



**POLICY BRIEFS**  
KOSOVO

Understanding  
relations between media and religion  
in Kosovo

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## Introduction

Topics on religion are attractive for reporting to media; they are topics that do not depend only on what is happening at the moment or on the time of report, therefore they find room in media whenever they are reported. In Kosovo, there is a paucity of studies on media and their functions, and especially on relations between media and religion.

Media need to have the courage to address topics that are sensitive or topics that are considered as taboo by societies. Their courage is an indicator of media independence and democracy. But the importance of the informative role that media have depends on their accurate, fair and impartial reporting. Irrespective of the topic, when media do not adhere to those principles, they bring about misinterpretation, misinformation and distortion of reality, and this holds true for religious topics.

The Constitution and laws of Kosovo guarantee religious freedom, promote tolerance and do not allow "encouragement or provocation of violence and hostility on grounds of [...] religion." Radios and televisions are monitored by state bodies, whereas print media is monitored by the Council on Print Media, a self-regulatory body that was established with the will of several editors and journalists. Electronic media (digital newspapers) fall under the latter body, but news portals are not controlled or monitored by any mechanism.

Religion and media are constantly changing and developing. Therefore the approach toward those issues should be updated and changed regularly. Commitment of all stakeholders is required, starting from government institutions, civil society and media, in order to promote religious tolerance. Religious tolerance promoted in media is a tango that needs both parties, media and religion.

Media have the power to promote religious tolerance or to incite hatred toward a religion or ethnicity. Therefore, there need to be meetings and debates on these topics. A good example are the events organized by the German foundation KAS (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung), which since 2012 gathers representatives of Islamic

Community, Catholic Church and Orthodox Church every year to discuss religious tolerance, challenges and the need for information, especially for the need to inform the youth. Another initiative was also undertaken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo and other international supporters. Organizing a series of meetings and setting up of a portal are part of Interfaith Kosovo, which aims to promote religious tolerance in Kosovo<sup>1</sup>.

This policy brief aims to address the following questions: How should media report on religious topics? Are Kosovo media adhering to journalistic standards and ethics? How did role of media change due to the development of new media (social media)? Why religious topics are attractive and how are they being addressed by media in Kosovo?

In addition, the policy brief aims to provide concrete suggestions to media representatives, institutions that monitor and supervise the work of media, as well as religious representatives.

### 1.2. Tradition of common religious life in Kosovo

Religious tolerance in Kosovo is promoted by its Constitution and laws. The Constitution guarantees freedoms of faith and religion<sup>2</sup>, that there is no official religion in Kosovo and that Religious Communities are separate from public authorities. The Law on Religious Tolerance, approved in 2006, also treats<sup>3</sup> relations between media and religious communities. In public media, religious communities enjoy equal access and have the right to publish information using all forms of media.

Media in Kosovo generally lack regulations, codes of conduct, regulations on ethical or editorial policies, which could define and explain reporting on various issues pertaining to religion, be it an explanation for the use of a single word. The weight of a single word or a sentence used in media reporting is heavy and it may

<sup>1</sup> For more informations visit official web-page of Interfaith Kosova, link: [www.interfaithkosovo.org/?lang=Al](http://www.interfaithkosovo.org/?lang=Al)

<sup>2</sup> Kosovo's Constitution, accessed on 12th April 2015, link: [www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Kushtetuta.e.Republikes.se.Kosoves.pdf](http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Kushtetuta.e.Republikes.se.Kosoves.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Law for Religious Tolerance in Kosovo, taken from official web-site of Kosovo's Parliament, 10 April 2015, link: [http://kuvendikosoves.org/common/docs/liget/2006\\_02-L31\\_al.pdf](http://kuvendikosoves.org/common/docs/liget/2006_02-L31_al.pdf)

lead to extremism or calls to take action against a religious group, therefore media should be held accountable for their use of language.

In Kosovo's case, the only public television, Radio and Television of Kosovo (RTK), is regulated by a special law and the document for ethical and professional standards at RTK. Based on that law, RTK cannot broadcast any material, which in its content, sub-text, ambiguity, alluding or tone incites discrimination based on race, color, gender, language, and religion<sup>4</sup>. RTK may broadcast information and events with religious content provided that such programs:

***Do not** portray, feature or present one religion as superior to another; **do not** mock, insult and denigrate any religion; do not influence, clearly and openly membership in any religious organisation, and subsequently **do not** promote membership in and preaching for them; **do not** contain political-religious promotion messages<sup>5</sup>.*

According to professional standards and ethical principles for RTK, the impartiality of journalists, content of religious programs, presentation of religion and religious groups up to attention to imposition or offence in advertising and promotion are explained. To see the extent to which the Law on RTK and the document on professional standards are respected requires a separate study. Since RTK is paid by Kosovo taxpayers and members of its board are elected by the Kosovo Assembly, this makes the need for accountability more acute, but accountability should also be demanded from private media as well. The Independent Media Commission (IMC), which monitors and licenses all audio-visual broadcasters in Kosovo, has stipulated the issues of religious prejudice, although same as in the case of RTK, it should update the definitions on religion, considering that topics on religion are evolving. Moreover, the part of responsibility of electronic media should be seriously addressed in line with the rapid de-

velopment that is taking place. Print Media Council has drafted the Code of Conduct for Press, whose objective is to serve the Kosovar press morally and professionally. The Code explains that there should not be any prejudice-based treatment of an individual or a group based on their ethnic, religious, etc. background (...) or use of denigrating expressions in order to hurt or threaten an individual or a group on religious or ethnic background, etc. But, this body, besides the role for raising media awareness does not have other competences.

Two events that could show that the audience is thirsty for images that show religious tolerance is the picture during Pope Francis on 22 September 2014 in Tirana, Albania. A Google search with keywords "vizita papa FrançeskunëShqipëri/visit of Pope Francis to Albania" turned 71,700 results, compared to the keywords or the visit of former- US president George W. Bush to Tirana which turned 34,400 results. The picture which shows Pope Francis with three religious Muslim, Bekta-shi and Orthodox leaders in the background, and behind them thousands of citizens with their smartphones capturing the moment<sup>6</sup> invades media and social networks in Kosovo. The second case I want to bring to attention of the reader and which I believe is familiar to the audience, is broadcasting of the march of four Albanian religious leaders in Paris walking arm to arm, which happened after the tragic event of killing of editors and journalists of satirical magazine "Charlie Hebdo". Only in a Youtube channel, the video showing that march had 13,700 clicks and had considerable coverage in Kosovar media.

Religious tolerance is necessary but it continues to be a challenging topic for Kosovo, and in particular for media. Fear of extremism has pushed institutions and civil society to fight that phenomenon. Now there is already in place a Strategy for Fighting Terrorism 2012-2017, which highlights the protection of citizens from influence of extreme ideologies that are based on intolerance, hatred and violence for achieving political and

<sup>4</sup>Law for RTK, taken from official web-site of RTK, Accessed on 12 April 2015, link: [www.rtklive.com/new/rtk/etc/ligji\\_rtk.pdf](http://www.rtklive.com/new/rtk/etc/ligji_rtk.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>See for more: Document for Professional Standards and Ethical principles of Journalism on RTK programs, accessed on 10 April 2015, link: [www.rtklive.com/rtk/standardetprofesionale\\_sq.pdf](http://www.rtklive.com/rtk/standardetprofesionale_sq.pdf)

<sup>6</sup>Photography from Associated Press, link: <http://m.deseretnews.com/photo/765660039>

ideological goals by abusing religion<sup>7</sup>. The geo-strategic position of Kosovo besides making it a transit target for illegal activities, also poses a risk for spreading of religious fundamentalism<sup>8</sup>.

European monitors have not criticized religious tolerance; furthermore, they have assessed there was continued progress in the area of freedom of speech, consciousness and religion<sup>9</sup>. But, challenges remain. A US State Department report has highlighted several cases of denigrating language and spread of hatred through media. Religious preachers describe women in derogatory language and in their preaching distributed widely through Internet and in media presentations stated that voting for a certain political party was a "sin"<sup>10</sup>.

Media reporting with excluding and denigrating rhetoric adds to the religious hatred and impedes the debate on religious tolerance. Such reporting must adhere to applicable laws and regulations. Apart from the reaction of the US Department of State, there was no other reaction by institutions that monitor the work of media. The public is not aware of any punishment of any media for inaccurate and unbalanced reporting or reporting lacking respect for journalism professional rules and ethics. So far, IMC has not punished any media for non-adherence to IMC law in relation to religious discrimination<sup>11</sup>. Print Media Council webpage includes reactions and press releases on certain topics. Both of these institutions have been given public advice by media contributors for the need to improve journalism professional standards. In general, both institutions must be louder about current ethical challenges and act to improve media standards and freedoms<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup>National Strategy against terrorism, taken from official web-site of Kosovo's government, accessed on 9 April 2015, link: [www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Strategjia\\_kunder\\_Terrorizmit\\_2012-2017.pdf](http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Strategjia_kunder_Terrorizmit_2012-2017.pdf)

<sup>8</sup>Ibid

<sup>9</sup>Progress Report for Kosovo, 2014, taken from web-site of MI, accessed on 10 April 2015, link: [www.mei-ks.net/repository/docs/IFINAL-ALB\\_MIE-Kosovo\\_Progress\\_Report\\_2013\\_%28alb%29\\_%282%29.pdf](http://www.mei-ks.net/repository/docs/IFINAL-ALB_MIE-Kosovo_Progress_Report_2013_%28alb%29_%282%29.pdf)

<sup>10</sup>International Report for religious freedom for 2013, State Department of United States, taken from web-site of American embassy in Kosovo, accessed on 11 April 2015, link: [http://photos.state.gov/libraries/kosovo/312585/pdf/irf\\_2013\\_alb.pdf](http://photos.state.gov/libraries/kosovo/312585/pdf/irf_2013_alb.pdf)

<sup>11</sup>Interview with vice-president of KPM, Driton Qeriqi. Author's communication for the needs of this analysis.

<sup>12</sup>Recommendations from Tomson Foundation, project "Media For All – Strengthening Media Self-Regulation, Media Law and Media Freedom in Kosovo". Accessed on 12 April 2015,

### 1.3. Attraction to topics on religion

There is no audio-visual media in Kosovo that operates entirely on the basis of religious promotion. Within their programs, some media include parts with content on religious education, but which cannot be qualified as religious promotion or considered to suggest religious superiority compared to another religion. Based on the IMC Law, a license cannot be issued to a political party, religious community, group or organization that is managed by an individual who holds an elected post or is a member of an executive body of a political party. But, the IMC Law does not decisively ban licensing audio-visual media outlets which may air religious education content through their programming<sup>13</sup>. Within the programs offered by private entities, "Peace TV" television relies entirely on a single-religious education. But, according to IMC, this entity is based in London, and it is included in the cable TV operators Ipkoand Kujtesa through the broadcasting authorization that the television submitted to IMC, and which demonstrated that they enjoy the right to broadcast in Kosovo<sup>14</sup>. IMC holds the responsibility and the right to remove channels from the cable system in case of violation of IMC law and regulations.

Media are a source of information about topics on religion, religion trends and religion ideas<sup>15</sup>. Media not only cover and represent religion, but they interact with religion in such ways that they change both themselves and religion<sup>16</sup>. As a practice of Kosovo media, their report on religious topics focus on covering religious celebrations, for which the reporting follows a cliché scheme and does not vary from Muslim, Catholic or Orthodox celebrations. They air celebratory messages of religious or political leaders, interviews with citizens (celebratory preparations) and the same are repeated every year. Media should be attentive to their informa-

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taken from Press Council of Kosovo web-site, link: <http://presscouncil-ks.org/?cid=1,13,525&tpl=list.php>

<sup>13</sup>Interview with vice-president of KPM, Driton Qeriqi. Author's communication for the needs of this analysis.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid

<sup>15</sup>Media and Religion, The Center for Religion and Culture, University of Colorado at Boulder, USA, nga Stewart M. Hoover, accessed on 12 November 2014, link:

<http://cmrc.colorado.edu/cmrc/images/stories/Center/Publications/whitepaperfinalversion.pdf>

<sup>16</sup>Ibid

tion and education mission, and not be limited to reporting during religious celebrations and these occasions should be used to raise issues that impede religious tolerance in Kosovo.

Topics reporting on religion must insure inclusive approach and must respect principles defined by media laws and regulations.

The most reported topics on religion in Kosovo include reporting on vandal acts or issues problems between ethnic or religious groups, reporting on war in Syria, danger from terrorism, then addressing political and party topics as well as social topics. In each of these categories, reporting should be careful.

- Reporting of vandal acts: here media must insure that they donot rely on a single source of information, and they should be attentive to include all sides involved in the incident. There should not be group blaming, and if one ethnic or religious group is blamed, the response of the other group should be included in reporting. There should not be opinionated but informative language. Media report, they do not judge.
- Reporting about war in Syria: due to sensitivity of the topic, the use of language must be accurate and attentive, there should not be generalization or hyperbolizing of cases and media must ensure not to promote war in Syria. Use of children in such reporting must adhere to journalistic professional ethics. Media should not show sensitive images of killing of civilians in Syria without providing a warning for such images or if they donot blur parts of the images.
- Addressing commentaries of political topics by religious leaders: during election periods media should pay attention to how they report messages of religious leaders, who from their religious position use media to promote or endorse a political party.
- Use of social topics: in absence of educational debates on various social topics, media must pay attention to the content of thisreporting, which are offered as debates on social topics but which include derogatorylanguage towards a certain religion or gender. Media should not air speeches or messages which use deroga-

tory languageagainst women, or to insult or share of-fensive labels.

Media have the power to make a certain topic or certain individual a familiar issue for the public. This function of media to select certain topics or to provide room only for certain individuals is referred to as conferral status. When media use this status for certain individuals or topics, citizens as a result follow them only because they were reported by media or believe persons since media selected them as sources and trusted them for interpretation. Therefore, media must pay attention to the selection of topics and individuals they cite or interview since their selection affects credibility of citizens for them. The content that media share with the public must be free of insult, offense anddisparagement.

#### **1.4. Broadcast media (news portals and digital newspapers)**

The role of media in the Kosovar society has changed due to the development of electronic media.They are dominating information and the media market.The advantages of electronic media are welcomed in journalism due to the opportunity to access them in different locations and all the time and due to interaction with public. But, electronic media in Kosovo face several difficulties which seriously affect public information. The lack of sources, lack of proofreading and editing and non-moderating of readers' comments affect the quality and accuracy of news. Portals that are not seduced by the speed of news are less visited or clicked by readers as a result.

Compared to traditional media (radios, newspapers, and televisions), new media outlets (news portals and digital newspapers) are even more dependent to the need to accelerate news. Acceleration in information may bring inaccuracy and misinformation. While for the religious topics, it may incite hatred and violence.

Portals also face the issue of a lack of sources, or the use of a single source.

"He was arrested several months ago as a suspect for terrorism but it turns out to have been a major mistake of Kosovar government"<sup>17</sup>. That news item is a statement and it does not have any used source. Single-sourced news items ruin objectivity in journalism and they cannot inform impartially. Thus, there is confusion whether portals are informing or commenting. There are plenty of news titles in broadcast media that use commentary language. E.g. "Serbia is shocked, the girl that converted to Islam"<sup>18</sup>. There are cases when portals publish statements, photos, and videos and they do not screen their content for derogatory language, insults of an ethnicity or religion or presents one religion superior to another, such as the following statement, "we have become worse than [derogatory term used for Serbs]"(...)<sup>19</sup>.

Not all portals in Kosovo moderate their readers' comments, which means anyone can write anything against a religion. The language used in comments is offensive, inciting and impedes development of religious tolerance that is welcomed by media. In reporting on religious topics, comments start from offense or insulting towards a religion up to calls for killings. Portals cannot excuse themselves that the language by user comments is not their responsibility, because those comments are made within portals and thus they cannot avoid responsibility. Some portals have blocked the right to comment entirely, but the number of portals who filter comments is low. The responsibility of portals for readers' comments was confirmed in a decision<sup>20</sup> of the European Court for Human Rights. In the decision, the Court further requires that in certain cases portals do not publish comments at all, and not merely remove them after they have been published in cases when comments are offensive, etc.

<sup>17</sup>For more read the article that doesn't have any declared source and has commentary language:

[www.indeksonline.net/?FaqeID=2&LajmID=148054](http://www.indeksonline.net/?FaqeID=2&LajmID=148054)

<sup>18</sup>For more read the article that has an commentator title and is based only in one source,

link: [www.telegرافي.com/lajme/tronditet-serbia-vajza-serbe-u-konvertua-ne-myslimane-video-4-24232.html](http://www.telegرافي.com/lajme/tronditet-serbia-vajza-serbe-u-konvertua-ne-myslimane-video-4-24232.html)

<sup>19</sup>For more read the news on the link:

[www.gazetaexpress.com/lajme/hoxhe-irfani-puthe-puthe-puthevideo-31715/?utm\\_source=referral&utm\\_medium=eb&utm\\_campaign=copyright](http://www.gazetaexpress.com/lajme/hoxhe-irfani-puthe-puthe-puthevideo-31715/?utm_source=referral&utm_medium=eb&utm_campaign=copyright)

<sup>20</sup>Taken from the official web-site of European Court for Human Rights, link:

[http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng/pages/search.aspx?i=001-126635#\["itemid":\["001-126635"\]](http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng/pages/search.aspx?i=001-126635#[)

## 1.5. Conclusions:

The analysis provides suggestions for journalists, editors, media leaders, Independent Media Commission (IMC), Print Media Council, media officers at various religious communities:

- From all stakeholders should be required accountability in relation to media, in compliance with laws and regulations. The lack of penalties shows that the job is not being done properly.
- Journalists and editors in Kosovo need to be attentive so that reporting on religion is balanced and inclusive, in order not to incite hatred against a particular religion. They should not allow offensive language against a religion or gender.
- IMC should monitor audio-visual services in Kosovo and reports and conclusions should be made accessible to public.
- The Committee on Media (within the Kosovo Assembly) should monitor the application of legal framework on media.
- Religious Communities must ensure that their representative are held accountable for their statements and in case of a use of hate speech, they should react and distance themselves immediately.
- Print Media Council should update its members' list and organize debates with journalists and media representatives on reporting issues pertaining to religion.
- Electronic media should invest in news that is free of commentary language, have more than one cited source and edit materials that are published in news portals (screen them for religious or gender hate speech). Portals need to empower the position of editors so that the news is reliable, accurate and correct.
- The legislation on broadcast media oversight should become a priority since broadcast media are contributing to ruining professional values of journalism.

- Broadcast media should be held accountable for comments posted under their published articles, in line with the decision of the European Court for Human Rights.

Views expressed in the policy brief are personal views of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

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