

2014

Print Media and the Economy in Kosovo

An Analysis of the Coverage





"This project was funded through a U.S. Embassy, Pristina grant. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the Author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State."

"Ky projekt u financua përmes grantit të Ambasadës Amerikane në Prishtinë. Mendimet, përfundimet dhe konkludimet apo rekomandimet e shprehura këtu janë të Autorit(ëve) dhe jo medoemos pasqyrojnë qëndrimet e Departamentit të Shtetit."

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Institute for Development Policy INDEP

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Bashkëpunimi Rajonal
Regional Cooperation



Zhvillimi i Qëndrueshëm
Sustainable Development



Qeverisja Demokratike
Democratic Governance

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I. Introduction

With a high scale of unemployment and continuous problems with poverty, Kosovo remains one of the countries that face serious economic challenges. In 2012, the country managed a 3500 USD GPD per capita, the lowest in the Western Balkans.¹ Improving the economic situation of the country requires the involvement of a range of actors and includes the necessity for continuous and careful public information. This is crucial in ensuring that the public is well informed regarding their economic opportunities and especially in enabling the public to take informed decisions regarding their representatives and actions concerning economic policy making.

For this reason, national newspapers serve as the most appropriate medium for the publication of in depth and careful economic analysis pieces. Newspapers dispose of enough space for the publication of stories that can be as long and deep as necessary for informing the public appropriately. Additionally, newspapers, at least technically, should have the necessary human resources to analyze and serve complex topics in a readily understandable fashion.

As a result, because of the important role that newspapers play in informing the general public, potential investors, and aspiring entrepreneurs INDEP has analyzed newspaper stories concerning the economy. Taking into account this prescribed importance that the media plays, this study's aim is to offer an overview on the frequency of content and the quality of that content that falls within the coverage of the economics by the daily newspapers. By looking at both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the coverage, through this study INDEP will strive to paint a concise picture of the state of the coverage of the economy by the newspapers. Attributes that mark the importance of a piece of coverage or the coverage in general, such as the length of a piece, the sources used in the piece, the way and extent at which those sources have been used, among others, were taken into consideration in order to make that picture as clear as possible.

II. Methodology

Through this study, INDEP analyzed the coverage of the economy by all national newspapers in Kosovo.

INDEP has monitored all seven national newspapers for forty five days, starting June 3, 2013 and ending in July 17, 2013, concerning their coverage of the economy.² The monitoring was done through a pre-established content analysis methodological grid. The content analysis was targeted to assess, without bias, the quantity and scope of coverage of the economy in national newspapers.

In quantitative terms, the monitoring was designed to aggregate the coverage of each topic, including position in the paper, presence of graphics, and the depth of coverage in terms of page space. Additionally, INDEP also targeted the scope of coverage divided according to sub-areas in each area of monitoring relevant to the economy. The number and type of sources, along with quote position and quote length were coded for in order to assess any distinguishable bias in

¹ World Bank – Kosovo economic profile. <http://data.worldbank.org/country/kosovo>

² The national newspapers that have been monitored are: Koha Ditore, Zeri, Kosova Sot, Tribuna, Epoka e Re, Lajmi and Bota Sot. The newspapers Tribuna, Epoka e Re and Lajmi are not published on Sundays.

covering one or more actors.³ Finally, INDEP also considered quantifiable context analysis, including the presence of key words and phrases that might indicate any type of lack of professionalism or bias. All of the aforementioned scopes of the monitoring have been included in one common monitoring grid in order to enable a correlation study if enough data was present.

In qualitative terms, the monitoring was designed to enable the analysis of the language and depth of coverage of the reporting concerning the economy in national newspapers. Additionally, the presence of intentional bias concerning the coverage of particular sub-areas in the coverage of the economy were discerned. Finally, the contextual coverage of the economy and possible presence of breach of professional journalism standards were also targeted.

For that reason, INDEP has consulted with professionals and internal experts in the field of economics and journalism, as well as outside contributors.

INDEP monitored all newspapers comprehensively, in order to assess each article for the presence of monitoring topic relevant issues presence. Therefore all articles in all newspapers for the monitoring period were assessed.

In order to quantify the findings, INDEP prepared a content analysis table with codes for all aforementioned criteria. The table was filled by an INDEP monitor, on a daily basis. INDEP adjusted the monitoring criteria to a thorough page by page read of every single article, instead of relying on trigger words for the analysis of an article in depth. Subsequent to the identification of the relevant articles, and the input of data in the methodology table, the articles were scanned and run through a text recognition software. This was done in order to isolate keywords for the content and context analysis study. Additionally, the INDEP monitor verified all text recognized articles to compensate for any software mistakes. In order to ensure quality of coding data, INDEP also conducted an inter-coder reliability test. This was done by assigning a random sample of articles to code to a researcher previously uninvolved with the monitoring in order to ensure interpretation quality. Thus, the inter coder reliability was evaluated at 95%, a commonly accepted level of cohesion concerning content and context analysis studies. Subsequent to the monitoring period, INDEP analyzed all relevant data using quantitative methodologies. Primarily, INDEP applied deterministic methods to the analysis of the data due to the small data pool making it impossible to run regression or other stochastic analysis. Deterministic methods were reliant on percentage based hypothesis proof, and other qualitative analysis models. All the data gathered was quantitatively analyzed and presented in the study in terms of parts or percentages across tables. No exceptional statistical testing methods were applied due to the fact that the small sample size made correlation analysis unreliable. Additionally, qualitative analysis of all the articles was conducted with a focus on the case study on the coverage of the economy by newspapers.

The qualitative analysis was done by analyzing the method of coverage of the newspapers in order to assess the presence of analytic pieces or press releases and press events coverage, otherwise known as protocol stories.

For this purpose, INDEP defined analytic pieces as stories in which studies and data obtained from the newspaper, independent of interviewees, were used as arguments in a story, either to challenge, corroborate or evaluate an argument. Additionally, stories in which the newspaper initiated an issue of evaluating or reporting on a policy or economic issue without press event

³ A source is generally considered to be an individual, publication or official document, or other verifiable point of information.

solicitation or daily news coverage present in other papers, while applying the aforementioned definition, were also considered analysis stories.

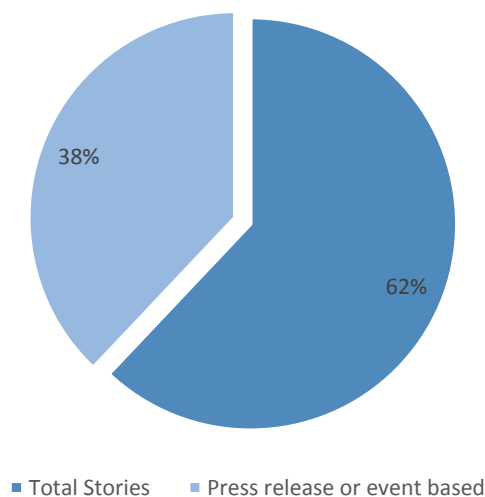
INDEP has also discerned the prominence of stories resulting from protocol journalism. Protocol journalism is the practice of covering public relations activity based stories including press releases, press events, protocol meetings between government officials or other activities that require little to no independent assessment. Furthermore, protocol stories were defined stories that had the same or very similar headlines across newspapers in the same day, along with the same quotes from the same individuals in the body of the texts. They were further discerned by the presence of pictures related to events or press releases and careful comparison between newspapers. INDEP intentionally used a very generous definition of the former, and conservative definition of the latter in order to discern that no mistakes are made in the identification of analysis stories and of protocol journalism. Even with these definitions, the findings were scarce.

INDEP also attempted to analyze the language used in context of the coverage of the economy. As a result, trigger words consisting of generally known economic terms were used as the basis for the initiation of the analysis. The articles were scanned using text recognition software in order to avoid human mistakes in the identification of the phrases. However, the extremely low number of usage of economic terminology in the coverage of the economy by the newspapers rendered such an analysis impossible without vague conclusions and inferences.

III. General Findings

INDEP monitored all national newspapers for a forty five day period. During this period, national newspapers published a total of 448 stories concerning the economy, or 1.4 articles per newspaper per day. This number is very small on its own and especially when compared to the amount of

Press release or event based stories

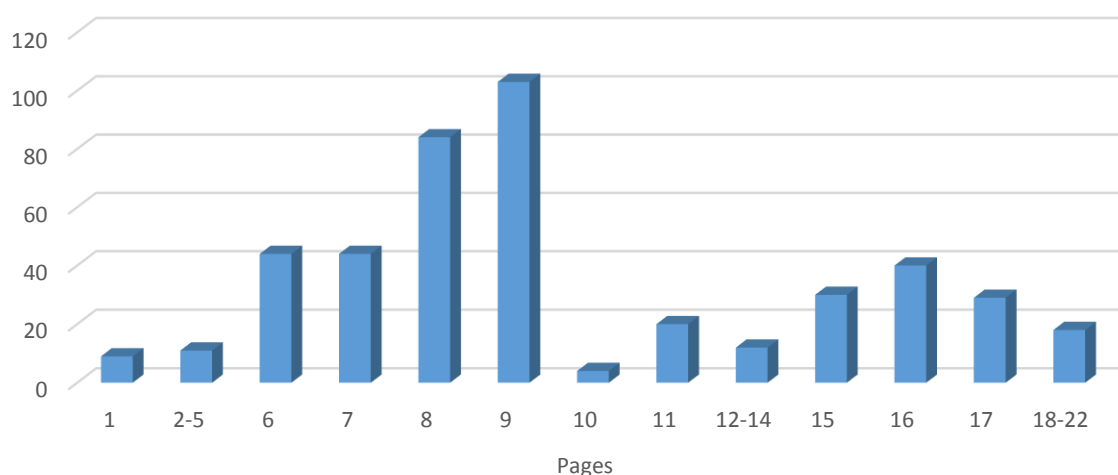


economic reporting occurring in more professional foreign media. Unfortunately, the monitoring also revealed that within these stories, the type and scope of coverage is even more problematic, as will be shown below.

Out of the 448 total stories concerning the economy, 170, or 38% of them, were press release or press event based. This number is a relatively conservative estimate due to INDEP's highly cautious definition of press release or press event based stories, referred to as protocol stories in the study. We labeled new stories as press releases only when an article had the same or very similar headlines across newspapers in the same day, along

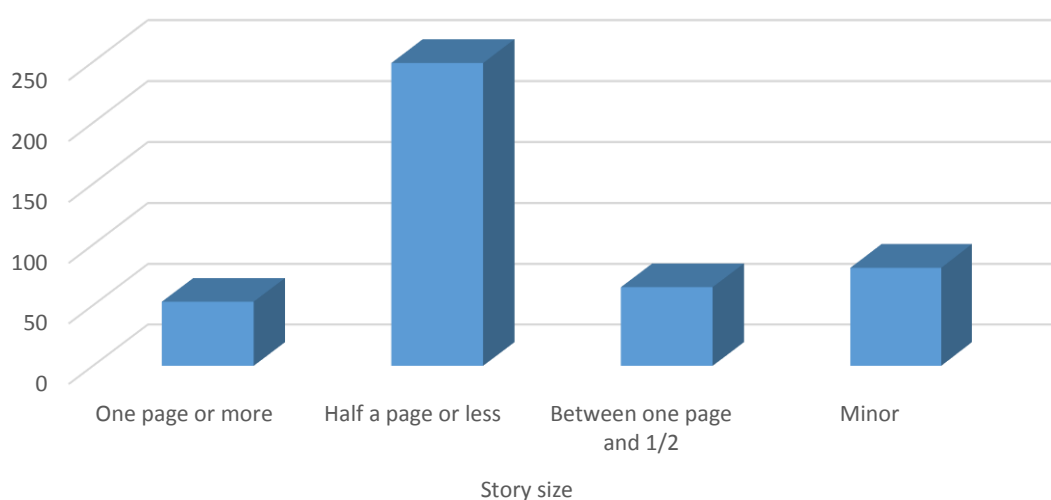
with the same quotes from the same individuals. This severely limited the number of non-original stories that we identified, although INDEP maintains this number to be higher. The high amount of press release based stories demonstrates that the coverage of the economy by newspapers is even more limited than initially thought. When removing protocol stories, the number of original stories per newspaper per day drops to 0.88.

Number of stories per page range



Additionally, page location of economics stories is far from being optimal. With the current state of the country's economy and the importance of an informed public debate concerning the economy, economics stories should have been prevalent in the front section of national newspapers. However, the monitoring demonstrated for this not to be the case. Only nine stories about the economy have been in the front page during the monitoring period for all newspapers, three of which were press release or press event coverage stories. 66% of the total number of stories were located relatively deep into the newspapers, in pages 6-11, with another 25% being located on pages 15-17. This means that 91% of the total stories concerning the economy, press releases included, were located in page 6 or deeper in the paper. This data also reflects the lack of pull lines in the front pages, small sections intended to introduce a story that is located further in the newspaper. As a result, the location of the economic stories in national newspapers indicate the low priority that the editorial boards of these newspapers place on economics coverage.

Distribution of stories according to page space



The overall space of the stories also reflects negatively on the coverage of the economy in general. 44% of the stories identified were between one half and one quarter of a page in length. The distribution is considerably more slanted toward the one quarter space. Additionally, another 44%

of the stories were between the one quarter and one seventh in space. In total, 88% of the total stories were under one half page long. The data clearly shows that little to no depth attention is paid to economics stories and calls into questions the amount of analysis and serious reporting that has been conducted for this particular sector. Unfortunately, as will be shown below, all the data points out to the fact that not only is coverage scarce and superficial, it is also unprofessional and lacks coherent editorial drive.

The fifth indicator concerning the state of the coverage of the economy in national newspapers is the lack of an acceptable number of sources per story. Generally accepted journalistic standards indicate that a story must contain at the very least two independent sources with the preferable range being three or more. Of the 448 stories identified in the monitoring period, 38% contained only a single source, 30% contained two sources, although not always independent from each other, and only 19% were based on three sources. This means that 68% of the total stories contained two sources or less, which is an indicator of the limited coverage and depth of coverage of the economy. Unfortunately, this a recurring and fairly problematic issue in Kosovo media, well documented and spanning different coverage areas.⁴ As a result, not only is the sphere of the economy limited in coverage, but it is also affected by the problems common to news coverage in Kosovo as documented by other studies.

These general findings are a good indicator of the state of the coverage of the economy by national newspapers in Kosovo. Coverage is severely limited for all newspapers, with a good part of the stories being drawn from press releases or press events. Virtually all stories about the economy are buried well within the paper and, most importantly, coverage of the economy is also subject to lack of professional journalistic standards that is characteristic to news coverage in Kosovo.

Primarily, the overall lack of coverage affects the level of general information of the public concerning economic policy making. Once the general population has no readily available information on the state of the economy, information that is easily interpreted and does not require specialist knowledge, no real debate can be sparked in the public sphere. This lack of debate has several consequences.

Without public debate and readily understandable information, the actual state of the economy is largely ignored by the voting population. As a result, voter decision making concerning the election of their representatives is severely limited when considering the candidate's economic policy plans. As a result, public leaders feel less pressure to pursue sustainable and long standing economic plans, and enables them to opt for short term returns for their constituents, more often than not at the expense of long term economic sustainable development.

This is also exacerbated by the overall lack of post-election pressure for policy action concerning matters of economic importance. Despite the lack of employment, low GDP, a persisting rate of poverty and lack of a coherent long term economic policy plan, little debate and grassroots efforts are seen in the areas of unemployment, taxation, availability of credit, etc. This is visible both in grassroots activities throughout the country, and, as we will see further in this paper, in the coverage of the economy by newspapers. As a result, it is plausible that the lack of consistent and professional coverage of the economy by newspapers negatively affects citizen feedback toward their representatives when concerning pressing economic issues.

⁴ Jeta, A., Gashi, A., Ejupi B., Gashi, K., Qavdarbasha, Sh. (2010). Monitoring the informative program of the Radio Television of Kosovo. Prishtina: Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development.

The limited coverage is also coupled with limited depth and quality of coverage. This phenomenon affects not only the general population, but also more specific niches such as decision makers in three important groups, namely in small and medium businesses and new entrepreneurs. These professionals rely on public sources for information regarding both macro-economic analysis and possibilities for new business ventures. This is all the more true considering that small to medium enterprises largely lack the capital to invest in heavy data gathering and forecasting methods. As a result, most still rely on news outlets to supply them with the information necessary to plan for their businesses in the long term, either directly related to their areas of operation or circumstantial factors that they haven't considered. However, with the current rate and depth of coverage, the extent to which these professionals are informed by newspapers is questionable.

Moreover so, the aforementioned is especially applicable to up and coming entrepreneurs. With little to no capital and high risk investment environment, these individuals largely lack even the business networks available to current operational small and medium enterprises. As a result, reliable information sources are crucial for these individuals, individuals that are extremely important to developing economies. However, due to the findings above, newspapers are not providing this information and as a result play a negative role in helping the economy develop.

Additionally, the large presence of press releases and press coverage events raises the issue of agenda spillage into the public sphere. With 38% of the total economic stories being protocol stories, a reader with little to no background in media can easily confuse the agenda of the press issuing party with the carefully considered factual reporting of journalists. Coupled with the lack of multiple sources per story, these agendas more often than not are conveyed in their entirety and not challenged by an analytic independent party. This potentially contributes to a mislead public, with information that is skewed so as to represent parties or economic policies under a certain light. As a result, public decision making and debate are subject to influence, unchecked by newspapers and unsubstantiated with coherent and continuous reporting.

A more thorough analysis of the scope of the limited reporting being done concerning the economy and the causes of these problems has been imperative in determining ways for newspaper to remedy their situation. Focusing on the primary and most problematic issues, INDEP has attempted to both isolate the current method of reporting on the economy and draw conclusions to help newspapers alleviate this problem.

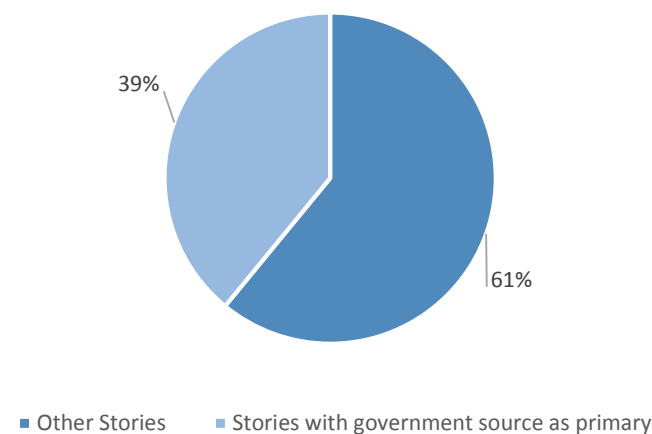
IV. Problems and Causes

1. Protocol Journalism

With the limited coverage of the economic sector in national newspapers, the persistence of protocol journalism, otherwise known as the publication of press release and press event materials, is of particular concern. As noted earlier in this study, total protocol journalism stories account for 38% of the stories concerning the economy, even with a very conservative definition of protocol journalism. The primary problem here remains clear. With the general statistics of under one independent story per newspaper per day, the high presence of protocol reporting points toward the potential for intentional or unintentional agenda pushing.

Of the 175 stories whose primary sources were government based, 80 were press releases or press event based.⁵ This is an issue of concern, seeing as 39% of the total stories were primarily based on government sources, while 18% of the total stories were government based press releases or events.

Stories with primary government sources



From the 80 protocol stories, 43 included secondary sources, all of them related to the primary governmental source. Of the stories with three or more sources, only four included a source independent of the issuer of the press release and their partners. This clearly shows that no independent pursuit of the verification of information in the press releases is conducted by newspapers. Additionally, newspapers go to no lengths to

gather an opinion that challenges the position presented in the press event materials.

This leak of unsubstantiated press releases on the side of the government poses several potential problems. Primarily, the public is offered only one position on an issue of economic policy and that position is usually of the proponent of a course of action. This poses a threat to overall quality of information presented to the public and leaves the public with the impression that whatever is presented in these stories must be true, since no other position has been offered. As a result, newspapers become either willingly or unwillingly participants in conveying a particular agenda without initiating public debate and without substantiating facts.

The source of this problem can most likely be attributed to a combination of a number of factors. Primarily, newspapers are subject to several financial difficulties, severely hampering their human resources and professional capacities. The unfiltered publication of press materials is due to unprofessional journalism and yet the minimum requirement of the inclusion of an opposing opinion is easily attainable. Therefore, this points out to a second, and rather more concerning, issue.

Newspapers, or journalists and editors within, might be implicitly supporting one or more agendas. Relatively harmless, press releases enable outlets to offer support of one particular side without substantially affecting the way they are perceived by the public. This occurs primarily because of a bandwagon effect caused by the publication of the story by multiple outlets and the dissolution of the perception of bias. As a result, the publication of economics based agenda pushing stories, within the scope of the aforementioned statistics of few and small stories about economics, enables newspapers to do political favors without suffering the consequences of unprofessional and biased reporting. However, this still impacts public perceptions about whatever agenda is being pushed, without promoting public debate and therefore silently aiding the pursuit of potentially unfavorable and unchecked economic policies. This is even more problematic when considering

⁵ Government based sources included all branches of the executive subject to political appointments, excluding independent agencies.

the complete lack of the presence of economic analysis in newspapers, either from opinion pieces or from the newspaper staff themselves.

2. No Analysis

Due to the large international presence and continuing support toward the establishment of transparent government mechanisms, Kosovo boasts considerable public resources concerning information about the economy. Numerous data sources are available in their raw format through the websites of entities such as the Kosovo Tax Authority, Ministry for Trade and Industry, Central Bank of Kosovo, Kosovo Customs, Statistical Agency of Kosovo, etc. Additionally, due to the support of the international community, numerous serious economic think tanks operate within the country and continuously publish studies regarding the economy and are generally well sourced. Whatever public information is not immediately accessible can be requested through the use of the Law on Access to Public Documents, although its implementation has been characterized by several problems. However, despite the general availability of raw economic data and well analyzed and elaborated economic studies, virtually no economic analysis stories are present in Kosovo newspapers.

From the 448 stories concerning the economy, only one was an analysis story and only ten opinion pieces were published. INDEP considered economic analysis stories, stories in which studies and data obtained from the newspaper independent of interviewees were used as arguments in a story, either to challenge, corroborate or evaluate an argument. Additionally, stories in which the newspaper initiated an issue of evaluating or reporting on a policy without press event solicitation or daily news coverage present in other papers, were considered analysis stories. Despite the generous approach toward identifying analysis stories, the end results were discouraging.

Moreover so, newspapers made virtually no use of basic economic terminology in their stories concerning the economy.⁶ This virtually invalidated the option of conducting a language based context and content analysis of the mode of coverage of the economy by newspapers, clearly pointing to the very superficial and not even nascent tradition of economic journalism in the country.

Adding to the above, 350 of the 448 stories concerning the economy identified during the reporting period contained a picture. However, of those pictures only 139 were specific to the story, most of which concerned press events. Most concerning, however, is the complete lack of any form of visual representation of data in the form of graphs and charts in all stories concerning the economy. The data above paints a bleak picture of the coverage of the sector of the economy in Kosovo newspapers and the quality of information that is offered to the public and businesses.

Primarily, the lack of usage of data sources maintains the public and business professionals in a state of general ignorance about the data sources available to them. This poses considerable problems, seeing as the average citizen will be uninformed about information they can use to assess the claims of the successes of their elected representatives. On the other hand, small businesses and future entrepreneurs with limited capacities to engage in policy evaluation, will greatly suffer because of lack of knowledge of data sources and lack of readily available analysis on issues pertaining to them.

⁶ Less than 5% of stories contained words such as GDP, deficit, loan, macro, micro, etc. [equivalents in Albanian were used]

On the other hand, the complete lack of cross evaluation of statements of interviewees concerning the economy provides these interviewees with the opportunity to pass as true more complicated economic inferences that are generally open to interpretation. As such, in this particular coverage area, it is crucial for journalists to carefully evaluate factual information given by their sources. However, seeing as no use of data sources and independent studies has been provided in newspapers, such statements from interviewed parties are largely not verified. As a result, the newspapers open themselves and the public to the reception of at worst untrue information and at best misleading interpretations. Therefore, newspapers do not use the tools available to them to fully implement their fact checking routines, calling into question the accuracy of their already few and superficial stories concerning the economy.

The lack of analysis and availability of interpretation of complicated economic issues in terms readily understandable by the general public has more serious implications on the economy. Due to the lack of such information, citizens are largely uninformed of the consequences that complex economic policy decisions have on their daily lives. On the one side, this legitimizes an uninformed public to request more populist economic policy at times where funds to pursue such actions are scarce. On the other side, it places policy makers with the potential to take more conservative economic policy decisions in an unfavorable position, enabling individuals with potential detrimental policy making decisions, such as the increase of wages of the public sector by Prime Minister Thaci, to pursue such actions for votes.

More crucially, the combination of the lack of economic analysis with lack of news about the economy affects both business and workers in businesses. The lack of performance information on specific industries disables workers to be aware of the state the business which they work for and their future prospects. This poses a problem when workers consider negotiating for better salaries, working conditions or decide to pursue further professionalization programs. Additionally, businesses are not offered ready information regarding economic prospects in the future, and as thus have to rely on relatively few sources of information and interpretation. Businesses are also uninformed about the adoption of new policies affecting their operations.

One such case is the adoption of the Law on Electronic Communications by the Assembly of Kosovo, which INDEP was a part of. Despite the efforts of the Assembly of Kosovo to reach all concerned parties, the lack of coverage by the media made it impossible for all concerned operators in the electronic communication related business to be informed about the law input process. As a result, a number of operators were not present to participate in what is arguably a crucial law concerning their industry. As such, the lack of reporting combined with the lack of analysis could have potentially negatively affected a whole industry.

The reasons for this lack of analysis are numerous, but mainly revolve around the lack of investment from newspapers in improving their reporting capacities. Out of the 448 articles identified, 253 were not attributed to a particular author, with a prevalence of press release stories contributing to this number. The rest of the stories were attributed to 47 journalists and opinion writers, with an average of four stories per journalist. However, the distribution of the stories per journalist was far from even, indicating that journalists assigned to cover the economy, with few exceptions, are far from regular. Additionally, a superficial analysis of the credentials of the journalists assigned to cover the economy on regular basis indicated no previous academic preparation in either business, economy or other quantitative fields. This is substantiated by an interviewee who remarked that the lack of special economic sections within the newspapers coupled with the lack of niched journalists who deal exclusively with economic reporting add to

the rarity of the occurrence of analytical pieces. Furthermore, the interviewee counts the inexperience, which at times can be attributed to the young age, of the editors which newspapers employ to revise their economic coverage as an added factor to the meagre quality of economic reporting. This lack of niched journalists and editorial boards according to our interviewee, also affects the very independence of a media outlet, decreasing the outlets resistance to outer political or business pressures.⁷

The aforementioned, along with the overall lack of coverage in terms of quantity, depth of reporting, professionalism standards and analytic pieces most clearly indicates that newspapers are not investing in this particular type of reporting. This is despite the fact that the state of Kosovo's economy is one of the most, if not the most, important area of concern in the country at the moment.

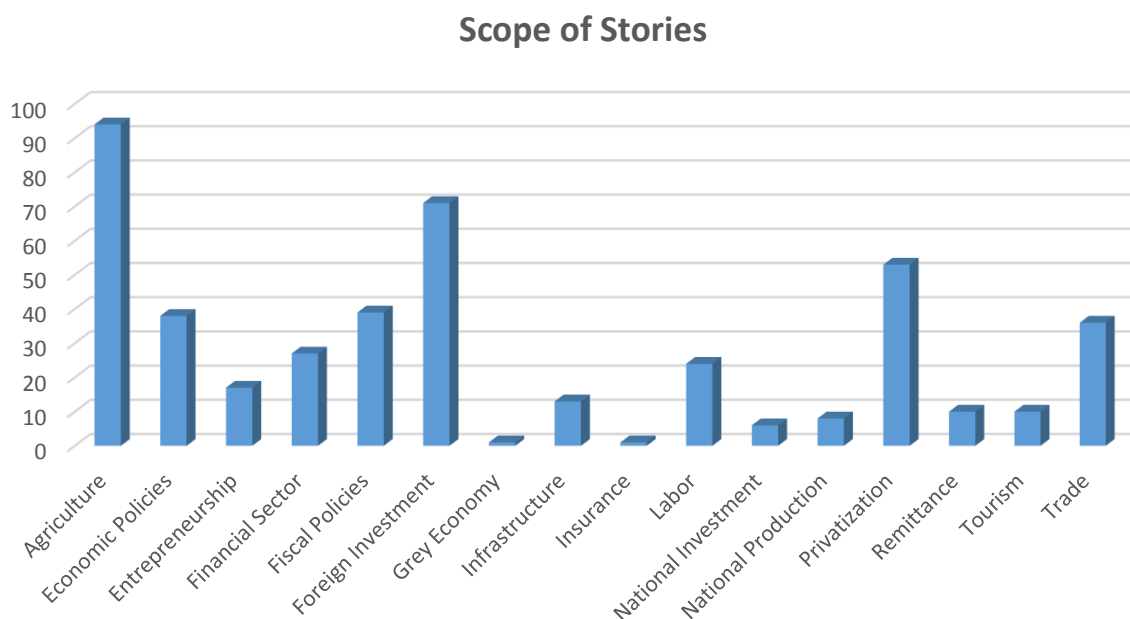
More counterintuitively, such a decision to irregularly and superficially cover the economy might be hurting newspapers economically in the long run. The primary demographic of reputable printed press worldwide remains middle to high income earners with university level or higher education.⁸ This affluent group of the public generally expects to receive well reported news and is more likely to maintain attention through longer pieces. Additionally, it can be argued that this audience strata is also more interested in economic news, considering their higher level of education. As a result, the method of coverage of the economy by newspapers might be damaging their readership in the long run, readership already challenged by the proliferation of online news outlets. Whereas foreign newspaper are more actively targeting the pursuit of stories with more depth and higher accuracy and reliability as a method of survival in these times of hardship for the industry, newspapers in Kosovo are opting for the exact opposite.

The lack of analytic news concerning the economy is not only hurting the general public by rendering public debate virtually impossible, it is also affecting businesses themselves. As a result, this lack of coverage might have a negative impact on the economy itself, besides the fact that the method of reporting on the economy is far from the best practices. Moreover so, by entirely ignoring one of the largest areas of operation in a country, newspapers are damaging their readership, consequently affecting their sales and advertising quotas.

⁷ Shabani, Zekirja, 2014, personal interview, Pristina.

⁸ The Pew Research Centre for the People & the Press (2012). In Changing News Landscape, Even Television is Vulnerable.

3. Coverage Areas



Coverage areas within economic stories also display considerable problems when considering Kosovar national newspapers. The majority of stories, as can be seen from the graph below, concern Foreign investment, the privatization process and different policies of the government. On the other hand, equally important and problematic sectors within the economy, such as the grey economy, labor and entrepreneurship have received little to no attention.

Foreign investment stories comprised 16% of the total stories, or higher than any other category, excluding agriculture. However, more than half of the stories, or 42 of them, were based on press releases or press events, with the majority of the primary sources on these protocol stories – 27 – being Kosovo government based. Of the remaining 29 stories, 16 were primarily based on government sources. This indicates that the coverage on foreign investment is largely centered on official governmental sources, with no input from either foreign investors, local investors or any other entity. In fact, only 14 stories contained non-government affiliated entities as a second source. As such, this area of high importance for the Kosovo economy, remains largely uncovered properly and relies on a single source of information which puts into question the overall accuracy of the information.

On the other hand the issue of the privatization of the country's previously socially owned enterprises continues to be high on the list of coverage, with 53 stories or 12% of the total stories. 21 of these stories were readily identifiable as press release or press event based, however, due to the conservative definition, this number is smaller than the full effect of protocol journalism when covering privatization. More problematic remains the issue of the coverage within the privatization scope, where journalists and media almost completely focus on the Post Telecom of Kosovo and the Trepca Mining Corporation. Absolutely no attention was paid to the operation of the already privatized firms, their success ratio or other economic analysis of the privatization process in Kosovo, despite the availability of general information.

However, by far the most prominent area covered when concerning economic activity remained the agricultural sector. The agricultural sector comprised 21%, or 94, of the total stories on the economy reported by the newspapers. Of these stories, 38 were press releases or press event based.

As has been a continuing trend, the majority of the stories relied on government sources as primary providers of information, with 49 stories having government representatives as primary sources. This isn't surprising considering the ongoing efforts by the ministry of agriculture to stimulate production through subsidies and policies, but also due to the reliance of newspapers almost completely on government information. The rather larger number of articles that were identified during the monitoring phase and that had agriculture as a central theme, can be most likely correlated with the timing of the monitoring period, an observation shared with economic editors and journalists who INDEP consulted with during the analysis. Indeed, the period when the monitoring was undertaken (3rd June-17th July) coincided with the time of the year when the harvesting season was at full effect, therefore it was natural to assume that such stories would contribute to a higher than average occurrence in the daily press. During this time frame both farmers and the Ministry of Agriculture amp up their activities to a much greater degree, something which has been reflected in the analysis of the data.⁹

Upon closer qualitative inspection, this choice of coverage areas seems almost entirely affected by the ease of available information. Due to the government's continuous presence in the media when concerning economic stories, most information presented in newspapers tends to represent topics considered important by the government. Thus, newspapers tend to portray a picture where Kosovo's economy largely revolves around foreign investment, agriculture and the privatization of socially owned enterprises.

However, there is little discussion of important issues such as labor, the financial sector, namely loans and interest rates, trade and Kosovo's dreadful trade deficit, etc. Unfortunately, this reflects a success on the side of the government to control the public debate concerning on the economy. By focusing on areas where the government has had some success, such as the privatization, adoption of new policies as part of their bid to adapt Kosovo legislation to EU norms, the discussion has been entirely shifted from the stagnating sectors. Issues such as Kosovo's lack of upward mobility of labor, the lack of high skilled labor and the impact of a dysfunctional education sector, few new business ventures and general lack of capital are not present in the media.

Unlike the lack of analysis, this problem is entirely more widespread and might be an indicator of a more problematic issue with the media in the country. The general population is left largely uninformed about the current state of the economy in the country and the necessary sectors and steps needed to be taken in order to alleviate this problem. This situation is exacerbated by what seems to be a perpetual cycle between lack professional standards in media concerning the coverage of the economy and the potential meddling of business and political interests in the editorial decisions of newspapers.¹⁰ As a result, Kosovo is faced with double edged problem, namely the lack of improvement on crucial areas of the economy, and the lack of information about the current state of these areas. As such, citizens are uninformed about the steps that need to be taken to alleviate some of these problems, and consequently the role they can play in helping in these aspects.

⁹ Rexhepi, Ibrahim, 2014, personal interview, Pristina.

¹⁰ Freedom House (2012). Nations in Transit Report, Kosovo.

V. Conclusions

The general coverage of the economy in Kosovo national newspapers is entirely unsatisfactory. Total stories per newspapers per day average at 1.4, including protocol stories of press releases and press events. This is further exacerbated by the fact that the crushing majority of stories regarding the economy are covered in the inside pages of a newspaper and are not clearly visible for readers. Few to no pull lines are seen in the front pages of newspapers for economy stories contained inside. Additionally, the coverage quantity is unsatisfactory, with 88% of the stories occupying one half or less of a page, with the distribution being far skewed toward less than half a page. Press release or press event based stories covered a large portion of the coverage while the number of sources per story was lower than the accepted norm for good journalism.

Content is even more problematic. In a 45 day monitoring period, newspapers contained only one story which could be labeled as analytic, namely including interviewee independent data and studies in order to assess claims, policies, or macro and micro economic analysis. This was further substantiated by the lack of use of mainstream economic terminology in economic stories. Although 78% of stories contained a picture, few contained pictures directly relevant to the topic of the stories and none of them contained graphs or charts or otherwise visually represented data. These findings point toward the lack of an analytic take on whatever few economy related stories the newspapers gathered.

The areas of coverage within economic stories also exhibited serious problems. The primary areas of focus were agriculture, foreign investment, different economic policies and the privatization process. These categories coincide with the areas in which the government has marked some success. Additionally, in the majority of stories concerning these areas the primary and secondary sources of information were government related. As a result, INDEP has concluded that the government has successfully high jacked the direction of the debate concerning the economy in the country in national newspapers. This has led to the scarce coverage of other sectors and problems with the economy such as unemployment, analysis of the impact of financial institutions and interest rates, low upward mobility, small private sector, etc.

The impact of this state of coverage of the economy is considerable. Primarily, voters are kept in the dark of the most contentious problems with the economy and therefore cannot make coherent decisions regarding their representatives. Additionally, no civic initiatives, including petitions, protests or other form of attempt to influence policies have been marked concerning problematic areas of the economy, despite the serious economic woes of the country. This seems to indicate that the general lack of coverage of the economy is affecting perceptions in the public and therefore resulting in less than optimal economic and policy performance.

Business on the other hand are also affected by this lack of information. Since most business in Kosovo are either small or medium enterprises they have little to no capacity to run appropriate economic forecasting for their needs. As a result, the lack of public information regarding economic policies and their impact can possibly have adverse effect on the business sector.

INDEP believes that the primary reason for this state of affairs concerning coverage of the economy by newspapers might partially stem from the lack of capacities by these institutions. Due to the relative severity of the financial problems encountered by the print media industry, their capacities for covering the economy properly might be limited. However, this does not explain the lack of proper coverage of the stories they already publish, seeing as a considerable number of them stem from press events and releases and do not contain the minimum number of sources.

This potentially indicates either a lack of interest by the media to cover the economy or other more sinister implications.

The lack of interest in covering the economy is primarily illogical and counterintuitive. The audience of national newspapers centers on middle to high income individuals with secondary education or more. As a result, coverage of the economy would be of paramount importance to these individuals. Therefore, the lack of coverage overall, and the lack of quality of current coverage indicate that media might be losing audience and advertising revenue as a result. This also indicates that there is a combination of factors affecting their editorial decisions concerning the coverage of the economy, not the least of which being potential business and political influence. In fact, the astounding presence of government stories and government agenda, seems to indicate that there might be a more concerted effort regarding the method of coverage of the economy. This is further substantiated by the lack of presence or quotation of independent data and studies, despite their general availability in the country.

The coverage of the economy in Kosovo is not satisfactory and might be greatly affecting economic policy making in the country and damaging both citizen and businesses. Additionally, this lack of coverage might be damaging the newspapers themselves, by limiting their primary audience. An immediate solution to this problem must be found in order to ensure proper coverage and potential increase revenues of newspapers.

VI. Recommendations

1. Newspapers should immediately assign resources to the preparation of manuals for the training of journalists concerning the coverage of the economy according to best practices. Preferably, news staff intakes should be drawn from pools of candidates with previous experience in any economic sector.
2. Editorial boards of newspapers should immediately start to create a coherent and independent approach toward covering the main contentious issues concerning the economy. Priority should be given to this topic due to its high importance.
3. Newspapers should refrain from publishing press release or press event material without the inclusion of tertiary independent sources and without independent verification of the information contained therein.
4. Newspapers should consult a range of actors on the best approach to cover the economy in Kosovo. A range of economic professionals both from the non-governmental, non-profit and business sectors are available to consult on the best approach on the issue.

