

Introduction

The present picture of the television market in Albania, and its evolution in recent years, is remarkable. Until 1995, for most Albanians, electronic media meant the State radio and television network. Today, according to official data, Albania has 68 local television stations, two national television stations, two satellite televisions, and 44 local cable televisions. With regard to radio stations, there are 46 local radio stations and two national ones. In addition, there is the public broadcaster, RTSH, composed of TVSH, which broadcasts in one national channel and three local ones, and Radio Tirana, which broadcasts in two national channels, four local ones, in one program for the Albanians abroad, and another in foreign languages.

There are currently two private national television stations: TV Klan, which was launched in 1998 and covers 43 per cent of Albania's territory, and TV Arberia, which was launched in 1996 and covers 30 per cent of the territory. The lack of systematic and scientific audience research makes it difficult to assess the market shares of broadcasters operating in Albania. It also remains difficult to assess their coverage of territory. It is, however, an established fact that Radio-Television of Albania (RTSH), the public broadcaster, covers 80 per cent of the country's territory, although the decrease in its popularity and audience is also admitted by RTSH management.

So, Albanian TV market has witnessed on one hand the steady decrease of influence of the public broadcaster, and, on the other hand, the continuous, although not always smooth, rise of the commercial TV stations as information sources and players in the market. However, success does not always equal quality news; or even if it does, how is this news shaping the public perceptions and attitude in what is offering to the viewers? For this purpose, this monitoring will focus on the prime time news edition of eight news editions of the same day in April for the public broadcaster and the most popular commercial TV station.

In the absence of regular market research on the popularity of TV stations, this monitoring will involve TVSH, the public broadcaster, and Top Channel, a commercial one. Although this TV station does not have a national license, it has managed to cover a substantial part of the territory by means of retransmission in other channels or by other means. In addition, it is also regarded among the three most influential TV station in the country, because of news and other very successful programs. The monitoring has measured and analyzed the content according to different topics, territorial distribution, form, and orientation to the subject, among other things. The monitoring has included all prime time news edition, plus some specific story announced in the news and broadcast right after the news; weather forecast is excluded.

Analysis of content

The monitoring period coincided with a very tense and loaded atmosphere in the Albanian media, due to two developments: the introduction of a proposal on the digital bill in the Parliament by the government and the friction of the government with one of

the main media companies in terms of financial controls. These developments significantly affected the coverage of this month's news, so it is important to briefly explain the background against which these developments occurred.

More specifically, April marked the introduction of a proposal in the Parliament of a bill on digital television by the government. Albania presently finds itself in a specific situation, since for nearly three years it has one fully operating digital terrestrial and satellite platform and another digital satellite platform, but a strategy and law for digitalization in the country has yet to be approved. There have been previous attempts to pass such a law in the Parliament before, but they have been contested by the different political forces for different reasons, amidst a climate of mutual political accusations and general lack of understanding and debate on what these developments would truly bring about. Meanwhile, Digitalb, the company that operates the terrestrial and satellite digital platform, boasts a high success.

The last attempts to pass a bill on this topic sparked a vivid debate that involved almost all television stations and in particular Top Channel, object of this monitoring. The reason that Top Channel was particularly sensitive is that the owner of the station is also the founder and one of the main shareholders in Digitalb. This motivation became stronger coupled to the fact that this period coincided with repetitious visits and financial controls from the tax office to the premises of Digitalb and those of Top Channel. These developments led to an open struggle of the station with the government, claiming that the government was trying to shut down the television because it told the truth and criticized all government's blunders.

Consequently, this spirit has significantly shaped almost all coverage of the news editions of Top Channel; as it could be expected, only sports, culture, and international affairs have not been affected by the tense relations between Top Channel and government. The reports on the tax police's controls on Top Channel and Digitalb along with the reports on the proceedings of the digital bill in Parliament constitute most of the percentage in the "other" topic, and this category makes up a sizable 31% of the total percentage against other topics. This significant figure is an indicator of how this topic has shaped the selection of news stories for this channel. Furthermore, the way this topic was covered by the channel reveals a lot about the way news editions are shaped when direct interests are affected.

Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, the attention devoted to this topic by the public broadcaster is insignificant: TVSH, the public broadcaster barely reaches 5% in "other" topic, compared to 31% of Top Channel, and even this is not made exclusively of these two topics that affect Top Channel. In view of this situation, treating the coverage of these two topics as a separate story can help shed more light in understanding the structure, choice, and priorities of these two very different television stations in this aspect.

Bill on DTV and Financial Controls: two ways of (not) covering the same topic

As mentioned above, the extent and manner of coverage of these two topics in the two television stations is almost diametrically opposed. More specifically, the public broadcaster has totally skipped the reports on the financial controls made to Top Channel and Digitalb; there is no mentioning of them and the tension that arose as a result in any news edition. So far this is an understandable decision, since these developments do not directly and transparently affect public interest and can be considered as strictly business relations.

However, the situation does not change significantly with the reports on the digital bill, even though explaining and analyzing the policies related to digitalization constitutes public interest, especially when considering that public broadcaster's role in digitalization is a very vivid debate topic in this age. For example, 12 April, which was one of the days of monitoring, was also one of the days when the Parliament had a session on the digital bill, and a very heated one. What appeared in TVSH news instead was that "the session was quiet and did not present any problems," except for one angry statement from a MP that used to be part of the parliamentary opposition group. This statement did not in any way mention the digital bill; instead, it directed its anger to a newspaper director that had said it was fine for the opposition party to hold its congress that day with closed doors. So, TVSH chose to broadcast almost the full speech of this MP that criticized the newspaper director and the opposition party, but failed to mention that a digital bill was being discussed and that its outcome would affect all, TVSH included. On a final note, this news story concluded by stating that the Parliament had ratified an agreement of mutual assistance in the war against terrorism between Albania and Bulgaria. War against terrorism is certainly an important topic, but these kinds of agreements present only formalities to the public, and, luckily, they are not tangible in any way to the general public at the moment, while, how many digital channels the viewer will be able to see tomorrow and on what terms certainly are.

Similarly, on April 20 the Parliamentary Commission on Media held a hearing session with interest groups on the bill on digital television. This news was broadcast in a very concise manner by TVSH, mentioning only that there was a hearing on this matter and with a statement from TVSH General Director, who requested the frequencies that the law reserved for the public broadcaster, with no statements from other actors present, including the owner of Top Channel and Digitalb, the main player in the market.

By contrast, Top Channel has followed and covered these two topics step after step, broadcasting editorials and taking them even beyond the country's borders, sometimes in a much stretched way. For example, the day the police controls were taking place against Digitalb, Top Channel broadcast a story on the visit of Belgian Speaker of Parliament Herman De Croo to his Albanian counterpart. The story's headline is "De Croo supports media," implying that international actors support Top Channel in the current situation with the government. The story mentioned that "the meeting also included media as one important point and De Croo gave an important message of support to the media." It also included one statement in the press conference by De Croo saying: "Now that I see you I can see how important a factor media is for the political life in Albania." However, TVSH broadcast a special story after the news on the same day, which was the entire

press conference of the Albanian Speaker of Parliament and her Belgian counterpart, De Croo. When seeing the quote selected by Top Channel in the whole context it is very difficult to link the statement to the ongoing situation with the media and the government. In fact, it seems the quote is related to the high presence of media crews in the conference room, as De Croo clearly and physically points to the people shooting, listening, or interviewing him. This reveals a particular way of seeing and treating information in a given context by the television in question.

Another example that testifies to the trend of putting the news through “Top-Channel” lenses in this period also refers to the same day. Top Channel has made use of its correspondents in Kosovo and interviewed three prominent Kosovo intellectuals on the topic of repetitious financial controls to Digitalb and Top Channel on April 3. The headline for this news story, part of the extensive story on these controls that constituted almost half of the news edition, was “Attack versus Top Channel: Strong reactions in Kosovo.”¹ However, when closely listening to the interviews, there is a discrepancy between the alarming title and its content. All three interviewees deplore the tense situation, but do not clearly take any sides on this matter; they only advise for self-containment and maturity by both sides. So, Migjen Kelmendi, journalist and analyst, is quoted as saying: “This attitude is not constructive and does not lead anywhere,” while Xhavit Haliti, a politician, says that he has “good faith in Prime Minister and a media of quality like Top Channel should have no fear of tax evasion charges and should submit its documents to the police.” This clear discrepancy between strong, sensational, and sometimes aggressive headlines and content are noticed frequently in news editions and this trend does not pertain only to Top Channel. As such, it deserves separate attention.

Headlines vs. Content

“Illegal attack: unprecedented pressure,” “Tax offices attack Top Media, “Police forces were preparing to forcefully enter Digitalb offices,” Top Channel versus the government,” “Academics against Berisha²,” “Attack versus Top Channel,” “Berisha against IMF,” “The war against Top Channel: Six months of political and tax repression.” These are some of the headlines that appear most frequently in Top Channel’s news editions, indicating the tense, aggressive, and loaded climate that surrounds this media company and the government. However, for the sake of fairness, it must be said that some of these headlines belong to the editorials that Top Channel ran in its peaks of crisis on April and these editorials were clearly labeled so. However, on the whole it can be said that there is a tendency to post headlines that attract attention by exposing aggressiveness and dichotomy and at the same time convey a sense of perpetual tension and ongoing struggle.

When comparing them to TVSH headlines, the latter reveal a softer side and do not project the alarm and state of war that headlines of Top Channel do, and considering the different trends in reporting this is understandable. However, it cannot be said that

¹ Top Channel and the Digitalb platform are available in Kosovo and other countries via satellite, so it can be said this matter affects many Albanians abroad.

² Sali Berisha is current Prime Minister.

TVSH's headlines are perfect and completely match the content. For example, on April 3 the Steering Council of TVSH submitted its annual report to the Parliament. This event made it to the news edition under the announcement "Lawmakers asked representatives of TVSH to live up to their promises of transforming the broadcaster into a genuine public broadcaster." From this announcement one would expect advice from MPs or even criticism towards TVSH management. However, the two statements that follow shift the responsibility for this situation in other directions. So, one MP says: "The government should reconsider the budget if it takes independent institutions seriously," while the other statement says that "it is a legal duty of Parliament to assist TVSH in this path." Not only does not the story and the quotes support the headline's announcement; they go on and support TVSH itself in the whole story, posing doubts regarding the impartiality of report in this specific case. Impartiality is one of the main indicators of quality news and can be further analyzed by considering the selection of news stories and the sources for the chosen topics.

Who speaks on what

With the exception of the coverage of the bill on digital television and government's controls versus Top Channel, the other events and topics covered in both television stations were similar to a certain degree, especially with regard to politics and economy. So, the controversial law on the fines against the business, the electoral reform, the developments within the two main parties in the country, the determination of the status of Kosovo were extensively covered by both stations. However, the manner of reporting, the sources selected, the quotes chosen, or the priority of news and quotes in these topics differ.

For example, Majlinda Bregu, Minister of Integration and also Government Spokeswoman gave a press conference on April 21. TVSH's headline on the story was "The government will change the plan for implementing the Stabilization Association Agreement." While also commenting the problems with the ruling coalition, the main statement of Bregu was on SAA in TVSH's story. By contrast, Top Channel's headline focused on the coalition and its problems, while leaving out the statements on SAA implementation plan. In fact, Top Channel devoted a news story on problems with the ruling coalition, where one of the small parties presented some requests and threatened to leave the coalition if the government did not meet them. However, this important fact of political life, which posed questions for the stability of the government, was not mentioned at all in TVSH; the coalition problem was left to the explanation made by the Government Spokeswoman.

Other cases of divergence in coverage between the two stations include the law on fines. This controversial bill led to a heated debate, involving many business representatives. There were several hearing sessions in the parliament on this matter; there was a meeting of the government with interest groups, and so on. Although, the coverage was more or less similar, Top Channel's headlines and content stressed the fact that the ruling majority was determined to approve the bill in spite of having all interest groups declaring themselves against it. On the other hand, TVSH mentioned the fact, but in a way that

tried to downplay the insistence of the government versus the other stakeholders. However, the most obvious contrast in this regard involved two cases of reporting. When covering the meeting of the government with interest groups the two televisions presented two distinctly different headlines and angles. TVSH's headline read: "Uldedaj³ asks dialogue between the government and business." For the same story Top Channel displayed the headline: "Businesses close to the government oppose the bill." In this case the public finds itself confused on what the truth is, although both of the TVs broadcast Uldedaj's statement.

The different angles of the same story always seem to involve the government, even when the statements are made by a foreigner. So, in April 20 both TV stations broadcast stories on the visit to Albania of Michael Leigh, Director of DG on Enlargement. Top Channel's content was positive, but in a contained manner, stressing that EU would provide assistance to Albania, but providing it did fulfill certain conditions. On the other hand, TVSH's coverage was a rosier one, mentioning only Leigh's praise on Albania's progress and the fact that it would get aid.

Finally, a fourth event reveals the differences in coverage of the same story when it comes to sensitive topics to both TV stations, but in different aspects. In view of the tense government-media relations, the delay in electoral reform, and the controversial law of fines, civil society representatives met with the President on April 12. However, if you compare the same news on the two TV stations it might very well look as if the same group had two separate meetings, on two different topics. It came as no surprise that Top Channel devoted the most significant part of its story to what the speakers dubbed as "government attack on the media." However, in the end the story also included statements on the discussion on electoral reform and government-business relations. The same story on TVSH contained extensive statements regarding the electoral reform and the need for a population census. Only at the very end of the story the journalist mentions very briefly, hastily, and in a very general manner that "the representatives of civil society also discussed the current media situation," with no statements included. The comparison of these two stories is a clear example of how the editorial interests of a media shape and affect the same event, producing results that are hardly comparable, with profoundly different effects among the public. Most of the time these differences result from the selection of topics and sources in the news, and especially by the priority; hence, analyzing news editions of both TV stations in this prism would reveal more on how news is defined in the manner it reaches the public.

Topics, sources, and order: a matter of priorities

When looking at the percentages of coverage of different topics in both TV stations, apart from the topic "other," explained above, in general the coverage of different topics are comparable and differences almost insignificant. The only exceptions in this case are related to the topics of domestic political life and that of country's international politics. Regarding these two topics TVSH's respective percentages are 24% and 11%, compared to 15% in domestic politics and a mere 2% in country's international politics in Top

³ Uldedaj is Chairman of the Albanian Chamber of Commerce.

Channel. As it can be noticed from the numbers, the country's political developments both domestically and internationally make up 35% of public broadcaster's total coverage, a quite sizable portion. This portion doubles the total of 17% of Top Channel in these topics. It is important to note that both TV stations show a generally neutral attitude in most cases, amounting to 70% of the coverage for TVSH and 83% for Top Channel. However, other details, such as the sources used, the agenda beyond the news and the different presences in the news reveal a more complete picture that goes beyond the initial objectivity.

- *Priorities of news order and sources*

When closely looking at news structure, it becomes clearer that this difference is also evident in news priority. For example, when looking at the eight monitored news editions of TVSH, there is not even one news edition that does not start with news from government, possibly quoting the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, or some other high government official. The only exception is the edition of April 11, which opens with the interview of the General Secretary of OSCE, who also is quoted as praising Albania's progress and hence the government. By contrast, Top Channel only once happened to start its news editions with the government, or rather with government changes discussed: on April 30, the Parliament voted for changes of two ministers in the government. Otherwise, the opening news in Top Channel has alternated between bill on DTV, the law on fines for the business, and financial control versus the media. Again, the two central points for the two TV stations are quite different, showing the different positions and priorities for them.

Along these lines, it is important to notice the presence of politicians in TVSH's news editions, and especially the coverage and selection of their quotes. For example, on April 11, after the announcement that George W. Bush would visit Albania on June 10, there is a long quote of the Prime Minister, attributing this visit to the success of government's reforms, mentioning the American support for NATO enlargement, and the imminent relief in the visa system. This was a quote from a government meeting, ranked as second news item, right after the praise given by OSCE General Secretary to Albania's achievements. Although this was presented as news, one cannot help but notice how both these items help build up the image of a successful government. It should also be mentioned that these were the opening news of the edition, although they did not constitute any news in the strict sense of the word, at least not as first news: one was an interview in the framework of OSCE's anniversary, while the other was a daily, routine government meeting, with no other announcement but self-praise of the government.

As it can be seen across all editions of TVSH, the presence of the Prime Minister is a guarantee that the event will be covered. Not only: in spite of the nature of the event, it is sure that the Prime Minister will be on the spotlight. For example, the news edition of April 12 opens with the report on a meeting of different experts on energy and the exploitation of different energy sources. This is a topic that has become popular and urgent all over the world, especially in Albania, which recently suffered a severe crisis due to the dry winter. However, the focus of the event presented in the news editions was

the Prime Minister, starting from the announcement: “Prime Minister opposes increase of energy price.” This statement was the recurring theme in the whole item, reminding the public that the prime minister was doing everything so they did not have to pay more. This was evident in the long quote from the Prime Minister, which was the only one in the news item, even though there was a big room full of experts of energy, who might think it differently. The second example in this case is related to the report on the celebrations for the birthday of Prophet Mohamed, which were organized by the Muslim community in Tirana, but featured statements first by the Prime Minister, who attended the event, and only then from the religious leaders, who were hosts and gave meaning to the whole event.

Along the same lines, it is also evident that government spokespersons also make it easily to the news editions. This is not a phenomenon limited only to TVSH: in the news editions of April 21, both TV stations lent space to the press release of the spokeswoman of Ministry of Education on the feedback on the new bill on education. However, the public broadcaster seems to be more willing to give a voice to the spokespersons: on the news editions of April 21 the full statement of the spokeswoman of one of the ministries is broadcast. She is denying the allegations made against her chief and against the Prime Minister in one of the daily papers; right afterwards the anchor reads the full press release coming from the Prime Minister’s spokesman on the same issue. However, to the news edition only denying the allegations seems important, even though the public might not be familiar with the issue at all.

However, for the sake of fairness, it must be said that the presence of government and ruling majority is greater in the news editions of TVSH, but they are not certainly limited to only one side of the story. For example, on current discussions on electoral reform, the law on fines, the election of president, both sides are presented and these items are hardly different from Top Channel, with a few exceptions. However, as the percentage of political topics in TVSH shows, being a politician you have a good chance of appearing in TVSH. So, in the news editions broadcast by TVSH on April 29 and 30, there was news items focused on ex-Prime Minister Fatos Nano. Although a very important person until recently, for the moment Nano is far from active in the party and only is an MP that rarely attends the Parliament. So, it would be difficult to explain his presence in the news editions. Even more so when seeing that he did not have any particular statement or opinion to make: the items featured two meetings of him with a group of Spanish MPs and with a Kosovo leader. Given that he does not hold any official position or influence in the country for the moment, at least not evidently so, the coverage of these normal and routine work meetings is not that easy to explain.

In fact, TVSH news editions feature several items whose importance is not that obvious in understanding why they deserve to be news. These news feature almost indiscriminately government officials, going on through their routine meetings. Interestingly, these meetings are not limited to government officials, but also include the US ambassador. For example, on April 3 TVSH informs of a meeting of the Minister of Culture with the US Ambassador. The meeting did not have any special focus or announcement other than the usual pledges for mutual cooperation and assistance. The

news item concluded by mentioning that afterwards the Minister met the weightlifting team and wished them success. In this information it is difficult to find some news value other than the presence of the minister in the news, if it can be counted as news value. Similarly, in the news edition April 12, TVSH reports of the US Ambassador's visit to Shkodra. Again, there was no anniversary, inauguration, or any other public event worthy to report on: the ambassador met the Prefect, a group of students and NGOs based in the area, announcing the call for proposals for projects, which is a routine activity happening every year. In all these elements it is difficult to spot anything but routine protocol news.

Similarly, if we compare the percentage of the topic of the country's international politics, TVSH reaches 11%, compared to a mere 2% in Top Channel. This is also an indication of the high presence of politicians and their statements and activities in TVSH. This is also easy to notice when seeing that out of the four special stories TVSH ran after the news, all of them interviews announced in the news, only one was an interview with an opposition member. The other three involved the Speaker of the Parliament, the President, or common press conferences of Albanian and foreign officials. Although it is not always the case, there is a high presence of protocol news in this topic, as well, such as counting the meetings of Minister of Foreign Affairs in New York on April 3, for example, with no statements or any information that would describe the outcome of these meetings.

By contrast, it is very difficult to spot any protocol news in Top Channel; in fact, due to the tense relations with the government the news in this station sometimes seems to go to the other extreme, where very few government activities are worthy to report. So, while TVSH reports of a joint press conference of Minister of Finances and World Bank, on the decision to grant a significant loan to Albania, there is no mentioning of this in Top Channel news. Instead, in the peak of financial controls against Digitalb on that same day, the only report is that of journalist asking the Minister on this account in a press conference not related to this topic.

This example is typical of the specificity of topics covered by Top Channel in this period: as mentioned above, the 35% of political life of TVSH is comparable to the 31% of "other" in Top Channel covering mainly the bill on DTV and the financial controls against this station by the tax office. Understandably, the choice of sources and actors for this news is different from that of TVSH. These voices consist mainly of Top Channel management and director, and other friendly and supporting persons, such as MPs, lawyers. International actors mentioned above, letters from Europarlamentarians, etc, constitute another frequently heard group in this station. In the peaks of the crises the news and comments on the news of DTV bill or tax police controls would take more than half of the news edition, rendering the problems of this station the problems of the whole public.

Along the same reasoning, there are other events that appear in the news of Top Channel in this period that otherwise would probably not be there. For example, in the general proclaimed war between Top Channel and the government and against the background of the government's pledges to fight informality, there is a statement from the chairman of

the trade union of Albanian journalists in a meeting in Fier on April 2, mentioning that most of employees in Top Channel have working contracts. There seems to be nothing strange with this news until considering that the union has frequently had meetings for this purpose in many other cities before and they have never made it to the news edition of Top Channel so far.

- ***Coverage of “socially useful” topics and ethical questions***

A more flagrant and ethically questionable practice in this aspect is the story on a family that has three sons that are paralyzed by some genetic disease, broadcast on April 11. Among other facts, this story mentions that in spite of the poverty of the family, the suffering children’s only amusement is watching Digitalb, (of the same company as Top Channel,) so their parents buy the subscription card every month.

However, on a more positive note, there are few efforts to a kind of civic journalism or better, attempts to raise awareness on social issues. In this case the reporter, in spite of the paternalistic attitude vis-à-vis the “unfortunate boys”, brings the case of suffering people by nature and by poverty and assists them in their pleas for help. Regarding another important topic in healthcare, breast cancer, TVSH broadcasts an interview with a cancer survivor, aiming to raise awareness through personal experience. However, in spite of the good intentions and the relevance of the topic, the reporter does not bring any statistics on the situations or any other opinions or advice from the doctors, although, paradoxically, these would be obtained much easier than first-hand experience.

In general social protection and healthcare does not occupy a very significant space in the news editions, but neither a negligible one: it is 7% for TVSH and 9% for Top Channel. In addition, despite of the evident importance attached to some events and issues in the news editions, there is not an easily discernible pattern in this regard, and this section is far from consolidated in terms of frequency and manner of coverage. For example, the “odd” news recently has involved several cases of fishing sharks in an area near Durres, a popular beach resort in Albania. Apart from the “oddity”, this is highly relevant news to the public, given that this is the most densely used part of the coast in Albania and danger is eminent. However, the news is present in Top Channel, but not on the public broadcaster on April 20. Similarly, violence against referees in the stadiums has been an important topic recently and events were reported by Top Channel on April 29 and 30, but TVSH only focused on junior championship of table sports, with no mentioning of this severe problem.

Social protection issues are not that numerous and controversial in these news editions in order to examine question of ethics. However, what catches the eyes in two news items in each of the stations is the fact that children appear and speak, although they are not identified. In two cases their appearance can be justified in the name of soliciting interest and support for a greater good, like in the case of blood feud isolated victims on TVSH on April 3 or in that of a village suffering earthquake aftermath on Top Channel on April 20.

The only questionable involvement in this case is that of students interviewed by Top Channel in a high school after allegations that their teacher had sold them CDs containing additional material on physics, as well as some erotic photos or games, broadcast on April 29 and 30. Although it was obvious that the children had agreed to talk beforehand and they were not under pressure, it was questionable whether they should be identified by face given the subject matter. Another equally important question is why this news did not appear on the public broadcaster, although the public needs to know if there is any risky behavior anywhere near their children.

- ***The “minority” news***

In this context, it is also important to note that there is no news on youth and children and on science in any of the TV stations; there is also total lack of war crimes coverage on TVSH and complete lack of religion events or analysis on Top Channel. On the other hand, TVSH seems to have a stronger advantage when looking at the cultural section: it has 9% compared to 2% by Top Channel in this section. TVSH regularly informs on the new plays and shows by the National Theatre and Opera and other similar events. However, interestingly, there seems to be no follow-up on these announcements. There is no reporting on how the shows went and clearly there is no review of these shows, a shortcoming typical not only of these TV stations, but of Albanian media in general, which lacks a tradition of cultural reporting or critical reviewing in this regard.

On a more negative note, in some of the cultural reports there seem to be an obvious interest for TVSH or the journalist's report goes beyond her duty. For example, on April 3 TVSH reports on the release of a CD by a well-known violinist, with the best works he has interpreted. Apart from the reason why choose the release of this CD and not others, as these events happen quite frequently, it is also unclear why the journalist needs to mention the distribution firm of the CD saying that “the multiplication of the CD was done by Antika company, based in Kosovo, Tirana's branch.” Afterwards there is also a brief interview with the representative of the company, something the public could easily live without.

Along the same lines on April 11 there is a long interview with a singer and a well-known photographer, who speak on two events: the organization of Miss Universe in Tirana, (which TVSH will broadcast and take part in organization) and on the concert of the singer in America (which will be broadcast on the same evening after the news by TVSH). Although both these events may be useful and interesting to the public, one cannot help but wonder whether the public would know about these events if TVSH were not involved, as it surely happens with other events going on in the country. In fact, the only evident trend in this regard is that there is no regular coverage of culture and art *per se*; rather, coverage is determined by the general agenda of the traditional state cultural bodies and TVSH events themselves.

The same can be noticed in that small percentage of culture and art covered in the news Top Channel. The news there is related to Top Fest singers, which is an annual event, a music festival very popular with the young people, organized by Top Channel itself. So,

similarly to other sections, culture and art does not escape the influence of general interest of the TV stations in Top Channel or TVSH.

- *The minority in the news*

Another important characteristic of news editions in both TV stations is the geographical distribution of their news, or rather, how far among the public they are interested and willing to go. When looking at the percentages there is not a noticeable distinction between the public broadcaster and the commercial one: the coverage of South and North changes slightly from 4 and 6% respectively for TVSH to 8 and 3% for Top Channel; Tirana coverage ranges from TVSH's 16% to Top Channel's 18%, domestic general coverage⁴ is 58% for TVSH and 52% for Top Channel, and there is an exact 10% coverage of neighboring countries in both TV stations. As it can be seen from these percentages, Tirana occupies an important space in the news editions; this percentage is equally important in public broadcaster, although it is supposed to address and serve the whole country's population. In fact, there are attempts to cover other cities and areas in TVSH, which has two studios in Korca and Shkodra, which usually report directly. There are also stories on different topics in areas far from Tirana, such as the ecological damage to Shkodra lake, the efforts of beekeepers in Kukes, the tourism developments in Pogradec and in Saranda, etc. However, the stories of spontaneous or follow-up stories on topics relevant to the community of the area are very rare and not commensurate with the role of the public broadcaster. The same is true for news from other regions in Top Channel, although this is not supposed to fulfill certain public obligations as TVSH.

However, what it can be noticed in this aspect is that the agenda that sets the news does not follow a different pattern than the one in Tirana: more often than not, whenever politicians visit areas out of Tirana, or meetings or events of political or economic repercussion in Tirana as the capital take place in other cities, there is a chance they will make it to the prime time news. For example, the tour of opposition leader Rama to the South of the country was covered in both TV stations, while there was not any report on any other aspect of the lives of common people in the area, not involved in politics. In fact, there is less and less space for the voice of people not involved in the "major" activities.

Nonetheless, it cannot altogether be dismissed that citizens are lacking in news, leaving their place to politicians and high officials. There are frequent stories in the news that are built entirely on street interviews or of citizens living in a particular area. This is also evident in the percentage of news that comes as a form of poll or interviews: 16% in TVSH and 12% in Top Channel. This percentage also includes numerous interviews with politicians, who take the biggest share in this part; however there are also chances for common people. For example, Top Channel ran a story on the business activity in Tirana, interviewing many shop owners regarding the registration of bills and profit. Similarly, TVSH had a story on the price of taxis in Tirana, interviewing both taxi drivers and

⁴ This coverage relates to events happening in Tirana, but affecting the whole country, usually including the activities of the Parliament, Government, Presidency, and other state institutions, civil society activities, different interest groups, etc.

consumers. However, the fact is that the kind of news involving and addressing first of all citizens remains a minority compared to the ones that involve less common citizens.

- ***Presence of international news***

Similarly to domestic news, international news does not have a very diversified geography. World Affair news ranged between 9% of coverage in Top Channel and 13% in TVSH. As it was only natural, Kosovo occupied the most significant part of this news, sometimes featuring also interviews with Kosovo leaders or citizens, especially in Top Channel, which has its correspondents there.

However, apart from the majority of news that involved Kosovo, TVSH broadcast a less usual selection of world affairs news. This news was related to the region, namely Balkan countries, and had specific topics. So, it broadcast on a Balkan symposium on theology in Sarajevo on April 11, although there seemed to be no Albanian representative; it reported on Commissioner Frattini's visit on Croatia and his comments on Croatia's status in EU enlargement; on the same day there was a report on Croatian police arrests on human trafficking; and on April 29 it reported on the death of ex-Croatian Prime Minister. If this news would be part of a TV news magazine on regional news, it would be fine, but justifying their selection as world affairs news in prime time edition is less obvious. Part of the explanation may lie with the fact that all of these are EBU news, which TVSH, as an EBU member, has ready for use in its news. Whether this news presents any interest for the general public in this selection and array, though, is yet to be answered.

Conclusion

Overall the prime time news editions in both public and commercial stations are similar in range of topics, but differ in the details, sources, and priority of coverage. The selection of prime time news, when viewed against the backdrop of specific developments, point to a specific agenda that sets the news criteria. The agenda's main priority, as the very order, selection, and sources of news show, is very close to the agenda of the government or politics in general or to that of the TV management and its interests at the moment. In fact, as repeatedly shown through the monitoring analysis, political presence or presence of persons that promote a specific interest for the TV station is one of the main criteria in defining news value.

As a result, the TV stations' following of the above priorities and interests has its toll on social issues and representation, as well as the diversity of topics that is offered to the public. In spite of the serious attempts often made regarding topics of a social relevance, their coverage is usually triggered either by tragic, or by events involving presence of prominent figures, with no possibilities for follow-up or a more detailed analysis of the problems that affect people who watch the news every day.