

## **Screen journalism; the new rules of procedure of the Assembly violate the freedom of the media**

**By Elira Kadriu, Entenela Ndrevataj**

They are used to communicating in front of the cameras, but on June 9, the journalists covering the work of the Assembly and the parliamentary committees did not hold microphones in their hands. Banners read: "We want to report what we see, not what we are served," they gathered to protest the new regulation of the Albanian Parliament, which they say violates the freedom of the media and the right of the public to be informed.

"The latest decision of the government turns the journalist into a visitor to the Parliament building", complains Arestina Skënderi, reporter of A2 television CNN.

"To tell a journalist that you will receive the news from a room where you will be accommodated and have screens, first you have denied him the right to information, second you have given him a served news and third you are not lets him report freely, "she added.

On June 2, the Bureau of the Assembly approved the decision to amend the regulation on accreditation, accommodation and orientation of the media at the Albanian Parliament. According to journalists, this regulation was approved by the Assembly without consulting stakeholders.

"It has been said that several meetings have been held with journalists, but none of our colleagues covering the developments in the Albanian Parliament confirms this fact," said Osman Stafa, a political journalist on News 24 television.

Meanwhile, experts on media freedom and the right to information - foreign and domestic, say that this decision violates not only the right of the public to be informed, but also the independence of MPs to communicate with voters.

"There is a long democratic tradition where parliamentary activity takes place in public," said Helen Darbishire, a human rights activist and founder of the international information rights organization Access Info.

"Journalists should have access to the physical premises of parliaments," she added, adding that "journalists should also be free to walk and talk to parliamentarians and their staff."

Following the protest by journalists and the reaction of freedom of expression organizations, the Assembly held an open meeting to hear stakeholder suggestions for the new regulation.

The Secretary General, Genci Gjonçaj said that the decision is being re-evaluated and all concerns raised are being taken into account, but he did not give a timeline for when they will be reflected in the rules of procedure of the Assembly.

"When, how and at what moment there will be changes is an issue that I can not answer," said Gjonçaj.

## **Deterioration of media freedom**

Media freedom has taken steps backwards in Albania after the center-left government of Prime Minister Edi Rama came to power. According to the index for media freedom in the world published by Reporters Without Borders for 2021, Albania is ranked 83rd out of 180 countries.

Seven international media freedom organizations, which visited Albania on a fact-finding mission in July 2019, expressed their concern that the Albanian authorities are not fulfilling their obligations to guarantee freedom of expression and the media.

"One of the biggest problems is censorship, the way the media works in Albania does not allow journalists to report freely," said Flutura Kusari, of the European Center for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), one of the participating organizations. in the fact-finding mission of two years ago.

"The second problem is access to information," said Kusari, adding that "increasingly, access to information is almost impossible, including now the attempt with this regulation."

The decision of the Assembly Bureau to amend the regulation on media accreditation prohibits journalists from monitoring and reporting independently of parliamentary committees.

Under the new regulation, journalists can no longer move independently on the premises of the Assembly, but will be forced to stay in a separate room in the basement - known as the journalists' room, from where they will be able to follow through the network. of controlled broadcasting the work of parliamentary committees.

Meanwhile, journalists who want to organize interviews with MPs must apply and get the approval of the Press Office of the Assembly.

Unlike independent media journalists, the new regulation gives special status to journalists of ART and the Albanian Telegraphic Agency (ATSH), who can move freely in the premises of the Assembly.

In an initial reaction after the journalists' protest, the Assembly claimed that the change in the regulation was a product of the European Union recommendations.

However, in a statement to the media, the EU Delegation in Tirana denied that it was behind the amendment of the regulation and asked the Assembly to consult with stakeholders.

"Public hearings and media access to Parliament to cover the work of its sessions and committees are important elements of a liberal democracy," the EU Delegation said.

## **Journalism is not done in front of the screen**

The new regulation of the Albanian parliament has been opposed not only by journalists who report daily from its premises, but also by local and international organizations of freedom of expression.

In a letter to the President of the Assembly, the ECPMF and three other international organizations - Article 19, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) and the International Press Institute (IPI) - asked Gramoz Ruçi to withdraw the new regulation on relations with the media, calling it restrictive of parliamentary transparency and detrimental to democracy in the country.

"We respectfully seek to withdraw these new rules and maintain the currently high standards for access of journalists and media workers," the organizations wrote in an open letter published online.

"Any new changes should be introduced only after consultation with journalists' organizations, trade unions and civil society," they added.

According to Koloreto Cukali, chairman of the Albanian Media Council, the Assembly's decision affects the ability of journalists to report independently of the Assembly.

"Journalism is not done in cafes and journalism is not done in front of a screen, so the journalist must be where the event takes place and this is the big difference between good and bad journalism", said Cukali.

"You can really keep a director and only a camera to shoot, but journalists must be present, especially when the biggest problems in the Albanian Parliament occur in the parliamentary committees and remove journalists from there or from countries. others is simply absurd," he added.

Flutura Kusari from ECPMF emphasized that through media reporting by the parliament, citizens are informed about the dynamics of developments in the Assembly, understand how political parties represent their voters, what they decide, what discussions there are, what different interests are pushed through lobbying, and agendas different during the drafting and adoption of laws.

However, she underlined that from the new regulation approved by the Bureau of the Assembly, the deputies are also missing.

"You should know that the deputies do not have full freedom to act as they want, they are usually dictated by the leaders of political parties and often the only opportunity for them to speak is only by communicating with journalists within the Albanian Parliament. ", Said Kusari.

Journalist Arestina Skënderi believes that the reason why many MPs are not opposing the change of the regulation is related to the fact that the Assembly lacks a real opposition.

"This decision comes at the moment because we have in 2019 that in parliament we have only one party and there was in fact no real opposition, and apparently the current majority wants not to have the last obstacle, ie journalism to report freely and independently, "she said.

"And ironically, all those who approved this regulation will not be in the new parliament, not even President Gramoz Ruçi, who resigned a few days ago," she concluded.

### The article in local language

[https://citizens-channel.com/2021/06/30/gazetaria-nga-ekrani-rregullorja-e-re-e-kuvendit-cenon-lirine-e-medias/?fbclid=IwAR01TfPxxTtrpej2dwpPTYx22CIV7yP1rMFK4N4V-FDNs\\_p84HYI\\_jzVBKk](https://citizens-channel.com/2021/06/30/gazetaria-nga-ekrani-rregullorja-e-re-e-kuvendit-cenon-lirine-e-medias/?fbclid=IwAR01TfPxxTtrpej2dwpPTYx22CIV7yP1rMFK4N4V-FDNs_p84HYI_jzVBKk)

**Citizens Channel**

KREU RAPORTIM I TEMATIZUAR HISTORI NJERËZORE REPOLIS KAUAZ FAKTMBLEDHËSI PERIFERIA FLET RRETH NESH

Ballina > Faktmbledhësi > Gazetaria nga ekrani; rregullorja e re e Kuvendit cënon lirinë e medias

Faktmbledhësi Histori Njerëzore Uj Medium Media për Median

# Gazetaria nga ekrani; rregullorja e re e Kuvendit cënon lirinë e medias

Nga **Citizens Channel** - June 30, 2021

RRJETET SOCIALE

- 9,444 Fans LIKE
- 902 Followers FOLLOW
- 339 Followers FOLLOW
- 156 Subscribers SUBSCRIBE

Recent Posts

- UNESCO kërkon zyrtarisht ndalimin e punimeve për Bypass-in e Gjirokastrës në zonën historike të saj
- Autobusët elektrikë, premtimi i përvitshëm i Bashkisë Tiranë
- "Zëra", një podcast nga Citizens Channel

Foto ilustruese: Xhemal Moku