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The full text of this report is available at <http://www.eumap.org/reports/2005> and at <http://www.institutemedia.org>.

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For immediate release

Albania: 257 media outlets, but what's on TV?

Tirana and Budapest, 21 November 2005 – Radio-Television of Albania (TVSH) is in dire need of restructuring. Private television broadcasters in Albania have experienced significant progress, although the market and its functioning remain chaotic. The main national regulatory body, the National Council of Radio and Television (KKRT), has limited implementing powers and is insufficiently resourced. Journalists in Albania work in difficult professional conditions.

These are the main findings of the Albania country report included in the monitoring series *Television across Europe: regulation, policy and independence*, released today in Tirana. Produced by the Open Society Institute (OSI) in cooperation with the Albanian Media Institute, the report provides detailed analysis of the situation of broadcasting in Albania. It also makes 28 concrete recommendations addressed at bringing the television sector into line with international standards, and with citizens' needs.

The public service broadcaster - TVSH - faces many difficulties. Covering 73 per cent of the country, it can be received by more people than any other broadcaster, yet its viewership is lagging behind compared to the other commercial stations. RTSH's cultural and educational programming – vital for its public service mission – have been repeatedly criticised as inadequate. RTSH is often accused of partiality towards the Government. Political pressure on RTSH can be acute, particularly at sensitive times, such as during pre-election campaigns.

Active international support for restructuring RTSH is insignificant – amounting to some € 15,000 in 2004, according to Alfred Dalipi, RTSH former Deputy General Director. Although intended to provide a main source of income for RTSH, the amount of revenue from licence fee collection is unclear. In recent years, more than half of RTSH's budget has come directly from the State budget and has been used in non-transparent ways.

The OSI report calls on the Government to transform RTSH into a genuine public service broadcaster, by clarifying roles and responsibilities, and guaranteeing the transparency of management. This debate should involve RTSH journalists, past and present directors, the regulatory authority (KKRT), NGOs and the journalism community in general.

This report, the most comprehensive ever published on broadcasting in Albania, also describes the remarkable growth in private broadcasting since it began in 1995. Albania, a country of 3.5 million people, has today some 257 media outlets, including television and radio stations. Considering the size and condition of the market, these numbers are extremely high.

Advertising revenue for the television sector in 2003 was €6.57 million, according to a report issued by the Albanian Center for Media Monitoring. Hence, the broadcasting market is far from being viable or self-sustaining. The national regulator reported that in 2003, 49 per cent of these stations' income was from "unknown" sources, and no station made a profit. Yet, few if any stations have closed down. The political economy of private broadcasting remains an enigma.

Transparency of ownership is not ensured by law. Foreign investors have not found sufficient incentives to invest in the Albanian media market, which explains the low level of outside investment. There are no restrictions on cross-ownership of print and electronic outlets. A lack of reliable audience data encourages chaos on the advertising market. In some cases governments use public funds to boost the advertising revenue of favoured broadcasters.

The technical and standard-setting responsibilities of the main national regulatory body, the National Council of Radio and Television (KKRT), are too broadly defined; it has poor enforcement capacity, and is under-resourced. By the time this regulator was established, in 2000, many private broadcasters were fully operational, and not inclined to welcome or respect regulation.

Journalists in Albania work in difficult professional conditions, often lacking contracts. There are no effective mechanisms of self-regulation and self-censorship often emerges whenever any risk is perceived.

Note to editors

This report is part of a series of 20 country reports monitoring "*Television across Europe: regulation, policy and independence*". The reports were prepared by EUMAP, the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program of the Open Society Institute, in cooperation with OSI's Network Media Program. All reports are available online at <http://www.eumap.org>. More information on the Open Society Institute is available at <http://www.soros.org>.

The Albania report was developed in cooperation with the Albanian Media Institute (AMI). AMI was established in 1995. After almost a decade, AMI is at present one of Albania's main civil society actor and a renowned journalistic training institution in the Balkan region. AMI is also actively engaged in facilitating and participating in debates on media policy and media legislation. More information about AMI is available at <http://www.institutemedia.org>.