

1. That political representatives, starting with government members, stop accusing the press of "espionage" or "attacking national identity", when it is not favourable to them or when they carry out reporting that serves the public interest. We call on the political class to take greater responsibility and not to add to the already charged climate in which journalists must work;
2. That journalists take all the necessary steps to re-launch a professional organisation capable of serving as an interlocutor with national and international institutions.

**REPORTERS
WITHOUT BORDERS**
FOR PRESS FREEDOM

International Secretariat
Reporters Without Borders
47 rue Vivienne
75002 Paris, France
Tel: 33 1 4483-8484
Fax: 33 1 4523-1151
Website: www.rsf.org
E-mail: rsf@rsf.org

Ambroise Pierre - Africa desk: afrique@rsf.org
Benoît Hervieu - Americas desk: ameriques@rsf.org
Vincent Brossel - Asia desk: asie@rsf.org
Elsa Vidal - Europe desk: europa@rsf.org
Olivier Basille - European Union desk: rsf_eu@rsf.org
Soazig Dollet - Middle East desk: moyen-orient@rsf.org
Lucie Morillon - Internet desk: internet@rsf.org
Press contact: presse@rsf.org

REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS is an international press freedom organisation. It monitors and reports violations of media freedom throughout the world. Consisting of a team of 12 journalists and a network of 140 correspondents worldwide, Reporters Without Borders analyses the information it obtains and uses press releases, letters, investigative reports and recommendations to alert public opinion to abuses against journalists and violations of free expression, and to put pressure on politicians and government officials.

Secretary-general: **Jean-Francois Julliard** | Head of publications: **Gilles Lordet**