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A typology of the Albanian journalist today

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Introduction

In contrast with the other countries of Eastern Europe, the journalists¹ who had operated within the norms and the frame of the ruling ideology of the old system in Albania were forced to abandon the profession immediately after the fall of the regime. A new generation of journalists replaced them and started operating in a legislative vacuum, ignoring both legal and moral norms. This radical behavior marked the whole Albanian transition, as this study suggests. The local development of journalism in the last twenty years reflects clearly the efforts to fuse imported Western values into the existing cultural and traditional bed.

Specifically this paper raises two fundamental questions:

What is the profile of the Albanian journalist today?

Which are the features of the Albanian journalism?

As “professional culture” we are going to understand ‘the characteristic or presentation of journalism as an independent institution, as a profession and discourse within a concrete political, economic and cultural context’². According to this definition, we cannot reduce the complex dynamic of the journalistic culture into simply ethical, theoretical and systemic norms of a given profession.

Key words: *Journalist, post-communist media, survey, journalistic field, journalistic culture, professional ethics*

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¹ For practical reasons, in this paper, the term „journalist“ except in certain specific cases, will be mainly used in the masculine, but also means female journalists (JG).

² Hanitzsch, Thomas (2009) Comparing Media Systems Reconsidered: Recent Development and Directions for Future Research. *Journal of Global Mass Communication* 1(2), 111-117.

Development of the Albanian media

To make a profile of an Albanian journalist we need to know first the professional context in which he works. A general appearance of the Albanian media system allows us to justify not only the development of journalism in Albania after the democratic changes in the 90s, but also on understanding professional journalists. As the media always takes the shape and color of political and social structures in which it operates³, the media should be studied in relation to the development of the political system and society as a whole.

After the fall of the communist regime, supported media and democratic changes accompanied by propagating them, but it could not guide them. Among others, the two main reasons were: the nature of media-power cemented relationship during the old regime, and the lack of dissident journalists not in the tradition of Albanian media, benumbed from censorship and self-censorship for half a century⁴. The orientation of journalism in the first period cannot be said that it was clear to any particular model. Just like in politics, the media imagined democracy as opposed to dictatorship and totalitarianism, and the move itself sufficient to justify the publication of new newspapers. Journalism in this first period was not associated with any particular model. Just like in politics, the media democracy was pictured as the opposite of dictatorship and totalitarianism; it was sufficient to justify the publication of others newspapers.⁵

³Siebert, Fred S./Peterson, Theodore/Schram, Wilbour (1963) [1956]: *Four Theories of the Press*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press, fq. 1

⁴Boriçi, H./ Marku, M. (2011). *Histori e shtypit shqiptar. Nga fillimet deri në ditët tona*. Tiranë: shblu.

⁵In his analysis, Jakubowicz uses the term "mimetic orientation" of the media - a straight transplantation of the generalized Western media system with a free press - in contrast to the materialistic orientation (foreign investors would privatize newspapers immediately after the collapse of the system) (2007: 177).

The *first stage* of transition spans from June 1990 to March 1992, when the first multi-party election brought a democratic government to power. This stage was characterized by multitude of partisan newspapers. The press, with few exceptions, openly supported the party's policy and preserved in some way the propaganda model. Although new, it was still regarded as a tool to serve the party concerned, and to ensure its return to power. The first edition of *Rilindja Demokratike* (RD, Democratic Revival) on January 5, 1991 (a medium of the Democratic Party, founded in December 1990) is considered the start of the new pluralistic press. It was followed by *Republika* (Republican Party), *Alternativa SD* (Social-Democratic Party) etc. The new press underscored its role as the driving force behind public opinion, and moved away from the Leninist concept of collective propaganda and organizing the masses. On the other hand, the readers' thirst for more information was so great that *RD*, having only six pages, reported a circulation of 60,000 copies per day within a short time (some time later, the number would be reached and only surpassed by *Koha Jonë*).

The *second stage*, extending from 1993 to 1997, coincided with the birth and spread of independent newspapers and media, but also with the end of the first Democratic government term and the return to power of former communists. The process of de-monopolization and decentralization of state-owned media that had started in the previous stage, continued in this period. But whilst the state-owned media officially turned public, it continued to depend on the government financially, so the transformation of the media at this stage was rather formal than substantial. In terms of organization, the media at this stage displayed the same chaotic features of the political system. Above all, there was no legal framework regulating the activity of media and journalists. The first law on press, No. 7756 (1993), was taken without much modification from Germany's Westphalia region or consulting with stakeholders in the media. Its restrictions soon

⁶ For ease of analysis, in the following stages I will only refer to the corresponding years, not the months. Their exact operationalization will be presented as above (JG).

became clear and evoked the reaction of reporters. However, the law continued to remain in force until the second election in 1997, to be repealed and replaced by a new regulation for the press as formulated in these two sentences: "The press is free. Freedom of the press is protected by law." Even today, the press operates under this law, and proclaims "freedom". Instead of regulation, the law brought about further institutional chaos.

Independent newspapers established by journalists or former journalists experienced a period of great prosperity. We could mention "Koha Jonë", "Albania", "Dardania", "Populli Po", "Dita Informacion", and two other organs: "Gazeta Shqiptare" (published by an Italian journalist and adopted a Western style of writing), and "Rilindja" of Pristina, subdued by force in Tirana. Compared with other newspapers, the last two did not represent a certain local political wing; they aimed at professionalism⁷.

The press this time was "partisan", "revolutionary", and operated in a legal vacuum. It resembled a hybrid of private and "cooperative" press⁸ - which lacked even the most basic conditions of a professional press. There was no criterion for hiring journalists, their dismissal, contract regulation, the rights and obligations of journalists, editors, and media managers. So, the media went from extreme to extreme; from total control and regulation through political power and the laws then, to anarchic freedom. Self-management skills and self-regulation were required. Despite the decentralization of the media, the growing number of press organs, the adherence to Western norms

⁷Sami Neza (2010): Tregu i medias në këndvështrimin e marrëdhënieve mes aktorëve të komunikimit, Studime Albanologjike nr.3, fq. 286.

⁸ There were times when the staff was both a reporter and owner of the media - these very delicate structures failed, causing frustration among young journalists. They realized that journalists as *entrepreneurs* was a model borrowed from other circumstances, and thus, a bitter reality that highlighted the media-politics relationship, regardless of leaning. An example of this experimental model was *Independent* newspaper, founded by the shareholders/staff who left the biggest newspaper at that time, *Koha Jonë*. *Independent* would survive only a few months and close after the opposition party (Socialist Party) came to power on June 1997; its former editor in chief was elected member of parliament (JG).

of journalistic conduct, the journalists' perception of their profession remained true to moral and educational values. They treated citizens as voters, who had to know whom to vote for and the reasons behind their decision⁹.

The *third stage* of media transition spans from 1998 to date, establishment of electronic media and a legal framework to regulate it. Whereas the press legislation was subject to the same body of laws of 1993, the regulation of electronic media¹⁰ was thought carefully and in collaboration with stakeholders of radio and television stations. So far, the law has been amended seven times, detailing more and more aspects of the activity of electronic media, including private cable, satellite and analogue television. In 2007, the Parliament adopted the Law on Digital Broadcasting.

In particular, the emergence of two media companies and media it was at this time markup. Businessmen enriched by lucrative privatizations or other unknown ways ran both. *Top Channel TV* (2001), one of the most important TV-stations in Albania today, came on the market when the competition was almost negligible. Public television was still in a critical condition, with "ancient" technology and journalistic professionalism. Other private TV stations have tried to work, like *Shijak TV* (using a small apartment as TV-station, 1997), but could not become the market leader. With the era of private television stations a new source of income has emerged: advertisement, which would bring the journalism to the media market economy.

While in the print market, the newspaper "*Shekulli*" (The century) (1997) was the first to mix information with sensational journalism. This newspaper as well as other papers that emerged in this period resembled Western popular newspapers, which had served as layout model.

The development of television was followed by a burst of new radio stations. *Radio Tirana* was the only radio station (stately) until 1994, with a diversity of programs and a lot of listeners. *Radio Vlora*,

⁹ Compare to Comain (1994), when discussing the journalists' status in Romania after the fall of the communist regime.

¹⁰ Law No. 8410 "Public and Private Radio Television" (quoting Londo)

was the first private radio that paved the way for local and national radio development. *Top Albania Radio*, as part of the same media company as *Top Channel TV*, was the first private national radio (1998), which covers today 87 percent of the territory. In the same year we also have access to the broadcast of Radio +2, of the same media company as newspaper "*Shekulli*", which covers 72% of the territory.

Although these radios have limited audience compared to television, geographically they are covering more than televisions.

The media landscape today

Actually there are 26 daily papers published in Albania. From a political perspective, the press represents all political beliefs, the left and right one. The biggest daily newspaper has a circulation of 20,000 copies. Currently, the total circulation of all daily newspapers does not exceed 100,000 copies, while many newspapers do not sell more than 1,000 copies per day. One explanation is the ever-expanding spectrum of electronic media, and no doubt, it has advantages over print media. The existence of 26 dailies in a place with no more than three million people is beyond economic logic. Regarding television, there are 76 analog television stations, 75 cable stations, two private national television stations, two satellite television stations in addition to public television, which already broadcasts in two channels¹¹. The media landscape is complete with over 63 radio stations and two private national radio stations, besides public radio channels and its four regional branches.¹²

Methodology

To identify the distinctive features of Albanian journalism and cultural elements that affect its structure and system the author has

¹¹Londo, I. (2009). Pronësia e medias dhe ndikimi i saj në pavarësinë dhe pluralizmin e medias. *POLIS* (8), 35-53.

¹² List of licensed operators, KKRT, www.kkrt.gov.al.

made a survey (face-to-face) in spring 2012 with Albanian journalists in all the country, 295 persons in total.

123 journalists participated in the survey from TV, 28 from radio, 108 journalists from the print media (newspapers, magazines and weekly), 19 journalists from news agencies and 28 from online media. The data was analyzed using the SPSS 20 program. Three models provided guidance for the questionnaire: „World of Journalism Studies“¹³; „The American Journalist in the 21st Century“¹⁴ and „Journalismus in Deutschland II“¹⁵.

The method of sample selection: a group of 5, 8 or 11 journalists were selected at random from every newsroom (from an alphabetical list of names submitted by the media organization). 2 of them had to occupy senior managerial positions (program director, editor in chief, or vice editor in chief), and 3 to work as simple field reporters.

Data were also gathered for every selected media company, by evaluating materials obtained from internal sources like newsrooms, and information on the Web. Comparison of the data reflects the editorial decision-making hierarchy and its associated problems¹⁶.

The chosen model makes it possible to collect and analyze data in three planes of journalism culture:

on the level of *media actors* (journalists), by the standardized or partly standardized questionnaire, with open and closed questions.

on the level of media organization and the media system.

¹³<http://www.worldsofjournalism.org>

¹⁴Weaver, B. B. (Ed.). (2007). *The American Journalist in the 21st Century: US News People at the Dawn of a New Millennium*. New Jersey: LEA (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates).

¹⁵Weischenberg/Malik/Scholl. (2006). *Die Soufflere der Mediengesellschaft: Report über die Journalisten in Deutschland*. Konstanz: UVK.

¹⁶Hanitzsch, T. (2006). *Comparing Journalism Across Cultural Boundaries: State of the art, strategies, problems and solutions*. In M. Löffelholz, & David Weaver, *Journalism Research in an Era of Globalization*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Demographic Data

Geographic Distribution of journalists

According to the survey, Albanian journalists come mainly from urban areas (96%). The most represented cities are Tirana with nearly 39%, Shkodra 7.8%, Fier 5.9%, and Elbasan 5.2% (see tab. 1). At a first glance it seems Albanian journalism is a metropolitan one. This can be blamed on the demographic movement in the last 20 years. This becomes even clearer if we see that 40.7% of respondents in the age-group 20-29 years to the question: „Where have they lived until the age of 18?“ - answered „in Tirana“.

Their age coincides exactly with the collapse of the system 1991, afterwards people could move without any hindrance. Significant however is the fact that respondents over 50 years (46.7%) in this survey, say they lived in Tirana. So the capital was under Communism the centre where journalists were recruited. This explains the concentration of media in a single center and the fail of media in other cities in the country.

While only 3.4% of respondents say they come from the village. Although these figures, as they are very personal, should be taken with caution and within a given context.

Tab. 1: Geographic distribution by age

	20-29 years	30-39 years	40-49 years	over 50 years	Total (%)
Tirana	40.7	33.3	44.8	46.7	38.5
Shkodra	8.5	5.6	6.9	20.0	7.8
Elbasani	3.4	4.6	13.8	6.7	5.2
Korça	6.8	1.9	3.4	13.3	4.8
Fieri	4.2	7.4	10.3	0.0	5.9
Vlora	4.2	2.8	6.9	0.0	3.7
Durresi	4.2	3.7	3.4	6.7	4.1
Others	28.0	40.7	10.3	6.7	30.0
N	118	108	29	15	270
Total	100	100	100	100	100

In early 1990 journalists in the media represented all the country. The first generation of journalists came mainly from the Faculty of Philology and History, Language and Literature Faculty. According to the tradition of Albanian journalism: a journalist is someone who knows how to write well (has more in common with a writer)¹⁷. During communism journalists working as correspondents were placed in their home districts. That changed in the early 90s. The main target city to work and live in the past 22 years has been undoubtedly Tirana. Also Tirana has been from the early 1920, and then during communism, the most concentrated area of media companies and the most important radio and TV stations.

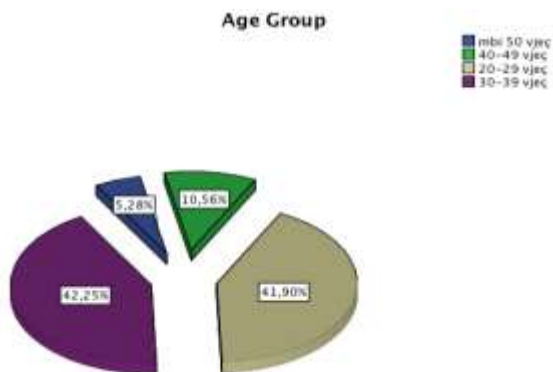
Age and Gender

From the collected data we can say that the Albanian Journalism is female. The female journalists were 52% of the sample. "She" is 31 years old, has a degree in journalism and a monthly average income of 31,000 – 40,000 Albanian Lek (270-370 \$).

If we look at the distribution of journalists according to their media, we discover that their percentage is higher in television (43.7%) and especially on the radio (11.3%). While male dominate in online media (5.7%).

The average age of the Albanian journalists is 32.5 years. In comparison with female colleagues, the male journalists (48%) have an average age of 34.5 years and earn 41.000-50.000 ALL (380\$-460\$). This is the first survey that shows that women are the majority in the Albanian journalism.

¹⁷Boriçi, H./ Marku, M. (2011). *Histori e shtypit shqiptar. Nga fillimet deri në ditët tona*. Tiranë.



If we look at the age distribution among reporters, we notice that Albanian journalism is relatively young. Their average age is 32.5 years; the majority fall under the age group of 30-39 category (42.3%), followed closely by journalists aged 20-29 who represent 41.9%. Journalists over the age of 40 account for 15.9%, of whom 10.6% are aged 40-49; the number of journalists over 50 is significantly lower (5.3%).

If we look at the distribution of age groups according to the type of media that is significant that the younger age group (20-29 years) is working in online media (83.3%), against journalists who work in traditional media (over 50 years) mainly in radio (17.9%) or in TV (48.1%) from the age-group 30-39 years.

This distribution is not surprising, considering that the younger generation is more about technology and new media.

Tab. 2: Age-group for each media (në %)

Age Group	Press	TV	Radio	News Agency	Online Media
20-29 years	37,7	47,5	17,9	37,5	83,3
30-39 years	48,1	41,8	32,1	43,8	16,7
40-49 years	10,4	6,6	32,1	12,5	0,0
> 50 years	3,8	4,1	17,9	6,2	0,0
Total (%)	100	100	100	100	100
N=284	106	122	28	16	12

If we look at the distribution of age of media ownership (Table 3), we can find the young journalists in private media and the older ones in state and public media. Respectively, the average age of journalists working in den Albanian broadcast is 42,3 years old, in the state ATSH is 35,4 years, and in the private media 31,1 years old.

Tab. 3: Journalists Age and Media Ownership

Media Ownership	Average(years)	N	Standard Variance
Purely private ownership	31,1	246	7,3
Purely public ownership	42,2	16	10,3
Purely state ownership	35,4	11	11,4
Mixed ownership but mostly public	45,6	11	13,2
Total	32,5	284	8,7

In the editorial hierarchy vast majority of women journalists 61% are reporters. In the meantime 60% of male colleagues work as manager, editor in chief etc.

Income

Albanian journalists are paid relatively well compared to average wages in other sectors and occupations by Statistics INSTAT¹⁸. 53% of journalists received a monthly salary of 31,000-60,000 alb. lek (280-560\$). None of the respondents earned less than 30,000 lek (280\$) per month. Journalists working in Radio (38.5%) were paid less (280-380 \$). Journalists working in the press and television are both good paid (350-560\$). By the news agencies the common salary is between 380-480 \$.

¹⁸The average monthly salary in Albania is 230 \$. There are some differences between the private and the state sector. Data taken from the Albanian Statistical Institute: <http://www.instat.gov.al/al/themes/pagat-dhe-të-ardhurat.aspx> (28 May 2013).

Salary distribution within the editorial room is not proportional. While a young reporter get 280 \$ per month, top executives, editors in chief received 3-4 times more. However, the income of journalists in the capital is at least two times more than in the other cities (local media).

Education

The Albanian journalist has studied journalism or communication. 64% of respondents hold a bachelor degree, while 32.2% have a Masters degree. Only 4 journalists (1.4%) admitted to have completed the high school. It is noticeable that female journalists prefer to study for a master degree (38%), while their male colleagues are satisfied with Bachelor (71%). Education of journalists is mainly done at the University of Tirana, Department of Journalism and Communication. While only 27% of journalists surveyed appear to have studied in different fields as journalism and communication. 73% say they were graduated in journalism or communication, or both of them (11%).

These figures show that the profession of journalists in Albania is standardized therefore their socialization in the workplace should be of great importance.

Journalists at their workplace

If we were to add the average number of hours used every day by journalists, and select the most representative responses, e.g. over 50% of the respondents (a total of 295), then we can find out the average number of hours that most journalists devote to their profession. Let's look once again at the categories of daily activity:

- 1) search/research (171 min, N= 273);
- 2) drafting/editing journalistic texts (125 min, N=283);
- 3) selection of additional information (77 min, N=262);
- 4) organizational activities (newsroom meetings, other meetings, etc.) (64 min, N=234);

- 5) editing press releases and news agency stories (54 min, N=221) and
 6) editing texts by colleagues/collaborators (88 min, N=149).

Tab. 4: Daily Activity -Average time per day

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Search/Research	273	0:20	12:00	2:51	1:46
taking care of media outlet's website	73	0:10	12:00	2:29	2:45
drafting/editing journalistic texts	283	0:02	8:00	2:05	1:46
Field taping	80	0:10	4:00	1:59	1:05
Others	14	0:30	8:00	1:49	2:00
Layout	33	0:10	5:00	1:37	1:20
Programming, production	12	0:30	5:00	1:35	1:20
editing texts by colleagues/collaborators	149	0:05	12:00	1:28	1:42
cutting, editing, etc	101	0:10	8:00	1:19	1:14
contact with the public (readers, viewers, etc.)	129	0:05	8:00	1:12	1:14
selection of additional information	262	0:03	8:00	1:11	1:14
PR, media marketing	35	0:10	7:00	1:10	1:26
Moderation	62	0:05	6:00	1:09	1:01
Organizational activities (newsroom meetings, other meetings, etc.)	234	0:05	8:00	1:04	0:58
editing press releases, news agency stories	221	0:02	8:00	0:54	1:13

On average, a journalist conducts his daily activity for approximately 479 minutes, or 9 hours and 39 minutes. Such a result indicates that in a given week, the Albanian journalist may do more

than 40 hours of work. This figure is backed up by previous surveys conducted with field journalists. Affected by this situation were particularly journalists of print media, mainly of daily newspapers, which come out throughout the week without leaving time for journalists to relax or calm down from the intensity¹⁹.

Technology and the new media

The survey finds out that the internet is used intensively. When asked about daily internet use, 293 Albanian journalists responded they spend an average of 6 hours and 17 minutes on the internet, of which 289 journalists use it for journalistic research for about 4 hours and 42 minutes. Given that we did not explicitly ask what they mean by internet search (online) in the framework of their profession and general online search, there is no way of knowing precisely whether online research is an added value of daily research or simply replaces it. When asked the question about how much time they spend taking care of their media outlet's website, journalists responded an average of 2 hours and 29 minutes (or 149 minutes). As it can be seen, this activity is most intensive after the search and research for information and news. This is stated by about 1/3 of the respondents. One does notice the difference in drafting texts (compiling) by 24 fewer minutes. Yet, this data may lead to misleading conclusions as one shortcoming of the survey is that it doesn't definitely establish what is "taking care of the website of the media outlet" they work in.

Professional Ethics

When asked about the factors that affect their worldview in daily work ethic, journalists consider „Family Education“ as the most important, with an average value of 4.2 (on a grading from 1 to 5). This response is interesting because it shows that the family still plays

¹⁹Londo, Ilda (2008): Albania, in: „Labor Relations and Media: Analyzing Patterns of Labor Relations in the Media of SEENPM Member Countries“, CHIȘINĂU/MOLDOVA, fq. 82.

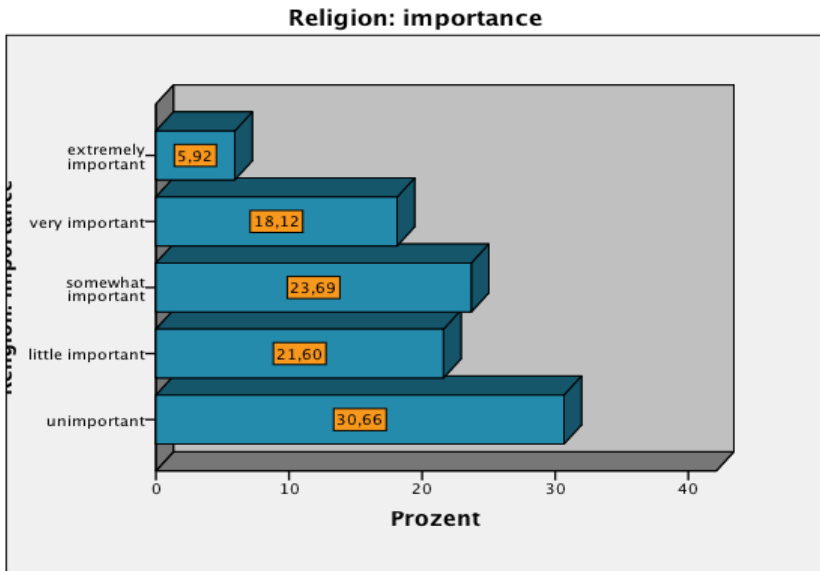
a major role in education and transmission of human and moral values, as it seems even professional ones. Also important is the socialization in the newsroom, the own personal experience in the field they work, and the role of the media executives.

Tab. 5: Influences on ethics of journalists

	N	Minimu m	Maximu m	Mean	Std. Deviation
Religious practice	293	1	5	1.9	1.184
Publisher, media owner	293	1	5	3.0	1.164
Ethics seminars	294	1	5	3.0	1.141
Professors in the university	293	1	5	3.1	1.174
Internet	294	1	5	3.3	1.216
Professional publications	294	1	5	3.3	1.062
Editors, editor in chief	295	1	5	3.3	1.009
Personal professional experience	295	1	5	4.1	0.768
Family education	295	1	5	4.2	0.815

University professors and their impact are found far below (Table 5), along with courses and seminars about ethics in journalism. Less impact seems to have the religion. This is not surprising if we see that 76% of respondents agree that religion is somehow still unimportant to them (tab. 6).

Tab. 6: Religion



Relationship with PR

While striking that the category „Editing press releases and news from agencies“ represents the shortest time: 54 minutes. On the one hand, this figure can show us the rutinisation of journalists to get information, but also the other issue highlights a rather small problem: press releases that come from news agencies, as well as from the press office various institutions, are adapted in such a way as to be ready for publication.

An analysis conducted by journalism Master students at the Department of Journalism and Communication, University of Tirana, with eight major newspapers: “Shekulli”, “Koha Jone”, “Mapo”, “Tema”, “Standart”, “Gazeta Shqiptare”, “Shqip” and “Panorama”, brought interesting results. About 47% of the news published in the media “flow or are sponsored by the public relations

and press offices".²⁰The most influential sections of the public relations and the press offices were identified: the social section 56%,the economicsection 52% and news about actuality (preponderant political news) 42 %.

Conclusions

Based on the data presented we can say that the Albanian journalist is young at age, well paid and lives in metropolis. Regarding the deontology of the profession the journalist himself introduces the problems observed in developing media system in Albania.

Given that many institutions have lost credibility in the past twenty years, the family remains the most trusted institution for the Albanians in general and for journalists too. This is reflected in their work through the influence that family education has in the way they conceive and use ethics in their profession.

The Albanian journalist has mostly a university education (Department of Journalism and Communication) and we can say that they are part of contry's elite. His working day lasts on average 8-10 hours,and when calculated per week it runs to 40-50 hours.

Influenced by technological developments, Albanian journalists are fond of internet and spend a great time with it, to work and also for fun. A strong point for critical discussion remains the approach of the Albanian journalists to PR and press releases coming from different political and public organizations. The professional routine and the perfection of techniques of press offices have made journalism to lose ground against the public relations and to put in question its role as "watchdog".

²⁰<http://al.ejo-online.eu/715/marredheniet-publike/nga-journalism-ne-churnalism--mbi-gazetarine-e-marredhenieve-me-publikun#more-715>.

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