

EDITORIAL

Regulation of the Media Environment in the Digital Age: An Examination of Innovative Tools and Practices Aligned with EU Standards¹

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Albania's progress toward European Union accession is inseparable from the way its media system adapts to digital transformations and aligns with EU standards. Media as infrastructures of democracy shape public discourse, influence political legitimacy, and affect citizens' capacity to participate. This special issue of *Polis Journal* addresses how media innovation, regulation, and self-regulation intersect with Albania's integration process, grounding the discussion in current policy projects and empirical research.

The contributions demonstrate both advances and persistent weaknesses. The study on technology-driven data journalism introduces tools for monitoring narratives, innovation, and online diffusion, showing how transparency and accountability can be embedded into newsroom practice. Yet it also identifies Albania's underrepresentation in global misinformation detection systems, highlighting the need for locally adapted and GDPR-compliant solutions.

The legal analyses assess the implications of the European Media Freedom Act, underlining gaps in ownership transparency, state advertising, and editorial independence. Empirical work reveals that prime-time news and youth media use reflect optimism toward the EU, but also narrow sourcing and susceptibility

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to misinformation. Policy reviews from the Audiovisual Media Authority show partial alignment with EU directives but underline the difficulty of regulating online platforms. The final article examines external influences, philosophical perspectives on European values, adding further depth to the debate.

These academic contributions are reinforced by institutional projects at the Faculty of Humanities, Education and Liberal Arts at European University of Tirana. The Jean Monnet Chair PROEUMEDAL (2024–2027) is reforming curricula, promoting comparative research, and convening policy dialogue to strengthen self-regulation and pluralism. In parallel, the AKKSHI-funded project on media regulation in the digital age investigates innovation mechanisms and self-regulation on the part of the media, aiming to produce research and policy-relevant recommendations and measurable outputs. Together, these initiatives provide an institutional framework that links research with teaching and policymaking.

The findings point to clear priorities. Regulators must build capacity and independence while ensuring that EU norms are not only transposed but implemented. Academia should expand policy-relevant curricula and research. Newsrooms need to adopt transparent verification practices and embrace self-regulation as professional culture. Civil society must promote media literacy and demand pluralism.

Albania's integration into the EU will not be decided by legislation alone. It will depend on whether classrooms, newsrooms, regulators, and civil society embed transparency, innovation, and pluralism in daily practice. The work presented here shows pathways for that transformation, offering evidence and tools for policymakers and practitioners committed to aligning Albania's media with European standards.