



Enforcing the Copyright Law in Albania

Foreign films on fifty television stations were illegally broadcast for the Albanian public 24 hours-a-day. Hollywood movies, MTV, and CNN dominated the TV screen free of charge to anyone with an antenna. Some of the films had not even reached the European market before they had arrived on the Albanian TV set.

Every station also had access to a full set of 300 Albanian featured films, plus 1,300 documentaries produced before 1991. They played them repeatedly without fear of being charged with piracy. Film producer Fatmir Koci was never paid for his films. "The stores were filled with my films and TV stations were stealing them right and left. I never made any money once the films were produced."

USAID, with the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX), is combating broadcast piracy head-on and ensuring that only licensed programming is allowed to be broadcast on the television. The Copyright Law in Albania was passed 14 years ago in Albania, yet, it was clear that the government had turned a blind eye to abuses of the law. With USAID help, the National Council of Radio and Television (NCRT) was created to control the licensing of TV programming in Albania, and the Albanian parliament made amendments to the Copyright Law, which allowed NCRT to penalize those stations in noncompliance.

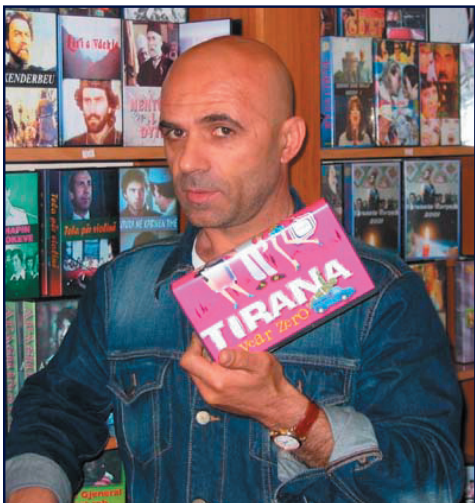


Photo: USAID/Albania Karla Christensen
Fatmir Koci proudly displaying his film that he has recently sold since the Copyright Law's implementation.

USAID's Media Development program, combined with other activities, offers assistance in media legal framework, media institution development, and training to journalism students in fact-based reporting. USAID helped create the Forum for the Protection of Producers and Screenwriters as a mechanism to protect the property of the filmmakers and directors. Due to USAID's help, the Copyright Law in Albania is now being enforced. Those that break the law are identified and must pay for the use of a film or will be referred to the NCRT for the removal of their license.

The Forum was officially recognized as a legally registered NGO on March 2004 by the Ministry of Culture responsible for the control of copyright issues in film. This endorsement by the ministry is a large step towards protecting authors' rights and supporting the growth of business. The implementation of the law is a concerted effort that is being made by NCRT, the Forum, the court and the state. USAID has put the spotlight on those that breach the law, and has made it difficult for offenders to hide.

"I would never have imagined getting this sum of money three years ago."

- Film Producer Fatmir Koci on being paid \$12,000 by a local Albanian TV station for "Tirana 2000," one of his internationally recognized films.

The enforcement of the Copyright Law is a strong indicator of Albania's willingness to fight corruption and support anti-corruption activities. The impact on the film and TV industry in Albania has been positive and increased support for programming produced domestically. Since TV stations cannot afford the high-cost of international films, Albanian films are becoming very popular. USAID funds television programming produced by IREX in Albania including "Heroes," which highlights citizen activism and community projects. "Heroes" has aired over 100 programs to date and is one of the most watched television programs in Albania. These shows are in demand since they no longer compete with Hollywood programming anymore.

Success Story

