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Freedom of the Press 2010 - Albania

Status: Partly Free**Legal Environment:** 16**Political Environment:** 16**Economic Environment:** 18**Total Score:** 50

- The constitution guarantees freedom of the press, and the media are vigorous and fairly diverse. However, outlets often display a political bias, and reporting is influenced by the economic or political interests of media owners.
- Libel remains a criminal offense, punishable by fines and up to two years in prison, though there were no cases brought against journalists in 2009.
- The government of Prime Minister Sali Berisha has used administrative mechanisms to disrupt the operations of media outlets it perceives as hostile. In January, the Ministry of Interior carried out the eviction of the daily *Tema* from a state-owned building, ignoring a court order suspending the action. The paper had obtained a 20-year lease in 2007, but the government cited national security concerns, noting that a company hired to produce identity documents would be housed in the same office complex. *Tema*, which has investigated corruption by government officials, continued publishing from a new location during 2009. In September, the Ministry of Economy instructed the private television station Top Channel, which has a history of critical reporting, to vacate state-owned facilities that were being privatized.
- The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) reported that virtually all monitored outlets demonstrated an alignment with one political party or another during the campaign for the June 2009 parliamentary elections. All monitored television broadcasts favored the ruling Democratic Party or the opposition Socialist Party, and smaller parties were reportedly denied their legally guaranteed share of coverage. The election commission's Media Monitoring Board was also allegedly politicized.
- Journalists sometimes face intimidation and assaults in response to critical reporting. In February 2009, an editorial in the generally pro-Berisha private daily *Koha Jone* explicitly called for the murder of Mero Baze, the owner of *Tema* and host of a talk show on the independent television station Vision Plus. Separately, Baze was allegedly assaulted by businessman Rezart Taci and at least two of his bodyguards in November 2009. Through his media outlets, Baze had accused Taci of tax evasion and irregularities in his acquisition of a state-owned oil refinery. Taci, who had close ties to Berisha, was arrested along with the two bodyguards, and at year's end they were free on bail pending trial.
- Albanian Radio and Television, the public broadcaster, is financially dependent on the state and typically shows a strong progovernment bias. Three private television stations have national reach, and dozens of smaller television and radio outlets also operate in a poorly regulated environment. Albanians have access to foreign radio content and television broadcasts from neighboring Greece and Italy. There are a variety of daily and weekly newspapers, but circulation is low. Media outlets typically rely on financial support from owners and a few major advertisers, and self-censorship to suit their interests is common. Journalists are especially vulnerable to editorial pressure due to a lack of employment contracts and irregular pay.
- There were no government restrictions on the internet, which was accessed by 41.2

percent of the population in 2009. Penetration has been increasing in recent years, but access in rural areas remains limited.

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