



MEDIA REPORTING ON PEACE, CONFLICT AND SECURITY ISSUES – HOW OBJECTIVE AND CONFLICT-SENSITIVE IS MEDIA COVERAGE AND REPORTING ON THESE ISSUES?

March 2014



An EU funded project managed by
the European Union Office in Kosovo

FORUM
for
SECURITY

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The Forum for Security aims to contribute to improve the security environment by promoting effective institutions and policies. The forum serves as a discussion platform among civil society organizations and authorities in Kosovo, and provides possibilities for exchange of experiences and lessons on security, regionally and internationally. Forum for Security is comprised of the following organisations: Forum for Civic Initiatives (FIQ), Institute for Development Policy (INDEP), and Kosovo Law Institute (KLI)

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I. INTRODUCTION

Currently, Kosovo is inhabited by eight recognized ethnic groups¹. The two main ethnic groups, Albanians and Serbians, have been the participants of an armed conflict that ended in 1999 that saw 13,526 persons dead or missing that have been confirmed until now². The conflict has caused persistent animosities between the two main ethnic groups in the country. The north of Kosovo remains largely un-integrated in either Kosovo or Serbia system, whereas this socio-political instability is a potential ground for tensions and conflict. The location or fate of many missing persons is still unknown and neither crimes nor killings in 1999 have been addressed directly by both sides. Despite the fact that currently Kosovo is no longer considered an imminent conflict zone, a careful approach is warranted when dealing with potentially sensitive topics.

These sensitive issues also touch upon intra-ethnic relations. As Kosovo moves further with its state-building efforts, interethnic problems start to take a secondary stage in front of tensions within ethnic groups themselves. The high level of diversity within each ethnic group in Kosovo, whether religious, educational or regional, provides for considerable grounds for conflict. This is all the more problematic seeing as the country's economy still remains in an unfavorable position. According to the World Bank, in 2013 the Gross Domestic Product per capita was \$3,640, while according to the same organization, a third of the population lives below the poverty line, while an eighth of the population lives in extreme poverty³. The high rate of unemployment contributes most to poverty, which in 2009 was 45.4 percent, while in 2012 it was 30.9 per cent, where 55.3 per cent of the unemployed are young people aged 15-24 years⁴. The data indicates that the adverse economic situation in the country provides a ripe environment for potential unrest. Additionally, considering the persistence of interethnic tensions, there is also the danger that economic grievances will not be articulated in the proper economic focus but rather be expressed along ethnic lines.

Due to these considerations, it is crucial for all relevant stakeholders in Kosovo to approach public issues through a conflict sensitive approach. Conflict sensitivity is a norm under which many stakeholders in conflicts operate, those stakeholders being governmental agencies, non-governmental agencies, civil society organizations and the media that report under such circumstances. All these entities agree that by being conflict-sensitive they are taking an approach that involves gaining a sound understanding of the two-way interaction between activities and context, and so they are acting to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive impacts of their intervention in conflict, within an organization's given mandate⁵.

Media have to be especially careful when operating in conflict-prone areas and their one-sided actions may have much stronger impact than those of any other organization that operates in similar circumstances. Furthermore, by being the most prominent source of information of the masses, even to those far away from the hotspots of potential conflict, the media's role only begins to exponentially rise closer to these hotspots. Therefore, in order not to further exacerbate conflicts, media have to pay much greater attention to their reports being conflict sensitive and objective, which often means that they have to fill a broader role than they normally would, in different environment. In this extended role, the media have to be proactive in offering clear and unbiased information regarding the causes and consequences of conflicts that they are reporting on. At the same time they have to strive to reconcile various actors of those conflicts by offering them a platform on which they can gain common ground. If though on the other hand media fail

¹ The law on the Defense and Promotion of the Rights of Communities within Kosovo recognizes these following ethnicities: Albanian, Serbian, Turkish, Bosnian, Goran, Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali.

² Fund for Humanitarian Rights. (2011). Kosovo Memory Book 1998-2000. Belgrade: Fund for Humanitarian Rights.

³ Varfëria në konsum në Republikën e Kosovës në vitin 2011, Banka Botërore dhe Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës, Mars 2013

⁴ Rezultatet e Anketës së Fuqisë Punëtore 2012 në Kosovë, Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës, Shtator 2013

⁵ Conflict Sensitivity Consortium. Retrieved March 16, 2014, from <http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/content/introduction-0#defining>

to fulfill such a role, either by failing to be objective or by lacking the necessary reconciliatory language within their coverage, they may in fact cause irreparable damage to the communities involved in the conflict. This damage can be caused by either deliberate or un-deliberate use of inflammatory language or by just being generally biased during the reporting on sensitive issues.

In Kosovo, media have to be even more careful to ensure that their coverage of various issues fulfills the norms of conflict-sensitivity, considering its peculiar situation. Under the conditions explained above, it is very easy for inexperienced or irresponsible media outlets to cause or escalate tensions through unfair coverage of extremely sensitive issues. When one adds to those factors various cultural divisions that exist within the communities that call Kosovo their home, the role of the media as some sort of universal facilitator is even more emphasized. Conversely, by avoiding recognition of their role as a facilitator, the media can on the other hand act as a catalyst for inter-ethnic, religious, political, or economic antagonisms and tensions.

With regard to the aforementioned, this study aims to analyze perceptions of citizens across Kosovo concerning media-sensitivity. This is of paramount importance in order to assess the likelihood of a media-driven conflict in the country and potential necessity for interventions to resolve any causes of media driven conflicts. Additionally, the study intends to juxtapose existing legal framework regulating media to these issues and assess whether any perceived problems have not been covered by respective regulatory policies. Finally, the analysis provides a number of recommendations for the resolution of problem areas within media coverage of conflict sensitive issues.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study has been prepared in order to analyze public perceptions concerning the conflict-sensitivity of the media, the regulatory framework concerning conflict-sensitive reporting, and expert opinions on the identified issues. More specifically, the paper has attempted to analyze how conflict-sensitive are the media in Kosovo.

Conflict-sensitive reporting refers to the practice of actively seeking to avoid potentially conflict inducing language and framing by journalist and editorial boards when reporting. The purpose behind this approach is to ensure that the public is thoroughly informed, while, at the same time ensuring that the reporting is not a precursor, or even an instigator of potential conflict in the society.

In order to address the research question, qualitative methodology was employed. The primary research method has been qualitative dual-moderator repeated focus groups. Focus groups were organized in Prishtinë/Priština, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Gjilan/Gnjilane, Gjakovë/Đakovica, Prizren, Leposaviq/Leposavić and Zubin Potok with mixed ethnicity participants, accordingly to regional representation. The target audience was of middle education and higher, gender-mixed, mainly "blue collar" work profile individuals. The age limit has varied from post-secondary education up to legal retirement age in Kosovo. The participants were not paid for their participation in the focus group. The focus groups were recorded in order to conduct post-focus group detailed analysis, but the participants have been kept anonymous in the paper in order to ensure a safe personal opinion assessment environment.

The focus group data were analyzed through a multifold approach – individual perception assessment, opinion-strength assessment, general group agreement and collective shared understandings. Focus group interview questions were prepared, however, general expansions at the discretion of their moderators were allowed.

Secondary research was conducted regarding the regulatory framework concerning media and reporting monitoring in Kosovo. The primary focus of secondary research has been the legal framework for the establishment of Kosovo government-based media-regulatory agencies and independent self-regulatory media bodies. Additionally, all bylaws, codes and regulations of these bodies were assessed as part of a legal review concerning hate speech, conflict-sensitivity and provisions to target these issues.

The second focus of secondary research has been all government-independent Kosovo media analysis reports. These are: 'Nations in Transit' by Freedom House, 'Media Sustainability Index' by IREX, 'Freedom of the Press – Reporters without Borders', Progress Reports prepared by the European Commission and 'State of the Media in Kosovo' reports by INDEP. An array of tertiary reports by other agencies was also considered during the background research phase.

Finally, in assessing primary problematic areas concerning media coverage, semi-structured interviews with media publicists, journalists, sociologists, editors as well as independent analysts were conducted. The interviews were targeted to assess expert opinions on problematic perceptions derived from the focus groups. All interviewees were asked a list of structured questions with unstructured follow-up questions.

III. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Media in Kosovo have to be especially cautious in remaining objective and unbiased in their reporting, due to the great degree of diversity in demographics of the people.. In a country boasting a population that is composed of 8 ethnicities, more than 3 religious groups and uncountable political views, news outlets must be especially careful over the way that the reporting is structured. This is all the more true in cases where inter-cultural news are being reported, in order not to incite disagreements or misunderstandings which may, at least potentially, lead to conflict. In the Constitution of Kosovo this is taken into account under the chapter that establishes the freedom of media, which provisions prohibit censorship up to the point in which it becomes necessary to deter the incitement and provocation of violence and enmity on the basis of racial, national, ethnic or religious aspects⁶. Furthermore, the Press Council of Kosovo and the Independent Media Commission of Kosovo serve to regulate the written and broadcast media respectively. No official regulating body exists for the online media that are increasingly gaining in audience within Kosovo, something which might cause concerns now and in the future.

The Independent Media Commission was formed under chapter 141 of the Constitution of Kosovo as a body that licenses and regulates radio and television channels that operate in the country. Further empowered with the ability to place bylaws, the Commission released a code of conduct early on, regulating many aspects of conduct of audio-visual media outlets. More importantly, it specifically called upon the language of the reporting to be devoid of hateful and violence-inciting elements. Encouragingly enough, it is stated within the very codes' intent that the one of the primary reasons for the codes' enactment was the prevention of social unrest through the regulation of the audio-visual medium outlets conduct⁷. Apart from rather common articles that call out for the prevention of the use of discriminatory and inflammatory language, an article within the code of conduct deals specifically with the prevention of the incitement of violence through audio-visual media outlets. The article, other than barring the use of language that is meant to or could incite violence, hate, uprising and/or rebellion, also foresees the

⁶ The Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, art. 42 § 2.

⁷ Code of Conduct for Audio-Visual Media Services in the Republic of Kosovo, intent.

restriction of visuals and tones which can cause the same outcomes⁸. Considering that improper or tendentious use of visuals and tones can have the same effect as the language used in cases of incitement of conflict, it is commendable that the Commission foresaw the inclusion of that aspect into this article.

Kosovo's Press Council is a non-governmental body formed by the union of several representatives of the media outlets that constitute the press medium in Kosovo, and its prime intent is also regulation of the operation and conduct of written media. In effect to this, the Press Council enacted the 'Press Media Code of Kosovo', which would regulate and enforce ethical, moral and professional conduct of the print media in Kosovo. Similarly as has been done by the Independent Media Commission, the Press Council regulates the language of the reporting through its Code of Conduct, in the prospect of lowering the chances of conflict breaking-out due to improper use of language during reporting.

As language isn't the only factor which might cause the incitement of conflict or hate, the Press Council also enforces the objectivity of the press media. Therefore, as obliged with the Press Code of Kosovo, the printing press has to ensure that it will do everything in its capacity not to incite hate or inequality through the treatment with bias of an individual or group on terms of ethnicity, religion, gender, race, marriage, age and physical and/or health; or the use of derogatory terms with the intent of hurting or threatening an individual or group on the exact terms mentioned before⁹. Also due to the sensitive nature of inter-cultural reporting, the Code specifies that references to the ethnic affiliation, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or to the physical/mental health of an individual will not be taken into account unless that information is of direct relevance to the piece of reportage itself¹⁰.

The reporting of crime constitutes another sensitive aspect of inter-cultural news reporting, and with the release of the Guidelines on the Press Code of Kosovo it has been properly addressed. According to the Guidelines, reporting on crime has to be done without the portrayal of the suspect's ethnic, religious, or any other affiliation, unless the information is directly relevant to the case¹¹. Because many conflicts in areas of the world which are demographically diverse are catalyzed by prejudiced reporting on the behalf of an individual or according to groups' affiliation, it is especially important that this has been specifically addressed in the Press Code.

Due to the rapid rise of digital news-outlet market, most notably in the form of internet portals, no specific regulating body has had the opportunity to be established yet. This of course creates a vacuum in the regulation of an extremely important source of information. In order to both counter this vacuum and enhance the Code in general, the Kosovo Press Council has released a supplemental document to its Press Code as a mean of taking the electronic media outlets in Kosovo within its regulatory umbrella. The Guideline on the Code, as the document was called, came into effect 7 years after the original implementation of the Code, and it brought forth many enhancements which were meant to promote conflict-sensitivity reporting of both print and digital media. As the comment sections make up an integral part of internet portals, the Press Council's guidelines to the Code has been devised with the main intent to regulate that crucial aspect. Therefore it does not come as a surprise that nearly the absolute majority of articles brought forth with the compilation of the guide have to deal with the comment sections of the portals. Within the guideline, it falls within the duty of the internet portal to monitor and remove any comments from the comment section that have content which could incite in any form, hate speech, use of derogatory forms or criminal acts¹². Furthermore, according to the guideline, apart

⁸ Code of Conduct for Audio-Visual Media Services in the Republic of Kosovo, art. 11.

⁹ Press Code of the Republic of Kosovo, art. 3, § 2.

¹⁰ Press Code of the Republic of Kosovo, art. 3, § 3.

¹¹ The Guidelines for the Press Code of the Republic of Kosovo, art. 3.

¹² The Guidelines for the Press Code of the Republic of Kosovo, Guidelines for Online Journalism, art. 2.

from the users themselves, the responsibility for the comments falls also to the internet media outlet¹³. By channeling part of the responsibility of the publication of comments to the mediums, the Press Code ensures that the online medium, which has the most capabilities to monitor and regulate its respective outlet, are actively engaged in sifting through hurtful or offensive comments with professional diligence.

Unfortunately, as is the case with many of the laws and regulations passed in Kosovo, they tend to stutter in practice. In the case of the Guideline to the Press Code, the previous assumption can be easily verified by only skimming through the comment sections of most of the online mediums operating within Kosovo, and witnessing some of the unacceptable language there.

IV. PERCEPTIONS – GENERAL FINDING

Kosovo boasts a populated media scene, with a high number of licensed broadcasters, print media and online media outlets. Currently, the number of licensed broadcasters in Kosovo sits at 167, with 21 TV stations, 83 radio stations, 14 cable operators and 49 program service providers that broadcast through cable television¹⁴. Out of 21 TV stations, three have Kosovo-wide coverage: the public broadcaster Radio and Television of Kosovo (RTK), which includes four more stations, one exclusively in Serbian, and the privately-owned broadcasters – Radio and Television 21 (RTV21) and Kohavision (KTV). There are also eight national newspapers, one in Serbian, with an unknown, but high number of local print publications across Kosovo. Additionally, besides the Kosovo-based outlets, there is a considerable presence of print and broadcast outlets based in Serbia that are largely followed by the Serbian population in Kosovo.

This high number of media outlets provides for a considerably large range of reporting on any particular issue, whether it is national, international or local. In such a large reporting environment, the quality, depth and nuance of preparing the news stories varies. As a result, public perception concerning coverage and amount of information on any given issue, particularly when concerning conflict sensitivity, is not uniform.

Kosovo-wide focus groups indicate that citizens cannot identify all ethnic groups living in their immediate cities and respective regions. When asked to name all different ethnic groups, focus group participants struggled to name a conclusive list of possible ethnicities living in a particular area. This is an indicator that the level of information available to citizens concerning the different surrounding ethnic groups is lacking.

The lack of information concerning various ethnicities living in a particular region was also applicable to media-transmitted information concerning religion. This was more accentuated among the perceptions of Albanian participants regarding the religious belonging of Albanians inhabiting their regions and also religious belonging of smaller ethnic groups.

When asked which media the participants preferred to follow, the general consensus remained that for national news stories, the three national televisions were the primary source of information. Participants from the north of Kosovo mentioned Serbia – based media as the primary source of information, alongside a limited number of local media stationed in the North, which they also follow. Following the initial evaluation, there was a clear and distinct opinion indicating that there were reservations regarding the reliability of the public broadcaster, RTK. The focus group held in Prishtinë/Priština, however, clearly distinguished itself, concluding that

¹³ The Guidelines for the Press Code of the Republic of Kosovo, Guidelines for Online Journalism, art. 8.

¹⁴ Independent Media Commission. (2012). Annual work report for the year 2012, Prishtinë/Priština, Retrieved March 15, 2014, from <http://kpm-ks.org/materiale/dokument/1369054659.2327.pdf>

the primary sources of information remain national media and online portals, with no focus on local media. Focus group participants also named online news portals as source of information, a perception shared mainly by younger participants. However, those participants that did mention online portals among their source of information also indicated that they usually seek factual substantiation by established outlets seeing as they did not perceive the information stemming from the internet to be reliable.

Participants also responded positively when asked if they seek out stories by individual journalists when reading their preferred news outlets. The participants indicated that they took this approach largely due to the fact that even with a publication or broadcaster, they perceived certain journalists to be more trustworthy than others. This perception was applied to national and local media alike, indicating that citizens perceive significant level of heterogeneity of trustworthiness within a particular medium, with certain stories carrying more accurate and balanced information than others. The participants perceived that this was due to editorial preferences of the editorial boards of these media, and that certain journalists seemed to maintain their professional integrity despite editorial policies of the media outlets they work for. Additionally, when asked if they followed media from other communities, participants in more advanced age groups indicated that they do. This response was concentrated among Albanian participants who follow Serbian and Turkish language media, and vice-versa, non-Serbian and non-Albanian communities that indicated that they follow both Albanian-language and Serbian-language media. In Serbian-participants' groups from the north of Kosovo no such pursuit has been indicated, whereas the language barrier has been stated as the main ground, together with a factual obstacle that broadcasting and media in Albanian language in general are not available in the northern part of Kosovo.

In order to substantiate the level of conflict sensitivity of media outlets, citizens' perceptions regarding the presence of interethnic conflict were also assessed. When asked if they thought conflicts existed between the ethnicities in their cities and regions, participants did not outwardly indicate presence of conflict. However, participants of Albanian nationality did focus on the fact that while their relations with non-Serbian ethnic communities were generally warm, relations with Serbian community remained scarce and sporadic. The answers of Serbian participants from the north of Kosovo also indicated that there is a barrier existing between the two main ethnicities, both imaginary as well as factual. Nevertheless, they also noted that there is no imminent conflict present at the moment when it comes to interethnic issues, but rather that general economic problems have gained the primary grounds. Finally, there were no direct indications that any religion was a perceived area of focus, however, specific questions that will be elaborated further in the paper indicated that one religious group felt they were being negated as a majority.

The general questions indicated that the citizens have a well-established perception of the general media landscape. Additionally, they were generally informed of current events, and had a respectable grasp of media outlets and their function, as well as their internal staff. However, information concerning the ethnic and religious composition of their localities was lacking, indicating that there is a general shortage of information on these issues present in the media in Kosovo. Because of the fact that the participants stated that their primary sources of information remain the media, this indicates that the media in Kosovo have not been successful in conveying this information to the reader.

V. MEDIA, ETHNICITY AND COVERAGE – PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

General public perceptions concerning their ethnic counterparts in areas that have been subject to interethnic conflict are susceptible to repeated deterioration. In the last 15 years considerable resources have been invested in ensuring that peace through understanding will be maintained. One of the main pillars of this peace-building effort remains the media. With direct access to large parts of the population, media are in a position to greatly support stability and security efforts. In a country with multiple ethnic groups with an unstable past, great care must be shown by media when covering emotionally charged issues. Failure to do so runs the risk of increasing tensions. March 2004, marked one of these instances when the media contributed to the escalation of conflict, with the consensus being that they did not show the necessary restraint in reporting¹⁵. Albanian and non-Serbian focus group participants, however, have clearly indicated that it is their perception that such an outcome is not likely to occur again.

When asked if they perceived that the amount of information present on the other ethnicities in their respective media was satisfactory in quantity, focus group participants responded positively. However, monitoring data clearly indicates that stories on non-Albanian ethnicities on Albanian national newspapers are scarce, with only 149 stories noted for seven national newspapers during a 45 day monitoring period¹⁶. When confronted with this fact, Albanian focus group participants elaborated that they were comfortable with the lack of minority reporting, seeing as it was their belief that majority media should focus on the majority population mainly. Additionally, Albanian focus group participants also stipulated that minorities have at their disposal local media targeted specifically at them, with specialized news and show editions by the RTK. Serbian participants in the north noted however, that they do not have access to Albanian media broadcasting in their municipalities, and they mainly follow Serbia-based media. Non-Albanian non-Serbian focus group participants noted that they are generally satisfied with sources of information in their respective languages and that the national broadcaster also covers the niche.

When asked if, from the stories that have been present regarding other ethnic groups or related issues, the participants remembered a story that aggravated them, the responses were mixed. The participants noted that there is a difference in coverage between national and local media.

Primarily, Albanian participants noted that most reporting on the Serbian community in Albanian media was focused on the talks between Prishtina and Belgrade. This reporting was mainly driven by national media and was perceived to be largely impartial; however, it was also felt that the newspapers conveyed that too much has been bargained to the Serbian side. Among Serbian focus group participants from the north alike, noted that the talks between Prishtina and Belgrade took a prominent position in this regard, also admitting an existence of the potential for inflammation of conflict due to the way how different media interpret the talks and due to the overall perception of the lack of objectivity performed by media. Besides that, the case of March 17th 2004, has been largely marked by Serbian focus group participants as the occurrence when media took a major role in triggering ethnically motivated conflict. Albanian focus group participants also noted that according to them, national media were extremely careful when reporting on interethnic issues, explaining that it was their perception that this care resulted from the events of March 2004.

¹⁵ A. Ahmeti, Journalist, Tribuna. INDEP in-person interview, March 12, 2014. I. Mushkolaj, Chairman, Press Council of Kosovo, INDEP in-person interview, March 14, 2014.

¹⁶ The Institute for Development Policy. (2013). The Print Media and Minorities in Kosovo: An Analysis of the Coverage.

Roma focus group participants noted that stereotypes are still present when reporting on their minority. Similarly, other non-Albanian ethnicities indicated that there are isolated cases of possibly conflict inducing stories in the Albanian majority media in certain instances. Such an instance has been the coverage of the request of certain groups in Prizren to amend the logo of the municipality. The proposed logo of the municipality of Prizren would include a drawing of the House of Prizren, a symbol of the first independence movement of Kosovo Albanians as well as a date associated with the Albanian independence movement, namely 1878. According to the participants the request was done simply due to visual reasons, however, the media covered it as an attempt by minority groups to remove Albanian specific symbols. It was noted, however, that this approach was believed to be a consequence of lack of professionalism and ability to understand the issue by the media rather than an orchestrated attempt to portray the non-Albanian communities in a negative light.

Focus group participants also noted that while the more serious national and local media did a respectable job of ensuring fair reporting on these issues, fringe and tabloid media were not as careful. Without specifying particular cases, there was a general agreement between participants that certain fringe and tabloid outlets are focused on sensationalistic reporting that might cause conflict. However, focus group participants also noted that such reporting was transparent for its purposes and they believed it posed no particular threat.

When the Albanian participants were asked if they followed Serbian outlets in the country, few participants answered positively. Additionally, few Serbian focus group participants indicated that they read Albanian newspapers. From the participants that were informed with coverage by Serbian media, all agreed that the coverage was highly negative and conflict inciting in nature, particularly from participants in the south of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. A number of Serbian participants from the north of Kosovo indicated the same belief about Albanian media though.. Thus, while Serbian media have been noted to still refer to Albanians with perceived pejorative terminology, Albanian media are on the other hand believed to be blaming Serbs on any possible occasion, by default.

Overall focus group findings seem to indicate that there is no homogeneous opinion on the interethnic conflict sensitivity of the media in Kosovo. Primarily, there is a distinct difference in perception of the carefulness of coverage of interethnic issues between reliable national outlets, local outlets and tabloids and fringe outlets. National outlets in the Albanian language are perceived to be fair and careful in reporting of interethnic issues, by all ethnicities in focus groups excluding Serbs in the north of Kosovo. Some Serbian focus group participants in the north of Kosovo perceive Albanian media to be generally biased against Serbs, with Serbian media being fairer, if not more conflict sensitive. There was general focus group consensus that no emotionally charged language was used in the few cases when reporting on minorities occurred and the communities did not feel incited by the coverage. This general focus group consensus only applied to focus groups in the South of Kosovo, while there are certain perceptions of participants in the northern municipalities reflected yet stated sensation that Albanian media coverage is biased against Serbian ethnicity representatives.

However, lack of coverage also presents its own problems. As indicated above, coverage of minorities in the country remains scarce. This lack of coverage has already negatively affected overall population knowledge of the ethnic and religious composition of their regions. This can negatively impact inter-ethnic relations seeing as overall lack of information can possibly lead to the further deepening of already existent rifts between different ethnic groups. As one interlocutor from Leposaviq/Leposavič stated, "We can only speak from one point of view, we do not have access to Albanian media, and even when we have there is no content in Serbian that we can understand. So we can only speak about the information we have in our media." Focus group

participants responded that communication between ethnicities is largely need based and no regular communication is maintained, with the exception of Prizren participants.

Lack of coverage on minorities is also largely a function of two phenomena. Primarily, privately owned Albanian language media clearly indicate that they have no interest in reporting on minorities and for minorities. This is due to the fact that the Albanian audience doesn't express a general interest in being informed on these issues and reader / viewership by non-Albanian communities is almost non-existent¹⁷. This is also substantiated by focus group perception findings, where Albanian participants clearly indicated that they expect reporting on minorities to be scarce. For Serbian participants from the North this has not been stated as an issue, seemingly considering the fact that they largely follow Serbia-based and locally-stationed media. Additionally, the language barrier also poses a considerable problem, seeing as multi language reporting is expensive. Moreover so, internal capacities to report from different localities inhabited by particular ethnic groups is expensive, seeing as correspondent costs are high and audience interest is low.

Despite the aforementioned, focus group participants have indicated that there is a consistent lack of coverage on issues that are recurrent from the end of the war. Reporting on missing persons and uncovered mass graves remains scarce. Reports on unresolved lingering areas of tensions from the past, such as the issue of war victims, disabled and other special groups as a result of the war is scarce. While this doesn't directly incite conflict, according to certain groups, it leaves tensions and a national debate on remaining areas of conflict unresolved¹⁸. This poses a long term problem, seeing as no sustainable solution to interethnic issues can be achieved without initiating debate and relieving some issues from the past.

VI. THE MAJORITY ETHNICITY – CONFLICTS UNSEEN.

After the war, most peace-building and security investment has been placed in ensuring that interethnic conflict is prevented and reconciliation is initiated between the Albanian and Serbian populations in Kosovo. Up until the war, the Albanian population has presented a unified social group and due to the common push for independence, inter-Albanian divisions were scarcely noticed. However, years after the end of the war, the diversity of the main ethnic group has started to become more apparent, as cross border national issues become of less importance.

Kosovo Albanians boast a high variety of political and religious beliefs, among others. The majority of Kosovo Albanians are Muslims, and the second largest religious subgroup being Catholics. However, other religious and non-deist groups exist among the population and amount to as much as 5% of the total population¹⁹. Additionally, regional divisions are also existent and more often than not they are expressed along political party lines. Currently, eight political parties are represented at the Assembly of Kosovo, with another 13 elected members not affiliated to political parties²⁰. The general list of political parties in the country is much larger, however.

The aforementioned data indicates that while most focus has been placed on interethnic issues, little work has been done to address the diversity of opinions with the main ethnicity. In fact, while reporting on interethnic issues by most major outlets is highly sensitive to conflict, reporting regarding issues affecting the majority community paints a different picture.

¹⁷ A. Ahmeti, March 12, 2014.

¹⁸ N. Ahmetaj, Executive Director, Centre for Research, Documentation and Publication, INDEP in-person interview, March 11, 2014.

¹⁹ Statistical Agency of Kosovo. Population Census. Retrieved March 15, 2014, from

²⁰ Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo. Numerical Representation of the Kosovo Assembly. Retrieved March 15, 2014, from <http://www.kuvendikosoves.org/?cid=2,107>

Albanian focus group participants indicated that they perceive most media to be sided with one or another political or business faction. When asked if the participants remember a particular story not related to interethnic issues that bothered them, virtually all participants indicated at least one such story. The majority of the conflict driving stories for the Albanian side were based on religious or political reporting.

Recently, the Assembly of Kosovo has been drafting a law on the reduction of noise pollution in Kosovo [Draft Law on Noise Protection]. This law also foresaw imposing noise control regulations for the mosques in the country, imposing a certain limit to the volume these mosques are allowed to use. However, according to focus group participants, the media portrayed the law as one aiming to limit the religious freedoms of the predominantly Muslim population. According to focus group participants, coverage of the issue did not make it sufficiently clear that the law aimed to decrease the volume of the call to prayer from mosques, rather than eliminate it altogether. As a result a potentially volatile situation was created within the majority population.

On the other hand, focus group participants also recognized the coverage of the request for resignation of the Rector of the University of Prishtina as highly controversial. Earlier in 2014, one of the national dailies in Kosovo reported that the Rector of the University of Prishtina had a questionable track record of publications in predatory journals, questioning thereby his academic integrity²¹. This led to protests calling for the resignation of the Rector and other academic staff of the university with a similar track record of publications. When asked what the problem was with the coverage of the crisis at the University of Prishtina, responses were mixed. Some participants indicated that they believed that coverage from certain outlets were highly defensive of the Rector, widely perceived to be aligned with the political parties with the majority in government. However, other participants indicated that the same coverage was warranted, calling into question the veracity of the allegation. The same participants also noted that the language of the newspapers reporting on the issue was intended to instigate protests and that it was one-sided.

Both these cases indicate that while media seem to be careful when reporting on minority issues, they do not show the same level of care when covering interethnic issues. The language, according to public group perceptions, remains largely one-sided and most participants believed that the media support one faction or the other.

These findings indicate that on some level, conflict driving language as perceived by different citizens, is currently being used by the media in Kosovo. When asked whether they perceive that this is done intentionally or not, responses were also mixed. Focus group participants mainly claimed two issues that according to their perception led to the conflict inducing reporting and language. Primarily, they cited editorial policies targeted at increasing the number of readers/ viewership by focusing on sensationalistic coverage and also editorial boards influenced by questionable media owners. They also mentioned the lack of capacities by journalists to properly cover stories.

The second claim is largely substantiated by previous studies analysing the state of the media in Kosovo. Media in Kosovo continue to lack the capacities necessary to ensure quality coverage, as is best demonstrated by the lack of implementation of professional journalism standards, such as multisource verification, balance of story coverage, etc.²² On the other hand, political influence through the proximity of business and political interest also poses some pressure on the media, especially as advertising revenues dependent on businesses close to politics are crucial to media survival.

²¹ Krasniqi, B. (2014, January 23). Kërkohet dorëheqja e rektorit Gashi. KohaDitore, pp. 1.

²² Gashi, K., & Qavdarbasha, SH. (2012). State of the Media in Kosovo. Pristina, KS: Institute for Development Policy. Retrieved March 15, 2014, from http://www.indep.info/documents/63998_INDEP%20-%20Gjendja%20e%20Mediave%20ne%20Kosove.pdf

Additionally, media representatives point out that there is an intentional framing of certain national issues in a method that would drive debate²³. According to these representatives, more direct approach of covering controversial issues such as high level corruption allegations, ensures that the public is kept informed about these issues. However, such an approach presents its own problems, because framing controversial issues in a sensationalist fashion without conflict sensitivity precautions can have adverse effects.

Nonetheless, there is no indication that this coverage breaches policies on media reporting and professional guidelines of media regulators. As outlined above, both the IMC and PCK continuously monitor media coverage against their professional reporting guidelines for defamation, insult, hate speech and other criteria. So far, these bodies have not indicated a level of concern regarding coverage of non-ethnic national issues. However, conflict sensitive coverage when concerning intra-ethnic issues is a delicate and not straightforward endeavour, and due to capacity limitations, the ability of PCK and IMC to intervene in these cases is questionable.

Media professionals also point out that skewed coverage increases during pre-election and post-election times²⁴. Kosovo held local elections on November, 2013 and 2014 is national election year, with early elections being likely²⁵. Media analysts and professionals seem to agree that due to the high number of political party activity throughout this time, and the limited capacities to uniformly cover all factions, a perception of bias might be created. However, they also point out that a large number of media do tend to focus on the larger parties.

Despite the seemingly complex causes of potentially detrimental coverage by local media concerning national issues, the problem remains that interethnic differences are not being properly addressed by media. This issue is of crucial importance seeing as sensationalist coverage of highly controversial topics can cause unrest. This is all the more important when considering the general economic situation in Kosovo making social unrest more likely. As a result, it is imperative to ensure that the media are aware of that, and take an appropriate action on ensuring conflict sensitive approach towards covering certain issues.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

The perceptions over the conflict sensitivity of media in Kosovo have proven to be generally mixed. There is not a perception of a systematic tendency by media (both local and national) to portray certain groups in conflict inducing perspectives, at least as perceived by non-Serbian communities. There are, however, isolated cases where the language or reporting method of a media outlet is presented in such a way that they can be potentially conflict inducing. This hints at a less than satisfactory state of the regulatory authorities to oversee and act on these issues. Additionally, it also potentially indicates that media lack the professional capacity to fully take into account conflict sensitive approaches when reporting. Apart from the lack of monitoring in certain cases, the regulatory bodies also display a lack of enforcement, especially considering the KPC, which does not have legislative powers to intervene in the operation of the print media. To mend this issue, the KPC should be empowered in a similar fashion as the IMC, which means that the KPC should have a say in the functioning of print media outlets, especially if those outlets have track records of including conflict inciting content in their news.

²³ A. Ahmeti, March 12, 2014.

²⁴ A. Ahmeti, March 12, 2014. I. Mushkolaj, March 14, 2014.

²⁵ Krasniqi, B. (March 5, 2014). *Zgjedhjet e parakohshme pa rrëzimin e Qeverisë*. Koha Ditore.

Media outlets themselves command the greatest responsibility when it comes to their content falling within the frame of conflict sensitivity. Due to the nature of how the regulatory bodies function, media can potentially cause unrest due to conflict inciting reporting, even if there is consistent monitoring done by the IMC and KPC. Since there is a time window that dictates how fast the regulatory bodies can act, the damage caused by media reporting can prove to be considerable. Therefore, various media outlets have to be especially careful when they initially release their report pieces, as later actions by the IMC and KPC may prove to be ineffectual. Considering that there have been cases in the past where reporting on interethnic issues led to sizable conflicts, some focus group participants have indicated that they perceive the media have begun to display increased attention when reporting on such issues. The same cannot be said for intra-ethnic reporting, with citizen perceptions indicating a trend to use divisions within a community, political or religious, to over sensationalize a reporting piece in order to attract more viewers and/or readers. This perception was especially true for fringe, tabloid and some online portals, for which the regulations is also of an increased difficulty.

Furthermore, lack of reporting on interethnic issues might be a cause for conflict itself, especially when considering the conciliatory role that media can play. This has also been corroborated by focus group participants, who stated that they rarely follow or even consider media outlets of different communities. Two possible factors have been attributed to this phenomenon, the first being the language barrier and the second being the content of the news that actually deal with interethnic issues. The language barrier is of exceptional importance, considering that members of different communities have no means of appropriating or disseminating the information found within media outlets of other communities without understanding the language in which the medium presents said information. Considering the consistent financial strains that media outlet throughout Kosovo face, it is difficult to expect mediums to conform to this issue, as the alleviation of it would require considerable increased funding. The content of interethnic reporting is also of concern, as also substantiated by various focus group participants. It has been stressed that the content of interethnic reportage pieces is often overly political in nature, something which frequently causes tensions among various communities. Considering this, media outlets should focus more of their resources to cover interethnic issues of a practical nature, such as different issues that communities face on a daily basis. Through such reporting mediums will also be able to explore and offer common grounds which different communities might use to avoid potential conflicts.

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