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ARMENIA

Armenian politics in 2008 was dominated by the aftermath of the February Presidential elections. According to official results, Prime Minister Serzh Sargysyan won the elections outright in the first round. Following the election results, opposition protests began in Yerevan's Freedom Square. On March 1st, the demonstrators were violently dispersed by police and military forces and President Robert Kocharyan declared a 20 day state of emergency. The announcement of the state of emergency was followed by mass arrests of prominent members of the opposition, as well as a de facto ban on any further anti-government protests. In the economic sphere, the economy posted a 6.8 percent growth rate, despite dislocations caused by the elections aftermath and the Russian-Georgian war which affected trade.

Against this backdrop, the Armenian media sector recorded some positive changes, with the overall score increasing slightly over the previous year. Panelists attributed this increase to improvements in the objectives of professional journalism, plurality of news sources, and business management. Of concern for the panelists, the freedom of speech objective decreased from 1.93 to 1.82, with the main reason for the decline, according to the panelists' analysis, being:

- Restrictions on media content during the state of emergency. The March 1 state of emergency declaration included a demand for the cessation of NGO activity as well as a media blackout of all but government statements and was followed by a shutdown of independent news reporting and waves of arrests. The press blackout was supposed to be limited to "internal political matters" for the duration of the state of emergency—except for official government announcements. The state of emergency as articulated was supposed to apply only to Yerevan, but unofficially all regional media and print houses were visited by the Armenian security services and were asked to sign documents stating that they agreed to enforce the news coverage limitations in their outlets.
- The halt in the licensing process for broadcast media during 2008.

Panelists noted significant positive changes in technology that could assist media development in the coming years. A third large telecom provider, France Telecom, entered the market and will introduce mobile services through its Orange brand and provide high-speed Internet to both corporate and private users. Additionally, WiMax technology was introduced to Armenia, designed to bring wireless communication to both private and corporate users.

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ARMENIA AT A GLANCE

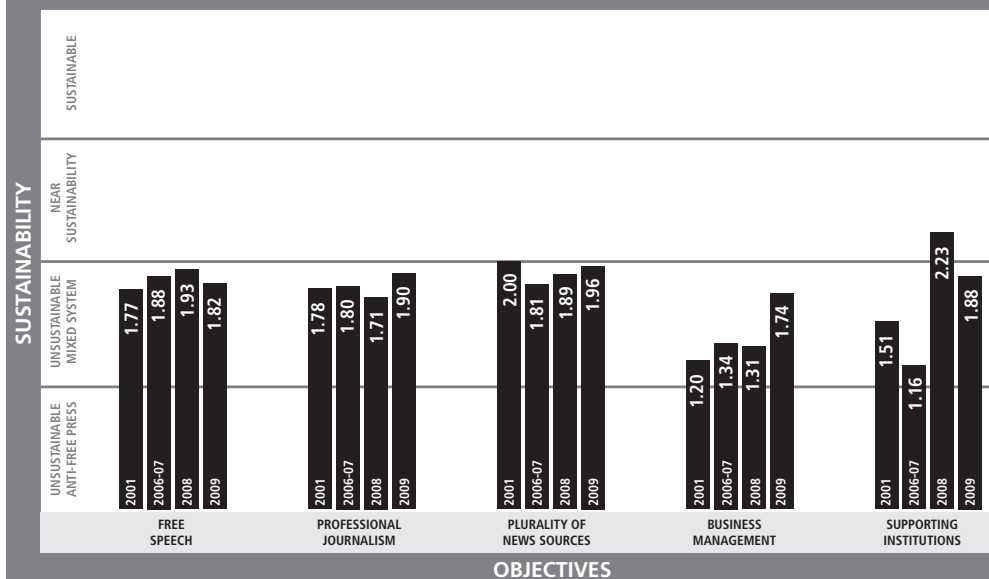
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 2,968,586 (July 2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Yerevan
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Armenian 97.9%, Yezidi (Kurd) 1.3%, Russian 0.5%, other 0.3% (2001 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Armenian Apostolic 94.7%, other Christian 4%, Yezidi 1.3% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Armenian 97.7%, Yezidi 1%, Russian 0.9%, other 0.4% (2001 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2007-Atlas):** \$7.925 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **GNI per capita (2007-PPP):** \$5,900 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **Literacy rate:** 99.4% (male 99.7%, female 99.2%) (2001 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Serzh Sargsian (since April 9, 2008)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print 30; Radio 21; Television Stations: 18 (3 local, others relaying from Russia) (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** The maximum circulation cited is 9,000 copies and the average real circulation for most popular newspapers is 5,000. (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** top three television stations: H1, Shant TV, Armenia TV (AGB Nielsen)
- > **News agencies:** Armenpress, Noyan Tapan, Arka, Regnum, Arminfo, Mediamax, Photolur, New Image and Spyur
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** \$45 million (International Monetary Fund)
- > **Internet usage:** 172,800 (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: ARMENIA



Annual scores for 2002 through 2005 are available online at http://www.irex.org/programs/MSI_EUR/archive.asp

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

Armenia Objective Score: 1.82

While panelists noted that the Constitution and the Law on Mass Media assure freedom of speech, the degree of implementation of those laws still remains low. As Shant TV news editor Husik Ariskakesyan stated, "Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information only on paper, i.e. there's no lack of laws, but they are frequently not enforced." Panelists felt that two main reasons explain this gap: the lack of a truly independent judicial system and the lack of willingness of society, including media professionals, to fight for freedom of speech.

Most Armenian media outlets respected the strictures of the state of emergency and only broadcasted/printed official news. However, a group of print and online media refused report news at all: they preferred to report nothing rather than the allowed official information. *Aravot* newspaper, for example, published issues with blank white pages as a form of protest.

Panelists assessed the licensing of broadcast media poorly due to the National Commission on Television and Radio (NCTR) suspension of the licensing process during 2008. Panelists argued that the suspension of licensing has political implications and is considered to be a violation of the Law on Media. Most of the panelists found the argument of authorities of why they ceased licensing broadcast media (because of delay in the digitalization process) inconsistent. As the director of Hrazdan TV said, "The licensing body depends on the government and implements political orders. A vivid example is the suspension of the licensing process during 2008."¹

Market entry for media is relatively free, and panelists did not identify any basic limitations for entry into Armenia's media market: there are no legal difficulties in registering a media outlet as a company. However, when assessing the practicalities of media market entry, panelists did take into account the halt in licensing in 2008 which effectively limited the ability of new entrants into the broadcast market for reasons other than business law or regulation.

Panelists noted some differences between the taxation of print and broadcast media. Television and radio have less favorable conditions, as they have to pay such additional taxes as broadcast tax and copyright taxes.

¹ Half of the members of Armenia's NCTR are elected by the National Assembly; the other half are appointed by the president. As of this writing, the National Assembly had not appointed its representatives to the NCTR. In 2009, the National Assembly plans to revise the Law on Television and Radio and will define the terms for selection of NCTR representatives by the National Assembly.

Armenia recorded an unprecedented increase of violence against media representatives during 2008, and panelists noted their concern that no prosecution and punishment of the attackers followed. "Journalists were beaten, pursued, their cameras were broken...All kinds of violence have taken place besides murders" said Shushanik Arevshatyan, director of Radio Van. There were at least seven notable cases of violence against journalists. One case occurred on November 17, 2008 and involved Edik Baghdasaryan, chief editor of the Armenian daily *Hetq* (Track) and the president of the Investigative Journalists' Association of Armenia. He sustained severe head injuries after being attacked by three assailants as he was leaving his workplace; the attackers also stole his camera. According to *Hetq* personnel, this incident occurred after repeated "warnings" and "threats" addressed to *Hetq* staff. Another case involved Lusineh Barseghian. On August 11, 2008, Barseghian, the correspondent of the Armenian daily *Haikakan Zhamanak* (Armenian Times), was assaulted and also sustained head injuries outside her home. A week later, Hrach Melkumian, acting head of the Yerevan office of the Armenian Service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, was also attacked. None of the culprits has been brought to justice.²

There are legal provisions that favor state media. Public television requires no license and therefore skips all dealings with NCTR, instead working under the Council on Public Radio and Television (CPRT). Further, Armenia's public television is exempt from legal provisions applied to private television that limits advertising to 10 minutes per hour. Mnatsakan Harutyunyan added that the law assures editorial independence, but in reality, they depend on government bodies (for instance, the President appoints all CPRT members); thus, so there is a lack of editorial independence. Panelists argued that public media, especially television, serves the government. In addition, in the state of emergency which followed political events on March 1, 2008, all broadcast and print media were censored. As director of Tsayg TV (Gyumri) Margarita Minasyan said, "the published news is edited not only by third, but also by fourth and fifth parties which are delegated to serve for the interests of the third party... I worked with Public TV and stopped it as all the materials were strictly censored...."

Libel continues to remain a criminal offense. However, panelists noted that in practice libel cases are treated more informally. For example, officials prefer to come to a consensus with the journalists by offering money, threatening them, and using violence. Few prefer to take such matters to court. Aram Mkrtychyan explains this preference, "... nobody goes to court... I think the reason is that libel in general is really "fixed," especially in newspapers... So as printed media

² <http://hetq.am/en/society/edik-assault-24/#more-975>

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has low circulation in Armenia, an official prefers more to ignore the case of libel than to treat it as a problem.”

Panelists observed some improvement in the availability of public information. “Availability of information increases year after year. There were no obstacles getting information last year, and journalists had equal opportunity to get information from different sources,” Shushanik Arevshatyan said. Nonetheless, panelists noted some problems regional media encountered in getting information from the local authorities. Large private companies are also not so transparent to provide journalists with information.

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.

As noted above, in the aftermath of the presidential elections and the state of emergency, Armenian media were, for the most part prohibited from providing independent information to the Armenian public. According to Point 4 of Section 4 of the state of emergency declaration issued on March 1, for a period of 20 days “publications related to state and internal political issues can be made exclusively within the limits of official information of state bodies.” This directive resulted in two kinds of limitations: a lot of Armenian and foreign oppositional Internet periodicals were blocked during the emergency and the Armenian Internet community simply “froze” several sub-domains in the “am” domain. Thus, the sites were accessible only by their IP address. One week later, the Armenian on-line community said that this measure was enforced by the National Security Service and made the following statement, “When the state of emergency was declared on March 1, 2008 the National Security Service of the Republic of Armenia applied to the Internet community of Armenia with a request to temporarily freeze some domains.” Subsequently, it was followed by pressure on Internet providers, the latter were ordered by the National Security Service to block access to the sites on the “black list.”³ Along with Armenian language sites, YouTube video clips were blocked after the appearance on YouTube of a video clip showing March 1 clashes with the law enforcement bodies. Some online periodicals, on their own initiative, suspended their work during this period of time, arguing that they preferred to keep silence rather than to publish official information.

Panelists gave high grades to the access of media outlets to international news and news sources. They agreed that situation in terms of accessibility of international news sources was quite favorable in general, although two problems were noted:

- The high price and low quality of Internet connection.
- Strict limitations on international sources were set during the period of the state of emergency (March 2008).

The government does not control entry into the journalism profession in any way. However, formal accreditation with the government is still required for journalists, and attendance at certain events (National Assembly sessions, for example) requires accreditation that can be withheld. Tigran Harutyunyan of the Noyan Tapan Media Union highlighted a new restriction for newspapers: only papers with a circulation of 2000 or higher are allowed to send journalists to cover matters in the Public Prosecutor's office. None of the other panelists had heard of this restriction, and Shushak Doydoyan, head of the NGO Freedom of Information, verified that no such restriction existed.

³ <http://www.gipi.am/?i=272>

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Armenia Objective Score: 1.90

Panelists continued to stress the weakness of journalists in terms of professionalism, irrelevance and lack of diversity in sources of information, and a lack of verification of information. Panelists mentioned that overall level of articles in term of linguistic and journalistic literacy is low. Reporters do not really rely on multiple information sources or do not verify information. The panelists attributed these weaknesses to three key factors. First, the quality of education is low in university journalism programs. Second, the number of stories required of journalists by management negatively affects the quality of their stories. Third, management influences coverage and has an impact on content and objectivity for political reasons. The net effect, panelists noted, is that the media as a whole does not provide objective and balanced information. Rather, coverage tends to be polarized in support of either the government or the opposition.

Even though there are ethical norms accepted by specific associations and media representatives, those norms are reinforced in isolation from each other and are not universal for the sector as a whole. An ethics committee was created which aims to regulate ethical violations before they go to court; there were 10 such cases in 2008. However, panelists likened the situation in the Armenian media sector to a game without rules. Panelists also noted that some media professionals accept bribes for publishing (or not publishing) specific topics. As Husik Aristakesyan said, "ethical norms are violated every second."

The panelists stated that journalists and editors frequently practice self-censorship because they fear various sanctions by different political forces, including sanctions as severe as switching off a broadcast signal.

Panelists did see some improvement in terms of coverage of key events and issues by journalists. They especially emphasized that some closed and taboo topics started to be covered by the media, such as the army, the police, different state structures, and historical events about Armenia, which were not covered enough previously. However, the panelists did note that even within these larger topics, there are stories that can and cannot be covered.

The salary levels of journalists and other media specialists are not high, but the panelists did not consider this fact as the only reason for corruption. Corruption in media coverage also stems from journalists who are more interested in serving specific political parties than in pursuing professional journalism.

There were disagreements among the panelists on whether entertainment programming unduly eclipsed news and information programming or not. Shushanik Arevshatyan of Radio Van said, "There are nothing besides entertainment programs to watch on TV. There are no proper news programs that people can watch and understand what's going on...I think the entertainment programs eclipse news, but as people have huge demand to get information they search for it in different sources...." The president of Noyan Tapan Media Union, Tigran Harutyunyan, argued the opposite point, "I think there are as many news programs as there needs to be," meaning that entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming. The panel did not identify any cases where news programs were canceled and replaced with entertainment. The panel noted that the availability of news for local stations in the regions was as lower that in Yerevan.

Panelists evaluated the quality and efficiency of facilities and equipment for news production relatively high and said that the existing equipment does not hinder the media. In spite of this, many media lack specialists with the skills to use modern equipment.

Panelists observed some improvements in quality niche reporting and programming. As Aram Mkrtchyan of Radio Hay said, "Two spheres, sport and business, stand out as properly specialized." Husik Aristakesyan added, "Print and Internet media stand out in sense of niche reporting, though there are also some positive changes in TV." However, the panelists agreed that investigative journalism is not developed in Armenia. Tigran Harutyunyan believed this was due to both a lack of financial resources and a lack of demand for investigative reports.

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).

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Armenia Objective Score: 1.96

While the panelists agreed that there does exist a plurality of news sources, there are serious limits on access due to cost and geography. The problem of limited access to different information sources is especially acute in the regions, especially in villages where printed media and Internet connections are almost totally unavailable. The most accessible media, in terms of both physical/technical and financial terms, are Public Television and Public Radio of Armenia: These stations cover all regions in Armenia. However, since Armenia's public television and radio mainly serve the interests of government, the majority of Armenia's population can only get news from these sources. Given low Internet penetration in the regions and limited print publication distribution, Armenians living in the regions do not really have the opportunity to compare the information with other sources. Moreover, Public Radio of Armenia used to rebroadcast news programs of Azatutyun (Radio Free Europe's Armenian language service) and Amerikayi Dzayn (Voice of America);⁴ however, prior to the 2008 presidential elections, these rebroadcasts ceased, further limiting Armenians' ability to get news from an alternative source.

Access to local and international media is not formally restricted for citizens, but their access is effectively restricted by cost. As the vice-editor of *Novoe Vremya*, Karen

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.

Miqailyan, stated, "Media in Armenia, more or less, provide citizens with opportunity to choose their source as in general, the access to media is free. The main limitations are related to technical and financial resources."

The MSI panelists argued that state media are partisan and mainly serve the interests of government. For private media, the panelists stated that these outlets serve the public interest only when those interests correspond to the interests of the political party that supports the particular media outlet. As Shushanik Arevshatyan said, "Mainly media in Armenia are not independent; almost all of them have their founders and follow those founders' orders... Sometimes these founders defend the interests of the society; these are cases when their interests match with public interests."

Armenia has few independent news agencies. The Coordinator of Journalism Department at the Caucasus Media Institute, Lika Mkrtychyan, said, "News agencies mainly broadcast so called "hard news," they try to avoid expressing their own opinion." The practices of using the news provided by news agencies differ from media to media. Many media frequently broadcast the news produced by their own specialists and avoid the use of agencies.

Yerevan-based broadcast media are more likely to produce their own news programs while, for the most part, regional broadcast media have difficulties preparing their own news programs and often broadcast the news of Yerevan channels.⁵ Panelists explained that the reason regional media did not air original news programming was due to population size: in small regional cities and villages, there is little to no demand for locally prepared news since their small population means that everyone knows what is going on in their community.

Panelists agreed that the ownership of media is not transparent. As Aram Mkrtychyan said, "we know about real ownership of major media only by hearsay. We sometimes hear that somebody has bought a part of 'X' TV or we can learn about it when observing programs of this TV attentively. But we never exactly know who really owns this TV." Tigran Harutyunyan added that "...the identity of the real owner of the TV is sometimes kept as a secret."

Media do not always reflect and represent a broad spectrum of social interests, but the panelists also saw some positive changes. For instance, the coverage of gender issues has improved and increased, but other topics remain underrepresented.

⁴ In July 2007, Armenian Public Radio indicated that it planned to halt RFE/RL broadcasts on August 9, citing contractual and payment issues.

⁵ The exception to this situation is that larger cities in the regions (for example, Gyumri) tend mainly to broadcast their own news programs.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Armenia Objective Score: 1.74

Panelists concluded that the Armenian media do not operate as proper businesses. In the majority of cases, media outlets do not follow basic rules of market competition. As Tigran Harutyunyan stated, “Many media outlets are financed by their founder as they are unprofitable as businesses.” Mnatsakan Harutyunyan added that since private media are, broadly speaking, not profitable enterprises, state media are in a more privileged position.

Panelist Shushanik Arevshatyan, the director of Radio Van, argued that some distinction should be made between television and radio on the one hand and print media on the other. She was convinced that television and radio can operate as profitable businesses with advertising and, therefore, could operate with editorial independence.

Panelists argued that opportunities to receive revenues from multiple sources strongly depended on the skills of the managers. As Shushanik Arevshatyan said, “If you are a good manager, you can find different sources to get income; a real businessman should be creative to understand where to find money.” Panelists also agreed that newspapers are in the most disadvantageous position in terms of diversity of income sources. This is especially true for regional newspapers which often depend on subsidies from local authorities.

Panelists indicated that advertising agencies do not adequately fulfill their intended functions and operate as just mediators who take money and do not properly organize, plan, and control advertising for their clients. Therefore,

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.

For most media, existing levels of advertising revenue are not sufficient, even among those media with large audiences. In the print media sector, based on Aram Mkrtchyan’s estimations, advertising revenues do not exceed 5 percent of total revenue.

media see little value added and often sell their own ad time, bypassing agencies. Information from media ratings is still poorly used in the country and this contributes to making the work of the advertising agencies ineffective. Media themselves have not adopted the use of media research on a widespread basis and many media use their own in-house methods to research their audience, which makes others suspicious of the validity of the results.

There are two companies in Armenia that provide television ratings based on internationally accepted research methodology: AGB and GFK. Panelists indicated that access to ratings data that meets international standards is problematic:

- Many media outlets lack sufficient financial resources to buy reliable data from qualified research companies. Thus, some outlets conduct their own research based on different methodologies. As a result, ratings data derived by different media outlets using different methodologies becomes incomparable.
- Large advertising agencies require auditable and reliable ratings data to make decisions about placing advertisements. Because there is limited access to such reliable ratings data, media outlets often lose potential advertising revenue from large ad companies.

Panelists mentioned that they have relied on the market surveys conducted by IREX’s USAID-funded Core Media Support Program for Armenia to make conclusions about their audiences.

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In discussing governmental subsidies to independent media, the panelists provided differing interpretations on the benefits of subsidies. Panelists considered them positive when they support programs of social importance that otherwise are not profitable.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Armenia Objective Score: 1.88

Panelists noted an absence of trade organizations representing the interests of media owners. However, they noted that there were positive changes in the work of professional organizations that seek to protect journalists' rights. While their presence in the media sector was positive for addressing the cases of violence against journalists, panelists argued it was still too early to talk about the real influence and scale of these initiatives.

One relatively new example of a trade organization is the All Armenia Media Association, which was founded as a result of the third All Armenian Mass Media conference of September 17, 2006 held in Tsakhadzor, Armenia. The Association aims to unite the mass media of the Diaspora, Nagorno-Karabkh, and Armenia. It organizes active media exchanges within the Diaspora, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Armenia mass media organizations and has created an open electronic database, where the information from all over the world on issues of importance for all Armenians is gathered. In 2008, the All Armenia Media Association saw the following events:

- A general meeting of members was held.
- Number of members of the association expanded to 40.
- An expert survey on the reliability of Armenian media was conducted. Heads of 25 parties, 45 NGOs, and 30 entrepreneurial organizations worked to estimate the degree of media reliability and media outlets were ranked accordingly.

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.

NGOs are seen as the more active organizations in terms of supporting free speech and journalists' rights. However, as the main source of financial resources for local NGOs are grants from international organizations, it is difficult to talk about the sustainability of these NGOs' activities. One of the most active NGOs in the area of media support and advocacy is the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia (FOICA) which was founded in 2001 with the primary goal of defending the people's constitutional right to have access to information. Another active organization in this field is the Committee of Protection of Freedom of Speech. Among other things, the Committee works to support democratic reforms in Armenia and promote media's role in this process, and increase media professionalism.

The panelists agreed that Armenia lacks quality degree programs for journalists, with an absence of practical teaching being the main problem. Panelist Shushanik Arevshatyan said that graduates from state universities coming to work in her radio station sometimes cannot use even basic equipment. Margarita Minasyan added, "...they come with zero level of practical knowledge, sometimes they don't even know on what equipment they should put the cameras...."

There is also a lack of short-term in-service trainings in Armenia. Panelists noted that only IREX and Internews provide media specialists with such trainings. Media managers do often try to upgrade the skills of their employees with their own resources, but not all media organizations can afford this. Panelists do highly appreciate the quality of foreign training programs as they see evident changes in work of trained specialists, but they argue for more extensive changes. Lika Mkrtchyan said, "Short-term training programs are too short to upgrade specialists' skills significantly. I don't think that training programs in Armenia can really make big-scale changes during three to four days."

Panelists observed no serious problems concerned with newsprint and printing facilities and saw no basic barriers or problems. However, they pointed to problems with distribution to the regions and the resulting ability to hamper circulation. As Mnatsakan Harutyunyan said, "... in the regions, if an undesirable article is published in a newspaper, this edition will never reach the kiosks. Recently, *Aravot* newspaper published an article about the local governor. I went to buy this newspaper and the salesperson told that this newspaper hasn't been published." One of the panelists said that he had heard about cases when some newspapers were not properly distributed to kiosks in the regions. He alleged that while the distribution company's explanation of the large quantity of returned newspapers was that they had not been sold, in reality the newspapers had not even reached the kiosks.

List of Panel Participants

Aram Mkrtchyan, executive director, Radio Hay, Yerevan

Lika Mkrtchyan, journalism coordinator, Caucasus Media Institute, Yerevan

Karen Miqayelyan, vice-editor, *Novoe Vremya* newspaper, Yerevan

Shushan Arevshatyan, director, Radio Van, Yerevan

Husik Aristakesyan, news editor, Shant TV, Yerevan

Tigran Harutyunyan, president, Noyan Tapan Media Union, Yerevan

Mnatsakan Harutyunyan, president, Hrazdan TV, Hrazdan

Margarita Minasyan, president, Tsayg TV, Gyumri

The following participants filled out a questionnaire but could not attend the panel discussion.

Karen Arshakyan, director, Fortuna TV, Stepanavan

Narine Avetisyan, executive director, Lori TV, Vanadzor

Moderator

Petros Petoyan, director, Marketing Communications Research Company, Yerevan

The Armenia study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, Marketing Communications Research Company, Yerevan. The panel discussion was convened on January 24, 2009.