

**INTERVIEW OF HEAD OF OSCE PRESENCE IN ALBANIA AMBASSADOR  
BERND BORCHARDT WITH A2 CNN TV STATION**

*5 May 2020*

*Interviewed by: Klementina Cenkollari*

**A2:** 3 May was World Press Freedom Day. How do you see media freedom in Albania? According to the latest report, media freedom in Albania worsened. Both the President and the DP Chair expressed concerns. Do you share the same concern?

**Ambassador Borchardt:** “The media situation has certainly not improved, and according to the rating even deteriorated during the last year, which is highly regrettable. The report attributed that mainly to the amendments to the media legislations, which are now in parliament. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media had long discussions with the majority fraction in parliament about these matters, and that led to broad improvements of the draft, but not yet to something that guaranteed, for instance, proportionality. Everybody, including the Albanian parliament is now waiting for the opinion of the Venice Commission – the other big European institution dealing with media issues - to give an opinion on the proposed amendments. They will do it next month, in June, as they announced. It remains to be seen what the Assembly is going to do with the comments of the Venice Commission. We have always been supporting self-regulation of the media, we have encouraged that over many years, and this is certainly the best option. This is also the view of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

But there are also many important other aspects why the media situation has not improved. First, the legal and socio-economic rights of journalists, which have not improved. This has been underlined repeatedly by the journalist union. Because employers do not often offer legally-binding employment contracts, and the responsible inspectorate does not systematically check the legal employment status of journalists. Social security contributions are not paid, like pension and health insurance, which makes journalists even more vulnerable to internal pressures from owners or managers on the editorial side, which in itself limits the diversity of opinions. Also the practice of political parties and public institutions to feed the media with ‘pre-fabricated tapes’ has been over many years criticized by us and from our friends from ODIHR after elections. Using these tapes from the political parties is, on the one hand, not professional. In other countries, this is marked: this comes from x, y, x party or institution, it is not our own material. So sending them out uncommented, unmarked is not professional journalism. The Albanian public is misled this way, because it gives the impression that the media were the authors of the pre-fabricated tapes. It looks like it comes from journalists, from independent media, but it is without critical scrutiny and interpretation by the journalists themselves. The journalists must have the right to cover public and political events, in particular in the run-up to elections, there it is most problematic. These are only two of the problems that have to be addressed.

On the other hand, I see also progress. There have been less conflicts between journalists and others, like conflicts in courts, or even worse, violent conflicts.”

**A2:** How have the Albanian media covered COVID-19?

**Ambassador Borchardt:** “I have been discussing that with my colleagues, because my Albanian is not good enough to follow the TV, I’m only following print media. In general, I

have a really good impression. I am following the websites of some of the leading media in Albania, and then I get the review that my colleagues prepare about the others. I believe that Albanian media have been doing a good job, even exposing themselves to risks for their own health. That helps certainly to prevent the spread of panic across the society. I must also give credit to the continued focus on other relevant political, and very important economic and social issues, which are at the forefront door and play now a very important role in the public debate, which I get from the many phone calls I do during the lockdown.”

**A2:** Should media outlets affected by COVID-19 receive financial support?

**Ambassador Borchardt:** “On World Press Freedom Day, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media very clearly stated that states must support media who are financially struggling because of the pandemic. And I can only echo that what he said.”

**A2:** How will the OSCE support media this year, considering also the fact that Albania is OSCE Chair?

**Ambassador Borchardt:** “As always, we are permanently monitoring Albanian media, and in particular reports on cases of threats or attacks against journalists, on cases when journalists were not permitted to do their job, or they were not given access to information they needed. In line with our policy to encourage media pluralism and in line with the ODIHR report on elections, in particular the last one and the 2017 one, we are also looking forward to discussing media ownership concentration in the country and what should be done to balance the situation. And then, I would also like to mention our main media project, where we implement a project supporting RTSH – Albania’s Public Broadcaster – and the Journalism Department of the Tirana University. This is financed by the EU Delegation and we are implementing that until 2022. These are just a few examples, but these are some of our important work trends.”

**A2:** The ad hoc committee on electoral reform will summon again, but not the political roundtable. What is keeping the parties apart? Do you have an appeal to them? Do you have any suggestions for the pending topics?

**Ambassador Borchardt:** “The OSCE Presence, ODIHR and other international organizations and bilateral friends of Albania have all strongly encouraged all sides to work together on the electoral reform, and we have offered our support with expert advice, with best practices to get this reform going. We have seen important progress in 2019, including the rejoining of this effort by those political parties who had decided to leave the parliament. We very strongly believe that the resumption of this process in the ad hoc committee on electoral reform of the Assembly tomorrow is a crucial step forward for the country, as the electoral reform has now been pending now for quite some time and many of the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations have not been addressed already over years. The political committee in which also the extra parliamentary opposition is present, we have seen that it has worked hard to achieve projects and we very strongly encourage all sides to keep this momentum going. With our in-house capacity, we will continue to provide support; our friends from ODIHR are available, and also other international partners like EU, Council of Europe can advise on how to progress and how to achieve in the framework of best international practices, on what is politically wanted. Finally, I can encourage all political actors to stay the course and not to let trail this important political process.”

**Ends**