

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

2008

**The Development
of Sustainable
Independent Media
in Europe and Eurasia**



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The Development of Sustainable Independent Media in Europe and Eurasia

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But despite problems with freedom of speech, the growth of independent mass media, along with the expansion of Internet availability, are moving this sector toward market economy norms. With political freedom, help from international organizations, and strict compliance with the law, the mass media of Tajikistan will be able to overcome its technical and professional deficiencies and become a profitable business sector.



TAJIKISTAN

The key events of the year 2007 in the Republic of Tajikistan were the three summits conducted in Dushanbe: the Summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and the Summit of the Eurasian Economic Community. Another significant political event was the reorganization of some ministries and departments, the appointment of new ministers, and the foundation of the Anti-Corruption Agency.

Like other Central Asian States that witnessed the “Tulip Revolution” of 2005 and subsequent political disturbances in Kyrgyzstan in 2006 and riots in Andijan in 2005, the Tajik authorities prevented rallies, pickets, and demonstrations by paying ample attention to the opposition, the growth of Islamic influence, civil society, and mass media. On the threshold of the summits (October 2007), Tajik leaders conducted several political actions that were supposed to demonstrate their country’s adherence to democratic values. On the other hand, they passed the law “On Traditions and Customs,” which restricts citizens’ rights and liberties.

The economic growth rate is still relatively low, and the income level of the population remains rather critical. According to official statistics, 50 percent of the population lives below the poverty line; labor emigration stays at about one million people and remains the main source of income for the majority of young males. A considerable part of the population’s income comes from the shadow economy. Panelists claim that most legal enterprises conceal the real volume of their sales and revenues, thus partially remaining “in the shadow.” Naturally enough, non-governmental mass media follow the tendency to hide their revenues as well.

Despite problems with freedom of speech, however, the development of independent mass media, their commercialization, and the expansion of Internet providers all testify that this sector is rapidly moving towards norms of a market economy. With a certain amount of help from international organizations, availability of political freedom, and strict compliance with the law, the mass media of Tajikistan will be able to overcome its technical and professional deficiencies and become a rather profitable business sector.

Overall this year’s study showed almost no change from last year: an average of 1.65 compared to last year’s 1.61. Individual objectives did not stray far from this average. Objective 5, supporting institutions, had the highest average with 1.92, while Objective 2, professional journalism, had the lowest with 1.40.

TAJIKISTAN AT A GLANCE

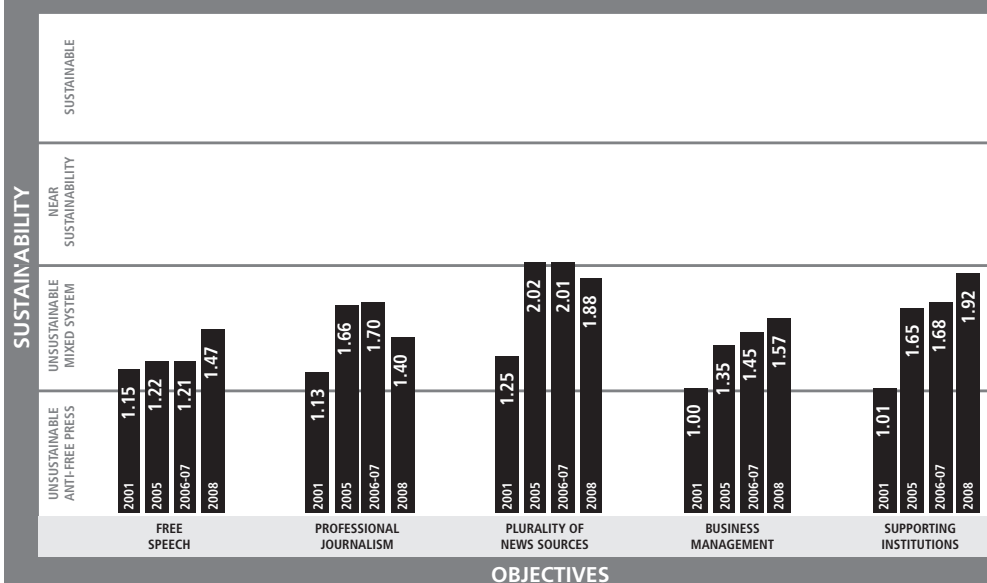
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 7,194,600 (The report of the State Committee on Statistics of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2007)
- > **Capital city:** Dushanbe
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Tajik 80%, Uzbek 15.2%, Russian 1.0%, Kirghiz 1.1%, other 2.7 % (The social and economic atlas of Tajikistan for 2005)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Sunni Muslims – 87%, Shi'a Muslims 5%, other – 8% (Data of the RT Government Committee on Religious Affairs)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Tajik (official), Russian is fixed in the Constitution as the language of international and interethnic communication
- > **GNI (2006-Atlas):** \$2.572 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **GNI per capita (2006-PPP):** \$1,410 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **Literacy rate:** 99.5% (male 99.7%, female 99.2%) (2000 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Emomali Rahmon (since November 6, 1994)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 272; Radio: 8; Television stations: 20+ (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Tajikistan)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** top 3: *Charkhi gardun* (The Wheel of Fortune), *Oila* (Family), and *Asia Plus* (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Tajikistan)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** top radio stations by region: Dushanbe: Radio Vatan, Radio Oriyono and Asia Plus; Khudzhand: Tiroz and CM-1
- > **News agencies:** Avesta, Asia-Plus, Varorud, Interpress-service, Pamir-Media, Hatlon-press, Zerafshan-times, Simonews, Khovar
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 19,500 (2005 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: TAJIKISTAN



Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):

Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3):

Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4):

Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.47

Indicators in this objective were mostly spread out from the average. Of note, Indicators 8 and 9, media access to international news sources and free entry into the journalism profession both scored roughly a point higher than the average. However, Indicators 2, 4, and 6, broadcast licensing, crimes against journalists, and libel laws, all scored much lower than the average.

The information sector in Tajikistan is regulated by a number of laws and regulations including the constitution, the Law on Press and Other Mass Media, the Law on Television and Radio Broadcasting, the Law on Information, Regulations on Broadcast Licensing, and numerous articles in civil and criminal law for a total of nine laws.

According to an analysis of media law conducted by the Institute of Information Law Problems (Moscow) in the former Soviet republics, Tajikistan received an average level of freedom (6 out of 13), ahead of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. Indeed, the constitution proclaims freedom of the press and bans censorship; there are special laws on mass media and television, and; laws guarantee access by citizens to information. Non-governmental media may determine the languages they use. The Criminal Code contains articles providing for punishment of those who impede journalists' legal and professional activities and officials who refuse to provide a citizen with information (articles 148 and 162 of the Criminal Code). Despite the fact that there has been not a single precedent of charging anyone on the basis of these articles during the history of independent Tajikistan, there is a de jure possibility of defending journalists' rights.

However, liability for defamation and slander is covered by criminal law, clauses for slandering civil servants have been added to the Criminal Code (articles 35, 136, 137, 130, 144, 306, 396). Further, in June 2007 the Parliament passed, and the president signed, the Decree on Criminal Liability for Slander on the Internet, which restricts journalists' rights even further.

Ideally, the better of these laws can grant favorable conditions to media; however, the compliance with, and implementation of, these laws is not in keeping with the letter and spirit of the law and is done so rather selectively. Farrukhsho Dzhunaydov, a program manager and a lawyer for the NGO Khoma, an Internews Network affiliate in Tajikistan, said: "The provisions of the law assume protection of free speech, but they do not really work. Journalists are persecuted by state officials and local authorities whom they criticize."

In 2007, a campaign by the civil society and NGOs for a new law on mass media failed. According to observers and independent experts, the 1990 Law on Press and Other Mass Media is outdated. It does not provide for implementation mechanisms and does not support, but rather prevents the development of, a mass media system. However, this law is relatively liberal and, despite its purely declarative nature, it reflects the objective of the country's authorities.

The panelists unanimously noted that the process of broadcast media licensing is not carried out within the provisions of the current law. One of the panelists, a journalist from *Rushon*, Makhmadali Bakhtierov, said that a journalist has been trying to establish a radio station in the city of Khorog in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province for five years, but his papers are still being examined by the Licensing Commission. Licenses are issued by the Licensing Commission under the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting, which also oversees state-run broadcasting. The presiding commissioner is the Chairman of the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting, and most members are government officials.

More than eight non-governmental broadcast media are still awaiting licenses. Since 2004, broadcast licenses have been granted to pro-state Simoi Mustaqili Tojikiston television and Imruz radio stations. The state-run Bahoriston television has not received any official broadcasting license despite currently operating. Commenting on Licensing Commission decisions regarding the first two broadcasters, Konstantin Parshin, an

LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

The information sector in Tajikistan is regulated by a number of laws and regulations including the constitution, the Law on Press and Other Mass Media, the Law on Television and Radio Broadcasting, the Law on Information, Regulations on Broadcast Licensing, and numerous articles in civil and criminal law for a total of nine laws.

independent journalist working for the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan (NANSMIT), said, "I think these two were registered just for show."

The editor-in-chief of the independent newspaper *Varorud*, Negmatullo Mirsaidov, said, "The State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting, whose officials are members of the Licensing Commission, does not need competitors in the form of independent media. The members of the Licensing Commission request the list of the applicant's technical equipment whereas the sponsors, who invest in the media, would provide the equipment or means for its purchase only if there is a license."

All the panelists mentioned that the Licensing Commission should be independent from the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting. Currently, no one knows who is on this commission; formerly, one journalist was a member of the commission, but there have been no media representatives there for two years.

Complicated, multistage licensing procedures for broadcast media, in combination with the absence of transparency in decision-making, create a situation where the vast majority of media outlets in the country are print, despite television being the most-used by citizens for information. According to the law, each broadcaster should renew its license every five years, though actual licenses are issued for various terms, sometimes even for a year, which is also a means of pressure from the authorities. For example, this year, the Licensing Commission rigidly inspected all FM radio stations except for one, Oriyono Radio, which belongs to the head of the largest bank of the country and who is a relative of the president.

In general, it is extremely difficult to enter the mass media market. Not only are there financial restrictions for media enterprises, but there are also political aspects of media activity that draw the attention of government officials more so than to other kinds of businesses. Officials find it difficult

to perceive the media sector as a commodity producer; therefore, during their inspections, representatives of the tax authorities try to interpret the Criminal Code articles in creative ways.

According to the panelists, journalists have recently become a frequent target of prosecution. Lawsuits are doomed to long delays and bureaucratic red tape. Reported last year, the investigation about an article written by Lyra Latipova, a journalist with *Crim-info* newspaper, has lasted for more than two years without decision. The trial of three journalists with the *Ovoza* newspaper, Saida Qurbonova, Farangis Nabiyeva, and Muhayo Nozimova, lasted for more than half a year. They published an article about a tour by a Tajik singer to Afghanistan, referring to critical opinions of forum visitors to the website www.mynet.tj. The singer filed a petition with the Dushanbe city prosecutor's office, which instituted criminal proceedings against the reporters. The prosecutor's office made no attempt to reconcile the parties and to institute civil proceedings. Moreover, in the course of the trial, the judge confidentially informed the journalists' lawyer that he was being pressured from above to make a decision in favor of the singer. After the Media Alliance management intervened and brought this fact to the attention of the chairman of the Justice Council, the latter ordered the judge to resolve the lawsuit objectively.

After a critical article appears, the government often orders a judicial inquiry. In addition, unofficial action occurs as well: practically every panelist cited examples of how government offices and certain officials exerted pressure on them or tried to intimidate them. Pressure tactics include: restrictions on granting access to information or refusal to provide it altogether, calls to law enforcement bodies, unauthorized searches, and public denouncements of journalists.

One example involved Makhmadullo Makhsadullo, a reporter for the independent newspaper *Tojikiston*. On his way to a press-conference by the CIS summit participants in October, a police officer stopped him forcefully and demanded to see his papers. Makhsadullo showed his press card, but this did not satisfy the officer, who took Makhsadullo to the police station where he was detained until the morning. The journalist's complaint to the prosecutor's office was of no avail because they claimed there were no witnesses. Makhsadullo later published an article about his ordeal. The police officer who had detained him sued Makhsadullo as well as *Faraj*, *Asia-Plus* and Radio Freedom, which had all published or aired stories in their colleague's defense.

Cases of infringement of journalists' rights were published monthly, until July 2007, by NANSMIT on their web site. It appears that their comprehensive monitoring and documentation of such cases has ceased, although they do post information on important individual cases. Generally, however, there is little reporting of such incidents in print or broadcast media.

A system of preferences has been created for state-run media outlets: representatives of these media are invited to press-conferences and other kinds of contact with the "newsmakers" and they are included in the president's press pool. Other reporters, mainly the ones in opposition, are rarely invited to government events.

The major obstacle to reporting is restricted access to various sources of information. Access to important public information is limited. According to article 28 of the Law on Information, the following procedure is required for access to official documents: a letter of inquiry is sent and an official answer (both written and oral) should be given within no more than 30 days. It is quite difficult to be granted an interview with a government official of any rank. An official must address the inquiry to their direct boss who, in turn, passes it on to their chief. Consequently, a simple clerk or press-secretary must receive permission for an interview from the head of a local administration. Since public officials are key sources of information, such procedures complicate the journalist's task of providing coverage of key events and problems.

According to personal instructions from the president, all ministries and departments should organize quarterly press conferences and provide a certain amount of official information on their activities during this period. However, some establishments have been closed to the press since 2005. For example, the Ministry of Defense and the State Committee for National Security consider their activities to be state secrets. Only state-run media receive information and press releases from them, and even that is provided irregularly.

Access to international news is relatively open, though there are some obstacles: power supply is unreliable, the price of Internet services is prohibitively high, and international information is monitored. Thus, an unrestricted opportunity to learn about events in foreign countries exists; however, access to news about Central Asia or remote areas of Tajikistan is limited. And if Russian newspapers are delivered almost without any restrictions, newspapers of other foreign countries are not available in Tajikistan.

Practicing journalism does not require licensing, and no professional education is required for a person who wants to work as a journalist.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.40

Most indicators in this objective received scores close to the final average. Indicator 5, pay levels for journalists, lagged noticeably—although not greatly—behind, while Indicator 1, reporting is fair, accurate, and well sourced, as the leading scorer.

The risk related to criticizing any sphere of public life forces journalists to resort to anonymous sources of information or even to use flagrant lies to operate unhindered. In the course of discussions, Makhmadali Bakhtierov said, "Journalists who write the truth may be persecuted by phone or in any other way by the head of a local administration or other officials that are criticized. Quite often, he or his editor would refrain from publishing critical materials in the future because of self-censorship." Elaborating on the same topic, Tuxhfa Akhmedova remarked, "If journalists do not resort to self-censorship, they are threatened with dismissal. It is especially so in the state-run and regional media outlets." Panelists recalled several cases when journalists were dismissed for truthful and objective articles written upon their editors' requests. These articles were excluded from the paper.

In many circumstances, there is a list of off-limit topics. However, Abdullaev noted, "Journalists cover all the major topics and events, and though they still practice self-censorship, its scope is getting smaller every year." The range of coverage of social issues is getting broader. The newspapers *Nigokh* and *Faraj* turned to themes related to the Civil War of 1992-1997. This proves that the taboo on discussing civil confrontation is gradually disappearing.

JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

Makhmadali Bakhtierov said, "Journalists who write the truth may be persecuted by phone or in any other way by the head of a local administration or other officials that are criticized."

The genre of investigative reporting, which used to be extremely rare, has now started to develop with the advent of the Center for Journalistic Investigations headed by panelist Khurshed Niyozov. The results of these investigations are regularly published in *Faraj* newspaper, edited by Niyozov.

Turko Dikaev believed that, in pursuit of popularity, many journalists fill their articles with "sensations" to the detriment of objectivity. "Until now, there are taboo subjects for mass media of Tajikistan, such as radioactive waste, national security, the activities of the State Committee for National Security, customs, corruption in the supreme government bodies, drug trafficking, the life and activities of top government officials as well as regional leaders. And if the business and economic journalism is coming into its own, the political journalism is at a much lower level of development. Criticizing the president and his family as well as the mayor of Dushanbe is still off-limits," he said.

Niyozov noted, "Corruption in the state medical and educational institutions is not a secret to anyone. Nevertheless, as soon as someone dares to write an article about it, he or she starts receiving lots of indignant phone calls from the Ministry, a maternity ward, or a hospital. The newspaper or the reporter is compelled to unveil the source of information and to publish a disclaimer. Eventually, both the reporter and the newspaper lose their reputation and stop writing about it." In his opinion, many editors-in-chief, media-holding executives, and heads of journalists' unions view mass media as a business rather than creative work. An abundance of public relations materials and thriving self-censorship cause journalism to fall short of professional quality standards.

Tukhfa Akhmedova from the NGO *Gamkhori* in Kurgan-Tube told a real-life story about the journalist Mokhsharif Kurbonzoda, a reporter for the nongovernmental newspaper *Bomdod*. After she had published several critical articles, even her colleagues ceased to support her, and the editor of the newspaper publicly accused her of non-professionalism. It was found out later, however, that while writing these critical materials, she did not turn to experts or the "heroes" of her reports for comments. As a result, her articles were one-sided and went beyond legal bounds.

All the panelists maintain that in order to succeed, journalists must have their own connections in the ministries and departments. Negmat Mirsaidov said, "Since the staff of the newspaper *Varorud* has had good relationships with all the government offices and law enforcement bodies for many years, we often receive information that the staff of other media is denied."

Another problem with the development of professional journalism is related to the pay level. Due to low pay, public relations materials and embedded advertising in mass media prosper. According to data presented by the panelists, the salary and fees in the governmental media outlets are especially low.

Makhmadali Bakhtierov, the editor-in-chief of the state-run *Paemi Rushon* newspaper, said, "The payment at the state-run media remains very low, the royalty scale has not been reconsidered for a long time. The royalties for the whole newspaper issue may not exceed TJS 50 (\$16). Therefore, almost all regional journalists make some money on the side by working anonymously for other media outlets or Internet editions."

The situation in some nation-wide media outlets has improved: the salary for the staff of two state-run television channels was raised to an average of \$40 monthly, and employees are allowed to earn extra by attracting advertisements and participating in the production of commercials. The National Information Agency of Tajikistan *Khovar* has also increased the rate of salaries and royalties for its staff, and its average employee can earn up to about \$100 per month. Despite this increase, the pay is still much lower than in private (independent) mass media. That is why media talents have to find additional sources of income on their own. For example, television crews must be paid \$100-\$150 for filming a 30-second outdoor spot as part of a news release; other employees augment their income by shooting private films. Despite the difficulty and risk of working for non-governmental publications, journalists of the state-run mass media often leave to work for them.

The pay level of non-governmental journalists is significantly higher. Their minimum income can be estimated from job advertisements. An average salary offered in such advertisements is at least \$150 per month for a journalist and at least \$250 per month for an editor. The more popular the journalist, the greater the chances are to earn income at other outlets, both in the country and abroad. However, the salary of regional reporters with private newspapers is much lower than that of their colleagues in the capital. The panelists noted that practically all the best Tajik journalists work as correspondents for foreign media outlets in Tajikistan.

The issue of professional ethics is an extremely important problem in Tajikistan. All the panelists recognized the low level of professional journalism and a poor knowledge of legal issues. Unethical approaches are widely employed in journalists' materials. Farrukhsho Dzhunaydov remarked, "Not only are ethical norms not observed; sometimes even legal norms are violated. People who have been detained are often referred to as 'arrested,' and their names and pictures are made public." The panelists cited instances illustrating how civil servants and business leaders use journalists as tools to defame someone or to pay off a score. Information "leakage" was used for this purpose.

In 2007, OSCE organized a number of round tables and a regional conference at which a proposed ethical code for journalists of Tajikistan was discussed. However, an agreement on the code has not been reached yet due to different interests of editors. The panelists acknowledged that *Asia-Press* newspaper is the only media outlet with its own moral and ethical code, though its own journalists fail to observe it.

Comparing Tajik television with broadcasts of other countries, Mirsaidov noted that it lacks socially significant information. The media tend to avoid showing accidents and natural disasters in the news. The panelists illustrated this with an example of two catastrophic earthquakes in Tajikistan, the coverage on which was shown by state television two days later, only after the government group went there. Two terrorist attacks and two fatal avalanches were also passed over in silence on the government television channels. People learned about them by reading foreign news sources and passing the information on to others.

Entertainment programs are prevalent in electronic media: they take up almost 70 percent of the broadcasting time. Turko Dikaev said: "The lack of competition from independent television stations allows the state television [there are three national channels] to allocate most of its time to entertainment programs. As a result, people have nicknamed it 'The State Philharmonic Society.'" Parshin added that "television and radio have practically no format, and the air is mainly filled with stolen music and pirated copies of films and musical programs." All the panelists mentioned the necessity of creating a national news and information channel that has the potential to become very popular, especially if it features regional news.

Negmatullo Mirsaidov remarked, "Tajik radio and television fail to provide necessary information, especially of social significance. The population frequently learns of events in Tajikistan from the programs on Russian television channels and the Internet. If the governmental media outlets are completely partisan, private ones do not have enough courage to protect the interests of the society."

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.88

The small decrease in the number of points for this objective reflects a decrease in the level of news sources that provide the population of Tajikistan with objective and useful information. All indicator scores hovered very close to the overall average, with the exception of Indicator 3, state media reflect the views of the political spectrum, which finished significantly behind the others.

In 2007, state broadcasting was consolidated and its management reinforced in an attempt to create favorable public opinion. Thus, a political and public affairs channel, Simoi Mustaqili Tojikiston (Independent Television of Tajikistan), Bahoriston, a channel for children, and one more state-run radio station, Tojikiston, were established. The government's considerable investment into all the three channels allowed them to switch to digital broadcasting. The governments of Tajikistan, Iran, and Afghanistan reached an agreement to start a common Farsi speaking channel in 2008. The government continued supporting state-run and official print publications.

Over the past year, four information agencies with their own websites were established, two national newspapers were founded, two television stations were re-registered, one new FM radio station began to broadcast, and one new television channel received a broadcasting license. Other private and regional television stations with modern equipment are operational, although many focus on entertainment.

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

“There are no information programs in minority languages in the regions; the state television broadcasts some programs in Russian and Uzbek, and that is it. National chauvinism, accompanied by the infringement of the rights of minorities, is increasing.”

The demand for information is enormous, and the printed press is a very popular media. There are no daily newspapers in Tajikistan yet. Almost all papers are weekly and come out on Thursdays and in the capital and large cities; almost all private newspapers are already bought up on Friday. Due to the limited scope of delivery and small circulations, independent editions published in the capital do not reach remote provinces. Bakhtierov noted: “In Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province, the situation with granting the citizens access to information is very difficult. The national press is delivered only to the administrative center of the province, the city of Khorog, and the papers arrive at the regions more than a week late, if at all.” According to the Department of the Press under the Ministry of Culture, 69 government newspapers are regularly published in the regions. Their circulation does not exceed 500-1000 copies. Due to technical and financial hardships, most of them come out twice, or even once, a month. Very few of them have proven that they can be profitable or have considerable circulation. Such publications include the newspapers *Diyori Tursunzoda*, with a circulation of 5,000 and *Khakikati Sughd*, with a circulation of 4,000 to 6,000.

Rano Bobojanova, head of the Center for Gender Research and a reporter for *Bonuvoni Tojikiston* magazine, gave one reason that the score in this objective has not increased: “Although the reading population grows from year to year, not everyone can afford to buy newspapers due to their high prices.” According to the panelists’ estimation, only 10-15 percent of the population can afford to buy newspapers. The retail price of printed media is quite high, TJS 1 to TJS 1.50 (\$.28 to \$.43) average. Niyozov noted that when the price for newspapers goes up, there is an informal lobby of all the editors that makes a decision on a simultaneous price rise at their outlets.

The limit on electrical power, which gets worse during the fall-winter period, prevents rural citizens from receiving live information on the events in the country and the world. Portable radios that work on batteries become the main

source of information during this period. However, electricity is available when programs about the president are broadcast.

The access of population, especially in remote regions, to the Internet is also affected by electricity supply, as well as other technical limitations. According to the Ministry of Transport and Communications, about five percent of Tajikistan’s population uses the Internet. An average Tajik family can afford a computer and Internet access.

In 2007, panelists reported problems accessing certain websites, including www.centrasia.ru, www.fergana.ru, www.arianastorm.com, www.charogiruz.ru, and www.tajikistantaims.ru. Government officials had made accusations that these sites had disseminated propaganda supporting the overthrow of the government and fomented ethnic hostility and dissension in 2006. Some Internet providers simply decided to safeguard themselves and block access.

The broadcasts of Russian channels are often interrupted for the sake of showing important political events. Satellite dishes have therefore become popular in most big cities. Viewing Russian and other foreign channels broadens access to information. The panelists noted the growing popularity of satellite television not only in cities, but also in the countryside. “Satellite dishes have become more accessible, and many more people can afford them now than two or three years ago,” said the panelists.

With OSCE support, civil society groups have opened information access centers in the regions. Centers of information with a wide choice of periodicals and access to the Internet have been opened in some provinces. However, due to Islamic customs, these centers are hardly visited by women, except for NGO activists and public figures.

There are no alternative points of view in government media: the representatives of the opposition political parties are deprived of the opportunity to speak on their own in governmental media. Access to the electronic media is granted only to the ruling People’s Democratic Party, although Communist or IRPT MPs may be invited to some television and radio programs. The newspapers of political parties support political pluralism. Although not all parties have newspapers, the largest parties have their own media outlets. Thus, for instance, the Islamic Renaissance Party in Tajikistan (IRPT) has two newspapers, two magazines, and its own printing facilities both in Dushanbe and in the regions.

There are nine news agencies in Tajikistan, the most famous of which are independent Avesta, Asia-Plus, Varorud, Interpress-service, Hatlon-press, Zerafshan-times, Pamir-Media, Simonews and the State Information Agency Khovar. They operate with a varying degree of success and try to capture

news from all over the country. The panelists especially praised the work of Avesta and Asia-Plus, which “provide timely information on-line, beginning in the very early morning; though, since 2007, they started to issue news not openly enough,” according to one panelist. Bobojanova noted, “Independent agencies disseminate information over the Internet and some newspapers, but not on television, which limits the number of its users.”

Due to their high cost, not all newspapers can subscribe to news agencies. Their sites are open, but access to information is limited and requires a subscription. Access to the sites of Zarafshon-times, Pamir-media, and Hatlon-press is completely open, however.

Dzhunaydov and Abdullaev emphasized the significance of inter-regional information interchange. Dzhunaydov said that very few original programs are produced by electronic mass media. In the past, there were many production studios that used to provide private companies with their products, but they all ceased operations after the licensing system was introduced in 2005. Both panelists declared that Internews network’s re-registration in Tajikistan gives hope for renewal of its projects and for the revival of the joint program of eight regional stations that was discontinued in 2006. This may fill the information vacuum in the regions.

However, strengthening the potential of the regional mass media has not led to any improvement in inter-regional information exchange yet. Until now, the residents of the capital find it much easier to receive international information than to learn what is going on in neighboring towns or villages just several dozen kilometers from them. Konstantin Parshin reported: “While going to work in the morning, you are listening to news on FM radio Asia-plus or Vatan, and there are more reports on international events than on those that take place in Tajikistan, especially in the regions. All radio stations broadcast in a similar format.” The panelists noted that news agencies also provide more information on events in other countries.

The public seldom knows who finances the groups that control independent media. Only journalists are familiar with the sponsors of their publications and in whose interest a certain independent radio and television station operates. The most influential political groups aspire to have, if not their own, then at least loyal private media outlets in their arsenals. Television is the top priority.

According to the panelists, last year, financial giants expressed their interest in the development of their own mass media. Oriyon International, owned by the head of the country’s largest private bank, founded the radio station Imruz in addition to the already existing Oriyono Radio. The media

“In Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province, the situation with granting the citizens access to information is very difficult. The national press is delivered only to the administrative center of the province, the city of Khorog, and the papers arrive at the regions more than a week late, if at all.”

branch of the holding company is planning to set up its own television company and an advertising agency.

There are very few minority media outlets in Tajikistan. These are mainly local publications in the Uzbek and Kirghiz languages; there are also news programs in Uzbek, Russian, Arabic, and English on the state broadcaster. Uzbek ethnic groups have a wider choice of media outlets in their mother tongue: in addition to local media, there is a national governmental Uzbek-language newspaper *Khalk Ovozi* and a non-governmental newspaper, *Dustlik*, distributed in places with a large Uzbek population. *Dustlik*, published by the Association of National Minorities of Tajikistan, deals with hot-button issues of the Uzbek Diaspora. Rano Bobojanova said: “There are no information programs in minority languages in the regions; the state television broadcasts some programs in Russian and Uzbek, and that is it. National chauvinism, accompanied by the infringement of the rights of minorities, is increasing.”

Bakhtierov reported that a limited-circulation newspaper in the Kirghiz language is published in Murghab region of Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province, which has a large Kirghiz population. The panelists unanimously claimed that national minorities are free to develop their own media in Tajikistan without any restrictions. Nevertheless, the Association of National Minorities of Tajikistan does not have its own offices yet, even though it made an application to the government on this matter two years ago.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.57

The dynamics of the development of mass media in Tajikistan over the past few years reveal that media outlets, which used to perform the role of political tools, are making a rapid transition to journalism by churning out quality products, satiating the market’s need for diverse

Bobojanova noted that television stations in the regions are subject to the influence of the authorities, especially in political programs. "The independent Chakhonaro television from Chkalovsk presented the mayor in a manner contrary to his wishes, and now the channel is about to close," she reported.

information, and getting on the road to becoming successful businesses. This objective yielded slight growth this year, improving to 1.57 from 1.45. All indicators finished very close to the objective score.

However, challenges remain. Private media must survive in the market, but this market is mainly regulated by political instruments that undermine free competition. The fact that the shadow economy constitutes a considerable part of economic activity hinders the development of the advertising market. For most media, especially in remote regions, the advertising market is not an important source of income. Regional media still earn most of their income from personal advertisements and sponsored articles. State-run media also suffer from insufficient capitalization and low levels of investments.

Nevertheless, insufficient sources of income may lead either to closure of media outlets or to their reliance on sponsors. Dikaev cited an example of Mavchi Ozod television from Vosei district. "This station works in agreement with a local oligarch, the owner of Samar. The television studio works on

INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED BUSINESSES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

the property of the plant belonging to Samar, the employees receive salaries from the plant, and know that if any problem arises, their patron will always find a solution," he said.

Bobojanova noted that television stations in the regions are subject to the influence of the authorities, especially in political programs. "The independent Chakhonaro television from Chkalovsk presented the mayor in a manner contrary to his wishes, and now the channel is about to close," she reported.

Despite rich reserves of hydropower and minerals, Tajikistan is still characterized by a relatively low level of economic development. The biggest business in the country is the Tajik Aluminum Company. Russian companies have recently entered the Tajik market and become active investors. In 2007, Russian holding company RusAl continued sponsoring some Tajik media outlets both in the form of grants and by publishing advertisements and public relations materials in *Asia-Plus*, *Facts and Commentaries*, *Tajikistan Courier*, and *Vecherny Dushanbe*.

However, the panelists noted that the representatives of large businesses seldom sponsor media outlets directly and prefer to do so by putting up their advertisements, commercials, and public relations materials. The main advertisers in the Tajik media have been cell phone operators, Internet providers, commercial banks, and international organizations and embassies. However, Abdullaev noted that businesspeople often refrain from placing advertisements because they fear this might call the attention of tax authorities and other verification entities to their businesses. Related to this, panelists noted that, according to the law, a limit on advertisements exists for television; however, the lack of monitoring enables television stations to conceal advertising revenues.

Panelists stressed that despite their external stability, many media outlets still subsist on grants. Mirsaidov said: "Most mass media in Tajikistan are keeping afloat due to grants from foreign donors. Grants are given only to media outlets that have a clear-cut strategy of maintaining their financial stability."

Journalists of various media have an incentive to attract commercials to their outlets because 30 to 50 percent of the total advertising fee is paid to the person who has brought the advertisement. However, such a practice turns the journalist from a reporter into a merchant who is engaged in writing only custom-made advertising materials. The owners of large non-governmental publication such as *Asia-Plus*, *Charkhi Gardun* and *Oila*, have created marketing departments to take on these duties and research potential new markets and advertising supply and demand.

Many successful editors develop other kinds of business in addition to printing. Thus, the richest media company, Charkhi Gardun, whose publications have the largest circulation in the country, is also engaged in delivery of newsprint, consumables, printing plates, construction, etc. The media company Oila has its own advertising agency and a printing house with state-of-the-art equipment.

Most state-run print media still rely on subscriptions (which are still mandatory for government employees) as their major source of income. Private media are more focused on advertisements, classifieds, and public relations materials, trying to attract more advertisers. Private regional television stations often receive small grants from local administrations.

Market and ratings surveys in mass media sector are conducted sporadically and irregularly. The panelists noted that all such surveys were conducted by the Zerkalo Center for Sociological Research. Now these surveys are not conducted at all, perhaps due to the lack of grants. Media outlets do not consider sociological research necessary and conduct their own surveys in the newspapers or on websites.

All the panelists noted that the practice of distorting the print publications' circulation figures goes on. There are some print media that understate their circulation to lower taxes; others overrate it to increase the popularity of their publication. There are printed media that, in conspiracy with printing shops, print off-the-books copies that are later sold tax-free.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.92

The panelists have noted considerable progress in the activity of institutions supporting the media. This objective showed notable growth, increasing from 1.68 last year to 1.92 this year. Among the factors contributing to this progress, some panelists noted advances in the work of the Journalists' Union after the election of a new and energetic leader. No indicator stood out as either ahead of or behind the average. The leader was Indicator 3, supporting NGOs and the trailing indicator was that related to access to printing facilities and newsprint, Indicator 6.

The head of media holding Charkhi Gardun, Akbarali Sattorov, was elected head of the Journalists' Union and now 1,600 journalists from all regions of the country belong to the Journalists' Union. Nevertheless, some panelists, including Khurshed Niyozov and Turko Dikaev, remarked that the Journalists' Union remains a pro-governmental organization, and its managers have never visited the southern regions of the country in order to familiarize themselves with the

Rano Bobojanova remarked, "2007 witnessed a sharp deterioration in the activities of both international and local NGOs in support of mass-media, the freedom of speech, and the rights of journalists."

situation media professionals face there. Niyozov claimed, "It was the head of the Journalists' Union who had advised the singer, Raihona, to file a petition and to bring Ovoz journalists to court instead of advising her to resolve the conflict by filing a civil suit or requiring a public disclaimer. It is him who helps the government to smother the freedom of speech in the country."

The youngest professional media organization, Media Alliance, has 45 members all over the country except for the Pamir. The organization arranges for the defense of journalists prosecuted for critical articles, and worked with the three journalists with the Ovoz newspaper. In 2007, Media Alliance opened a memorial board in a journalists' complex in the capital in memory of the journalists who perished during the civil war.

However, Rano Bobojanova remarked, "2007 witnessed a sharp deterioration in the activities of both international and local NGOs in support of mass-media, the freedom of speech, and the rights of journalists. On the one hand, this was due to the political process because 'color' revolutions worsened the image of NGOs and international organizations; besides, there is no cooperation and solidarity among journalists."

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

Mirsaidov thought, "Government journalists are especially weak giving interviews and covering economic topics." Besides, most editors of state-run media outlets are extremely conservative.

Turko Dikaev said that the "mass media and sponsors pay attention to journalists' associations only when a certain media outlet or its employee needs help. Therefore, their activities rely on the financial support of international organizations. Most NGO activities practically never reach the regions, except for carrying out rare seminars and trainings only for independent journalists."

The panelists expressed different opinions on the activities of the most prestigious NGO supporting media and journalists, NANSMIT. Some participants stressed the important role of this NGO in protecting the rights of journalists and media outlets. Others believed that the work of this organization in the current year has declined considerably, saying the rigorous monitoring of infringements of the rights of journalists has practically ceased and very few professional trainings and seminars were conducted. Saidumron Saidov commented that NANSMIT advocates the rights of journalists provided they receive donor support, and as of now, they do not have a professional lawyer.

In spite of the fact that training programs of the Internews Network in Tajikistan have been curbed since October 2007 due to the ending of their financial backing, all the panelists praised this organization for having made the most essential contribution not only by supplying equipment and supporting media management technologies, but also by training the staff of electronic mass media in the international standards of journalism and management.

The panelists expressed special concern regarding the professional training of journalists, which had not improved during the past year. Tajikistan has one faculty of journalism and five departments of journalism with about 100 students. However, the panelists commented on the low level of the graduates' qualifications and mentioned several reasons for this. In the course of their studies, students do not receive even the most elementary computer skills, not to mention working with special software packages. The teaching of professional disciplines employs outdated methods; the course material is based mainly on the history of journalism.

Bobojanova declared, "The number of training sessions has sharply decreased, and though journalists sometimes do go

to study abroad, students of departments of journalism never do. There is no surplus of journalists because graduates do not want to, and many of them just cannot, work in the profession. The work in mass media, especially Russian ones, has become a female occupation." Akhmedova noted, "The graduates of the departments of journalism, especially those who studied abroad, do not want to work in the profession. All of them are looking for jobs in international organizations where salaries are much higher."

The panelists remarked that employees of the state media outlets seldom attend seminars and trainings because their editors do not allow them to go. That is why there is such a sharp difference between the professional level of journalists working for independent media outlets and those in the state-run media. This becomes obvious from the fact that independent media presents more references to authoritative and competent sources, whereas journalists with the state media outlets write in the first person, imposing their own opinions upon the reader. Mirsaidov thought, "Government journalists are especially weak giving interviews and covering economic topics." Besides, most editors of state-run media outlets are extremely conservative.

There is competition among mass media outlets, both governmental and non-governmental, to obtain promising journalists. Each outlet entices him or her with higher royalties. However, none of them start selecting promising journalists while they are still studying in colleges or universities.

Only the Journalists' Union and the Tajik affiliate of the *Arguments and Facts* newspaper conduct training and retraining sessions in the workplace. All the panelists pointed to the disastrous situation with trainings and seminars, which were not conducted anywhere except by Internews in 2007.

Discussion of the quality of the press led to a discussion of printing houses. A group of panelists noted that the monopoly of the state printing houses continues; thus, the governmental printing house Sharki Ozod still allows itself to choose customers, often on political grounds, and command "from above," which editions to print, and which to reject. Most private printing shops have outdated equipment. Khurshed Niyozov informed the panelists that "in the state printing house Sharki Ozod, priority is always given to the governmental newspapers, and the price of paper, plates, and services is 15-20 percent lower for them than for independent newspapers." However, the publishing house Oila-print works successfully, characterized by reasonable prices, modern equipment, and full-color printing. All the panelists remarked on the necessity to imitate Kyrgyzstan in creating printing houses for independent newspapers in Dushanbe and regional centers such as Khudzhand, Kurgan Tube and Khorog.

List of Panel Participants

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