

ITALIANIZATION ACCOMPLISHED

FORMS AND STRUCTURES OF ALBANIAN TELEVISION'S DEPENDENCY ON ITALIAN MEDIA AND CULTURE

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Abstract: After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of communist rule in 1989, the Eastern European media system embarked on a process of transformation characterised by political liberalization and commercialization. In Albania, this process was accompanied by a growing dependence on Italian television as a structural, economic and cultural model for Albanian television. This article seeks to outline the different layers and aspects of dependence that link Italian and Albanian television systems and which began to be established during the last years of the communist regime and remain prominent today. From the first programmes produced by Albanian television broadcasters in the early 1990s to the recent appearances of Italian television presenters on Albanian private channels we can observe a steady and continuous trend of growing dependency on Albania's western neighbour.

Keywords: Albanian television, Italian television, Dependency, Italianization

With the fall of Berlin Wall and the end of the communist regimes, Albania – along with other Eastern European countries – dealt with the passage from dictatorship to transition to a democracy. This process affected political, economic, cultural and even the media system. Television, in particular, underwent a deep transformation from a state-dominated model characterized by the control and the censorship of the regime to a “dual system” with a sudden explosion of private and commercial broadcasters since the middle of the 1990s.

The change of the Albanian television system after the end of communism followed a slightly different path than other countries belonging to the Soviet bloc; in fact, it could be identified as the clearest example of Italianization, since its evolution and transformation revealed strict legacies and relationships with Italy and showed how the dependency on an *Italian way of life* played a major role in Albanian society.

This article examines the dependency and interaction mechanisms that tie the post-communist Albanian media system to the Italian media system, in order to underline the different steps affecting the transformation of Albanian television and the influence exerted by the neighbouring country. I will provide a detailed overview of the main programmes and channels in the Albanian television system in the last twenty-five years, highlighting their similarities with foreign broadcasters, Italian in particular. My contribution will try to combine different approaches; first of all, the theoretical approach will help to focus on the concept of Italianization, which is distinct from other theories and methods used to approach media change. Then, a historical approach is adopted to provide a context for the understanding of the basis for the transformation of the Albanian media system and the transition from the state model to the market-oriented model. The historical approach is essential for tracing the development of media systems in a long-term

perspective, which also allows us to develop more context-sensitive understanding.¹ Lastly, the complexity of media systems and their relationships with other sectors suggest a need for a multidimensional approach, which is able to integrate different variables. To understand the dependency of Albanian television on Italian television one needs a multidimensional perspective to highlight interactions between the media system and the social, economic and political system. Such a multidimensional approach can act as “an antidote to the functionalism that typically underlies reductionism.”²

1. Americanization or Italianization?

After 1989, the Eastern European media systems underwent major changes, moving from an authoritarian media model to a market-based media model. Before starting the analysis of the process of Italianization of Albanian television, it is necessary to understand the role of globalization in this process, with a particular focus on the appropriation of American media culture. The concept of “americanization” in the field of media and communication studies dates back to the late sixties when the perspective of “cultural imperialism” began to be adopted in research on media change.³ This approach tried to explain why European media were looking increasingly similar to American ones, and emphasised a direct influence of American culture on journalism, cinema, entertainment and other genres and sectors of communication around the world. With regard to the television system, Jérôme Bourdon⁴ identifies three forms of “americanization” in European broadcasting: the first type discussed by the French scholar is “invisible americanization,” which started soon after the end of World War II and consists of the “exportation by the United States of a cultural and media grammar”⁵ rather than the global circulation of American products. The second type is the so-called “triumphant americanization”, which occurred during the 1980s and coincided with the period of deregulation and commercialization of television systems in Europe, when American formats began to appear in European schedules in a more directly visible manner. The last phase, for Bourdon, is the “intimate americanization”, a process characterized by a relative independence from imported American products and formats, but at the same time by the production of domestic programmes inspired by or directly based on American formats. In this context, formats like games, reality-shows or talent-shows are created by European producers, but often reproduce American culture and know-how, with extensive use of appropriation and re-adaptation of techniques in order to align the products with particular national and local features.

In Albania, the tendency towards americanization and homogenization of formats and contents became more clearly apparent only after 1989, following the end of communist rule. Americanization in Albania adopted the “intimate” form, through the interiorization of styles and languages familiar from globally circulated American formats. Since the beginning of the new century, channels and formats inspired by American products have proliferated. These include Scan TV, an economic and financial network with the same news and graphics of the American CBNC, as well as reality and talent shows like *Big Brother Albania* (on *TopChannel*, now in its seventh edition) or *Dancing with the Stars Albania* (*Vizion Plus*, fourth edition), both with the original foreign title.

On the other hand, the concept of Italianization was introduced by Slavko Splichal⁶ to underline how Eastern European media systems after 1989 have been developing along Italian lines; the scholar described Italianization as

¹ Silvio Waisbord, ‘Media in South America. Between the Rock of the State and the Hard Place of the Market,’ in James Curran and Myung-Jin Park, eds, *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, Routledge, 2012, pp. 50-62.

² Michael Schudson and Silvio Waisbord, ‘Toward a Political Sociology of the News Media,’ in Thomas Janoski, Robert Alford, Alexander Hicks and Mildred A. Schwartz, *The Handbook of Political Sociology. States, Civil Societies, and Globalization*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 350-364, quote p. 351.

³ Herbert I. Schiller, *Mass Communications and American Empire*, Beacon Press, 1969; Jeremy Tunstall, *The Media Are American*, Constable, 1977.

⁴ Jérôme Bourdon, *Du service public à la télé-réalité. Une histoire culturelle des télévisions européennes. 1950-2000*, INA, 2011 [From Public Service to Reality Tv. A Cultural History of European televisions. 1950-2000].

⁵ Ibid. p. 222.

⁶ Slavko Splichal, *Media Beyond Socialism: Theory and Practice in East-Central Europe*, Westview Press, 1994.

a combination of commercialization and politicization, the latter visible in the intervention of the state in public service broadcasting and a highly political orientation of journalism. This model is based on two pillars. First, post-communist governments, similarly to the Italian government, could be described as ‘coalitional complex[es] consisting of a large number of parliamentary parties or single “great coalitions.”’⁷ Indeed, until the 1980s, i.e. until the rise of privately owned, commercial broadcasters, the media in Italy were politicized and state-dominated in a similar way as those in Eastern Europe. The only major difference was that the state and hence the media were dominated by a single party throughout the period, rather than being subjected to periodic changes as a result of multi-party competition.

The Italianization model certainly offered some important contributions to the study of media democratization in Eastern Europe. First of all, emphasizing the historical legacy and national specificity of each country, it could be considered as a theoretical alternative to the so-called ‘transitional model’⁸, which tried to explain the development of media systems and their progressive liberalization as a direct consequence of the transition from authoritarianism to a democratic system⁹. Many scholars¹⁰ criticized this approach for its excessive determinism and the axiomatic assumption that media freedom and development was strictly correlated with economic growth and Western democracy, ignoring the cultural and historical context of transformation.

Besides, the Italianization model helped identify differences between media systems within the Western world – namely, between southern European media on the one hand and those that are based on Anglo-Saxon features on the other hand – allowing us to examine specific patterns that define national media systems within the west.

However, the concept of Italianization suffered from some limitations: it was applied to all Eastern European countries without taking into account the national specificities and seemed to be overly concerned with the relationship between media and politics, neglecting cultural and economic aspects of the transformation of media systems after decades of authoritarian rule. Furthermore, many scholars¹¹ underlined the risk that, based on the Italianization model, the specificity of Eastern European media systems is reduced to ‘berlusconization’, that is the close interdependence of political power and media ownership, as found in Italy when the country’s government was led by the media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi.

The following sections examine the development of Albanian television and its dependency on Italian features.

2. Albanian Television in Transition

The transition to democracy and the transformation of the media system in Albania occurred slowly, partly due to its rather extreme isolation during the period of communist rule. In 1968, Albania abandoned its earlier allies in the Warsaw Pact and sought instead to follow the Chinese model of communism, becoming the most reactionary,

⁷ Ibid., p. 146.

⁸ On the transitional mass-media model, see John C. Merrill, *The Imperative of Freedom: A Philosophy of Journalistic Autonomy*, Hastings House, 1974.

⁹ Many scholars adhered to this theory and applied it to Eastern European countries; see e.g. Karol Jakubowicz, ‘Media Within and Without the State: Press Freedom in Eastern Europe,’ *Journal of Communication*, 45, 5, pp. 125-139, 1995; Peeter Vihalemm, *Baltic Media in Transition*, Tartu University Press, 2002.

¹⁰ See, for instance: Colin Sparks and Anne Reading, *Communism, Capitalism and the Mass Media*, Sage, 1998; Tomasz Goban-Klas, *The Orchestration of the Media: The Politics of Mass Communication in Communist Poland and the Aftermath*, Westview Press, 1994; Maria Raicheva, ‘Of Leaders, Laggards, and Losers: An Examination of Post-Communist Models of Media Transition’, *Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Convention*, Austin, 2002.

¹¹ Angelika W. Wyka, ‘Berlusconization of the Mass Media in East Central Europe: The New Danger of Italianization,’ 2007, available on-line at <http://www.kakanien.ac.at/beitr/emerg/AWyka1.pdf>; Andrej Školkay, ‘Research on Mass Media in Central / Eastern Europe and Southern European Comparative Analysis’, in Bogusława Ostrowska-Dobek and Michal Glovacki, eds, *Comparing Media Systems in Central and Eastern Europe Between Commercialization and Politicization*, University of Worclaw Press, 2008, pp. 27-40.

backward and poorest country of Eastern Europe¹². During the regime of Enver Hoxha, who died in 1985, state radio and television were under the strict control of the communist party; there was just one television channel broadcasting only four hours a day¹³, with a schedule composed of documentaries, news, propaganda in support of the regime. Only one weekly film was aired and even that ‘was invariably political, patriotic and didactic and aimed at indoctrinating audiences rather than entertaining them’¹⁴.

The communist élite was aware of audience dissatisfaction with such programming and gradually allowed a partial reception of Italian television. In the early 1980s, Albanian television began to transmit Italian news of RAI1, the main channel of Italian public service broadcasting, at 8pm, moving the domestically produced Albanian news programme to 8.30pm.¹⁵ Further relaxation of restrictions of access to foreign TV programmes and channels occurred after the death of Hoxha.

The transformation of the media system in Albania took a path similar to the change of its political system. In contrast to other countries that used to belong to the Soviet bloc, such as Poland, Czech Republic or Hungary, where transition to democracy occurred relatively quickly due to the partial liberalization and democratic concessions during the period of communist rule, the isolation of Albania during communist years made the transition much more difficult. The political system changed slowly; during the elections of 1991, the Socialist Party, which was in continuity with the former Communist élites, won the elections and gained 66% of seats in the parliament against 27% gained by the Democratic Party.¹⁶ Only at the next multi-party elections, in 1992, Albanian people elected the first non-communist president since World War II and minority political parties managed to enter the parliament. The transformation of the media system followed a similar pattern; only in 1993, four years after the fall of the regime, a new law on the press was passed. Besides, *Zeri i popullit* (“Voice of the People”), which was the official newspaper of the Communist Party, became the organ of the new Socialist Party.¹⁷ However, for many years since the beginning of the process of democratization, “Albanian media [...] found itself in a situation when there is freedom of the press, but no free press”¹⁸. The broadcasting sector followed the process of political reform, too: until the middle of the 1990s, *Radio Tirana* (RT) and *Television Shqiptare* (TVSH) – state radio and television of the regime – remained under the control of one party and were the only source of information for Albanian people.

Since 1995, a more radical transformation of the television system started, prompted by an explosion of private television channels often broadcasting in local areas, sometimes small neighbourhoods; this led to a regionalization of the media system, on one hand, and a phenomenon of home-made televisions on the other¹⁹. The construction of a democratic television system followed the pattern known from Italy. In fact, the emergence of hundreds of small private broadcasters transformed Albanian media in a way similar to what happened in Italy during the 1980s. First of all, a long period of *deregulation*²⁰ favoured the birth of many small commercial broadcasters with regional (or sub-regional) coverage; then, small enterprises established their own channels to promote their products and activities. These two trends started in Italy at the end of the 1970s, along with the process of commercialization of the media sector, and constitute the hallmarks of the Italian television market²¹. The further proliferation of small local broadcasters,

¹² Bülent Gökay, *Eastern Europe since 1970*, Longman, 2001; Karen Henderson and Neil Robinson, *Post Communist Politics. An introduction*, Prentice Hall, 1997.

¹³ Roberto Gritti, *Postcomunismo e media* [Postcommunism and the media], Meltemi, 2001.

¹⁴ Peter R. Prifti, *Socialist Albania since 1944: Domestic and Foreign Developments*, The MIT Press, 1978.

¹⁵ Edlira Roqi, ‘La radiotelevisione albanese e l’italiano’ [Albanian radio and television and Italian language] in Cornero, L. (ed.), *L’italiano di fronte* [The facing Italian], RaiEri, 2009, pp. 47-50.

¹⁶ Antonello Biagini, *Storia dell’Albania contemporanea* [History of contemporary Albania], Bompiani, 2005.

¹⁷ Roberto Gritti, *Postcomunismo e media*.

¹⁸ Ilda Londo, ‘Legislation on media ownership’, *Southeast European Media Journal*, Special Report, August 2004.

¹⁹ Paolo Carelli, ‘Media systems in Central Eastern Europe after 1989. A national way to post-communism?’, *Comunicazioni Sociali*, 35, 1, 2013, pp. 101-110.

²⁰ A law on broadcasting sector was passed only in 1998 putting an end to a period of *deregulation* that allowed the proliferation of private broadcasters. The law No. 8410 of September 30th, 1998 (‘Law on public and private radio and television’) regulated the activity of both public and private broadcasters. For a more critical perspective, see Ilda Londo, ‘Major trends of media development during post-communist transition,’ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2012).

²¹ On the development of local television market in Italy, see Aldo Grasso, *La Tv del sommerso. Viaggio nell’Italia delle tv locali*, [Undeclared Tv. A travel through Italy of local Tv], Mondadori, 2006.

which developed in the 1990s, implied the existence of an “imperfect dual system”, where the main public and private channels were steadily threatened by the fragmentation of the sector into regional networks. Finally, as in Italy, the many local channels in Albania are complemented by a few channels with national coverage: RTSH’s first public channel, covers 81% of the territory, the second public channel covers only 47%, while private broadcasters *Tv Klan* and Top Channel reach 69,8% and 62,1% of the territory respectively.²²

3. Many Types of Dependency

The Albanian television system has always existed in close relationship with the Italian one; this dependency developed along different ways that influenced the forms, languages and structures of media system as a whole²³. King and Mai²⁴ argued that the role of public and private Italian television during the later years of the dictatorship had at least four effects: a) it functioned as an antidote to the isolation of Hoxha’s regime and led Albanian people in a landscape of freedom and materiality that they didn’t know for many decades; b) it played a subversive role since watching it meant to challenge the collectivist identity of the regime and pursuing an individualistic lifestyle; c) it gave to young Albanians a new social role oriented to Western tastes, messages and aspirations; d) it opened up a desire to migration in search of wealth and better opportunities for the expression of themselves.

However, we should be wary of assuming a simple causal relationship between Italian media and social change in communist Albania. The relationships of dependence between Italy and Albania are far more wide-ranging, date back to pre-communist decades and centuries, and can be visible in several different fields, including politics, culture and economy. As Robert Elsie²⁵ underlined in his historical dictionary of Albanian nation and culture, the historical relationships of dependency between Italy and Albania can be traced back to the period of the Roman Empire, when the city of Dürres received the status of a Roman colony due to the strategic geographical position of its seaport, and since then, the attempt to establish influence in Albanian territory has always been one of the main goals of Italian cultural, military and economic élites. Between the two World Wars, Italy’s fascist regime signed two important pacts to ensure Italian dominance in political affairs as well as military influence in the country. When Italian troops invaded Albania in 1939, the Albanian parliament offered the King of Italy Victor Emmanuel III the crown of its reign and he became the King of Albania until Italy’s defeat in 1943.

Another legacy of historical relationships of dependence between Italy and Albania can be found in the ethnic community of Arbëreshë, a minority group which settled in the southern regions of Italy in the 14th century, when the Ottoman Empire conquered Albania and local people fled the country. Nowadays, the Arbëreshë community has about 100,000 members who live mostly in Calabria, Sicily and Apulia; they live in close enclaves and groups with their customs and traditions, but they are well integrated in Italian society, protected by minority legislation, and the territories in which they are settled are considered bilingual by the Italian state. The presence of this sizeable minority, fostered continued relationships and exchanges between the two cultures as well as promoted the rapprochement between Italian and Albanian language.²⁶

Finally, we should also acknowledge the long-existing economic relations of dependency between the two countries, which grew more prominent again after the end of communist rule, when Albania opened its doors to privatization and foreign investors, key roles have been played by Italian investors. Italy is also Albania’s main trading partner; in 2012, over half of Albania’s foreign trade was with Italy (51,1%), followed by Spain (9,2%), Turkey (6,3%) and Greece

²² KRRT, Annual Report, 2012.

²³ The effects of Italian television on Albania have been much discussed. For a detailed analysis, see: Onofrio Romano, *L’Albania nell’era televisiva: le vie della demodernizzazione* [Albania in televised era: the ways of demodernization], L’Harmattan, 1999; Yili Polovina, *RAI e Albania: una grande presenza nella storia di un popolo* [RAI and Albania: a great presence in ta people’s history], Rai-Eri, 2002.

²⁴ Russell King and Nicola Mai, *Out of Albania: From Crisis Migration to Social Inclusion in Italy*, Berghan Books, 2008.

²⁵ Robert Elsie, *Historical dictionary of Albania*, Scarecrow Press, 2010, pp. 206-209.

²⁶ For a brief description of Arbëreshë community, see Jeffrey E. Cole (ed.), *Ethnic Groups of Europe: An Encyclopedia*, Abc-Clio, 2011.

(4,4%).²⁷ Thus, media dependency is only one of the various types of dependency involving the two countries, which means that the media cannot be seen as the sole factor in explaining social and cultural change in communist Albania.

With regard to television we can identify at least two main kinds of dependency that reveal how Albanian television was influenced by its Italian counterpart. Following Raymond Williams' description of television as both a technology and a cultural form,²⁸ we could consider the transformation of the Albanian television system as a paradigmatic example of both technological and cultural dependency on Italian television. First, a technological dependency characterized the evolution of Albanian television since the last years of the communist regime. At the end of the 1970s, for instance, Albanian people began to be able to capture Italian TV frequencies and signals, often illegally and despite of the ban imposed by the dictatorship. Italian TV signals, as well as Yugoslav and Greek ones, were received mainly along the Albanian western coasts, where most of the large towns and densely populated agricultural areas are located; these were also the richest areas of the country throughout the communist period, and areas where in the mid-1980s around three-quarters of families possessed a TV set²⁹. Public and above all private foreign broadcasters were received and seen with the help of a special device called *canoçe* (tin, in Albanian), an electronic tool made with a couple of transistors, a condenser and a tin that allowed the capture of signals. Another technical aspect, which played a key role in the construction of the Albanian perception of Italy, was colour television, which represented a key point of appreciation of the Italian (and, by proxy, western) way of life as an alternative to the 'black-and-white' of communist propaganda.

The second type of dependency is cultural. As some authors have argued,³⁰ the migration of Albanian people to Italy in the early 1990s was in part prompted by the impact of Italian television on their lives. In his ethnographic analyses on the first Albanian communities in Italy, Nicola Mai³¹ observed that 97% of these migrants had regularly watched Italian TV and 89% learned Italian language watching it; besides, watching foreign television (Italian, but also Yugoslav and Greek) was an important factor that shaped their desire to emigrate.

The cultural dependency on Italy was evident above all in the first programmes of Albanian broadcasters produced in the early 1990s; the main formats, in fact, reproduced the typical features of public and private Italian television. Popular shows, games, sport, satirical news were some of the characteristic genres produced by Albanian television at the time, and resembled the genres known from Italian television. Another aspect that demonstrates the dependency of post-communist Albanian television on its Italian counterpart can be found in the attempts to stimulate popular engagement in public debate, which included different forms of audience participation in TV shows (either live, by phone or by means of other devices). A similar increase on popular participation could be detected in Italian television during the period of *Mani Pulite*, the previously mentioned judicial inquiry into the corruption of politics and economy which exploded in Italy in the early 1990s.³²

²⁷ For a detailed analysis of trading partnerships, see [The World Factbook](#).

²⁸ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, Fontana, 1974.

²⁹ Piero Dorfles, *Guardando all'Italia. Influenza delle Tv e delle radio italiane sull'esodo degli albanesi*, [Watching to Italy. Italian Tv and radio influence on Albanian exodus], Rai-VQPT, 1991.

³⁰ Nicola Mai, ["Looking for a More Modern Life...": The Role of Italian Television in the Albanian Migration to Italy.](#) *Westminster Papers in Communications and Culture*, 1, 1, 2004, pp. 3-22.

³¹ Nicola Mai, "Italy is Beautiful": The Role of Italian Television in Albanian Migration to Italy, in Russell King and Nancy Wood, *Media and Migration: Constructions of Mobility and Difference*, Routledge, 2001, pp. 95-109.

³² In 1992, Italy was shaken by a phenomenon of corruption known as 'Tangentopoli' and by the judicial inquiry 'Mani Pulite' (Clean Hands). During that period, public and private networks aired talk-shows and information programmes with the aim to denounce the corruption of political system. Some of these programmes, such as *Profondo Nord* (Deep North) or *Milano, Italia* (Milan, Italy) conducted by the Italian journalist Gad Lerner, became an opportunity to gather comments and opinions of common people, often aggressive and exasperated. Still nowadays, several programmes – above all on local and regional networks – gave people the possibility to interact with politicians live or by phone.

4. The Three Steps of Italianization

The process, which led to a complete Italianization of the Albanian television system, occurred in different ways. Each of these is indicative of the many forms in which the relationship between the two countries developed in the media sector. We can identify, in this sense, three kinds or steps of Italianization, which can help us clarify the different stages of transformation undergone by Albanian television after the fall of communism. This transformation, which brought Albanian television closer to the Italian (and more generally Southern European or Mediterranean) model didn't affect only the structural economic and political aspects of television, but also the languages, formats and content of television programmes. The three steps, outlined in the following paragraphs, do not correspond to clearly distinct historical periods; rather, they overlap and are covering the entire span of the last 25 years of history and transformation of Albanian media.

The first step of Italianisation is 'subtle Italianization'. This is a silent process of adaptation of Italian formats and languages, visible in the emergence of several programmes created along the lines of successful products known from Italian television in the early 1990s. Since the middle of the 1990s, when the Albanian media system underwent an explosion of hundreds of small private broadcasters, many programmes had a recognisable Italian blueprint. For instance, *Memgjes i mbar* ('Good Morning') was a morning show airing on Teuta TV that reproduced the narrative format of *Unomattina*, a historical daily product of RAI. In this programme, people could phone and interact with the host and guests commenting on the news of the day. *Grila Grisura* ('Open Shutters'), on Real TV, was another talk-show of a similar kind, where people could participate and have their say on issues of social marginalization. Sports programmes also played a key role in the development of Albanian television during the 1990s; a particularly significant sports programme was *Process Sportif*, modelled on the well-known programme broadcast by the Italian public broadcaster from the beginning of the 1980s (*Il Processo del Lunedì*).

The most important and successful programme belonging to the category of 'silent' Italianization is *Fiks Fare*, a satirical news programme airing on TopChannel since 2002, which is a faithful reproduction of *Striscia la Notizia*, a programme created by Berlusconi's channel Canale 5 in 1988 and watched by Albanian people during the last years of the communist regime. *Fiks Fare* and *Striscia la Notizia* share the set design, with two comedians (Samjr Kodra and Gent 'Doktori' Pjetri) behind the desk as if they were TV news anchors, and two girls named *veline*,³³ who dance and bring the news. Both programmes also include sketches, comic scenes, televised reports denouncing corruption and lawlessness and interludes of dance and music.³⁴



Fiks Fare (TopChannel, since 2002)



Striscia la Notizia (Canale 5, since 1988)

³³ Even in Albanian format they are named with the epithet of 'veline', just as in Italian for product.

³⁴ Before *Fiks Fare*, another programme tracing the format of *Striscia la Notizia* aired on an Albanian private broadcaster: it was *Letra nga populi* (Letters from the People), a satirical news conducted by the humourist Philip Chako on *Tv2000* since the middle of the Nineties. The title of the programme recalled the headline of a section on newspapers created by the regime in order to show the appreciation of people towards the leader of Albania, Enver Hoxha.

More recently, dozens of programmes arose following Italian formats and set designs: popular satirical shows *Portokalli* (on TopChannel) and *Al Pazar* (on Vizion Plus) are both closely following the format of *Zelig*, a programme airing on Berlusconi's Italian channels; the afternoon entertainment programme *Vizioni i pasdites* (on Vizion Plus) is a faithful reproduction of *La vita in diretta*, a product of Italian public service broadcasting; and the talk-shows *Opinion* (on Tv Klan) is very similar to RAI's programme *Porta a Porta*.

A second step of Italianization is 'shared Italianization', a phase consisting of experiences of cooperation and exchange flows between the two countries. Over the course of the twenty-five years of media democratization, Albanian broadcasters have often included Italian productions and programmes in their schedules; this process occurred in different ways, including the retransmission of Italian programmes on Albanian channels and co-productions airing in both countries. The first attempt of collaboration between Italian and Albanian television systems after the end of the communist regime offers a good example of such 'shared Italianization'. In 1990, the RAI's agricultural magazine *Linea Verde* produced reports from Tirana that were broadcast on Albanian television in the Italian language and were very popular among Albanian audiences. Following this experience, Albanian broadcasters, both public and private, began transmitting further programmes in Italian. This practice became particularly widespread on the channel Telenorba Shqiptare, the Albanian version of Telenorba, an Italian local private channel broadcasting in the Southern region of Apulia. From its launch in 1998 to 2010 when it ceased broadcasting and was re-branded as *ABC News*, Telenorba Shqiptare retransmitted several Italian shows with subtitles in the Albanian language, such as soap operas (including some imported from Latin America and dubbed in Italian) or nightly adult shows like *Colpo Grosso* ('Big Shot').

Another aspect of 'shared Italianization' is the co-production of contents and programmes broadcasting on Italian TV channels, addressed to the Albanians living in Italy. This is the case, for instance, with the Albanian news bulletin airing on the Apulia regional network of RAI 3, the third channel of Italian public service broadcasting, which is also available in Albania and Italy as a whole via satellite. The first Albanian news bulletin airing on Italian television dates back to 1997 and was broadcast from the offices of RAI 3 in Bari at lunch time. It was presented by Alba Malltezi, a young Albanian journalist, and the reports were in the Albanian language with subtitles in Italian.

The last step of the Italianization process of Albanian television is 'quasi-colonial Italianization'. According to Fabris³⁵ the openness of Eastern European media systems after the end of communism transformed them into a 'supplemental engine for the Western European media industry'. This process of 'Westification', argued Fabris, led former Soviet countries to a status of 'quasi-colonial dependency'. In Albania, this quasi-colonial dependency went even further and included the growing presence of Italian television professionals on Albanian television. AgonChannel represents the clearest example of this strategy and represents the fullest accomplishment of Italianization. The channel, founded at the beginning of the decade, is financed by the Italian entrepreneur Francesco Becchetti and recently started employing television professionals from Italy. For instance, Alessio Vinci, a former anchorman of *Matrix* – a talk-show of Berlusconi's channel Canale 5 – became the director of the network in 2013. The peak of quasi-colonial Italianization was reached by the hiring of Barbara D'Urso, a very popular host of many programmes on Berlusconi's channels, including some editions of *Grande Fratello* ('Big Brother'), the Sunday show *Domenica Live* ('Sunday Live') and the afternoon programme *Pomeriggio Cinque* ('Afternoon Five'). In June 2014, in the run-up to parliamentary elections in Albania, Barbara D'Urso hosted the programme *Kontrata për Shqiperinë*, a show in the Italian language where she interviewed famous public figures from both Albania and Italy. The former President of the Republic Bamir Topi was the main guest of the show's first episode, alongside Michela Brambilla, an Italian politician of Berlusconi's People of Freedom party. In one of the following episodes of the same show D'Urso hosted Italian politicians Livia Turco (Democratic Party) and Stefania Craxi (Italian Reformists) who debated with Albanian politicians Mimi Kodheli (Socialist Party) and Ilir Meta (Socialist Movement for Integration). The format of *Kontrata për Shqiperinë* is also a very faithful reproduction of programmes she hosted on Italian channels.

³⁵ Hans H. Fabris 'Westification?', in David L. Paletz, Karol Jakubowicz and Pavao Novosel, eds, *Glasnost and after. Media and change in Central and Eastern Europe*, Hampton Press, 1995, pp. 221-231.

Another example of the ‘quasi-colonization’ of Albanian television by AgonChannel and its owner can be found in *A Krasta Show*, a programme where the format, set, script and also the placement in the schedule are the same as those of *Che tempo che fa*, a show airing on the Italian third public channel during prime time on Saturdays and Sundays. Finally, the network owned by the Italian entrepreneur also produced *Ça thu...?*, another perfect copy of *Striscia la Notizia*, which confirms the continuing influence of Italian satirical news in the Albanian television imaginary.

5. Conclusions

Over the course of twenty-five years, the Albanian media system was moved from a state-controlled system subjected to strict control and censorship to a system that is considerably more open, plural and democratic. However, this transition was far from smooth and is still incomplete; also, Albanian television now faces the danger of substituting the tyranny of the state with the tyranny of the market³⁶. The transformation of the Albanian media – and television above all – revealed several layers of dependency on Italian television. The analysis of the main channels, programmes and formats found in Albania since the end of communism highlights the impact of Italian culture on all aspects of Albanian television. If, as stated by O’Neil, “the media in Eastern Europe are a clear example of how past institutional configurations influenced the process of media transition”³⁷, the case of Albania is paradigmatic of two contradictory trends: on the one hand, the strong authoritarianism of Enver Hoxha isolated the country and slowed down the process of reform; on the other hand, the aim to capture Western (and, more specifically, Italian) media products symbolized the desire for freedom and rejection of communist rules. However, the Italianization of Albanian media was not a result of an autonomous process of adoption of the Italian media model, but rather an outcome of a passive acquiescence and mimicking. As already foreseen by Reljic³⁸, the proliferation of mass media outlets in post-communist countries did not go hand in hand with real pluralism. In the absence of a mature public opinion, Italianization was the obvious choice for Albanian television, and built on historical legacies of the country’s political, economic and cultural dependence on Italy.

Biography:

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³⁶ Svetlozar A. Andreev, ‘The media and the consolidation of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe,’ Eumap Working Papers Series (EUMAP), 2003.

³⁷ Patrick H. O’Neil, ‘Introduction. Media reform and democratization,’ in Patrick H. O’Neil, ed., *Post-communism and the media in Eastern Europe*, Routledge, 1997, pp. 1-6, quote p.5.

³⁸ Dušan Reljić, ‘Civil Society, Mass Media and Democracy in Post-communist Countries’, Working Paper No. 131, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), 2004.