

Circulation and Politicization of the Print Media in Kosovo

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1. Introduction

This report was researched by the “Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED)” as the implementing partner of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo project, "Technical Assistance to the Press Council of Kosovo”

The low circulation of print media is a phenomenon that has been accompanying newspapers throughout the world in the last two decades. This trend has especially increased with the expansion of televised networks and internet-based media, which are able to serve news to the public instantly, by using not only text but also audio-visual platforms. Newspapers are left in an unequal position in the media market, and had to go through important editorial changes in order to be able to become sustainable. Major world newspapers have adjusted their editorial content, leaving less space to the primary product – the news – and more space to in-depth reports, follow-up stories and news analysis. Only by providing exclusive stories and in-depth investigative reports, newspapers managed to compete in the media market with the fast-growing TV and web networks.

This research analyses the problem of low circulation of Kosovo dailies and examines whether the newspapers have managed to create their own content in order to compete with the broadcast media. Furthermore, a special focus is given to the level of politicisation of the print media in Kosovo and other factors that have led to the current state of the daily newspapers.

There are currently nine daily newspapers that are published in Kosovo, all of them in Albanian language. One of them was set up in September 2009 and will not be a subject to this paper. All eight newspapers¹ have a daily circulation between 25,000 and 35,000 copies². This number is very low compared to the number of people in Kosovo (approximately 2.1 million), even when considering that three to five people read one purchased newspaper.

This research will not focus on analysing any newspaper in particular, but will look at the issues of low circulation and politicisation as a whole, taking into consideration previous research in this field.

¹ According to the data provided by dailies *Bota Sot*, *Epoka e Re*, *Epoka e Re*, *Express*, *Infopress*, *Koha Ditore*, *Kosova Sot*, *Lajm* and *ZëriZëri*.

² The data from previous research and data specified by newspaper publishers/editors are different.

2. Methodology

A mixed methodology has been applied in this research, such as desk research, in-depth interviews, focus groups and media monitoring. Also, other publications and previous research conducted in this field are taken into account.

All editions of the daily newspapers have been monitored between 15 July and 15 August 2009, focusing on cover stories and advertisement pages.

The cover stories were monitored in order to determine their nature and character. All the stories were classified into three categories: exclusive stories, newspapers' own stories including news analysis and interviews, and stories covering daily events of the previous day. This process was used to determine whether the print media are capable of having their own news agenda, and enough exclusive stories, in order to compete with broadcast and internet-based media in the market.

In the marketing pages, all the advertisements published in daily newspapers that were paid by Kosovo Consolidated Budget were monitored. This part of the monitoring process was used to determine advertisement preferences that Kosovo institutions, and the political parties that lead these institutions, have for specific newspapers, when it comes to advertisement.

Readership trends and preferences were measured in focus groups. Two separate sessions were organized with focus groups, where geographical, gender, age and professional diversity was ensured. Sessions lasted between 70 and 90 minutes.

Qualitative in-depth interviews were used to determine key challenges that the daily newspapers in Kosovo face. In the first round of interviews, media experts, media professionals, sociologists and representatives of media associations were interviewed, while in the second round, the interviewed were editors of daily newspapers.

3. Findings from Focus Groups³

Participants in focus groups have stated that they read newspapers on daily basis, but hardly ever buy them. Reasons provided for not buying daily newspapers were different. Some participants stated they do not buy newspapers as they read them in social environments such as cafés and restaurants. Some others said they do not buy newspapers as their parents or siblings do. The third reason that came out of two meetings of focus groups is a professional reason and has to do with the content of newspapers, which, according to participants, provide too many plain news and no news analysis or investigative reports.

The participants in focus groups had different preferences regarding the content they read, varying between news analysis, reports on cultural events, and sports. The general conclusion was that the content of Kosovo dailies is predominated by the coverage of political events. Most of the participants said they do not expect newspapers to inform them about yesterday's political events, but rather about different issues that the broadcast media did not cover, like editorials and comments, analysis and exclusive reports.

Focus group participants stated a number of reasons which they believe are behind the low level of newspaper circulation. The first and crucial factor mentioned is the outdated and limited editorial content of the newspapers. Newspapers rarely have exclusive reports, and by the time they get printed and distributed, the vast majority of their content is already consumed by the public through other media, mostly TV and internet portals. Newspapers have not succeeded to create their own content to compete in the market, and make people buy them. Secondly, participants have stated that once they scan the headlines of newspapers in a café, or watch the press review on one of the morning TV shows, they never feel the need to buy any newspapers as they realise that nothing exclusive or new has been published, from what they have read before on the internet, or seen on TV channels.

Lack of diversity of the editorial content was mentioned as another reason that has led to the current low circulation. Newspaper pages are overwhelmingly filled with plain reports of political events. Participants that were professionals in fields such as information technology or agriculture noted that there are no specific reports on these fields. Others complained that newspapers do not publish sufficient reports on social issues and lifestyle articles.

Unattractive headlines and newspapers' failure to cover events that happen during evenings and nights have also been mentioned as additional reasons why people do not buy newspapers. The vast majority of participants in focus groups complained that there are no follow-up stories, and argued that when they read about one event or phenomenon in a newspaper, it is hardly ever the case that the paper would continue to write about the same issue in the next editions.

None of the participants believed that the financial situation and newspaper price could be a reason for low circulation, saying that there are many newspapers in Kosovo that they would not read even if they were given for free.

³ Conclusions from two focus group discussions, 18 August, 2009.

Another conclusion of the group was that political influence on newspapers has damaged the reputation of print media and resulted in a low level of sales. Participants said newspapers are gaining financial support from certain political parties in order to promote them through their editorial content, but at the same time by doing this they are losing readers.

4. Key Factors behind Low Circulation

After taking into account conclusions from two focus groups and findings from in-depth interviews⁴, three main factors behind the phenomenon of low circulation of daily newspapers in Kosovo were indentified.

The first factor is of professional nature. Newspapers have to suit their editorial content to a specifically targeted audience and be able to compete in winning this audience with the broadcast media as well. Kosovo newspapers have not been successful in this process and they still continue to publish plain reports of daily events, instead of focusing on in-depth reporting and investigative journalism⁵. In addition to this, newspapers are confused when it comes to the audience they are targeting. The approach of most of the dailies is elitist, meaning they target the specific audience of decision-makers, policy-makers and intellegencia. This targeting excludes the rest of the population from the audience, influencing directly the newspaper circulation.

The second factor is the politicisation of the press. There is an overall perception that there are no fully independent newspapers in Kosovo and that most of them clearly support certain political parties⁶. This perception alone heavily damages the reputation of newspapers and people's trust in them. Moreover, there is a tendency of Kosovo institutions, including both the central government and municipal authorities, to exercise control over the media. Institutions put pressure on print media by conditioning positive reporting of their activities and performance, in exchange for publication of advertisement in the newspapers, which is crucial for their sustainability.

The third factor is the weak distribution system of newspapers. There is one major distribution system, and two other smaller initiatives, for all the newspapers in Kosovo. None of these networks applies distribution based on the supply and demand principle.⁷ Instead, the distribution of newspapers remains based on a given quota , meaning certain sale points receive certain amounts of newspapers all the time, without taking into account the number of copies sold or returned. In addition to this, in many sale points, people are allowed to borrow newspapers, read them, and return them later, not having to purchase them at all.

⁴ Fifteen interviews with journalists, editors, publishers, media experts and sociologists, 8 August – 20 September, 2009.

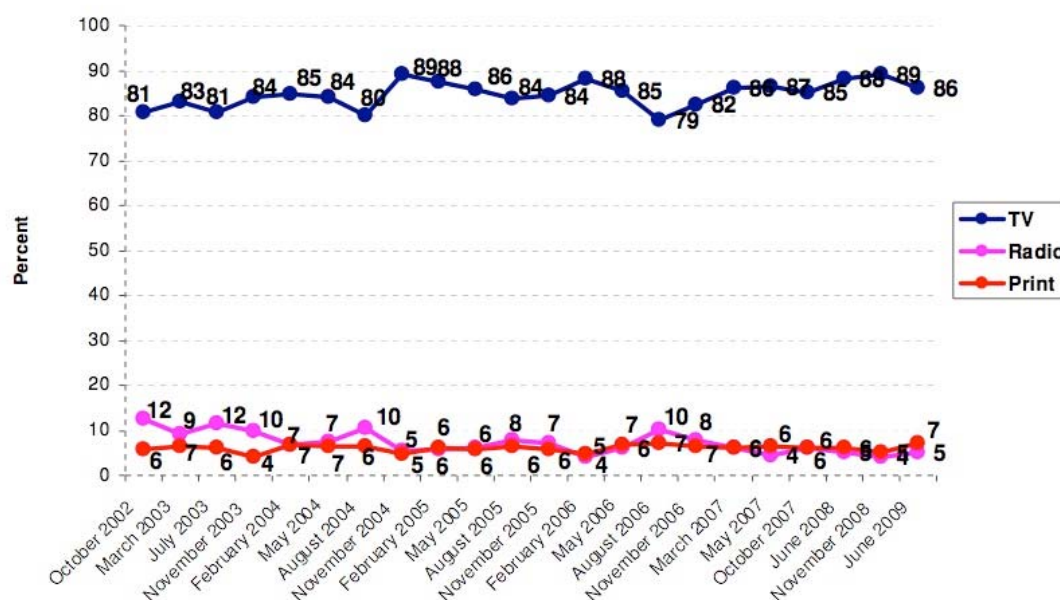
⁵ Conclusions from two focus groups, 18 August, 2009.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Interviews with newspaper editors.

A. Editorial Content

Television remains the top source of information in Kosovo. In a survey conducted by Index Kosova⁸, 86% of the respondents said they receive news from TV, some 5% from radio and only 7% from the press.



Trends of primary sources of information in Kosovo 2002 - 2009

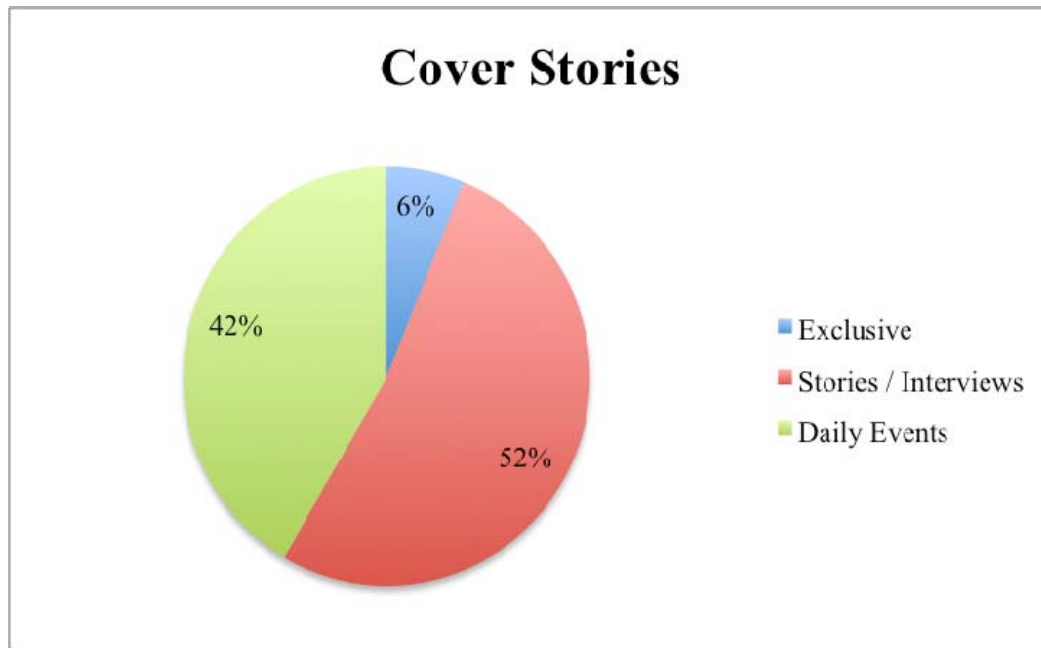
Due to lack of sufficient resources of news agencies in Kosovo, which would offer multimedia materials beside the written ones, all the three TV stations (RTK, KTV and RTV21) have invested both money and efforts on their news desks, which currently cover most of the daily events in Kosovo. This has strengthened the already strong position of TV stations as the main source of information for Kosovo audiences.

The powerful audiovisual advantage of television has made the circulation of worldwide newspapers drop. But most of the world's newspapers have adopted their content and editorial policies in order to compete with the new media. Major newspapers have limited or eliminated plain reports on daily political events, because by the time their editions would be printed and distributed, their readers would receive the information from TV and radio stations, or from many web portals. The only way newspapers could compete with new media was by giving more space to news analysis and in-depth reporting, and especially by running exclusive stories on their cover pages.

Kosovo daily newspapers' cover pages have been monitored between 15 July and 15 August, 2009. All the stories have been divided into three categories. Any story that had real exclusivity over all other media has been categorised as Exclusive. In the

⁸ Index Kosova, Overview of Kosovo media, July 2009.

Story/Interview category, categorised are all the interviews and stories that were based on daily events but also contained additional input, from additional sources, or in some good cases even had some analytical character. Stories that were plain reports from daily events were put in the Daily Events category. These are stories that are based on daily press conferences, protocol meetings of politicians, or other events, written and published plainly, with no additional sources quoted and no additional inputs.



Only 6% of cover stories in all newspapers were exclusive stories.

Analysing the data, it was concluded that plain reporting on daily events, most of which are of the political nature still represent a very high percentage of cover stories in Kosovo dailies. In that, 42% of cover stories were reports from events with no exclusive insights or analytical approach. Stories that were based on daily events but that did have some analytical approach or additional interviews consist of 52% of all cover stories. Only 6% of cover stories during this period were exclusive reports.

Exclusive stories sell newspapers and the Kosovo market makes no exception on this matter. There are many such cases to remember: the circulation of *Express* was higher on the eve of 17 February 2008 when their covers included insights from important international documents regarding Kosovo's status⁹; *Epoka e Re* boosted its sales when they published a series of exclusives on issues with the management of University of Prishtinë/Priština in early 2009¹⁰. Yet, such stories are rare, and with the current level of exclusive stories, survival of newspapers in Kosovo media market will remain difficult, and their circulation will remain low.

⁹ Interviews with media experts.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Another important factor which impacts on newspaper circulation is the limited diversity of the editorial content.¹¹ Daily newspapers are overwhelmingly reporting on political issues, whereas reports of social nature and reports on different industries remain minimal.¹² What is considered to be economical analysis is indeed plain reporting on macroeconomic trends, whereas business and financial reports are very rare, or hardly ever published.¹³ There is an overall absence of in-depth analysis, whereas investigative journalism remains underdeveloped.¹⁴ While in principle, investigative journalism demands journalists to investigate more from what they have seen and what has been said and provide new and previously unknown information to the public, in Kosovo investigative journalism is often mixed and confused with leaked journalism and exclusive stories.

Supplements for arts, culture and lifestyle that newspapers publish with their weekend editions happen to be quite popular and widely read.¹⁵ Such reports, however, are not sufficiently present in weekday editions.¹⁶ Lifestyle articles are shallow and celebrity journalism, which usually triggers the attention of youth, is in its first stage of development.¹⁷ Furthermore, newspapers very rarely publish cultural and art reviews, while there are no food and drink review sections. A diverse content of the newspapers may directly impact their sales and circulation.

Diversifying the content, and focusing on their own news agenda, would directly increase the circulation of newspapers.¹⁸ The creation and maintenance of their own news agenda is a must for all the media, and especially for newspapers.¹⁹ According to the discussions in the focus groups, specific nature of reports would also help newspapers to better serve their audience.

Identifying the target audience is another problem for daily newspapers. While the *Express* daily claims to be targeting the Kosovo elite, and *Kosova Sot* has a populist approach targeting the masses, other newspapers remain somewhat in-between.²⁰ Definition of target audience is a crucial factor for the overall circulation of a newspaper. In western countries the audience is divided between broadsheet and tabloid newspapers, or liberal and conservative ones. In Kosovo the difference in targeting audience is so far limited to political preferences or affiliation.

The internet-based media in Kosovo will be the next competitors in the news market. Although there are many running portals at the time being, the expansion of internet media in Kosovo is yet to come. These new publications will not only have the advantage of time and technology, but will also have the advantage of the growing audience and lower price. Thus they represent an immediate future threat to all the media, and especially to newspapers.

¹¹ Conclusions from two focus groups, 18 August, 2009.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Interview with local and international media experts.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Conclusions from two focus groups, 18 August, 2009.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Interviews with media experts and newspaper editors.

¹⁸ Conclusions from focus group discussions, 18 August, 2009, and interviews with media experts.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Conclusions from the two focus group discussions, 18 August, 2009.

B. Political Pressure

Politicization is a crucial factor that stands behind the phenomenon of low circulation of newspapers, and also one of the biggest challenges that the newspaper publishers and editors have to deal with. Affiliation with political parties has damaged the reputation of the print media.²¹ Politicization is a consequence of a complex media environment in Kosovo, in the sense that most newspapers are not commercially sustainable businesses.

Currently, most of the newspapers are sold for a price of 0.20 euro. *Koha Ditore* costs 0.30 while *Express* costs 0.10 euro. This price includes a Value Added Tax of 16%. Publishers pay a percentage of 20-25% of the total turnover for sales and distribution of newspapers.²² Taking into account low circulation, low price, high distribution cost and the applicable VAT, it is easy to conclude that revenues from sales do not represent a substantial income for newspapers. As a result most of them rely on revenues from marketing.

The Kosovo government continues to be the biggest employer and the biggest business contractor²³. This fact alone gives the government a supreme position towards media, by being one of the biggest advertisers too. Research for this paper indicates that editors and publishers are under pressure from authorities, who insist that in case they publish any report critical to their performance, they would not publish any advertisement in respective newspapers.²⁴ Authorities in Kosovo have neither the mechanism nor the willingness to spread their advertisements equally in all newspapers. As will be illustrated in further text, circulation and readership of newspapers is not being taken into account when drafting marketing plans. Certain institutions usually publish their advertisement in the newspapers that are close to the political party who's representative is in charge of that institution. In this way, authorities indirectly sponsor their newspapers and on the other hand commercially damage other newspapers that they cannot control.

Even in cases when newspapers are owned by major businesses of other industries, and do not depend directly on revenues from marketing, political pressure is still present. In such cases, the pressure does not go directly to the newspaper staff, but rather to the owner companies. These companies depend on commercial contracts with the government and with publicly owned enterprises controlled by the government. Therefore, they often impose self-censorship to the newspapers they publish, not to criticise the performance of the government, in order to remain in good terms with them and not to lose any potential contract.²⁵

In order to determine the pressure that authorities and political parties put to newspapers, all the advertisements published in all eight newspapers were monitored between 15 July and 15 August, 2009. Focus was put on advertisements by Kosovo institutions, including Kosovo Government, Kosovo Assembly, Office of the President, independent agencies and institutions, municipal authorities and public

²¹ Ibid.

²² Interviews with newspaper editors.

²³ According to the Kosovo's Chamber of Commerce.

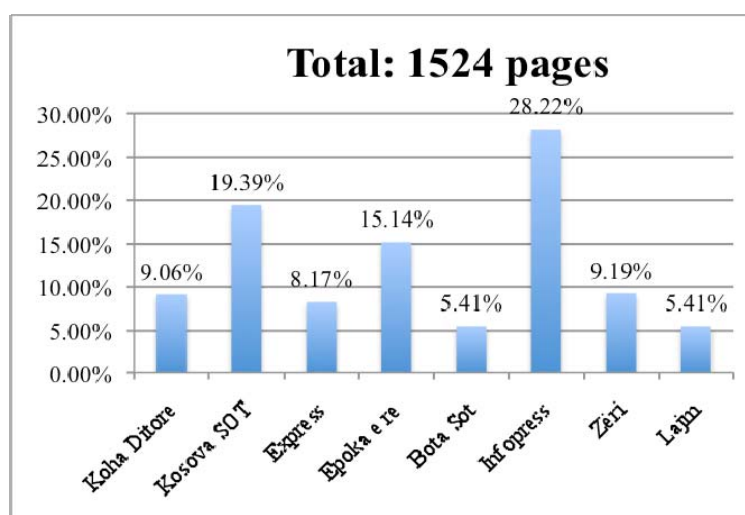
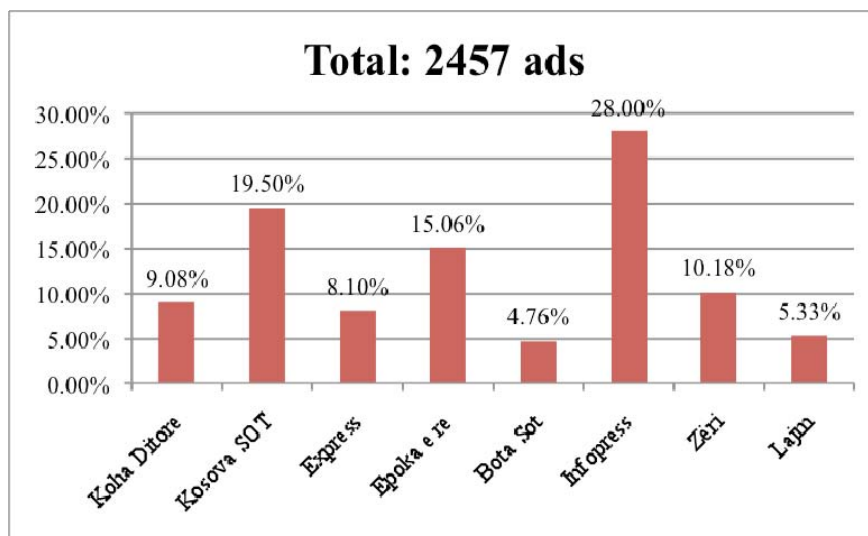
²⁴ Interview with chairman of Association of Professional Journalists of Kosovo (APJK).

²⁵ Ibid.

companies. After analysing the data gathered during this monitoring process, it can be concluded that Kosovo institutions have an unequal, biased and even discriminatory approach towards particular newspapers, when deciding about where to advertise.

There were totally 2,457 ads published in the dailies during this period, in 1,524 newspaper pages. Out of these, 688 ads, or 430 pages of ads have been published in the daily newspaper *Infopress*. This newspaper has the majority of ads compared to other newspapers with 28% of all the ads and 28.22% of all the pages, which is more than double of the 12.5% that it would get, in case the government would advertise equally in each of the 8 newspapers.

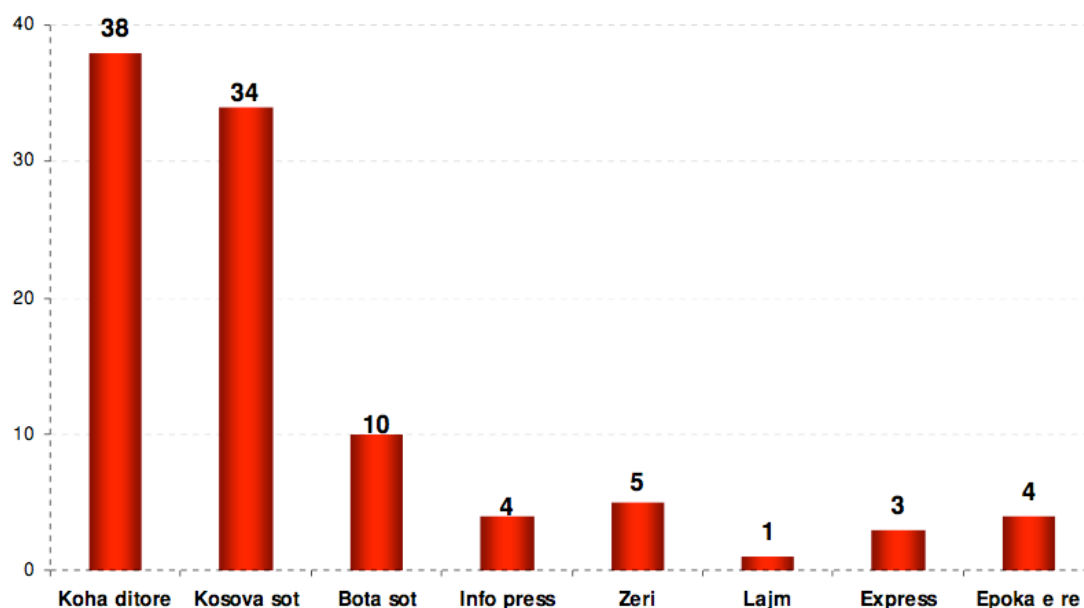
Kosova Sot is rated second with 19.5% of all ads or 296 pages of marketing. Other newspapers that follow are: *Epoka e Re* with 15.06% of all ads or 231 pages, *Zëri* with 10.18% of all ads or 140 pages, *Koha Ditore* with 9.08% of all ads or 138 pages, *Express* with 8.1% of all ads or 125 pages, *Lajm* with 5.33% of all ads or 83 pages, and *Bota Sot* with only 4.75% of all ads or 83 pages.



Total number of 2457 ads distributed in 1524 pages of eight newspapers during period 15 July to 15 August 2009 by Kosovo Institutions: Government,

**Assembly, Office of the President, Independent Agencies and Institutions,
Municipal Authorities and Public Companies.**

Based on a survey conducted by Index Kosova²⁶, only 4% of people in Kosovo buy and read *Infopress* daily, whereas other newspapers such as *Koha Ditore* and *Kosova Sot* are read by more than 30% of people.



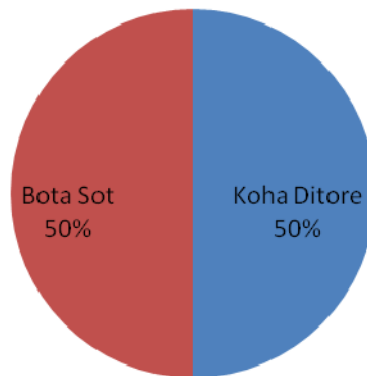
Readership trends of Kosovo dailies²⁷

From all central institutions in Kosovo, the Office of the President has had the lowest number of ads, only two, both published in only two newspapers, *Bota Sot* and *Koha Ditore*. Kosovo's president Fatmir Sejdiu is also the head of the LDK, although he has formally frozen this function in the party. His office has decided to publish ads only in *Koha Ditore*, which still maintains a good reputation as a newspaper, and in *Bota Sot*, a newspaper that is seen as close to the LDK²⁸.

²⁶ Index Kosova, Overview of Kosovo media, July 2009.

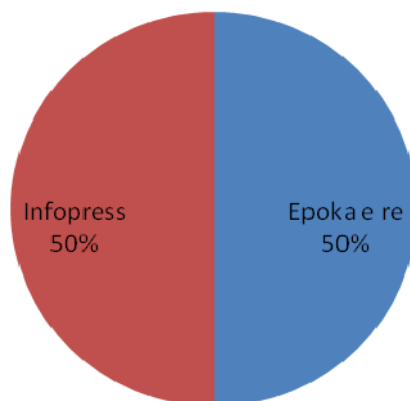
²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ http://www.imc-ko.org/IMG/pdf/Bota_Sot_08_May_05_ENG.pdf Articles 22-25



The Office of the President prefers only two newspapers to publish their ads

Ads published by the office of the Prime Minister don't get published in the same newspapers as the ads from the President's office. The office of Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi, who is also the head of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (Partia Demokratike e Kosovës - PDK), decided that all ten of the ads during this period should be published only in *Infopress* and *Epoka e Re*. Both of these newspapers are seen as close to the PDK and are quite low in the readership rank^{29 30}.



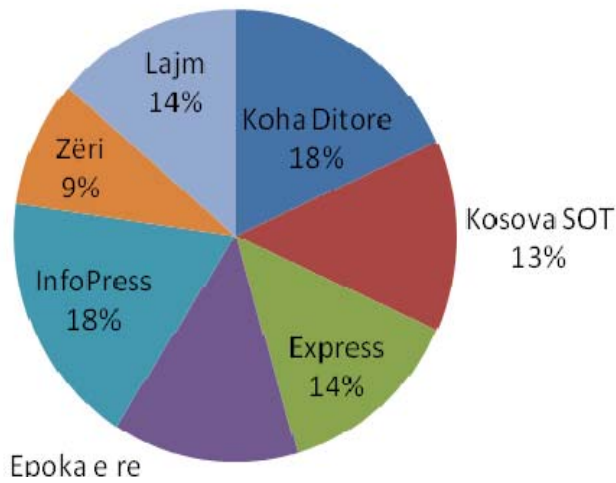
Prime Minister's Office advertises only in newspapers seen close to PDK

The Assembly of Kosovo is the only high-level institution not to discriminate newspapers in terms of advertisement. There were 22 ads that the Kosovo Assembly published during the monitoring period. The ads were somewhat equally divided between seven newspapers, with only *Bota Sot* remaining out of Assembly's advertising strategy. Most ads were published in *Koha Ditore* and *Infopress*, some

²⁹ <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/analysis/20169/>

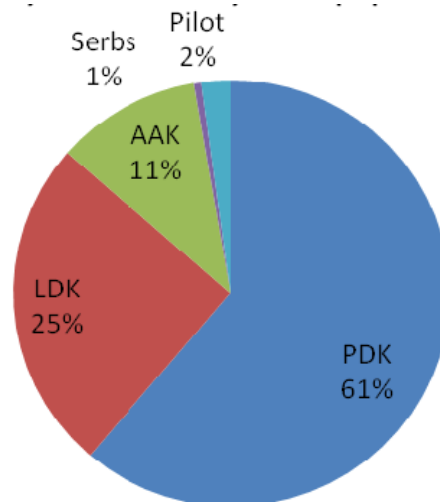
³⁰ <http://shortstorymadelong.wordpress.com/2009/10/05/freedom-of-speech-in-kosovo/>

18% of the total ads in each. *Express* had 14% of the ads, *Kosova Sot* 13%, *Lajm* and *Epoka e Re* had 14% each, and *Zëri* 9%.



Ads published by the Assembly of Kosovo

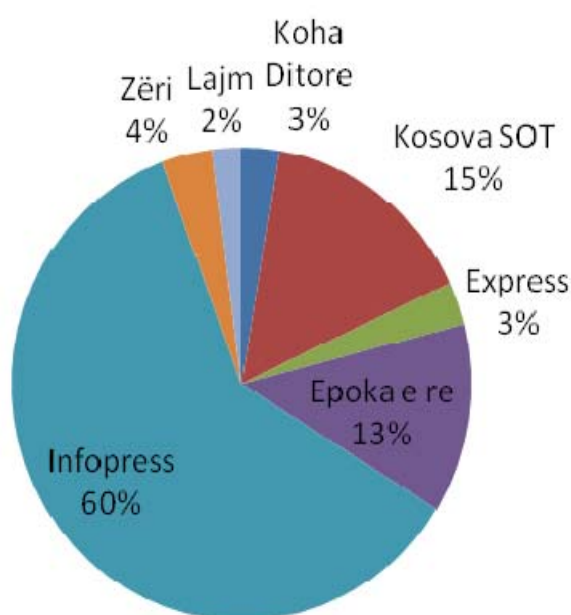
There is a visible difference when comparing in which newspapers PDK-controlled ministries and municipalities advertise as opposed to where the LDK-controlled ministries and municipalities advertise. There were altogether 554 ads from 33 municipal governments, published in 277 pages in all eight newspapers.



Ads of municipalities based on political parties in power

Municipalities that are governed by the PDK³¹ have published a total of 339 ads, out of which 60% were published in *Infopress*, 15% in *Kosova Sot*, and 13% in *Epoka e Re*. *Koha Ditore* and *Express* had each 3% of the ads while *Lajm* only had 2%.

No ads were published in *Bota Sot* daily. PDK has been clearly favouring the daily newspaper *Infopress* in terms of publishing the majority of ads in this newspaper. *Infopress* has also been favoured in terms of the number of pages containing ads from municipalities governed by the PDK. Out of 171 pages of ads that these municipalities paid for, 105 were paid to *Infopress*.

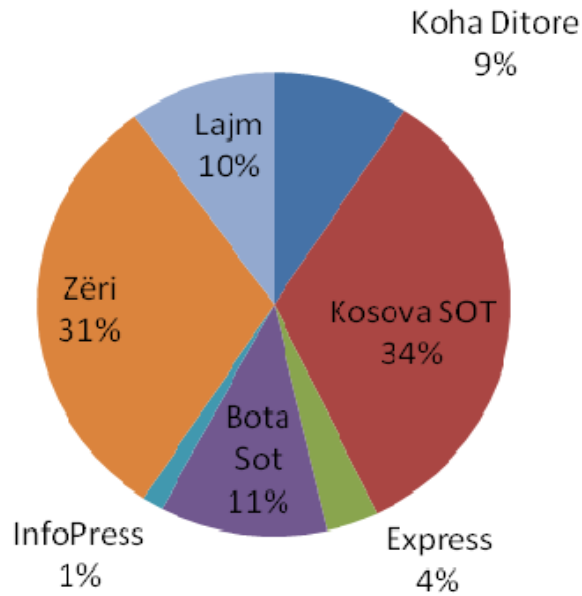


Distribution of ads published by municipalities governed by the PDK

Municipalities governed by the LDK³² published 11% of their ads in *Bota Sot*. These municipalities published a total of 140 ads, out of which most were published in *Kosova Sot* (34%) and *Zëri* (31%). Nine percent of the ads were published in *Lajm* daily, 9% in *Koha Ditore*, 4% in *Express* and only 1% in *Infopress* and no ads in *Epoka e Re*.

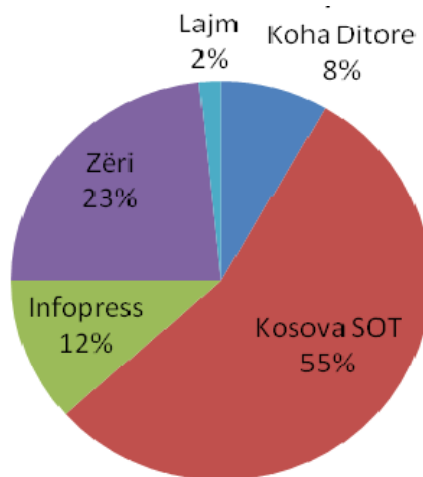
³¹ Dragash/Dragaš, Ferizaj/Uroševac, Gjilan/Gnjilane, Glogovc/Glogovac, Kaçanik/Kaçanik, Kamenicë/Kamenica, Klinë/Klina, Lipjan/Lipljane, Malishevë/Mališevo, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Prizren, Rahovec/Orahovac, Shtime/Štimlje, Skenderaj/Srbica, Viti/Vitina and Vushtrri/Vučitrn.

³² Novobërdë/Novo Brdo, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Istog/Istok, Obiliq/Obilić, Podujevë/Podujevo, Prishtinë/Priština, Suharekë/Suva Reka.



Distribution of ads published by municipalities governed by the LDK

The Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (Aleance për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës - AAK), which is an opposition party in the central level of governance, administrates three municipalities³³.



Ads published by municipalities governed by the AAK

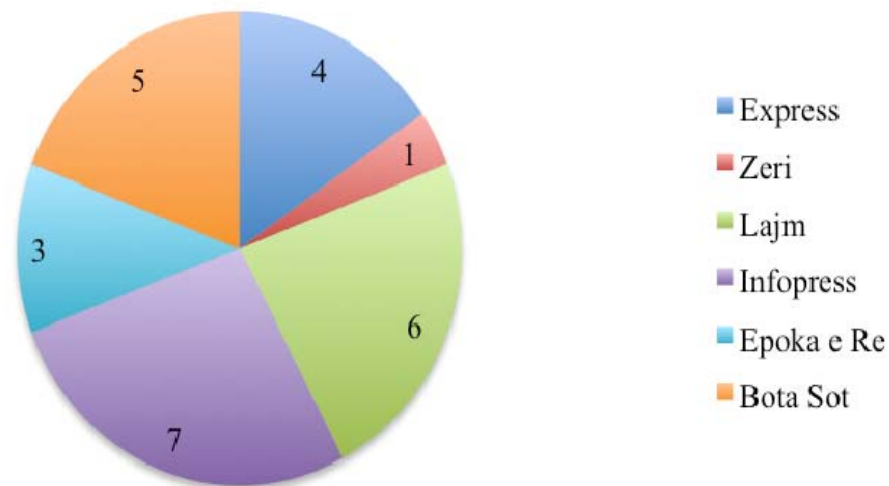
³³ Deçan/Dečani, Gjakovë/Đakovica and Pejë/Peć.

These municipalities have published a total of 60 ads in 27 pages of all eight dailies, out of which 55% in *Kosova Sot*, 23% in *Zëri*, 12% in *Infopress*, 8% in *Koha Ditore* and 2% in *Lajm*.

Despite the fact that the PDK and the LDK jointly form the Kosovo government, municipal governments of these two political parties have different preferences when it comes to advertising in print media. Municipalities in which PDK is in power favour *Epoka e Re* and especially *Infopress*, two newspapers that are heavily discriminated against by LDK-run municipalities.

Political Cover Stories by Kosovo Dailies

The rapport between political parties and the newspapers and the way this rapport reflects on the editorial content of Kosovo dailies has been analyzed. Initially, cover stories of all the newspapers have been monitored, and politically driven stories have been identified. Only stories that have no news value and no other relevance whatsoever except representing views or programmes of a certain political party or politician, were classified as political stories. Yet, the percentage of such stories is very high, reaching a quota of 10% of the total 226 monitored cover pages.



Number of political cover stories in newspapers

Koha Ditore and *Kosova Sot* had no cover stories that fit these criteria. However, *Infopress* had seven such cover stories; *Lajm* had six, *Bota Sot* five, *Express* four, *Epoka e Re* three, and *Zëri* had one story.

The political affiliation shown in the results of this monitoring process is confirmed in a coverage of the visit of [European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy](#), Javier Solana to Prishtinë/Priština, by Kosovo daily newspapers. On 14 July 2009, Mr. Solana visited Kosovo giving a series of different statements, varying between rating Kosovo’s overall progress up to commenting on the fact that Kosovo was left out of the visa liberalisation process. His statements included both praise and criticism for Kosovo leadership. The next morning, on 15 July, most of the daily newspapers had Mr. Solana’s visit on their covers. The reports, however, remained very different from each other. While more independent

newspapers had objective reports with fairly balanced titles about Mr. Solana's visit, newspapers supporting opposition parties or the parties in the governing coalition, rushed to reflect their own views on this event.

After analysing cover stories and their headlines, it can be concluded that newspapers which benefited most by publishing ads from public institutions governed by the PDK, have positively reported on Mr. Solana's visit, highlighting only his praise for Kosovo government. Criticism that Mr. Solana has publicly expressed in reports published by *Infopress* and *Epoka e Re*, was minimized or not covered at all.

Infopress published a large photograph of Mr Solana with Kosovo's President Fatmir Sejdiu and Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi, and a large title reading "Impressed with achievements" while the highlights on the cover page were all the positive statements of Mr Solana. *Epoka e Re* had a similar approach, having a cover story with Solana's photograph and a headline reading "Solana gives strong statements." Differing a little from *Infopress*, this newspaper also included the criticism that the High Representative had given to Kosovo leaders.

However, the newspaper that had least income from governmental ads – *Bota Sot* daily – had a totally different approach. The paper also had Solana visit as a cover story, publishing a close-up photograph of his and a large headline reading "Solana's bad news" while most of its reporting was focused on the bad news about Kosovo being left out of the visa liberalisation process initiated by the European Commission.

The daily *Lajm* had Mr. Solana's visit on the cover page but as second most important event. The report on his visit was fairly assembled, whereas the cover story of this newspaper was a clear example of what can be defined as a politically driven story. Headlined "Supported by Washington too" the cover story included a photograph of newspaper's owner and the leader of the AKR Behgjet Pacolli. The report talked about efforts made by Mr. Pacolli in the international arena to encourage the recognition of Kosovo.

C. Distribution and Sales

The poor distribution and sales network is another factor mentioned by editors as important indicator for the low circulation of newspapers. There are three distribution networks currently used. The major one is the old distribution of Rilindja, a network that used to have own kiosks and transportation but is still functioning.³⁴ This network, however, still keeps paper-based data and uses lump sum methodology of distribution³⁵, meaning that certain amount of newspapers are sent to a certain sales point, regardless how many newspapers are sold there, or how many other newspapers are returned unsold.

Not being satisfied with Rilindja distribution but also wanting to keep secret the real data regarding readership and circulation, some newspapers initiated their own networks. Such an initiative was initially taken by *Bota Sot* daily, and later on also by *Koha Ditore*.³⁶ Both of these newspapers use their own distribution system and the Rilindja one as well.

Moreover, there are no classical newspaper stands where only newspapers are sold. Most of the sales points are actually small shops throughout Kosovo. Due to the low price of newspapers, shopkeepers see them more as teasers for their costumers, often giving them the option to take newspapers home, read them, and then return them in the afternoon without having to pay anything³⁷. All of these newspapers are returned to publishers although they have indeed been read. Publishers assume that up to 10,000 copies of all eight newspapers are ‘borrowed’ and returned in this form. There are even cases in which distribution networks return to publishers copies of newspapers in which the crosswords have been filled.³⁸ This phenomenon, in case it is as wide spread as the newspapers editors indicate, represents a threat to the overall circulation.

In many social environments, such as restaurants and cafés, costumers have access to all the newspapers which is another factor that is not possible to eliminate and that prevents people from buying newspapers.³⁹ Many participants in the focus groups have stated that they prefer to read newspapers in cafés instead of buying one themselves.⁴⁰ This phenomenon is not unique for Kosovo and it is not possible to fight. Newspapers editors, however, can put more efforts on having more exclusive stories, which would make the readers buy newspapers even after reading in a café or restaurant.⁴¹

³⁴ Interviews with newspaper editors.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Interviews with newspaper editors, journalists and media experts.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Interview with editor-in-chief of *Kosova Sot*.

³⁹ Interviews with newspaper editors.

⁴⁰ Conclusions from two focus groups discussions, 18 August, 2009.

⁴¹ Findings from Focus Groups

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

There are several reasons that have led to the current state of the print media, one being low overall circulation. First of all Kosovo daily newspapers have not succeeded to adopt their content in such a form that would make them competitive with other electronic media. Newspapers continue to publish plain news and reports from daily events, although the public does not expect to read such content. Instead, readers expect newspapers to provide them with in-depth reports, news analysis and investigative reports. Moreover, the news agenda of Kosovo dailies is dominated by daily national politics, with significant absence of reports from other social, cultural and professional fields.

Most of the newspapers have not been successful in defining their target audiences. It remains unclear whether their approach remains elitist or populist. Editorial content of all the newspapers is dominated by political and macroeconomic trends, while agriculture, technology, finances, culture, lifestyle, and arts, are ignored or often not presented at all.

With the current circulation, newspapers cannot be commercially sustainable. Revenues that come from marketing are crucial for their existence, and in many cases, it is the marketing policies that dictate the editorial policies. This has brought about the current state where newspapers are heavily politicised, which has damaged the overall reputation of newspapers.

Institutions in Kosovo, of both local and central level, have a tendency to control editorial content of newspapers by favouring them when it comes to publication of government-sponsored ads. Newspapers that benefit mostly from ads coming from public funds that are controlled by certain political parties tend to be heavily biased in supporting these political entities and their programmes. Some newspapers are assessed to be mouth pieces of politicians⁴², or companies⁴³, that are heavily influenced by some political parties.

The current sales and distribution systems of daily newspapers does not function to its full extent. Firstly, newspapers are not distributed based on the demands from the sales point, but rather using a lump sum method. Secondly, a phenomenon of people borrowing newspapers from sales points, reading them and returning them afterwards, without having to pay for them, is clearly damaging the sales.

Following are the recommendations for the improvement of the current poor state of the print media:

1. The government should consider exempting daily newspapers from Value Added Tax.

⁴² See footnote 28, 29, 30

⁴³ See footnote 30

2. The government should stop the unbalanced advertising where some newspapers are being directly sponsored and some others discriminated.
3. The government should create a mechanism to regulate its media marketing, respecting the pluralism of print media. The circulation and of each newspaper should be taken into consideration.
4. The Press Council of Kosovo should amend its Press Code with amendments that would regulate and limit political influence over print media.
5. Publishers should take an initiative to set up an Association of Newspaper Publishers. This initiative should be followed by the creation of a mechanism that would measure the readership and circulation of all the newspapers. The good experience of a similar project being implemented by three Kosovo-wide TV stations should be taken into account.
6. Publishers should immediately invest in creating a joint distribution system which would not only distribute the newspapers based on the demands, but would also supervise the sales.
7. Publishers should concentrate on generating revenues from sales and fair marketing, in order to be independent from governmental ads.
8. Publishers should ensure autonomy of their newsrooms from the marketing departments, within their own publications.
9. Newspapers should publish fewer reports on daily events. Instead, more analytical and investigative reports should be published.
10. Editors need to refrain from the current practice of sending journalists to cover unimportant daily events. Instead, these journalists should be given time and adequate training courses so they can produce good in-depth investigative reports and news analysis.
11. Editors should establish their own news agenda, in order to distinguish their reports from those of the broadcast media.
12. Editors should put much more effort in presenting exclusive stories on cover pages. News and daily reports should be taken out of the cover pages.
13. Editors should ensure diversity of the editorial content. Editors should also make sure that important and relevant stories are followed up.
14. Newspapers should publish diverse reports in order to reach a wider audience. Content such as art and culture reports and reviews, dining reviews, celebrity news, job analyses, social trends, and lifestyle articles, should be published in supplements to the newspaper.
15. Media organisations and the Press Council, in co-operation with newspaper publishers and editors, should draft training programmes focusing on investigative reporting. Publishers and editors should sponsor such trainings for their journalists and encourage them to participate.

