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The Autonomy of News Journalists of Kosovo's Public Service Broadcaster between Political Instrumentalization and Social Responsibility

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Abstract. The news journalists of Kosovo's Radio Television are a category of employees who find themselves between the influence of political factors, and the social responsibility assigned to them by the functions of the public broadcaster. Although their professional autonomy is guaranteed by the status of the public broadcaster, its actualization depends on the media hierarchy, which in itself is a product of political decision making. Politics exerts its influence on the public media of Kosovo through the right of decision making on strategic issues pertaining to its development, and through the election of the managing bodies. The effects of political instrumentalization within the public radio television (RTK) are diffused from the managerial level to the professional level of newsrooms and practices of news reporting. The journalistic autonomy within the newsrooms of the public broadcaster of Kosovo is relative, whereas the journalists find themselves caught between opposed requests from the linear hierarchy and professional standards of journalists as a *merit good*, determined by the role of the public media in a democracy. Instances of organized expression of dissatisfaction and protests within the RTK against editorial policies that support politics and restrict professional autonomy have indicated that within Kosovo's PSB there exists contradicts with regards to the perception of the concept of the journalistic autonomy and the role of the journalist in a public medium vis-à-vis the other actors of political and social communication.

Keywords: Kosovo, news, journalistic autonomy, Kosovo public broadcaster, RTK, social responsibility.

1. Introduction

The media outlets with the legal status of public broadcasters appear as organized media institutions that act between two opposite influences: the political factors, which in different ways determine their activity and that of the citizens, which are obligated even by legislation to offer *merit goods*. In the case of the Radio Television of Kosovo we may identify some characteristic phenomena for the public media outlets that are developed in the countries of the South Eastern Europe, where a long and conflicted transition has engendered a media system that is closely linked with the world of politics (Hallin and Mancini, 2004).

The symbiotic relationship between the media and politics (Willis, 2007), in this model, functions based on the dependency and instrumentalization of the media by politics; where politics attempt to guide the media and their political functions towards their political benefit (Schatz cited in: Uvod u znanost, 2006). In the case of RTK, the instrumentalization that is realized through the political influence on its managing bodies extends to all levels of the media outlet thus affecting the professional autonomy of the newsrooms and of the journalists, who are found between “the interest of the opinion on the objective information and of the power that is interested on the information, which begins with the top level of the power and not with the vital problems of the citizens” (Beqaj, 2010).

Acting within an environment where the freedom of information, as a pillar of democracy that directly influences on the lives of its citizens is guaranteed by legislation, albeit unapplied entirely in practice, the journalists are attracted by a media outlet that is legally obligated to apply professional and economic standards towards them. However, the practice of doing journalism within the RTK indicates that the public medium is not isolated from the influence of factors that affect the overall media and political systems in Kosovo.

1.1. Methodology

This paper has combined several methods, of which, interview is the key one. A total of 20 structured interviews were conducted with journalists and news editors at the Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK). They were selected based on the time they were employed with the RTK and based on their involvement in the politics section. A total of 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with journalists for politics and news editors from the privately-owned media outlets, and with media experts and experts on legal matters. A survey was conducted with 61 students of journalism, media and communication from the public university and privately-owned colleges, to elicit their perception on the prospect of journalists in the media market of Kosovo. For certain parts of the paper, archive materials from the Assembly of Kosovo, media organizations, and the electronic archive of the public broadcaster have been used. The personal observations of the author – as an RTK employee – are used as a method to assist the elaboration of the internal developments within the newsrooms.

2. Journalists in Kosovo with partial freedom of the press

The failure to apply the laws in Kosovo is achieved through interference in the work of the journalists by the interest groups: political or other; through threat, or failure to allowing access to official documents. The cases involving threats against journalists are committed by three main social categories: institutions, businesses and individuals (INDEP, 2015). In 2014 and 2015, the Association of the Journalists of Kosovo (AJK) has ascertained 27 cases of threats made against journalists. This number indicates that the threat cases is increasing compared to the previous years, when the average was 15 to 18 cases within a given year. As the President of AJK, Zekirja Shabani, says, Kosovo remains a half-free country, with a partial freedom of expression and unfavorable environment to do journalism. *“While journalists are threatened and assaulted due to their investigation and reporting of the abuse of public money, crime, corruption and violence; while they are insulted and disrespected due to informing the citizens about what is really happening in the country, we cannot talk about any improvement of the freedom of expression. The journalists put their lives on the line to report the truth and often, their freedom of expression is violated”.*

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The factors that violate the freedom of journalists in Kosovo are related to the political system and the businesses that establish ties with the political factors. In Kosovo, as a state where the public sector remains the largest employer, the close ties between the businesses and the Government are reflected on the internal organization of the media outlets, thus violating the professional autonomy of the journalists and editors. The Government is identified as a factor and institution that has kept its influence by interfering in the work of the journalists in the last 5 years, regardless of the political party changes in its composition.

In 2011, journalists considered the Government as the institution that violated their rights, whereas in 2016 some cases were ascertained when the journalists reported direct threats against them from the level of the Prime Minister due to their reporting.

Interference from the media managerial levels that act by establishing ties with powerful factors from the world of politics extends to the professional level of newsrooms. As Dr. Lindita Camaj determines: *"Dependency of media by the institutions is a result of the absence of the democratic or economic competition. The clientelist relationship between media and institutions, however, is not a stable dependency but it relies on the changes in the power structures and access to resources. The influence of this relationship on the freedom of journalists is double-fold. From the clientelist position, the media organizations offer to their masters their services in access and favorable coverage in exchange of meeting the economic goals of the media owners. On the other hand, the political masters appreciate the loyalty of the media clients thus oppressing the professional independence of the journalists"*.

In Kosovo, where the public sector is the main employer and there are only a few media that still preserve their independence and fight for the greater good, the level of professional freedom and autonomy in journalism depends on the media outlet where a journalist is employed, and on the professional qualities and principles a journalist cultivates. As confirmed by the interviews with journalists, editors and other media and communication experts, the political and economic system in Kosovo places journalists in a position facing pressure or baits by other factors that a journalist is obligated to respond to through choice based on the self-perceptions of the mission and social factors. Milaim Shefkiu is a political journalist and editor of "Zëri" newspaper (which in Kosovo is considered to be among the independent ones), describes as follows the position of journalists in the face of interference, especially by politics:

"Interference is always evident but it depends on the journalist and the media outlet to what extent they will accept. People leading the institutions always strive to find alternatives to stop scandals from being published when the journalists investigate."

This model that creates room for a journalist to function as a "well-identified figure that belongs to a reference group, equipped with knowledge and technical skills and has to exert for the community a double role of a neutral and impartial information, and counter-weight for the power (Maigret, 2010), is characteristic for the media that are independent from the financial point of view and from the political factors, for which financial independence becomes the grounds for editorial independence. The existence of this category of independent, privately-owned media outlets in Kosovo creates opportunities for their journalists to oppose the pressure and eschew influence from powerful political factors. However, the system of the media in the transition period that follows the UN protectorate has produced only a few such media outlets that do not constitute a dominating category in Kosovo. Journalists create a clientelist relationship with different interest groups, either political or economic, using the opportunities created by the system to achieve their personal goals under the cloak of professional functions. The main causes that influence Kosovo journalists to enter into clientelist relationships are related to their economic situation, which make them fall for the lure of political and business offers, to that, which the journalist and head of information in Tribuna Chanel, Agron Halitaj, calls a missionary reason:

“The interest groups target professional journalists in serious media outlets and make them tempting offers. Today, we have plenty of journalists who have accumulated within a short period of time great wealth of dubious origins. On the other hand, we have the group that establishes the clientelist relation as a mission: firstly, to meet the obligation towards the group, using the media outlet where s/he works, and secondly, to fulfill a personal ambition of becoming someone with social influence, like the political appointees”.

The political and economic system established since the period of the UN protectorate is characterized by the influence of interest groups, where clientelism appears as one of the main characteristics (King&Mason, 2006), (Capusella, 2015). The relations and membership to an interest group is considered as an opportunity to achieve economic and financial status and to achieve career aspirations within the labor market in Kosovo, where media outlets, due to issues with financing, fail to make payments in time thus aggravating the position of the journalists (INDEP, 2015/04).

This situation in the private media market in Kosovo has become a factor of influence on the decision of journalists to become part of the public media outlet, which, with regards to the abovementioned issues, presents the other side of the media reality in Kosovo.

3. How journalists are hired and their position within the RTK

The characteristic of the public broadcasters as a type of “most highly structured media organization” (Hanretty, 2011), in the case of the Radio Television of Kosovo, is indicated through the normative and administrative acts. As a public company, the RTK is obligated to apply the legislation in power in terms of the rights and responsibilities deriving from the contractual agreements with its employees. The financial stability and the legal obligations to guarantee conditions for exerting the journalistic activity are revealed as the main motives driving the journalists who have become part of the RTK in the last ten years, or the new ones getting ready to join the media market in Kosovo. While employees of former RTP have perceived their inclusion in RTK as reinstatement to their previous jobs after having been dismissed by force by the Serbian regime, the new journalists of the post-war period have considered the legal status of the public media outlet as their main motivation, whereas the journalists hired after 2008 emphasize as their main motivation the financial stability and legal responsibilities of the public media outlet towards its employees.

Ten journalists/editors hired after 2008, part of a group of 20 interviewees, highlights the financial stability of the company. Of 10 journalists and editors hired by the RTK between 1999 - 2004, 4 former RTP staff say they considered the RTK an extension of the RTP, 4 new journalists at that time said they appreciated its credibility in the media market, and 2 considered that an opportunity to find a job. One of the staff members, defines the reason for joining RTK in 2001:

“After the war, RTK had four advantages over the other media outlets: the geographical spread of its visibility-audibility; the prestige of working for RTK at that time was extremely high due to the credibility and visibility and audibility of the TV and radio; the job and salary security; observance of employees’ rights was higher compared to other media outlets” (I35).

This category of journalists reveals the changes that have occurred in their initial perception guided by professional motives through the years of working within the company. From a company that was attractive from the professional point of view, RTK became the safest job within an instable market.

“When I started to work for the RTK, its name and degree of professionalism provided the main motivation. The developments in the recent years have resulted in having the salary and employee

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benefits, stemming from the applicable Law on Labor in Kosovo, take the place as the main motivation”(I10).

The category of journalists hired by the RTK in the recent years and after their experiences with the privately-owned media outlets provides an opportunity for a comparative analysis between the private and public media sectors in Kosovo. The attraction to be part of the public broadcaster within the media milieu stems from the position held by this media company, favored by its legal status and state support, which serve as factors placing the journalists in a position where they have to make compromises between professional goals and opportunities in the market to achieving such goals. As one of the journalists and news editors of the Kosovo TV states:

“RTK remains the media outlet that journalists regard as the best opportunity to pursue their career. Journalists who choose to work for the RTK are aware that they leave aside the ambition to become more professional and instead choose this media outlet for greater job security, which is lacking in the other media outlets”(I17).

The leading and privileged position ensured by its legal status and economic standing, formally provides the RTK the chance to select people who have demonstrated their professionalism within the Kosovo media milieu. However, the methods used to select the staff are influenced by the hierarchical connections between the public media and the political factors of interest groups, and such relations have transformed the RTK into a company with a heterogeneous structure of its employees. All management structures of the RTK have justified the increase of the number of employees with the programmatic needs. However, by failing to set a clearly defined standard for hiring employees, RTK has created some new categories of employees who have created a structure that reflects different principles of the editorial and professional functions of a public media outlet. Although since 2010, when the Law on Labor was adopted, the vacancy announcement has become the main method of hiring staff for the RTK, it has not influenced on transforming the practice of hiring people for the RTK. The practices followed by the RTK by publishing pro-forma vacancy announcements as the law requires, has bred the ground to legalize and expand the clientelist relations between the managerial bodies and the political or economic interest groups. Within the company, the controlled pro-forma vacancies have affected the expansion of the influence of interest groups over all levels of managerial and professional bodies. The Independent Trade Union of RTK has ascertained in its public reactions concrete cases when relatives of politicians, including of some deputies who are members of the Parliamentary Committee for Media, and of board members of RTK, have become part of RTK through misuse of vacancy announcements. The ITURTK qualified it a shameful act that an institution that is obligated to promote lawfulness and transparency to provoke the feelings of the unemployed, giving them false hopes that should they be found meritorious they can be employed with the RTK.

On the side of the political forces, the employment at RTK that are not based on any criteria, have been addressed in special cases. In its parliamentary reactions, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) has raised this issue during the meetings of the parliamentary committees and debates. Vetëvendosja Movement has included this issue in its action against the instrumentalization of the public institutions by the political power, while during protests from other parties of the opposition (AAK and Nisma) RTK has been ranked as one of the institutions considered as “caught by the state”. Meanwhile, the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), as the recipient of the majority of attacks regarding the RTK has reacted less; it has supported the RTK and has taken a defensive position by accusing other parties who have their supporters within the RTK. Such reaction on the side of the political subjects against the employment methods within the RTK does not differ from the practice of reactions about other public institutions that have the same problems in the process of executing vacancy announcements as per the professional criteria. But, RTK differs due to the influence of the employment policies on the specific

social responsibilities it has and due to the reflection created through the proximity of the hierarchical structure with the political factors on the newsrooms and the journalists.

4. Professional Autonomy of Newsrooms and News Journalists

Newsrooms are the units of the organizational structure of the public media in Kosovo, where the influence of politics is carried from the managerial hierarchy to its professional level. "Factors that condition the organizational autonomy also influence on the journalistic autonomy" (Sjøvaag, 2013) by placing them under the coordinated influence of external and internal factors in the framework of the process for the dependence of the public media by the political power.

The RTK newsrooms are comparable examples with the practice of the media in countries where the external dimension of the influence is related with the coercive measures that reduce the political autonomy of the news organization, including policies and legislation, while the internal restrictions are related to the freedom of journalists to take decisions without the pressure of the management (Hanitzsch, 2013). Within the company, the newsrooms and the work place represent the fourth and fifth levels within the organizational structure of the company, and as such, depend on the highest hierarchical levels. The professional autonomy of the journalists as an individual freedom to choose the information and ways of reporting is reduced by the external factors that condition the organizational autonomy of the institution and by the internal factors within the hierarchy of the media that implement the external influence. By focusing the process of selecting the board as a managing body of the Radio Television of Kosovo by the Assembly of Kosovo alone, politics decides on the control mechanism on the day to day activity of the public media and affects the decisions of its senior management. In the hierarchical line, the management related to the politics determines the level of the middle management of the company, and appoints heads of programmatic units. Such structured and organized influence at the hierarchical level causes to the journalist of the media outlet to suffer from double pressure, which Dr. Hasan Saliu describes as follows:

"Journalists of the public media face two types of pressure: the external pressure, by the editorial policy, and the internal pressure, i.e. self-censorship to achieve some goals. Both these types of pressure result in the journalist of the public media outlet to be close to politics. The top-down pressure is out of discussion as it is a widely-known fact; whereas the internal pressure – the self-censorship, clinging to politicians, is another type of pressure to the detriment of the journalistic objectivity. Often, these journalists get close to politics, because politics has a great influence on the appointment of the professional management of the public broadcaster".

The influence is top-down following the pyramid model all the way to the structures with two categories of journalists and editors: the professionals, who perceive their engagement within the RTK as part of the function of the public media, and the missionary journalists, who through their engagement in the public media outlet carry out services to the interest groups outside of it. The first category of journalists in this scheme is under the coordinated pressure of external and internal factors. In the day to day journalistic activity their professional autonomy is reduced by the competences of the middle and top level management, by the interference in professional issues of dealing with the topics, selection of sources, space for parties involved in the topics, determination of events to receive priority in the program, and other routine journalistic activity matters.

The way how the information departments are organized determines for the RTK newsrooms "similar bureaucratic characteristics compared to other institutions, where responsibilities are divided, the authority is structured and the highest level is rewarded" (Esser, 1998). In the framework of the

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organizational structure of the RTK, the newsroom place the news journalist in front of the appointment editors, who, through their influence on the newsroom, aim to realize editorial policies that favor actors with political influence and other interest groups but as such, goes against the professional principles of the journalist and other functions of the public media. The hierarchical structure acts through installing within the newsroom such practices influence in cultivating self-censorship on the part of the journalists and in cases when they fail to achieve that, one that censors their materials.

The twenty journalists from the TV and radio who were interviewed ascertained the existence of the censorship cases in newsrooms but said that gravest damage for them is the installation of self-censorship as a characteristic of functioning within the newsrooms, from the establishment of the RTK in 1999, in the framework of the general relationship of the RTK with international and Kosovo political factors. As one of the journalists and news editors says:

"The first form of self-censorship is the fear of journalists and editors to report freely on the fact that the media outlet is controlled by the parties in power. The second form is the interest group: firstly the political one from people within the media outlet, especially within the senior management who often, in order to play the role they have taken over or to benefit in various ways from the people in power, exert censorship or influence the journalists the censor themselves. This is the most irreparable damage that has been caused to the medium". (I12)

In this way, the journalist appears to be an actor with no influence on the editorial policy, which reduces his role only as conveyor of messages from actors of communication. The tendency to reduce the role of the journalist is directed only towards that category of journalists who are not linked with the political subjects in power, or with any other interest group. On the other hand, the practice of the functioning of newsrooms indicates that within that newsroom there is room for that category of journalists who have direct relations of interest with powerful economic and political factors. The media hierarchy does not harm such relationships that journalists have when those are in line with the external forces that the leadership of the media outlet is also connected to. Within the company, this category of journalists is promoted and appreciated by the management thus transforming clientelism into an instrument to realize personal ambitions to the detriment of professional criteria within the public media. In the day to day functioning, its reflection can be seen in the information programs where during the analysis of the news one comes across cases when continuously, the same journalist prepares news that promote the activities of only a certain politician or subject; accompanies the same leader on his/her visits abroad and on other activities. One of the interviewed TV journalists explains:

"RTK provides an opportunity for the journalists to cultivate their relationships with political factors from other interest groups. In the practice of promotions within the medium, these "colleagues" are promoted faster to higher positions and enjoy support within the media outlet". (I17)

The Radio Television of Kosovo does not apply criteria that have been strictly determined to promote journalists to more senior editorial positions. The promotions are made based on performance evaluations, which are made by the supervisors who are also appointed or selected through disputable and opposed within the company. In this way, clientelism – which on certain cases starts with employment – grows further during the work process through the promotion of journalists who are put in charge of covering the main developments in Kosovo, which in the case of the RTK are the political developments. Through them, the managerial structure of the company creates and strengthens interest groups within the newsrooms, which by functioning according to the "principle of force" attempt to implement the editorial policy determined by the management, something that in 2013-2015 caused the reaction by a part of the staff.

5. Internal Objections to the Editorial Policy

The reaction by categories of journalists and editors of the public broadcaster of Kosovo to the media practice according to which “centralizing tendencies always appear within the newsroom, including topics and way of handling topics that attempt to exceed the boundaries, which follows editorial policies or internal restrictions”, (Gjergji, 2014) are different. At certain periods of time, the clashes of interests represented by each category of journalists and editors causes reactions within the newsrooms, and have two-sided effects, as none of the parties manages to completely achieve its aims: the hierarchical authority is realized with difficulty, or is made impossible, while on the other hand the professional autonomy of news journalists and editors is reduced. The organized reactions within the RTK against the routine practice where “each of specific groups push their line and do not mind each other and where each group has its own control” (TV program CLICK, RTV21, 2015), can be found within the period of 2013-2015. At that period, disagreements between news journalists and editors with their supervisors, have revealed the problems that were caused by the model of the hierarchical organization of the public broadcaster that is characterized by the method of functioning based on groups that create categories of employees that have different purposes within the company.

The organized reactions initially occurred within the TV newsroom, where the news journalists and editors have ascertained numerous cases of interference from media hierarchy regarding the editorial and journalistic autonomy within the newsrooms in order to realize favoring editorial policies for the main political party in power in Kosovo, which at that time was the Democratic Party of Kosovo. Journalists and editors have made public cases when the hierarchy decided to remove from stories such statements that voiced opinions against the politics in power, or have completely removed news items from the news programs and there have even been instances when broadcasting of shows was interrupted by decision of senior editors as they did not contain the news item they expected to see about the favored politicians (Letter to RSF, April 2015).

March and April 2015 are the most notorious in the history of clashes between managerial and professional instances within the RTK and have proven that making public these clashes between different hierarchic levels within the company is accompanied by the reaction of other social forces, especially at the political level, and at the level of journalist organizations, but not by citizens and the RTK audience. During this period, on March 26, 2015 the RTK management dismissed the President and Deputy President of the Independent Trade Union of the RTK thus causing protests of the employees. The deputies of all parliamentary subjects, with the exception of a part of the PDK deputies, qualified this case as a violation that proved the serious situation within the public broadcaster. At the international level, the decision was opposed by the organizations for the protection of the freedom of press, including the organization Reporters Without Borders (RSF). In its letter RSF assessed that Fadil Hoxha and Arsim Halili had been dismissed after they had denounced the cases of censorship and other irregularities, on behalf of the RTK Trade Union (RSF letter, April 4, 2015). In his response the General Director of RTK moved over the case to the connections and interferences, which, according to him, were established by politics with the journalists of the public media when, through questions and answers, he linked the protests and the objections of the employees with their contacts with deputies and parliamentary debates about the RTK (Shala, letter for RSF, April 8, 2015). However, the letter of the General Director did not address the issue of connections between the management and the political subjects in power and as such, it was followed by the objections on the part of the journalists and editorial staff. For the first time, a summary of cases of interferences in their work by their superiors was addressed to the RSF, bearing the 60 signatures of journalists and editors of the RTK (Letter of journalists to RSF, April 12, 2015). In another instance, in July 2015, the management of Radio Kosova

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(part of RTK) stopped the broadcasting of an investigative material on the lists of categories of individuals from the KLA war, due to its critical approach. At the same time, the managers had failed to react against the threats that the journalist/editor had been subject to during her investigation, although the threats concerned a journalist Serbeze Haxhijaj, known for her investigations, and as a recipient of awards from journalist organizations and other international organizations. In that case also, factors outside of the RTK reacted: the Association of the Journalists of Kosovo and SEEMO which called to the authorities in Prishtina to react right away and find the persons responsible for the threats (SEEMO, August 18, 2015). By such practice, the RTK places its journalists in the position to act against the professional obligations formally determined by the company through the internal documents on standards and principles they should follow during their involvement with the public media. As Haxhijaj defines:

"RTK remains a broadcaster for the political parties in power, which clearly disseminates political propaganda... It is the people of the party who look to it what should be broadcasted in TV and on the radio, from its daily agenda to the personal interests of specific politicians. The professional criteria remain peripheral".

In this structure of functioning, the RTK journalists act as employees who are aware that there is no-one they can address to the eventual pressure from the political power.

"While politics exerts its control over the institution (RTK), then I cannot be protected by any eventual pressure coming from politics. Pressure also is "censored", i.e. a journalist has no-one to turn to report the pressure from politics, mainly the forces in power". (IJ4)

Asked whether they have any protection from the company in cases of facing interests groups outside of it, as was the case mentioned above, 15 of 20 interviewed journalists and editors responded by "no", while 5 responded "partially". The journalists identify this perception for protection from the institutions stems from the organizational staff of the company and is linked with its relationships with politics, because within a broadcaster that has been instrumentalized by politics and the clientelist relations, no protection is offered and the application of the professional standards or of the autonomy of journalists is not guaranteed, regardless of what documents the institution has approved.

With this way of functioning of the media, journalists appear as powerless factors to change their position within the editorial room and as individuals hired with no professional autonomy within the public institution. The organizational and hierarchical structures operating above them minimize their professional scope of work and restrict their possibilities of "being independent in their work and preserve the autonomy of the journalist's profession", (RTK Professional Standards, 1.4.Credibility) as is determined by the legal status and professional standards of RTK.

The bottom-up pressure, in the form of organized journalistic and editorial objection to change this situation, has proved through the history of the development of RTK that results in improving the situation can be achieved but those are short-term and are achieved through partial compromises by the managing hierarchy. In cases of egregious violations as in 2014-2015 they react by opposing publicly the influence of the leadership structures of the company, without managing to change the practice of how they are treated within the RTK.

6. The Future of Journalists in RTK

The Radio Television of Kosovo is a media outlet that "produces" from among the professional journalists the category of dissatisfied employees and which through its status within the media market in Kosovo managed to keep them as an integral part of the company. Among RTK journalists there are

contradicts between the reasons that make them become part of the RTK, and the dissatisfaction during the work process there, as well as the lack of willingness to leave RTK in spite of being dissatisfied with the developments within the RTK.

The RTK journalists act as employees who are aware of the influence over them by the discouraging factors in terms of exercising their profession within the public media, and their day to day activity is characterized by: distress, despair, and revolt expressed through protests about their position.

However, in spite of the professional restrictions, for its journalists the RTK appears to be the best alternative in the media market of Kosovo. Asked whether RTK is the media outlet where they plan to continue their career or whether they are thinking of leaving to another media outlet, 11 of the interviewees link their decision to stay within the RTK. One of the journalists justifies as followed the decision to be part of the RTK even in the future:

“The privately-owned media outlets are worse in the professional and financial aspects. They are often dependent to the extreme by various interest groups and they are far worse in terms of income, do not respect contracts”. (IJ13)

This standing of the public media outlet in Kosovo within the media market appears as a determining factor when journalists make the decision to become or to continue being part of it. In the editorial area they have restricted opportunities to achieve professional goals but expressing dissatisfaction does not endanger their jobs as may be the case with the privately-owned media.

In perspective, in case the overall situation in terms of the functioning of the public media improves, these circumstances may be preconditions for the improvement of the situation of journalists. Five interviewees emphasize in the arguments of their answers that in spite of the current political instrumentalization, RTK is a public media and this status offers them the opportunity to insist within the media to realize their professional requests. One of the journalists responded as follows:

“As a journalist I should give my contribution and continue to insist on quality and professionalism striving to avoid pressure and eventual blackmail”. (IJ20)

This way of perceiving the engagement with the RTK is an indicator that depending on the circumstances within the media environment in Kosovo, the public media in the future will continue to attract experienced journalists, or may lose them in the period of any eventual changes of the conditions of the media market. The way how the involvement in the public media outlet in Kosovo is perceived it reflects the trend followed by its development in the media market, and is expected to continue in the future. As students of journalism, media and communication in Kosovo state, the priorities offered by their engagement in the public sector shall remain determining factors even in the future. The preference to be part of the public media outlet does not stem from the credibility and status of the public media but is rather an alternative to the economic conditions it offers. This reflects the continuation of a trend according to which, the public broadcaster of Kosovo is first of all seen as an opportunity to secure a job and as such, it will continue to be the media outlet for which journalists shall accept “professional compromise” from the moment they join the staff. With this model of functioning the inter-dependency created between the economic and professional components shall continue to affect the position of the journalists within the newsrooms and their level of professional autonomy.

Discussion and Conclusions

The status of the public media in a market dominated by the privately-owned media in Kosovo, as a country with a low level of economic development and problems with the application of the employees' rights, enables the Radio Television of Kosovo to be a competitive company in the market, and an attractive media for the journalists.

It attracts the categories of professional journalists who consider it as the best alternative in an instable market and where the media outlets are linked with the interest groups, which influence on impairing the opportunity to realize professional autonomy and the rights as media employees. The other category of journalists employed with the RTK stems from the clientelist relations of the company with the factors that have political influence over the RTK, in the framework of the process of instrumentalization of the public media.

With its staff recruitment policies, RTK creates mixed structures of newsrooms, through which the hierarchical authority of the company realizes the editorial policy in favor of the political power, which is achieved through that category of clientelist journalists and by violating the professional autonomy of the professional journalists.

The influence of the politics that is achieved through the decision making rights on strategic issues pertaining to the development of the RTK and the election of the management bodies goes from the managerial level to the professional level of newsrooms through the principle of "force" that is realized by the middle management of the organizational structure of the company.

The professional journalists are therefore faced with contradicts created by the legal status of the public media with the requests from the hierarchy of the media to exercise the editorial policy that is against the social and professional responsibilities of a public media. Their autonomy is violated and restricted by the hierarchy of the media, which, by applying the external political influence on the company, reduces within the newsrooms the role of that category of journalists who are not connected with the political power.

The RTK journalists cultivate self-censorship as a protective measure from the pressure of the hierarchy while they face the censorship and lack of support from the public media in those cases when they oppose the editorial policy. The organized objection within the media and the public denouncing of instances of censorship bring only partial and short-term results which do not influence on changing the way how the editorial policy of the RTK is organized.

The long-term effects of the bottom-up pressure to improve the position of the journalists in the newsroom and to increase the level of professional autonomy is expected in the framework of any eventual restructuring of the eventual general relationship of the company with the external influencing factors and the circumstances in the media market of Kosovo.

The RTK news journalists react as employees who rationally decide on selecting the company where they will exercise their profession by intertwining this with the economic principle and the status of the public media outlet. RTK risks being transformed from the "best alternative" to a media outlet that is not attractive for them during the eventual change of the conditions of the employees in the media market in Kosovo.

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