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HUMAN RIGHTS, DISCRIMINATION AND GENDER EQUALITY ISSUES IN THE ALBANIAN NEWS MEDIA

AN ANALYSIS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Today's media are widely seen as social agents that through their messages act as important determinants in how societies deal with the issues of human rights and discrimination issues. Albania clearly falls among the countries with a high media density, thus constituting an interesting case in terms of the relationship between media and society seen through the lenses of major social changes that the country has gone through over the recent decades.

This study commissioned by UNDP represents a deliverable under the UN-GoA Programme of Cooperation (2012 – 2016), in the framework of its output 1.1.2 - Civil Society and media facilitate a public demand for human rights, gender equality and access to justice including the compliance with international legal instruments and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It aims to monitor and study the Albanian news media over a given period of time (January-December 2012) with a specific interest that concerns discrimination and gender equality issues as they are reported by the media.

Considering the importance of the print and audio-visual media in today's societies and their effect on shaping up public opinion, this study will first provide a conceptual frame of reference and secondly, within the Albanian media reality, will propose certain interventions that aim at improving reporting on gender equality and discrimination issues.

The primary aim of this study is that, through content analysis of the Albanian media, to bring forward the existing discourse on social inclusion and specifically on gender issues, with a particular interest in the issues of gender equality, violence against women and women empowerment.

The study is of a descriptive nature and its methodological approach is to go beyond the mere quantitative data even though in this case they are particularly meaningful. The study aims to look at the individual media articles reporting on human rights, gender issues and discrimination along some specific analytical categories that aim to grasp the quality of portrayal of women issues and other marginalized groups in the Albanian media discourse.

Section one provides an overview of the current state of affairs in terms of discrimination and gender equality issues in Albania in the broader context of human rights. It provides an institutional and legal framework that helps explain the complexity of the issues at stake. The section informs about the news media monitored and analysed.

Section two offers a theoretical framework as to how the media have influenced societies and where does Albania stand in this process. It provides a comprehensive view on how human rights, including discrimination and gender equality issues, have become as prominent as we know them today also thanks to the mediatisation of the Albanian society. This section aims to explain the importance of the news media in shaping up the country's public opinion.

Section three looks carefully at a selection of Albanian news media for the calendar year 2012 and serves as an observatory for the identification of the issues that the media are picking up, the way these issues are reported and/or analysed and the impact they are having on the society at large. The aim is two-fold: on the one hand to provide factual evidence and information that help to understand what are the strengths and the weaknesses of the mediatisation and on the other to be able to provide content analysis and viable solutions to the issues identified in the study.

Section four provides recommendations for future work with the news media in terms of capacity building, standard setting in reporting techniques and editorial approaches towards discrimination and gender equality issues.

In order to be able to understand the context in which this monitoring and analysis takes place it is of interest to look at the institutional and legal frameworks that govern the issues of discrimination and gender equality first in the global context and then within the country.

At the global level, there are several key events and crucial documents that constitute the basis for the protection of human rights and ensuring gender equality and protection from discrimination, which have also served as a basis for Albania to embrace the international agenda for substantial change in this direction.

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948) is the first expression of human rights entitlements globally and a follow-up to the United Nations Charter (1945) which in the aftermath of the Second World War aimed “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small”¹.

The Universal Declaration urges member nations to promote a number of human, civil, economic and social rights, asserting these rights are part of the “foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”². It is very important to underline the fact that the document defines the meaning of fundamental freedoms and human rights, by laying out the foundations of protection from discrimination and establishing gender equality.

¹ UUnited Nations Charter, available at: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/preamble.shtml>

² Universal Declaration on Human Rights, available at: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>

In the European context, the European Convention on Human Rights (1953) is the international treaty that protects human rights and fundamental freedoms in Europe. Specifically, Article 14 of the Convention refers to the prohibition of Discrimination by stipulating that “the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.”³

Within the same context, for obvious reasons after 1990s, in Europe there was a growing movement to embrace the notion of social inclusion at the policy level and by doing so targeting specific groups in society, which had been so far marginalised or socially excluded. The understanding here is that, as Labonte has identified it, the list of the excluded consists of: “women, racial minorities, the poor and the sick, those with disabilities, children and youth”⁴.

In 1993, the first international document on human rights, the Declaration of the United Nations on the Elimination of Violence Against Women touched upon the very important issue of advancement of women by recognizing that “violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men”.

Later on the Beijing Platform for Action, in 1995, clearly identified 12 critical areas of concern from women’s poverty, to inequalities, to violence by also specifying the concern about the “stereotyping of women and inequality in women’s access to and participation in all communication systems, especially in the media”⁵. The Platform for Action asked the governments, the international community, civil society and private sector to take strategic action in the 12 areas of concern by stating that “the advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men are a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and should not be seen in isolation as a women’s issue”.

The above-mentioned milestones reached at the global level with regard to human rights/discrimination issues and more specifically to gender equality have had their impact on Albania as well. Because of its recent past, Albania in the nineties went

³ European Convention on Human Rights, available at: <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=005&CL=ENG>

⁴ In Chamberlain, Susanna, “Whispers on the Wind”: Social Inclusion and the Media, *Journal of Social Inclusion* 2 (2) 2011, p.72.

⁵ The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China, September 1995, available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/plat1.htm#concern>

through vivid societal transformations that involved important developments in terms of human rights and women's issues.

There are two main pieces of legislation that regulate the above-mentioned issues of discrimination and gender equality in Albania, namely the Law on Protection from Discrimination (No. 10 221, dated 4/2/2010) and the Law for Gender Equality in Society (No. 9970, dates 24/7/2008). Both laws are considered to lay the foundation of a society free from discrimination and where gender equality is ensured. Article 26 of the Gender Equality in Society Law gives media a role in promotion of gender equality while its second paragraph prohibits display of offensive, humiliating and disparaging materials towards one sex⁶. Any violation of the provisions of this Law is punishable by penalties. Similarly, the Law on Protection from Discrimination prohibits publication of discriminatory announcements and advertisement⁷.

Based on the Constitution (1998), other pieces of legislation reflect the principle of equality of all citizens and non-discrimination.

From an institutional point of view the establishment of the office of the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination as the guardian of effective protection from discrimination and every form of conduct that encourages discrimination⁸ is an important step forward. At the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities there is a specific Department that deals with the issues of discrimination and gender equality at the policy-making level. At the local level, full-time gender equality and domestic violence focal points are being established.

Albania has also approved the gender quota at the level 30% for women representation in all public institutions. Unfortunately, indicators that testify to the involvement of women in politics and decision-making are such that underline the importance of further progress in this direction. Following the general elections of 2009, only 16.4 of the members of the parliament were women – an improvement

⁶ NArticle 26 of the Gender Equality in Society Law reads as follows:

Gender equality in the media

1. The media helps in increasing the general awareness of equality between women and men by:

- a. Not discriminating on a gender basis in its reporting;
- b. Applying gender-neutral terminology;
- c. Avoiding gender stereotypes throughout its activities.

2. The broadcasting, printing and publication of information and material that contains or implies differences that are humiliating or disparaging on the basis of gender, or that display exclusive or offensive attitudes towards either sex shall be prohibited.

⁷ Article 8 - Discriminating advertisement: "The publication of various advertisements and announcements is prohibited if they present, openly or in an implied manner, a purpose to discriminate for the causes mentioned in article 1 of this law.

⁸ "Strategic Plan 2012-2015 and Action Plan for 2012", Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, Tirana 2012, p.7.

if compared with the 2005 elections when the figure was only 7%⁹.

It is equally important to say that the above-mentioned provisions at the political and institutional levels need to be translated into concrete action and results in society, and it goes without saying that the media have a crucial role to play in this direction.

What happens quite often – and we will be touching upon this extensively in the next sections – is that the media in many ways do perpetuate gender stereotyping and they seem to be too busy to care about marginalised groups in general. Albania's developmental reality of the last 15-20 years has in fact been such that has called for a rather exclusive media attention towards the major issues of political and economic stability at the macro sense of the word and less on the social aspects of people's lives.

It is also true that research papers and studies related to gender or more broadly discrimination issues and human rights in the Albanian media are quite rare. It was a difficulty of this research project to be able to refer to a strong base line relating to the above-mentioned issues.

For this reason, with this analysis we are making an attempt to provide a systematic analysis of the media at hand while providing a theoretical explanation as to why the media and its influence plays such a crucial role in today's societies in general and the Albanian society in particular.

For a period of 12 months during the year 2012, we have been closely following the issues of human rights, gender equality and discrimination in the Albanian media, mainly in the printed press and online media.

Audio-visual media have not been monitored for the purposes of this study, however it is worth noting that through the support of the UN, extensive attention was dedicated to the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence by the public broadcaster (TVSH) and the main national private TV stations such as Top Channel, Albanian Screen and Klan TV. The awareness-raising campaign that is undertaken annually worldwide has been reported in a particularly vocal way during the year in review, thanks to the joint effort of the UN for maximum outreach in 2012.

The monitored newspapers have been chosen based on their popularity (although it must be noted that there is no exact readership calculation in Albania) and also based on their attention towards human rights, discrimination and gender equality issues (both through news and opinion pieces). In a few words, we concentrated our monitoring efforts towards newspapers that are commercial and market-oriented,

⁹ "The Situation of Women Leaders at the Local Level in Albania – A Baseline Study", Albanian Centre for Economic Research with the cooperation of ASET, Tirana, September 2010, p.25.

which also enjoy popular readership in their print and online editions.

The last few years have seen the emergence of new, non-traditional online news media that are specifically focused on human rights, discrimination issues such as the online media platform Gazeta Idea, which dedicates special attention to human rights issues and it is financially supported by the Open Society Foundation for Albania. This platform has been extensively monitored throughout the year in review, as it serves as a repository of news regarding discrimination and gender issues and represents a novelty in the Albanian media landscape.

2. THE SOCIETY'S MEDIATISATION PROCESS: THE CASE OF ALBANIA

It is quite evident that the power of media has changed dramatically the way societies live today. While discussing about human rights and discrimination issues, it is impossible not to touch upon the way the media have influenced today's society. For the purposes of this study, we would like to refer to the term "mediatisation" in the same way that Stig Hjarvard does, i.e. "mediatisation is to be considered a double-sided process of high modernity in which the media on the one hand emerge as an independent institution with a logic of its own that other social institutions have to accommodate to. On the other hand, media simultaneously become an integrated part of other institutions like politics, work, family, and religion as more and more of these institutional activities are performed through both interactive and mass media."¹⁰

Having said this, it is important to briefly explain the Albanian legacy in terms of human rights, non-discrimination and gender equality over the last century. During the communist regime, Albania suffered tremendously the oppressive experience of that system¹¹. Although formally a member of the United Nations, Albania failed to ratify international instruments binding States to respect basic human rights so, following the collapse of the communist regime, one can say that for Albania the challenge of properly addressing the issues of human rights, discrimination and with them gender equality issues was of an acute importance.

It is also true that the communist regime used its propaganda machine to proclaim the equality between men and women with equal opportunities for employment, social benefits and political representation in the former communist party structures. However, as Ibroscheva and Stover put it "the net result of the communist measures for gender equality was an oppressive model of pseudo-emancipation where participation of women in the political and social spheres was mainly symbolic or perfunctory at best"¹².

The concept of mediatisation itself helps us understand the importance of media to society and culture today. It also helps explain why media reporting on discrimination

¹⁰ Hjarvard, Stig, "The Mediatization of Society: A theory of the Media as Agents of Social and Cultural Change", *Nordicom Review* 29 (2008) 2, pp. 105-134, p. 105.

¹¹ Irrera, Daniela. "Is Albania Ready for Europe Yet?", Jean Monnet Centre EuroMed, University of Catania, January 2013, p.2.

¹² Nistorova Ibroscheva, Elza and Raicheva-Stover, Maria. "MPs with Skirts: Or How Popular Press in Bulgaria portrays Women Politicians", *Observatorio (OBS*) Journal*, 8 (2009), pp. 311-335, p. 313.

issues, including domestic violence, is worth analysing and why recommendations in improving the quality of such reporting are necessary in the case of Albania.

Mediatization is a rather recent concept with earlier theorists focusing on political communication and the way media reports on political communications, thus considering the effects of such process towards society. The first to speak about the mediatization of political life was Swedish media researcher Kent Asp who explained it as a process whereby “a political system to a high degree is influenced by and adjusted to the demands of the mass media in their coverage of politics”¹³.

Earlier than that, we come across the concept of a “media-twisted society” developed by the Norwegian sociologist Gudmund Hernes who in 1978 argued that the media had a fundamental impact on all social institutions and their relations with one another¹⁴. Rightfully, Hernes also poses a fundamental question that is on the basis of the mediatization concept: in what way do media redistribute power in society? The important conclusion reached by Hernes is the fact that media, according to him, have transformed society from a situation of information scarcity to one of information abundance, thus rendering attention a strategic resource, for which anyone with a message must compete. This conclusion makes one think that the mediatization process is closely linked and is, in fact, a by-product of modernity. The truth is that since the invention of the printed press in the times of Guttenberg that enabled information to circulate like never before to today’s media realities the transformative change that has happened is extraordinary. In fact, as sociologist John B. Thompson sees it, the media’s development is an integral part of the development of modern society¹⁵.

Hjarvard also elaborates on mediatization in postmodern theory by listing other scholars that consider mediatization as an expression of the postmodern condition, in which media give rise to a new consciousness and cultural order. The example of the work of Baudrillard as referred to by Hjarvard represents probably the most radical linkage between mediatization and postmodernism. Baudrillard perceives the symbols or signs of media culture - images, sounds, advertisements etc. – to form semblances of reality that not only seem more real than the physical and social reality, but also replace it, thus media create what Baudrillard calls a ‘hyper-reality’¹⁶.

Back to the Albanian reality - with the freedom of the press and freedom of expression that Albania went through following the collapse of the communist regime - one notices the following gap: on the one hand there are no limitations

¹³ Hjarvard, Stig. “The Mediatization of Society: A theory of the Media as Agents of Social and Cultural Change”, *Nordicom Review* 29 (2008) 2, pp. 105-134, p. 106.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.106.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.108.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.110.

as to what the media should write or report about and on the other, regardless of the high number of media outlets, both in print and audio-visual media, there is an alarming lack of information on discrimination issues and even more so on gender equality issues.

Here we come to the very important question of whether the media have enabled, demanded or actively created a space for the inclusion of varying groups in society, for the empowerment of women and, among others, ensuring gender equality. The other important question of interest for the purposes of this study is to see and explore how was this done in the context of the Albanian media we have monitored, or as Adla Isanović poses the question: How is the world represented and what identities are set up for those involved in the programme of the story and what relationships are set up between those involved¹⁷? In other words, what is the Albanian imprint of mediatisation in light of discrimination and gender equality issues?

To answer these questions we still need to have a closer look at the correlation between the concept of social inclusion and the role of the mass media. According to recent studies, it is generally accepted that social change occurs at two levels, through the deliberate act of creation of policy and through the amorphous effect of the influence of social movements and their access to the means of communication¹⁸.

What is of interest to analyse in this study is the ability of the media to report on the “Other” in an inclusive way which goes along with the definition that Habermas has developed, i.e. “inclusion means that the political community stays open to include citizens of any background without confining those *Others* within the uniformity of a homogeneous national community”¹⁹.

It is also important to underline that the process of mediatisation, as we will argue in the next section, very often goes hand in hand with media’s commercialisation, the latter constituting a serious threat to the quality of reporting and the degree of professionalism.

While we explained in the previous section that Albania has endorsed important pieces of legislation in this regard, it is difficult to say that the approach of the media and their reporting agenda goes along the same line. The mediatisation

¹⁷ Isanović, Adla. “Media Discourse as a Male Domain: Media Representation in the Daily Newspapers of Bosnia and Hercegovina, Croatia and Serbia” in “Stereotyping: Representation of Women in Print Media of South East Europe”, Mediacentar, Sarajevo, 2006, p. 50-51. In her study, Isanović refers extensively to author Norman Fairclough who has written about the subject in his *Media Discourse* published in 1995.

¹⁸ Chamberlain, Susanna. “Whispers on the Wind”: Social inclusion and the Media, *Journal of Social Inclusion* 2 (2) 2011, p.78.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.73.

process in Albania has brought along a clear imbalance of political versus social; the powerful versus the marginalized; men versus women.

It is also interesting to witness that the mediatisation process as defined by Hjarvard has made institutions adapt to the media logic, the media themselves appear to us to be part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

In this regard, we agree with the common conclusion that the dominant notions about gender (as well as about race, or ethnicity, and other factors of differentiations among people) are strongly dependent on the media, since the process of representation is central to the media itself²⁰. By representing various issues, events, situations, individual and social groups, the media at the same time develop a set of meanings around these issues, events, individuals and social groups.

As sociologist Artan Fuga puts it, in the case of Albania, the media has just closed up its transition from totalitarianism to a free information market while it has just entered an even broader and deeper transition stage: going from the Gutenberg media – a model of the age of Scanderbeg - to the media of the digital era²¹.

It is difficult to say – partly because it is not within the scope of this study - whether this transition makes it easier for journalism standards and integrity to be maintained or whether this transition has its own price tag on the reporting agenda in order for it to be balanced between the various issues that are of public concern. However, while Albania strives to cope with the mediatisation of its own society, the issue of reporting on discrimination and gender equality suffers from both quantitative and qualitative scarcity.

²⁰ Isanović, Adla. "Media Discourse as a Male Domain: Media Representation in the Daily Newspapers of Bosnia and Hercegovina, Croatia and Serbia" in "Stereotyping: Representation of Women in Print Media of South East Europe", Mediacentar, Sarajevo, 2006, p.49.

²¹ Shekulli, The End of Journalism of the Time of Scanderbeg, Interview of Artan Fuga by Skerdilajd Zaimi, 21 December 2012.

3. NEWS MEDIA REPORTING ON DISCRIMINATION AND GENDER EQUALITY: ISSUES, IMPACT AND MESSAGES

For a period of 12 months during the year 2012 we have observed and monitored the Albanian news media, with a particular interest towards the most popular daily papers like Panorama, Shekulli, Shqip, Mapo, Gazeta Shqiptare, Koha Jonë and Shqiptarja.com. A total of 74 articles that concern human rights or discrimination issues, gender equality and political representation of women, domestic violence and social inclusion have been detected. They represent different genres from news items to feature articles and opinion pieces. The number of the articles does not include multiple coverage of the same issue by a number of papers, even though they have been read and analysed upon.

Before attempting to undertake a thorough content analysis of this sample as reported by the media, we would like to provide some important data that have characterized the year in review as represented by the media, the most important one being the fact that during 2012 a shocking number of 27 women killed was registered²². The year 2012 also registered the first attempt for the organization of a gay parade in Albania in the framework of the International Day Against Homophobia on May 17, which saw the heavy involvement of police in order to protect a dozen of human right activists that did go through the Albanian capital's centre riding bicycles. The year 2012 also saw a growing role for the People's Advocate and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination in the promotion of human rights and anti-discrimination issues, which is also a direct follow-up of the country's obligations in its path towards EU integration.

Generally, what we observed by the monitoring we undertook was that human rights, anti-discrimination issues and even more so gender equality issues have not yet been integrated into the natural course of daily reporting. These issues become news as soon as there is a crime around them – thus pointing to the Albanian media's thirst for sensationalism. The news items that we read and registered are also very often generated by conferences, workshops, seminars and other internationally-supported activities and seem to yet need more time to be assimilated by the local news agenda. Last but not least, the issues that are at the core of this study seem to be almost completely overshadowed by political reporting which is the main, common interest of the Albanian news media at large.

In this context, we realize that almost five years following the publication of a

²² Panorama, 27 Women that Could not Celebrate the New Year's Eve, by Elida Domi, 30 December 2012.

guide on domestic violence and media reporting, the issue of reporting over crimes deriving from domestic violence still creates the false idea that domestic violence is an issue that is seriously taken up by the media²³. Actually, it is not. Media reporting as recorded by this study is not able to go beyond the main elements of a crime scene, it fails to dwell on the roots of the problem, it doesn't provide the broader picture of people's lives as to the why-s and how-s and it actually continues not to report on violence but on crime only.

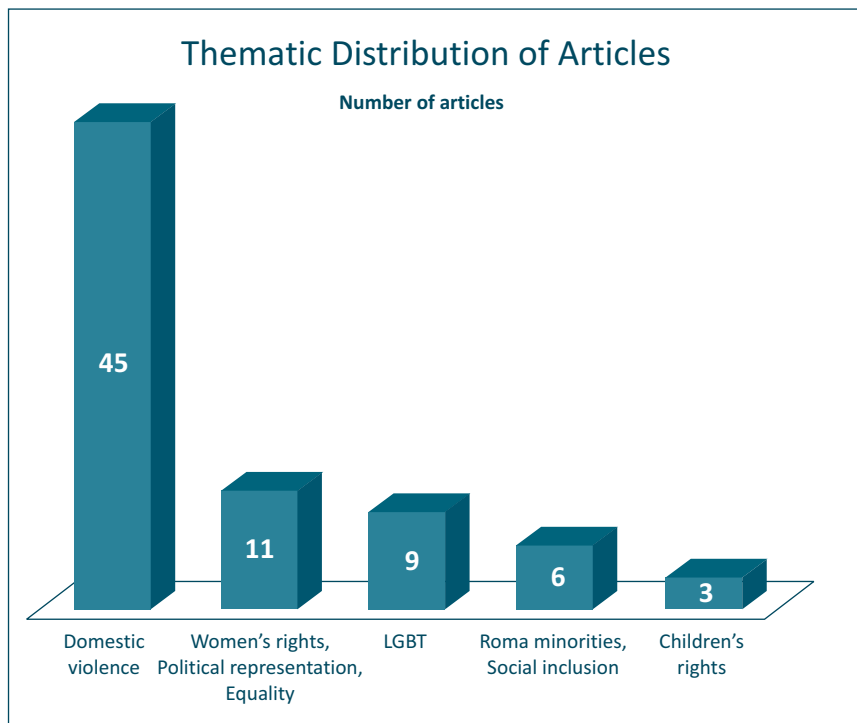
When reviewing the material at hand, the natural question of whether the Albanian media reflects, perpetuates or challenges gender and other societal stereotypes comes up. We felt that the Albanian media strongly reflects, and consequently it perpetuates, while it never challenges these stereotypes.

In order to be able to decode the representation of discrimination and gender issues in the media, we would like to follow some analytical categories that are of help in understanding the issues at stake:

Thematic representation: The dominating theme in the 74 articles collected is domestic violence with 45 articles. The following themes concern women's rights, including political representation and gender equality, with 11 articles. Less represented is the issue of LGBTs with 9 articles - which is mainly dealt with on the occasion of the homophobia day and the organization of the gay parade - Roma and Egyptians discrimination within the broader scope of social inclusion issues with 6 articles and children rights issues (mainly in the framework of domestic violence) which are the least represented ones in the sample at hand with only 3 articles ("Children, 45% of them undergo violence within the household and at school"²⁴).

²³ Marku, Mark et al, Domestic Violence on the Focus of the Media, A Guide, Gender Alliance for Development Tirana, 2008, p. 41.

²⁴ Panorama, 2 June 2012.



While treating gender themes and issues, the articles occasionally touch upon women empowerment issues or gender equality. There are attempts to also touch upon discrimination of women in terms of pay in comparison to men (“Albanian Women Are Paid Less than Men”²⁵) and also the low representation of women in politics and/or decision-making (“Electoral Code To Guarantee Gender Equality And Women Protection from Family Voting”²⁶).

There is a notably high attention of the media towards events, conferences and discussions around the issues of discrimination and gender issues that are generally supported by the international donor community in Albania which usually make headline news.

To illustrate this, here are a few headlines: “Diplomats on Women Rights: Figures Are Disturbing”²⁷, “Saccote on Roma Discrimination: Improve Legislation”²⁸, “Wollfarth’s Statement: Lack of Diversity Hinders Police Legitimacy”²⁹.

²⁵ Gazeta Idea, 18 May 2012.

²⁶ Panorama, 20 January 2012.

²⁷ Shekulli, 23 January 2012.

²⁸ Gazeta Idea, 3 October 2012.

²⁹ Ibid, 8 October 2012.

Quite the opposite is evident when it comes to finding public officials being quoted on the same issues, with the exception of the People's Advocate which is extensively quoted by the media on various issues, ranging from addressing blood feuds, to the social inclusion of Roma and Egyptians, children's rights and wives of fallen policemen.

There are also attempts for objective and genuine reporting on women rights. A worthy example is found in the electronic platform Gazeta Idea which produced a story on convicted women's rights – "The Drama of Convicted Women: Their Children are Sequestered by Former Husbands Families"³⁰ – even though the aim of the article and the accompanying interview with an inmate is to show a touching, personal story, lacking proper investigation as to what really happened, how spread the phenomenon is at the national scale and what the public authorities' views stand vis-à-vis the issue. However, the article raises the issue of their rights in terms of getting in touch with their children that, the article demonstrates, is not observed in at least eight cases at a Tirana prison.

The themes are a very important indicator as they reflect on social roles, social identities and the social setting that the media reproduce, hence they are very instrumental in reflecting our main idea that as the stories fail to go deeper in their reporting, similarly the Albanian society fails to deal appropriately with the social challenges that discrimination, human rights, along with gender issues in particular, pose.

Another interesting aspect, that in a way testifies to the existing information gap created by the Albanian media because of the partly political and partly commercial agenda of the media outlets in the country, is the reproduction of certain news stories from international media outlets that produce and disseminate news in Albanian and on Albania, such as Deutsche Welle, Voice of America and Reuters.

Voices: Through this analytical category, we aimed at finding out about who is present and who is not, who gets to speak, who is being heard about human rights and discrimination and how these voices are being picked up by the media.

Very rarely the other – the one being discriminated against - is being heard; very rarely the woman is the central voice of the reported pieces. Even if they are at the centre of a piece, they are mainly to be depicted as the vulnerable, as those in need to be rescued: "Beaten woman at the judge's office: I feel threatened"³¹.

The same applies to other groups such as minorities, children, LGBTs, with the latter having an increased voice during the year in review ("LGBT – An Open-minded Movement?"³²).

³⁰ Gazeta Idea, 10 September 2012.

³¹ Shqip, 25 April 2012.

³² Mapo, 16 May 2012.

Photographs/Images: Visual presentation, both substantially and methodologically, holds a similar analytic importance to headlines³³. This category poses probably the most difficult analytical category to write about. There are two very problematic issues with this category: the photographs and/or images are either meaningless, with no relation whatsoever to the events reported – quite often with no credit line on authorship – or, especially in the cases of violence, they are rather shocking, due to the level of detail they provide from the crime scene or by featuring the victim. In some cases they are used for commercial purposes, clearly identifying the victims of violence, even though that goes against protection of privacy; in other cases there is a clear exploitation of images mainly of homeless, unprotected and/or working children. In extreme cases the photos are used in such a way that they set up a specific scenario or lead the reader to believe a certain path in the reported story. The use of generally judgemental language vis-à-vis abused women, accompanied by women's portraits or visual material that almost never point to the men – the perpetrators of violence – constitute a general trend that mistakenly refers to domestic violence as a women's issue instead of a men's issue.

The widely referred example – also in the public discourse about the role of the media is society – in support of this conclusion is the reported story of a young lady that has been on trial after being accused of killing a man whom she claims to have been her molester since she was a kid. Under the title “mobile phone of the 45-years old reveals an intimate relationship with the 18-year old”³⁴ personal photographs of the two, where the young lady appears happy and in his arms have been published repeatedly on the front page.³⁵

In other examples of reporting on news items that cover the issues of prostitution, drug abuse, the accompanying photos are very often women close to cars at night-time, nightclubs and or tools used in drug injection, which create an unnecessary, rather disturbing visual frame in this case.

Again, the instances where we could detect a proper photo usage were the various international conferences, meetings and workshops where pure informative value has been attached to the photographs used.

In conclusion, photography and/or image is not being used as complementary data that makes a story more complete by adding authenticity to the events. On the contrary, quite often, photographic material is used to make the story catchier and the paper more commercial at the expense of professionalism and respect for

³³ Milivojevic, Snjezana, Media Monitoring Manual, Media Diversity Institute, London, 2003, p.32.

³⁴ Panorama, 15 August 2012.

³⁵ The case of Nazime Visha and the media reports around it have prompted Albanian Human Rights groups to publicly address the prosecutor general in order to guarantee that the confidentiality of investigation is preserved and to the media to stop, what the Group calls “a distorted soap opera-like” reality by respecting citizen's rights while drafting publication material and reporting on the case.

ethical reporting.

Language: “Basha: If my son would become gay, I would put a bullet in his head”³⁶. The headline is actually a quote that has been publicly pronounced by an Albanian politician; however its prominent usage by the Albanian media is in our view unjustified. Even more so, when there was almost no space in the papers for an analysis on the case and there was no clear stance represented in the media as to how and what the predominant view of the Albanian society was like in this case. The soundness of the ‘take-away’ message in the case is seriously challenged, while readers/viewers are bombarded with the sensational headline story. This is an example that clearly testifies to the lack of will and/or capacity to go deeper in the reporting layers, stripping the media of its own potential in informing the public.

The general issue with the language in the articles we are analysing is that it very often is insensitive towards the victims by even trying to justify the violence. In other instances it echoes the gender stereotypes and more importantly by emphasizing violent aspects of issues, it is accompanied by the lack of defining clear responsibilities vis-à-vis those who commit the specific acts of violence, thus creating a predominating idea that this is a normally acceptable phenomenon³⁷.

Headlines like “Domestic Violence: 100 Cases In Four Months in Fier”³⁸; “Domestic Violence: 202 Cases In Four Months in Elbasan”³⁹ which are accompanied by stories that rather telegraphically report on figures provided by public authorities and fail to investigate deeper as to the underlying factors and reasons of such violent reality, thus creating the wrong impression of violence being a daily normality.

Other examples of insensitive language are found in the following titles: “Tropoja: A Woman Kills Two People”; “Jealous Woman Hits Husband With Hatchet Following Violence”.

At one case, in an attempt to raise awareness about the very delicate issue of selective abortion procedures in Albania, the paper reports the following headline: “In 18 Years Albania To Undergo a Women Crisis”⁴⁰.

In very few cases – we could only record two – articles focus on positive, inspiring success stories about women that can serve as role models for wider communities using non-discriminatory, sensitive language. Under the title “Alimeta, a successful civil society activist” the daily paper Koha Jone for instance provides the reader with a positive, inspiring example of a local woman, Fatbardha Alimeta, who has

³⁶ Shqip. 3 April 2012.

³⁷ Londo, Eva, Media Effects On the Construct of Society, Panorama, 30 October 2012.

³⁸ Shqip, 3 May 2012.

³⁹ Koha Jonë, 9 May 2012.

⁴⁰ Koha Jonë, 20 November 2012.

become a role model for many in the small town of Librazhd. The portrayal of Alimeta as a successful mother and a passionate civil society activist contrasts with the mainstream news agenda vis-à-vis gender issues which is predominantly in search of violence-affected women to report about.

gjinore, të cilat në më të shumtën e rasteve janë në kërkim të reportazheve për gra të ndikuara nga dhuna.



4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The careful observation of the Albanian news media with a particular interest on discrimination and gender issues underlines the important fact that social issues are clearly under-represented, with the lion's share still being taken by political and entertainment sections. In Fuga's words, today there is a crisis surrounding the social identity of the Albanian society and crime and politics is what the newspapers' front pages are all about⁴¹. However, is there a role for the media to contribute in the way social issues and events are perceived by the society, by modifying the existing approach towards news and by assessing its impact on society⁴²?

We believe that the answer to that question is a strong yes. Such a role is crucial for the society and the media to move on. In order for this role to be strengthened we believe that the following conclusions need to be taken into account:

First, discrimination and gender issues have yet to become an integral part of the reporting agenda in the Albanian news media. As they stood during the time of this media monitoring in 2012, discrimination and gender issues have yet to gain human rights status in the lenses of news media reporters. The current imbalance between the political and the social, the continuous effort to only connect discrimination with crime and death, the simplification and lack of thorough reporting on discrimination and gender issues as basic human rights constitute a matter of concern about the way the Albanian reality is being portrayed by the media. The issue is directly linked with the role of the media in a democratic society and more importantly its crucial role as a watchdog on human rights.

Second, exactly because of the findings explained above, there have been signs of an intensification of public debate around discrimination issues, and more specifically over domestic violence, gender representation and LGBT issues – a positive step encouraged by civil rights activists and women activists. In a way, it is our conclusion that the tragic figure of 27 women killed in 2012 has become louder than any individual, less tragic, story. As we explained in the previous section, and this is a sad and equally alarming indicator: the voices of violated women were made louder when they were dead rather than alive.

Third, the lack of genuine media interest in reporting on the other, be it a minority representative, a handicapped person, a woman, a lesbian, gay, bisexual or

⁴¹ Fuga, Artan, interviewed by Zaimi, Skerdilajd, *The End of Journalism of the Time of Scanderbeg*, Shekulli, 21 December 2012.

⁴² Londo, Eva, *Media Effects on the Construct of Society*, Panorama, 30 October 2012.

transgender calls for a media diversity programme⁴³, which can contribute towards a substantial improvement of the media reporting agenda. This would equally contribute towards an improvement on reporting techniques, but more importantly it would constitute a shift in the way Albanian society is portrayed in the media, thus correcting the way mediatisation appears to have worked out for the society here, which is mainly a superficial and commercial portrayal of the society.

Forth, and very important, is the finding that while the dominating editorial approach in the mainstream news media continues to be based on the importance of political reporting over any other field, the emergence of new, alternative media platforms benefitting from modern communication and information technologies add to the competition and it is the assessment of this report that this will soon have an impact over the mainstream media. Our conclusion is that a huge potential lies with the new era of digitalisation, which by increasing competitiveness can have a substantial impact on the quality of reporting.

Fifth, the Albanian media is a male-controlled sector (there is an overwhelming imbalance in gender terms among the media owners, directors and editors) and there is a clear need for gender mainstreaming within the media themselves, especially in the editorial boards and other managing media structures.

While reporting eventually improves by undertaking some of the interventions that we will recommend below, there is a need for more comprehensive and systematic research efforts that measure impact and effectiveness of these interventions.

Also, following the mediatisation logic, there is a need to strengthen the outreach and advocacy of the key public institutions concerned with human rights and discrimination such as the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination and the People's Advocate. In order for the media to be fed with useful information, concrete action can be taken in cooperation with these institutions in order to advance gender equality and social inclusion through a strengthened information and communication sector.

Following the conclusion on widespread violence in family relations for reasons that remain not fully dealt with and lacking in detailed analysis, there is a need to focus on the role of the media in re-socialising both women and men, and changing traditional attitudes, behaviours and roles that perpetuate gender stereotypes and inequalities.

Efforts towards mainstreaming gender in editorial policy and practice can be made by partnering with one or various interested media outlets in setting up an

⁴³ Gender Mainstreaming in Information and Communication, A Reference Manual for Governments and other stakeholders, Joan Ross Frankson, May 2000, p.53.

editorial committee that will use proper gender lenses while elaborating editorial approaches. It is important to understand that the current quality in human rights, discrimination and gender issues' reporting is an issue of technical capacities as much as it is an issue of the prevailing spirit, a state of mind that perpetuates stereotyping instead of reversing it.

Creating a diversity programme for journalists and supporting the production of a handbook for reporters on human rights and discrimination issues with a special focus on gender equality and domestic violence, by providing a combination of reference material on the specific issues with the actual producing of a set of standard-setting stories that inform and encourage public debate⁴⁴ would also serve as a model of reference for younger reporters.

Last but not least, diversity programmes can be introduced with the journalism school in the country with the long-term vision of creating a conducive environment for professional reporting that is genuinely concerned with social issues and more specifically with human rights remains an important recommendation.

Media capacity in Albania finally needs to be tackled in a way that goes beyond the traditional training and technical assistance. The development of gender-sensitive indicators for media organisations would be a first important step in this direction. These indicators on the one hand would help the media forums to create gender sensitivity among the media organizations and on the other would have the desired impact on media content.⁴⁵ Time has also come for the creation of mature and credible journalist representation through forums and organizations that are crucial in advancing ethical and professional standards and which share the common concern for advancing human rights, social inclusion and gender equality in society.

⁴⁴ Reporting Gender-Based Violence, A Handbook for Journalists, Inter-Press Service, South Africa, 2009.

⁴⁵ Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media, UNESCO, Paris, 2012, p.15.



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Abbreviations

EU	European Union
GoA	Government of Albania
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered
TVSH	Televizioni Shqiptar
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organisation