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Press Freedom In Albania

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ABSTRACT

By academics and journalists alike, a free press is often seen as fundamental to a functioning democracy. A lot of research has been carried out in the field, examining the relation between press freedom, democracy and corruption. This thesis uses the example of Albania to build on the research on press freedom, looking into what conditions are necessary for a functioning free press as well as exploring the relationship between such a press and the society and political environment in which it functions. We find that even though Albania has no legal restraints on the media or freedom of opinion, other restraints are in place which prevent the country from meeting the necessary conditions for a functioning free press.

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“The more I observe the main effects of a free press, the more convinced I am that, in the modern world, freedom of the press is the principal and, so to say, the constitutive element in freedom.”

— Alexis de Tocqueville¹

1. Introduction

Press freedom is often described as a key factor in stifling corruption. For a country like Albania, eager to modernize and be admitted into the European Union, deep-rooted corruption is one of the main obstacles to overcome. If free and independent, the media could play a vital role in this process. However, press freedom is not a binary state in the sense that a country’s media is either free or not. This thesis will argue that the issue of press freedom is much more complex, and that media freedom is determined not only by the absence of censorship but also by, among other factors, rule of law, quality of government, working conditions and the financial situation for the media.

In their world-wide indexes of press freedom, Freedom House gives Albania a score of 51 out of 100, ranking the country’s press status as “partly free”², while Reporters Without Borders places³ Albania on 96th place out of 179 countries surveyed – worst out of all Balkan countries except Montenegro (107th place). By comparison, the ranking is led by Finland and Norway on first and second place, with Turkmenistan, North Korea and Eritrea being the bottom three of all countries surveyed.

The **purpose of this thesis** is to explore press freedom through the example of Albania. To acquire first-hand views and insights into the situation, I have travelled to Albania and interviewed a selection of journalists and media professionals. My findings resonate with a lot of the problems described by previous studies of Albanian media by, among others, Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders, and provide a new level of detail. In the

¹ Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. Lawrence, George, tr. Mayer, J. P., ed. Harper & Row (New York 1969), Book I, Chapter ii, Section 4, p. 191.

² Freedom House. *Freedom of the press* (2012)

³ Reporters Without Borders. *Press Freedom Index* (2011/2012)

following chapters I will present my most relevant findings and, using my interviews, (1) paint a picture of the **media landscape** in Albania as well as (2) outline some of the **major issues** affecting press freedom and the situation for journalists, as well as how these issues play into the press' potential as a **catalyst for societal change**.

In the second chapter I will give a brief introduction to the theoretical background for this study and try to summarize part of the research on media freedom, its role in a democratic society and potential for stifling corruption. I will also describe the method behind this thesis and how I have gathered my material, outline some of the limitations that my method has brought and also suggest topics and fields of further study. The third chapter will give an introduction to the Albanian media landscape. Without going into too much detail, I will describe what freedom the media is guaranteed by the constitution and give some insight into the ongoing debate on the legal situation for media in Albania. Chapter four will deal with political interference in the media and outline the most common ways and methods that politicians – primarily the government, but also the opposition – use to steer and influence the media. In the fifth chapter I will describe the working conditions for journalists in Albania and what effect these have on the journalistic outcome. The sixth chapter will deal with the possible dangers journalists face in their work. In the seventh and final chapter I will go into the conclusions that can be drawn from this material.

1.1 Historical background

Albania is a relatively young country that broke free from the Ottoman empire in 1912. Its history of democracy and press freedom is short. After World War II, with first Italian and then German occupation, Albania emerged as the Socialist People's Republic of Albania – a communist state ruled by Enver Hoxha up until his death in 1985. All media was controlled by the state and the ruling Party of Labour (PPSH) during this period. The party's Central Committee published the most important newspaper, *Zeri i Popullit* (Voice of the People) with a circulation of around 100,000. State-owned Radio Tirana was the dominant radio station, which also broadcasted internationally in around 20 languages.

The communist regime collapsed in 1990 and in the elections of 1992 the ruling Party of

Labour was hoisted out of office.⁴ Democracy and capitalism opened up for private media and since the early nineties the media landscape has developed an with impressive pace. See chapter 3 for more on how the media scene has developed. From time to time, Albanian media has played a huge role in public discourse and had dramatic effects on the political climate. One of the most recent examples was in January 2011, when an investigative program on the TV-station Top Channel aired a video of then Deputy Prime Minister Ilir Meta allegedly discussing corrupt activities⁵. The video sparked large anti-government demonstrations in which four protesters were shot to death by the Republican Guard. During the protests, several journalists were attacked as well – two of which were seriously wounded.

Compared to the half-century of authoritarian rule, Albanian media and democracy is doing well. In October of 2012, the European Commission recommended that Albania should receive EU candidacy status, albeit with some conditions. The Albanian government, led by Prime Minister Sali Berisha of the Democratic Party, took this as an affirmation of their progress in reforming the country. But looking at the global measures of corruption and press freedom over the last decade, a worrying trend is clearly visible. The situation – with regards to corruption and media freedom – is getting worse rather than better.

In Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index for 2012, Albania dropped to 113th place, down from 95th place in 2011, giving the country the lowest score among all European countries.⁶ Reporters Without Borders' "Press Freedom Index" shows an alarming downward trend for Albania. From 34th place in 2003, the country has dropped to 96th place in 2012. Albania is definitely not alone in performing worse today. This trend is visible among several other countries in the region. By comparison, however, none of the other countries in the Balkans have fallen down the ranking with the same pace as Albania.⁷ Albania's bid for candidacy status was turned down by the European Council in December of 2012.

⁴ Vickers, Miranda. *The Albanians: A modern history* (2001)

⁵ In January of 2012, the Supreme Court acquitted Ilir Meta from all charges of corruption.

⁶ Transparency International. *Corruption Perceptions Index* (2012)

⁷ Reporters Without Borders. *Press Freedom Index* (2003-2012)

2. Theoretical background and method

According to Olof Petersson and Ingrid Carlberg⁸ the idea of a democratic society is inextricably linked with the principle of freedom of opinion. The citizens require free access to information to exercise their rights.

The importance one bestows on press freedom stems from one's conception of democracy. In its most simple definition, democracy is the rule of the people. From a normative starting-point, the primary role of media in a democracy has traditionally been defined as scrutinizing power (those who govern) and to inform and facilitate the free exchange of ideas between the governed (the people).⁹

This concept echoes through many liberal theorists, back to the beginning of the Enlightenment, where an independent press is seen as necessary to strengthen the responsiveness and accountability of governments to all citizens, and thereby strengthen democracy itself. Pippa Norris outlines three key functions of the press: a *watch-dog* promoting accountability and transparency, a *civic forum* for political debate, facilitating informed choices, and finally as an *agenda-setter* for policymakers.¹⁰

Others¹¹ see the primary role of the press as improving transparency, and thereby governance, reducing corruption in the long run. Shyamal K. Chowdhury describes the role of the press as disseminating information in order to "reduce the information asymmetries that otherwise prevail between voters – the principle, and public officials, bureaucrats and elected politicians – the agents."¹²

In the final concluding chapter, having gone through my findings, I will try to assess how Albanian media is performing with regards to these different roles of the press. As Kent Asp points out the media plays other roles too. "They are there to entertain, to provide

⁸ Petersson, Olof & Carlberg, Ingrid. (1990)

⁹ Asp, Kent. (2007)

¹⁰ Norris, Pippa. (2006)

¹¹ Lederman, Daniel, Norman V. Loyaza and Rodrigo R. Soares. (2005)

¹² Chowdhury, Shyamal K. (2004)

vicarious experience and sensations, and to make money.”¹³ The focus and theoretical framework for this thesis is however confined to what one might call news media – that is, media content of a journalistic nature.

The normative starting point of this work, and the classic liberal conception of democracy outlined in the paragraph above, is decisive for assessing the situation and performance of the media. It is worth noting that media itself, as a phenomenon, is morally neutral and can play different roles under different forms of government. The previously described classic ideals of the press are often presented in the context of a more or less democratic society, and of a journalistic tradition in which the media is working to serve the citizens and keep the power in check. Under dictatorship or more autocratic regimes, however, the media can just as well work to “maintain autocracies, to reinforce crony capitalism, and to consolidate the power of media oligopolies”.¹⁴

International comparisons show strong support for the assumption that a free press is one of the major components of both democracy and good governance. Comparative studies have found that corruption is less prevalent in countries with a free press. The empirical evidence seems to show that the causation runs from more press freedom to less corruption.¹⁵

One assumption, which rests on the rationale of individual actors, is that the benefit of corrupt acts are weighed against the possible or expected costs. To put it simply, a free press raises the cost of corruption for the individual politician or official by increasing the risk of getting exposed and reprimanded.¹⁶ Being somewhat of a hybrid – not a democracy of, say, West-European standards, yet no longer a dictatorship – with rampant corruption in almost all sectors of society¹⁷, Albania offers an interesting case to study in light of this assumption and see whether it rings true in this particular country.

Another assumption, touched upon earlier, rests on the democratic influence of the public

¹³ Asp, Kent. (2007)

¹⁴ Norris, Pippa. (2006)

¹⁵ Färdigh, Mathias. (2007)

¹⁶ Färdigh, Andersson, Oscarsson. (2011) & Ahrend, Rudiger. (2002)

¹⁷ U.S. Department of State. *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Albania* (2011)

(the principal), who are provided with information and gain insight into political affairs and the workings of politicians and officials (the agents) through the transparency provided by the media. Corruption cases are brought by the free press to the voters who, in a functioning democracy, punish the corrupt politicians by ousting them from office. In this way, the political classes have an incentive to deal with corruption within their own ranks in order not to lose the trust of the voters.¹⁸ This assumption is challenged by Bo Rothstein who stresses the sheer scale of the task of establishing "good governance" in countries with deep-rooted corruption. To achieve that, he argues, occasional incremental changes (e.g. due to the press' reporting) is not enough. What's needed is a more revolutionary, "big bang' type of change".¹⁹

Relying on individual actors to absorb the information presented to them by, in this case, the press and then act on it both rationally and morally might be asking for too much. Since these individuals are working within the corrupt environment, they risk becoming involved in the corrupt arrangements for their own benefit. Furthermore, in cultures of corruption the practice can be beneficial to both the bureaucrat and the client or citizen, keeping things running smoothly and giving them both relative short-term gains. In all cases, even someone who finds corruption morally wrong is still likely to take part in it as long as everyone else is doing it – there is no point in being the only one to act in a noble manner.²⁰

In this environment, the press could potentially be in a unique position to investigate and expose wrongdoing. If independent, their only bias and incentives should be towards news, investigating and uncovering stories. If the media market is competitive and free, one might be able to buy off some journalists but not all of them.²¹ These are however big "ifs", which we will go into in the following chapters. And even with a free and independent press, is transparency itself enough to prompt political change? Lindstedt and Naurin find that informing the citizens will not contribute to stifle corruption if "such conditions for

¹⁸ Chowdhury, Shyamal K. (2004)

¹⁹ Rothstein, Bo. (2011)

²⁰ Rothstein, Bo. (2011)

²¹ Brunetti, Aymo & Weder, Beatrice. (2003)

publicity and accountability as education, media circulation and free and fair elections are weak.”²²

Both within the international community as well as in academic circles, strengthening press freedom is proposed as a way of fighting corruption.²³ Albania has a relatively free media (in the negative sense of liberty, as the absence of censorship or state control) and is a very corrupt country, becoming more so according to organizations like Transparency International.²⁴ Understanding the case of Albanian media might help us to better understand both the limits and the potential of press freedom as a tool for fighting corruption, as well as what other factors are essential for a free press to be able to work towards better governance.

For Albanian media, fighting corruption is an uphill battle – and a particularly steep one at that. In countries with a working system of checks and balances, an independent judiciary contributes in reducing the potential benefits of corruption²⁵. In their 2011 report the U.S. State Department concluded that corruption remained a serious problem in all branches of Albania’s government and “particularly within the court system”²⁶. In more developed democracies, the courts play their part as an external controller on power, checking corruption. This task of external control is shared with, among others, the media.²⁷ But in the case of Albania, the courts are failing to live up to this role, whereby the media is forced to fill the vacuum of the judiciary and carry a major part of the role of “external controller” in checking corruption.

Most of the research on press freedom, democracy and corruption referred to in this chapter is concerned with the effects a free press may have on society. However, it stands to reason that **this process must be reciprocal**, since the press – even if free from a state censor – does not operate in a vacuum but is an integral part of society. With the choice of topics in this thesis, my aim is to look at press freedom from this opposite angle

²² Lindstedt, Catharina & Naurin, Daniel. (2010)

²³ Ahrend, Rudiger. (2002)

²⁴ Transparency International. *Corruption Perceptions Index* (2012)

²⁵ Färdigh, Mathias. (2007)

²⁶ U.S. Department of State. *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Albania* (2011)

²⁷ Brunetti, Aymo & Weder, Beatrice. (2003)

and investigate how a free press (in legal terms, that is) is hindered or hampered by the societal and democratic *milieu* in which it functions.

Mathias Färdigh quotes David H. Weaver who defines press freedom in the following three ways: "(1) as the **relative absence of governmental restraints** on the media; (2) as the relative absence of governmental and **other restraints** on the media; and (3) as not only the absence of restraints on the media, but also the **presence of those conditions necessary** for the dissemination of a diversity of ideas and opinions to a relatively large audience such as enforced right of access to newspapers and radio stations (Weaver 1977, 152)".²⁸

As I will explain in the next chapter, the first of Weaver's conditions is more or less fulfilled thanks to Albania's relatively free media legislation. The topics of investigation chosen for this study – media landscape, political interference, financial situation of the media, working conditions for journalists as well as violence and threats – are examples of those other restraints (2) and necessary conditions (3) that Weaver so rightly describes as essential to the concept of press freedom. Other examples of such themes, but outside the scope of this thesis, are circulation of media and the public's access to media content.

2.1 Method

The material in this thesis has been collected through personal interviews with 13 subjects in Tirana, Albania. Ten of these were journalists from both newspapers and television, from so called oppositional as well as more government friendly outlets. These persons will be introduced in the following chapters. The remaining three interviews were conducted with **Remzi Lani**, director of the Albanian Media Institute, **Alexander Çipa**, head of the Union of Albanian Journalists, and **Entela Kasi**, president of PEN Albania. The Albanian Media Institute is a civil society organization involved in, among many other things, training of journalists and media research. PEN is an international organization working, in broad terms, to defend freedom of expression. The sample of journalists interviewed were selected partly on recommendation from the Albanian Media Institute and partly on reference from their fellow journalists that I met and/or interviewed. The obvious risks

²⁸ Färdigh, Mathias. (2007)

with this approach were worth taking, seeing as my contacts within the Albanian media scene were very limited prior to this study. I had no choice but to rely on the few journalistic contacts I had in the country and find my interviewees through them.

My reason for picking Albania as a case-country was to some extent personal. I have been interested in the Balkans and in Albania for long enough not to be able to remember what sparked this interest in the first place. As a country that has recently emerged out of totalitarianism and state-owned media, Albania of today with its young and fragile democracy, deeply-rooted corruption and privately owned media offers an interesting possibility to explore the issue of press freedom. However, the problems and issues described by the respondents are far from uniquely Albanian but similar to the problems and issues in countries with similar history and cultures of corruption, especially in Eastern Europe.

The choice of method and scope of study obviously limits the conclusions that can be drawn from my findings. The selection of interviewees is limited in number, even if "both sides" of the political spectrum are represented. The complexity of these topics was my main reason for going for a qualitative in-depth method of research. Whereas a survey sent to a much larger number of journalists would have given me a more substantial and generalizable amount of data, this method allowed me to perform a more thorough set of interviews and to ask necessary follow-up questions. Furthermore, the issues I am concerned with, such as self-censorship or political interference, are difficult to concretize and quantify within a questionnaire survey.

I have only focused my research on the media based in the capital of Tirana. Bringing in the local media landscape and journalists in the rest of the country would be an interesting objective of further study into this issue. So would a look into the representation of ethnic and cultural minorities in mainstream Albanian media. The Albanian Media Institute have done an interesting study²⁹ into media aimed at and/or run by minorities, which could be used to build upon.

As we shall see in the following chapters, the judiciary and the issue of its independence is a frequent topic of discussion when talking about the situation for journalists in Albania. A

²⁹ Albanian Media Institute. *Minority media in Albania in 2009*. (2009)

thorough look into court cases involving journalists in Albania would be another interesting subject for further study.

On the matter of precision, I should mention that these interviews – with the exception of three of them, where an interpreter was used – was conducted in a second language (English) both for myself and the people interviewed. I can't be certain of in what way, if any, this affected my findings, but it is at least worth mentioning. All interviewees were also offered the option of anonymity, but none of them felt it was necessary. However, those with stories of violence or severe threats were usually reluctant to go into specifics about such events, wary of possible repercussions. Hence the number of concrete and detailed examples in chapter six is limited.

3. Media landscape

"The press is free. Freedom of the press is protected by law."³⁰ This statement, which comprises Albania's *entire* Law on the Press, is at least direct in its simplicity. Since the early nineties, the media landscape has developed dramatically with an ever increasing number of media outlets. The *laissez-faire* attitude towards the market and regulation is partly understandable, taking into account that the country relatively recently emerged from half a century of communism.

"Coming from the experience we've had, being a communist country, it's a big thing for us to now be able to write and express our opinions freely. To try to impose stiff regulations on Albanians at this stage would feel like a remnant of the regime we used to live under." says **Alfred Lela**, deputy editor-in-chief at newspaper *Mapo*.

But as we shall see in the next chapter, the absence of repressive legislation neither guarantees any particular outcome, nor does it protect against political pressure or interference. The new and open media market has spawned an impressive amount of newspapers and other media outlets. It has also brought new problems and challenges. The lack of regulation and transparency in the media business is a frequent topic of debate.

³⁰ Law No.8239, "On Press," 03.09.1997.

”Market analysis is by no means a familiar practice in Albania, and media businesses operate in the mist, with no data on their efficiency, apart from gut feelings.” writes the Albanian Media Institute in a report on media ownership³¹. According to a 2012 report³² there are 26 daily newspapers published in Albania. Their total combined circulation is not believed to exceed 70,000 copies. There are about 63 local and two commercial national radio stations along with one public national station, Radio Tirana. There is also a large number of local and cable TV stations. The three most popular national television broadcasters are the public broadcaster RTSH, followed by TV Klan and Top Channel.

The independence of RTSH is questionable, to put it mildly. ”It is a ministry for propaganda” says Remzi Lani, director of the Albanian Media Institute. RTSH has several national and local television and radio stations, all financially dependent on the government and biased to its favor.³³ RTSH receives 50 percent of its budget from the government, which controls the editorial line.³⁴ According to the EU, the independence of RTSH has not been increased. The public broadcaster ”continues to lack sufficient administrative and technical capacity and concerns remain about its independence”.³⁵

Just under half the population have internet access³⁶, and online media is on the rise. The chairman of the Union of Albanian Journalists, Alexander Çipa, says that ”in the last two years, we have seen a 10-15 percent increase in online media. This is one of the most positive phenomena we have noticed in Albanian media in the last years. The internet is a space which further enriches the freedom of the press and of the media in general.”

Probably the first aspect of the media market that strikes you when browsing the newspaper stands in Tirana is the over-establishment of media outlets. There are 26 daily newspapers available – in a country of just under 3 million people. Because of the lack of transparency mentioned earlier, and the absence of any circulation data other than the newspaper’s own statistics, it is hard to say how well all these publications are doing. It is

³¹ Londo, Ilda. *Media Ownership, Independence and Pluralism*. (2007)

³² Londo, Ilda. *Mapping Digital Media: Albania* (2012)

³³ Freedom House. *Freedom of the press* (2012)

³⁴ U.S. Department of State. *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Albania* (2011)

³⁵ European Commission. *Albania 2011 Progress report*.

³⁶ Londo, Ilda. *Mapping Digital Media: Albania* (2012)

however clear that a majority of them are mere side-products of big business conglomerates, who use them as a forum for their own political agenda. They might have a circulation of just a few hundred, and are sustained financially through their owners' other businesses.³⁷

"These newspapers that sell maybe 200 copies are basically propaganda tools that are used [by special interests] to slander people. They have nothing to do with journalism, they are just there because someone can afford to pay for them." says **Besar Likmeta**, Albanian editor for the regional English-language news portal *Balkan Insight*.

"The people behind the majority of these papers are involved in business, from the construction industry and so on. Of all the available papers maybe only four or five of them really sell – the rest mainly exist for the press review on television each morning. They are used as a way to attack political enemies or to protect the owner's own interests." explains **Muhamed Veliu**, political correspondent for the private television station *Top Channel*.

Among this cacophony of newspapers, there are a few that are commonly viewed as the major and more influential ones. Again, because of the lack of data it is hard to rank and compare them to each other. The journalists interviewed in this thesis are all from these major papers apart from some, like Muhamed Veliu, who represent the televised media, and Besar Likmeta whose outlet *Balkan Insight* is targeted at an international audience.

These outlets all have their place in Albania's polarized media landscape, which follows the country's political battle-lines. The independence from the government or the opposition varies, but almost all of them can be put in either one of those two political camps.

Valbona Kurti, vice director of the news department at private television station *Vizion plus*, explains how "you can see this polarization everywhere in the news, in the priorities. In some media, for example, the government will always be the lead or top story." In her opinion Albania has "almost no free media", in the sense of media which is independent from political interests. "Most media is either controlled by the Democratic Party and the government, or under the interest of the opposition." she says.

³⁷ Interview with Remzi Lani, director of the Albanian Media Institute.

When discussing the legal situation for the media in Albania, most people interviewed brought up the problems with rule of law that permeate all of society. When asked what were the major shortcomings in the current legislation and what reforms they would like to see, many found that line of question irrelevant.

”I don’t believe that more legislation is actually going to fix anything when you cannot even apply the rules that are already there. It is not only the media sector that suffers from this – all sectors of society suffer.” says Besar Likmeta at *Balkan Insight*.

One example is the poor implementation of the labor code, which will be discussed in chapter five. Another example is the law regulating public information and access to documents, which is fairly good by international standards. But because of lacking implementation and accountability, journalists working towards a deadline are usually forced to rely on personal contacts and informal procedures to get access to documents from the authorities.

The law guarantees a citizen who requests information a response within 40 days. **Fatjona Mejdini**, political reporter at *Shqip* newspaper, explains that ”in most cases, they never respond.” Well aware of the bad state of the judiciary, and the levels of corruption, she believes most journalists do not bother to press charges when their right to information is not respected. ”You know the procedures, the high legal costs, and even if you’ve done everything right you can’t be sure that the judge will give a fair ruling.” she says.

Mero Baze, founder and editor-in-chief of *Tema* newspaper, explains that ”access to information is very limited. If you raise a sensitive question or inquiry you will encounter a wall of resistance from the officials.”

Similar stories are common. In a panel discussion arranged by IREX as part of their Media Sustainability Index-report on Albania, the deficit in implementation of the law on access to information was explained as partly stemming from ”political and cultural resistance to openness and transparency reflected in the bureaucratic administration”.³⁸

³⁸ IREX. *Media Sustainability Index 2012 – Albania*

4. Political interference

The fact that the media is not restrained by law or censored by the state doesn't mean that it is free from political control and interference. As we shall see in this chapter, the government has several refined methods of influencing the media and exerting pressure on the different media outlets.

Media outlets in Albania are in a difficult financial situation, which has worsened since the financial crisis erupted. Not only does this have consequences for journalists' work conditions, which will be discussed in the next chapter, but it also makes media very dependent on their financiers. Here, the state (i.e. the government) wields considerable power, both directly and indirectly. In the most direct way, all ministries of government have their own advertising budget to invest in public information campaigns. The lion's share of this money – in total between 14 to 15 million euros annually³⁹ – goes to government-friendly media. These public funds are used to reward some outlets for their reporting and to punish others by giving the advertising to their competitors.

Almost all interviewees described this practice as a problem. **Emirjon Senja** was a reporter at *Shekulli* newspaper for almost five years before he left the job and started working at the Tirana University instead. He sees the government advertising as a way to buy loyalty, and is afraid that "journalism will die here, if the situation goes on like this for five or ten more years and if the only way to survive financially is to be near the government."

Aristir Lumezi at *Panorama* newspaper also stresses the power that the government wields with their advertising budget. "The best selling newspapers should get this money, but right now it is mainly the pro-government outlets that get it." he says.

"Here at Top Channel, we did not get more than maybe 3 percent of this advertising. Most of the money go to pro-government television stations and media outlets like Klan Television." says *Top Channel's* Muhamed Veliu.

³⁹ Estimation from interviews with Mero Baze and Muhamed Veliu.

Valbona Kurti from *Vizion plus* also states that "two or three television stations take most of the government money, and the outlets that are critical get almost nothing. They [the government] use this money to buy the media. And it is a lot of money for a small country with a small state budget."

Private advertising is managed in a similar way. Here the government's influence is indirect, yet just as strong as its direct influence. It is important to grasp how intertwined business and politics are in Albania, as they are in many countries with similar levels and cultures of corruption. And since the media is polarized along the political lines, businesses advertising in oppositional media is seen as actively supporting the opposition. Business-owners are well aware of this, and know that their choice of media partners will have consequences for their relations with the state. This puts oppositional or critical media in a disadvantage compared to more government-friendly outlets.

"It is very hard [for oppositional media] to get advertising. Sometimes, if a business advertises with the wrong media, the government will send the tax authorities against that company. I am not saying this happens all the time, but it is something that they [the businesses] have to think about." says Besar Likmeta at *Balkan Insight*.

Anila Basha is director and co-founder of newspaper *Shqiptarja.com*, and answers "it is very difficult" when asked how they find advertising. "If you see our paper, as well as *Tema* or *Shqip*, nobody wants to advertise with us. They are afraid of the getting in trouble with the tax offices or of having other political pressure from the government" she says.

Muhamed Veliu at *Top Channel* also says that "opposition media has a hard time getting advertising. Some of the businesses are reluctant to advertise on television stations that are critical of the government, because the next day the financial police [tax authorities] goes and make their lives miserable. This puts the critical media in a very difficult position."

This practice clearly skews the competition on the media market. The cash flow of advertising is not determined primarily by the quality, popularity or circulation of the outlets, but of their political allegiance. This puts oppositional media in an unfavorable position in relation to their pro-government competitors.

”We have poor media and very wealthy media. But they are in that situation not because of their professionalism or their performance, but because of their support from political and business interests. For instance *Tema*, my newspaper, is the most popular online news source, but it is also the poorest.” says Mero Baze.

This echoes the complaints raised by publishers and broadcasters in the U.S. Department of State’s report from 2011 on human rights, where they said that ”the government distributed its advertising based on favorable reporting rather than viewership or readership.”

As a final point on the topic of advertising, it is worth stressing that advertising is not a tool only for the government. Powerful and wealthy businesses can and do use their economic power to buy the silence of media. Besar Likmeta at *Balkan Insight* is not the only interviewee to give the example of ”the cell-phone companies who use their advertising budget that they have, which is pretty big, to keep newspapers from writing about their high tariffs...”

Financial dependence also has consequences for the outcome and journalistic product. The resources to do more investigative in-depth reporting are lacking. It is also hard to keep talent in the profession.

Besar Likmeta believes that ”smart people, those who have the ability to do quality reporting, can do other jobs too. If you don’t invest in human resources, you’re going to lose them. The experienced reporters are replaced by a younger and cheaper crowd. They lack the experience and are not trained good enough. Then they come into this market with a lot of pressure from publishers, the business elite and politicians. It’s hard for these new reporters who are just trying to make ends meet, that are paid poorly, to provide quality journalism in this difficult environment.”

The financial dependence also seeps into how the media outlets are run internally. The dependence on political and business interests has affected the editorial structure of news media. Besar Likmeta explains that the editors ”do not work as a filter for quality.” Instead they work to ”ensure that what appears on television or in the newspaper is in line with the business or political party supporting the news outlet.” In this environment, the editors act as censors rather than filters. Usually self-censorship – a phenomenon that will be

discussed further on in this thesis – kicks in even before an issue reaches the editors. "It's not like the editors have to tell you what goes and what doesn't. Once you're hired, everybody knows the leniency of that newspaper or TV station and what you can't write about." says Besar Likmeta.

Emirjon Senja, who worked at *Shekulli* newspaper, concurs and says that as a journalist "you have a virtual map in your mind – you know if your newspaper is financed by this business or that political party. You don't need anyone to tell you about it. And if you should step over the line, the editors are there insisting either that this is not newsworthy, that people don't want to read it, or tell you to find more information until you drop the story."

This situation is also described in the U.S. State Department report referred to earlier. "Journalists continued to complain that publishers and editors censored their work either directly or indirectly in response to political and commercial pressures."⁴⁰ The European Commission's progress report⁴¹ on Albania similarly states that "editorial independence continues to be hampered by political and business interests, which also leads to self-censorship."

4.1 Corrupt judiciary

The levels of corruption in Albanian society, especially within the judiciary⁴², was discussed in the second chapter. The regulatory bodies are seen as highly politicized⁴³ and journalists and media companies risk high fines if sued by influential people with economic and/or political interests. That is not to say that all judges will indiscriminately rule against all journalists at all times. However, a brief look into some of the more well-known cases from the last couple of years involving journalists do give the impression of a judicial system that is both unreliable and unpredictable.

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Albania (2011)

⁴¹ European Commission. *Albania 2011 Progress report*

⁴² U.S. Department of State. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Albania (2011)

⁴³ Freedom House. *Freedom of the press* (2012)

In their 2011-report, the U.S. Department of State highlights the example of when Mero Baze – interviewed for this thesis – was sued for libel by an appellate court judge in 2009. "The Tirana District Court ruled in favor of Baze. However, Baze claimed that in September 2010 the appellate court, without notifying Baze or his lawyer, ruled that he should pay Sollaku [the judge] 10 million leks (\$91,500) in moral damages and Baze's newspaper company should pay Sollaku 5 million leks (\$45,750). Baze appealed the ruling to the High Court, which reportedly failed to inform Baze about their ruling upholding the lower court decision before initiating collection procedures."⁴⁴

When asked how often he and his newspaper get sued, Mero Baze replies "every month" and laughs. But the fines imposed are no laughing matter. "They [the fines] can go as high as 800.000 euro. I earn 500 euro per month – I wouldn't be able to pay those fines off if I worked for 400 years. These fines are given to buy the silence of the journalists, they don't expect to actually get the money they sue you for. It is a way of intimidating us." he says.

The European Commission draws similar conclusions in its progress report from 2011, although not as categorically: "The application of the principle of proportionality of fines against media outlets or journalists is not always respected." the report reads.⁴⁵

4.2 Other types of pressure

Fatjona Mejdini, political reporter at *Shqip* newspaper, says she is not particularly worried about ending up in court. The thought of it is always present, she says, but as she reports mainly on the daily activities of the Prime Minister she can steer clear from the most sensitive topics and investigations. There are however other more subtle ways for the political establishment to show their dislike of individual reporters and their stories.

"If I make a story that is not the story that the government wants to hear I will find myself with personal problems, usually that I don't get invited when there is a press conference, or that I can't get hold of the documents I want." says Fatjona Mejdini.

⁴⁴ U.S. Department of State. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Albania (2011)

⁴⁵ European Commission. *Albania 2011 Progress report*

Several of the interviewed journalists mention that they are concerned with the possible consequences that their reporting might have for their family members and relatives. Fatjona Mejdini says that journalists in Albania "know that when they do a story against politicians, their family members risk being fired if they are public employees working for the state."

Lindita Çela, journalist working at *Shekulli* newspaper, has similar concerns. "Sometimes I am afraid, not just of what will happen to me but to my parents or my sister who work in public administration. Maybe they will get fired from their jobs?"

Sometimes, the methods to silence the press and stop news from reaching the public are more hands on. Two months before our interview was conducted, Fatjona Mejdini's newspaper *Shqip* ran a story that prompted the businessmen who were the subject of the story to let associates buy up all the newspapers in circulation from the newspaper stands. "They bought up all the newspapers early in the morning! Of course, we can always publish the story on the internet. But then again, most of the elderly don't have internet access." she says.

Last but not least, there is the issue of bribery. With the scope of this thesis, I was unable to get any real grasp on the practice of bribery. It is, at least, not unheard of. Besar Likmeta says he has been offered money on several occasions. "I was offered 30.000 dollars once. But generally I don't get these kinds of offers, because they know I won't take them." he says.

5. Working conditions

If we are concerned about press freedom it is essential to look not only to the legal restraints on media, or to political interference as in the previous chapter. Just as fundamental are the working conditions for journalists in the country in question, and analyzing what effect they have on the journalistic output.

As previously discussed, rule of law is a big problem in all sectors of Albanian society. The media sector is no exception. While the labor code gives you the right of an annual vacation of at least four calendar weeks, far from all journalists can expect that right to be honored. Fatjona Mejdini, working at *Shqip* newspaper for around 600 euros a month, says she only gets 15 days off each year. "We work six days a week, with long hours. Still, I believe I am privileged. This paper has among the best conditions for workers in the market." she says.

Fatjona Mejdini is part of the minority of journalists in Albania who have some kind of contract with their employer. Most of the journalists – between 70 and 90 percent⁴⁶ – work without any kind of contract. The report by Ilda Londo describes labor relations as "one of the main problems facing journalists" and predicts that "proper formalization of labor relations in the media is going to be a lengthy process."

Alfred Lela at *Mapo* newspaper is concerned with the effects of this informal labor market. "If you don't have a contract you are not as free, because you always have to think: if I do this, will I fly out? So I think this has an indirect effect on the freedom of the press." he says.

Even the journalists working with a contract, as both Alfred Lela and Fatjona Mejdini do, cannot be sure that they are safe. In a study from 2007, Ilda Londo at the Albanian Media Institute surveyed 72 media employees. Of the 72 surveyed, only 9 had signed a work contract for their current jobs. Of those with contract, most believed that their contract would not "offer any real protection against sanctions or removal from their jobs"⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Union chairman Alexander Çipa stated 70 percent in our interview (October 2012), whereas Ilda Londo in her report "Mapping Digital Media: Albania" from 2012 stated 90 percent.

⁴⁷ Londo, Ilda. *Labor relations* (2007)

Long hours are common for most workers in Albania, including journalists. In Ilda Londo's study, no more than 21 percent of the respondents stated that they work less than 40 hours per week. The study found that "employers seem to violate most of their [employees'] labor-related rights such as those related to vacation time, working conditions and payment of salaries." 73 percent of the respondents raised the issue of delayed payment of salaries, sometimes for as long as several months. In November of 2012, the Union of Albanian Journalists said that data from their members showed that 20 of 25 daily newspapers based in Tirana were late in paying salaries to their employees. Most of the delays were as long as two months. In television, the situation is even worse, claims the union, with 17 of 18 broadcasters delaying payment of salaries.⁴⁸

Alexander Çipa, chairman for the Union of Albanian Journalists, says that "there is almost no implementation of the two basic laws that regulate labor relations: first of all the labor code and secondly the law on trade unions."

In this environment, with insecure forms of employment and unreliable payment of salaries, journalists become vulnerable to self-censorship. In Ilda Londo's study mentioned above, respondents were asked "whether labor relations imposed a certain degree of censorship or led to self-censorship?". Only 15 out of 72 persons claimed that this was never the case.

Freedom House describes self-censorship as "common" and something that "journalists see ... as a necessary precaution for keeping their jobs or advancing their careers."⁴⁹ The U.S. Department of State has reported that "many journalists complained that their lack of employment contracts frequently hindered their ability to report objectively and encouraged them to practice self-censorship."⁵⁰

Journalists' salaries are above the average salary of 250 euro per month. According to a study from 2012 by Ilda Londo "reporters in Tirana are rarely paid less than €300 per month, while the general average salary of journalists is estimated to be in the range of €400–500 per month, while editors and talk show hosts can also be paid €1,500–3,000 per month. The situation seems to be more difficult for journalists outside the capital

⁴⁸ Balkan Insight. *Union Pans Albanian Media Over Delayed Wages* (2012/11/13)

⁴⁹ Freedom House. *Nations In Transit* (2012)

⁵⁰ U.S. Department of State. *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Albania* (2011)

where, according to the UAJ, about 60 percent of journalists do not even reach the average salary level as defined by government standards.”⁵¹

5.1 Union of Albanian Journalists

”There is a lack of solidarity when it comes to improving social conditions or the status of journalists” says Alexander Çipa, chairman of the Union of Albanian Journalists. The union was established in 2005 and has almost 900 members, out of approximately 1,500 journalists working in Albania.⁵²

Albania has a relatively weak tradition of organization in the media market, and union chairman Alexander Çipa explains that the solidarity among journalists is limited to reacting when a reporter is threatened with or exposed to violence, or when a journalist or media outlet is slapped with a harsh sentence from the courts.

One of the major issues that the union are trying to deal with is the culture of informality in labor relations within the media market. ”There is a lack of collective and individual contracts, as well as a lack of respect for the criteria of employing journalists. The media scene is functioning in an anarchic environment.” explains Alexander Çipa.

Lack of professionalism is another big problem that the union has to deal with. As Besar Likmeta pointed out in the fourth chapter, more experienced journalists are from time to time replaced by a cheaper and younger crowd. ”This has been one of the main concerns for us in the last year. We see that professional journalists are replaced with students of journalism from the first or second year in journalism school, who lack the skills or experience.” says Alexander Çipa.

Getting the different media outlets to work together towards common goals is made more difficult by the polarization of Albania’s media landscape. ”The fact that media is so politicized, that politics prevail in the media, makes it hard for us to be professional and to function.” says Alexander Çipa, and adds that since 2013 is an election year (parliamentary

⁵¹ Londo, Ilda. *Mapping Digital Media: Albania* (2012)

⁵² Because of the informal labor market, there is no exact data available on the number of journalists employed. Figures are estimates from union chairman Alexander Çipa (Oct. 2012)

elections are held in June), the union is "really careful in the statements we make, because they could be interpreted politically and we don't want that to happen."

The limited influence of the union was brought up by 7 out of the 10 journalists interviewed for this thesis. Aristir Lumezi from *Panorama* newspaper is a member of the union but noted that "they don't have much power." Fatjona Mejdini at *Shqip* used to be a member, but has not renewed her expired membership. She stated that "they [the UAJ] are weak" and said that "this is one of the main problems of Albania's democracy, the fact that we don't have strong associations and syndicates."

Muhamed Veliu at *Top Channel* says the union is active in promoting the rights of journalists, but the impact of their statements and actions is limited. "The owners don't take the union into account. The union can stage protests and raise their voice about our concerns, but the situation mainly remains the same." he says.

Mero Baze at *Tema* believes that Albanian journalism would benefit from better organization on the labor market, but thinks that the Union of Albanian Journalists has got their priorities wrong. "They need to focus on what's most important, and that is not salaries. Journalists make more money than other sectors. And anyway, wages is a question for all of society and not only journalists. No, what needs to be their main focus right now is the state capture of the media. Once we've dealt with that, we can start talking about our wages."

6. Violence and threats

Apart from the more refined pressure from business and politics, by economic and judicial means, there is also the aspect of physical pressure in the form of violence or threats thereof. Being a journalist in Albania is not without risk. Even if attacks are sporadic rather than regular⁵³, the simple fact that they do occur acts as a deterrent to reporters.

In relation to the large protests in January of 2011 mentioned in the introductory chapters of this thesis, several journalists were seriously wounded and some of them forced to leave the country or hide. Fatos Mahmutaj of *ABC News* was shot and wounded during the protests on the 21st of January. Following his reporting of the incident, he reportedly received several death threats and soon after left Albania. A few months later he was granted political asylum in Belgium.⁵⁴

Investigative reporter Artan Hoxha was behind the broadcasting of a video that showed how one of the four protesters killed in the demonstrations was unarmed and not, as the Prime Minister later claimed, attempting to enter the government building when he was shot to death by the Republican Guard. Four days after the broadcast, Artan Hoxha stated, his 10-year-old son was handed an envelope by unknown men. The envelope contained three bullets.⁵⁵ Because of the threats made to him following the broadcast of the video, Artan Hoxha was forced to hide in the mountains for several weeks. On the day of the protests police officers also beat up journalists Ened Janina, Feliks Bilani and Elton Dono. The latter two were seriously wounded by the beatings.⁵⁶

The protests of January 2011 could obviously be described as an extreme situation, and is not necessarily a fair representation of everyday life for Albanian journalists. On the other hand, one could argue that it is precisely in such extreme and fragile situations that the press is needed the most and where the safety and protection of journalists is more crucial than ever.

⁵³ IREX. *Media Sustainability Index 2012 – Albania*

⁵⁴ U.S. Department of State. *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Albania (2011)*

⁵⁵ U.S. Department of State. *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Albania (2011)*

⁵⁶ IREX. *Media Sustainability Index 2012 – Albania*

Several of the journalists interviewed for this thesis have their own stories of violence or threats of violence. Most of them were reluctant to go into the details of such events. Luckily, these events are rare. However, the pure notion of risk and the possible consequences can be frightening enough to keep reporters on their toes and think twice about their investigations. Once more, the issue of self-censorship becomes relevant, albeit very difficult to measure.

"It [self-censorship] definitely exists. If you have a family, you have to think twice. A bomb with a mobile phone uplink costs around 300 euros. You can get it easily in Montenegro for instance, and place it under a car and detonate it with the push of a button. So, yes, you have to be careful and think twice about consequences and what's going to happen after you run with a story, and who's going to protect you." says Muhamed Velju from *Top Channel*.

Out of all those interviewed for this thesis, Mero Baze from *Tema* is probably the one who has had the hardest time staying out of harms way. He speaks in broad terms and says he does not want to dramatize the events or go into specifics. From other sources I hear stories of what he has been through: stories of repeated beatings and even having his car set on fire.

"You grow skin" Mero Baze answers when asked how he handles these attempts of intimidating and silencing him. "This is part of the profession. If you can accept your fate, then I think you can deal with it better".

Mero Baze says he has, at times, feared for his life. In general, big business pose the biggest threat, if the reporting or investigation will hurt their interests. "There are anonymous enemies, that I don't know who they are, that could hurt me. But the government is fairly strong right now and they don't need to go to those lengths. They have more refined methods of intimidating or making trouble for me" he says.

Both the physical threats and intimidation, as well as the political interference described in chapter four, compromises the professionalism, Mero Baze believes. "We are transformed from journalists into activists. It's hard to be impartial when we are being treated this way."

During the local elections in 2011, Muhamed Veliu went to the vote counting center where a member of the ruling Democratic Party tried to beat him up. "He was upset about something I had reported the day before. I got protection from the members of the Socialist Party who were present. When I left the premises I reported the incident and the person was arrested. After I gave my statement to the police, he came to my office and apologized, so we closed the case in that way. He begged me to withdraw the allegations and I said to him to be careful with journalists next time." says Muhamed Veliu, and adds that "a few months later he [the DP-member who tried to fight him] was arrested for smuggling people to Canada. So he's in prison now anyway."

This is the only time Muhamed Veliu has experienced any direct violence since March of 2011 when he moved back to Albania after being a correspondent in London. But he is well aware of the possible consequences of uncomfortable news. "One of my colleagues was threatened during the 2009 general elections. Someone showed her their gun". "It's part of the job. And it's going to be interesting to see how tough or bad it will get in the next general election in June 2013. It's going to be a big battle, and journalists are always in the middle of those developments." he says.

Lindita Çela at *Shekulli* says she is always aware of what might happen."How can I say.. If you are a woman like me and you live in Tirana, it's not very easy. Sometimes I am afraid and think about what will happen to me. But I have chosen to do this job and I accept.. or who can accept these things, but I guess I live with it. For example, I pay more attention and take precautions. I used to be able to go out freely with my friends after work, but these days I only go out with my most close friends and always to public places. I am very careful. If I finish late I send my driver to pick me up from the office – I can't take my car and go alone." she explains.

To be able to do this job, you also have to be tough, she says. "When they call and threaten, you need to give the same kind of response. Like, ok, if you are so tough and powerful, come and say that to my face. Over the phone you are nothing to me."

Among the more sensitive issues to investigate are organized crime and corruption, areas with powerful interests involved. Reporting on politics, especially the day-to-day of political events is not as risky, at least when it comes to one's physical safety. As we have

seen in previous chapters, the government has other, more refined methods (often of a financial nature) to try to influence and steer the media.

Although, as is often the case in corrupt societies, distinguishing between business and politics is not always easy. Anila Basha at *Shqiptarja.com* says there "is no line between business and politics". According to Entela Kasi, Albanian president of PEN, it is not possible to "divide where the politics end and where the business start." Besar Likmeta at *Balkan Insight* agrees that these spheres are deeply intertwined, and goes on to say that "the political elite, even including the opposition, are all criminals, in the sense that they have ties to what you would call the mafia."

Entela Kasi at PEN Albania says that even though they have left dictatorship behind them, there are still a lot of topics and issues which are too delicate to discuss. "It's not yet an open society. I don't think there are that many journalists here who dare to touch on all the sensitive topics like organized crime, the mafia, corruption or even crimes committed during communism. And I understand that, because they are not safe. It's a high price to pay, so people keep silent." she says.

7. Conclusions

The Albanian example gives credit to the notion that societal context – the quality of government, most notably the level of corruption – is decisive for the press' constructive potential. If the press is to be a remedy for corruption, the absence of state censorship or repressive legislation is not enough. We need the wider definition and understanding of press freedom used in this thesis.

While Albania's legal framework doesn't contain any major constraints on the freedom of the press, media outlets and journalists face significant pressure. The pressure comes predominantly from business and politics. Their means of pressuring the media are economic, legal and in some cases even physical in nature.

The forms of **economic pressure** as described in chapters 4 and 5 comprise market pressure through revenue from advertising, steered by government interests. This practice **skewes the competition** on the media market and puts any oppositional or government-critical media at an economic disadvantage. Furthermore, weak labor relations and a lack of implementation of the labor code puts journalists in a vulnerable position. Journalists fear their family members working as government employees will face repercussions, such as being fired, if they go too far in their reporting.

In some cases, the **pressure is physical**. As discussed in chapter 6, personal safety and the risk of violence is something journalists have to consider, and think twice about. In other cases, the **pressure is judicial**. In chapters 3 and 4 we went into what extent the courts are, to put it bluntly, for sale, and how they can be used to intimidate journalists and media owners.

Going back to Weaver's three conditions for a free press, we can see that Albania indeed has a (1) "relative absence of governmental restraints on the media". Meanwhile, the different kinds of pressure outlined above are examples of those (2) "other restraints", the absence of which is the second of Weaver's conditions. With regards to his third condition, the financial situation of the media – exacerbated by the pressures from special interests – severely hampers the (3) "dissemination of a diversity of ideas and opinions".⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Färdigh, Mathias. (2007)

Now, it is difficult within the scope of this thesis to capture in detail how these different factors affect each other and the performance of the media and the journalistic output. But using Weaver's model of press freedom, the stories told in this thesis show that **the conditions of a free press are not fulfilled in Albania**. It is clear that Albanian journalists are working in an environment which fosters **self-censorship**. The boundaries – the topics, issues or people that are "off limits" – differ between media outlets and their political affiliation, but are usually well-known among the reporters of each outlet. So are the potential consequences of crossing those boundaries. The severity of those consequences vary depending on what is being reported, but nobody is unaware of the fact that there are potential consequences.

Even if not as intrusive as censorship conducted by a state actor, self-censorship is detrimental to any media whose ambition it is to be free and independent. While self-censorship does not need to be enshrined in law, it works to undermine the free press as a "fourth estate".

In the second chapter, Pippa Norris (2006) was quoted outlining three key roles for the press: to work as "(1) a **watch-dog** promoting accountability and transparency, (2) a **civic forum** for political debate, **facilitating informed choices**, and finally as (3) an **agenda-setter** for policymakers."

If we go through these one by one, we can see that despite there being a fair number of courageous Albanian journalists out there, (1) the media's role as **watch-dog** is severely restrained by self-censorship, lack of resources and by the parties investigated trying to obstruct the journalists' work. It is further undermined by the economic dependence on business and political parties.

Albanian media functions fairly well as (2) a **civic forum**. Debate and opinions are not as sensitive as investigations. The quality of the discourse and the output has not been part of this project. It is hard to judge what quality of political debate is facilitated through the media. Although, it is clear that there is a risk of this civic forum deteriorating or shrinking, should the financial situation not improve for the newspapers. If the government-friendly media becomes too dominant through government advertising and pressure on business, and the oppositional or critical media cannot improve their finances, the civic forum and political debate will suffer. Furthermore, **facilitating informed**

choices is done partly by investigation and unravelling what the audience (the people) did not already know. This task is expensive and hard to perform due to the financial situation and the risk of repercussions.

Finally, the role as (3) **agenda-setter** is turned upside down by the financial dependence of media on both business and political parties. Most media could not survive without the support of business and political interests, but this support comes with conditions or an expected return of loyalty or silence. In this environment, the financiers have a substantial influence on what agenda is set for the policymakers. "He who pays the piper calls the tune", as the old saying goes.

What we have seen is that the relationship between the press and society is reciprocal, and that a free press cannot in itself guarantee any particular outcome. The press' potential as a catalyst for societal change depends on the political and economical environment in which it functions. Simply put, press freedom as an ingredient for development is important, but should not be overestimated. In the case of Albania, the press needs help in the form of a more strictly upheld labor code and a more transparent and fair system for supporting the media. An un-biased state system for press subsidies, based purely on circulation and including the current government spending on advertising, would be one option (provided that the media business could also become more transparent with regards to circulation, number of employees and so forth). This would limit the dependence on business and political interests and prevent the government from skewing the competition by distributing their advertising budget based on the outlets' political affiliation. The question is whether it is possible for the citizens to trust the state with organizing such a system considering the deeply corrupt political environment.

It would definitely be worthwhile to see how other Eastern European countries compare to the case of Albania in this regard. This would help us to better understand the correlation between press freedom and reduced levels of corruption that is supported by a significant amount of international studies and comparisons.

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