

Framing Europe: Albanian Audiovisual Media and the Discourse of EU Integration

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Abstract

This research investigates the media discourse surrounding Albania's European Union (EU) integration process, focusing on how three major national TV stations, Top Channel, RTSH 1, and Klan TV, frame and communicate this subject to the public. EU integration remains a strategic priority for Albania, symbolizing both a political aspiration and a developmental pathway toward membership by 2030. Using a systematic content analysis of prime-time news edition broadcast, between 1 September and 30 November 2024, the study examines the frequency, tone, and thematic framing of integration-related coverage. Findings show that while the dominant tone across these TVs is optimistic, emphasizing progress, EU support, and governmental commitment, there are variations in the inclusion of critical perspectives, especially when addressing unresolved reforms, political tensions, and anti-corruption measures. Technical and bureaucratic terminology remains prevalent, potentially limiting accessibility for broader audiences. The study underscores the need for balanced narratives, greater source diversity, and more citizen-focused reporting to enhance public understanding of the EU integration process.

Keywords: Media discourse analysis, European Union integration, Journalism, Content framing

Introduction

The process of Albania's integration into the European Union (EU) represents one of the most significant political, economic, and societal transformations in the country's modern history. As a candidate country, Albania has ratified its European objectives through institutional measures and strategic plans, such as the *National Plan for European Integration 2022–2024*, which underscores EU membership as a geostrategic priority at the core of domestic and foreign policy (European Commission, 2022). Also, as a candidate country, Albania's EU trajectory is shaped not only by the implementation of reforms in governance, justice, and the rule of law, but also by how this process is communicated to the public. In this context, the role of the media, particularly national TV stations, is critical in shaping public perceptions by generating informed debate, and fostering transparency. Media discourse does more than simply inform; it frames the narrative, highlights certain aspects of the process, and influences how citizens interpret progress and challenges. To construct a narrative structure, media framing uses both inclusion and omission (Abuhasirah, 2025). Also, Entman (1993) noted that framing involves selecting and highlighting certain aspects of an issue while downplaying others. National television channels, as the most widely consumed news source in Albania, serve as primary intermediaries between political decision-makers and the public. In the Balkan context, studies show that national television remains a primary source of political information, with framing and tone playing a decisive role in shaping citizens' attitudes toward the EU. This research paper focuses on three major national broadcasters Top Channel, RTSH 1, and Klan TV, examining how they portray Albania's EU integration process over a defined monitoring period. By categorizing coverage into positive, neutral, and critical tones, the research seeks to identify prevailing narratives, thematic frames, and editorial tendencies. The findings aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of media framing in transitional political contexts and to provide insights into the relationship between journalism and European integration process.

Research Objectives

This study is guided by the following specific objectives:

- To investigate the media discourse on Albania's EU integration process and assess how this process is represented in national media;

- To identify the dominant themes and framing strategies employed by TV channels in reporting on Albania's EU integration;
- To conduct a content analysis of three prime-time news edition from three national television channels, categorizing coverage as *positive*, *neutral*, or *critical*, based on a rigorous analytical framework.

Methodology

The research employs systematic monitoring of the prime-time news edition broadcast by three major national TV stations - RTSH, Top Channel and Klan TV.

The monitoring period spanned from September 1 – November 30, 2024, encompassing daily main news bulletins. News items pertaining to Albania's EU integration were identified, coded, and analyzed. Each item was classified into one of three categories - positive, neutral, or critical, to evaluate the editorial stance and framing tendencies of the outlets.

Furthermore, quantitative data were compiled to measure the frequency and distribution of integration-related coverage, thereby enabling an assessment of reporting intensity on this subject.

Case Study

Albania, as one of the Western Balkan countries, has taken several steps toward integration into the European Union (EU). In October 2024, Albania opened its first cluster of negotiation chapters with the EU, followed by the opening of negotiations for two additional chapters in December 2024, covering foreign relations, foreign policy, security, and defense. This process is seen as an opportunity for Albania to achieve its goal of EU membership by 2030.

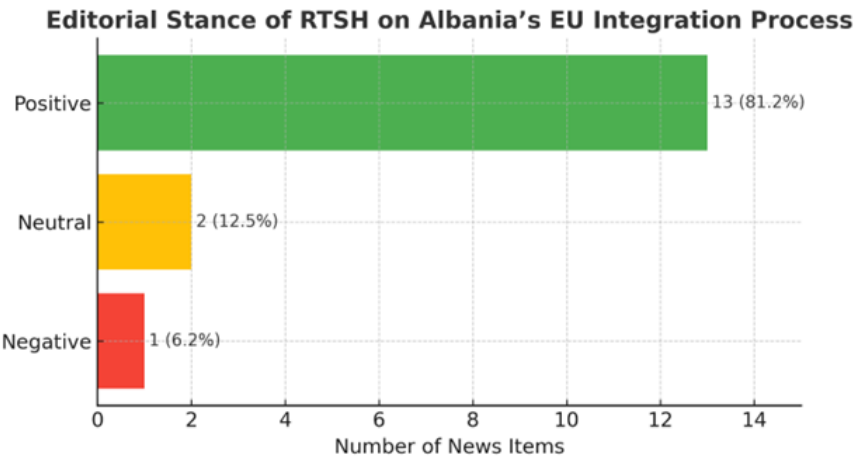
In this context, media discourse surrounding the integration process has played a crucial role in informing the public and shaping perceptions of this journey. RTSH, Top Channel, and TV Klan nationally licensed and among the most widely followed TV outlets in Albania were therefore selected as the sources for monitoring. During the months of September, October, and November 2024, the prime-time news edition of these channels were monitored to obtain a clear overview of the content and approaches adopted in covering the integration process.

The content analysis of integration-related news on these three channels has enabled the identification of trends and patterns in the use of specific media terms. The frequency of terms such as "*opening of negotiations*," "*acceleration of integration*," "*negotiating chapters*," and "*economic reform*" is significant for understanding how the media portrays this process and constructs a public image of it.

Media Discourse on Albania’s EU Integration

In general, news items classified as *positive* highlighted Albania’s achievements and progress in the integration process, while *critical* reports emphasized the obstacles and challenges the country faces. *Neutral* coverage combined elements of both, offering a more balanced perspective on the situation.

FIGURE 1: News Approaches on EU Integration in RTSH TV station, (September 1 – November 30, 2024, main news edition at 20:00)



In Figure 1 (OpenAI, 2025), a predominance of positive coverage in RTSH reporting on Albania’s EU integration is evident. Out of 17 selected reports during the three-month monitoring period, 14 adopted a positive approach, only 1 was negative, and 2 were classified as neutral, based on the analysis of terminology used.

The prevailing narrative regarding Albania’s integration process focuses largely on the country’s progress, acceleration of the process, and its advancement beyond neighboring states in the Western Balkans. One example is the report of 15 October 2024, titled “*We Were Behind Macedonia, Today Ahead of the Entire Balkans,*” featuring an interview with Prime Minister Rama. This headline underscores Albania’s advancement in the integration process in comparison to North Macedonia and other regional countries.

During the monitored period, reporting tones were predominantly enthusiastic about Albania’s EU integration. The terminology and keywords used were heavily technical, with frequent references to institutions and international actors involved in the process. All reports were linked to diplomatic developments, meetings, conferences, official statements, interviews, and formal reports - often placed

at the beginning of news bulletins, reflecting adherence to an official agenda in coverage.

While the use of bureaucratic and formal terms aims to convey the importance of the information, it often increases ambiguity and confusion for audiences. Complex and technical expressions such as “*assistance packages*,” “*working groups*,” “*regional integration*,” and “*multilateral aid*” may be difficult for viewers unfamiliar with the terminology of international politics, economics, and diplomacy. This institutional communication style, when replicated in media reporting, can create the perception that integration-related issues are highly technical and removed from citizens’ direct concerns.

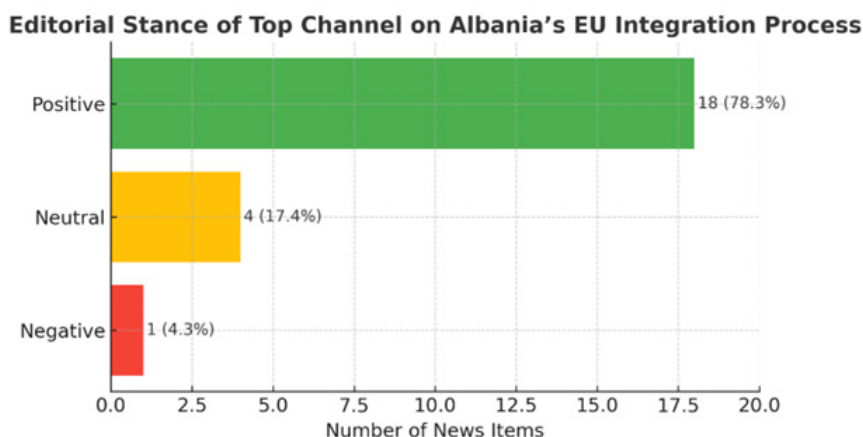
Frequent terms such as “*negotiations*,” “*chapters*,” “*growth plan*,” or “*reforms*” tend to frame the integration process as a purely technical and institutional journey. RTSH data analysis underscores continuous progress and strong EU support for Albania, conveyed in an optimistic tone consistent with the current government’s political stance. Coverage of EU-related events prioritizes positive developments, while challenges faced by Albania are less frequently emphasized. Terms like “*support*,” “*progress*,” and “*readiness*” highlight the EU’s commitment to assist Albania, as illustrated in reports from 15 October and 7 November 2024, which stress the opening of negotiation chapters and the authorities’ optimism about concluding the process by 2027. Similarly, terms such as “*reform*” and “*progress in implementing reforms*” are framed as evidence of Albania’s advancement.

The narrative of EU support remains dominant, emphasizing sustained EU engagement and assistance for Albania. This strategy helps construct a strong image of the integration process and a positive assessment of Albania’s membership prospects.

The optimistic tone on Albania’s EU integration, highlighting progress and EU backing aligns with the government’s strategy to foster a favorable public perception. Much like the official narrative, RTSH’s coverage places strong emphasis on meeting conditions and opening chapters as indicators of progress. While the positive framing is often presented as a consensus, the findings suggest that diversifying the narrative would be beneficial. This includes incorporating a wider range of perspectives and critically examining factors that could delay or hinder further progress, as well as exploring potential solutions to overcome these challenges.

Top Channel News Edition (September 1 – November 30, 2024, main news edition at 19:30)

FIGURE 2: News Approaches on EU Integration in Top Channel



As illustrated in Figure 2 (OpenAI, 2025), the news reports on Albania's EU integration broadcast in Top Channel's prime-time news edition are predominantly positive, although the discourse often contains neutral and critical nuances. Despite an overall optimistic presentation of the integration process, the language employed is generally neutral and, in some instances, critical, particularly in relation to the fulfillment of conditions and criteria for reforms, the fight against corruption, and compliance with EU requirements concerning enlargement, funding, and the broader advancement of the integration process.

According to monitoring data, a total of 23 reports were broadcast during the assessed period. Notably, due to the intensification of integration-related events and activities in October, the number of reports increased significantly, reflecting heightened media attention on Albania's EU integration during this period.

While the overarching narrative is relatively positive, the treatment of reform issues and political commitments tends to be more neutral in tone and occasionally critical, given the variations in thematic coverage. The news items are divided between positive portrayals of progress and reports highlighting political tensions. For instance, the reports aired on 15 October, 23 October, 29 October, and 7 November 2024, with titles such as "*Accession Talks Open*," "*Albania, €920 Million from the EU*," and "*Albania-EU Meeting*" – all these titles adopt a positive stance that emphasizes progress and the potential benefits of EU membership. The frequent use of terms such as "*negotiation chapters*," "*opening of negotiations*," "*reform plan*," and "*EU integration*" conveys a sense of continuous progress and

clear commitment by Albanian authorities to meeting EU standards. Reports on judicial reform and economic development are framed around positive developments, while simultaneously stressing the need to meet additional conditions to accelerate the process.

Conversely, the report of October 30, 2024, covering the Democratic Party's blockade of the integration resolution, marked a notable shift in tone and approach. This report was more critical, highlighting domestic political tensions as obstacles to EU integration. Terms such as "*blockage*" and "*obstacle*" introduced a negative framing, emphasizing the disruptive impact of internal politics on the integration process. Similarly, other headlines such as "*U.S. State Department Official in Tirana: Keep Corruption Under Control to Join the EU*," "*Reforms Required Before EU Provides Funds*," "*EU: Evaluation, Criticism, and Tasks*," and "*EU Conditions for €920 Million*", reflect a more neutral or critical discourse.

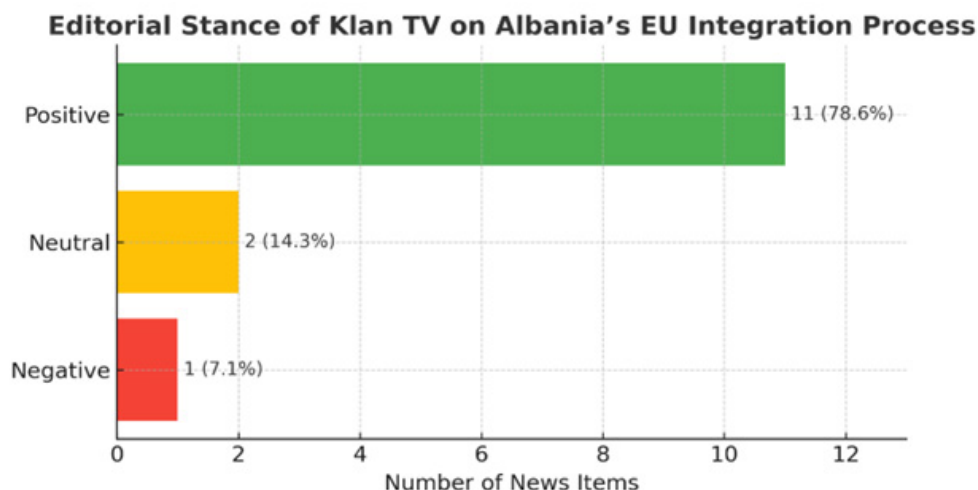
From a critical discourse analysis perspective, positively framed reports construct integration as an achievable opportunity, with repeated references to "*opening of negotiations*," "*successful reforms*," and "*first chapters opened*." By employing terms such as "*progress*," "*support*," "*hope*," and "*commitment*," these reports generate a tangible perception of integration as both realistic and imminent, fostering public confidence in the process. Conversely, the use of terms such as "*blockage*" and "*obstacle*" in politically charged reports conveys uncertainty about the country's trajectory toward irreversible integration.

The frequency analysis of key terms indicates a tendency to present a progressive narrative of Albania's EU integration. Nevertheless, the absence of political consensus and the slow pace of reforms also emerge as obstacles, producing a more nuanced and complex portrayal of integration-related coverage on Top Channel. It is evident that political dynamics dominate the coverage, although in some cases critical emphasis is placed on economic shortcomings, the justice system, and reform implementation, with particular attention to calls for tackling corruption, often articulated through references to EU diplomats.

Finally, the 'actors' most frequently featured in Top Channel's integration-related reports are high-level EU officials and senior Albanian politicians, with limited inclusion of experts and citizens expressing their views on the country's integration process. A broader diversification of information sources, alongside greater coverage of non-political and socio-economic aspects of integration, would expand the perspective of media discourse on the EU.

TV Klan News Edition (September 1 – November 30, 2024, main news edition at 19:30)

FIGURE 3: News Approaches on EU Integration in TV Klan



As shown in Figure 3 (OpenAI, 2025), the coverage of Albania's EU integration on TV Klan is also dominated by a positive narrative. A total of 14 reports directly addressing the integration process were identified five in September, five in October, and four in November. Of these, 11 reports adopted a positive approach, while one was classified as negative and another as neutral.

The reports frequently adopt a personalized framing, with headlines such as *"Von der Leyen: EU Commissioners Dedicated to the Balkans," "Von der Leyen Meets Western Balkan Leaders," "Chief Negotiator: Integration Reforms by 2027,"* and *"Negotiations, Hasani: To Be Concluded by 2030."* Coverage is often centered on statements and visits by Prime Minister Rama, such as *"Rama: Russian and Iranian Disinformation Through Social Media,"* accompanying reports on the appointment of an EU Commissioner dedicated to the Balkans, or *"Rama on Official Visit to Hungary,"* accompanying reports on Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán's support for accelerating Albania's EU accession, or *"Rama Attends Borrell's Meeting with EU Leaders,"* covering discussions on geopolitical challenges and EU integration with Western Balkan prime ministers.

However, there are instances when the narrative shifts toward neutrality or criticism. The report of October 30, 2024 on the European Commission's progress report adopted a more neutral tone, stressing the need for intensified reforms, particularly in combating corruption and strengthening the judiciary. Although Albania's achievements were positively acknowledged, unresolved issues were also

emphasized. This type of coverage presents a balanced stance between support and constructive criticism. The report further highlighted ongoing concerns regarding media freedom, noting stagnation and the European Commission's observation that last year's recommendations remained unimplemented.

Thus, while the prevailing narrative in TV Klan's coverage of Albania's EU integration is positive, focused on government efforts to advance reforms and progress, there are instances of neutrality and critical tone due to persistent challenges in the rule of law and anti-corruption measures.

Analysis of titles and content reveals that reports on high-level meetings such as those of Von der Leyen with Western Balkan leaders, or Rama's official visits to EU member states, aim to underscore EU support for Albania and progress toward accession. This pattern is consistent across most selected reports, where terms such as *"progress," "support," "reforms,"* and *"growth plan"* frequently appear, reinforcing an optimistic vision of Albania's European future.

For example, the report of 2 September 2024, titled *"Von der Leyen: EU Commissioners Dedicated to the Balkans,"* employed a distinctly positive narrative, highlighting efforts to accelerate Balkan integration and the potential benefits for Albania from a €6 billion growth plan. Similarly, the report of 26 September 2024 on the opening of negotiation chapters stressed that Albania had met the necessary criteria, portraying this as a significant milestone toward EU membership.

TV Klan's style of presentation is characterized by frequent repetition of terms designed to consolidate the perception of Albania's progress and commitment to integration. Key terms such as *"reforms," "negotiations," "EU,"* and *"Western Balkans"* recur systematically to reinforce the country's alignment with EU standards.

Another notable stylistic element is the use of quotations and statements from high-level leaders, such as EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Prime Minister Rama. Their inclusion creates a direct connection to international authority and conveys a strong message of EU support. In reports covering Rama's visits and reform discussions, these quotations reinforce the perception of Albania as an active and committed participant in the integration process.

Recommendations

From this study, several recommendations emerge for improving media reporting on Albania's EU integration process:

Clarity and simplification of information: The media should aim to use clearer, more accessible language for citizens, particularly for those who are not closely engaged with technical matters or international negotiations.

Diversification of media approaches: Coverage should provide a balanced view that reflects not only achievements but also the challenges and setbacks Albania may encounter, thereby creating a realistic and comprehensive public perception.

Explanation of concrete impacts for citizens: It is essential for the media to highlight the tangible effects of each stage of the integration process on citizens' daily lives, including implications for the economy, justice, freedoms, and citizens' rights.

These recommendations would contribute to more accessible and balanced reporting on Albania's path toward EU membership.

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