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TAJIKISTAN

Visits from foreign heads of state brought deals between Tajikistan and foreign partners in 2011, with many countries vying for influence in this small and poor, yet strategically important, country. During a visit from Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Tajikistan and Iran forged an agreement to extend their cooperation in the fields of hydropower energy, transportation, and communications. The launch of the first unit of the Sangtuda-2 hydropower plant, which Iran is currently constructing, is a centerpiece political and economic event. Russia displayed interest in Tajikistan as well; the two countries signed the Border Cooperation Agreement, implying that Russian Border Control officers will deepen their presence in Tajikistan. In addition, Russia inaugurated the Russian Center of Science and Culture in Dushanbe and established two more faculties at the local branch of Moscow State University. Belarus signed cooperative agreements with Tajikistan as well, on joint mechanical engineering ventures and on migrant workers. Tajikistan and Afghanistan launched a 200-kilometer electric power line linking Sangtuda in Tajikistan with Pul-i-Kumri in Afghanistan.

During her visit, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton raised concerns regarding the state of media freedom in Tajikistan, saying, “We believe journalists should be free to perform their function without fear of reprisals; that is why I stress the importance of an independent judiciary system and establishing civil-society organizations.” Meanwhile, Russian television stations launched a campaign to invoke fear among Tajik citizens that democracy-building efforts threaten to lead to brutal conflict, as seen in the Arab Spring.

Tajik officials continue to show concern over Islamic militants, and the government’s January to April campaign of elimination of hard-line Islamic opposition militants in the Rasht Valley stirred controversy internationally. The Islamic Movement of Turkestan (formerly called the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) and Al-Qaeda, as well as the ultra-religious Hizb ut Tahrir party, have increased their activity in the region. The authorities detained and convicted more than 60 members of these organizations in 2011. After President Emomali Rahmon’s appeal in 2010 that parents of students illegally studying in foreign Islamic religious schools bring their children back, students began to return from Iran, Pakistan, and Egypt en masse. Tajik authorities are encouraging more study-abroad exchanges between Western Europe and the United States.

Despite constitutional support for a free press, there are many confusing and conflicting laws, some dating back to the Soviet era, and implementation is poor. Just as in 2010, this year’s campaign by civil society—especially NGOs that support the mass media and media associations—has failed to pass the Mass Media Law, even though two alternative sets of amendments to this law have been drafted and a joint working group of MPs and heads of media associations has been organized. The media community’s struggle for the decriminalization of slander and libel has failed as well. Nonetheless, despite its purely declarative nature, the MSI panelists believe that the law itself—when it is applied—is quite liberal and reflects the intentions of the country’s authorities.

TAJIKISTAN AT A GLANCE

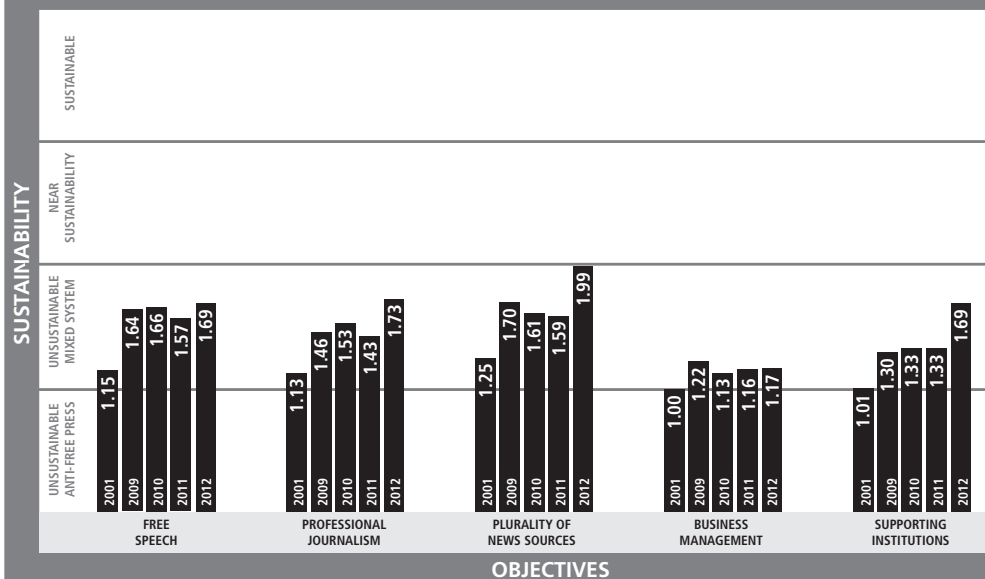
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 7,768,385 (July 2011 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%, Shia Muslim 5%, other 10% (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** Tajik (official), Russian widely used in government and business
- > **GNI (2010-Atlas):** \$ 5.512 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **GNI per capita (2010-PPP):** \$ 2,060 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **Literacy rate:** 99.5% (male 99.7%, female 99.2%) (2000 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Emomali Rahmon (since November 6, 2006)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active media outlets:** Print: 268 newspapers, 136 magazines; Radio Stations: 19; Television Stations: 25 (Ministry of Culture and NANSMIT)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** The top three newspapers by circulation are *Oila*, *Asia Plus*, and *Charkhi Gardun*
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Dushanbe's top radio stations are Radio Imrüz, Radio Vatan, Asia Plus, and Orieno (Russian-language); in Khujand Tiroz and SM-1
- > **News agencies:** Asia Plus, Avesta, Tojnews, Pressa.tj (private); ruzgor.tj (private) Khovar (state-owned); 4 more are registered but inactive
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 700,000 (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: TAJIKISTAN



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

Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1): Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2): Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3): Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4): Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.69

The Tajik information sector is still governed by a number of laws and regulations, including the Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan, the Law on the Press and Other Media, the Law on Television and Radio Broadcasting, the Law on Information, the Statute on Licensing of Broadcasting, and other chapters of the civil and criminal codes—nine laws in total.

Freedom of speech in the country is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan (article 2.30), which provides for freedom of the press and prohibits censorship. There are also special laws on the media and television that guarantee freedom of speech and access to information. However, on a practical level, they do not guarantee freedom of expression. And although the criminal code does govern prosecutions for libel or slander, there are supplements to the articles of the criminal code (articles 135, 136, 137, 330) that address the defamation of public officials. Also, at the end of July 2007, the parliament passed, and the president signed, a decree on criminal liability for defamation on the Internet.

The fundamental Tajik Law on Press and Other Mass Media, adopted back in the Soviet era (December 14, 1990), is

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.

clearly outdated, despite numerous amendments and supplements made over the past 20 years. A number of laws concerning mass media and their activities have been drafted and adopted.

Many independent experts and civil-society representatives claim that a new draft Media Law, initiated by the members of the Majlisi Namoyandagon Majlisi Oli (Parliament) of the Republic of Tajikistan and written by the head of the Parliamentary Committee for International Relations, Olim Salimzoda, and his deputy, Akramsho Felaliev, fails to meet the needs of the times. It is not in line with democratic standards of human rights and freedom of speech, it does not aspire to increase the independence of journalists, and it does not establish a legal framework for the free expression of citizens' views, beliefs, or opinions.

Following heated debates in the press on the necessity of radical changes to the Media Law, the Council of Ministers created a working group affiliated with the Parliamentary Committee on Media, which includes two representatives of civil society (and 2012 MSI panelists): Nuriddin Karshibaev, the head of the National Association of Independent Mass Media in Tajikistan (NANSMIT), and Kironshokh Sharifzoda, chair of the Journalists' Public Association. The working group is currently discussing the draft law, which has not yet been finalized, and is trying to integrate as many of the media's proposed adjustments as possible.

Articles 148 and 162 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Tajikistan allow punishing those who impede journalists in their legal and professional activities, as well as officials who refuse to provide information to citizens. Even though such charges appear never to have been recorded during the entire history of independent Tajikistan, a *de jure* possibility of defending journalists' rights does exist.

Yet, all panelists agreed that the implementation of laws and regulations is still rather low. Contributing factors include low legal awareness among journalists themselves, the impunity of government officials who do not enforce the law, and the failure of journalists to hold officials accountable for illegally refusing to provide information (even though article 27 of the Tajik Law on Press and Other Mass Media grants that right).

Turko Dikaev, a media holding company's correspondent in Kulyab, believes that media laws are not without merit; they are just at odds with international norms. He noted that laws are often amended and supplemented, but the laws regulating media activities remain confusing. "Reading and comparing all nine laws that govern media activities could drive a person crazy," said Dikaev. "Our debates on their harmonization, and our efforts to adopt at least a framework law, are carried on from one year to another," Dikaev added.

The panelists noted that public opinion is currently divided. There are those who claim that a free press would benefit the state and society and those who maintain that free media accelerate tensions in society and may provoke an armed conflict similar to the one that took place in Tajikistan in the 1990s. "Following a large information campaign by several Russian television channels on the possibility of conflict due to excessive democracy in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries in view of revolutions in Arabic countries and Northern Africa, the attitude of Tajik society to free press has deteriorated, fueled by government authorities," said Ravshan Abdullaev, executive director of the Eurasia Foundation in Tajikistan.

According to Dikaev, Tajik journalism has entered a period of court proceedings and lawsuits. "The judiciary system punishes journalists as if they are killers or terrorists," he added. The panelist referred to the verdict of Northern Tajikistan journalist Urunboy Usmonov, who was accused of membership in and aiding the prohibited ultra-religious Hizb ut Tahrir organization. Security officers detained Usmonov in June, and he spent a month in jail. Later on, he was released after local and international organizations protested. In the course of the court trial in the Sughd Province, Usmonov asserted that he was strong-armed by security officers who detained him. On October 14, the court of justice of Sughd Province sentenced Usmonov to three years in jail, but he was released directly from the courtroom due to the amnesty law. Nevertheless, a BBC reporter considered this sentence "unfair" and demanded that the Supreme Court of Tajikistan decriminalize him.

Khurshed Niyozov, director of the Center for Investigative Journalism, said the authorities attempt to detect the source of information, applying pressure on journalists to reveal who had commissioned the article and who had paid for it, rather than investigating its truth. All panelists agreed that almost all articles criticizing the authorities and individual officials are considered "commissioned."

Dikaev recalled that he had written an article on misappropriation of funds allocated for the construction of schools in the Kulyab Region. "About TJS 2 million had been allocated for this purpose, but these funds were stolen by people who are close to the president of the country. Having come to their senses, they (for the second time!) repaired the school, in which the head of state had studied, instead of building 20 new schools," he said. "The new repairs were conducted with violations of sanitary norms: the walls were covered with gypsum plaster, which is harmful to children's health. In my article, I wrote that if a child wants to study, he or she must be born in Dangara, our president's birthplace," reported Dikaev. "At first, I was praised for watchfulness,

and then they started demanding that I reveal my sources of information, but I refused," he added.

The Media Law explains how to protect the sources of confidential information: there is an article on "Specific Cases of Non-Divulging Information," which states that a journalist shall have no obligation to name a person supplying information with an agreement to not divulge his or her name, except as required by a court of law." However, the criminal code has an article that contradicts the Media Law, saying that if a person is called as a witness, he or she must testify.

In view of the above, all panelists agreed that there is an urgent need for a law on the protection of sources. The authorities continue to ignore requests for such a law, along with demands from NGOs and media associations to cancel four criminal code articles on defamation and slander.

According to Zinatullo Ismoilov, SMT TV director and the head of Media Council, licensing broadcast media is another sore spot. "The licensing procedure itself, as well as the work and composition of the State Licensing Committee, require dramatic changes. For example, there are neither civil-society representatives nor journalists among the committee members—all are the heads of state-run radio and television companies," he reported. According to him, the licensing procedure is extremely murky; for instance, Khovar radio received its license quickly and effortlessly, whereas independent media have been waiting for years.

In all, six nongovernmental electronic media outlets are still waiting to be licensed, and the panelists were unanimous that the process of licensing electronic media outlets is not conducted within the framework of the current law. In the north, licenses to television and radio companies are considered a political tool. "Stations licensed there are expected to interfere with the signals and broadcasting from neighboring Uzbekistan," claimed Dikaev. Shonavruz Afzalshoev, editor of the independent newspaper *Kalam*, in Khorog, provided an example. Two or three years ago, JSC Pomir and the association of entrepreneurs and mountain farmers decided to create an independent radio station in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province but faced continuous delays on various pretexts.

Lola Khalikjanova, editor-in-chief of the IWPR branch in Tajikistan, reported that authorities categorically prohibited the creation of independent media in the Rasht Region in the east of the country.

Sharifzoda mentioned that the licensing procedure does not depend on the State Licensing Committee members but is mainly determined by the Television and Radio Broadcasting Law, which puts licensing under the auspices of the State Committee on Television and Radio Broadcasting.

"The situation will change only if the law is amended so that licensing is taken away from the State Committee on Television and Radio Broadcasting, and the responsibility is imposed on an independent body affiliated with the parliament or president," he opined.

Entering the mass media market is as easy as establishing any other type of business: any citizen, even one without an education in journalism, can start up a newspaper. People with no education in journalism frequently head newspapers; however, their publications are characterized by low quality or tabloid-style content, incompatible with international journalistic standards.

While it might be easy to launch a media outlet, it is extremely difficult to stay afloat and become independent in the current market, especially since political aspects of mass media activities have gained momentum in the past year. The authorities have been paying much more attention to media than to any other kind of business.

There are no special tax incentives for media businesses, except VAT (value-added tax)-free printing. The panelists also would like to see VAT on paper, printing plates, and print media distribution waived. At the same time, state-run media outlets are better off due to permanent budget funding, regularly upgraded equipment, advertising from the State Property Committee, and a so-called compulsory subscription in all public institutions. Instead of creating normal conditions for the development of printed press, panelists said, the state authorities create barriers that hinder it, with unequal conditions for state-run and independent media outlets. "State-run media outlets receive subsidies and are engaged in advertising and PR; they receive aid with subscriptions, while independent media receive nothing more than VAT-free printing," reported Karshiboev. Furthermore, the government still uses the tax authorities to pressure independent media.

The August 2011 monitoring report of the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan marked a number of violations of journalists' rights. The principal violations in 2011 include unjustified restrictions on the provision of information of public importance, or refusal to provide such information at all; unjustified summonses from law-enforcement bodies; ignoring the rights to a person's inviolability, in the form of unwarranted searches and seizures; public affronts to journalists for their professional activities, etc. The panelists noted that despite the law, journalists do not feel protected, and Tajik society does not respond to violations of their rights or persecution of journalists.

Nazarali Pirnazarov, a reporter for ca-news.org news agency, noted that a violent attack in March on Khikmatullo Saifullozoda, the editor-in-chief of *Najot*, of the Party of

According to Dikaev, Tajik journalism has entered a period of court proceedings and lawsuits. "The judiciary system punishes journalists as if they are killers or terrorists," he added.

Islamic Revival of Tajikistan, has not yet been investigated, nor have the attackers been found.

Khalikjanova believes that civil society ignores issues concerning pressure on journalists and violations of the right to expression. "Nowadays, many independent media outlets, which criticize the country's government, are considered instigators and troublemakers; therefore, court hearings of their cases do not have any significant impact inside Tajikistan," she said.

Since the beginning of the year, practically all independent media outlets have fallen under some degree of government pressure for publishing critical materials. "Undesirable" journalists were barred from press conferences on the grounds that their names were not on an approved list, their cameras and dictation machines were taken away, information was deleted, and authorities demanded retractions. The president's executive office still works according to the "pool" principle, which means that only a very small group of selected journalists—no more than 10 to 12 people—can attend press conferences of the head of state.

Abdullaev added, "Public opinion is currently divided—some people claim that free media are extremely beneficial for the state and society, whereas others maintain that free media accelerate tensions in society and may provoke an armed conflict similar to the one that took place in Tajikistan in the 1990s." He noted that this latter feeling is reflected in calls by some politicians for restrictions on freedom of expression in order to prevent violence. Vera Kulakova-Brannerud, director of independent Radio Vatan, believes that if journalists themselves do not unite and do not make an effort, civil-society and human-rights organizations will be ignorant of such persecutions and trials of journalists.

Nargis Boyahmedova, the first vice director of the national information agency Khovar, raised the issue of editorial independence in mass media. "Editors and editorial board members in the state-run media outlets are political appointees, while the editorial boards of public media outlets are appointed by their publishers and are, thus, relatively independent," she said.

All panelists agreed that they would like President Rahmon to express more political will to stop the divide of mass media outlets into state-run and independent media. The law prohibits mass media monopolization; however, more than 90 percent of electronic media outlets are state-owned. Editorial independence is protected by the law as well; however, independent media outlets that raise political issues are persecuted and threatened, noted Zarina Ergasheva, manager of an NGO training project for young journalists and a reporter for the Asia-Plus information agency.

As noted earlier, the treatment of libel under the criminal code is one of the most serious points of concern for the media. The panelists pointed to many incompetent court decisions resulting from the biased judiciary, including groundless lawsuits against *Faraj*, *Asia-Plus*, and *Ozodagon* and against journalists Ramzia Mirzobekova, Urunboy Usmonov, and Makhmadyusuf Ismoilov.

Karshiboev confirmed that officials are not using legal civil reclamation proceedings but are directly appealing to the prosecutor's office, where cases are being treated as criminal proceedings and the journalists have fewer chances to prove their innocence.

In one case, Sughd Province law-enforcement authorities detained Makhmadyusuf Ismoilov, of *Nouri Zindagi*, in November 2010. He was accused of defamation (article 135 of the Criminal Code of Tajikistan), slander (article 136), ethnic, racial, regional, or religious enmity (article 189, part 2), and extortion (article 250). In October 2011, the Taboshar city court acquitted Ismoilov of extortion, and he was released directly from the courtroom. The court imposed penalties for the other three articles at the rate of TJS 50,000 (\$10,500), but since the journalist had already spent 11 months in prison, the fine was reduced to TJS 35,000 (\$7,300). The public prosecutor demanded that Ismoilov be imprisoned for 16 years, with two years' reduction according to the amnesty law. Juma Mirzo, editor-in-chief of *Nouri Zindagi*, emphasized that the journalist was arrested for his professional activities, specifically critical articles authored by Ismoilov and published in *Nouri Zindagi* and *Istiqlol*. Both Ismoilov and Usmonov disagreed with the court's verdict and appealed to the Supreme Court of Tajikistan, which decided to leave Usmonov's verdict unaltered.

The deputy minister of the interior filed another lawsuit, against *Asia-Plus*, over an article by Ramziya Mirzobekova ("Investigation or Inquisition?"), published in December 2010. Referring to witnesses and medical-legal investigations, the article reported that the personnel of the Tajik Interior Ministry's Department for the Prevention of Organized Crime, and its branches in Sughd Province, use torture against people on remand.

In response, Anvar Tagoimurodov, then the head of the Tajik Interior Ministry's Department for the Prevention of Organized Crime, filed a lawsuit on January 20, 2011, with the Dushanbe Firdavsi District Court seeking to recover damages inflicted by *Asia-Plus* on the honor, dignity, and reputation of the law-enforcement agency he heads. The plaintiff demanded TJS 1 million (\$210,100) in compensation.

The media community took a stand in that case. In March, the NGO Coalition, in a report to a UN committee against the use of torture came to *Asia-Plus*'s defense, noting, "The civil society of Tajikistan is seriously concerned about the growing number of persecutions of journalists and mass media concerning the protection of honor, dignity, and business reputations, which might lead to self-censorship in mass media and have a negative impact on the level of freedom of speech in the country."

The National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan monitoring report also highlighted the unjustified restrictions on the provision of information of public importance, or refusal to provide such information at all, as a serious stumbling block for Tajikistan's media. Pirnazarov said that government authorities do not share all information; the priority is still given only to the state-run media outlets. "Corrupt authorities are trying to conceal their activities from the public by limiting access to information," added Khalikjanova.

On the one hand, journalists are required to provide objective and timely information; on the other, their access to socially important information is restricted. Due to the 2008 Law on the Right of Access to Information, information has become more available. Governmental bodies are now given 30—or, if necessary, 45—days to prepare their response to citizens' requests.

However, Murod, editor of *Paem* in Kurgan-Tube, described the difficulty that journalists in the regions face trying to access information. "Government bodies often refuse to provide us with information, requesting written applications. However, this requires time, and meanwhile information becomes obsolete and loses its significance," he said.

Afzalshoev expressed frustration over how much effort it takes to get access to information in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province. Clerks often say they must obtain approval from higher management. Boyahmedova added that journalists find it extremely difficult to obtain access to government documents, and the officials, who are afraid of losing their jobs, create all types of limitations in supplying information, giving interviews, and providing comments.

The panelists noted that one of the prerequisites for access to information is the journalist's professionalism. Experienced

journalists have their own sources of information, but if the authorities want to conceal something, it is impossible to receive information even from reliable sources.

Another factor limiting access to information is the cancellation of quarterly conferences, which are now only held semi-annually. "These press-conferences are the only places where a journalist can meet a head of a ministry or department in person and ask questions directly," said Ergasheva.

Dikaev believes that restrictions on access to information are thriving and the right to information access is violated, but no one is held responsible. To illustrate, state ministries and departments used to give quarterly press conferences, but the management of the Mass Media Department of the president's administration declared the press conferences "formal and inefficient," and the president issued a decree reducing them to semi-annual events.

The panelists noted that under Tajik law, officials can be held liable for failing to provide information; however, it has never happened in practice. Although this year, the Avesta news agency filed two lawsuits against the Barki Tojik Energy Holding and the Tajik Air State Unitary Aviation Enterprise for refusing to provide requested information, but the court dismissed both suits.

Each ministry keeps its own list of information to be shielded from the media, and bureaucratic procedures for relaying requests up the chain of command complicate the journalists' efforts significantly.

Pirnazarov illustrated this with an example: When security forces carried out the anti-terrorist operation in the Rasht Region in early 2011, they provided minimum information and with a significant delay. "Video coverage was supplied only by press services of security forces themselves, and it was quite subjective," he said. In another example, key officials avoided complying with the president's verbal instructions to publish tax declarations on income and property in mass media.

According to Abdullaev, journalists also failed to obtain any information about the owner of the IRS off-shore company, which controls the Dushanbe–Chanak toll highway, connecting the center of the country with the north as far as the Uzbek border. All media requests were simply ignored, and in response to any article the company promptly accused journalists of distorting information on IRS. Soon the media stopped writing about it," he said.

The panelists were unanimous that foreign correspondents in Tajikistan continue to have privileged access to information. Niyozov recalled that in the course of the antiterrorist operation in the east of the country (Rasht region), the

foreign media—ITAR-TASS, RIA Novosti, BBC, and Svoboda—broke the news.

Journalists' access to international news remains relatively open, though there are obstacles. The authorities sometimes restrict access or completely block opposition websites that publish critical materials about Tajikistan, such as with Fergana.ru, Centrasia.ru, and Arianastorm.com. Karshiboev noted that Deputy Minister of Transportation and Communications Beg Zahurov sends letters to Internet service providers, flouting Tajik law by requiring them to block certain websites.

Other obstacles include a limited electrical supply in some Tajik regions from November to February and the price of Internet services (\$25-60—quite high relative to the population's average income). Niyozov reported that he received Internet services from a provider in exchange for advertising in *Faraj*, adding, "This is great, because otherwise it would be too expensive for me to pay for the Internet."

Pirnazarov commented on blogging, noting that nothing has changed with online journalism and no blog platform has been blocked. "Nonetheless, two or three Internet service providers block access to LiveJournal and Twitter until their subscriber personally asks for access, which requires writing an application letter," he reported.

Ergasheva said officials are already taking notice of what is going on in social networks. Abdullaev noted that social network members tend to threaten those who post challenging publications and comments. "For example, three local journalists told me in November that they had received threats via Facebook from people with anonymous nicknames, e.g., 'Watch what you are writing, or else you will regret it,'" he said.

Practicing journalism does not require licensing; even professional training is not compulsory in order to start working as a journalist. "Anyone with a press card is considered a journalist. There are restrictions for nongovernmental media in terms of inclusion in the president's pool. Representatives of independent media outlets are not allowed to attend events with high-ranking officials," noted Zinatullo Ismoilov.

The state does not interfere with the selection of journalism students or their training, though Tajik National University (TNU) journalism students are not allowed to obtain work internships or jobs in the independent media. Niyozov recounted how the dean of the TNU Faculty of Journalism once entered a lecture hall and warned students not to work for *Faraj*, as the editor of that newspaper is an "enemy of the Tajik people."

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.73

Professional journalism in Tajikistan is hindered by multiple obstacles, especially the limited access to various governmental sources of information—although access has improved somewhat—and editorial interference. Obtaining interviews and comments on important issues of the day from government officials of any rank ranges from difficult to impossible, although the law protects only state secrets. The Ministry of Defense, as well as the State Committee for National Security and Central Directorate of Border Control, still consider their activities to be state secrets. Only the state-run media outlets receive information and press releases from these agencies, and only in irregular and small doses. Risks incurred from criticizing any aspect of public life make journalists resort to anonymous sources of information.

However, media outlets have started quoting experts' and analysts' opinions in their materials more often, in keeping with international standards. "Journalists are trying to write materials that comply with international standards; however, the editorial policy of their media managers often prevents them from doing so," said Pirnazarov. The panelists noted that journalists often fail to receive their source's approval for an interview before its publication, and then often distort it. "The best interviews of 2011 were published by Kayum Kayumzoda from radio Ozodi, who tackled very sensitive issues," said Kulakova-Brannerud.

Adherence to professional ethics is an extremely important problem in Tajikistan. Last year, 35 journalistic organizations

adopted the Media Code of Ethics; this year their number has grown to 53. Most notably, "The Journalist and Media Alliance organizations, which previously objected to its norms, adopted the Media Code of Ethics," reported Zinatullo Ismoilov. The Code has not been adopted by the major Tajik-language opposition newspapers *Nogoh* and *SSSR*.

He also said that the Media Council conducted 14 meetings in different regions of the country with representatives of state-run media outlets, including television, which came under heavy criticism concerning news coverage and excessive glorification of the government that contradicts the Code of Ethics.

One of the major goals of the Media Council, according to its member Karshiboev, is the struggle for more active observance of journalistic ethics and solidarity among journalists when they are persecuted. "Not all media outlets that have signed the Code are really observing it—for example, *Oila*, whose reporter Lenura Mustafaeva falsified an interview with the detained BBC journalist Urunboy Usmonov," according to Karshiboev. Zinatullo Ismoilov commented that the head of *Oila*, Sharif Khamdamov, is a member of the Media Council.

The panelists noted that many journalists still violate ethical norms, and overall, this year the Council has examined 14 cases, five of which involve plagiarism. Plagiarism, as well as hidden public relations, is thriving. "The volume of advertising, commissioned articles, and hidden PR in mass media is growing from one year to another," said Afzalshoev. Zinatullo Ismoilov added that the creative activity of journalists should differ from the business side, as written in the Code of Ethics, and if such materials exist, they should be marked. "There are cases in the regions, especially in the Sughd Province, where journalists request information from commercial entities and are invited to come at the end of the month when there is money or food so that they can be paid for the information," he added.

Dikaev said he had visited the Shuroabad Region, along with reporters from the state television, and after the shooting was over, each of them was given a sack of apples, meat, and money. "Officials, especially low-ranking ones, enjoy being shown on television and are ready to pay for that," he said.

Both overt censorship and self-censorship stifle reporting. For example, regional authorities disapprove of local journalists' working for central media and monitor their publications, as seen in Ismoilov's case from Sughd Province; his critical articles were published in an independent newspaper in the capital city," said Sotiev. The panelists also recalled the case of *Paikon*, which was closed because it published critical materials. In another case, when *Faraj* published a critical

JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

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

article on cotton growing in Tajikistan that mentioned Deputy Prime Minister Murodali Alimardon, Alimardon's team simply bought out all 5,000 copies of the paper.

There are many motivations for self-censorship, though. Sharifzoda claimed that editors will censor critical articles on the activities of tax authorities, for fear of inviting an audit. "Even if all the documents are fine, the tax authorities will find something to pick at," he noted. Businesses also exert power over the media. "A media outlet will never criticize its own advertiser or sponsor," reported Pirnazarov, describing a case when a founder fired a journalist who dared to criticize an advertiser—one of the biggest banks in the country.

The panelists noted that Tajik media are wary of publishing critical articles about the president and his family, the speakers of Houses of Parliament, activities of TALCO, the State Committee for National Security, tax authorities, and corruption in the higher echelons of power. State-run television also tries not to show accidents, military clashes, and natural disasters.

According to Niyozov, the situation worsened after a lawsuit against three newspapers (*Asia-Plus*, *Faraj*, and *Ozodagon*). "There are some topics that I, as an editor, either delete or change considerably because they are dangerous. And this is because during those three months when the newspaper was not published, since publishing houses refused to do so, no one wrote an 'obituary' about us. No one came to our defense except for the 'September 29th Committee,' which we founded ourselves. And there are topics we do not touch on at all," he said, including the president's family, his relatives, and the Ministry of Defense.

However, the panelists noted that social networks have played a significant role in making journalists much braver. Kulakova-Brannerud said that Facebook overturned the notion of freedom of expression in Tajikistan. "People actively speak and express their opinions only in closed and secret groups, and this will impact further development of the freedom of expression in journalism," she added. The panelists noted that many newspapers started to quote Facebook discussions, whereas local political analysts began conducting online conferences on the Internet.

Another problem related to the development of professional journalism is the pay level. According to data presented by the panelists, salaries and royalties in the state-run media are especially low and have not changed since 2009-2010 despite the severe financial crisis and a sharp rise in prices for food and sources of energy. Dikaev and Sotiev noted that regional journalists accept meat, flour, rice, and vegetable oil as a fee for regional press coverage.

"Not all media outlets that have signed the Code are really observing it—for example, Oila, whose reporter Lenura Mustafaeva falsified an interview with the detained BBC journalist Urunboy Usmonov," according to Karshiboev.

For state-run and private media outlets, salaries differ. "Salaries in the Khovar National Information Agency are paid from the state budget, and this is definitely not enough. Reporters usually earn \$140, but royalties and bonuses are not paid," reported Boyahmedova, who said that is why three of the agency's 11 staff members have left. She added that the director himself now quietly allows them to look for supplementary income in other media outlets. On the other hand, state-run media employees sometimes receive favorable housing benefits, and those living in the periphery sometimes receive a plot of land free of charge.

"State television journalists receive \$100-150 for shooting a 30-second coverage for a news broadcast, while other cameramen earn a bit on the side at private shootings, such as weddings, concerts, and banquets. All regional branches of television have become independent legal bodies and work on a self-supporting basis," Zinatullo Ismoilov said.

Niyozov, in turn, said that at *Faraj*, a journalist's salary depends on his or her work. "There are journalists who earn \$100, but there are those who earn \$350 as well. Some accept payments from advertising and paid journalistic investigations," he reported.

The panelists noted that all journalists, including those from independent media outlets, work in two or three places and also write for Internet portals. On average, a journalist in the independent media earns \$150-500. The panelists noted that, due to good salaries and working conditions, the best Tajik journalists work as local correspondents for foreign electronic and print media in Tajikistan.

In terms of the balance between news and entertainment, Sharifzoda noted that musical entertainment dominates radio and television, with concerts lasting for two to three hours. "Information and analytical programs are made only to cover the president's administration. News coverage includes such standard, safe topics as preparation for the winter, cotton harvest, and anti-drug war," he said.

On state-run television, news programming occupies no more than 25 percent of airtime, and that figure dips to 20 percent for private radio and television. "Our television channels

Dikaev said he had visited the Shuroabad Region, along with reporters from the state television, and after the shooting was over, each of them was given a sack of apples, meat, and money. "Officials, especially low-ranking ones, enjoy being shown on television and are ready to pay for that," he said.

lose the battle for viewers to satellite television, since Tajik television programs do not interest the Tajik public," Zinatullo Ismoilov said.

From a technical standpoint, the panelists noted that most of the media outlets in Tajikistan are poorly equipped. Pirnazarov reported that not only local but also foreign media accredited in Tajikistan lack modern recording equipment. "Most reporters, working for both foreign and local media, take pictures with cheap digital cameras or mobile phones," he added.

Sotiev reported that in the Khatlon Province, journalists have no printing equipment, such as scanners, printers, and risographs, and they have to buy photo cameras at their own expense. The panelists noted that the shortage of equipment results in delayed information, though some media outlets, which have their own websites, are trying to work around the clock. For instance, two *Asia-Plus* journalists have round-the-clock Internet access paid for by their employer so that they can promptly post news even from home," reported Ergasheva.

Kulakova-Brannerud reported that practically all FM radio stations use obsolete equipment. "Only the central state-owned radio stations regularly receive modern broadcasting equipment, and no expense is spared for it by the government," she said.

As for specialized coverage, Khalikjanova said there are journalists who specialize in certain topics. "However, as a rule, no editorial board and no media outlets try to train their journalists in that. Perhaps they do not have the time or resources for this, and this remains a problem for Tajik journalism. Specialization is not emphasized while they are studying at the university, and sponsoring organizations do not pay attention to this, either," she said. The panelists noted that the Tajik media desperately need training for multimedia journalists, economic analysts, and legal education experts, with further internships with their colleagues in other countries.

Abdullaev pointed out that the lack of high-quality specialized journalism in Tajikistan also stems from the education of other specialists. For example, in his view, economists, who graduate from the institutions of higher learning, do not possess enough theoretical knowledge to provide media with high-quality comments. The panelists believe that specialization is further hindered by the fact that there are no more than three to five journalists on each editorial staff.

Still, Tajikistan's journalists produced more than 15 investigative reports on social topics, economics, and human rights in 2011. The panelists noted that the most daring socially significant materials, particularly in the genre of investigative reporting, are published in Tajik-language newspapers *Nigokh*, *Faraj*, *Ozodagon* and the Russian-language *Asia-Plus*. Quite a few investigative articles addressed such problems as torture, religious freedom, and politics. Niyozov added, "Our Center for Investigative Journalism turns to a topic only after having thoroughly researched all of its aspects. This year we have conducted 10 economic investigations—such as apartments, plots of land, corporate raiding. There is a demand for political issues, but we are trying to be careful about it."

Five or six years ago, Niyozov continued, his staff conducted investigations for free; however, journalistic investigations are quite expensive, and the staff has to be paid. "For many people offended by the law, we are the last resort after their fruitless appeals to the head of state and courts of all levels," noted Niyozov. According to Karshiboev, though, paid investigations and commissioned articles cannot be called journalism. "There are funds, including international ones, that support journalistic investigations," he said.

Finally, the panelists said that journalistic investigations are not always conducted according to ethical norms, nor do journalists always check the facts; this leads to conflicts with the law and authorities. The panelists called for more training in proper investigative techniques as a way to address these shortcomings.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.99

Tajikistan's media community expanded this year, including the launch of a new informational website—ozodagon.com. Two radio stations have been registered, one of which is affiliated with the National Information Agency Khovar, and *Asia-Plus* radio has received a license for broadcasting all over the country. The north of the country now has Sadon

Khujand and Sadon Jamol radio in Khujand, as well as TV-5 television station in Kanibadam. In print, the Ministry of Culture has registered 10 newspapers and five magazines. Five newspapers are trade; the rest are private. Two are published in Dushanbe, two in the Sughd Province, and one in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province.

Only one newspaper, *Imruz News*, is published daily, while all others are issued weekly. The overall circulation of all newspapers published in Tajikistan does not exceed 150,000 to 200,000 copies. According to the Press Department of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Tajikistan, 65 state-run newspapers are regularly published in the regions. Their circulation does not exceed 500 to 1,000 copies. As in 2010, only *Dieri Tursunzoda* (Tursunzoda city) with a circulation of 4,000 to 4,500 copies, *Haqiqat Sughd*, from Sughd Province, and *Kulyab Pravda* each with a circulation of 3,000 to 5,500 copies remain profitable. At the same time, there is an enormous demand for news in the country, and newspapers are popular.

As for broadcast media, most residents of big cities possess satellite dishes, and television—both broadcast and satellite—has opened up awareness of foreign news. “Satellite dishes have become commonplace, even in the most remote regions of the country, because local television is too boring to watch,” said Afzalshoev. There are five independent television stations in Tajikistan: three in the Sughd Province, one in Tursunzade city of the Khatlon Province, and one in Dushanbe. The state-owned regional television and radio

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.

“Later on, I was told that intelligence agencies had studied these video materials, and it is known that Facebook activities are being monitored,” he said, adding that he suspects that the authorities plant spies connected with the state authorities to be active in social media.

studios have weak and obsolete technical equipment in comparison with these independent stations.

Despite the popularity of newspapers, the panelists noted that in sheer quantity online information sources overshadow all other sources of information, and the news-hunting public resorts to the Internet more and more often. According to the Tajik Association of Internet Service Providers, there are about 1,600,000 Internet users in the country. There are 10 mobile-phone companies and the same number of Internet service providers. Six million people are mobile-phone service subscribers, and 20–25 percent use mobile Internet.

And yet, the panelists noted a reduction in the level of news sources that provide the population of Tajikistan with timely and objective information. “Today, only a few newspapers and Internet sites are trying to present opinions of all the interested parties in their materials. However, even in those cases when a journalist has collected enough evidence, the editor might reject the article due to self-censorship—either for personal reasons or that of the newspaper,” said Sotiev. The panelists did point to a couple of examples where the independent media gave diversified coverage of socially significant events. “For example, *Faraj* presented Putin’s idea concerning the Eurasian Union as beneficial for Tajikistan, whereas *Nigoh* expressed the opposite opinion in its articles,” Sharifzoda added.

Furthermore, during the past year, the role of social networks has grown, and if in 2009 they were mainly using *odnoklassniki.ru*, now most are using Facebook. An estimated 25,000 users from Tajikistan are now registered in this network, and about one million Tajiks per day enter various international networks. Although this trend is still weak, it exists: social networks have begun affecting offline life. Active Internet users turn to Facebook and other social networks to express their civic-mindedness, as well as social and economic problems disturbing Tajik society.

News is not yet distributed by SMS. However, many media outlets encourage their readers to report newsworthy events

that they see via SMS and have opened a special section, “Public Reporter,” on their websites and pages.

Despite multiple declarations by the state authorities on the necessity of actively developing the “electronic government,” the government sites do not yet provide governmental services online. “Their sites are mostly static, not informative enough, seldom updated, and filled with information that is relevant only to a narrow circle of specialists in this or that field,” said Ergasheva. As a result, common users from Tajikistan do not visit those websites, because they cannot receive any online governmental services and feedback. “Nevertheless, Internet-savvy Tajiks feel the need to contact the authorities via social networks,” said Niyozov.

Civil society, with support from international organizations, is trying to expand public access to a broad spectrum of information. News resource centers, offering periodical publications and Internet access, have opened up in the regions. With the support of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), information access centers have been established in the regions. The Republican Press Center is very popular among journalists. Due to financial problems, the Media Resource Center in Dushanbe, which used to offer free Internet access and had a library on journalism, newspaper archives, and access to news feeds from various news agencies, was closed by the OSCE at the beginning of the year.

Additionally, Internet service providers are still restricting access to the oppositional websites centrsia.ru, tjknews.com, and Fergana.ru. The panelists noted that during the past two years, Internet blogs and social networks have become a more and more popular platform for journalists, politicians, and other politically active citizens to present their alternative opinions to those of the government. “However, during the past year the authorities have started to pay more attention to civil journalism and social networks and have tried to limit the flow of online information,” reported Pirnazarov. “So far, these attempts do not go beyond declarations of a potential threat; however, in the near future, access to some social networks is likely to be either blocked or severely controlled,” noted Abdullaev.

Karshiboev noted that people in social networks are less careful than those in print media. “During the trial of the pilots Sadovnichiy and Rudenko, there were comments on Facebook calling for the overthrow of the government and insulting the president of Tajikistan, which is legally punishable according to article 189 of the criminal code,” he said.

Abdullaev reported that during a flash-mob, which gathered near the building of Barki Tojik Energy Holding in February 2011 to protest energy shortages, 10 out of 15 participants

had photo and video cameras and recorded everything that was happening there. “Later on, I was told that intelligence agencies had studied these video materials, and it is known that Facebook activities are being monitored,” he said, adding that he suspects that the authorities plant spies connected with the state authorities to be active in social media.

Furthermore, Internet access, especially in remote regions, also depends on technical issues, especially on the electrical supply schedule. That affects television as well; panelists noted that satellite television has become more popular in rural areas, but due to electrical outages, only newspapers remain a reliable source of information there.

A low standard of living—over half of the population is considered poor—means that not every family owns a personal computer. Furthermore, Internet services in Tajikistan are expensive because the Internet service providers rent satellite channels; the monthly cost, which varies from \$25 to \$70, depending on the provider and mobile-telephone operator, is beyond the financial reach of most residents. The price of Internet services may increase after the authorities introduce a 3 percent value-added tax (VAT), which customers will paid for.

According to the panelists, no more than 18 percent of the population (1.6 million) has access to the Internet, and that includes those who visit Internet cafés. “Another problem is the lack of content in the Tajik language. It is very scarce and is mainly presented on the governmental sites as regulatory and part of a legal framework or is generated by news agencies,” said Zinatullo Ismoilov. According to Kulakova-Brannerud, the information gap between young people, who know Russian and English, and those who understand only Tajik, is growing.

While literacy rates improve every year, not everyone can afford to buy newspapers because their price went up several times this year (15 percent during 2011). The price of newspapers is relatively high—TJS 1.5 to TJS 2.0 (\$0.35–0.40)—and Zinatullo Ismoilov added, “The further from the capital, the higher the price; for instance, in Garm (in the east of the country) newspapers published in the capital are TJS 2 to TJS 3 [\$0.40–0.63] more expensive than in Dushanbe.”

Afzalshoev reported that newspapers from Dushanbe are delivered to Khorog with a two-day delay and are sold for TJS 1 (about \$0.22) more than their retail price. “The national newspapers are delivered irregularly—two to three times a month, even to subscribers,” he said. Russian and other foreign newspapers are generally unaffordable because of their exorbitant cost, “except for *Argumenty i Fakty*, *AIF-Zdorovie*, and *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, which are printed in Tajikistan by Oila media company,” reported

Kulakova-Brannerud. Given that the minimum pension and wage is about \$15.00 a month, people still choose necessities over newspapers.

Furthermore, Karshiboev noted that the rise in prices of paper, plates, and printing dropped circulation of even the most popular newspapers about 15–20 percent. In the regions, due to technical and financial constraints, most of them come out two or three times a month.

Abdullaev believes that Tajikistan's state-run media fail to meet the standard in terms of providing the public with access to objective information. "These media reflect only one viewpoint, that of the government and state authorities, and reject any alternative information," he said. Afzalshoev agreed, commenting, "The viewpoints of the opposition are seldom presented. Although independent media do express various opinions, they are often very careful in commenting on events," he added. Dikaev agreed, noting, "The state-owned media publish one and the same viewpoint, just one truth—the government's—and if you open one of those newspapers, you will see exactly the same as in any other state-owned paper."

On the broadcast side, Abdullaev said that the Tajik national radio and television present information from the government's point of view. "The 20th anniversary of Tajik independence was celebrated by showing a television series about those years—everything from President Rahmon's viewpoint," he added. Broadcasting of all local television channels is still regularly interrupted to show important political events, especially those related to the president's travels and speeches.

Zinatullo Ismoilov added that during the president's official speeches and visits, all four channels of the state-owned television show nothing but these events. "Then, these programs are rebroadcast for several days by all four channels in turn," he said. According to Sharifzoda, "Viewers call the first national channel of the Tajik TV 'The State Philharmonic Society,' Safina channel is a mix of culture and entertainment, Jahonnamo is a clone of Russian Vesti-24, and only the children's channel, Bahoriston TV, fulfills its mission of educating and the upbringing of children."

Ten information agencies are registered in Tajikistan: the independent Asia-Plus, Avesta, Varorud, Interpress-Service, Zarafshan-Times, TOJNEWS, Simonews, Paem, Pamir-Media, and the state-run Khovar. However, only Asia-Plus, Avesta, TOJNEWS, ruzgor.tj, and pressa.tj are really working, some panelists said, and Asia-Plus is a leader among them, as it is trying to cover news from the whole country. However, regarding Khovar, Boyahmedova noted, "Although our agency, Khovar, is state-owned, we do not engage in PR

Afzalshoev reported that newspapers from Dushanbe are delivered to Khorog with a two-day delay and are sold for TJS 1 (about \$0.22) more than their retail price. "The national newspapers are delivered irregularly—two to three times a month, even to subscribers," he said.

of the ruling People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan and are independent of it." Three agencies—Pamir-Media, Khatlon-Press, and Varorud—were shut down due to financial problems (their grant funding came to an end).

Currently almost all newspapers receive news from local information agencies either free of charge or for a nominal fee. On the other hand, BBC and Ozodi subscribe to information from agencies' news feeds. In this context, Pirnazarov noted that all newspapers reprint the same news, but often without references or hyperlinks. "This is especially true for information obtained from newsfeeds of the leading international agencies, such as Reuters, BBC, RIA News, and ITAR-TASS," he added. Zinatullo Ismoilov noted that when electronic media cover international events, they use the services of such international information agencies as Reuters, RIA News, ITAR-TASS, BBC, and Ozodi, whereas print media prefer to obtain information from the Tajik services of BBC, Ozodi, and IrNA (Iran).

Electronic media produce few programs of their own, except for brief news, entertainment programs, concerts, and talk shows. Zinatullo Ismoilov added that independent television channels have few original news programs because they are extremely expensive to create.

All four channels of the national television station use only information provided by the state-run Khovar agency, but while preparing international news coverage, they use fragments of news shown on Russian channels, Euronews, and CNN.

The panelists noted that all FM radio stations in Tajikistan have a similar broadcasting format and can be distinguished only by the anchor's voices during short news programs. Most of the airtime goes to music (including that ordered by the public), congratulations, and quizzes. Only Radio Imruz, which broadcasts in Tajik, specializes in news and analytical programs.

However, Karshiboev mentioned the wonderful work of television and radio stations in the Sughd Province. "They are much better than television broadcasts from the capital. They present interesting, analytical programs and their own news

round-ups, though they do not devote enough time to the life in the region," he reported.

Regarding the transparency of ownership, the panelists noted that information consumers, except for a certain circle of media employees, do not seem to care who owns media outlets; rather, they are interested in receiving timely information on current events.

The panelists believe that the openness of information on who owns print media is confirmed by references to the founders in the newspapers' logos. For example, readers and journalists are well aware of the fact that Orieno-media holding company, which includes a newspaper and radio station with the same name, belongs to Oriyon Bank's chair, the president's brother-in-law Hasan Asadullozoda. And, last year, an obscure media magnate emerged in Tajikistan—Umed Sattorov, who allegedly owns seven newspapers. Officially, he has a publishing house, Mushfiqi, that prints more than 25 newspapers, invitations, postcards, business cards, *Caravan Megapolis* newspaper, and *Dilkusho* magazine—with a total circulation of more than 25,000 copies," reported Niyozov.

According to Tajik law, foreign nationals are not allowed to found media outlets. Large commercial media corporations still avoid showing themselves and their interests openly in Tajikistan, while foreign capital is present in media in the form of grants from international donor organizations.

As far as coverage of social and minority issues is concerned, the panelists believe that such problems as gender, sexual minorities, and religious minorities receive either no or very little media attention. "Perhaps one of the reasons lies in the Islamic mentality, which sometimes considers these topics dirty and taboo," added Abdullaev. Sharifzoda believes that interests of national minorities are not represented in either the media or parliament. "If newspapers do write about national minorities, they do not mention problems but rather focus on cultural events," said Abdullaev.

Due to the poverty of the population and, to a lesser extent, a lack of information, there are almost no media outlets in the minority languages (except for Russian). There are very few national minority media outlets and only about 20 newspapers—mainly local publications in the Russian, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen languages. In addition, the first national and Jahonnamo channels present news in Uzbek, Arabic, and English.

Uzbek ethnic groups have a wider choice of information in their mother tongue: in addition to local media, there is a national governmental newspaper in Uzbek, *Halk Ovozi*, as well as the nongovernmental newspapers *Dustlik* and

Zamondosh. Besides, those living close to the Uzbek border can easily view television programs from Uzbekistan, as the signal is stable there. Most residents of Sughd Province prefer to watch Uzbek television. There is also a popular Uzbek-language newspaper, *Tong*, and two magazines in Uzbek.

Tajiks with satellite antennas prefer to watch Iranian and Russian television programs, as well as Euronews and BBC. *Karategin*, in Tajik, Russian, and Kyrgyz, has been published in the Rasht region since 2009. However, the panelists mentioned that this year, a newspaper in Turkmen language stopped being published in Jilikul, in the south of the country, where Turkmens comprise almost 100 percent of the population. "There is a biweekly newspaper in Kyrgyz in Murgab, but it is published in Kyrgyzstan; there is also a newspaper in Shugnan (one of the languages of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province)," said Afzalshoev.

According to the panelists, national minority media are absolutely free and can develop without any limitations in Tajikistan. However, discrimination does exist in the higher echelons of power and parliament, where neither Russians, nor Uzbeks, nor other nationalities are represented. As for media, Khalikjanova mentioned that Russian-language newspapers do not reflect the problems of the Russian-speaking population of Tajikistan.

The panelists also commented on the low level of interregional information exchange. People in Dushanbe are often unaware of what is going on in neighboring cities and villages just a few kilometers away. And, neither state-run nor independent print and electronic media post correspondents in central Tajikistan or abroad (except for Asia-Plus in Washington, Moscow, and London and Khovar in Moscow, Ankara, and Istanbul).

All panelists agree that the division of media outlets into state-run and independent has polarized opinions. They believe the time has come to create a nationwide public radio and television, which will present information from all the provinces and regions of Tajikistan.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.17

The mass media in Tajikistan are transitioning to better-quality journalism, satisfying the demand of the market for diverse information, and becoming more successful businesses. Nevertheless, the panelists think that it is too early to claim that media outlets have already become efficient businesses.

Private media are too strapped financially to spend on efficient business management. More than half of the population lives below the poverty line, and the market is dominated by the state, which makes it harder for private media to compete in the market. Corruption is widespread; it is believed that most businesses still conceal the real volume of their sales and revenues to increase the appearance of profits. Concealing income has become a universal strategy of Tajik businesses, and the print media are no exception, often masking their revenues by publishing hidden advertising, understating their circulation in tax reports, and printing unrecorded copies.

The state-run media, meanwhile, live comfortably on government support, with a bloated workforce, and do not feel the need to draft business plans, plan capital investment, and engage in marketing. The panelists feel that for the most part, the state-run media show little regard for taxpayers' money.

Regional media outlets do not have business plans whatsoever; they subsist on the state budget, advertisements of state-run enterprises, or subscription, which is often compulsory. Subscriptions to two governmental newspapers, *Jumhuriyat* and *Sadoi Mardun*, cost TJS 50,000 (\$10,500), while subscription to the newspaper of the ruling People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT), *Minbari Khalk*, costs only TJS 35,000 (\$7,350).

The panelists believe that under such circumstances, it is too early to speak about compliance of the media outlets' accounting and financial policy to international standards, although some private media come closer than others.

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.

Niyozov reported that his advertisers claim they are often afraid of advertising in the oppositional Tajik-language media, including his Faraj newspapers. "They often just give me money as financial aid, record it as advertising, but ask me not to publish it," he said.

"Although Asia Plus does have its own management and marketing service, its activities are not efficient enough," said Ergasheva. She noted that this media holding company successfully sells subscriptions to analytical materials, reviews, and photographs. Niyozov said that some newspapers, including his own *Faraj*, do make business plans. However, as he noted, they cannot afford to employ a manager, as their means barely cover the price of printing.

Most private media subsist on circulation revenues as well as advertising, ever-declining grants, non-journalistic activities (such as printing, or selling photo and video coverage to foreign news agencies and newspapers), and support from their founders. Only one large financial corporation, Oriyon International, has its own media business. It owns two radio stations, a daily newspaper, a monthly economic magazine, and an advertising unit. Asia-Plus media group has two newspapers, an FM radio station, a production studio, and the first glossy magazine in the country, *VIP-Zone*; it also provides publishing services. Oila has two newspapers, a publishing house, and an information and advertising agency. Charkhi Gardun owns a publishing house and four newspapers. All of them successfully work in the media market and turn a healthy profit.

Regional media draw their main income from publishing personal ads and commissioned articles. Print media also draw funds from advertising and paid commercials of governmental bodies, banks, and business enterprises allied with the government, as well as a "voluntary-compulsory" subscription in all state-run institutions, enterprises, establishments, schools, and universities, mainly at the expense of governmental funds. This is ultimately a minor contribution, though; by way of comparison, *Faraj*, a popular independent socio-political newspaper, has about 600 subscribers, whereas *Minbari Khalk*, the press organ of the ruling PDPT, has about 35,000 subscribers.

Although advertising is the main source of media revenue in other countries, it has not yet become a pillar for Tajik media. For most media, especially those in remote areas, advertising is not the most important source of income, as advertisers

“Circulation figures for independent newspapers do not always correspond to reality, as the owners commonly disguise income and real circulation figures,” said Niyozov.

are deterred by the low circulation and lackluster potential for profits. Very few independent newspapers and television channels post advertisements. In contrast, advertising is highly profitable for state-run media, which lure advertisers with their high circulation.

Three national television channels, two governmental newspapers, and four to five private newspapers sport the largest volume of advertising. One of these newspapers, *Asia-Plus*, is one of the most profitable print media outlets in the republic. The newspaper is issued weekly and has 48 pages, 12 to 14 of which are devoted to advertising.

Advertising flows mostly to media outlets that publish and broadcast in the capital and large provincial cities, and at any rate, it is declining. According to a survey conducted by the Zerkalo (Mirror) NGO in September 2011, Tajik enterprises' investments in advertising have declined by \$160,000 and now comprise about \$1.17 million. The volume of advertising on television and radio has decreased by 16 percent and has increased by 1 percent in print media.

The top advertisers in the market are mobile-phone operators (18 percent), followed by food (13 percent) and pharmaceuticals (13 percent). The most prominent advertisers, including a handful of mobile-communication companies, TALCO Aluminum Company, and the Board of Trade, do not place advertisements according to the principles of a market-driven economy but rather in compliance with the political will of governmental authorities. Niyozov reported that his advertisers claim they are often afraid of advertising in the oppositional Tajik-language media, including his *Faraj* newspapers. “They often just give me money as financial aid, record it as advertising, but ask me not to publish it,” he said.

Tajik media usually work with advertisers directly, without employing advertisement agencies. There are only six advertising agencies in Tajikistan, and they charge high fees for their services; therefore, advertisers prefer to deal directly with the media. There are advertising departments in all four channels of the national television as well as in Oila, Charkhi Gardun, Oriyon-Media, and Radio Vatan,” reported Kulakova-Brannerud. At the local level, although panelists expressed concern that local goods and services are not advertised enough, the quality of advertisements produced by

local television stations is extremely low. Therefore, it mostly broadcasts advertisements from Russian, Turkish, and Iranian television channels translated into the Tajik language.

The panelists noted that advertisers prefer television, as it is more accessible than newspapers and other media. However, well-known foreign brands prefer advertising on banners and billboards. Outdoor advertising is also widely used in the regions, and it is especially popular since the TV and Radio Committee increased advertising broadcast prices in 2010. Mobile-phone companies are currently attempting to tap the new market of SMS advertising, sending adverts and greetings.

The Law on Advertising, which governs advertising in the media, has been in effect since 2003 and presents a different attitude to state-run and private media outlets. State-run electronic media may devote no more than 10 percent of their daily broadcasting time to advertising, whereas the cap for private media is no more than 30 percent. The volume of advertising in the state-run print media should not exceed 25 percent, with no more than 40 percent in nongovernmental periodicals.

Although most regional media outlets are not profitable and subsist on international grants, dying out when the grants dry up, two radio stations in the Sughd Province, Tiroz and SM-1, are profitable enterprises due to advertising and commercials—but the price is that advertising takes up to 50 percent of their broadcasting time.

The government continues to support all four national television channels and the state-run print media, providing them with funding and upgrading their technical infrastructure, while judicial opportunities granted by Tajik law on providing the mass media with government subsidies (article 4, The Mass Media Operation; The Law of the Republic of Tajikistan on the Press and Other Mass Media) have not been realized in practice. Nongovernmental regional television stations and print media, however, often receive small subsidies from the budget of their local administrations.

Advertising and marketing surveys do not take readers' needs and interests into account, as print media measure their success only in terms of circulation and sales. The panelists also mentioned that Internet meters and website hit counters are not always accurate, as they count the number of clicks instead of the number of unique visitors to the website itself. Some Internet media, however, conduct polls of their readers' opinions on various political and social issues.

Most advertisers are not able to determine the optimal advertising partners among media outlets and typically just choose the best-known media that boast the biggest circulation. However, all panelists noted that circulation figures of the print media are often underestimated in

order to reduce taxes. "Circulation figures for independent newspapers do not always correspond to reality, as the owners commonly disguise income and real circulation figures," said Niyozov.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.69

There are no well-established trade associations in the media sphere, although there are several media holding companies that defend the interests of their own publications. As noted in last year's MSI, there is an Association of Entrepreneurs of the Republic of Tajikistan, but no media companies belong.

However, there are signs of growing interest in media trade associations, with two new organizations forming. In mid-December 2010, the leaders of the independent print media, supported by OSCE, founded the Association of Media Publishers and Distributors (Matbuot); however, this association has not yet begun working because of disagreements among the founders. In addition, the Association of Audiovisual Production Distributors, which includes 15 television and radio companies and production studios, was founded in August 2011 to protect the interests of private electronic media and production studios. These associations are built on membership fees and grants for special projects.

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.

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The number of professional associations for journalists has grown to 14, as well as one creative union, up from 11 reported in last year's MSI. Current associations include the Union of Journalists, NANSMIT, the Media Council, the Media Alliance, the Society of Independent Electronic Media, the Fund for the Defense and Remembrance of Journalists, the Journalists' Public Association, the Association of Publicists, the Association of Sports Journalists, the Center for Investigative Journalism, the Association of Teachers of Journalism, the Association of Professional Journalists of Sughd Province, and the Association of Television Journalists. Journalists do not have their own trade union.

The participants noted a significant interest in the activities of media-support institutions, especially this year, when the pressure from the government on the oppositional media has increased—as the lawsuits against *Asia Plus*, *Faraj*, and *Ozodagon* demonstrate.

The Media Council, in accordance with its statutes, dealt with issues related to violations of ethical norms and plagiarism, in a bit to keep the cases out of the courtrooms. "NANSMIT, the Media Alliance Association of Tajik journalists, and the Journalists' Public Association conducted several joint events aimed at the legal education and protection of journalists, access to sources of information, and actions for the protection of freedom of speech," reported Sharifzoda. "All of these associations efficiently protected their colleagues who faced problems with the authorities, including lawsuits," said Pirnazarov. "Apart from giving legal advice, NANSMIT has provided legal assistance to the journalists Mirzobekova and Ismoilov, who faced lawsuits this year," said Kulakova-Brannerud. The organization also monitors violations of journalists' rights, freedom of speech, and access to information. Niyozov added, "The Union of Journalists, which clearly used to be under the government's control, has lately become more independent of their opinion and started signing applications defending journalists persecuted by the authorities and demanding freedom of expression and access to information," said Niyozov.

The Union of Journalists of Tajikistan, NANSMIT, and the Media-Alliance also initiated a series of roundtables to discuss

“It is virtually impossible to change the state-approved programs and standards of journalists’ education under current circumstances. The standards used here now are those of the second generation of the MSU Faculty of Journalism, whereas MSU itself is already teaching with fourth-rate standards—we are falling far behind,” said Sharifzoda.

the Draft Law on the Right of Access to Information and amendments to the Law on the Press and Other Mass Media.

However, the panelists expressed concern that this year, not all journalists showed solidarity with their colleagues, who were persecuted by the authorities, and not all of them signed petitions in their support. “This especially concerns those who work for the state-run media,” said Boyahmedova.

As for NGOs and international organizations that support media freedom and provide journalists with legal aid, the panelists mentioned Khoma, the Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, Nota Bene, and the TajFEN network. In addition, an NGO network has united around the goal of promoting the freedom of expression in Tajikistan, including the Bureau of Human Rights and Rule of Law, the Civil Internet Policy Initiative Social Fund, the Union of Journalists of Tajikistan, the Media Council of Tajikistan, NANSMIT, NGO Khoma, the Journalists’ Public Association, the IWPR representative in Tajikistan, and the Tajik Association of Independent Electronic Media. However, the activities of NGOs are mainly directed toward centers of provinces and seldom deal with the regions of central Tajikistan.

The panelists also confirmed that local NGOs are cooperating with international organizations that support freedom of speech, including the European Union, embassies of the United States and the United Kingdom, Internews Network, the Eurasia Foundation, the National Endowment for Democracy, the Department for International Development, and the Soros Foundation.

However, despite their attempts, a number of NGOs have not succeeded in establishing an independent trade union that would protect journalists’ rights. All panelists agree with the opinions expressed in previous years that Tajik journalists urgently need to organize an independent trade union to ensure the protection of journalists and resolve their conflicts with employers, including problems within editorial offices.

Karshiboev noted that the government’s reluctance to cooperate with media associations impedes the protection of independent media and promotion of freedom of speech. At the same time, there are unofficial levers of pressure on media associations and NGOs, mainly tax audits. “In May of this year, the authorities closed an NGO, the Bureau of Journalistic Investigations and Linguistic Expertise, only because in [the director’s] registration documents he failed to indicate the floor of the newspaper-magazine complex where his organization was located,” Niyozov said.

The participants expressed their concern about the professional education of journalists, which they feel has stagnated for several years. Every year, more than 200 journalists graduate, but the level of their training is low. There are eight institutions that educate journalists, three of which are in the capital city, but so far there are no private institutions for journalists. “It is virtually impossible to change the state-approved programs and standards of journalists’ education under current circumstances. The standards used here now are those of the second generation of the MSU Faculty of Journalism, whereas MSU itself is already teaching with fourth-rate standards—we are falling far behind,” said Sharifzoda. “More than 80 percent of their education is theory,” he added.

However, the panelists noted that the qualifications and technical competence of the graduates are extremely low. “Many of them cannot use computers; their literacy level is low—I just wonder how they managed to get accepted and to study for all these years,” added Sharifzoda. As noted in last year’s MSI, there are concerns that their training does not include enough basic computer skills or specific software and training for online journalism (just 36 hours in a year). “Some schools and regional universities still teach with MS-DOS programs, which were used before Windows in the 1990s,” reported Abdullaev. Dikaev thinks that another problem is the absence of textbooks and learning aids; Sharifzoda said that only the faculties of journalism at RTSU, TNA, and Khujand State University are more or less technically equipped and have basic educational facilities.

Nazarali expressed concern over the adequacy of training, given the trend toward multimedia journalism, noting that it is extremely difficult to shoot video and take pictures at the same time; therefore, journalists need special training to become multimedia reporters, he said.

Kulakova-Brannerud said that the Faculty of Journalism of the Russian-Tajik Slavonic University does have a specialization for broadcast and print journalists. “These subjects are taught by experienced journalists who work in the newspapers, on television and radio; however, students find it hard to find a job after graduation,” she added.

The panelists also noted a negative trend, which is growing from year to year: practically all institutions of higher education that teach future journalists are trying to prevent them from working with the independent media. “Students cannot meet with independent journalists and international experts unless they have written permission from the dean of the faculty,” said Niyozov.

Ergasheva added that her organization, Dast ba Dast (Hand in Hand), which trains young journalists—students and schoolchildren—also faces problems with the internship of students in the faculties of journalism. “One of our course attendees, a senior student, was about to be expelled from the Faculty of Journalism of the National University because he was attending our school and because his article was reprinted by the *Faraj*,” she reported. She added that the problem was solved only after a lawyer’s intervention.

The panelists noted that the same practice exists in the Sughd Province in the north of the country, though independent journalists are already being invited to teach there. Moreover, there is a certain balance between theory and practice (about 60 percent to 40 percent).

The panelists reported that the number of short-term trainings has decreased sharply, but Khalikjanova reported that two- to three-day-long IWPR trainings are being attended by students of the faculties of journalism not only from Dushanbe but also from the provincial centers. “After the training, they tell me that they have learned as much during those two to three days as they did in four to five years of studying in their schools,” she added. Boyahmedova added that the NGO Khoma conducted a two-day training session on photo journalism for reporters both from the capital and the regions in November.

The panelists noted that government media journalists seldom attend seminars and training courses because they would not have any chance to apply such knowledge in practice. Besides, government media CEOs rarely support their employees’ desire for professional development. Consequently, there is a big gap between the level of professional training of state media journalists and that of independent media journalists in terms of international standards.

The panelists also mentioned the popular website reporter.tj, developed by Internews, which publishes news as well as announcements on grants and training programs and offers access to a blogging platform.

Short seminars (one to two days), on-the-job trainings, and additional classes in online journalism and using social networks, as well as investigative journalism, are the most popular forms of training among journalists. Editors are often

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reluctant to grant their staff a study leave for a longer period. All the courses and additional classes are free of charge, and access to them is unlimited. However, the panelists stressed the necessity of longer training, training by specialization, and training in convergent journalism.

“It was very difficult to attract practicing journalists to our trainings—we had to get in touch with the editors we knew or RTSU—until we opened our own page in Facebook,” said Khalikjanova. She reported that now they accept course participants on a competitive basis.

Although journalists sometimes go abroad for training, the students of journalism do not, mostly because of their poor knowledge of English. So far, students can study abroad only privately, in various programs in the United States, Turkey, and Iran. Officially, students can study abroad in just a few CIS countries: Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Belarus, according to quotas of the Ministry of Education of Tajikistan. Three students a year can study at the University of Montana, in the United States, at the expense of the state, but the program does not include journalism. Unfortunately, journalism graduates from foreign institutions generally do not return to Tajikistan.

There are vacancies for graduates in the media outlets, but media CEOs are not always satisfied with the quality of their professional training, and the potential candidates are not happy with the salaries they are offered. And, the panelists noted that no more than 5–10 percent of graduates stay in the profession.

According to Khalikjanova, international donors contemplated establishing a permanent school of journalism in Tajikistan. “At the beginning of this year, a number of donors met in Dushanbe to discuss this issue. However, everything came to a halt when NGOs failed to agree over which organization would receive the grant for the school—each NGO started lobbying its own interests, and the donors told us to sort it out ourselves,” reported Abdullaev.

Only staff of the Asia-Plus media group benefit from formal in-house training, as it has its own independent school of journalism. Sharifzoda and Sotiev spoke about the necessity of conducting trainings and seminars for journalists in the regions.

As for the quality of printing and access to equipment, the panelists noted that access to printing facilities is subject to political restrictions and depends on the authorities' will. There are no restrictions on access to newsprint and equipment, though Niyozov mentioned that since mid-November the Sharki Ozod complex has been short of newsprint, which goes to government newspapers first.

Almost all private publishing houses are profitable businesses and purchase paper and plates themselves. However, the panelists noted that there are no really independent publishing houses in Tajikistan, only private ones, and even they stop printing undesirable newspapers on government orders. "There are 10 districts in the Kulyab Region, and only five of them issue their own newspapers; there are no local publishing houses, and all the newspapers are printed in Dushanbe," reported Dikaev.

The panelists were unanimous that it is useless to talk about the freedom of expression in Tajikistan until there is a private and independent publishing house under the auspices of one of the international organizations. "Until then, all publishing houses may stop printing an undesirable oppositional newspaper by a phone call from any official from the president's administration," claimed Niyozov.

They did note, however, that the CEOs of private publishing houses in the Sughd Province are much less dependent on the authorities in terms of whether to print a certain newspaper. The discussion of the quality of printing led to the topic of publishing houses and consumables. The panelists noted that so far, the best quality is provided by Oila and Intoshod. However, the prices for services in the private publishing houses Oila, Intoshod, and Mushfiki are 10 to 15 percent higher than those in the state-run Sharki Ozod.

All the panelists agreed on the need to establish printing and typesetting facilities to serve the independent media in Dushanbe and in such provincial centers as Khujand, Kurgan-Tube, and Khorog.

The panelists believe that the channels of print media distribution are politically controlled as well. "The Dushanbe mayor has officially prohibited selling newspapers on the main roads," reported Niyozov. The authorities also exert influence on the distribution of independent print media; the Tajikmatbuot (Tajikprint) state-run distribution agency is interested only in selling government publications. Opposition

publications can rarely be found in Tajikmatbuot kiosks; they are sold only by public distributors—often by elderly women and men past retirement age.

The Intishod Association of Media Distributors, which was founded in 2011, has not yet begun operating. According to Pirnazarov, one of the reasons for this is the fact that media magnates failed to reach an agreement on who would lead. "They rented a luxurious office, bought a sport-utility vehicle, and swelled the administrative staff, but they have not done anything, although the project cost \$70,000," said Sharifzoda.

Nowadays each television and radio station buys its own transmitters independently, and their capacity is quite low, although four years ago they used to be supplied by the Internews Network. Practically all software the Tajik media use is counterfeit and pirated.

The government monopolizes distribution of broadcasting frequencies. This can prevent independent media from going on air because nongovernmental media rent their frequencies from the state. There is no independent channel in Tajikistan that broadcasts throughout the country, though the technical capacity exists.

The issue of transition to digital broadcasting is extremely difficult, as only the four governmental channels are included in the multiplex. "Thus, the population is denied the opportunity to access alternative information, and private radio broadcasting business is hindered," said Kulakova-Brannerud.

The government is also trying to limit access of the public and media to alternative information on the Internet. Several websites have been blocked, and there have been attempts to break into the accounts of the most active users of social networks. The government has not blocked blog platforms yet, but it does monitor them. Three panelists—Abdullaev, Pirnazarov, and Khalikjanova—have their own blogs.

Although mobile Internet exists, it does not cover the whole country, and as soon as the electrical supply shuts down, 3 and 4G transmitters cease working, too. All television towers belong to Tajik telecom, which is under the auspices of the Ministry of Transportation and Communications.

Overall, the media situation in Tajikistan has deteriorated since 2010. There were more attacks against journalists, the level of self-censorship has increased, and the professional level of most media outlets leaves a lot to be desired. The government shows strong commitment to restricting access to information.

The panelists concluded that certain assistance from international organizations and donors, as well as political

freedom, strict adherence to the rule of law, and amendment of the current legislation, might help mass media in Tajikistan overcome their technical and professional backlog. The panelists feel that more support from international donors in the area of journalism training, particularly the establishment of a formal journalism school and technical assistance, could be especially valuable.

Summarizing all the objectives discussed, the panelists noted that the level of self-censorship has somewhat increased after the lawsuits against the journalists Ismoilov and Usmonov, and some newspapers still violate ethical norms and international standards. Nevertheless, the level of professional journalism has grown in terms of highlighting pressing socio-political problems. The level of journalistic education in the institutions of higher education is still low, and there is also no progress in solving the problem with licensing. Society is still indifferent to persecutions and lawsuits against journalists. Professional associations of journalists have started to consolidate to a certain extent, although media outlets do not unite to defend their interests. Technical facilities still lag, and this is especially felt in many regions. The panelists stressed the need to restart IREX and OSCE media projects and to continue Internews Network trainings for journalists, with an emphasis on specialization and coaching multimedia journalists.

List of Panel Participants

Ravshan Abdullaev, executive director, Eurasia Foundation in Tajikistan, Dushanbe

Shonavruz Afzalshoev, editor, *Kalam* newspaper of the Civil Society Support Center, Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province, Khorog

Nargis Boyahmedova, first vice editor-in-chief, Khovar, Dushanbe

Turko Dikaev, reporter, *Asia-Plus*, Kulyab

Zinatullo Ismoilov, director, Media Council; director, SMT TV, Dushanbe

Nuriddin Karshiboev, chairperson, National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan, Dushanbe

Vera Kulakova-Brannerud, director, Radio Vatan, Dushanbe

Khurshed Niyozov, director, Center for Investigative Journalism; editor-in-chief, *Faraj*, Dushanbe

Nazarali Pirnazarov, reporter, ca-news.org news agency, Dushanbe

Murod Sotiev, director, Paem information agency, Kurgan-Tube

Lola Khalikjanova, editor-in-chief, Institute for War and Peace Reporting-Tajikistan, Dushanbe

Kironshoh Sharifzoda, director, Journalists' Public Association, Dushanbe

Zarina Ergasheva, manager, Dast ba Dast NGO training project for young journalists; editor, Kloop.tj Internet portal; reporter, Asia-Plus information agency, Dushanbe

Moderator and Author

Lidiya Isamova, correspondent, RIA News, Dushanbe

The MSI panel convened on November 25, 2011.