

Kosovo: Profile of Media Ownership and Potential Foreign Influence Channels

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Introduction

What are the entry points for foreign actors to shape and influence the narrative in the Kosovar media market? This profile seeks to address some of the entry points related to media ownership and Russian state-owned media. AidData recognizes that malign influence may affect narrative creation in other ways, including the republishing of foreign content in domestic media outlets, interactions on social media, and journalist biases. However, this project focuses solely on direct and indirect ownership of traditional domestic media outlets to identify potential entry points for Russian influence through elites and media owners. By better understanding Kosovo's domestic media ownership environment, including what media outlets citizens consume and who the owners of those outlets are, we can anticipate entry points where malign actors may try to influence domestic narratives.

Laws that require media ownership transparency do exist in Kosovo, yet owners of media are not always known to the public.¹ Currently, the Independent Media Commission (IMC), Kosovo's media oversight and regulation body, only requires broadcaster outlets in television and radio to declare ownership. The Press Council of Kosovo, a non-governmental, self-regulatory body, requires its print and online outlet members to disclose ownership information but participation in this body remains voluntary. Since owners of top media houses have the potential to influence the content and tone of topics covered by journalists in their employ, understanding who owns the media is crucial to identifying avenues for influence and potential bias in reporting. In this profile, we begin to close this gap with an in-depth look at domestic media ownership in Kosovo.

This media ownership profile and the supporting data were prepared by AidData, a research lab at William & Mary's Global Research Institute.² The data for this profile was collected manually by AidData staff and student research assistants. We began by conducting web searches to identify a list of media in Kosovo, and then identified a list

¹ IREX (2021) Kosovo: Vibrant Barometer Information, pg. 7. URL: <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/vibe-kosovo-2021.pdf>.

² This profile is part of a collaboration with the USAID E&E Bureau made possible through a buy-in to a Higher Education Solutions Network cooperative agreement (AID-A-12-00096) in place between USAID/LAB/HESN, AidData, and William & Mary.

of the top-ranked outlets in terms of overall consumption. We then used this information to gather ownership data from available sources, including Kosovar government registries (e.g., IMC and the Kosovo Business Registration Agency), survey data, media watchdog sources, and other open source data.³

In the following sections, we provide summary data on the presence of Russian state-owned media, top outlets, and media ownership in Kosovo as of 2021. This profile focuses on the ownership of traditional broadcast, print, and online media outlets. Social media is not included in this analysis. By mapping out the ownership and influence of traditional forms of media, these profiles lend insights into potential channels for foreign influence in the top consumed outlets.

Russian Media Footprints

The most direct form of Kremlin influence in Kosovo's media landscape is via Russian state-owned media (see Table 1). Two of the eleven Russian state-owned media outlets we tracked have a physical presence in Kosovo, which provides the Kremlin with a weak channel to directly communicate with, and ultimately influence, Kosovar citizens. Physical presence includes physical infrastructure, such as cable packages, physical office space or local bureaus, and radio broadcasters, but excludes satellite broadcasting and online or streaming availability. Table 1 provides a footprint of Russian state-owned media presence in Kosovo, but does not speak to how well-consumed each outlet is by Kosovo citizens.

³ Due to a lack of data, we were unable to use cross-country sources, like Zenith's Market & Media Intelligence database for traditional media reach and Alexa for web traffic.

Table 1: Russian state-owned media in Kosovo, 2021

Television		Print		Radio		News Agency	
Russia I	✗	Rossiyskaya Gazeta	✗	Sputnik	✗	TASS	✗
Russia 24	✗					Sputnik	✗
Russia K	✗						
RTR-Planeta	✗						
TV Centre	✗						
Channel One	✓						
RT	✓						

Other indirect forms of Russian influence are possible, including domestic outlets republishing narratives and pro-Russian journalists in-country. In this profile, AidData has captured direct Russian channels of influence through state-owned media infrastructure.

Top Media Outlets

Table 2 identifies the top five most-consumed media outlets in Kosovo by medium (television, print, radio, and online) based on cross-sectional indicators such as viewership share and circulation.⁴ Although Kosovo has one of the highest internet penetration levels in Europe,⁵ television remains the most frequently used medium for political news and information.⁶ While we cannot know the exact influence of each

⁴ Since all top media are Albanian-language outlets, we do not include any Kosovar Serb outlets that produce content in Serbian.

⁵ Kosovo Digital Agenda Observatory (2021) Country Report and Roadmap for Digital Agenda advancement in Kosovo, p. 12. URL: <https://opendatakosovo.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Kosovo-DAO-2021.pdf>. Accessed February 28, 2022.

⁶ Center for Insights in Survey Research. Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Kosovo (September 3-18, 2021). International Republican Institute, p. 54. URL: <https://www.iri.org/resources/iri-kosovo-poll-shows-strong-desire-among-youth-to-leave-dim-views-on-economy-and-corruption-strong-support-for-western-institutions/>. Accessed February 28, 2022.

individual outlet, we can assume that outlets that reach higher numbers of consumers have greater potential to influence more citizens.

AidData used a weighted average of media consumption survey rankings from 2017 to 2021 to determine the top media outlets in Kosovo. This strategy offers a more long-term perspective of top media outlets, rather than a snapshot of the top media outlets right now. As such, the top outlets may not exactly reflect the current order of most consumed outlets, but do show a solid picture of the media landscape over the past five years. Recent rankings are weighted more heavily to adjust for new changes.⁷

Table 2: Top Kosovar media outlets ranked by overall consumption

Rank	Television	Print	Radio	Online
1	RTK	Koha Ditore	Radio Dukagjini	Gazetaexpress.com
2	RTV21	Kosova Sot	Radio Kosova	Telegrafi.com
3	Klan Kosova	Zëri	Radio Kosova	Koha.net
4	Kohavision (KTV)	Bota Sot	Radio 21	Kosovapress.com
5	T7	Epoka e Re	Radio Blue Sky	Insajderi.com

According to findings from an AidData survey of regional and local media experts in 2021, the majority of top Kosovar outlets mirror the results of open-source data collection by AidData researchers. However, additional outlets excluded from this top outlet list but ranked highly by local experts include the television channel TV Dukagjini, the newspaper Gazeta Express, the radio station Radio K4, and the web portal Botasot.info.

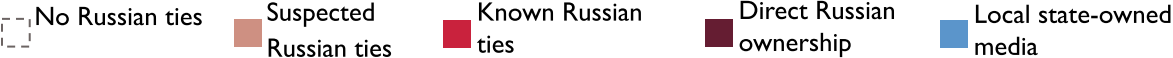
⁷ We calculated television, radio, print, and online rankings using multiple publicly available surveys and circulation data, including an AidData survey of country and regional experts conducted in summer 2021. Additional survey data came from: Alban Zeneli Report (2020), the European Union (EU) Mission in Kosovo (2019), IREX's Media Sustainability Index (2019), the University for Business and Technology Kosovo (UBT) Knowledge Center (2019), Digital Media (EU Report) (2018), and the Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (KRCT) (2017).

Media Ownership

Table 3 lists the ownership information of top Kosovar media outlets by medium (television, newspaper, radio, and online). In 2005, before Kosovo declared independence from Serbia, the Independent Media Commission was created to require broadcasters to declare ownership. The Kosovo Press Council requires a similar declaration for print and online media firms, though participation in this non-governmental organization is voluntary. As a result of these institutions, the ownership of many of these outlets was relatively transparent. Further examples of ownership ties and relationships are discussed in the following section.

In order to highlight which outlets may be more susceptible to Russian influence, AidData staff have devised a four-point scale to indicate levels of Russian ownership. This scale is color-coded shades of red in the table below to indicate 1) Direct Russian ownership, 2) Known Russian ties, 3) Suspected Russian ties, and 4) No Russian ties. Additionally, Kosovo state-owned media is color-coded blue. In Kosovo, no owners had suspected or known ties to the Russian government, and none had direct Russian ownership. As such, this profile has zero red color-coded outlets and four designations of state-owned media.

Table 3: Ownership of top Kosovar media outlets by share



Medium	Rank	Outlet	Owner, Company	Owner, Individuals	Owner (%)
Television	1	RTK 1	Government of the Republic of Kosovo		100
	2	RTV21	Company 21	Aferdita Saraçini-Kelmendi	60
	3	Klan Kosova	Company 21	Eugen Saraçini	20
				Forin Kelmendi	10
				Xheraldina Vula	10
	3	Klan Kosova	KGO Media Investment Ltd.	Kushtrim Gojani	100
4	Kohavision (KTV)	Koha Group	Flaka Surroi	100	

Print	5 T7	MediaWorks	Berat Buzhala	100
	1 Koha Ditore	Koha Group	Flaka Surroi	100
	2 Kosova Sot	Interpress Company	Ruzhdi Kadriu	100
	3 Zëri	Zëri Publishing Enterprise	Remzi Ejupi	50
			Lazim Destani	50
	4 Bota Sot	Media Print	Xhevdet Mazrekaj	100
5 Epoka e Re	Muhamet Mavraj B.I.	Muhamet Mavraj	100	
Radio	1 Radio Dukagjini	Dukagjini Group	Ekrem Lluka	100
	2 Radio Kosova 1	Government of the Republic of Kosovo		100
	3 Radio Kosova 2	Government of the Republic of Kosovo		100
	4 Radio Blue Sky	Government of the Republic of Kosovo		100
	5 Radio 21	Company 21	Aferdita Saraçini-Kelmendi	60
Eugen Saraçini			20	
Forin Kelmendi			10	
Xheraldina Vula			10	
Online	1 Gazetaexpress.com	MediaWorks	Berat Buzhala	100
	2 Telegrafi.com	Telegrafi	Gentian Lluka	100
	3 Koha.net	Koha Group	Flaka Surroi	100
	4 Kosovapress.com	A.L. Kosova Press SH.P.K.	Skënder Krasniqi	100
	5 Insajderi.com	Insider, L.L.C	Vehbi Kajtazi	50
Parim Olluri			50	

Results

Television

Television is the most consumed and trusted medium in Kosovo.⁸ State-run outlet RTK 1 is the most watched television channel in the country. While it remains popular among Kosovars, RTK 1's funding relies entirely on state coffers, which makes it vulnerable to political influence.⁹

The second most watched outlet is RTV21, which is majority owned by the Saraçini-Kelmendi family through Company 21. Aferdita Saraçini-Kelmendi holds the largest share (60%) of Company 21, followed by her brother Eugen Saraçini (20%), and her husband Forin Kelmendi (10%). Xheraldina Vula, a long-time collaborator and business partner of Saraçini-Kelmendi, owns the remaining 10%. Company 21 also owns other program service providers, including 21 Plus, 21 Popullore, 21 MIX, 21 Junior, 21 News Business, and the TV21-Kosovo web portal. RTV21 Macedonia operates in neighboring North Macedonia and has the same ownership structure.

The owners of RTV21 seem to have close ties to the United States. Early donors to the media outlet were USAID and the US-based Open Society Institute Media Program.¹⁰ Saraçini-Kelmendi also serves as a board member of both the Kosovo Committee at the Kosovo American Education Fund and the American Chamber of Commerce in

⁸ Information on consumption from Petković et al. (2020) National Data Overview: Kosovo; Sustainability of Professional Journalism in the Media Business Environment of the Western Balkans. European Union, p. 13. URL:

<http://tacso.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Sustainability-of-Professional-Journalism-in-WB-Study-National-Data-Overview-KOSOVO-final.pdf>. Accessed February 28, 2022. Information on trust from National Democratic Institute (2021) Kosovo: Public Opinion Survey, April 2021. URL:

<https://www.ndi.org/publications/ndi-kosovo-public-opinion-poll-april-2021>. However, an expert interviewed by AidData staff suggested this trust is more heavily concentrated in the older generation, with younger citizens less trusting of broadcast television.

⁹ IREX (2019) Kosovo: Media Sustainability Index, p. 5. URL:

<https://www.irex.org/resource/vibrant-information-barometer-vibe>. Accessed February 28, 2022. State funding also comes through USAID, so the USG indirectly provides partial support for KTV.

¹⁰ Berisha, Isuf (2015) Media Ownership and Finances in Kosovo: Legal Vacuum and Lack of Transparency. Peace Institute, p. 5. URL:

https://mediaobservatory.net/sites/default/files/Media%20Ownership%20and%20Finances%20in%20Kosovo_0.pdf. Accessed February 28, 2022.

Kosovo. These ties keep her connected to the Kosovar diaspora, particularly in the United States.

The third most consumed television outlet is Klan Kosova. Officially, KGO Media Investment Ltd. owns the outlet, and KGO Media is directly owned by Kushtrim Gojani. However, its ownership structure lacks transparency, with multiple sources suggesting partial ownership by the Devolli Group.¹¹ Though we cannot confirm an ownership stake, the Devolli Group did donate a building to the Klan Kosova channel sometime between 2013 and 2015, with renovations worth 2.4 million euros.¹² BalkanInsight recently reported that the Devolli Group owns firms in various sectors through shell companies in order to avoid being penalized for exceeding the number of tax breaks allowed to a single owner on clean energy.¹³ Also, the Devolli Group is one of the main business supporters of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), and Klan Kosova is perceived as reporting on the PDK favorably.¹⁴

The fourth most watched outlet is KTV, also known as Kohavision TV. Flaka Surroi directly owns KTV through the Koha Group. Her brother Venton Surroi founded the outlet but transferred ownership to his sister Flaka in 2004 when he founded the political party ORA. ORA has since merged with the Democratic League of Kosovo, a seat-holding party in the legislative assembly.

The Koha Group has other media and telecommunications holdings, including Arta TV, the daily newspaper Koha Ditore, popular news portal Koha.net, the Koha Print printing plant, Koha Publishing House and the internet service provider Koha Net. In the past, the Koha Group has been openly supportive of Vetëvendosje, a Kosovar

¹¹ Hoxha, Abit (2020) Media Landscape in Kosovo: Hate and Propaganda Influences. Resilience, p. 6. URL: <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/resilience-for-media-free-of-hate-and-disinformation/>. Accessed February 29, 2022.; Petković et al. (2020) National Data Overview: Kosovo; Sustainability of Professional Journalism in the Media Business Environment of the Western Balkans. European Union, pg. 8; Berisha, Isuf (2015) Media Ownership and Finances in Kosovo: Legal Vacuum and Lack of Transparency. Peace Institute, pg. 6.

¹² Berisha, Isuf (2015) Media Ownership and Finances in Kosovo: Legal Vacuum and Lack of Transparency. Peace Institute, pg. 16.

¹³ Prebreza, Visar and Jeta Xharra. "Unclean Energy: The Kosovar Who Would Own the Sun." BalkanInsight. Published June 2, 2020. URL: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/06/02/unclean-energy-the-kosovar-who-would-own-the-sun/>. Accessed February 28, 2022.

¹⁴ Berisha, Isuf (2015) "Media Ownership and Finances in Kosovo: Legal Vacuum and Lack of Transparency." Peace Institute, pg. 7.

political party also active in Albania.¹⁵ In the April 2021 national elections, Vetëvendosje won a majority in the legislative assembly and the current Albanian Prime Minister Albin Kurti is a member.

The fifth most consumed outlet is T7, whose ownership is unclear. While Kosovo's business registration and Kosovo's Independent Media Commission registry currently list MediaWorks as its direct owner, identifying the ultimate owner remains difficult. Kosovo's business registration lists A.B.C. Management as MediaWorks' owner but does not provide further information. However, a 2020 report commissioned by the European Union¹⁶ and Kosovo's Independent Media Commission registry points to Berat Buzhala as MediaWorks' ultimate owners.¹⁷ Given firmer evidence points to Buzhala, we list him as T7's ultimate owner. Buzhala was a former deputy of the Democratic Party of Kosovo and is still visible as an active member. MediaWorks also owns the popular Gazeta Express Internet news portal.

In sum, we find the ownership of top Kosovar television channels diverse, though difficult to identify at times. Each of the the top-five outlets does seem to have a different owner, which promotes diversity of narratives and ideas in Kosovar television content and increases resilience to influence on television content. Despite difficulties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, new private channels like K10 and ATV have recently entered the market, furthering this diversity.¹⁸ However, outlet ownership by a single owner and murky or overt political ties do leave some outlets less resilient, as a

¹⁵ In Albania's April 2021 elections, Vetëvendosje supported three candidates for the Albania Assembly. See Taylor, Alice. "Albanian Election Live Blog: Morning." Exit News. Published April 25, 2021. URL: <https://exit.al/en/2021/04/25/albanian-election-live-blog-morning/>. Accessed February 28, 2022.

¹⁶ Petković et al. (2020) National Data Overview: Kosovo; Sustainability of Professional Journalism in the Media Business Environment of the Western Balkans. European Union, p. 8.

¹⁷ Reports from Macedonian sources suggest ABC News Albania purchased T7 and Gazeta Express in 2020, though these reports name Klodjan Allajbeu as the station's ultimate owner: (i) "Shitet Gazeta Express dhe TV T7, ja kush janë pronarët e rinj." Almakos. Published June 6, 2020. URL: <https://almakos.com/ekskluzive-lajmi-i-fundit-shitet-gazeta-express-dhe-tv-t7-ja-kush-jane-pronaret-e-rinj/>. Accessed February 28, 2022; (ii) "Shitet Gazeta Express dhe TV T7, ja kush janë pronarët e rinj." Tetova 1. Published June 6, 2020. URL: <https://tetova1.com/lajmi-i-fundit-shitet-gazeta-express-dhe-tv-t7-ja-kush-jane-pronaret-e-rinj/>. Accessed February 28, 2022. AidData's own research on Albanian media ownership found that ABC News Albania is owned by Aleksandër Frangaj (50%) and Alba Gina (50%). With tepid evidence linking T7 to either of these owners, we present Berat Buzhala as the outlet's owner but note this opacity.

¹⁸ IREX (2021) Kosovo: Vibrant Barometer Information, p. 3.

malign foreign actor would need only to compromise a single individual or the political party tied to the outlet to influence its content.

Print

Newspapers in Kosovo have the least reach among the four major mediums.¹⁹ The print market has generally shrunk in Kosovo since the more dynamic post-war period, when international investors directed large sums of money into the country's media development. Low revenues and widespread access to the Internet have since weakened print media in the country.²⁰ However, newspapers backed by big companies continued to circulate in the country until the Covid-19 pandemic forced print outlets to shut down circulating physical newspapers and operate strictly online.²¹ While it is unclear when circulation will resume, we proceed with our analysis using the most recently available circulation data. The analysis also shows that some print media owners are owners of other businesses and use their paper to advocate and advance their own interests.

The most circulated newspaper is *Koha Ditore*, which is owned by Koha Group and its owner Flaka Surroi, discussed above. The second most circulated paper is *Kosova Sot*, directly owned by Ruzhdi Kadriu through Interpress Company. Besides *Kosova Sot*, Interpress Company owns other media-related firms, including a publishing house and Top Kosova Radio. Kadriu promotes his businesses through his newspaper, including negative coverage against anyone perceived to threaten his business interests.²² In 2014, *Kosova Sot*'s editor-in-chief Margarita Kadriu—daughter to owner Ruzhdi—was elected as a member of the Kosovo Assembly for the Democratic Party of Kosovo. She subsequently switched to the Independent Party and is no longer employed by the daily. USAID and the Open Society Institute supported *Kosova Sot* in Kosovo's early, post-war years.²³

The third most circulated paper is *Zëri*, owned by *Zëri Publishing Enterprise*, which in turn owns a number of other outlets in other mediums, including online media outlet

¹⁹ Petković et al. (2020) National Data Overview: Kosovo; Sustainability of Professional Journalism in the Media Business Environment of the Western Balkans. European Union, pg. 8.

²⁰ Berisha, Isuf (2015) Media Ownership and Finances in Kosovo: Legal Vacuum and Lack of Transparency. Peace Institute, p. 8, 10.

²¹ IREX (2021) Kosovo: Vibrant Barometer Information, p. 5.

²² Berisha, Isuf (2015) "Media Ownership and Finances in Kosovo: Legal Vacuum and Lack of Transparency." Peace Institute, pg. 8.

²³ Berisha, Isuf (2015) "Media Ownership and Finances in Kosovo: Legal Vacuum and Lack of Transparency." Peace Institute, pg. 8.

Zeri.info and cable TV channel Zëri TV. Lazim Destani and Remzi Ejupi own Zëri Publishing Enterprise and have investments in other businesses as well. Destani is a Macedonian national who owns Kosovatex Company in Kosovo and various businesses throughout the world. Ejupi owns the Eurokoha travel agency, the soccer team FC Prishtina, and several businesses in Germany. Here, we find another example of a paper advocating for the business interests of its owner. Zëri extensively covered the Pristina Airport's privatization while Eurokoha was actively submitting bids made available by this privatization; the paper criticized the Privatisation Agency of Kosovo and other companies submitting rival bids.²⁴

The next two papers are well circulated but do not have the backing of larger business firms, placing them in danger of being unable to sustain their operations, in the eyes of some observers.²⁵ The fourth most circulated paper is Bota Sot. The paper is owned by Media Print, which is solely owned by Xhevdet Mazrekaj. Though not tied to any large corporations, media watchdog groups reported a pro-Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) party bias in Bota Sot's coverage in the 2000s when the LDK controlled the Kosovar legislative assembly.²⁶ It is unclear whether this historical bias continues to be present in Bota Sot's reporting, as we did not find more recent sources to confirm a current political bias. Finally, the fifth most circulated newspaper is Epoka e Re, founded by long-time journalist and activist Muhamet Mavraj, who led the 1997 Kosovo student protests against the Yugoslav government. Mavraj has no overt political or foreign ties.

Overall, the analysis reveals reasons to be both optimistic and pessimistic about resilience to malign foreign influence in the Kosovar print sector. Like the television sphere, we find the top print outlets all possess different owners. This diversity strengthens defense against widespread influence of the most consumed print content, including from malign foreign actors. On the other hand, as in the Kosovar television space, we find a majority of single-owner outlets and ties to political parties, increasing vulnerability to influence. Given the uncertainty the Covid-19 pandemic has placed on

²⁴ Berisha, Isuf (2015) "Media Ownership and Finances in Kosovo: Legal Vacuum and Lack of Transparency." Peace Institute, pg. 9.

²⁵ Berisha, Isuf (2015) "Media Ownership and Finances in Kosovo: Legal Vacuum and Lack of Transparency." Peace Institute, pg. 8.

²⁶ Committee to Protect Journalists profile of murdered Bota Sot journalist Bardhyl Ajet. URL: <https://cpj.org/data/people/bardhyl-ajeti/>, accessed February 28, 2022. Freedom House (2004) Nations in Transit 2004: Kosovo. URL: <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/1240497.html>, accessed February 28, 2022.

funding for print media, it is unclear whether this industry will dissolve and become fully digital or return to circulating physical papers once again.

Radio

Radio attracts the third largest audience behind television and internet in Kosovo.²⁷ Ownership in this medium is generally transparent, and three of the top five outlets are state-owned. The most listened to station is the Dukagjini Group's Radio Dukagjini, owned entirely by oligarch Ekrem Lluka. The Dukagjini Group also owns TV Dukagjini, Publishing House Dukagjini, and Dukagjini Telecommunications, as well as a number of businesses in non-communications sectors like construction, hotels, insurance, investment, and tobacco. Analysts suggest Lluka uses his media to promote his business interests.²⁸ Recently, leaders of the Democratic Party of Kosovo have cut off communication with all Dukagjini-owned media because of their accused blatant bias in favor of the Vetëvendosje political party.²⁹

The second, third, and fourth most-listened to stations are state-owned Radio Kosova 1, Radio Kosova 2, and Radio Blue Sky. Radio Kosova 1 is primarily a music and entertainment station but also broadcasts the only daily, English-language news program on Kosovar radio. Radio Kosova 2 focuses more on news and information, broadcasting in Albanian, Serbian, Turkish, Bosnian and Roma. Radio Blue Sky was founded in 1999 by the United Nations Peacekeeping Operation in Kosovo and began broadcasted youth-centric content in Albanian, Serbian, and Turkish a few months after the Kosovo War.³⁰ It was managed by the UN and the Fondation Hironnelle before being turned over to the RTK in 2000. The fifth most-listened to station is Radio 21, owned by the aforementioned Saraçini-Kelmendi family and Xheraldina Vula through Company 21.

Kosovar radio contains the most ownership concentration of all the mediums we have covered so far. A single owner, the government, controls three of the top five radio

²⁷ Petković et al. (2020) National Data Overview: Kosovo; Sustainability of Professional Journalism in the Media Business Environment of the Western Balkans. European Union, pg. 8.

²⁸ Berisha, Isuf (2015) "Media Ownership and Finances in Kosovo: Legal Vacuum and Lack of Transparency." Peace Institute, pg. 20.

²⁹ Kosova Sot Online. "PDK: Kemi shkëputur çdo komunikimi me Dukagjinin dhe platformat tjera në pronësi të oligarkut Ekrem Lluka." A.P. January 21, 2021. URL: <https://www.kosova-sot.info/lajme/520500/pdk-kemi-shkeputur-çdo-komunikimi-me-dukagjinin-dhe-platformat-tjera-ne-pronesi-te-oligarkut-ekrem-lluka/>. Accessed February 28, 2022.

³⁰ Fondation Hironnelle. Radio Blue Sky - Kosovo. URL: <https://www.hironnelle.org/en/kosovo-en>. Accessed February 28, 2022.

channels in the country. This does not bode well for resilience against outside influence in this medium. If the government in power is compromised by a malign foreign power, this undue leverage can impose substantial effects on the narratives Kosovars consume through radio.

Online

Ninety percent of Kosovars have access to the Internet,³¹ with online outlets attracting an audience second in reach only to television.³² Though no law requires websites to publish ownership information, we found ownership of these top news portals fairly transparent. The most visited news portal is Gazetaexpress.com. Berat Buzhala owns Gazetaexpress.com through the firm MediaWorks, which also owns the television channel T7 discussed above. Gazetaexpress.com began as a print daily until it moved online in 2013 due to struggling sales and financial instability.³³ Despite its challenges as a physical newspaper, it has become the top web portal in Kosovo, as well as gaining popularity in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia as well.

The second most visited news portal is Telegrafi.com, which is owned solely by Gentian Lluka through the company Telegrafi. Gentian Lluka is also Telegrafi's CEO and son of Kosovar oligarch and Radio Dukagjini owner Elkem Lluka. Gentian Lluka remains involved in other telecom businesses, including Top Reklama (an outdoor advertisements company) and Smard (an e-commerce company). The news portal is also well-read in Albania.³⁴

The third most trafficked website is Koha.net. Owned by Flaka Surroi, this is the third outlet the Surroi family owns among the top outlets in Kosovo. Unlike the other two outlets owned by the Surroi family, USAID provides funding to Koha.net.³⁵ The fourth most visited website is Kosovapress.com. The web portal is directly owned by A.L. Kosova Press SH.PK, which is then owned by Skënder Krasniqi. Krasniqi is an

³¹ World Bank (2021) Development Indicators. URL: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=XK>. Accessed February 28, 2022.

³² Petković et al. (2020) National Data Overview: Kosovo; Sustainability of Professional Journalism in the Media Business Environment of the Western Balkans. European Union, pg. 8.

³³ Berisha, Isuf (2015) "Media Ownership and Finances in Kosovo: Legal Vacuum and Lack of Transparency." Peace Institute, pp. 10-11.

³⁴ Berisha, Isuf (2015) "Media Ownership and Finances in Kosovo: Legal Vacuum and Lack of Transparency." Peace Institute, pg. 11.

³⁵ Petković et al. (2020) National Data Overview: Kosovo; Sustainability of Professional Journalism in the Media Business Environment of the Western Balkans. European Union, pg. 8.

outspoken businessman and current chairman of the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce.³⁶ He does not seem to have overt ties to foreign actors or domestic political parties.

Finally, Insajderi.com is owned by Insider LLC, which is owned by Vehbi Kajtazi (50%) and Parim Olluri (50%).³⁷ The owners have no overt political or foreign ties, though Olluri was the target of physical attacks in 2017 for what appears to be his reporting.³⁸

Much like television and print, online media ownership is diverse in Kosovo. Ownership information is also transparent and relatively easy to find. However, four of the five outlets have single owners, which raises concerns and presents a potential channel for influence. Given the reach of the Internet and the growing trust Kosovars have in digital content,³⁹ online outlets will undoubtedly be an important space for malign foreign actors looking to influence narratives, as well as Kosovars looking to maintain an independent voice. Finally, given uncertainty around funding losses in the print sector, Gazetaexpress.com provides a successful model for print dailies to switch to a digital format and remain relevant in the country's media landscape.

Conclusion

In this brief we have identified several avenues by which foreign actors, including but not limited to the Kremlin, might influence the media landscape in Kosovo. The most direct path to influence is via Kremlin-owned media outlets operating in Kosovo

³⁶ Named as chairman in Kosovar media as of 2022. "Energy crisis, request to the Government to draft a plan for the protection of businesses." RTV 21. Published 2022. URL: <https://en.rtv21.tv/energy-crisis-requires-government-to-draft-business-protection-plan/>. Accessed February 28, 2022.

³⁷ We note a curious episode regarding ownership at insajderi.com. In 2020, Kajtazi and Olluri accused Florim and Ardian Alaj of hacking Insajderi and blocking their access to the domain. Florim and Ardian Alaj claimed they owned the outlet. A court indicted Florim and Ardian Alaj in mid-2020, and many sources back up the claim that they wrongfully hacked Insajderi. We were unable to find any updates on this case. However, the Kosovo National Business Registry does list Kajtazi and Olluri as the legal owners. A statement from the Association of Journalists of Kosovo condemns Forum and Ardian Alaj (as well as provides the basic facts of the events) here: <http://agk-ks.org/en/news/ajk-welcomes-the-indictment-for-the-attack-on-gazeta-online-insajderi/>, accessed February 28, 2022.

³⁸ Prishtina Insight. "Kosovo journalist Parim Olluri attacked in Prishtina" Published August 17, 2017. URL: <https://prishtinainsight.com/kosovo-journalist-parim-olluri-attacked-prishtina/>. Accessed February 28, 2022.

³⁹ IREX (2021) Kosovo: Vibrant Barometer Information, pg. 6.

through the two television channels operating there, Channel One and RT. Though official Russian state-owned media presence is relatively limited in-country, we find other foreign ties to domestic Kosovar ownership, including Albania and North Macedonia (via the Kosovar-Albanian diaspora) and the United States. However, three indirect paths emerge in our analysis that may contribute to the vulnerability of Kosovar media to foreign influence, including: (i) the concentration of ownership by families across mediums; (ii) business interests; and (iii) ties to political parties.

The first indirect path for potential foreign influence is through the concentration of media ownership. Our research indicates a handful of families own much of the top media in Kosovo. This includes the Surroi, Lluka, and Saraçini-Kelmendi families that own top media outlets in more than one medium. The Surroi family in particular owns outlets in television (Kohavision TV), print (Koha Ditore), and online media (Koha.net). Berat Buzhala also owns a top outlet in more than one medium. This concentration of ownership across mediums increases the amount of content vulnerable should a malign foreign influence co-opt the outlet's editorial position. A fully compromised Koha Group, for example, could have huge implications for the narratives and stories in multiple mediums that Kosovars consume. Additionally, the state owns four of the top media outlets—more than any single private owner. Given that these outlets operate on funding nearly wholly provided by the government, foreign influence in the government of Kosovo has the potential to significantly impact the media narratives that Kosovars consume.

Second, we find that the business interests of an owner can influence their outlet's content if they view it as a platform to advocate for and advance lucrative deals. Zëri and Radio Dukagjini are blatant examples in the print and radio sectors. This overt misuse of media likely contributes to the declining public trust in Kosovar media.⁴⁰ These outlets are vulnerable to malign influence if foreign actors compromise their owners and begin to advocate for the interest of the foreign actor, especially if the foreign interests align with an owner's business interests.

⁴⁰ National Democracy Institute. Kosovo Public Opinion Survey. Published March 2019. URL: <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Kosovo%20Public%20Opinion%20Poll%202019.pdf>. Accessed February 28, 2022. More recent polls from 2020 and 2021 confirm the low trust in radio but do not ask about newspapers.

The final avenue for influence is ties to political parties. Many outlets seem to have adopted stances in favor of one political party in Kosovo. One glaring example is the accusation that the Dukagjini Group, which owns media in radio and television, are so pro-Vetëvendosje that the Democratic Party of Kosovo refuses to communicate with them. Malign foreign actors may take advantage of these cozy relations to influence media narratives by co-opting or making deals with political parties.

Even with transparency laws and self-regulating standards set by the media sector, the identities of the individuals and companies who truly control many Kosovar outlets may be obscured. Such is the case with the potential control of Klan Kosova by the Devolli Group. However, we were able to find names of owners tied to media outlets using official, government sources. This is an important step to shore up transparency in Kosovo's media sector.