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TURKMENISTAN

Since the last MSI Eurasia report, the country has undertaken what amounts to, for Turkmenistan, an international charm offensive.

Turkmenistan formally ended its single-party system in 2012, by registering a second political party for the first time in more than 20 years of independence. It also completed population census, first time in 17 years. Turkmenistan also attempted to burnish its diplomatic credentials, hosting a summit of regional heads-of-state summit and getting itself elected to the UN General Assembly's Economic and Social Council. Moreover, Turkmenistan formalized the ambitious, multi-billion dollar US-backed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India natural gas pipeline (TAPI) project in 2012. The project would allow Turkmenistan to theoretically export natural gas to South Asia in 2017, which would add to its current customers China, Russia, and Iran.

President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov was reelected for a second five-year presidential term on February 12, 2012, in an election the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) considered so flawed that it would be pointless to send observers. During his campaign, he stated that he fully supports the democratization of Turkmenistan by developing the political system, strengthening the power of local authorities, public institutions and establishing independent media. "We need parties that would unite and inspire people to creative work for the sake of further prosperity of our country," he said, on the way to his 97.14 percent victory over seven friendly alternative candidates. His victory brought about a new moniker, "Arkadag" (Protector), and the announcement that his first term "Era of Great Revival" had given way to the "Era of Power and Happiness." Despite gas-fueled growth, non-government sources still estimate high unemployment and poverty rates.

Turkmenistan is an absolute dictatorship, a sentiment shared by the participants and the international community. Reporters Without Borders consistently places Turkmenistan as one of the three worst countries for media freedom and one of the nine states with the worst civic freedoms record. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has described the lack of press freedom in Turkmenistan as "unprecedented" in the body's history. It is one of the most corrupt nations on the planet, according to Transparency International.

Berdimukhammedov reversed some of the more bizarre and regressive reforms of his predecessor, Sapamurat "Turkmenbashy" Niyazov, though critics contend these changes have been cosmetic, limited, or ineffective. On the media, however, 2013 opened with the surprising enactment of the president's promised media freedom law, which guarantees freedoms of expression, dissemination of information, bans censorship, and ends the president's formal ownership of all the country's newspapers. At first glance, the media law appears to be a cause for hope, though the law flies directly in the face of total media control that has lasted Turkmenistan's entire history.

One of the few genuinely positive trends of increasing Internet access of the past few years is now being blunted by increasing filtering of social networks, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. This censorship was extended to Gmail in 2012, reports RSF, which lists Turkmenistan as an "Enemy of the Internet."

TURKMENISTAN at a glance

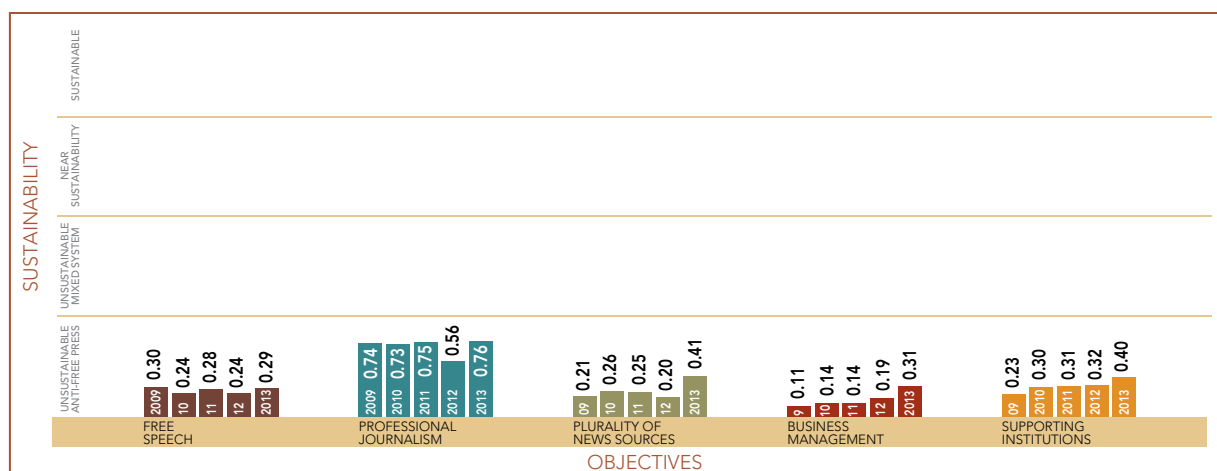
GENERAL

- > Population: 5,054,828 (July 2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Capital city: Ashgabat
- > Ethnic groups (% of population): Turkmen 85%, Uzbek 5%, Russian 4%, other 6% (2003 est, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Religions (% of population): Muslim 89%, Eastern Orthodox 9%, unknown 2%
- > Languages: Turkmen (official) 72%, Russian 12%, Uzbek 9%, and other 7%
- > GNI (2010-Atlas): \$ 19.159 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > GNI per capita (2010-PPP): \$ 7,160 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > Literacy rate: 98.8% (male 99.3%, female 98.3%) (1999 est, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > President or top authority: President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov (re-elected February 12, 2012).

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > Number of active media outlets: Print: 25 national and local newspapers, 17 magazines, Radio Stations 5; Television Stations: 7
- > Newspaper circulation statistics: The top two newspapers by circulation are *Neutral Turkmenistan* (Russian, English language state-owned daily), *Turkmenistan* (Turkmen language daily)
- > Broadcast ratings: N/A
- > News agencies: Turkmendovlethabarlary (state owned)
- > Annual advertising revenue in media sector: N/A
- > Internet usage: 80,400 (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: TURKMENISTAN



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2013: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES



CHANGE SINCE 2012

▲ (increase greater than .10) □ (little or no change) ▼ (decrease greater than .10)

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.

Scores for all years may be found online at http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE_msiscorers.xls

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Turkmenistan Objective Score: 0.29

Turkmenistan's score for Objective 1 remained almost the same as last year's 0.31, reflecting that the country has no tolerance for freedom of speech. Despite the government's passage of the country's first ever media law, its provisions are redundant to the protections provided by the constitution, which has failed to provide any acceptance of speech freedoms for the rest of Turkmenistan's history.

Turkmenistan's legal foundation have always provided for the basic protections of freedom of expression and of the press. The new constitution, adopted on September 28, 2008, by President Berdymukhammedov, reaffirmed these rights. In practice, such laws are not honored, even deliberately ignored, with the intention of controlling nearly all information in society. One MSI participant, editor of a website that covers Central Asian news, said, "Turkmenistan is [arguably] one of the freest countries in the world. Its constitution enshrines all of the major freedoms with liberal democracy. But the horrible reality is the reverse. Dissenters are routinely tortured. Privacy is non-existent, as monitoring of all communications is ubiquitous. The rule of law is a mockery."

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 or registration of media protects a public interest and is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against media professionals, citizen reporters, and media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > The law protects the editorial independence of state of public media.
- > 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 available; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media, journalists, and citizens.
- > Media outlets' access to and use of local and international news and news sources is not restricted by law.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

"A phone call from the Ministry of National Security or the President's Office can decide the outcome of any case," said one Turkmen journalist.

On December 23, 2012, the Turkmen government's official news website *Turkmenistan: The Golden Age* (Turkmenistan.gov.tm) reported that the Turkmen Parliament passed new laws on mass media guaranteeing freedom of the media. The law, which came into effect on January 4, 2013, states that "Nobody can prohibit or impede the media from disseminating information of public interest" and that citizens of Turkmenistan have the right to use any form of media to express their opinions except when necessary to protect the constitutional order, health, honor and dignity, private life of citizens, and public order. Under the law, obstruction of the legal professional activities of journalists by government officials and public organizations is explicitly forbidden. The new law prohibits mass media censorship, though there are no truly independent publications to test the provision. Details about how the law pertains to Internet media remain unclear, though many sites remain blocked, including exile opposition sites.

The participants agreed that there is no rule of law in the country, especially on politically sensitive cases. "A phone call from the Ministry of National Security or the President's Office can decide the outcome of any case," said one Turkmen journalist. "This happened with the case of Andrey Zatoka, the well-known ecologist and civil activist, who was first given prison term but then the sentence was changed to a fine and he was deported from the country. The courts decided nothing here."

Another participant wrote of the consequences of this environment. "All people trying to express their opinion freely are harassed, including Natalya Shabunts, Gulbansoltan Achilova, Turkish Djumageldyev; imprisoned, such as Ogulsapar Muradova, Dowletmurad Yazgulyev, Annagurban Amanklychev, Sapardurdy Khadjiev; committed to psychiatric wards, such as Amangelen Shapudakov and Kakabay Tejenov; or forced to leave the country, such as Andrey Zatoka and Annamamed Myatiyev." Many of these individuals were journalists assisting or informing international news outlets and documentary filmmakers, or were environmental and social activists.

A pleasant surprise came in early 2013, when Amanklychev and Khadjiev were released after serving their full

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seven-year terms for facilitating a French film crew’s documentary on the country during the Niyazov era. Berdymukhammedov offered them no quarter. Muradova, who was arrested with them, died in prison. Her case has never been investigated. Journalists are only rarely released early or amnestied, and only if their detention brings about condemnation from western governments.

The regional website editor explained how these crimes were perpetrated under previous permissive iterations of speech protections. “Parliamentary legislation is ritualistic empty wording. The real policies are the myriad informal decisions made by officials and national elites away from public view,” said the regional website editor. Article 43 of the new constitution guarantees judicial protection of citizens’ dignity and their private and political rights and freedoms. These freedoms, at least, are in written laws. Turkmen Deputy Foreign Minister Vepa Hadjiyev stated during the UN hearing on Turkmenistan’s compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on March 16, 2012, that people are allowed to collect information and disseminate it in Turkmenistan. In response, Veronika Szente Goldston, Human Rights Watch’s advocacy director for Europe and Central Asia, told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty that the statements of Turkmen officials at the hearings demonstrated that Ashgabat was in a state of “complete denial” when it comes to respecting basic rights.

The 2012 U.S. Department of Commerce report for investors looking at the country notes that the government does not provide information support to investors, and officials use this lack of information to their personal benefit.

Mass media outlets are required to obtain a government license. The new mass media law of Turkmenistan allows anyone of at least 18 years old to establish mass media in the country including local authorities, political parties, public associations, government organizations, other legal entities and citizens. Licensing fees differ, depending on the applicant. Government entities, for example, do not have to pay a licensing fee to launch a newspaper in Turkmenistan. Turkmen citizens or corporations, on the other hand, must pay 100 times the size of the estimated monthly wage,

which is almost \$30,000, on average wage equal to \$285. The State Publishing Association, Turkmenmetbugat, issues licenses with approval of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Cabinet of Ministers. The ministries can reject applicants for a variety of reasons. Due to the secretive environment in Turkmenistan, it was not possible whether any news outlet that applied for a license was granted or denied in the past year, besides the highly publicized ritualistic establishment of *Rysgal*, described below.

The Turkmen president regularly reprimands editors for poor performance. The criticism appears at times arbitrary and vague, at other times, absurd. “A newspaper can publish an article where the editor of this very newspaper is being severely reprimanded,” said one participant.

The president severely reprimanded and warned Shadurdy Alovov, the Chairman of the State Committee for Television, Radio, and Cinematography of Turkmenistan, for “poor performance of official duties, weakening of control over the order and discipline in the subordinate organizations,” on March 20, 2012. In January 2013, he was dismissed on national television for vague shortcomings and failures.

On May 28, 2012, the president appointed new heads of four TV and radio channels, according to the semi-official website Turkmenistan.ru. As usual, it was left unclear as to why their predecessors were removed. Speaking at a cabinet meeting, Berdymukhammedov noted only the need to ensure high-quality articles published in the mass media, featuring “achievements in the field of national culture and art in the new historical epoch.” In August, he dismissed the chief editor of *Watan (Nation)* newspaper for his “inability to cope with assigned duties.” Similarly, he replaced the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Edebiyat we Sungat (Literature and Arts)* Bayram Sakhedov without reason. A day earlier, a journalist from *Ashgabat* newspaper Atamurat Shaguliev was accused of plagiarism and was dismissed from the editorial board of the newspaper, according to the opposition website *Chronicles of Turkmenistan* (Chrono-tm.org). Plagiarism is unheard-of in Turkmenistan.

Turkmen law deems libel and invasion of privacy as criminal offenses. The libel law grants special protection to government officials, public figures, the state, and state symbols. The burden of proof is on the accused, and convictions can lead to as many as five years in prison and a fine up to 30 months’ pay. But in practice, libel and invasion of privacy are not concerns among journalists in Turkmenistan, because controls on media are so strict that journalists have little chance to publish or air critical content.

In terms of access to official information, government officials control the release of all information. There is only one government-owned state news agency, Turkmen Dovlet

Habarlary (State News). The presidential administration or specially-designated officials from the regions must approve, in advance, all interviews with government officials. "All departments and state agencies refer journalists to their press centers, and the press centers hardly answer any requests," said one participant.

Internet access is not enjoyed by officialdom, either. "Officials in Turkmenistan are deprived of the opportunity to use the Internet," reports Chronicles of Turkmenistan. "Regional administrators have no funds to pay for the services of Internet providers. A fax machine is used to receive and send reports and other documents. If a document has been created in electronic form, staff members disseminate it by using flash drive sticks or CDs."

Turkmen government considers journalists as such only those working for state-owned news outlets in the country. The government holds exclusive oversight on press accreditation. In 2012, the Turkmen government accused correspondents of RFE/RL's Turkmen Service of working in the country without proper accreditation. Speaking to the UN on March 16, Turkmen Deputy Foreign Minister Vepa Hadjiyev said, "If they think their actions are journalistic work, then these types of activities are not in accordance with the current law."

The government grants visas to foreign journalists to visit Turkmenistan only to cover specific events, such as international oil and gas conferences and other summits. Minders are assigned to monitor their activities, and they are rarely permitted to leave Ashgabat, the showpiece capital. For the Summit of the Russia-led Commonwealth of Independent States in Ashgabat in December 2012, local security services confiscated mobile phones from the Russian correspondents, recommending they use landlines. According to opposition exile site Gundogar.org, there were only four for a hundred correspondents working out of the press center.

Theoretically, people are free to choose their profession; however, many obstacles exist in Turkmenistan to prevent people from choosing a profession, most notably the need to pay a steep bribe to purchase any public job, or, barring that, connections with high-ranking officials, and the necessity of having completed a relevant domestic academic program in order to access the profession in question. This last holdover from the Soviet age constitutes one of the few remaining strict educational barriers to the journalism profession in the region. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has overall control over who gets selected into its international journalism program, as journalism program is under the Institute of International Relations.

"Many working reporters are not journalists by degree but only those who follow the general line stay in the profession," said one working journalist.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Turkmenistan Objective Score: 0.76

Turkmenistan's score for Objective 2 improved slightly from last year's 0.52. Facilities and equipment and pay levels fared comparatively well, owing to the state's spending on technology, printing, and editing for the state-owned mass media outlets. However, indicator of 3 (media serving the public interest) received the lowest possible score.

Journalism is a highly manipulated profession in Turkmenistan. Journalists working for state news outlets are expected to be highly subjective, producing pro-government reports highlighting the president's accomplishments and success stories, barely quoting anyone else except the president. In September 2012, one MSI participant conducted a survey of Turkmen media for a roundtable dedicated to press freedom in Central Asia, and found that there was not a single article in 20 sampled newspapers that did not mention the president. Berdymukhammedov regularly dismisses editors of news outlets for failing to meet his idea of what the news outlets should publish or air, often without specificity. One participant said, "All news is about him. If he is unhappy with the results, he can only be unhappy with their coverage of himself."

"The quality of reporting is very poor and reminds journalism of the Soviet Union in the 1950s, 60s and 70s,"

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 and retain qualified personnel within the media profession.
- > 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 exist (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

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said one participant. "Subjectivity is evident. No opinion of independent experts, like political analysts, lawyers, doctors, sociologists, is given as there are no such independent experts," the participant added. Quotes from anyone other than the president usually refer to his wise policy, or openly plaudit the president himself. Journalists and editors are clearly playing the role of cult-builders, after some foreign analysts on Turkmenistan pointed to the removal of some more public and permanent aspects of Niyazov's personality cult as evidence of distancing from the past. Citizens, assailed by the media and PR campaign of unqualified praise for the president, are under no such illusions.

Turkmen journalists have few opportunities to improve their professional skills, as neither government agencies nor NGOs offer many real training opportunities. Those who manage to get accepted into foreign programs are usually fired under suspicion of foreign influence or for their intent to use actual journalistic skills. Participants in other foreign-government sponsored exchange programs routinely risk loss of employment for leaving the country, reporter particularly those who travel while employed by the government yet without official, specific permission.

"News articles are boring, sentences are sometimes ridiculously long, up to 10 lines in a column, and they state commonly-known things," said another participant. "There is hardly any investigative reporting except for cases when a person or a group of people are being accused of something serious, such as major drug smuggling cases. Even in such cases the stories are biased, facts are provided and approved by security services, and the language used is accusatory and often humiliating," said another participant.

However, there were several professional trainings held in Turkmen capital in 2012 for working journalists organized by the UN and OSCE. For example, BBC World Service experts Kevin Burden and David Stead led a two-day seminar to about issues touching on professional standards in modern journalism, the ethics of relations between journalists, society, and authorities, Turkmenistan.ru reported. The seminar was a part of training for Turkmen journalists for coverage of the Indoor Asian Games in 2017, which will be hosted by Ashgabat. Also, the OSCE conducted a seminar led by Elena Zaburdaeva, the Deputy Dean of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations on social media

and Internet, as well as methods of presenting news. Finally, the Chairman of the State Committee on Television, Radio, and Cinematography of Turkmenistan Shadurdy Alovov reportedly visited London from August 4-7, 2012, to see how the British were broadcasting live sporting events at the Olympics. He will not be applying whatever knowledge he garnered during his trip, as he was fired soon after.

The OSCE conducted a course regarding launching a news website and online management skills for twenty working journalists from national print and broadcast media, online newspaper *Turkmenistan: The Golden Age* and Turkmen state news agency Türkmen Döwlet Habarlary. There are other similar trainings conducted by the OSCE under the financial support of foreign, usually European, embassies.

There were no reports of any imprisonment or harassment of journalists in Turkmenistan in 2012, however, journalists are under constant threat of imprisonment should they risk providing independent reporting. As such, self-censorship and official censorship color nearly all reports by domestic journalists.

Turkmen news outlets have no formal ethical guidelines; editors do not distribute any to newly hired journalists. This can be partially explained by the fact that majority working journalists in Turkmenistan are not journalists by education, but have rather received their positions through patronage or bribery.

Mass media outlets do not have access to the Internet in Turkmenistan, and thus do not use Internet as part of their reporting. Most of the state's newspapers are based out of Ashgabat's House of Free Creativity, where a foreign Internet development expert found the entire staff of the ruling party newspaper playing solitaire, unashamedly, on a visit in 2008.

Journalists limit their coverage to issues that please government officials, and are not permitted to cover critical and controversial issues. In the summer of 2012, the authorities refused to let Turkmen students leave the country to Russia and the United States. That fall, the US Peace Corps ignominiously pulled out of the country after the authorities refused to extend their visas, apparently on suspicion of foreign espionage. Elena Myatieva, a journalist from Turkmenistan now living in Europe, said in an interview with the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) that the authorities are trying to prevent social, civic, public and political activism by obstructing American educational programs. Domestic news reports made no mention of these controversies.

The same can be said for most issues of central importance to the daily life of Turkmen citizens. Corruption, HIV/AIDS

prevalence, labor migration, poverty, and almost every other topic with a potential negative social connotation is omitted from the local press. The president's occasional direct statements about the need to curb drug use among youth are publicized, though such coverage is the exception, not the rule.

Even unavoidable tragedies are still avoided by the press. Floods caused by severe rains or ice flows, earthquakes that damage remote villages, or other incidents are ignored, if at all possible, by the press. The only source of information within the country for such events is word-of-mouth, or the occasional circulated SMS message.

Since gaining independence, Turkmen government increased the salaries multiple times, including the recent pledge by president that salaries and pensions would be increased by at least 10 percent beginning January 1, 2013. Officially, the country's gas wealth would be used to push up living standards. However, there is still some mixed opinions among the participants regarding salaries of journalists in Turkmenistan. One participant said, "Salaries have barely risen, especially for rank-and-file journalists." Indeed, a 10 percent increase in a country experiencing relatively high inflation quickly dissipates.

Since coming to power in 2007, President Berdymukhammedov instructed the government to improve facilities in Turkmen news outlets by purchasing advanced technologies of printing equipment, editing systems and TV studios. A notable example is the brand-new 212 meter television tower equipped by Turkish and Western companies. This new TV tower in outside of Ashgabat is, as one participant said, one of the largest structures of its kind in Central Asia. One local citizen reported to a participant that the tower's location far from the city in the mountains had led to the resignations of many older employees, citing heart and circulatory health conditions.

Entertainment programming dominates among local media, and Turkmen television programs are filled with entertainment of varying quality. If President Berdymukhammedov takes part in festive event that ends with a concert, all other programs are cancelled and the entire concern is shown, focusing on images of the president and his entourage. Thus, purchasing a TV program schedule is useless, since TV channels do not follow the printed schedules.

"Turkmen TV shows are boring and highly politicized no matter what is being discussed, and no live shows exist," said one participant. "There is no initiative coming from TV managers to make programs interesting and lively, no incentive to fight for viewers or attract advertisers. They know they will be paid anyway. Nobody knows what kind

of reaction a new program will get from the president, and therefore nobody wants to take the risk."

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Turkmenistan Objective Score: 0.41

Turkmenistan's score for Objective 3 is up from last year's 0.44, largely due to the symbolic introduction of the first domestic non-state news outlet. The score is still abysmal, however, and reflects a domestic media scene completely dominated by the state, and worse, by the aggrandizement of the president's personality cult.

The Turkmen government funds all media outlets in the country, and has stunning amount of control over newspapers, magazines, and radio and television stations. A new "private" weekly newspaper, *Rysgal*, opened in 2010, on the instruction of the president himself. The paper is officially owned by the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, a pro-government business association. The newspaper's stories are largely reprints of state media outlets or reflect the views of the government. As with all other papers, the president is always on the front page, above the fold.

Citizens have no opportunity to check sources against each other, as all media outlets in Turkmenistan present only one point of view. The flow of information is so slow in

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE, OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > Plurality of public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet, mobile) exist and offer multiple viewpoints.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted by law, economics, or other means.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for media outlets.
- > Private media produce their own news.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge the 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
- > The media provide news coverage and information about local, national, and international issues.

People get most of their information through domestic television and satellite television. Satellite television is one of the few means by which residents of Turkmenistan can access to independent channels in a country dominated by state-controlled media.

the country because government officials must carefully any announcement they want inserted in the press. Oguljamal Yazyleva, director of the US-funded and based Radio Azatlyk, has said that word-of-mouth is a primary means of gathering information - as it was in early societies of civilization.

There are seven state television channels, one national radio service, 26 national and local newspapers, and 16 magazines, all owned by the state. While transparency of ownership is, in this sense, quite apparent, the panelists agreed that the scores should be heavily docked for this concentration of ownership in the hands of the state.

If that array of state-owned outlets were not enough, the president announced in 2012 an initiative to launch new TV channels, magazines and newspapers, "To widely promote and popularize the achievements made by our country... in an era of happiness of the Turkmen state." As such, the Turkmen government launched two new television channels in 2012, Sport and Ashgabat.

Russia's Perviy Kanal is re-broadcast by Turkmen television for two hours a day, though only recorded, often dated entertainment programs are shown. Before releasing Russian television programs on air, Turkmen government thoroughly reviews the content of the Russian programs. "In this way, officials are protecting the country's residents from 'ideological propaganda,' which TV programs not controlled by the Turkmen authorities may contain," argues *Chronicles of Turkmenistan*.

People get most of their information through domestic television and satellite television. Satellite television is one of the few means by which residents of Turkmenistan can access to independent channels in a country dominated by state-controlled media. Most households have satellite dishes, through which most homes gain access to Russian and Turkish television, as well as foreign broadcasters such as CNNi, BBC, and Al Jazeera. Due to language barriers, older and urban citizens rely on Russian satellite television for news, while younger and rural citizens with satellite access may turn to Turkish channels for entertainment

and cultural programming. Comprehension of Turkish by Turkmen speakers is limited, though improving with cultural links and labor migrants traveling between the two countries.

Otherwise, official information is disseminated through the state's only news agency, Turkmen Dovlet Habarlary. Newspapers are printed, but not widely read, because all newspapers print an identical set of information coming from state's only news agency. The state media outlets do not compete to win readers. Those working in the state's prosecutor's office, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, and others are required to subscribe to the newspaper of *Adalat (Justice)* and *Esger" (Military)*. Those working in the medical profession have to subscribe to *Saglik (Health)*. Those working for the Ministry of Culture have to subscribe to the president's newly established *Medeniyet (Culture)* magazine, printed in Turkmen, Russian, and English. The State Committee of Turkmenistan for Tourism and Sport launched a new weekly newspaper *Turkmen Sporty*, and new magazines *Bedenterbiye we Sport (Physical Culture and Sports)* and *Siyahat (Tourism)*, for which they also have a captive customer base of state employees. The Turkmen Institute for Human Rights reported in September 2012 that students living in dormitories were required to watch the propagandistic state TV news program *Watan (Nation)*. Materials broadcast on the national television and radio channels differ very little, but they all praise the president's accomplishments.

The major, and often the only newsmaker is the president, said one MSI participant. "Sometimes it gets so absurd that a newspaper article describes in detail how the president visits a foreign country: starting from how the ministers see him to the airport, how his beautiful airplane takes off, how he was warmly greeted in the host country, how the best hotel was given over to him, and finally how the airplane lands back in Ashgabat that the ministers meet him at the airport no matter how late or early it is," said one participant. "Ministers are portrayed more as the president's retinue," she added.

Turkmenistan restricts Internet access, blocks content, and monitors activities online. Turkmenistan's subscription costs are astronomical, presenting practical barriers to at-home use. Bandwidth is abysmal, with basic at-home connections offered at a maximum speed of 2048 Kbit/s for about \$50/ mo. Office connections, which may be 10 percent of the speed of the typical US office, can run over \$5,000/mo. Slow and filtered Internet is also available through cellular subscriptions with the state provider and the Russian branch of MTS, though at speeds that leave streaming video impossible.

Turkmenistan also heavily filters Internet content and blocks numerous websites and social networks, opposition websites, general news websites in Russian about the region, and some useful tools such as Gmail. Rachel Denber, Human Rights Watch’s deputy director for Europe and Central Asia, believes that Turkmenistan “has gone to great lengths to monitor and interfere with people’s use of the Internet in order to keep down dissent,” according to EurasiaNet.org. Privacy International, a London-based organization privacy rights organization, reported that Turkmenistan has purchased advanced and sophisticated surveillance technology to monitor citizens’ communication from the British firm Gamma International. The technology, known as FinFisher can “covertly install malicious software” on computers and mobile phones by tricking users into downloading updates for popular programs, and thus circumventing encryption and providing full access to emails, social media messages, and Skype calls. Skype is widely used by Turkmen communicating with friends, relatives, and contacts abroad.

Chronicles of Turkmenistan, the exile opposition news site that provides some information from inside the country, was hacked three times in 2012. For the third attack, the hackers, widely believed to be Turkmen security services, posted pornographic pictures on the site’s homepage on December 5, 2012. The two previous attacks in 2012 occurred ahead of the presidential election in February and ahead of the Independence Day celebrations in October. *Chronicles of Turkmenistan* has been publishing news from Turkmenistan since 2005. A few days before the latest attack, the news site posted a story about two students in Ashgabat dying of exposure when they were forced to practice waiting by the side of a road waiving at the president’s motorcade for hours.

“There are no blogs, SMS alerts, feeds, etc. Not a single medium has even its own website, not to mention social media pages,” said one participant. With the exception of the Russian-language *Neutral Turkmenistan* and *Vozrozhdeniye (Revival)* magazines, all media is in Turkmen. There are no outlets in Uzbek, despite the fact that at least 15 percent of the population speaks the language natively. No regional outlets are in Russian, despite high concentrations of Russian-first speakers in some regional towns. Beginning 2012, *Neutral Turkmenistan* has published a poorly translated English version of the newspaper.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turkmenistan Objective Score: 0.31

Turkmenistan’s score for Objective 4 is up slightly from the last year’s 0.20. As all media outlets are entirely subsidized by the state through government institutions, and in the case of *Rysgal*, a semi-government institution, media firms were judged to have no sustainability in their present form. The natural gas-fueled economy could support decent advertising markets, were it allowed to function freely. Barring economic openness, the effects of increasing wealth among some citizens, and the increasing presence of foreign companies in the country offer limits the dividends to the media.

All domestic mass media are under the strict government control and financed fully by the state through subsidies. Sales are almost entirely through mandatory subscriptions by state employees. Aside from some advertising by international companies, donors, and a very few domestic services providers, mass media outlets are not involved in commercial activities. The state determines the budget for each outlet and the president appoints and dismisses editors-in-chief. These budgets are generally not known to the public. The government provides no transparency guidelines to citizens for them to determine their personnel policies.

There are no mass media firms in Turkmenistan. Outlets under ministries and agencies of the government, the participants agreed, are managed uniformly poorly. Managers are appointed by the president based on his or

MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED ENTERPRISES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets operate as efficient and self-sustaining enterprises.
- > 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.
- > Government subsidies and advertising are distributed fairly, governed by law, and neither subvert editorial independence nor distort the market.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor the product to the needs and interests of the audience.
- > Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are reliably and independently produced.

“Occasional guest speakers from Russia, and other countries invited by OSCE, UN, or GTZ cannot always speak about Western journalism, ethics and professional standards, because the conditions in Turkmenistan preclude them,” said one participant.

her loyalty. Bribes are purportedly widely used to advance to higher levels at the outlets, though the participants had no direct evidence to support these claims.

The Turkmenistan’s advertising industry appears to be developing, though no data is available, due to an increasing number of international oil and gas companies entering the market, as well as international companies in the construction industry. If a foreign organization wishes to place an advertisement, it needs government approval. In many cases, this process could take up to a month before the advertisement is approved, and requires 50% pre-payment. Domestic advertisers are few. Turkmenistan’s genuine private sector is one of the smallest, by proportion, in the world, pockmarked by small family businesses. The few large private businesses have grown with the acquiescence and participation of top officials. The government provides the majority of jobs and dominates the economy, which continues to be one of the least free in the world.

“Without state [financial] support, all media in Turkmenistan in their current form and conditions would go bankrupt,” said one participant. “Revenue from advertising makes a small up to 10% of some outlets’ budgets. TV stations and *Neutral Turkmenistan* newspaper do have advertising, the rest of newspapers and magazines do not.”

The broadcast media sector has no ratings system. Observational evidence suggest that most Turkmen prefer Russian television programming to their own, if they can access it. Market research is nonexistent in Turkmenistan.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Turkmenistan Objective Score: 0.40

Turkmenistan’s score for Objective 5 changed little from 2012. Despite a generally dismal environment for local NGOs, the participants did register an increase in the number of professional trainings in Turkmenistan for working

journalists, as well as the efforts of the OSCE, UN, and EU in developing the mass media law.

Turkmenistan has no trade associations or professional associations that could represent the interests of the media, provide member services, or work to protect journalists’ rights. The government-run Institute for Democracy and Human Rights under the President of Turkmenistan plays its ombudsman role on paper only. No report could cite the accomplishments of this institute, which is the partner for many donor-financed events. A Human Rights Resource Centre was opened in November 2012 in Mary, with financial support from the UN in Turkmenistan. The Center is intended to disseminate information on human rights, raise awareness and increase understanding of people living in Turkmenistan on their human rights.

The media sector has no need for an association of media owners because the government is the only owner. Two unions for journalists used to operate in Turkmenistan, but it is difficult to know whether they function or what specific activities they undertake these days, if any. The Union of Journalists in Turkmenistan was founded in 1992 with a charter that includes “The protection of journalists’ interests against state and public organizations, founders, and publishers of the media.” The other is the Shamshirag Association of Journalists of Turkmenistan. Whether either exist on paper makes little difference, as they would be unable to offer any real protection to journalists working inside of the country. Recent incidents, such as the arrest of freelance journalist Dovletmyrat Yazgulyev in 2011 for his independent reporting on an explosion at a munitions dump

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of media owners and managers and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists’ rights and promote quality journalism.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs exist providing substantial practical experience.
- > Short-term training and in-service training institutions and programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of media equipment, newsprint, and printing facilities are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, cable, Internet, mobile) are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Information and communication technology infrastructure sufficiently meets the needs of media and citizens.

outside Ashgabat demonstrates that these associations are either practically or legally non-existent. Yazgulyev was tried and convicted of influencing or abetting in the attempted suicide of a family member, according to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, for whom he had provided reporting.

Yazgulyev received a presidential pardon in October 2011 after the government received withering international criticism. In 2012, he Yazgulyev received the Human Rights Watch Hellman/Hammett Award for his reporting on sensitive issues in Turkmenistan. The award is given annually to writers who have been targets of political persecution or human rights abuses in their home countries.

The constitution and law provide freedom to form associations, but the government restricts this right in practice. The law requires all NGOs to register with the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Economics and Development, coordinated through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Unregistered NGO activity is punishable by fines, short-term detentions, and confiscation. The government continues to deny registration to NGOs and private organizations, using subjective criteria. In 2012, at least one NGO attempted to register and was rejected. There were reports of Turkmen security agents who harassed and detained Turkmen activists for several hours for conducting youth camps and educational seminars on grounds that they were not approved beforehand. Other barriers included government requirements that founders of associations be citizens of Turkmenistan, and that associations operating domestically have at least 500 members to be registered. Other barriers included regulations that permitted the Ministry of Justice to send representatives to association events and meetings, and requirements that associations notify the government about their planned activities.

Journalism education is in its infancy. A journalism program has been offered since 2008 at the Institute of International Relations of Turkmenistan. "Its instructors come from fields other than journalism," said one participant knowledgeable of the program. She said the department lacks modern textbooks. "Occasional guest speakers from Russia, and other countries invited by OSCE, UN, or GTZ cannot always speak about Western journalism, ethics and professional standards, because the conditions in Turkmenistan preclude them."

On September 15, 2012, Turkmenistan.ru reported the president's instruction to build a new university to prepare highly qualified specialists, including in international journalism. The president instructed that instruction be in English, and should meet the international standard of separate bachelor's and master's programs. In the meantime, Turkmenistan's government remains suspicious of foreign-educated students, and reports vary on whether

state institutions have begun accepting foreign degrees on their merits. In 2012, there are reports that some students have again been prevented from leaving the country for study, as they have been in previous years.

Short-term training opportunities exist, but are possible only with the support of international organizations such as the OSCE, UN, EU, and some foreign embassies in Turkmenistan. In 2012, the Turkmen government website reported of holding several roundtables with international experts such as BBC consultant Marek Bekerman, Moscow State University journalism lecturer Elena Sherstoboeva, and the director of the Kiev Institute for Media Law. They discussed with Turkmen colleagues the principles of media and methods of their regulation in the CIS and Europe. This was organized by the Turkmen government jointly with the BBC with the support of the European Union and the British Foreign Ministry.

In late 2010, over two million individuals were left without cell phone service—many without Internet, as MTS's GPRS service was one of the only ways to connect—due to the government's abrupt suspension of MTS's licence. Many struggled to get access to even basic cellular service, not to mention mobile Internet, through the state provider Altyn Asyr, which was left as the monopoly in the market.

Finally, the longstanding conflict between Turkmen government and Russian mobile operator MTS has apparently been resolved, as MTS returned to Turkmenistan in 2012 to provide mobile services. Since then, the president ordered improvements at the state-operated mobile provider Altyn Asyr. The Ministry of Communications has reportedly been instructed to purchase and install of latest telecommunications equipment ordered from foreign companies, including Huawei Technologies and Nokia Siemens Networks. Cell phone service and mobile Internet is improving again, though many observers suspect surveillance and control of communications is increasing alongside these improvements.

The government owns all printing production facilities, print distribution facilities, and media distribution channels. Only some small kiosks are in private hands. Some of these will distribute Russian newspapers, often well after their issue dates.

List of Panel Participants

Due to the political environment in Turkmenistan, IREX did not conduct an in-country panel discussion. This chapter was produced by using desk research, interviews, and the results of questionnaires filled out by several people familiar with the media situation in the country.