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InterMedia Research Finds Sharply Different Levels of Trust in Media in the Balkans

WASHINGTON, D.C. – InterMedia’s 2008 national surveys in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia, show vast differences in perceptions of media freedom, satisfaction with the information provided by the media, and the amount of media choice and access, not only from country to country, but also between different demographic groups within each country.

Albanians are the most optimistic about media freedom. Close to half the adults in the country, home to the one of the most technically sophisticated cable and satellite TV scenes in the region, “strongly” agree journalists in Albania can report on any topic they wish. In contrast, less than 20 percent of Bosnians say their journalists enjoy the same freedom. Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia fall between these two extremes.

“Continued tensions between the ethnicities that make up Bosnia and Herzegovina, paired with highly complex media regulations in public broadcasting that aim not to offend any of the constituent peoples, are major reasons that journalists in Bosnia continue to practice self-censorship” says Aneta Guenova, InterMedia’s Regional Research Director for Southeastern Europe. “This practice is not lost on news consumers.”

When it comes to which media platform is the most trusted, Balkan populations are unanimous: about two third to three quarters in each country put their highest trust in television. However differences emerge on whether it is public or private television they trust most. Albania, with its vibrant private TV market, is an exception in the Balkans, with half of the respondents placing most trust in *private* television. In the countries of former Yugoslavia, about half of the population choose *public* television as the most trustworthy among different media platforms and types (such as private/ public TV and radio, newspapers, and internet). “In light of years of government dominance and abuse of state media, the trust preference for public television may seem surprising, but it is important to realize that the public channels are still the main purveyors of news programs,” says Guenova. “Many of the commercial stations in the Balkans do not have

serious or comprehensive news programs; most are focused on entertainment. Private stations are also often perceived as serving particular business interests or the political ambitions of their owners.”

Due to the still limited penetration and access the internet is not reported among the most trusted sources of news. Indeed, few—less than 10 percent in any given country—count the internet as their most trusted media platform at this point.

A high level of perceived media freedom, as there is in Albania, does not translate to more satisfaction with the information provided by the media. As in the other Balkan countries, only about 15 percent of Albanians are “very” satisfied with the information they receive. Choice is a major factor in predicting satisfaction. In Albania, those with less than seven TV channels from which to choose are least likely to be “very” satisfied with the information provided by the media. Given the tendency among many outlets in the region to report news through a filter of ethnic, political or business interests, news consumers across the region are naturally keen to compare and contrast sources to arrive at a balanced picture.

InterMedia is about to launch its 2009 national survey in Bosnia. 2,500 face-to-face interviews will be conducted in April 2009. InterMedia is able to add a limited number of questions to the survey on behalf of external organizations. Other Balkans country surveys will field in May/June 2009.

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InterMedia is a leading international media research, public opinion, evaluation and consulting organization creatively equipping clients to understand their audiences, gauge their effectiveness and target their communications in transitional and developing societies worldwide. Based in Washington, D.C., and active year-round in more than 60 countries, InterMedia helps clients understand complex issues in challenging research environments. The company’s strengths include its people—area experts skilled in scientifically-based research and focused on client solutions—its vast global network of local research partners and contacts and its rich data archive of more than 700 media and opinion surveys carried out over the past 15 years.

Data and analysis from the 2008 Balkan nations’ surveys is available by contacting Alex Wooley, +1.202.434.9332; wooleya@intermedia.org.

Survey Details: *Between April and June 2008, InterMedia conducted nationally representative surveys in Albania (n=2,000), Kosovo (n=2,000), Bosnia and Herzegovina (n=2,500), Montenegro (n= 1,000), and Serbia (n=2,000) using face-to face interviews. The surveys were conducted via multistage random probability sample of the adult population (those 15 and older). The sample data were weighted on gender, age, and type of settlement. Maximum margin of error, with a 95% confidence interval, is ±3.1 % for n=1,000, ±2.2% for n=2,000 and ±2.0% for n=2,500.*