

Press release

Albanian broadcasting sector still in state of anarchy

Tirana, London and Budapest, 02 October 2008 - According to a new Open Society Institute (OSI) report, broadcast media in Albania continue to be unstable. This report, part of the series 'Television across Europe: Follow-up reports 2008', expresses concern over the viability of Albania's overcrowded commercial broadcast sector. It also questions the future of a public broadcaster that is stuck in transition. It ultimately warns of a situation which affects the quality of information available to most Albanian citizens.

The report, which follows up on OSI monitoring carried out in 2005, expresses concern over the funding shortfall that has led to the stagnation of reform at Radio-Television of Albania (RTSH) and the continuing decline in programme quality. The report also highlights the abnormal situation whereby RTSH's funds, collected as licence fee revenue, are unclear both in their amount and in their use.

On the commercial side, Albania proves that sheer quantity of channels does not produce a broadcasting market. The sector is characterised by a lack of ownership transparency and by mysterious financial sources, most likely originating from the owners' other interests.

Lack of labour protection continues to hamper the professionalization of commercial media and the public broadcaster. Employment conditions are such that "self-censorship rather than self-regulation is the norm among journalists", says the author of the report Ilda Londo.

Digital broadcasting is well underway despite the complete lack of digital regulation so far. Claiming more than 120,000 subscribers (in a population of about 3 million), the DigitAlb company has been broadcasting since 2004 without a licence. The Albanian audiovisual landscape is therefore on its way to be shaped by a private operator with resources greater than those of the public service broadcaster, as was shown when DigitAlb acquired broadcasting rights for the 2006 World Cup.

The continuing weakness of Albania's broadcast regulator, the National Council of Radio Television (KKRT, *Këshilli Kombëtar i Radio dhe Televizionit*), gives no reason to believe that it will rise satisfactorily to the challenge of digital licensing.

In terms of audience research, Albania is still a black hole. Without credible and ongoing market research, it will be impossible to provide fully dependable analysis of the audiovisual sector – and very difficult to attract foreign investment.

More positively, Albania has adopted a number of legislative measures over the last three years which put it better in line with international standards, as well as rules on the distribution of State advertising, as recommended in the 2005 OSI report. Government subsidies to media – in the form of advertising and public information contracts – are now also disclosed in bulletins issued by a new body, the Agency of Public Procurements.

The Government, the KKRT, and other relevant bodies should ensure transparency of media ownership and funding. The Government should also enforce the Labour Code in media organisations. The levying and spending of licence-fee revenue should also be made transparent. The management and staff of RTSH should strive to improve the quality of programming. Finally, the international community should continue to build the capacity of journalists' associations, which should vigorously promote the code of ethics that they prepared in 2006.

Note to Editors

This report is part of the monitoring series, "*Television across Europe: Follow-up Reports 2008*". The series updates the analysis in nine of the twenty countries that were covered in the 2005 series of reports, "*Television across Europe: Regulation, policy and independence*": Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Italy, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

Both series of reports were produced by the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program (EUMAP) of the Open Society Institute and the Network Media Program (NMP) of the Open Society Foundation, in cooperation with local experts and civil society organisations. The full text of all the reports, as well as a European overview, is being published in English and in translation on <http://www.mediapolicy.org>.

The Albanian 2008 report, as well as the 2005 report, was drafted by Ilda Londo of the Albanian Media Institute. The Albanian Media Institute is an organization focused on training media professionals, facilitating media policy debates and carrying out media research, as well as publishing books on media. The Albanian report will also be available online at AMI's website: <http://www.institutemedia.org>