



USAID/Kosovo Newsletter

Arberia (Dragodan) II Nazim Hikmet St. No. 1

Pristina, Kosovo

telephone: +381 (38) 243-673

email: kosovoinfo@usaid.gov

In this Issue:

Increasing Access to Information

Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, written in 1947, affirms that *"Everyone has the right to the freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."*

It's not just a right - but a cornerstone upon which other elements of democracy function.

In recent weeks, this right to freedom of information in Kosovo has been enhanced: a new Law on Access to Public Documents was promulgated in November; a funding mechanism was established for public broadcasting in the public interest; and the drafting of a law is under way which forms an Independent Media Commission that will ensure the independence and fairness of public and private broadcasting.

These steps, preceded by earlier development of Kosovo media, such as USAID's donation of transmission towers across Kosovo and training of journalists, are providing more and better access to information throughout Kosovo.



NEW LAW OPENS DOORS TO INFORMATION

Seeking information may be easier now that Kosovo's 'freedom of information' law was signed into effect on November 6, 2003.

It's a first step in ensuring the right to obtain information from authorities and is similar to other "disclosure" laws in Europe and around the world. Several organizations that have worked on the Law on Access to Official Documents, providing draft and other assistance to facilitate the adoption of this law, are supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

"This is a much needed law," says Agron Bajrami, editor of the daily Koha Ditore, Pristina. "We will try to squeeze out every possibility to use this law - to see how it works, and make a case when it doesn't work."

"This is a basic step in strengthening a democracy - the more information that is available, and the more everyone seeks to know how their government is serving them - the stronger a democracy can be," says Dale Pfeiffer, director of USAID/Kosovo.

Article 19, a London-based organization working on free expression issues, in its analysis of Kosovo's law, stated that "...freedom of information is both fundamentally important in its own

Contents:

Page 1: *"New Law Opens Doors to Information"* - Kosovo passes law ensuring freedom of information.

Page 2: *"Putting the Public into Public Broadcasting"* - How a new Administrative Direction will provide funding and help expand Kosovo's public broadcasting.

Page 3: *"The Power of the Press"* - The story of one Kosovar journalist and the career she has chosen.

Page 3: *"When Viewers Have a Say"* - Private television stations in Kosovo thrive with the help of USAID assistance.

New Law Opens Doors

continued from page 1

right and is also key to the fulfillment of all other rights."

The law's introduction states that its goal is to help citizens "participate more closely in the decision-making process of public institutions" and to "guarantee that the public institutions enjoy greater ... transparency and are more ... accountable to the citizens of Kosovo."

However, there are concerns that the law is limited. "There is too much room for institutions to escape their obligations to share information," says Koha Ditore's Bajrami. While the law states disclosure of information should happen, especially when there an overriding public interest in disclosure, it also allows material to be withheld if the institution says disclosure would endanger the protection of the public interest, security, defense of citizens, international cooperation, financial or economical policies of the Provisional Institutions of Self Government, or the privacy and honesty of the individual.

"We hope this law will contribute to freedom of expression," says Agim Zatriqi, general director of RTK1, Pristina. He says that for better investigative journalism, not only is access needed, but also safety and a strong legal and court system that can offer protection to reporters. "Only then can we expect brave and investigative journalism - then this law will have full meaning."

Bajrami sees many people in addition to journalists using the law. "There are a huge variety of issues, on the municipal level, that can be tackled. Even little neighborhoods will try to solve problems through this."

Kreshnik Berisha, director of the Advocacy Training and Resource Center (ATRC), Pristina, has been working on the law since summer 2002 and believes it will be mostly used by NGOs. "The critical phase (of approval) is over -- the hardest part is implementing it," Berisha says. ATRC will start training administrative workers how to fulfill document requests, and training NGOs, journalists and citizens on how to apply for material under the law. ¶

PUTTING THE PUBLIC INTO PUBLIC BROADCASTING

Every citizen has a right to open media - a media free from political or other influences and supported by the communities it serves. Public media around the world has long been regarded as integral to democracy, representing the diversity of the audience it serves. With donations and sometimes sizable fees, it supplies news, events, cultural and educational programming to its audience. For example, in the United Kingdom, public broadcasting (the BBC) is financed solely through license fees assessed on TVs and radios.

"Good public broadcasting is at the service of its audience. It is not under any political control or subject to financial or political interests," remarks Agim Zatriqi, director of RTK, Kosovo's public broadcaster.

However, in many countries citizens cannot enjoy this right to an open media. Instead, government-sponsored broadcasting carrying coercive political and cultural messages, and/or profit-driven programming and advertising is the only choice.

"The Kosovo before 1999 is not the Kosovo after 1999. We [RTK] do not support ethnic hatred and war - we support people and methods that solve ethnic problems," says Zatriqi.

In November 2003, Kosovo took a big step toward strengthening its publicly-owned broadcasting station. USAID supported the implementation of an Administrative Direction, providing public funding for Radio-Television Kosovo (RTK), and bringing Kosovo's RTK closer to a European model of financing public television and radio. A 3.50 euro fee added to all monthly electric bill payments will put financial support of public broadcasting directly into the hands of Kosovar citizens.

"If we don't participate in funding public programming, we won't get what we want," says the head of Kosovo's Association of Broadcasters, Aferdita Kelmendi, director of RTV21. "Without the fee we will leave RTK in the hands of the politicians - it is our responsibility to get it out of state hands."

Despite the benefits, the fee has raised some questions. Some Kosovars say the fee is difficult to pay in the poor economy, or that the fee is unfair to those who cannot receive RTK in their homes. However, this small fee (75% less than the European average of 169 Euros annually) will help finance new towers and transmitters necessary to expand RTK's coverage and improve its quality, as RTK's revenues from donors and government decrease. Furthermore, Kosovars now have a more direct say in RTK's operations, as its budget will be more transparent and accountable to the public. The administrative direction takes advantage of the USAID-funded Joint Billing Initiative of the Kosovo Electric Company which ensures greater transparency of public funds collected by KEK and decreases opportunities for fraud and mismanagement.

"The implementation of this fee will force us to improve our programming even more," says Zatriqi enthusiastically about the station's new programming. "We are transmitting in five languages and have multi-ethnic staff working together not only under the same roof, but in the same room." This is extremely important, he believes, as Kosovo seeks to support a diverse society. ¶



KTTN has plans to construct more towers such as this in order to increase broadcast coverage across Kosovo.

THE POWER OF THE PRESS

Syzana Bytyçi, 25, is clearly accustomed to being the reporter, and not being interviewed herself. A business reporter for Koha Ditore, she is enthusiastic about the power of the press to serve the public - and takes seriously her responsibility as a journalist.

Bytyçi didn't start out as a journalist. She entered medical school, planning on becoming a doctor, a goal her family supported. But that career choice quickly changed after she answered Koha Ditore's advertisement for reporters in August 1999. She was hired - first translating and editing news, then reporting on the health sector, all the time receiving on-the-job training from colleagues. Today, she's covering business in Kosovo. In addition, she is still a student, not in medicine, but English (she's in her third year at the University of Prishtina). She has discovered through her work the importance of journalism.

"I think media is of great help (to society). We can pressure institutions to be more careful using public funds. Kosovo citizens are often indifferent, and don't react to what they read. It's their money being misused. It's their rights not being respected," Bytyçi says. "There is no perfect media." She reads and watches many international media. "BBC is the best - they are professional, they don't take sides, you can trust them."

She works to gain the same trust. "I want readers to believe in me." Bytyçi tries to do this by gathering all sides of a story and verifying facts. "Sometimes I feel like I'm taking sides because I can't get information -- people won't answer," Bytyçi says.

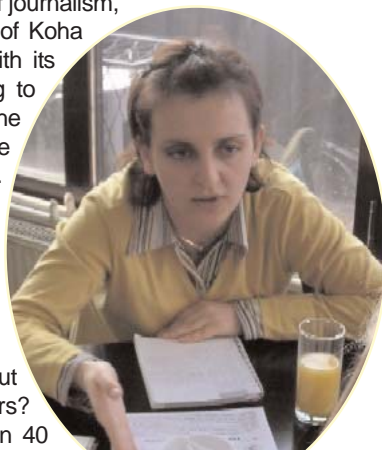
In July 2003, Bytyçi, along with three other Kosovo journalists, participated in a job exchange program offered by IREX - International Research & Exchanges Board's ProMedia journalism education program, and supported by USAID. They spent one week working in London with Dow Jones, a business reporting service that supplies news to media and business clients around the world. "They have responsibility - their clients have money depending on information." Additionally, Bytyçi and colleagues have attended training seminars held by IREX as part of the USAID's media support program.

Now, in addition to her work with Koha Ditore, she is a Kosovo freelance correspondent for Dow Jones Newswires. The first Dow Jones article to appear under her name was about Kosovo's mobile network agreements.

"It's not easy to be a journalist in Kosovo - you have to work to build relations, find reliable sources. I work hard on all stories," she remarks.

"We see in her a new kind of journalism," says Agron Bajrami, editor of Koha Ditore. The newspaper, with its training and staff, is aiming to serve "a society where the media and journalists will be watchdogs over institutions. That is what we are getting from her and others - we are happy to have them as guardians of the public interest."

"It's a big responsibility." But would she change careers? She smiles. "In 10 years, in 40 years, I'll still be a journalist." ❧



Syzana Bytyçi describes the tough role of journalists in Kosovo

WHEN VIEWERS HAVE A SAY

Broadcasting has been one of the greatest communication developments of the last century - channelling information on local and world events, education, politics, culture, art, sports and much, much more into everyday life - revolutionizing the way information is disseminated to the common citizen.

"It is the right of the citizen to be informed," says Aferdita Kelmendi, director and founder of Radio Television 21 (RTV21), one of two independent Kosovo-wide broadcast stations. "At RTV21, we give the public a sense of democracy and let them know that they can express and say what they think. Everyone has a right to say what they want."



Aferdita Kelmendi monitors RTV21 programming from her office

The staff of RTV21 fully understand this right. Founded in 1995 as a women's media project, the radio station was forced to shut down just before the NATO bombing

in 1999. However, they resumed work from Macedonia transmitting to the Kosovar public via satellite from Holland. Since returning to Pristina shortly after the bombing, RTV21, as well as Kosovo's other independent and public broadcast stations, are now thriving thanks to USAID assistance. RTV21 now provides 24-hour television and radio programming. "In this world of TV, we're proud that people know who RTV21 is," Kelmendi says. "We achieved something others didn't - with a small group of people, a small investment - (we demonstrated that) you can do a big thing!"

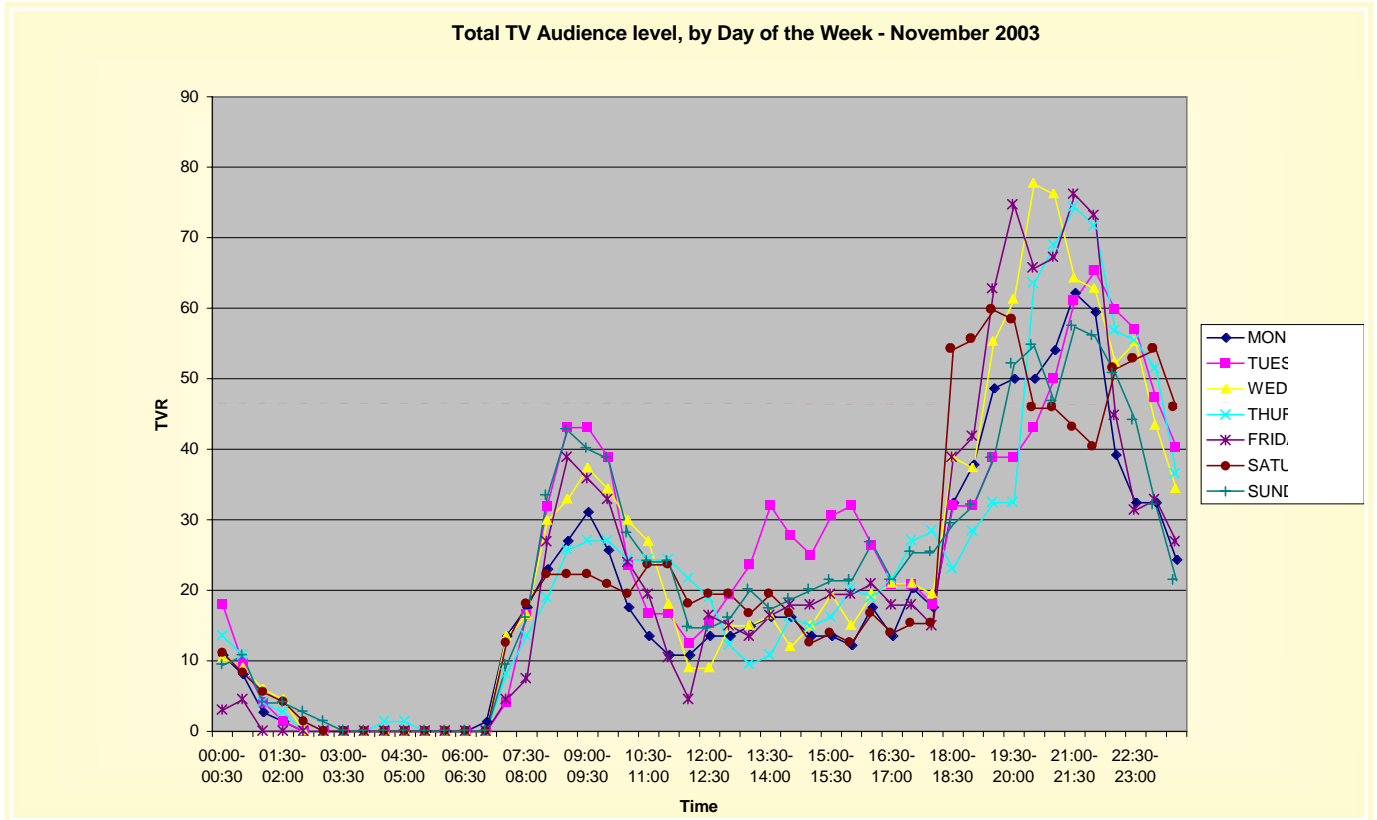
The two private Kosovo-wide TV stations, RTV21 and Kohavision Television (KTV) have benefited greatly from USAID assistance since 1999. Through the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) journalists have participated in extensive training. By supporting the development of freedom of speech legislation and fair licensing practices USAID is working to create an environment in which independent media can operate more easily. USAID support has supplied equipment, and constructed transmission towers for broadcasting allowing television and radio stations to serve nearly all of Kosovo. Satellite capabilities have even further expanded broadcasting. "We are now broadcasting through Europe, the United States, and experimentally in Australia," Kelmendi reports.

In Kosovo the development of open broadcasting and free media was one of USAID's primary objectives after the war. Providing Kosovars with accurate and timely information about the opportunities and changes around them was a key step toward transforming Kosovo into a democratic society, and normalizing the lives of Kosovars after the crisis. Support to local television and radio stations such as RTV21 played a large part in this transformation.

"We use television to benefit society. We are helping [Kosovo] society to understand the changes it is going through," says Kelmendi. She takes pride in the relationship that the station has with its audience, and RTV21's focus on the Kosovo family unit. "The family is the nucleus of society, in the microworld, and in the larger perspective, family is society."

"We have a wonderful relationship with the viewership, and we encourage our viewers to ask questions. It is important for people to know that we are them and that they are us." ❧

TV Viewer Survey Demonstrates Audience Interest



The third quarterly survey of television viewers - to determine what and when people are watching in Kosovo - was completed in November 2003, following similar surveys in March and July 2003. The survey is supported by USAID's Kosovo Independent Media Program (KIMP) implemented through International Research and Exchanges Board-IREX.

A common tool in developed market economies, viewer surveys help television stations better understand what programs their viewers want and provide the stations with accurate information to market their programs to advertisers. Surveys can lead to better programming and can help develop the advertising market, which contributes to the financial sustainability of the stations. This survey, conducted by Helen-Harrison & Company, London, and coordinated by KIMP-IREX, sampled 501 individuals about their attitudes to programs and TV viewing behavior.

The survey found that people of Kosovo watch television the most on weekends (an average of 3.37 hours on Saturday, 3.49 hours on Sunday) in comparison to weekdays (an average of 2.78 hours). Looking at average percent share of viewing throughout the three surveys of 2003, RTK achieves highest share with 35% average weekly share of viewing, and KTV & RTV21 are virtually equal with 23% share each.

The genres of programs - especially music and film -- were the main influence regarding viewers' decision to watch a specific channel. Music and film are significant for all channels. News is perceived as the most important genre for RTK. Sport remains an important genre for KTV. In comparison to July 2003 all genre remain consistent with the exception of an increase in importance for news on TV21, which replaces 'Entertainment Programs' in third place.

All three national channels achieved high levels of reception. Reception quality had improved marginally for all channels and is generally considered to be good. A major factor affecting the survey results, however, is power cuts. Eighty percent of respondents reported experiencing at least one power cut during the week of the survey. Furthermore, approximately one-third of the sample was without power during the crucial early "prime time" segment from 18:00 - 20:00. Reliable and uninterrupted electricity not only allows viewers to watch their favorite TV programs, but it's also essential to the financial health of Kosovo television stations. ☞

Genre Influences by Channel

| TV21 | % | RTK | % | KTV | % | Satellite | % |
|---------------------|------|---------------------|------|---------------------|------|---------------------|------|
| Music | 72.5 | News | 75.8 | Film | 67.1 | Film | 25.1 |
| Film | 70.3 | Music | 62.9 | Music | 59.9 | Music | 21.4 |
| News | 58.7 | Film | 62.5 | Sports | 59.1 | Sports | 16.6 |
| Entertainment progs | 50.3 | Entertainment progs | 51.1 | News | 54.5 | Entertainment progs | 11.4 |
| Sports | 43.1 | Sports | 43.3 | Entertainment progs | 47.5 | Women's progs | 8.6 |