

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

2006/2007

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



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2006/2007

The Development of Sustainable Independent Media in Europe and Eurasia
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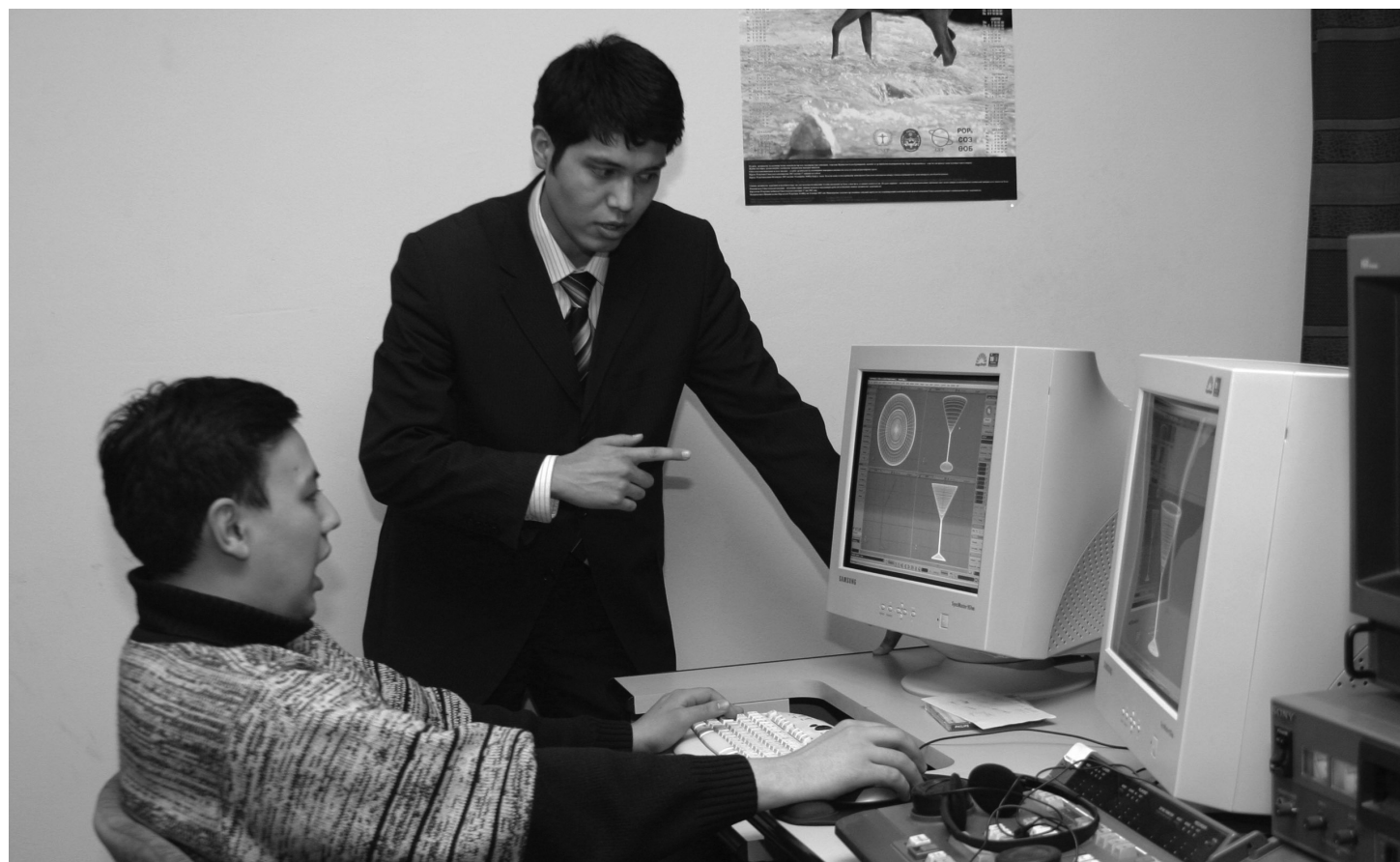
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One indicator of whether the environment promotes or resists the media is the quantitative development of the media sector. According to statistics, over the year only two electronic media outlets were able to join the array of just over 300 media outlets, and two existing stations renewed their licenses.



TAJIKISTAN

The key event of 2006 in the Republic of Tajikistan was the presidential election, which took place on November 6 and resulted in the victory of the republic's incumbent, Emomali Rakhmonov. As in other Central Asian countries that witnessed the "tulip" revolution of 2005 and the subsequent political disturbances of 2006 in Kyrgyzstan, in Tajikistan the authorities paid special attention to opposition, civil society, and media to prevent unrest.

Preparation for the presidential election included several political strategies associated with the media system. One strategy, focusing on democratic rhetoric, was concerned with demonstrating democratic reforms and changes. It was in the context of this political strategy that the republic's leadership, for the first time in the history of independent Tajikistan, invited international observers—an election observation mission of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. Additionally, Tajikistan's highest leaders made a number of displays of political will intended to attest to their adherence to democratic values.

Another political strategy many discerned was not made public and was aimed at the screening and identification of all public institutions not loyal to the regime and its principal figures, in order to subsequently monitor and pressure them. A third political strategy entailed activities on the part of the presidency to reinforce the government information system for the purpose of managing its image as completely and effectively as possible to create favorable public opinion. This explains the second nationwide government television channel, Safina, that was created on the eve of the election year, as well as the development assistance received by government print publications.

In this environment, the campaign by civil society, especially institutions for support of the media, to get a new law on the media enacted were not successful. In the assessment of panelists and outside experts, the Law on Print and Other Media enacted in December 1990 is obsolete, provides no implementation mechanisms, and does not reflect, but actually impedes, the development of the media system. However, the law is on the face of it liberal and, along with its purely declarative nature, suits the country's authorities quite well.

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TAJIKISTAN AT A GLANCE

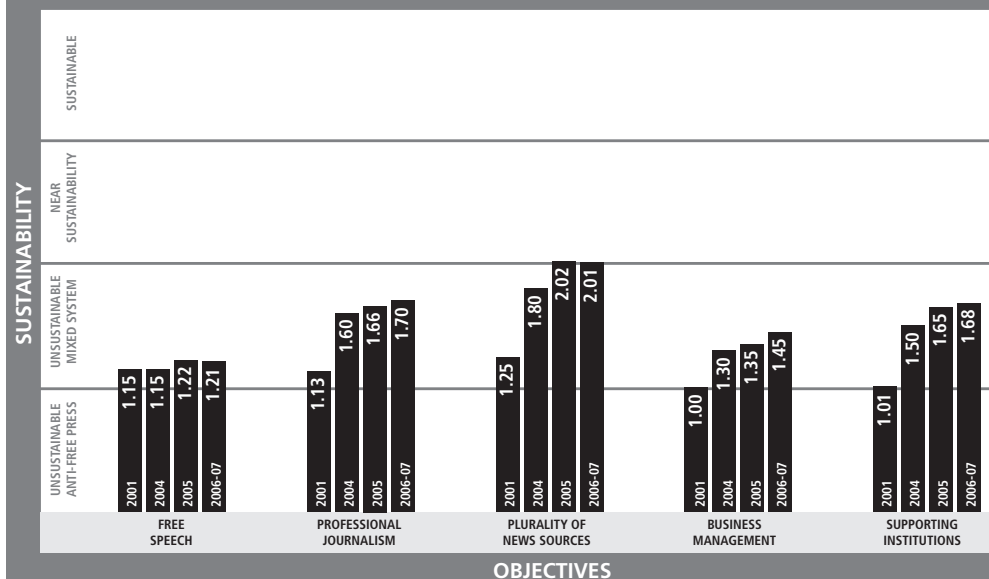
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 7,076,598 (July 2007 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Dushanbe
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Tajik 79.9%, Uzbek 15.3%, Russian 1.1%, Kyrgyz 1.1%, other 2.6% (2000 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Sunni Muslim 85%, Shi'a Muslim 5%, other 10% (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Tajik (official), Russian widely used in government and business
- > **GNI (2006-Atlas):** \$2.572 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **GNI per capita (2006-PPP):** \$1,410 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **Literacy rate:** 99.5% (male 99.7%, female 99.2%) (2000 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Emomali Rakhmonov (since November 6, 1994)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Approximately 20 printing houses, over 20 television stations, 7 radio stations
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** There are approximately 265 registered print publications in Tajikistan. The largest ones are *Asia Plus*, *Tochikiston*, *Nerui Sukhan*, and *Vecherniy Dushanbe*
- > **Broadcast ratings (top ranked stations):** Dushanbe: Radio Vatan, Asia Plus, SM-1; Khudzhande: Tiroz
- > **News agencies:** Asia Plus, Mison, State Information Agency Hobar, Varorud, Avesta
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 5,000 (2005, *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: TAJIKISTAN



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

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

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

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

Near Sustainability (2-3):

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

Sustainable (3-4):

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

The rates of economic growth continue to be relatively low, and the population's income level remains fairly critical. According to official statistics, 64 percent of the population is poor; labor emigration from the country occurs on a huge scale and remains the chief employment strategy for most young men. The shadow economy accounts for a large share of people's income. According to panelists, most legal businesses conceal their actual sales and income, thereby remaining partly "in the shadows." The concealment of income is becoming a universal strategy of business. Naturally, the sector of non-state media outlets follow these trends in their business dealings.

These private media must survive on the market, but the market is regulated primarily by political instruments that prevent truly free competition. The fact that the shadow economy accounts for such a large share of economic activity makes it difficult to expand the advertising market. For most media outlets, especially in the outlying regions, the advertising market is not an important source of revenue. Regional media outlets continue to earn most of their revenue from individual announcements. Government media also suffer from poor capitalization and low investment.

In general, panelists saw a decline in the media and the political environment for the media in 2006, and the overall score remained effectively the same as last year at 1.58.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.21/4.00

The information sector in Tajikistan is regulated on the basis of a number of laws and regulations, including the Constitution, the Law on Print and Other Media, the Law on Television and Radio Broadcasting, the Law on Information, Statutes on Licensing for broadcast, as well as numerous other parts of the civil and criminal code.

According to an analysis of media law conducted by the Institute for the Problems of Information Law (Moscow) in the former Soviet republics, Tajikistan belongs to the group of countries with an average level of freedom (the country's score is 6 of 13), putting it, by that criterion, substantially ahead of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. Indeed, the Republic of Tajikistan's Constitution proclaims freedom of the press and prohibits censorship, and there are special laws on the media and on television, and laws guaranteeing citizens' access to information. Laws and regulations permit nongovernmental media outlets to independently determine the languages in which they broadcast. And although accusations of libel or insult are governed by criminal law, the

Lidiya Isamova, from the RIA News agency, said: "The fact that four media outlets obtained licenses before the elections is politically significant. That is, before the elections, the authorities needed to show that they were democratic, that they were issuing government licenses. Never mind that we have six radio stations that have been waiting for licenses for three or four years. I think that those four were registered for show."

insulting of public officials does not have a separate article of the criminal code devoted to it, but rather is a subcategory of general insult. Furthermore, the criminal code contains articles permitting the punishment of anyone who impedes a journalist's lawful professional activity, and of officials in the event of their refusal to provide information to a citizen (Art. 148 and 162 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Tajikistan). Although, for the entire existence of independent Tajikistan, no precedent has been set of bringing charges on the basis of the aforementioned articles, de jure the possibility of defending the rights of journalists does exist.

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

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

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

Access to international news is relatively open, although some factors do create obstacles. First of all, there is the reliability of the electric power supply. Second, there is the relatively high cost (compared with incomes) of Internet services. Third, international information is subjected to screening. Thus, it is possible to find out about events in Italy or Israel without restriction, but the possibility of obtaining information about the Central Asian region or news about events in the outlying regions of Tajikistan is limited.

While these articles may represent the most favorable environment for the media in Central Asia, the enforcement and implementation of these articles is remote from their de jure status. As Masrur Abdullayev, a staff member of Internews Network, Tajikistan, said, "Provisions of law supposedly protect free speech, but in reality those provisions do not work. Journalists are persecuted, especially by local authorities and specific officials that they criticize."

The panelists unanimously cited the process of licensing the electronic media as criteria of how effective the law is. Thus, more than 10 applications for licenses from nongovernmental media outlets have been waiting for several years in a row. However, since 2004 no licenses have actually been granted, under various pretexts. That is why the decision of the licensing committee, which met for the first time in a long time, to grant four licenses—granting licenses to two new stations (radio and television) and renewing the licenses of two existing, regional television stations (in Kanibadam and Istaravshan)—was viewed by most of the journalists as a symbolic action.

In commenting on the licensing committee's decision, Lidiya Isamova, from the RIA News agency, said: "The fact that four media outlets obtained licenses before the elections is politically significant. That is, before the elections, the authorities needed to show that they were democratic, that they were issuing government licenses. Never mind that we have six radio stations that have been waiting for licenses for three or four years. I think that those four were registered for show."

One panelist, K. Alamshoyev, happens to be from one of the media outlets that have been waiting for licenses for four

years. He explained what sort of "mechanisms" are impeding the development of media institutions under such liberal laws: "This is the fourth year now that we have wanted to establish a radio station. Not until this year did I succeed in getting registered with the [province] justice administration. Now, on the basis of our registration in the province, we have to obtain a license from the commission. Our licenses are issued by the licensing commission under the State Television and Radio Committee. The commission chairman is the chairman of the State Television and Radio Committee of Tajikistan. And all the members are also mainly government officials. Only one person from nongovernmental radio sits on the commission. I have gone to that commission many times and turned in documents, but they are still at the stage of being studied."

The complicated and multiple-stage procedure for licensing the electronic media, along with the lack of transparency in decision making, account for the fact that in a country in which television has priority with the public, the vast majority of media outlets are print. A number of regional television stations (14) have been established only in the past few years with the financial and advisory support of the organizations of Internews Network, Tajikistan. If one realizes that, according to law, each electronic media outlet must renew its licenses every five years, while in reality licenses are issued for various lengths of time, sometimes even for a year, one can understand how licensing issues can be used to the authorities' advantage. On the whole, it is extremely difficult for enterprises to get into the media market. It cannot be said that there are financial restrictions for media business, but the political aspects of media activity and the authorities' constant attention to such business make an enterprise's risks and costs much greater than in other forms of business.

It is interesting that even for key government entities (the tax agencies), the information sector is hard to understand as a producer of goods, and in their application of the law they attempt to "creatively" interpret articles of the criminal code.

In the panelists' opinion, in recent years engaging in professional journalist activity has more and more frequently become grounds for the judicial prosecution of journalists. Trials are doomed to lengthy delays and bureaucratic red tape. For example, the investigation concerning an article by the journalist Lira Latipova from the newspaper *Krim-info* has gone on for more than a year and still has not come to any resolution. Yet the cause of the investigation was a critical article directed not at the republic's top leaders but at an ordinary notary public who was using forged documents to deprive the elderly of their lawful residences.

It is a usual practice in the republic for prosecutors to conduct investigations on the basis of critical articles, which the authorities regard as an indication of the great effectiveness of articles in the press.

More common than judicial investigations in the wake of journalists' articles are threats and other extralegal forms of the persecution and pressuring of journalists. Virtually every panelist cited examples of how government agencies and individual officials had pressured them, attempted to intimidate them, etc.

The violations of journalists' rights most frequently pointed out in monthly monitoring by the National Association of Independent News Media of Tajikistan are unjustifiable restrictions on the provision of publicly important information, or the refusal to provide it at all, unjustifiable summonses to law-enforcement agencies, violation of the right to the inviolability of the individual in the form of unsanctioned searches and seizures, the public insulting of journalists for their professional activities, etc.

The panelists believe that any critical article by a journalist puts him in jeopardy. Examples were cited in support of this contention: as the result of a critical article about an immunologist, a journalist with the independent newspaper *Bomdod* has now become involved in a lengthy trial; a journalist with the publication *Avesta* was arrested when gathering information on the issue of why people were not admitted to mosques. All of his tape-recorded notes were erased, and his photo film was exposed. After writing an article about how bank employees in Sughd Province were holding up the payment of pensions, journalist Zhamilya Guseinova was subjected to telephone terror and received threats of physical reprisal. Thanks only to the intervention of the Media Alliance NGO did her persecutors leave the journalist in peace.

Even journalists for government publications are not ensured against pressure and prosecution for criticism in the media. Thus, U. Yerkayev, from the newspaper *Zhumkhuruyat*, recalled: "In late 2005 I received information about the situation with respect to the payment of wages at a carpet mill. The mill's employees, it turned out, were not being paid their wages for a half year at a time, and then were paid them in carpets. I wrote about this and was commended by management. But when the article came out, I was called in by the carpet mill's management and given a good talking to about how such an article should not have been written." Such cases are not uncommon—the same U. Yerkayev had experience with even harsher pressure and threats as the result of an article about the relationship between major agricultural associations and futures organizations. "As a result," Yerkayev

said, "I was left on my own: no one supported me. I had to apologize and say that I had acted improperly."

As in the past, attacks on journalists and threats of physical reprisals are not infrequent. Usually journalists do no more than appeal to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that monitor the observance of journalists' rights. In the few cases in which attacks on journalists are investigated, the investigations usually produce no results. Thus, Radzhabi Mirzo, editor of the nongovernmental newspaper *Ruzi nav*, and Iskandar Firuz, a correspondent with BBC radio, who were victims of attacks in 2005, were unable to obtain any information from law-enforcement agencies concerning the results of their investigation.

For government media outlets, a system of preferences has been formed: The representatives of these media outlets are the ones who are invited to press conferences and other formats for contact with "newsmakers," and they are the ones included in the presidential pool (list of accredited journalists), which has been formed by analogy with the Russian presidential pool. Pressure also can be put on nongovernmental media outlets through influence on printing facilities.

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In 2006, an attempt was made to block access to a number of Internet sites, including www.centrasia.ru, www.fergana.ru, www.arianastorm.com, www.charogiruz.ru, and www.tajikistantaims.ru, on the basis of accusations of the presentation on those sites of propaganda subverting the legitimate system in the Republic of Tajikistan and inciting ethnic enmity and discord. A week after access to those sites had been blocked, under pressure from the international and domestic public, the government rescinded the decision banning three of the sites, although users said they had difficulties loading the "rehabilitated" sites as well. It was recommended to two other Internet pages that they change the tone and content of their materials. According to information cited by the OSCE's ODIHR observation mission, there are 120,000 Internet users in the country. At present, there is a growing trend for the average Tajik family to purchase a computer for its children and connect to the Internet.

Another, even more widespread channel of foreign information is satellite television, which has become very widespread in Tajikistan. Satellite dishes have become a realistic means for many citizens, especially in the cities, to expand their access to objective and timely information.

A journalist's practice is not subject to licensing, and it is not even mandatory to have professional training to begin practicing journalism. The training of highly professional journalists has not become a concern of the state, although the president has spoken often about the importance of good education.

The improved score on this objective, to a certain extent, contradicts the opinions that were expressed during the discussion.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.70/4.00

There are numerous obstacles to a journalist's professional work in Tajikistan, the chief of which is the restriction of access to information from various sources. The provision of information requires, on the one hand, timeliness and objectivity, and on the other, access to publicly important information is restricted [sic; the Russian sentence is ungrammatical—Trans.]. Thus, in accordance with Article 28 of the Law on Information, the following procedure is stipulated for access to official documents: a written request and waiting for an official response (both written and

JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

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

oral) within no more than 30 days. Obtaining an interview or comments on an important current problem from a government official of any rank is a very complicated task. An official must make an inquiry to his superior, while his superior, in turn, must submit it to the office of his superior. Consequently, the clearance, the permission for an interview, with an ordinary official must be obtained from the *rais* (head of the territory's executive branch) himself. Since it is the representatives of government in Tajikistan who are the chief newsmakers, such procedures for working with the authorities naturally do not make it any easier for journalists to cover key events and issues.

In accordance with the personal instructions of the president of the Republic of Tajikistan, every agency organizes a quarterly press conference and issues a certain amount of official information concerning the agency's activities. However, in the past year some agencies have been closed to the press. For example, the Defense Ministry regards its activities as a state secret. Only government media are invited to the Security Ministry's press conferences.

The risks associated with critical coverage of any area of public life force journalists to practice self-censorship. As Isamova said in the panel discussion, "For writing truthful articles, journalists usually either start to be harassed over the phone or subjected to other forms of hounding on the part of the chairman of a district or other branch of government that was criticized. If outside forces stand up for a journalist, next time he will simply be refused information. And it is possible that his editor will not allow the next critical article to go through, because of censorship."

The panelists recalled several cases in which journalists were fired for truthful and objective articles, and their articles, which had been assigned by their editor, were removed from the issue. Under such circumstances, a list of taboo topics develops, and self-censorship is widely practiced among journalists.

Investigative journalism is an extremely rare genre in the republic. The panelists noted that just one publication, *Aziya+*, practices that genre, but even its investigations deal with the past and are possible only when the main characters are no longer alive.

Rustam Buriyev, on the staff of Mavzhi Ozod TV, believes that self-censorship has historic roots: "Self-censorship is left over from wartime, when an article could end a journalist's life." Today, in the panelists' view, the fear is not so great. Tuxhfa Akhmedova, from the Gamkhori Press Center NGO in Kulyab, said: "It's simply that everyone knows what can be said."

The list of topics that are unofficially taboo includes corruption, drug trafficking, border issues, the life and

activities of the state's top leaders, and, for the regional press, the leaders of a given territory. However, depending on the situation, the list of topics can be expanded. The panelists recalled the case of an article by Kh. Umarov, an analyst well-known in the country, about falsifications in national statistics on a number of sectors of the economy. The author of the article, "Statistics Lie," backed up his claims and relied solely on facts in the article. It was no accident that the article in question was published simultaneously by two leading newspapers, *Aziya+* and *Vecherniy Dushanbe*. But since the publication of that article, the analyst's articles have not been accepted by a single publication, not even by the independent press. The panelists' assessment of this case is that the newspapers are simply afraid of inviting that person, who has become a sort of *persona non grata*.

Isamova summed up the issue of taboos as follows: "Everyone knows that we have corruption in both the public health agencies and the education agencies. But as soon as you write an article about it, you immediately get howls of indignation from a ministry, a school administration, a maternity center, or a hospital. The journalist starts to get phone calls demanding to know the sources of the information, and rebuttals are sent. Angry parents get involved, saying that such and such an instructor is a good one, doesn't take bribes, and has been libeled. The ministry writes a letter: We have investigated, and found no facts. Everything would seem to be true, and everyone knows it, but we try not to touch those topics. The ministry will wriggle out of it, and the journalist will end up with a stained reputation. And the publication will suffer both intangibly and financially."

For a journalist, the performance of professional duties also can run into pressure from his own editors. The case of Mokhsharif Kurbonzonda, a correspondent with the nongovernmental newspaper *Bomdod*, serves as a telling example of this. Following her publication of several critical articles, even her own journalist colleagues stopped supporting her, and the newspaper's editor publicly accused her of unprofessionalism.

To be a professional journalist, Tuxhfa Akhmedova believes, it is important to have social connections. "Over many years of cooperation with the law-enforcement agencies, I have developed such social connections. Sometimes another journalist will not be given information, but it's always given to me. Of course, I reciprocate with the support. Thus, for example, I write articles for the heads of law-enforcement services. That's called speech writing. And then I try never to exacerbate relations and do not carry matters to the point of conflict."

Another problem with developing professional journalism has to do with the level of pay. According to the panelists' information, the situation is especially dramatic at

Questions of professional ethics are an extremely important issue in Tajikistan. Several NGOs that work to support media institutions have organized a number of roundtables and discussed proposed ethical codes of journalism. But agreement has not yet been reached among the various groups of journalists and their organizations concerning a unified set of professional ethical standards.

government media outlets. S. Saidov, who represents the Association of Professional Journalists of Sughd Province, said: "The pay at government media outlets is meager; the royalty scale has not been revised since 1996 and makes it possible to receive royalty of up to 1 som for an item. The royalties for a whole issue of a newspaper may not exceed 50 soms (or approximately \$16 US, while on television they can be slightly higher—up to 33 soms. So, while earning up to \$40 a month for State Television and Radio as a correspondent for Sughd Province, I have to moonlight for all the media outlets."

Certain government media outlets do not budget for royalties at all (Khubar government television, the television station in Sughd Province, etc.). Instead, the creative workers at media outlets (especially television), independently find "revenue sources." Journalistic pieces (that is, positive pieces covering "achievements") are almost universally paid, commissioned pieces. An unofficial "fee" has even been established, according to which a 30-second piece on government television costs \$100 US.

The level of journalists' pay at nongovernmental media outlets is substantially higher. One can judge the minimum income from help-wanted announcements for journalists at private media outlets. The average salary mentioned in the announcements is usually \$100 US. The more popular the journalist, the greater his chances of earning additional pay. The pay of regional correspondents for private publications is considerably lower than that of their capital-city counterparts.

Despite the risks of journalists' work on nongovernmental publications, journalists at government publications frequently leave to work on them. The panelists noted that meager earnings have forced many prominent professional journalists to leave the republic in search of new work.

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At the same time, journalists’ materials very widely employ unethical approaches. Alamshoyev remarked: “It’s not just that ethical norms are not observed—sometimes even legal norms are violated. Sometimes when a person who has been arrested on suspicion of involvement in Khizb-ut Tahrir [a terrorist organization—Trans.] is shown on television, he is presented as already a criminal. Sometimes the full names are given of persons who have been victims of trafficking. That’s regardless of whether it might be a young girl, and she might have family. That is, it is done without regard for the consequences.”

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The sole example of the development of an internal set of ethical standards at a media outlet was the newspaper *Aziya+*, but in the panelists’ opinion, articles indicate that journalists simply do not follow those standards.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Tajikistan Objective Score: 2.01/4.00

The only objective for which the expert panel gave slightly lower scores than last year was the objective of diversity of news sources providing citizens with reliable and objective news. P. Bobodzhanova, head of the Center for Gender Studies NGO from Kudzhant, explains his scoring as follows: “In terms of living standard, the residents of Tajikistan cannot permit themselves the weekly purchase of a newspaper. Many are forced to pool their resources to buy newspapers, and then pass them from hand to hand. Despite greater Internet access, restrictions on electric power have gotten even worse.”

According to experts, only 10–15 percent of the population can afford to buy newspapers. The cost of print publications is fairly high, averaging up to 1 som at retail. Isamova believes that, when the price of newspapers is raised, editors collude and raise the prices of their publications at the same time.

At the same time, the demand for information in the country is huge, and the press is very popular. There is no daily press in Tajikistan, and nearly all publications are weekly and published on Friday, at the end of the week. In the capital and major cities, by noon not a single private paper is left for sale. Because of their relatively small press-runs, the nongovernmental publications published in the capital never make it to the remote regions. Alamshoyev noted: “In Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Province, the situation with respect to providing citizens with information is especially difficult. The national press is delivered only to the province center,

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

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

and if newspapers reach the district centers, it's only after two months, when they have lost their relevance. The state of radio networks in the district is dilapidated, and about 70 percent of the residents do not have access to Radio Badakhshan, which broadcasts just 10 hours a week in Tajik and Russian. Journalists' work becomes pointless if residents can't hear it."

The state of affairs at local publications is very bad. According to the information of Mirzobadal Badalov, chief of the Tajikistan Republic Culture Ministry's Press and Printing Administration, 69 government district, city, and province newspapers are regularly published in the republic. The circulation of these print media outlets is as high as 300–500 [sic]. Most of them come out twice a month, and some of them come out monthly. Only a very few local government publications have proved capable of being profitable and have circulations that are sizeable for the country. Such publications include the newspapers *Diyori Tursunzoda* (city of Tursunzoda), with a circulation of 7,000; *Khakikati Leninobod* from Sughd Province, with a circulation of 1,500 to 6,000; and *Zarafshon* (Pandjakent District), with a circulation of 1,500.

Local authorities, as well as civil-society institutions with the support of international organizations, have been attempting to expand the public's access to information. In the provinces, resource centers are being opened with a wide choice of periodicals and Internet access, and press stands are being installed in regional centers with support from the OSCE. However, because of gender stereotypes, the use of such information resources is difficult for women.

The limited supply of electric power is becoming a scourge for citizens in remote regions, preventing them from obtaining information about the country and the world. The electricity situation is especially strained in the winter.

If one sets aside the interruptions in power supply, in most of the country's regions the possibility of receiving broadcasts of the first state channel, TVT, and of receiving Russian and other foreign channels over satellite dishes has expanded. The panelists noted that satellite television has become especially popular not just in the cities but in the countryside as well. "Satellite dishes are no longer a luxury but a vital necessity," it was said in the discussion.

While noting that the population is covered by the Russian channels' broadcast networks, the panelists said that, all the same, during the time of news broadcasts citizens switch to government and independent channels, "because since the times of civil war the interest in politics has remained high."

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The Internews Network project to support regional television studios is very important. Thanks to that project, television studios have been opened and are operating in 14 regions. These electronic media outlets are equipped with digital technologies, and the government regional television studios lag seriously behind them technologically.

However, strengthening the potential of the regional media has not yet brought about an improvement in the interregional exchange of information. As a rule, it is much easier for citizens in the capital to obtain international information than to find out what is going on several dozen kilometers away from them in a neighboring city or village. One panelist had the following to say about this problem: "I was riding in a fixed-route taxi today and listening to the news over Vatan radio as I rode. In five minutes only two events in the capital of Tajikistan were reported, and then the announcer gave a detailed report on the health of Berlusconi. Why do I, a Tajik in Tajikistan, need that information? And I'm not even saying they should provide regional information. The same situation exists on the news agencies' wires. They provide five or six reports on the country, and the rest is filled with information about other countries. I realize that it is hard to do their own news reports, once again because of finances, but this will result in their audience's switching to other stations."

The issue of interregional information exchange proved to be a very important one for the panelists. They discussed at length the closing in the summer of 2006 (on the pretext of the need for a license) of the Internews project for creating a joint program among eight regional stations, and they spoke of the lack of information security in a situation in which there is an information vacuum concerning events in the regions.

The panelists unanimously said that the minority nationalities' media outlets are free and can develop without restrictions in Tajikistan. Abdulloev explained: "Broadcasting or the publication of print media in the languages of minority nationalities in the Republic of Tajikistan has been without problems since Soviet times. In that sense, all the rights of the minorities are protected."

Comparing Tajik television with the broadcasting of other countries, Isamova noted one distinctive feature: "In all countries journalism has long since turned into disaster journalism. In our country there must not be any natural or other disasters on the news. For example, at the first of the year we had a case in which an orphanage burned down and 13 young children were burned alive. Government television did not say a word about it. There were two terrorist acts—silence on TV. Flooding, roads closed, an earthquake—nothing said. People find out this information any way they can—someone, somewhere reads it from outside sources, and people report it to one another."

Tajikistan already has a group of news agencies: *Aziya+* Information Agency, *Avesta* IA, *Khovar* GIA, *Varorud* IA, *Interpress Service* IA, and the *Khatlon Press* IA, which function with varying degrees of success and attempt to cover the news of the entire country. The panelists gave especially high marks to the work of *Avesta*, which "is more timely, provides the news from the morning on, and provides it on an open basis on the condition of hypercitation." But as Abdulloev notes: "The Independent Agencies such as *Aziya+* and *Avesta* gather and disseminate news. But their news is mainly distributed over the Internet and through print media, the influence of which is not so significant as that of the electronic media."

The interest groups that are behind certain independent media outlets are not open to the public. Only the journalists know who patronizes given publications, and in whose interests given stations operate. Since a kind of table of ranks has developed in Tajikistan on which television journalists are indisputably on top, the most influential political groups strive to have, if not their own, then at least loyal private electronic media outlets in their arsenals.

As the panelists noted, last year major financial groups, in principle, showed interest in the media industry. As an

example, mention was made of Oriyono Media LLC, which is financed by the owners of the country's largest private bank, Oriyon Bank. The media group has far-reaching plans to have not only its own radio station but its own television company and both news and advertising agencies.

In the electronic media and newspapers, entertaining materials claim the greatest share of time or space. As M. Bakhtiyerov said: "On the government broadcasting network, on TVT OR SOFINA, up to 70 percent of the time is occupied by concerts, and the amount of poetry reading has been increasing. There is not even a full-fledged, basic press survey. Only a survey of government media outlets is provided."

In the opinion of Isamova, "the public longs for news—objective, varied, and timely news. If we had a news channel, it would be one of the most popular. Especially if it provided news about the regions. And not as it is now—within a radius of 40 kilometers around the capital."

There is a minority-nationalities press in Tajikistan. Mainly these are local publications in Uzbek, Kyrgyz, or other languages, but there are also news segments on the first government channel in Uzbek and Arabic. The Uzbek ethnic group has a more varied choice of media outlets in its language: in addition to local media outlets, there is a national government Uzbek-language newspaper, and there is a nongovernmental newspaper with broad coverage of the country. The nongovernmental Council of the Peoples of Tajikistan has its own publication—the *Dustlik* bulletin, in which pressing problems of the diaspora are raised. The panelists unanimously said that the minority nationalities' media outlets are free and can develop without restrictions in Tajikistan. Abdulloev explained: "Broadcasting or the publication of print media in the languages of minority nationalities in the Republic of Tajikistan has been without problems since Soviet times. In that sense, all the rights of the minorities are protected."

Political pluralism of information is provided in the country through political-party media outlets. Although not all parties have their own publications, the most active parties do. Thus, for example, the Party of the Islamic Renaissance of Tajikistan has two newspapers and two magazines and its own print shop. Access to the electronic media is predominantly enjoyed only by the ruling party, although certain broadcasts may be devoted to the Communists or the Popular Democrats. On the whole, a group of party media outlets already has been formed that serve the interests of their members in various languages.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.45/4.00

The dynamics of the development of the media sector in Tajikistan over the past few years demonstrates a turn away from media outlets performing the role of political tools, of “propaganda conveyor belts,” and toward journalism that has the qualities of a product and promises to be a successful business enterprise.

Given the country’s relatively low level of economic development, a field of principal players in the country’s economy has not yet been formed. Only now are the country’s ore reserves beginning to be developed, a construction boom is getting started, along with active investing in the capital’s housing market, and reforms are expected in the energy sector and other of the most promising sectors of Tajikistan’s economy. But financial groups are already emerging that have expressed an interest in Tajikistan’s media space. Not only an attempt to establish a media holding company associated with Oriyon Bank, but philanthropic acts for the media taken this year by the RusAl company are instructive.

But the trends that have been noted are so far episodic, and big business serves as the chief buyer of ads in the central media. The groups of the biggest advertisers include cellular phone operators, Internet providers, shopping markets, and commercial banks. International organizations are also regular buyers of advertisements.

Panelist Buriyev believes that “among our businesspeople there are fairly many who want to buy ads. But fear of the tax authorities stops them.”

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

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

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

The widespread practice of distorting print publications’ circulation figures attests indirectly to the relatively low extent of development of the advertising market in Tajikistan. Real circulations are understated in publishing figures in order to keep the taxes from being so high.

The widespread practice of distorting print publications’ circulation figures attests indirectly to the relatively low extent of development of the advertising market in Tajikistan. Real circulations are understated in publishing figures in order to keep the taxes from being so high. And there is no process of “chasing after” circulation numbers in order to lure advertisers, which already has begun in neighboring Central Asian countries. The number of advertising spots on television is also understated. The panelists pointed out that, under law, a norm has been set for the placement of ads on television, but the lack of monitoring of the practice of running ads enables the television stations to conceal advertising revenues. Bakhtiyerov did some math: “Take the most popular publications. They reach agreements with distributors, and if those are supposed to receive 100 copies each of a publication, in reality they receive as many as even 1,000. And then no one calculates what the revenues from advertising are.”

Journalists on various publications have a vital stake in attracting advertising revenue to their publications, because from 30 percent to 50 percent of the total advertising fee goes to the person who has attracted the ad. But this stake ultimately results in completely replacing journalistic work with advertising work. At the large nongovernmental publications, the owners already have set up marketing departments, and only those departments engage in seeking advertisers and in studying potential and real markets and advertising supply and demand.

To develop a successful business enterprise in journalism, the media companies that have already gained a certain recognition and found their niches in the market need to develop a multifaceted business. Thus, for example, the most successful enterprise, Charkhi Gardun, which has the largest circulations in the country, also engages in supplying newsprint, consumables for print shops, construction, etc. The media group that publishes *Todzhikiston* has established one of the best private print shops and has even been quite energetically developing the mass press market—combined

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information and advertising publications and entertainment publications, which include the most successful weekly, *Oyla*.

For most government publications, revenue sources continue to be subscription income (with the support of government agencies, it continues to be mandatory for employees in the budget-funded sector), subsidies, and commissioned articles. In the panelists' estimation, subscriptions account for nearly half of all media income. Nongovernmental media outlets are more oriented toward advertisements and announcements, and they attract more commissioned articles; regional nongovernmental television stations also may receive subsidies from the regional administrations for covering certain subjects and objectives. Nonetheless, the meagerness of revenue sources results in either the closing of publications or their reliance on the support of sponsors. In Kulyab, the regional independent television station, despairing of surviving independently in the media market, switched to equally meager, but guaranteed, support from the government budget.

Marketing, rating, and other media measurement studies are so far done only episodically in Tajikistan. All research is almost always done by the Zerkalo opinion-survey company. Previously, monitoring of the development of the media sector also was done by experts with the Fourth Estate NGO. But on the whole, media outlets do yet not consider media research necessary at this time.

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OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.68/4.00

Panelists noted significant progress with respect to the operations of institutions supporting the media. Among the factors contributing to the higher score, the experts noted a step-up in the work of the Journalists' Union since the election of a new and energetic leader. At present, the re-registration of members is underway, and preparations are being made for the launching of a resource website by the organization. Provided that all former members (and as of today there are 2,080) reaffirm their participation in the organization, the Journalists' Union promises to be the largest trade organization.

The professional membership organization *Mediya Alyans* (45 members, covering the whole country, except for the Pamir) has been performing its mission by presenting training programs for professionals, providing assistance in operating internships, and resolving labor disputes. The organization publishes a regular bulletin for its members. The organization also arranges for the defense of journalists prosecuted for critical articles. The *TadzhAnesim* professional organization and the *Internews Network* are continuing their activities.

At the same time, as Rano Bobodzhanova noted: "This year NGOs devoted to defending free speech have become more passive. The most influential of them is the Tajik Human Rights Bureau. Most NGOs operate mainly in the big cities and the capital."

Contradictory opinions came out in the panel discussion regarding the activities during the current year of one of the most prestigious NGOs for support of the media and

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

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

journalists—the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan (NANSMIT). Whereas some panelists emphasized the NGO's leading role in defending the rights of journalists and publications, others believed that the organization's work in the current year had shown a substantial decline. Thus, for example, Alamshoyev noted: "NANSMIT used to have a very active presence in the Pamir, but now the regions have left its field of attention. In a situation in which a network program for the interregional exchange of information among televisions was shut down, the only thing the association did is that one of its staff members wrote an article—an ordinary journalistic article—about it, instead of getting to the bottom of it and putting pressure on the authorities."

Nonetheless, panelists noted that it is NANSMIT, despite repeated hacker attacks, that has continued to edit the association's website and reported monthly on the results of the monitoring of the observance of journalists' rights.

Compliments were given to the Internews Network organization, which has been making the most significant contribution, not only to supplying media outlets with equipment and supporting media-management technologies, but also to training their staff members in the international standards of journalism.

In this connection, the panelists voiced special concern regarding the professional training of journalists. The country has one journalism department and five journalism divisions where dozens of journalists receive higher professional training. However, the panelists noted, the qualifications of journalist graduates is very low. There are several reasons for this: training does not provide the opportunity to learn even the most elementary computer skills, not to mention work with special software; professional skills are taught by language and literature instructors; the curriculum has strong bias toward literature and the history of journalism; and professional journalists who are enlisted to teach lack much motivation on account of the meager pay.

Short courses and trainings offered by Internews Network or other organizations, with their curriculums, have been helping to improve the quality of the nongovernmental media. Although Internews is prepared to provide instructional support to the government media as well, by and large the editors of those publications do not want to do their part. Thus, for example, TVT makes no use of the organization's free resource, and TV Safina cooperates only with respect to the development of directing skills. In the panelists' opinion, the Internews master classes have produced obvious results. Isamova commented: "In Tajikistan one can sense the difference in style and work between journalists at government media outlets and those with private outlets. Whereas the nongovernmental media

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offer more references to authoritative and competent sources, journalists at government publications use the first person, speak on their own authority, and offer their own expert commentaries. Moreover, the editors of government media outlets take a conservative attitude toward genres, which in their view have not changed since Soviet times. They jealously monitor 'genre purity.' And in general, from government journalists and editors one gets pieces that try to impose their views on readers. From nongovernmental journalists one gets articles that conform more to international standards. And that is due in large part to training in Internews Network seminars."

At the media outlets themselves—both governmental and nongovernmental—a competitive environment has not yet been established, and there is no orientation toward the enlistment of promising professionals. Panelists noted a few scattered initiatives to develop professionals in the workplace, such as the initiative by the *Aziya+* holding company to establish a School of 21st Century Journalism. But that project is not doing anything today.

Among the training seminars, panelists gave high marks to the marketing and management seminars offered by the Soros Foundation-Tajikistan (the Open Society Institute), seminars offered by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, and several others.

However, as Bakhtiyerov noted: "Most of the seminars take place in the capital and the biggest cities. The regions and remote places are left to stew in their own juices. For 15 years no one has worked with newspaper journalists from the regions. And then we are surprised at how far behind the quality of the regional press lags." It is precisely for the purpose of supporting the regional media that the PAMIR Nongovernmental Foundation was established; it has been accumulating library and other information and technical resources for journalists in Khorog, as Alamshoyev reported to the panelists.

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Discussion of the quality of the press naturally led to a discussion of the matter of printing facilities and consumables. Panel participants agreed that this year the process of liberation from the monopoly of the government printing facilities (Sharki Ozod, Sanodvora) began to take real shape. The *Aziya+* and Charkhi Gardun private printing facilities are already up and running, and they have the capability to print using digital technologies, in full format and in color. However, not all nongovernmental publications can afford the services of these print shops, especially since the private print shops often will not accept orders for press-runs smaller than 4,000. The opposition press is tossed about. As for the regional press, the prospects for opening, on a competitive, market basis, several print shops in each province center are relatively unrealistic in the near term.

Nonetheless, the rapid development of the Internet providers' market in Tajikistan demonstrates the possibilities of a market economy that is capable of overcoming the technological lag, provided there is political freedom.

Panelists

Kurbon Alamshoev, Pamir Mass Media Center

Mahmadali Bakhtiyorov, *Payomi Rushon* newspaper

Masrur Abdulloev, Internews

Lidia Isamova, RIA News

Saidumron Saidov, Association of professional Journalists of Sogd Oblast

Buriev Rustam, Mavji Ozod TV

Tuhfa Akhmedova, NGO Press Center Gamkhori

Rano Babajanova, NGO Center of Gender Research

Ulmas Erkaev, *Jumhuriyat* newspaper, TV & Radio

Abdurakhim Muhidov, USAID

Moderator

Gulnara Ihrayeva, Kyrgyzstan