



KOSOVAR INSTITUTE FOR POLICY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

RTK Challenge

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Introduction

Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK) news at 19:30 remains the main source of information for the majority of Kosovo's citizens. Information given on this news edition is the main shaper of public opinion. Therefore, it is essential that during this news edition the highest professional standards are implemented, with information that is right and accurate so that Kosovo's citizens are well informed. Well informed citizens will ensure that the debate will be much more informed so that they are able to have well informed convictions and positions on all developments in Kosovo.

RTK's independence, and with this the freedom of work for journalists and editors in charge of news in RTK, is guaranteed by the Law on Radio Television of Kosovo¹ and – as KIPRED has said in previous reports – preserving the financial, managerial and editorial independence, remains an obligation of the entire Kosovar society.

Because of the power that RTK's central news edition has, it is also the main target of politicians and political parties. Being presented in this edition brings visibility and consequently power for politicians. Unfortunately, as it was documented several times, Kosovar political class tries to influence directly on the content of RTK's news editions by connecting or by pressuring the staff in charge of preparing and supervising news section in this important public institution. Such intrusions have been noticed by the European Commission, which has criticized them on the Progress Report at least since 2009, but also from EBU, which in a letter from 2009 accused the PDK led government for interfering with RTK's work.²

KIPRED, wanting to analyze RTK's central news edition at 19:30, has monitored this edition for a period of four months. During this period broadcasted news, their scheduling as well as their quality have been followed. The purpose of this exercise was to measure the level of professionalism of this information program and evaluate the extent that RTK news edition journalists and editors preserve professional integrity and how much do they stick to professional principles and standards.

RTK has its own code of conduct, "Professional Standards", known to all RTK journalists and editors. RTK's document "Professional Standards", approved by the RTK Board in 2005, represents a good framework to ensure professional reporting by RTK. The document also acknowledges the importance of RTK and its news and reporting. This leads us to conclude that RTK journalists are aware about the importance of their work for society and their responsibility at work. This report will also evaluate the extent to which this code is respected during the everyday job of RTK journalists, in order to have a more conclusive analysis that will be presented hereafter.

¹ Law on Radio Television of Kosovo, Article 1 and 6

² Look at: http://www.ebu.ch/en/union/news/2009/tcm_6-66520.php (accessed on 28 December 2011).

Methodology

For the purposes of this research RTK's central news edition has been monitored for four months, from August to November 2011. While monitoring, scheduling of news, space given to the government and the opposition as well as other subject matters was followed. However, attention has been given also to the content of the journalistic reports themselves, meaning that the reporting was analyzed for its professionalism.

One of the main difficulties during the study were objective developments outside the domain of journalism, more precisely escalation of tensions in the northern part of Kosovo. These resulted in domination of news by the developments in this part of Kosovo and have much less space left for political or other developments, during the monitoring period. Nevertheless, this has not made it impossible to identify some general inclinations that can be noticed at RTK and they will be presented in this paper.

“Professional Standards and Principles of Journalistic Ethics in the Programs of Radio Television of Kosovo” is a public document and it can be downloaded from the RTK's official website³. This document sets the principles that should guarantee professionalism for journalists and editors at RTK. This document has been drafted and approved in 2005 and even though it is an important step for RTK towards establishing professional standards, it looks incomplete since the documents needs a more clear elaboration of professional and ethical principles for it to become even more useful.

This report is based on direct monitoring of the informative program of the only television channel of the Radio Television of Kosovo. Monitoring and drafting of this report has been made independently and during the drafting none of the RTK representative, RTK Board, or other parties have been consulted or interviewed.

Analysis

RTK's central news edition, broadcasted at 19:30, according to most survey conducted so far is the most viewed informative edition in Kosovo with an audience of more than 500,000 viewers, making this news edition the most important and the most influential information program in Kosovo. The reasons for such a popularity of this news edition are at least two. This first one can be inertia since news broadcasted at the same time, at 19:30, used to be the only main news in Albanian in Kosovo and further, broadcasted by the Radio Television of Prishtina, which does not exist anymore. The habit of news at seven thirty could be an important factor that kept the high audience of central news edition of RTK. The second reason could be that RTK remains the

³ “Professional Standards and Principles of Journalistic Ethics in the Programs of Radio Television of Kosovo”, downloaded from RTK's official website at http://rtklive.com/rtk/standardetprofesionale_sq.pdf. Latest download on 25 December 2011.

sole public medium, non-private, and consequently perceived as more independent by Kosovo's citizens. The other two channels in Kosovo that have a broadcast license for the entire territory of Kosovo, national channels, are KTV and RTV21 which are private channels..

The latest KIPRED research has noticed that regardless of many remarks that have been given about the RTK's news edition, very little has been done to improve the reporting quality. More precisely, RTK news continues to be in most part "protocol news", meaning news that follow mainly what the main political leaders in the country are doing. RTK news deal a lot less with other subject-matters. It seems that only during the weekend, when there are few political events, RTK journalists touch upon other non-political subject-matters. As has been written before by KIPRED, in "Monitoring Informative Program of Radio Television of Kosovo", published in January 2011, "RTK's central news edition resemble more to a government, opposition and to some extent civil society spokesperson, which only transmits to the public what these three sectors say"⁴.

The last monitoring done by KIPRED, notices that there is no improvement in the proportion of news given at the central news edition. Even though RTK's regulation foresees that there should be an ensured equilibrium between local, regional and international news, without clarifying what this proportion should be, the monitoring revealed that regional and international news remain at minimal proportions. It was also noticed that the reporting quality for regional and international news has not improved either. KIPRED has mentioned these shortcomings in the abovementioned report. Developments in Kosovo are influenced by developments in the region and the world, therefore reports on the developments should have space at central news edition of RTK. Ignoring international news a perception is created that Kosovo is separated from the rest of the world, isolated and disengaged, without being influenced or influence outside of its borders.

The last monitoring confirmed previous findings of KIPRED that reports at central news edition in RTK is balanced if looked from the point of coverage of all political actors. 19:30 news report on main activities of the Assembly of Kosovo, Government of Kosovo, Office of the President as well as the opposition and the civil society. Space given to each actor is usually in proportion to their engagements. Each time an opposition party has an activity or they simply give out a statement for a development in Kosovo, RTK will report on it. This is a simplified balance implemented by RTK, giving news on the government and the on the opposition or the government criticizers. In fact, this is not necessarily the balance which is required by the RTK's code. The code requires a balance in the reporting, so that no report, no news comes out biased, but present all parties involved in an issue treated by the journalists report equally.

⁴ The report can be found at KIPRED's website:

http://kipred.net/web/upload/monitorimi_i_programit_informativ_RTK.pdf

Furthermore, it is noticed that news usually do not need to be balanced since they are not dealing with an issue but they only report or inform about an event or activity and do not require a balance of point of views or sources. A similar conclusion came out of the KIPRED report issued in January 2011 which monitored and evaluated RTK's central news edition.

On the other hand, in those few reports covering issues where at least two sources of different point of views should be compared, RTK journalists try to balance. However, even here there are drawbacks when journalists cannot contact one party and are content with the justification that the said party could not be reached or something similar. This is a shortcoming noticed also in the "Professional Standards and Principles of Journalistic Ethics in the Programs of Radio Television of Kosovo" since there is no elaboration of the steps that should be taken by a journalist so that it could be considered that all possibilities have been exhausted in trying to find the necessary information for the news to be balanced.

Another practice that has been noticed is that of long reports that often last more than 4 minutes. RTK is the biggest media house in Kosovo, with more journalists than all other media and with better technical conditions. Therefore, RTK journalists have the possibility to prepare more news reports during a day. With shorter news, not longer than 2 minutes, RTK would ensure that more events would be covered that are important for the citizens of Kosovo.

Some doubt also remains on the scheduling of new in RTK. The most descriptive example is that of the first news given on central news edition of 7 November 2011 for a "football school" named "Arsenal". It seemed that the journalist "sniffed" a fraud at this football school that was using the name of a well-known football club and had not connections to it. We can suppose that the intent of the journalist and editors was well intended, inform the public on a possible scam. However, the journalist report does not prove any wrong-doing beside the usage of the name "Arsenal" without having any connections to the football team. The report was not that convincing to justify its scheduling as first news at central news edition.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The last monitoring of 19:30 news edition at RTK has revealed that most of remarks given by KIPRED on January 2011 report still remain. RTK news continues to be a source of information for the vast majority of Kosovo's citizens and because of this they require responsibility and professionalism while they are being prepared. RTK journalists in general are careful in their reports. Unfortunately, the caution to represent all actors of our political scene is becoming a self-censored measure for RTK.

Journalists are not getting into subject-matters that are more difficult and that require more investigation but are content with protocol reporting. It should be the goal of the journalist and also the editors at RTK to increase reporting on subject-matters that are important for Kosovo's citizens and that go outside the area of daily political developments. Such an example was

noticed by KIPRED after the monitoring of 19:30 news ended. An investigative report on distribution of bread to shops has broad positive change. The journalist report informed that bread distributors that distribute bread in the early hours often leave packages of bread in front of the entrance of shops that are still not opened, leaving the bread exposed to pollution by dust coming from vehicles or even from animals. The journalist report incited responsible inspectors, which at first gave justification that there is nothing they can do on this issue since they are not working that early in the day to take note of such violations, to go out and issue fines for those bread distributors that were leaving bread in front of the store in non-hygienic conditions. KIPRED, congratulating RTK on this, encourages them to have more reports of this nature that are in the interest of Kosovo's citizens.

Another positive development in RTK reports was noticed in general with reporting on developments from the north of Kosovo. While in March 2004 journalists report, including those of RTK, were one of the reasons that gave flame to the riots, in summer of 2011 RTK journalists were reporting in a prudent manner on the developments in the north of Kosovo. The reports did not have any warmongering language. RTK reporting on the developments in the north had the same shortcomings that other media had and this was not being able to go to the location of events and report on what was happening in the north. This made all media, including RTK, dependent on official sources, in this case Kosovo Police and the Government of Kosovo, to report on the development in and around the northern part of Kosovo. RTK has also Serb journalists that work for the section of news edition in Serbian language but it can be supposed that even they were impeded to go to northern Kosovo to report directly on the developments there.⁵ However, we can conclude that reports for the developments in the north, even though free from warmongering language, were not able to completely and independently present daily developments in this part of Kosovo.

RTK undoubtedly has improved even during this year that was monitored by KIPRED. Some of the achievements were mentioned earlier. However, this is not sufficient to say that Kosovo's citizens are guaranteed in receiving professional and unbiased reporting in general. It remains an imperative for RTK to continue working on further completion of the journalist code and implement it orderly.

Based on the abovementioned observations, the following recommendations can be given to achieve the declared goal of RTK, professionalism at work.

⁵ "Klan Kosova" television channel was the only medium that had a journalist, a Kosovo Serb that reported directly from the north. However, even him was attacked and beaten up by extremists in north of Kosovo and he was impeded in continuing his work. The same could have happened even with journalists of Serb nationality that work at RTK.

- RTK should complete “Professional Standards and Principles of Journalistic Ethics in the Programs of Radio Television of Kosovo” in order to remove any possibilities for slipups and increase standards of professionalism. For example, clarify when all possibilities are exhausted in trying to contact protagonists of events or in trying to find a source, is it sufficient to call someone on the phone or should one go further in trying to contact them in person.
- By shortening the time for a report – news that last longer than 4 minutes can become boring for the viewer – RTK will create space for more reports during the 30 minutes allocated for the central news edition at 19:30.
- RTK should ensure that reports that deal with issues or problems that have a higher level of importance, than the simple transmission of daily events, have more space at central news edition. Protocol stories dealing with meeting but that do not treat any issue can be eliminated.
- Increase investigative reports and use the strong position that RTK has to incite positive changes in the society. Even with those few investigative reports that were done by RTK, it has proved that it can have an impact in society. Journalists and editors are encouraged to continue doing this even more.
- In order to preserve a high level of professionalism, RTK is encouraged to do a continuous monitoring of central news edition themselves. Self-critics and continuous development should replace self-censoring. This will increase credibility of RTK in the eyes of their viewers.