Edgar Vardanyan of the Armenian Center for National and International Studies commented on the potential for abrupt changes in media freedoms. "I would not say the probability is high, because of several factors. People's culture, mindset, behavior, and civic awareness have changed, and you can't just strike it out at once—that is very hard to do," he said.

ARMENIA

ARMENIA

Signaling a major shift underway for Armenia, President Serzh Sargsyan signed an agreement to join the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan on October 10 in Minsk, Belarus.

The EEU entered into force on January 1, 2015, but debate over the possible implications for the country's foreign policy, economics, sovereignty, and citizens have already consumed Armenians. Emotions aside, people tend to feel unsure about the union's merits, experts say. Questions swirl surrounding the compatibility of different taxation, customs, and other vital systems. However, some experts and officials portray the move as a breakthrough achievement that could guarantee Armenia's social, cultural, and political well being, as well as the safety of Armenia and the neighboring Nagorno Karabakh republic. Even EEU opponents tend to agree that the union will make Armenia safer.

The Armenia panelists said that they have not yet noticed major shifts in media freedoms after the EU-to-EEU integration shift. But they also said that the Armenian media landscape, like other sectors, will most likely gradually adopt more of an EEU approach. Edgar Vardanyan of the Armenian Center for National and International Studies commented on the potential for abrupt changes in media freedoms. "I would not say the probability is high, because of several factors. People's culture, mindset, behavior, and civic awareness have changed, and you can't just strike it out at once—that is very hard to do," he said.

The switchover from analog to terrestrial digital broadcasting, slated for July, will bring more change for the media, and more channels for residents—up from two or three to nine, and up to 18 for residents of the capital, Yerevan. Many panelists expressed pessimism about the prospects for successful implementation, despite assurances that the infrastructure will be ready. Most Armenian residents do not yet have digital television sets, so will either have to buy one—which many cannot afford—or buy a decoder, which the government claims will be affordable. How affordability will be calculated remains undetermined, but the socially and economically vulnerable will need to receive them free in order to stay connected to broadcast television.

Two amendments to media laws passed in 2014. The first lifted the ban on television advertising of strong alcoholic drinks, which can now be advertised during limited hours. The second amendment, to the law on radio and television, banned public television from broadcasting advertisements. While purportedly to use public funds more responsibly by funneling the funds into the commercial sector, stopping unfair competition with the private media, many in the media community said that the amendment just allows for shifting money to other government-friendly channels.
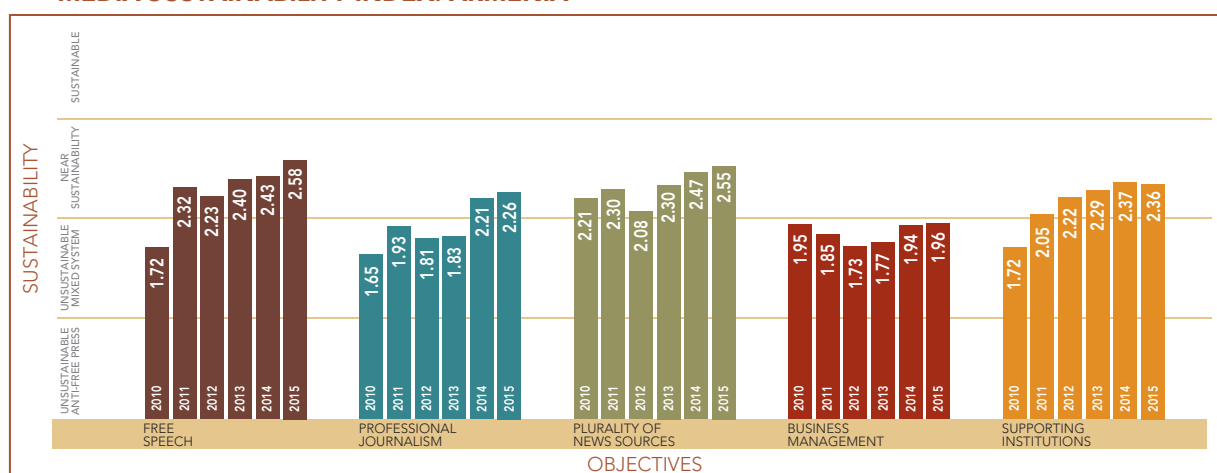
ARMENIA at a glance

GENERAL

> Population: 3,060,631 (2014 est. *CIA World Factbook*)
> Capital city: Yerevan
> Ethnic groups (% of population): Armenian 98.1%, Yezidi (Kurd) 1.1%, Russian 0.5%, other 0.3% (2011 est. *CIA World Factbook*)
> Religions (% of population): Armenian Apostolic 92.6%, Evangelical 1%, other 2.4%, none 1.1%, unspecified 2.9% (2011 est. *CIA World Factbook*)
> Languages (% of population): Armenian (official) 97.9%, Kurdish (spoken by Yezidi minority) 1%, other 1% (2011 est. *CIA World Factbook*)
> GNI (2013-Atlas): $11.32 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2014)
> GNI per capita (2013-PPP): $8,180 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2014)
> Literacy rate: 99.6%; Male 99.7%, Female 99.5% (2011 est. *CIA World Factbook*)
> President or top authority: President Serzh Sargsyan (since April 9, 2008)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

> Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations, Internet news portals: Print: over 36; Radio stations: 21; Television Stations: 13 stations in Yerevan, 3 Russian relay channels; 26 television stations in regions; Internet news portals: over 200
> Newspaper circulation statistics: Average reported circulation is between 1,000–3,000
> Broadcast ratings: Top three most popular television stations are H1 (public), Shant TV (private), Armenia TV (private) (AGB Nielsen)
> News agencies: ARKA, Armenpress, Arminfo, MediaMax, Photolur
> Annual advertising revenue in media sector: $70–$80 million, estimated by panelists
> Internet Users: 208,200 users (2009 est. *CIA World Factbook*), over 700,000 Facebook users (Facebook, Nov. 2014)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: ARMENIA

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2015: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES

0–0.50	0.51–1.00	1.01–1.50	1.51–2.00	2.01–2.50	2.51–3.00	3.01–3.50	3.51–4.00
⧠ Turkmenistan 0.24	⧠ Uzbekistan 0.79	▲ Azerbaijan 1.32 ⧠ Russia 1.46 ▲ Belarus 1.22	⧠ Bulgaria 1.85 ▲ Kazakhstan 1.93 ▲ Macedonia 1.72 ⧠ Serbia 1.80 ▼ Tajikistan 1.56 ▲ Ukraine 1.93	⧠ Armenia 2.34 ⧠ Bosnia & Herzegovina 2.03 ⧠ Croatia 2.40 ▼ Kosovo 2.27 ⧠ Kyrgyzstan 2.03 ⧠ Moldova 2.38 ⧠ Montenegro 2.15 ▲ Romania 2.33	▲ Albania 2.52 ▼ Georgia 2.51		
UNSUSTAINABLE ANTI-FREE PRESS		**UNSUSTAINABLE MIXED SYSTEM**		**NEAR SUSTAINABILITY**		**SUSTAINABLE**	

CHANGE SINCE 2014
▲ (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_msiscores.xls

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Armenia Objective Score: 2.58

Not much has changed over the years with respect to enforcement of Armenia's constitutional provisions that guarantee free speech. They are largely harmonized with international human rights and freedom of expression standards. Independent courts and the executive branch, however, fail to genuinely protect the freedom of speech. Society increasingly places a high value on freedom of speech and media freedom, but that has led to little change.

The law respects the confidentiality of sources, albeit with some limitations, and generally people are not imprisoned for safeguarding their sources. Armenia's Law on the Dissemination of Mass Information stipulates that journalists and media outlets should not be obliged to disclose their sources. The exception is in the case of court decisions, if the crime in question is of a serious enough nature, if the public interest of law enforcement outweighs the public interest of protecting the sources of information, and if all other means to protect the public interest are exhausted. In such cases, the journalist can demand that the court hearings not be made public.

However, the Special Investigations Service (SIS) pressed two outlets, *Hraparak* daily newspaper and ilur.am, to reveal their source for a story on an Olympic wrestler assaulted

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.

> "Obstruction of journalistic duties is more widespread and frequent than violent crimes against media professionals; however, it never occurs to the authorities that obstruction is not normal, either," Martirosyan said.

by a police official in Gyumri, Armenia's second largest city. The outlets refused. SIS then filed a claim with the first instance court, which ruled in favor of the claimant. An appeals court later upheld the ruling. The two outlets then applied to the cassation court to try to overrule the previous court rulings; at the time the MSI was prepared, they were awaiting the decision.

Staff members at *Hraparak* and ilur.am said that they did not believe that the crime was serious enough to warrant the disclosure of sources; therefore, it was at the court's sole discretion to determine the gravity of the crime. "In a way, this was unprecedented, because even if before there had been attempts to urge outlets to reveal their sources, these claims had not been taken to court," said Gayane Saribekyan, a reporter for *Hraparak*. The panelists could not recall a case of a reporter being imprisoned for concealing a source.

Samvel Martirosyan, a blogger, mentioned the lack Internet regulation as another indirect restriction of freedom of expression. He described the case of Delfi AS v. Estonia, regarding the news portal's liability for third-party comments made on its website, as setting a negative precedent in this sphere. Estonian courts found Delfi AS guilty of failing to prevent insulting comments from appearing on its website, and the European Court of Human Rights later ruled in favor of the Estonian government as well.

Although no licensing competitions were held this reporting year, the panelists characterized the licensing body, the National Commission on Television and Radio (NCTR), as highly political. "I believe that the licensing is vastly dependent on the will of political authorities and is not objective—and it is no accident that the Internet and broadcast sectors are completely different," Vardanyan said. The Internet, he added, features a "diversity of opinions, differing political views, debates, and coverage of critical issues," while quite the opposite is true for broadcast media. Some panelists argued that today viewers can see some television content from political parties aside from the ruling party. Examples include Kentron television, which is perceived as a Prosperous Armenia Party (PAP) channel; and Yerkir Media, which is perceived as an Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) channel.

Market entry and structure for media are fairly comparable to other industries. Print media continue to enjoy a slight tax break, being exempt from value-added tax for distribution.

Crimes against media professionals occur, but offenses surrounding the obstruction of journalists' work (during rallies, demonstrations, etc.) are more common than the brutal attacks of earlier times, when journalists sometimes suffered beatings in dark alleys. "Obstruction of journalistic duties is more widespread and frequent than violent crimes against media professionals; however, it never occurs to the authorities that obstruction is not normal, either," Martirosyan said. Although journalists file complaints whenever crimes are publicized, usually courts close cases for a lack of substantive evidence, and the crimes go unpunished.

The panelists described one assault on a journalist that occurred in September 2014. The head of the National Assembly security service hit Marine Khachatryan, a journalist from A1+, on her arm, forcing her to drop the tablet she was using to record members of an art group protesting in front of the National Assembly. The head of the security service justified his actions by saying that Khachatryan failed to identify herself upfront as a journalist. Although the police can be harsh during rallies, panelists noted that four to six years ago, even filing a complaint was not possible—and the crimes were much fiercer.

Panelists said that public support for the media is not based on the type of outlet (e.g. viewing bloggers less seriously than newspaper reporters). It is based on the perception of whether the journalists are balanced and professional or provocative like activists. The panelists acknowledged that some journalists are behaving more like protestors, thus provoking the police.

Gayane Mkrtchyan, a reporter at armenianow.com and iwpr. net, said that during a demonstration against the rise in electricity rates, law enforcement officers went overboard and behaved harshly toward reporters. But in line with comments from other panelists, Martirosyan said, "The police also complain that this is often due to the fact that they cannot tell media professionals and protestors apart." Photolur photo news agency owner Melik Baghdasaryan said that in most circumstances, "if you wear a [media] badge, police treat you differently, but the law doesn't function during the demonstrations." Sometimes, the journalists and protesters know laws much better than [low-ranking] police officers, he added.

Steadily over the years, panelists have asserted that the state/public media are in no way independent from those in authority, despite the legal protections on paper for their editorial independence. "It is becoming more apolitical by drifting away from covering political issues, which creates the illusion of truly public, apolitical media, but in reality, it just avoids the political field," Vardanyan said.

To illustrate, Anna Satyan, the deputy editor-in-chief of *Novoye Vremya*, a Russian-language newspaper, said that when an important political event is underway, public television news might broadcast a charity banquet of Armenian diaspora in Los Angeles as the prime news piece, relegating the important political event to a tiny coverage slot close to the end of the newscast. Such examples show that the public media is far from independent of government influence, according to Satyan.

However, Armenia has no media laws that explicitly favor state/public media over private media.

Libel in Armenia is a civil law issue. Today it is more often used to threaten an outlet to publish a disclaimer or apology before the case would appear in court. For example, *Aravot* published a story about a nightclub in one of Yerevan's underground passages. The article implied that the nightclub is, in essence, a strip club, and the adjoining bar a "motel" frequented by prostitutes, to the annoyance of the residents. The club owners sued the newspaper for libel and demanded a total of AMD 3 million (roughly $6,400)—AMD 1 million from the journalist and AMD 2 million from the newspaper. The first hearing was on December 5, and the court ruled that the burden of proof should lie on the plaintiff.

However, Martirosyan noted that even if the claims are preposterous sometimes, the court so far has not ruled in favor of these large amounts. If it is proven in court that a story is true, journalists or media typically incur no further fines (e.g., for inflicting damage to someone's reputation). Satyan also mentioned that even the threat of such litigation can be costly. One case against her paper *Novoye Vremya* was withdrawn, but the company still suffered by having to pay legal fees. The panelists noted one upside to the law: journalists have become more responsible about what and how they write.

Access to public information varies by government sector. "Public information, although accessible in general, in particular cases may be quite difficult to obtain, due to technical and subjective factors," said Vardanyan. According to Nelli Babayan, a reporter at Aravot, some sectors make it either impossible or extremely difficult to obtain information, while others are more transparent—such as the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Healthcare, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Welfare, and the police. Less open are City Hall, the Ministry of Transport and Communications, and the State Revenue Committee. "I think in some sectors, it is prohibitive and unnecessary to send the formal written inquiry forms for trivial questions and explanations," Satyan said. "There should be someone

available to answer your questions right away, in case it is an urgent issue."

The panelists all agreed that personal ties with the information provider often prove paramount, despite the law. Satyan also noticed that the rank of the media professional often makes quite a difference as well, with reporters having less ease than editors, deputy editors, or famous journalists. Arevhat Amiryan, editor of *Vorotan* in Sisian, described her experience of having to sue a kindergarten that had failed to release requested information. She won the case. When testifying, the kindergarten director said that he just did not know the procedures, but Amiryan maintained that it was because he was told specifically by the municipal officials not to give her any information.

As described in previous MSI studies, the law does not restrict media outlets or citizens from accessing or using local and international news and news sources. Individual media outlets sometimes prescribe ethical codes for fair use that protect intellectual property but allow for discussion of others' works or reports. This practice takes the place of having consistent, defined standards to which all Armenian outlets adhere universally. More often than not, intellectual rights are still ignored or deemed unimportant.

Last year's MSI underscored the amendment to the law of copyright and adjacent rights as a step forward, but noted that it remained to be seen whether original content would replace the copied content. The improvement is happening, albeit slowly and inconsistently. This year's panelists complained that plagiarism has not been fully or largely weeded out by the law, and said that they hope to see improvements to the law.

Entry into the journalism profession is free; there are no restrictions and any interested person can become a journalist.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Armenia Objective Score: 2.26

Many reporters have started verifying and fact-checking the information they present, with some motivated after facing libel suits.

"Now it is not respectable to just write 'according to our sources,'" Saribekyan said. "You have to mention other sources, too, to appear professional—which was not the case even a year ago." Babyan agreed that when journalists write "according to our sources," now they also attempt to track down other sources. The panelists also noted that the new standards have diluted some outlets' "yellow" tone,

displayed by a focus on intrigues, rumors, and name-calling. The more professional editors now require fact checking and strive to come up with credible and trustworthy sources. The majority of the panelists also agreed that the changes have not led to self-censorship, but rather to a higher degree of responsibility, ethical standards, and professionalism.

Martirosyan summarized that poor quality journalism remains a major issue despite more professional journalists working to shape a community that strives to uphold high standards. The field is still rife with those who do not verify, fact check, or consult a wide variety of relevant sources, rarely obtaining all sides to a story. Some present the different articles featuring the opposing sides, but very seldom are both sides presented in the same article. Such reporters seldom conduct the necessary background research and interviews for a story. Vardanyan said, "The questions [of the interviewers] most often do not derive from the previous answers, or past answers [from previous years]. They lack any analytical component, [and] are rather 'template' questions that the interviewer need not ask in person, [and] could just as well print out on a sheet of paper and hand it to the interviewee and just let him go over the list and write the answers back."

A number of professional journalists do consult technical experts. However, sometimes that proves costly, because the experts are not willing to just give short answers, preferring instead to write analytical stories for a certain fee, which can be quite prohibitive for some outlets.

The panelists also complained about the quality of journalists attending press conferences. "The editors just

As for receiving money for a certain type of coverage, one of the panelists, wishing to remain anonymous, said, "I was offered a certain amount of money for a series to cover as if upon my own initiative, so that the editor did not suspect anything—but of course I refused."

send the newly graduated reporters to the press conferences just to type in the text," Gevrogyan said.

As stated over the years by different panelists, the ethical standards and codes are usually the domain of individual outlets. Some outlets have these standards in written form, others uphold unwritten standards, and the rest do not bother. Panelists from *Novoye Vremya* and *Hraparak* mentioned that they have unwritten ethics codes, while armenianow.com and *Aravot* panelists said that they have developed more formal, written codes. Satyan added, "The ethical standards also come from editors. If they are decent, educated people, their qualities also spread to their journalists."

The journalistic associations in Armenia have developed ethical standards that overall differ little from international norms, but the panelists said that outlets do not adhere to them widely or effectively. "To me, these 'universal' codes of ethics do not make sense [in Armenia], because I do not see any effect or attempt at enforcement after an outlet violates any of the points of the code," Satyan said. "Therefore, what is the sense of having this [general] code?"

The panelists also raised the question of whether it is ethical to use nicknames of public figures. Mkrtchyan asserted that her outlet's editor does not let its journalists use nicknames, while Vardanyan argued that it is at the discretion of the outlet—but the journalist should word it properly and ethically.

Few media outlets make clear distinctions between news reporting and "advertorial" placements, and only sophisticated readers realize this. As for receiving money for a certain type of coverage, one of the panelists, wishing to remain anonymous, said, "I was offered a certain amount of money for a series to cover as if upon my own initiative, so that the editor did not suspect anything—but of course I refused." A different panelist, Satyan, recalled a case in which one of her outlet's trusted journalists was sneaking in a series of stories that favored a certain person, but

he was busted finally on the third attempt. The panelists mentioned the counter-models, too—the unethical journalists that write or publish critical stories about a certain official, businessperson, or public figure and later blackmail the person for compensation in exchange for not publishing the article.

Journalists and editors do practice self-censorship. However, the degree and the nature depend vastly on the specific outlet type (broadcast, online, etc.) and any perceived, real, or disguised political or business affiliation. "Sometimes you can concentrate even on one single word … whether it is going to bounce back at you or not [as backlash]," Gevorgyan confirmed. Babayan also explained that "when journalists see that a certain type of content is repeatedly edited out of their articles, they understand that in the future, similar content will not make its way through, either—and they start to self-censor just to save time and nerves."

As for photography, Baghdasaryan said, "We are free to shoot everything. It is already up to the editor of the outlet whether and how [and] with what type of caption to use our photographs. We have an internal policy for the photographers: 'Don't come and tell what you saw—you show me.'"

The panelists agreed that journalists cover all major events and issues in Armenia. Each media outlet reports on events differently and often will be selective, but citizens can get the whole picture by accessing news from other outlets. Online media usually cover all types of events, and now broadcast outlets might also cover previously taboo events (opposition rallies, meetings, demonstrations, coverage of opposition political/public figures, content critical of government bodies, ruling party figures, etc.). But for all media, the angles, duration, content, and importance given to the event can differ dramatically, depending on political affiliation.

Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are not sufficiently high to retain qualified personnel. Most journalists must combine working at two or sometimes more outlets, or even unrelated jobs. However, this also applies to the other employment sectors—education, for example, is one sector that pays even less than the media. The disparity in the salary levels has more to do with specific outlets than with the different media sectors. Entry-level salaries are much lower than those of higher-ranked or more experienced journalists and editors.

Previously, entry-level journalists would even work for free, but that is no longer true. As Babayan explained, "No matter how low the pay level is, a decent journalist will never accept money for corrupt coverage, because he/

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she is struggling for justice…and besides, the money will be offered to the editors or chiefs, not the journalists." Saribekyan agreed, saying, "Low salary doesn't justify corruption, it's a matter of morality."

People can get information when they need it, especially with so many online outlets. However, in broadcast media, entertainment does eclipse news and information programming because it sells better. The panelists agreed that the inclusion of more news-related programs would certainly push audiences to switch to other formats.

The panelists agreed that the facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient enough not to affect the quality of journalism in Armenia. Broadcast digitalization, on the other hand, is a challenge that still needs to be faced in the coming year.

Niche reporting and programming exist in Armenia. Some journalists and outlets specialize in investigative reporting, but due to its costly nature, they are very few. Few outlets can afford, time-wise or money-wise, to dedicate the same journalist to investigating a story for days, weeks, or even months. "People are more interested in sensational, low-quality stories, and the substantial investigations are in low demand," Vardanyan said.

Healthcare programs can be found on television, while ecology, economics, business, and political analysis are more likely to be found in print or online newspapers than on television. However, because of the lack of personnel, few if any journalists specialize in only one area. Analytical stories on sports are also a rarity, because of the lack of journalists with expertise in that field.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Armenia Objective Score: 2.55

The Armenian market has a plurality of public and private news sources, offering multiple viewpoints. But whether they provide citizens with reliable, objective news is questionable. There are more than enough news sources so that people can check one against another, and some media outlets strive to remain balanced and unbiased and offer multiple points of view in their editorial policies. But most outlets are singular in their point of view because political or business affiliations. Less sophisticated readers/viewers might find it hard to understand events objectively, because the views presented are mostly meant to serve the interests of either side and not to present information neutrally. "Objective information is very hard to get, since the viewpoints [presented by different outlets] are not based

on substantive facts, arguments, and analysis. There are no criteria to judge, and readers start to get disappointed and feel that everything is a lie," Vardanyan said.

Although a myriad of online outlets vanished after the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2012-2013, others have emerged in their stead, and the overall quantity of media outlets remains almost the same. "Many have come to understand the importance of owning a media outlet, and if five or six years ago we dealt with only government and oppositional media, now every fourth *chinovnik* (minor official) owns a media outlet," Martirosyan summarized.

In Babayan's view, no media company is able to report freely. "I don't believe there is any single outlet in Armenia that can criticize the whole spectrum of events or people. There are always events, people, parties, etc. that outlets feel they have to stay neutral/positive/silent about," Babayan said.

Gevorgyan gave examples of the bias in television reporting. "During a Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe session, I was watching coverage from various television channels. Armenia TV aired only the Republican Party representatives' speeches, while Kentron TV aired only the PAP and ANC [Armenian National Congress] representatives. Thus, if you watch only Armenia TV, you have the impression that PAP and ANC members did not have time on the floor, and if you watch Kentron, you have the impression that the Republicans had no floor time."

Overall, viewers can find coverage of the various political viewpoints from different multiple outlets. Blogs in their

> ### 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.

> "Objective information is very hard to get, since the viewpoints [presented by different outlets] are not based on substantive facts, arguments, and analysis. There are no criteria to judge, and readers start to get disappointed and feel that everything is a lie," Vardanyan said.

classical form are very rare in Armenia today, overshadowed by microblogs on Facebook (clearly the most popular) and Twitter (not yet very significant in Armenia). According to Martirosyan's estimate, more than 1,000 active users contribute through Facebook. Many people, especially in the older generation, still perceive television to be the only respected, legitimate source of information. "They quote television personalities, but the Internet is not yet deemed that reputable," Vardanyan said. However, Martirosyan noted that for certain types of content, such as live coverage from rallies and demonstrations, the online media garner more than 10,000 simultaneous viewers, whereas previously they might have pulled 2,000 to 3,000.

Vardanyan said that in the past, the government-controlled broadcast media brainwashed people, and opposition media dominated the Internet; now, the government also is trying to influence the minds of a younger generation through an abundant Internet presence. It is mostly that generation that relies heavily on social media channels (primarily Facebook) for news. Twitter is underused in Armenia, while most traffic to YouTube is generated from Facebook. "There is also so much garbage out there, aimed just to garner likes or views, drowning out some events," Satyan complained. "The situation has gotten worse with the ever-growing number of online and social media."

The law does not restrict citizen access to domestic or international media. Some panelists contended that buying newspapers regularly might be difficult financially, but others said that these newspapers are also available online. The Internet is becoming more accessible and affordable, though not necessarily more dependable. Regional panelists said that the Internet is becoming more accessible in cities other than Yerevan, but the rural areas still must use highly unreliable wireless solutions. Other types of media available to rural audiences include local television and radio channels (in larger towns like Gyumri, Vanadzor, Sevan, and Hrazdan), and satellite broadcasts. For some smaller or more distant towns and villages, satellite service is the only option aside from perhaps public television.

Several panelists complained about the work of the print media distribution agency, Press Stand, but others said that the problems could be attributed to poor management rather than deliberate hindrance. Overall, the panelists concluded that there are no direct or significant restrictions to domestic or international media. However, the digital switchover, slated for completion by July, might pose challenges in the area of distribution, too.

Foreign media are accessible freely through the Internet, but language barriers still preclude a majority of citizens from being interested in foreign media. However, some foreign outlets (e.g. Deutsche Welle, BBC, Reuters) are also available in Russian, but interest tends to be low because they seldom cover local issues—and most people still turn to local media for international issues, too. People in large cities have greater access to television channels than people in villages and smaller towns. For those who can afford them, satellite dishes are still rural residents' sole reliable tool for diverse programming.

Over the years, the panelists have always enjoyed reading the title of the MSI's third indicator: "State or public media reflect the views of the political spectrum, are non-partisan, and serve the public interest." The reason is that for Armenians, it sounds more like sarcasm. Although the public media has undergone some tweaks to make it look more neutral and non-partisan, all of the panelists agreed that it still remains highly dependent on the government or ruling party instead of following a public-service model.

However, progress has been recorded. Previously, in the extremely polarized climate, viewers never saw oppositional figures or events on public television (or any other outlet)—or if they appeared, it was for the sole purpose of being ridiculed. Today, even public television features opposition news, although diluted and blurred among other non-important events. Public television's *Parliament Time* program also gives oppositional figures some airtime—sometimes directly, sometimes in the context of parliamentarian session coverage featuring opposition speeches. Also new this year, public television has started a series of educational and cultural programming, which is quite rare in private media.

Several agencies for gathering and distributing news still operate in Armenia. They include ArmInfo, ArmenPress, MediaMax, Photolur, and ARKA. These agencies mainly survive through selling exclusive content, financial/business analytical pieces, etc. Outlets also buy unique video footage from international agencies. However, panelists this year reaffirmed that the lines are blurred between online outlet content and classical news agencies. While agencies used to sell news content to media outlets, today that content

is available to anyone online. Martirosyan commented, "Photos still sell, as they are unique, but it is very difficult to sell information about a fact, because it is freely available somewhere else."

Private media produce their own news and informational programming. Most media, especially broadcast outlets and television in particular, produce their own news programs. Among private outlets, and between public and private outlets, news programming varies in overall professional quality, but the content differs little. Conversely, online media content does differ from that of state media. This difference perhaps allows for wider viewpoints, but is sometimes lacking quality and professionalism.

Regional outlets produce their own content and news programming, since that is their strong exclusive point that sets them apart from national/capital outlets. Only a few outlets can afford to produce international news, however, and dispatch reporters on stories that involve Armenia almost exclusively. Only a few television outlets post reporters abroad—typically one in Russia and one in the United States.

Transparency of media ownership in Armenia remains controversial, with many rumors but few facts. Ownership tends to be relatively obscure, and even when the owner information is public knowledge, the outlet's financing is less clear. Consumers have often surmised ownership based on content, but this is no longer a reliable indicator. Many outlets now have transcended this primitive stage and are engaged in pseudo-oppositional content production, and sometimes criticize even the perceived owners and stakeholders. As an example, Vardanyan said, "The only thing that I can affirm is that [the online outlet] 1in.am strongly criticizes the PAP, but who it is financed [or] owned by, I cannot say."

In terms of minority coverage, public radio airs programs in 14 minority languages, including Russian, Kurdish, Georgian, Assyrian, Ukrainian, and Greek. Armenian media also publish Russian, Kurdish, and Ukrainian newspapers. The media also widely covered the massacres of Yezidis in Syria. Society tends to resist the inclusion of issues concerning non-traditional religion or sexual orientation, and that has changed little since the last reporting year.

Citizens are able to find news and information about their hometowns, other regions of the country, and national and international issues and developments. Yet the local newspapers and television stations seldom venture beyond local news to cover capital or federal news. The national outlets generally stick to national and international news. They rarely present regional news, with the exception of loud, resonant cases of crimes of public figures, corruption,

etc. However, news from the regions has become more vibrant compared with previous years, when mainstream media offered little to no news from areas outside of the capital. Competition has also boosted the flow of information from the regions. "If you write only about the capital, your readers are less read than if you also include information from the *marzes* [regional administrative units]," Martirosyan said.

Armenian citizens seldom turn to international sources for international news, mostly because of the language barrier. A majority of citizens do not know other languages (except, perhaps, Russian) well enough to utilize foreign-language media. The more sophisticated readers turn to foreign media mostly through Facebook or Twitter subscriptions, to compare with local coverage of international news.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Armenia Objective Score: 1.96

Little has changed since last year's MSI in terms of media outlets' self-sustainability. They rarely operate as for-profit businesses, but rather depend on their (mostly politically-affiliated) benefactors or owners for financial support. They seldom prepare and follow business plans that could help them secure financing or guide decisions on expenditures and personnel.

Accounting and finance practices need to be kept in line with local tax legislation to avoid problems with tax authorities, fines, penalties, etc., so usually media companies hire trained accountants. Accountants are sometimes

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.

contractors, not necessarily full-time, in-house employees; and if the outlet is very small, sometimes the editor or owner handles all accounting tasks. Larger outlets might also employ legal experts, human resources staff, and marketing professionals. Normally, television outlets employ advertising agents to bring in advertising.

Very few outlets receive the revenue from multiple sources that would prevent one client or source from exerting undue influence over editorial policy. Some outlets seek to diversify funding purely from the perspective of financial health: if an outlet depends on a sole source and that funding dries up, the outlet might be forced to close. Public media have guaranteed sources of revenue from the state budget, but this does not ensure independence from political interference.

Media advertising is both market-driven and politically influenced. However, the new amendment to the Law on Radio and Television is designed to eliminate advertising from public television so as to not impede the development of the commercial media sector.

But large advertising clients still indirectly influence editorial policies, management, and content of media outlets, which actively avoid offending advertisers with negative or critical coverage. One of the panelists confessed that when she has complaints about a telecommunications provider, she hesitates to write about it, knowing that the company is a big advertiser with her outlet. There is also the phenomenon of officials and politicians owning businesses and at the same time acting as advertisers, thus indirectly influencing the outlets' coverage of their owners.

Many companies buy media ads. Banks, telecommunications providers, insurance companies, and automobile dealerships have long been the country's biggest advertisers. Another player has returned to television advertising, after the June 2014 amendment to the Law on Advertising that allows ads for strong alcoholic drinks (more than 20 percent alcohol) to air any time from 10:31 p.m. to 5:59 a.m. Television ads

for strong alcoholic drinks had been banned in a 2002 amendment to the law.

Aside from commercial advertising, regional print and broadcast media run classified ads, holiday greetings, and congratulatory messages to help foot their bills. Generally, advertising agencies work only with broadcast outlets and large newspapers and online media. Their contracting with regional outlets is minimal to nonexistent. Most advertisers ignore local media, opting instead to buy advertising in media with nationwide coverage.

The panelists also voiced their concern over the Media International Service sales house, which has claimed that it will be the exclusive seller to four television channels: Armenia TV, ArmNews, A TV, and Shant TV. The PanArmenian Media Group owns the first three channels and some other media outlets, including two radio stations, a magazine, an entertainment weekly, and an ad agency. The panelists said that they see these two media houses as monopolization of the advertising market, since large advertisers will be funneled to those outlets, leaving others with just medium-to-small, casual advertisers. On the other hand, panelists noted, some media companies have very aggressive advertising agents that can bring in considerable amounts to their respective outlets.

Media managers, mostly broadcast managers, feel pressed to use more and more ads, as they are the only substantial source of revenue for broadcast stations. However, the media managers have been prompted by advertisers to place short—but more expensive—commercials that do not get lost in the myriad of other commercials.

Another factor that might affect advertising effectiveness is that the two triple-play cable providers have technical functions that enable viewers to skip past the commercial breaks. "Whoever has this service is saved; I personally just fast-forward all the commercials," Satyan said. According to panelists' estimates, around 50,000 households view television through these IP television cable providers, and these viewers are usually the ones with strong purchasing power. The more sophisticated advertisers have realized this and buy sponsorship spots within the program, or they place the ad in unexpected spots within the program.

With the recent amendment to the Law on Television and Radio, public television is banned from airing advertising. The exception is social advertising or commercial advertising in educational, cultural, scientific, and sports programming, with the number of sponsors to not exceed one per program.

Regional independent newspapers, as well as minority-language newspapers, receive subsidies from the

government, but these amounts are slight and offer very little potential to either subvert editorial independence or distort the market. For the past several years, the editors of *Sevan, Vorotan,* and *Tufashkharhi Arorya* in Artik have received AMD 500,000 ($1,200) per annum.

Media companies seldom use market research for the purpose of tailoring products to the needs and interest of audiences, enhancing advertising revenues, or as part of strategic business planning. Professional, third-party research is hard to find in Armenia, and is rare for media companies to order. Most outlets use call-in shows, post-program feedback through calls, and Facebook comments as handy and affordable options. "Professional research is quite expensive and few can afford it," confirmed Vahe Sargsyan, a moderator at Lratvakan Radio and a freelance journalist.

Babayan described how Aravot collects information informally: "We create a picture of our audiences through observing the popularity of content with certain demographic groups, through feedback under online versions of our articles, and we may adjust the content respectively to better suit the audiences." Satyan said that *Novoye Vremya* also listens to consumer feedback. "Our audience is very compact, and they keep writing and calling us to share their impressions/opinions about this or that article. On our newspaper's twentieth anniversary, we visited one of our long-term loyal readers—an elderly woman who had preserved all of our issues [for] many years." Satyan mentioned that *Novoye Vremya* has younger readers, people ages 30-35, but she lamented that its readership does not go any younger, because the paper is in Russian, which is not spoken widely by the younger generation.

Two ratings companies, AGB Nielsen Media Research and Telemediacontrol (working under the license of GFK), produce regular ratings. They rate only capital-based television outlets, and data are not freely available; television outlets must purchase them. Moreover, advertising agencies that do not have a working agreement with the TAM (Television Audience Measurement) company are not able to access the ratings of those television outlets. IP television (triple-play providers) also are left out of measurements at the moment, although, according to panelist estimates, they constitute around 50,000 potential viewers with mid- to upper-range purchasing power. The panelists said that these ratings are accepted with skepticism.

Armenia has no companies that produce, track, or assess newspaper circulation figures/statistics. The average cited circulation is 2,000 to 3,000 for daily newspapers.

As for tracking online visits, Google Analytics is now used, with the closing of circle.am (the local Armenian tracking company). Armenia has no other widely accepted service. Martirosyan questioned the value of the tracking information: "Even if circle.am had not shut down, numbers alone do not tell us anything. We see 100,000 visits, but who are these people? Maybe only 13 to 15 minors that visited the site thousands of times because a Kardashian photo appeared there."

With regard to television ratings, those who buy, sell, and utilize the data understand the basic analytics terminology. Online media managers might be able to differentiate unique visits and hosts, as opposed to total hits/views, but more sophisticated analytical data (traffic source, time spent, and bounce rates) are not yet well understood or utilized.

Armenia Objective Score: 2.36

Armenia has no trade associations to represent the interests of media owners and managers or provide member services. However, several professional associations strive to assist journalists as much as possible, and work to promote journalism to the public in a positive way. The list is essentially the same as in previous years: the Gyumri-based Asparez Journalists' Club, the Yerevan Press Club, the Association of Investigative Journalists, and the Vanadzor press clubs. The panelists said that they view these groups as independent from the government, as

> **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.

> Saribekyan said that her student experience was as such. "I studied journalism for four years at university, and all those four years were not interesting to me. After graduating [and starting to practice journalism] it got very interesting for me."

they support themselves almost solely through grants from international donors, embassies, etc. (as opposed to dues or memberships). Over the years, the government has not imposed legal restrictions to prevent these associations from registering or functioning.

Asparez Journalists' Club is currently working with Open Society Foundations (OSF) to implement the joint project "Media Hub for Civic Activism," aimed at building citizen participation in youth centers and civic activities. The major initiatives include expanding the distribution of *Asparez*; involving reporters from other *marzes*; publishing supplemental inserts that cover social issues such as human rights, ecology, domestic violence, and corruption; and starting up an online radio station that would ultimately reach 24-hour broadcasting and air news, analytics, and other content of public interest.

NGOs in Armenia strive to support free speech and independent media. They include Media Initiatives Center (MIC), Eurasia Partnership Foundation Armenia (EPFA), and OSF. The Alternative Resources in Media project, funded by USAID and jointly implemented by MIC and EPFA, closed in March 2014. These organizations are funded predominantly by international donors. They work in cooperation with the media sector to support freedom of speech and media independence, and respond to media freedom violations. The government does not impose legal restrictions on the registration or functioning of these organizations.

Panelists asserted that Armenia has seen little if any change in journalism degree programs. Quality programs are very rare. Many private and state institutions do have programs, but the quality does not differ much, and most do not provide substantial practical experience or training to prepare aspiring journalists to enter the profession as skilled specialists. Few schools teach modern techniques, such as the use of multimedia. And with so many degrees offered throughout the country, the field is flooded with students and graduates.

Panelists said that media professionals are extremely unhappy with the quality of graduates. Media outlets

mainly regard new graduates as assistants to fill in text during press conferences and perform other "dirty" jobs and assignments. Gevorgyan said that she is dissatisfied with the attitudes of newly hired employees. "They come and think that they should have a standard working day of an office clerk, and count the minutes before it turns 6:00 p.m. so that they can flee." Babayan agreed, saying, "These 'kids' perceive journalism as just doing stand-ups with the microphone in their hands. They don't understand that a journalist is a fighter, a warrior."

The majority of panelists remembered having worked for free, or just for a transportation allowance, when they entered the profession. "One of my students said once, 'I will never write stories for AMD 3,000 ($7.22),' but I try to explain them that they have to love their profession—it should be their calling. Otherwise, it is not going to bring them a lot of money, unless they are corrupt through and through," said Satyan, who is a journalism lecturer at Slavonic University as well as a newspaper editor.

All the panelists lamented that the previous enthusiasm of graduates has vanished. Satyan gave details of her experience as a professor. "When I started teaching at the university, I hoped I would be able to find promising journalists to hire. But having studied for four years, they get turned off—they just lose interest after so many years [of academics]. The first-year students are just great. I give them assignments, they carry them out with interest, and their inner 'engine' is working vibrantly. But over the course of four years of theoretical and often unrelated disciplines, they just get discouraged, disappointed, and tired. And I think this problem is true for all the other institutes as well." she said. Saribekyan said that her student experience was as such. "I studied journalism for four years at university, and all those four years were not interesting to me. After graduating [and starting to practice journalism] it got very interesting for me."

Short-term training seminars and programs exist and are accessible to practicing media professionals. Some editors encourage participation in training programs; others prefer to keep their working journalists on the job, producing more articles and stories under the conditions of severe competition by volume and speed. Training programs are mainly organized by international NGOs or local NGOs (such as the Yerevan Press Club or Asparez Journalists' Club) with international donor funding, making them free for participants. The most popular and necessary offerings are training programs on new using media tools and social networks and developing multi-media skills. Other types of programs that address the professional needs of the other departments—advertising, marketing, management, etc.—

are rare today. "For me, these seminars are of little use if they do not have a practical component," Satyan said.

International media offer short-term training opportunities abroad, which journalists search and apply for independently.

At the moment, the government places no undue restrictions on importing or purchasing the materials that media or journalists need to produce their work. Armenia has enough commercial, private printing houses to turn to if any one decides to discontinue cooperating, but the panelists said that such a change would not be based on political interests.

This year as well, the panelists recorded no major impediments regarding media distribution channels. Some panelists complained about Press Stand, stating that, for unknown reasons, their newspapers sometimes fail to reach readers in distant villages or other small towns. Other panelists ascribed this to poor management rather than malice.

The switchover from analog to digital should take place in July, and the infrastructure should also be ready by that time. How digitalization is going to affect television distribution has yet to be observed. It is envisioned that after rollout, regional residents will be able to watch up to nine free channels instead of the previous two or three, and residents of the capital are going to be able to watch up to 18 free channels. However, many panelists were pessimistic about a successful launch and further implementation. Most Armenian residents do not yet possess digital television sets and will either have to buy one (which many cannot afford) or buy a decoder. Decoders will be available at an affordable cost (although it is unknown how affordability will be achieved) for the general population, and free of charge for the socially vulnerable.

Television stations have access to cable networks, U!Com and Rostelecom, which include all the 13 capital-based channels in their basic packages. Rostelecom is also available in Gyumri, the second largest city, and offers two additional local channels: Tsayg TV and Shant TV.

Overall, ICT capacity satisfies the existing needs of media outlets and consumers. Internet accessibility and affordability is improving every year, with Internet of reasonable quality penetrating the regions little by little. However, Rostelecom has not yet saturated Gyumri or other smaller towns, and U!Com has not yet reached Gyumri. Neither provider can give specifics on approximately when that will happen. Rural area residents mostly depend on a wireless USB card Internet provided by all three telecommunications providers, but they come with traffic limitations and are mostly unreliable.

List of Panel Participants

Gayane Saribekyan, reporter, hraparak.am and *Hraparak*, Yerevan

Nelli Babayan, reporter, *Aravot*, Yerevan

Armine Gevorgyan, journalist, haynews.am and Armenian Public Radio, Yerevan

Samvel Martirosyan, blogger, IT security expert, Yerevan

Vahe Sargsyan, moderator, freelance journalist, Lratvakan Radio, Yerevan

Pap Hayrapetyan, editor-in-chief, *Sevan*, Sevan

Anna Satyan, deputy editor-in-chief, *Novoye Vremya*, Yerevan

Gayane Mkrtchyan, reporter, armenianow.com and iwpr.net, Yerevan

Edgar Vardanyan, expert, Armenian Center for National and International Studies, Yerevan

Arevhat Amiryan, editor-in-chief, *Vorotan, Sisian*

Melik Baghdasaryan, owner, Photolur photo news agency, Yerevan

Anahit Nahapetyan, owner and editor-in-chief, *Tufashkharhi Arorya, Artik*

Moderator and Author

Artashes Parsadanyan, independent media consultant, Yerevan

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