

## THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN THE RELIGIOUS AND THE ETHNIC HARMONY IN ALBANIA

## ULOGA MEDIJA U OČUVANJU RELIGIJSKE I ETNIČKE HARMONIJE U ALBANIJI

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In this material will be in focus the role of the Albanian media in environmental preservation of harmony in Albanian society. Despite the difficult political economic and social transition, Albanian society and proved difficult moments in its development. Some of the problems to be raised here are: the role of the Albanian media and attitude that she has held and holds for very acute problems.

*Sažetak*

U ovome radu naglasak će biti na ulozi albanskih medija u očuvanju harmonije u albanskom društvu. Unatoč teškoj političkoj, ekonomskoj i društvenoj tranziciji, albansko društvo je preživjelo teške trenutke u svom razvoju. Neki od problema koje treba naglasiti su: uloga albanskih medija i stavovi koje oni zastupaju kod svakog ozbiljnog problema.

Despite the difficult political, economic and social transition, Albanian society experienced difficult moments in its development during this period. Today after 20 years of post monism our society is facing other important issues. The demand for European integration, thus to consolidate the various aspects of social, economic and political power, are the current issues of contemporary Albania and the Albanian social reality. Of course there are major developments in key areas, but our interest is focused on the Albanian media and its role on the ethnic and religious harmony in Albania and the position it has held and holds for many acute problems, which in some cases may be an incentive for inevitable conflicts, whether religious, ethnic or social. For this reason we are focused on the important public debate on the issue of registration of the Albanian population, a debate which began in 2010 and has led to numerous controversies over two points: the registration of the population on religious and ethnic basis, which of course media has its own important role in reflecting the opinions and discussions in various social and public levels. Also we should mention that in addition to different materials and historical sources, interviews with famous Albanian intellectuals, in this material we are referred to the most popular Albanian papers such as "Shqip" and "Gazeta Shqiptare" during the period 1 April 2010 - April 30, 2011. Albania is known as

one of the harmony and interfaith dialogue, and in most cases it seems like an important value in the EU integration. However religious faith and religion itself as an institution suffered many aftershocks over the socialism tide. Albania reached most emphatic extremes among the socialist countries. According to statistics of 1945, 72.8% of the population was declared Muslim, presenting Albania as the first Muslim state in Europe. Of course 17.1% were declared Orthodox Christians and 10.1% Catholics. The Constitution of 1946 guaranteed civil rights and religious freedom. Under Article 15 "All citizens are equal regardless of their nationality, race or religion. Any action against the constitution, which limits the rights of citizens under nationality, race or religion reasons will be punished according to law. Any provocation, which can cause hatred and conflicts among nationalities, races and religions is unconstitutional and will be punished according to law". According to article 18: "All citizens are guaranteed freedom of conscience and religion. Church is separated from the state. All religious circles are free due to their religion, as well as to their external appearance. The use of the church and religion for political purposes is forbidden".

These constitutional guarantees were modern and fully democratic. But would they be respected them in practice? Attacks against religion and church began in 1945. The reasons for such an attack were not

ideological, but purely political. Political Bureau and the government simply were afraid of Muslims, their ties with Turkey, Catholics with the Vatican and the Orthodox with Greece. They suspected that these links could have been used to harm the security of government and government in Albania. This attacks against the church were in large-scale incompatible. In May 1967, 2169 religious institutions that had remained were destroyed or converted to other institutions. On November 19, 1967, the regime adopted the 4337 decree. It stopped completely faith in Albania, declaring it as the only atheist country in the world. Many churches and mosques were turned into educational centers, libraries, stores, cafes, etc. The general trend of four and a half decades of socialism was the eradication of religious beliefs and inculcated new "contemporary" and "socialist" ideals /1/. In no other countries from Eastern Europe was religion denied in such an extreme way. Unfortunately, studies on the status of the believers are lacking in Albania. Even today, after so many years, there are no studies on this issue, which would provide an opportunity for a much deeper and complete understanding of these the processes. Here and there can be polls, but they can not reflect the whole picture of religious faiths in the country. Despite the ban of the religion in Albania, we can not say that it disappeared. Regardless of this a contingent of the population practiced in secret. In the village was easier to preserve religious traditions. In the northern part of Albania, despite the numerous persecutions, customs were strong. Understandably, the elderly were more willing to respect religion. Generally the problems are more complicated from a historical standpoint. In 2000, the Institute of Statistics declared that religious belief is back at the years of after World War II: 70% Muslim, Christian 30%, of which 10% Catholic. After 90 ies of the XX century religious relations were restored. In fact, Albania does not have an official religion, but celebrates all religious holidays, even those of Christian ones (Orthodox, Catholic) and Muslim ones (Sunni and Bektashi). In these days visits are exchanged not only by leaders of communities, but also by the political ones. We could keep writing about it, but what interests us is why in fact there are reactions against the declaration of faith of the Albanian population? First of we need to mention this debate has more than a year that has started in Albania. Minister of Information, Innovation and Technology, Genc Pollo in June 2010 at a seminar organized by the EU announced the news that

INSTAT (Albanian Institute of Statistics) will host the Albanian population and housing census in 2011, an EU requirement (initially in 15 November 2009 it was the Prime Minister, Berisha, who stated that Albania would develop the census including the declaration on the basis of religion and ethnicity). INSTAT had conducted a pilot census in 2010. According to Minister Pollo "census is one of the major processes and of a more importance for Albania to establish a database for policy making and better governance as well as aligning the national statistical system with that of Europe" /2/. The latest population census in Albania was made in 2001, where the form did not include ethnicity, religion and mother tongue, taking in of consideration the fact of the numerous debates on them. Media has been very careful in presenting the controversial situation, on this record. Intellectuals, historians and scholars are involved in debate who have given their own opinion regarding the declaration of religious and ethnic Albanian population. Opposition is very suspicious of the census process, they even have asked a motion with the Prime Minister Berisha /3/, but according to one of the drafters of the Albanian Constitution, Sabri Godo census have to be conducted only if two elements, religion and ethnicity are excluded, as this recording will be free only when the Albanians will be able to move freely in Europe. A day later on October 26 it was stated the date of registration, and will be closed within this month April 2, but the newspaper "Shqip" comments that this would coincide with the election campaign for the local process that will be on May 8, 2011 and Albanians would "tell" not only details about their personal data, but also the candidate they want to govern /4/.

But the main and deeper debate is the declaration of ethnicity. One of the interested parties to register ethnicity on basis is the Party of Human Rights, which has insisted for years for the registration of the minority in Albania. In this case the historians and political representatives of the Party of Human Rights are facing each other, but also the Archbishop Janullatos. There have been statements from the representatives of Greek politics. We will have to explain that one of the debates throughout the Albanian transition has been that of the Greek minority in Albania and the Greek side claims for Vorio Epirus, where according to them Himara, south of Albania belongs to Greece. Based on INSTAT data of the 2001 the minorities comprise 1.4% to 3,069,275 of Albania's residents, or 42 892 minority residents.

Greek minority, namely 35 829 inhabitants, 4188 people Macedonian, Montenegrin and 678 inhabitants, 992 inhabitants Romanian and other 1245. According to INSTAT in 1989 minorities accounted around 58,758 Greek people and the reason for the downturn in 35,829 deals with minority departure to Greece /5/. But, if we refer to figures of minority organizations it is much higher. Thus "Omonia" claims that Albania has about 300,000 Greeks. Throughout the Albanian transition, there have been allegations of a minority of size several times larger and Himara was considered as Greek land. Time after time there have been held media debates on this topic, the most active of which is the Albanian newspaper, which publishes periodically historians' debates those of Kristo Frashëri, Valentina Duka and Paskal Milo, and the debate between Frashëri and Archbishop Janullatos /6/. In the daily papers we find debates of historians and their claims. In fact, debate has arisen long before the murder on August 12, 2010 in Himara of a 35-year-old man, Aristotel Guma, which became more controversial issue such as killing an ethnic character. However, for media was enough rigorous statements and responses to this case.

During this period the media parallelly address some issues, which indicate that the beginning of 2011 is full of important events concerning the Greek minority. So on 5 February 2011 the Greek consul Theodoros Ikonumus on the occasion of 20 anniversary of minority organization "Omonia" makes a statement that could provoke diplomatic precedent, saying that in Korca there are Greeks and that the Vlachs are Greek. According to him the Greeks do not have to fear from the census to declare the real origin. "Please one thing, go to the cemetery and see the graves of your fathers and grandfathers and the language in which they were written and take your decision. They are written in Greek... This battle does not end with this census, but with the registration of the Greek population" /7/. So there was sufficient with the harsh reactions from Vlachs' community in Korça while their cleric stated that: We are Orthodox, not Greek /8/.

But also have representatives and policy responses Albanian and Greek about the statement of Ikonumus consul. So Gazmend Oketa Democrat deputy at the meeting of the parliamentary commission for foreign policy has requested the declaration of the Ikonumus consul "persona non grata" /9/.

The two newspapers attach importance to a significant moment - Tendency of change from the

Albanian nationality in that Greek. On the same newspaper at the same day we have a post "Albanians "Greek" progressive increase year after year", where we have the clear statistics of changing nationality. In this paper the emphasis is on the large increase since 2004, where ethnicity changed only 2 people, in figure 61 in 2010. Judicial District Court of Korca has published statistics which resulted in six years 263 people's as the winner of the Greek nationality. But the easier form of changing nationality actually allows Article 58, paragraph 7 of Law no. 10129, dated 11.05.2009 "On Civil Status", which sanctioned the "change of nationality could be made only by judicial decision, invoking any case, as a part in the process, civil service even when ethnicity has been assigned temporarily or when is made material error" /10/. In its investigation of the Albanian newspaper published in the 14 February article "Court: how changed marital status of 300 Albanians in Greek", where consideration is given to the fact that during 2000-2002 in abusive way 294 Albanian citizens have changed the nationality. For the first time we have and the statement of Deputy High Council of Justice, Mr. Kreshnik Spahiu, according to which "Is violated Albanian sovereignty" /11/. Based on the inspection made from the district courts of the South, Spahiu declares a disturbing figure of the change of nationality, 2000 citizens of Gjirokastër and 469 in the Përmet. But, Ministry of Justice reveals the nationality scandal much earlier. On March 25, 2009 in the Albanian newspaper published the article "The Albanian made in Greek the courts violated the law" /12/, even are given specific cases of change of the nationality. On the same newspaper is noted how the Athens gives the Greek citizenship in a collective way, on 2008 to 1106 Albanians. Greek Interior Minister himself, Prokopis Pavlopoulos has personally delivered Greek passports to Albanian citizens. Ceremony held in February 28, 2008 in sports stadium in Athens, in the presence of the head of the municipality of Himara Vasil Bollanos, once and chairman of OMONIA-s. The debate over changing the nationality started since 2010 gets large size. An open table was held in which according to the ex-president Rexhep Mejdani "The registration of the population on religious and ethnic basis does not serve the truth, but could damage it and could be a serious concern not only among albanians but also among neighbours... We support the registration of population with all necessary elements but not the

self declaration on ethnic and religious bases" /13/. On February 26, 2011 the youth of the Party for Justice, Integrity and United (PDIU) protest against registration of the population on ethnic and religious bases. All mentioned in one fact - Albanian society still in not prepared for this registration, based on the high figures of the nationality change. Media actively participates in covering these events, just trying to give much more details what is happened, but also by addressing the debates with intellectuals and researcher, but also representatives of the Albanian institutions and politics. But, absent are the editorial writings and opinions of the largest newspapers in Albania. Lengthy debates and discussions are conducted in various popular televisions known in Albania and beyond such as Top Channel, TV Klan, Time News, etc. At this point observed facing of two different currents related to the census – pros and cons. One stream is initiated and than expanded in moving to national identity by Kreshnik Spahiu, which held during February and March 2011 meeting with intellectuals all over Albania and in Kosovo (4 March, 2011, Prishtinë) and is categorically against the census on ethnicity (already, register on the basis of religion and ethnic appear in the second plan). It calls from intellectuals for more national and legal conscious and should be required one constitutional solution. According him "If we have tolerance legislation, but also breach of the law relating to nationality leaving, taking Greek nationalities, Montenegrin, Serbian, Macedonian, so fictitious and artificial, I tell you with conviction that it would pose the greatest risk to the sovereignty and the future of Albania. A risk which threatens the near future of Albania" /14/. We should not leave behind the important fact that a good part of the Albanian population is in immigration and registration process, which from the numerous debates Albanian government was forced to postpone to October 2011, to leave out some 25% of the population. Only to Italy and Greece live respectively 575,000 and 600,000 thousand Albanians, without leave after the U.S. - 113 661 Albanians, UK - 50,000 Albanian citizens, etc. On February 28, 2011, 52 known intellectuals in Albania, of which two former presidents Albanian Mejdani and Moisiu, former ministers of governments in transition professors and representatives of science and major public life in Albania send to current President Bamir Topi a petition calling census based on ethnicity and religion as an not national action because Albania is an laic state and the process

conflicts with the Constitution and with national interests. Article 20 of the Constitution give the right of the national minorities to express freely themselves, without being stopped or forced, their ethnicity, cultural, religious and linguistic. According to the petition is considered especially dangerous in moments of current demand for self-declaration of nationality, arguing that this requirement does not exist in 27 EU countries which Albania seeks to be part. Meanwhile and the 75 cultural and patriotic associations rather say "No!" government project for registration /15/. Loom so and "Red and Black Coalition", which actively campaigning in cities where collect signatures against the declaration of religion and nationality. According to them this is the first legislative initiative proposed by the people, require amendment and as mentioned the above census was postponed to a late term of the law. Although the Albanian government justified this decision with the election process on 8 May, the media was emphasized that the main reason for the postponement of this recording was harsh reaction of intellectuals, and the interested groups witch insisted to a fact that with this process will abused by increased fictitious number of minorities in Albania. Concern, which is focused mainly on the part of Albanian, whom for interests of the day can be claimed to belong to the Greek ethnicity, given the experience that the country has had with his issue with a part of the population living in the South. But, and Mr. Sabri Godo asks Foreign Ministry to react. He notes that "The statements of the Greek state considered as destruction and interference in the internal affairs of another state, in this case to Albania" /16/. In the Albanian press observed and other lines to the census. There are opinions and analysis that stress on the registration of the population on bases religious and ethnics. Dr. Miltiadh Veveçka consider that as "an inevitable, democratic procedure which we Albanians, as always on our history are carrying out late, even the last in Europe" /17/. Also known Albanian philosopher Artan Fuga, in its analysis on Standard newspaper writes that there are two reasons that make the Albanians to have an open soul and democratic (regarding the registration of population based on ethnic and religious), because the Albanian society has integrated very well and without national minority, but also because on Balkan, considerably Albanians currently live even within countries with most other national. According to

Fuga, Albanian factor was and will stay democratizes on Balkan, with aims and Europeans strategy and Western precisely because the distribution itself of its geopolitics is concerned that neighboring countries are recognized and respect strongly the minorities rights, so and those Albanian, to Macedonia Monte Negro, Greece etc./18/ Further Fuga gives the idea that the practices of distribution and filling of forms first must explain what is meant by national and ethnic affiliation, which according him it is not done, but must search for different proves to verify this (Language? Spoken or written language? Habits? Origin? Origin from which parent? Birthplace of parents? Recognition of culture? Many criteria together?). Mentor Nazarko well known Albanian opinions and expert of international politics argues that through a law in Parliament to registration, to define the concept of ethnicity. He insists on changing the methodology of processing the results of the census. As basis can serve self-declaration (needed for statistical reasons and the number of those who claim not Greek or Albanian), but the competent authority, one impended commission, to examine the documentation of the real target's ethnicity based on the self-declaration. And only than stressed Nazarko - could have the right data, based on Western registration sample, maybe American. This is the right way according him, and the time is now. This is the solution that we will give this problem, would be fully sovereign, and realistic /19/. I will mention another known Albanian analyst Fatos Lubonja, which states that it is in support of the population census based on ethnic and religious. In his analysis of "Why am pro registration?" /20/. Judging by the outrage as the basic principles of democracy in Albania today, twenty years after the fall of the totalitarian regime, collective hysteria brought against ethnic and religious census, which by Lubonja talks about the crisis of democracy this society. Lubonja justify the change of ethnicity, even now after 20 years of communism falling, to get, as some say, 300 euros per month or the continuation of migration and change of the Albanian nationality, should be viewed primarily the concern of the inability to build a state. As one of the most famous critics of the Albanian politics, Lubonja insists on the lack of democracy and conservative attitude towards registration for is indicative of the Albanian crisis caused by the inability to manage democracy and freedom. If we will refer to the theory of Henry Tajfel /21/, social identity will based on three basic

processes: that categorization, where the central entities (minority) build discriminatory categories of participation, of a different ways, distinct changes with other ethnicities, the process of identification, belonging to a group creates psychological grounds to feel better than the other ethnic group (here will mention the Greek government pressure to persons naturalized as Greeks in Greece, pensions and other social services) and the last the social process one social collision is unavoidable consequences if further distinguished two elements and in our case if the Greek minority is not making efforts to be an element of cooperation and peace in Albanian. History has shown that the Albanians have had good relations with other ethnicities.

Communication, which despite the efforts of outside forces (policy) had conducted harmony. In our opinion it would be interesting to have a census of population. In the first case, the declaration of religious affiliation is not a problem, because every person has the right to be like to feel it themselves in relation to the trust that has or will have. It is entirely personal that Albanians are Muslims, Christians, practitioners of any other religion or sect or even atheists. The whole problem in this case lies at the point of declaration of ethnicity. It is true that we have the leak of a part (however if) the Albanian population, already returned to Greece, Montenegro or the other. But this need not frighten us for this registration. It is understood that part of historians see the problem on the pressure towards Albania from Greece. However, if there is a significant point, eg the declaration of the mother tongue will have a more precise result about the plea of religious affiliation /22/. In fact, the Albanian government's efforts somehow coincides with the efforts of a number of other countries in the Balkans and Europe which are in the wake of a census, or before this process. This shows that Albania has reached a significant level in its development as a democratic state. In this case the role of media has been very transparent in the representation of all stakeholders, not leaning towards one or the other line about this process. We can say that it is ready enough with the events and presentation of the same figures of the Albanian opinions public. Would have to say that in a moment of reflection of so many facts lead to confusion audience. It will also be good to have the Albanian media investigative material that only so can bring a more objective of the current situation on these issues and not abusive with information sources. Often considered the same sources in both

papers ("Shqip" and "Gazeta Shqiptare"). Dignified presentation deeply controversial issue throughout the general public will not have backgrounds stereotyped as "minority", "us", "Albanians" and "them" "being sold" (naturalized in Greek). This will not lead anywhere Albanian society. If we want to be part of Europe, the European mentality will have to have harmony with minorities, to accept another if different in religion or ethnicity. Even here a significant role as seen media should play a very important part of social life in Albania.

#### Notes

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- /2/ Erjon Ajazi, "Pollo: Rregjistrimi i popullsisë prillin e ardhshëm", *Shqip*, 10.06.2010, pg. 2
- /3/ Erjon Ajazi "Opozita, dyshuese për procesin, kërkon shpjegime", *Shqip*, 25.10.2010, pg. 2
- /4/ Fatjona Mejdini "Regjistrimi i popullsisë nis më datën 2 prill", *Shqip*, 26.10.2011, pg. 4
- /5/ Tedi Blushi "Qeveria: Minoriteti grek, 35 mijë vetë", *Gazeta Shqiptare*, 25.03.2009
- /6/ Rezarta Delisula "Simpoziumi mbi Himarën, Debatet", *Gazeta Shqiptare*, 5.10.2010, pg. 13-14-15; 6.10.2010, pg. 9, 9.10.2010, pg. 2-3
- /7/ Juliana Dhimitri "Konsulli i Greqisë: Vllehët janë grekë", *Shqip*, 6.02.2011, pg. 11
- /8/ Juliana Dhimitri "Kleriku i vllshve: Jemi ortodoksë, jo grekë", *Shqip*, 10.02.2011, pg. 6
- /9/ Tedi Blushi "Kombësia, Skandali Oketa: Konsulli grek në Korçë duhet të shpallet "non grata"", *Gazeta Shqiptare*, 14.02.2011, pg.2
- /10/ Po aty.
- /11/ Spahiu: Po çenohet sovraniteti shqiptar, *Gazeta Shqiptare*, 14.02.2011, pg. 3
- /12/ Tedi Blushi, Shqiparët bëhen grekë, gjykatat shkelën ligjin, *Gazeta Shqiptare*, 25.03.2009, pg. 2
- /13/ Meidani: Regjistrimi mbi baza etnike, jo afër së vërtetës, *Shqip*, 26.10.2010, pg.5
- /14/ Spahiu: Ndryshimi i Kombësisë, rrezik për Shqipërinë, *Gazeta Shqiptare*, 27.02.2011, pg. 5
- /15/ Regjistrimi i popullsisë, 81 shoqata i thonë "JO!" projektit qeveritar, *Shqip*, 23.02.2011, pg. 5
- /16/ Fatjona Mejdini, Godo: Greqisë i duhen treguar limitet, *Shqip*, 6.03.2011, pg. 5
- /17/ Miltiadh Veveçka, Numërimi i popullatës është procedurë demokratike, *Shqip*, 13.03.2011
- /18/ Artan Fuga, Regjistrimi i popullsisë: Tjetri dhe vetja, *Standart*, 5.03.2011, pg.
- /19/ Mentor Nazarko, Vllehët dhe regjistrimi, *Panorama*, 18.03.2011, pg.8
- /20/ Fatos Lubonja, Pse jam pro regjistrimit, *Panorama*, 21.03.2011, pg.6
- /21/ Tajfel H., *Human groups and social categories: Studies in sociology*, Cambridge University Press, 1981
- /22/ Bazohem këtu në 5 pikat themeltare të identitetit etnik sipas Antony Smith: *National Identity*, Penguin Books, 2001