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TAJIKISTAN

The presidential elections were a key event in the Republic of Tajikistan in 2013. In addition to Emomali Rahmon, the incumbent president, and chair of the ruling People's Democratic Party, the Communist, Agrarian, Socialist, and Democratic parties and the Party of Economic Reforms nominated five candidates. For the first time in history, a woman, Oynihol Bobonazarova, a 65-year-old human rights activist, nominated by the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), ran for office. However, she fell short of the votes required for registration with the Central Commission on Elections, and therefore dropped out in the first stage of the elections.

Opponents of President Rahmon continue to be systematically targeted, as seen with the detention and arrest of Abdumalik Abdullojonov, the former prime minister and opponent of the president, at Kiev's Borispol Airport in March. The government accused Abdullojonov of attempting to assassinate President Rahmon in 1996. International organizations called for protection of the former prime minister and prevention of an extradition. The former prime minister has lived in exile for nearly two decades, mostly in the US, and is seen by many as a political rival to Abdullojonov. Many have pointed to the possible connection between Abdullajanov and the journalist Dodojon Atovulloyev, a critic of the Rahmon government, who also heads the Vatandor political movement, as a possible motive for the detention and arrest. The former prime minister has since returned to the United States, after a Ukrainian court found that Abdullojonov had political refugee status.

The Tajik government recognizes the existence of torture, an act that carries five to eight years of imprisonment according to the Criminal Code. However, media throughout the country have reported numerous cases of torture and, according to human rights defenders, there were four recorded cases of alleged torture of prisoners in this past year alone. Increasingly, Tajiks are taking to social media to protest, as seen in the case of Umejon Tojiev, a board member of the Isfara cell of the IRPT, who was beaten and thrown from the third floor of a building. After his death, a number of social media users in Tajikistan called on friends and followers to sign an online petition, which called for the country's authorities to stop the use of torture. However, due to ongoing government interference, social media networks and news agency sites such as Facebook, Tjknews.com, Tojnews.tj, Gazeta.ru, Mk.ru, Toptj.com, Centrasia.ru, Ferghana.ru, and Ozodagon.com are intermittently blocked. While the government continues to restrict access to information, especially via the Internet, there are 3.7 million Internet users in Tajikistan (1.5 million more than last year) and citizens continue to actively use blogs, social networks, and access online news sites.

TAJIKISTAN at a glance

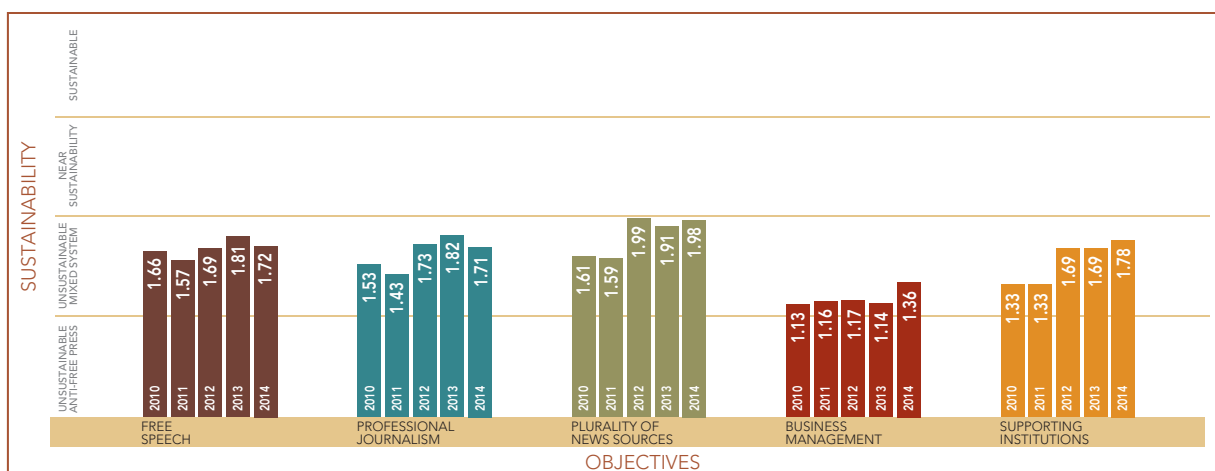
GENERAL

- > Population: 8,051,512 (July 2014 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Capital: Dushanbe
- > Ethnic group (% of population): Tajik 84.3%, Uzbek 12.2%, Russian 0.5%, Kyrgyz 0.8%, other 2.2% (results of the 2010 Census of Tajikistan)
- > Religion (% of population): Sunni Muslims 89%, Ismaili Muslims 6%, other 5%. (Data of the Committee for Religious Affairs)
- > Language: Tajik (official), Russian enshrined in the Constitution as a lingua franca
- > GNI (2012-Atlas): \$6.869 Billion (World Bank Development Indicators 2013)
- > GNI per capita (2012-PPP): \$2,180 (World Bank Development Indicators 2013)
- > Literacy Rate: 99.7%; male 99.8%, female 99.6% (2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > President and Head of the Government: Emomali Rahmon (since November 6, 1994)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations: 515 print media, including 330 newspapers, have been registered in The Ministry of Culture; Television Stations: 35 (including 26 non-state); Radio Stations: 24 (including 15 are non-state)
- > Newspaper circulation statistics: The largest (in terms of circulation) private newspapers are *Charkhi Gardun*, *Asia-Plus* and *Oila*; the largest state-run are *Jumhuriyat* and *Sadoi Mardum*
- > Broadcast ratings: Dushanbe's top radio stations are Radio Imrüz, Radio Asia-Plus, Radio Vatan, and Radio Hovar; in Khujand: Tiroz and SM-1.
- > News agencies: News agencies: asiaplus.tj, avesta.tj, tojnew.tj, pressa.tj, ruzgor.tj, tajikta.tj, tajnews.ru, ozodagon.com, faraj.tj and the governmental Hovar
- > Annual advertising revenue in media sector: N/A
- > Internet usage: 700,000 (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: TAJIKISTAN



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2014: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES



CHANGE SINCE 2013

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

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

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

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

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

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

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.72

As in previous years, the Tajik media is governed by an array of laws and regulations, including the Constitution, the Law on the Press and Other Media, the Law on Television and Radio Broadcasting, the Law on Information, the Statute on Licensing of TV and Radio Broadcasting, as well as multiple other articles of the civil and criminal codes.

The Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan provides for the freedom of expression and prohibits censorship, and has special laws on mass media and broadcasting that guarantee the freedom of speech and access to information. Articles 135 and 136 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Tajikistan (defamation and insult) were transferred to the Civil Code of the Republic of Tajikistan, through Rahmon's new initiative; however, Article 137 (insulting the president of Tajikistan) and Article 330 (insulting public officials) remain enshrined in the criminal code. Nuriddin Karshiboev, Chair of the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan, (NANSMIT) argued that, "...the signing of the new law at the beginning of the year was a positive moment" for media freedom in the country, and now depends "on the journalists themselves and how they use the law in terms of access to information." In reality, the new media bill has had no effect on the media landscape and has not bolstered freedom of the press.

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.

In December 2012, the parliament adopted a new draft law of the Law on the Periodical Press and Other Mass Media, replacing the outdated legislation adopted in 1990. Journalists and media organizations had fought for the new bill for over 10 years. The Act is more liberal and complies with international standards, however requires a mechanism for implementation and enforcement.

According to Turko Dikaev, the Asia-Plus Staff Correspondent in the Kulyab region, while Rahmon has decreed the protection of free speech, and continues to point to the growth in independent media outlets, the quality unfortunately is not addressed. The panelists believe, as in the past, that the observance of laws and regulations is minimal. Azamhon Akbarov, director general of the Asia SEC, stated, "When it comes to the practical implementation of the laws regulating media activity, individual officials enforce them not in the interests of the general public, but in the interests of a certain group of people." Akbarov explained that officials interpret the existing laws on freedom of speech differently, each understanding them as it best suits their interests. Zarina Ergasheva, a media expert with the NGO Center for Human Rights and a reporter with the Asia-Plus Agency, noted that in a conversation with a senior official, freedom of speech according to the official "should be regulated by the authorities, because the Tajik people cannot yet distinguish truth from 'yellow journalism.'" She added that many Internet sites remain blocked illegally in Tajikistan, however, those whose sites remain blocked have not sought legal recourse against the Communication Services, as the agency will cite "technical problems" in their response, according to Lola Halikjanova, editor-in-chief at the Institute for War and Peace Reporting Office in Dushanbe.

Interestingly, in the Annual Report on Human Rights in Tajikistan, published in March 2013, Zarif Alizoda, Ombudsman of the Republic of Tajikistan, labeled the blocking of news sites a violation of civil rights. According to the Report: "...limiting access to social and news sites will ensure that domestic Internet users keep away from sources of information, and this may adversely affect the development of the information space in the country."

SMS messaging has become a tool of communication between officials, and the agencies under their control. "Beg Zuhurov, chief of the Communication Service, controlled by the government, actively employs this method, sending out emails and text messages demanding the blocking of ISP and mobile operators' websites," explained Halikjanova. Nuriddin Karshiboev noted that these text messages and emails are not legally binding.

Zinatullo Ismoilov, director of the independent SMT TV, believes that many cases against journalists could be resolved administratively through the Press Council without

opening a criminal case and going to court. "Many lawsuits have been filed not for establishing the truth, but for intimidation and to restrict the rights and activities of certain journalists and mass media," he said.

Officials continue to hassle journalists for their sources, despite the right of journalists not to disclose sources as stipulated in the Press Law under the clause on Specific Cases of Non-Divulging Information. The clause specifies that "a journalist shall have no obligation to name a person who provided information with the agreement to not divulge his/her name, except as required by a court of law." However, the Criminal Code blatantly contradicts the Press Law by stating that if a person is summoned as a witness, they must testify and/or disclose their sources. Hurshed Nyezov, director of the Center for Investigative Journalism, explained that he often writes under a pseudonym to avoid problems with the authorities. Zarina Ergasheva added that following the publication of a critical piece, she was approached by high-ranking officials with requests to disclose the names of any experts who had given an interview under a pseudonym.

The panelists were unanimous in their call for the adoption of a law that protects the identity of sources. According to Ravshan Abdullaev, officials should be prevented from filing a complaint with the Persecutor's Office in civil cases.

The licensing procedure of print media is still cumbersome and non-transparent. To start and register any type of media organization requires visiting up to four to five agencies, in addition to the required registration process to attain legal status.

The legislation on broadcasting and telecommunications, especially on licensing, remains biased. The Licensing Commission, created under the auspices of the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting by the government, stipulates unequal conditions for those initially wishing to obtain a license. As before, the Commission blocks licenses for a number of independent mass media outlets that have the opportunity to start broadcasting. The Commission is a closed structure, headed by Asadullo Gulomov, the chair of the Committee for TV and Radio, with no representatives from independent media.

Although over the last year a number of television and radio stations in the north of the country received licenses to begin broadcasting, the process still lacks transparency as not all applicants launching television and radio broadcasts can freely obtain a broadcasting license. As before, independent media often have to wait many years for a license. Zinatullo Ismoilov concluded that the License Commission, which includes representatives of public channels only, weeds out competition through the licensing process.

This year, only three television stations and two radio stations in the Sughd province in northern Tajikistan received licenses to broadcast. Dilbar Samadova added that obtaining licenses by the broadcasting companies in the north of the country is political. The government needs these stations to counter broadcasts available from neighboring Uzbekistan, as segments of the Sughd population are Uzbek speakers.

The panelists maintained that an independent body and not the Komteleradio (TV and Radio Committee) should grant licenses.

Speaking in October 2013 at one of the round tables on the development of independent media, Akbarali Sattorov, chair of the Union of Journalists of Tajikistan, said that this year the newspapers and journalists have become more daring, though their level of "responsibility and professionalism have not increased." Touching upon the problems of the independent mass media, he stressed that the tax burden was an excessive burden for these publications. "If the situation does not change in the next two years, we can say goodbye to the independent mass media in Tajikistan," warned Sattorov.

The panelist pointed out that instead of creating conditions for the development of the newspaper business, the state creates conditions for impeding the process. The provisions of the new Tax Code, introduced in the country January 1, 2013, may lead to the bankruptcy of many media outlets. "Few media executives can pay 18 percent of VAT and 25 percent from their profits. This will suppress any motivation to work, as print media profits will plummet," stated Hurshed Nyezov.

"Now, in order to be able to broadcast as an entrepreneur, an independent broadcasting company needs not only obtain permission from the Komteleradio, but from the tax authorities, as well. An example of this is a television station in the town of Penjikent in the north of the country," reported Zinatullo Ismoilov.

Before 2013, the tax authorities stated that all media outlets are subject to taxation, i.e., no matter whether they were individual legal entities, or structural subdivisions of other legal entities, they had to register with the tax authorities and pay taxes.

The National Association of Independent Mass Media of Tajikistan (NANSMIT) continues to monitor the violations against the rights of journalists in its monthly reports. Over the past year, the Association cited 82 infractions against journalists, and three assaults, however there is often no investigation or legal action taken. In December, Abdurakhim Shukurov, a journalist with the Ozodagon News Agency, was arrested and beaten by law enforcement officers after covering the high profile case of Zaid Saidov,

the former Minister of Industry and Energy who formed the New Tajikistan Party in April, seen by many as a threat to the government.

Ravshan Abdullayev added that there are continuous reports from bloggers that they are threatened. Bloggers from the Blogiston.tj platform have stated they receive threatening messages whenever they write reports of a critical nature about the unlawful actions taken by authorities. For example, Rustam Gulov, a well-known blogger in Tajikistan, was tracking cases of unlawful detention of youth for additional service in the armed forces. Due to the nature of the story, he was "repeatedly detained by the police" Abdullayev added.

There are many sources of information in Tajikistan, especially in the north of the country, where there are a large number of independent television and radio stations. Consequently, the consumer has a wide choice in obtaining information. However, state-run media in Tajikistan fails to maintain editorial independence, and do not provide the public access to objective information according to the panelists. In most cases, state-owned media outlets have a significant influence over public perception.

"Despite the fact that the law protects editorial independence, self-censorship thrives in virtually all mass media, especially in the state-run mass media, from the journalist to the editor," noted Dilbar Samadova.

Although the law prohibits mass media monopolization, more than 90 percent of electronic media outlets are state-owned.

The Internet has greatly improved access to information for journalists, as many official documents can now be obtained from Internet repositories of ministries and departments. However, some local government entities for example in Khatlon province, request a written application for access to government information. Murod Sotieva, director of the Paem Independent Information Agency in Kurgan-Tyube, explained that it "is impossible to obtain information in the regions over the phone" as officials will state that permission is required from their supervisors. Hushed Nyezov said that his Center for Investigative Journalism found a way to obtain information by cultivating relationships with sources housed in key ministries, departments and law enforcement agencies.

However, the ministry of defense, as well as the State Committee for National Security and the Central Directorate of Border Control, according to the panelists, only provide journalists with information that these bodies themselves find necessary to publish, and hold limited press conferences.

In 2013, the amount of content in the Tajik language increased on the state-run site launched as part of a program to establish an "electronic government." Despite the state authorities' measures aimed at enhancing the activities of the electronic government, the government websites are, with rare exceptions, insufficiently informative and rarely updated. "There are, perhaps, no more than 6 or 7 websites of ministries and departments that offer statistical data, and other useful and ongoing information," Nazarali Pirnazarov added.

The panelists noted, however, the active participation of Mahmadsaid Ubaidulloev, the mayor of Dushanbe and second highest-ranking state official, on Facebook. According to the panelists, Ubaidulloev announces all regulations adopted by city hall on his page and addresses various issues raised by citizens.

Access to international news in Tajikistan is open, though there are barriers to access including the limited supply of electricity to rural regions. From November to March, the price of Internet services provider ranged from \$25 to \$70 in comparison to the average income of the population. Moreover, for the third year, authorities have restricted access or completely blocked websites that are critical of the government such as Fergana.ru, centrasia.ru, toptj.com, arianastorm.com, mahalla.org and lenta.ru.

As in past years, the Presidential Administration has tightened access for foreign journalists accredited in Tajikistan. Since 2012, they have not been invited to official meetings between the President and international delegations, and official photo sessions have ended. Bahtier Hudoyarov, Head of the Presidential Administration, implemented the harsh measures without explanation.

As in past years, practicing journalism does not require a license, even professional training is not compulsory in order to start work as a journalist. In fact, anyone with a press card is considered a journalist. However, the absence of accreditation for reporting on some official events can be an obstacle for journalists.

Journalists are educated in six institutes throughout the country, but not all graduates are ready after graduation to work in the media sector according to the panelists. Unfortunately, a number of state universities still prohibit their journalism graduates from pursuing an internship with independent media outlets. Students who received diplomas in foreign universities often do not return home.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.71

Professional journalism in Tajikistan is still hindered by a number of obstacles including the limited access to government information. High-ranking government officials rarely give interviews with reporters, citing workload pressure and, if interviewed, use the opportunity to promote their own platform and interests. Many senior officials are seen and heard only at press conferences that take place only twice a year.

Plagiarism in the mass media, the panelists pointed out, is still thriving. "As legally no information is subject to copyrights" and these materials can easily be republished, noted Nuriddin Karshiboev.

The journalism community in Tajikistan adopted the "Ethical Standards of Journalism in Tajikistan," on October 30, 2009, which serves as a guide for professional ethics within framework of self-regulation. The ethical norms reflect standards developed by international professional associations.

While "some journalists are working according to international standards, using the views and comments of all interested parties," said Turko Dikaev, other panelists noted that the *Ozodagon* newspaper and its website, for example, do not always present a balanced view, and often break ethical standards. Lola Halikjanova added that only a few outlets present a balanced view of the political discourse in Tajikistan, and the main problem of the press is use of

"excessive emotion" and "one-sided coverage." Zinatullo Ismoilov explained that the mass media tend to take sides, backing either the opposition or the government.

Nazarali Pirnazarov believes that not all journalists are objective in highlighting certain events, as was the case, for example, with the media coverage of the elections. Hurshed Nyezov noted that there is a perception among some independent journalists that if they criticize opposition leaders it somehow implies that they work for the state security agencies.

The Media Council, comprised of 74 newspaper editorial offices and media organizations, oversees the implementation of ethical standards governing journalists in Tajikistan. Its decisions are largely prescriptive, added Zinatullo Ismoilov, who explained that the Council monitored compliance with ethical standards in 2013 and reported fewer complaints in 2013 compared with 2012. This year, the Council reviewed 15 appeals, centered on ethical and privacy issues as well as the objectivity of contested publications.

"This year, the Nigoh media holding signed the Code of Ethics of Journalists of Tajikistan," Nuriddin Karshiboev added. He noted, however, that the culture of ethics is not entrenched among journalists and is often violated by many of those in the media sector who signed the code. The largest Tajik language newspapers, *Millat*, and *USSR* have not yet adopted the code. "We need to strengthen the work of the Mass Media Council, along with the adoption of inter-editorial and corporate alliances," Karshiboev concluded.

Panelists noted that the practice of self-censorship has decreased in the past year. Journalists felt a loosening of the government's grip on the press prior to the 2013 presidential election compared with the 2006 election, according to Nazarali Pirnazarov. However, a majority of journalists in the outlying regions continue to practice self-censorship.

The panelists pointed out that independent media do provide diverse coverage of socially significant events. For example, after the agreement on the status of the Russian military base in Tajikistan was signed in October, *Asia-Plus* and *Evening Dushanbe* regarded the agreement as beneficial, whereas the *Nigoh* and *USSR* vehemently criticized the agreement, describing it as "slavishly humiliating" for the country.

Azamahon Akbarov noted that journalists try to cover a variety of hot issues, but often fail to access information or encounter other obstacles. The panelists added that the Tajik media are still largely fearful of printing articles critical of the president and his family. His personal life remains

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).

controlled by the inner circles of power, including the State Committee of National Security. However, Lola Halikjanova, quickly pointed out that media outlets are starting to publish stories, for example, concerning the indiscretions of the children of senior officials appointed to high positions from the president's inner circle.

Another factor affecting the development of professional journalism in Tajikistan is the level of pay. According to the data presented by the panelists, salaries and royalties in the state-run media outlets increased during the last year, but they still lag behind the average level of pay offered by independent media.

The average monthly salary in the state-run mass media outlets is about \$170 compared with \$700 offered by privately operated media outlets. On the other hand, state-run media employees of the TV & Radio Committee received housing benefits twice in the last three years, and some can receive a plot of land free of charge. Many journalists work for several mass media outlets or NGOs and some of them have left for Russia to work as general labor migrants.

Poor levels of pay precipitate corrupt practice among journalists, including the use of blackmail, according to panelists. "There were reports of embezzlement and blackmail by some newspapers in the Sughd and Khatlon regions," according to Dilbar Samadova. "Some employees of the *Salomat Boshed* and *Tochikistoni Dunye* newspapers brazenly demanded money" to prevent the publication of materials that could smear individuals. Regional journalists still demand both food and money as a fee for press coverage of events.

State television journalists charge \$100–\$150 for traveling and shooting 30-second spots for a news broadcast, while other camera operators earn a bit on the side at private events, such as weddings, concerts, and other celebrations.

Entertainment programs tend to outperform news and informational broadcasts. Entertainment programs take up to 70 to 75 percent of the airtime on the state-run television, 60 percent on the public radio and more than 80 percent on private FM radio stations. News programming does not exceed 25 percent of the airtime on the state-run television and 20 percent in private television and radio. "There is little quality news and useful information," Nuriddin Karshiboev added.

For his part, Azamhon Akbarov stated that the production of proprietary programs is a very expensive process. The panelists agreed that most of the young audience is not

prepared to appreciate news and analysis. However, Turko Dikaev added that there is a growing interest of young people in political content on television, and in newspapers, in southern Tajikistan.

The panelists maintained that, just like last year, the only channel that does meet the news and information requirements of both the authorities and its viewers is the Bahoriston television station. The station provides a number of cognitive, educational, and cultural programs for children and family viewing.

Dilbar Samadova noted that almost all television stations in the Sughd province produce their own interesting news items, covering the life of the region.

Panelists noted that they continue to lack access to modern equipment. "Due to ongoing financial problems and instability in almost all regional editorial houses, there are no portable computers, cameras, tape recorders, camcorders, scanners or printers," according to Shonavruz Afzalshoev and Murod Sotiev.

In many editorial houses of print media, journalists buy, at their own expense, computers and other equipment necessary for the job. Inadequate technical equipment often results in delayed information. As of yet, no news agency works around the clock. However, state-run television and radio channels upgrade their equipment almost annually.

It was noted that in terms of both technical quality and the content of their programs, the Tajik state-run television channels are inferior to satellite channels and television of neighboring countries—Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. "The populace of the [Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province] desires more to watch Afghan television broadcasts and Russian satellite channels," stated Shonavruz Afzalshoev.

The panelists believe that there are very few versatile specialists among Tajik journalists, as well as multimedia experts. Tajik media outlets cannot afford to have thematic subdivisions or at least one journalist who specializes in a certain area.

However, panelists noted that the genre of investigative journalism is on the rise, with more than 25 reports this past year on topics ranging from corruption to human rights.

The panelists pointed out that this year the most daring publication on socially relevant themes, especially in the genre of investigative journalism, covering the issues of torture, corruption, lawsuits, religious freedom and politics were published in the Tajik-language *Faraj*, *Nigoh* and the Russian-language *Asia-Plus*.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.98

The modern reader has a choice: they can read newspapers, magazines, listen to FM-radio, or receive updated information from the Internet. "In connection with the availability of a sufficient amount of information sources, they have the opportunity to select and compare," said Zarina Ergasheva. However, independent mass media do not exist at all or remain poorly developed in the southern and eastern regions of the country, so that population has no alternative information.

However, there are a growing number of publications in the country, representing the viewpoints of all interested parties in their materials, including the opposition. The Ministry of Culture registered six new newspapers and three magazines.

The panelists pointed out that blogs and social networks have become an increasingly popular venue to express an alternative position of non-state journalists, politicians and other socially active citizens. The Internet is becoming ever more accessible in large cities, but less so in the regions where the situation remains difficult due to limits on electricity in the autumn-winter period.

The panelists also mentioned that online sources had surpassed any other sources of information, and the urban population often looks for news on the Internet. "Over the last year, state authorities began to pay more

attention to civic journalism and social networks, trying to restrict the flow of information on the Internet," Nazarali Pirnazarov added.

SMS news is a fledgling source of news in Tajikistan, with readers sending reports to newspapers and information agencies on events in the city, emergencies, and data for example related to power cuts. Tajiks actively participate in social networks, and Facebook and Twitter are actively used. According to the latest statistics, more than 48,000 users from Tajikistan have Facebook accounts, and more than one million Tajiks visit various international social networks every day.

Residents of more rural regions simply cannot afford to buy newspapers due rising prices resulting in an average increase of 15 percent with papers costing about 50 cents per copy.

Although any *de jure* decision about blocking a site or social network in Tajikistan can only be made by a court, the freedom of speech on the Internet is regularly restricted by the government. This process intensified in 2013 and now Internet providers explain their decisions to block a particular site as having received the instructions via SMS from Beg Zuhurov, head of the country's Communication Service. Service providers that fail to abide by the instructions of the Communication Service to block a particular website soon experience technical problems.

Turko Dikaev explained that under the direction of Communication Service chief Zuhurov, in July "a so-called group of volunteers has emerged that continually browse social networks, publishing dirt on civil society activists, opposition politicians and independent journalists." Therefore, the continual block on social media and certain news sites will continue to impact citizens' access to both domestic and international news. The overall low standard of living in Tajikistan does not enable every family to own a personal computer, but many people have cell phones and are able to access the Internet.

The Communication Services for the first time this year have managed to block access to Kazakh K+ TV Channel and the opposition Sappho TV, broadcasted from Moscow.

State-owned and public media outlets remain politicized and continue to "reflect nothing else but the viewpoint of the government and state administration, protecting their interests," according to Ravshan Abdullaev. As before, representatives of the opposition political parties are denied the opportunity to express their viewpoints in any state-owned or public outlet as seen in the most recent presidential elections.

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.

State-run television tries not to show accidents, military clashes, terrorist acts, and natural disasters. “All the state-run media print almost the same materials—presidential decrees, government regulations, reports about parliamentary sessions, differing from each other only in the name of the official organ,” Murod Sotiev explained. All four state-run television channels provide identical coverage during any of the president’s official speeches and visits.

Almost all the newspapers in Tajikistan use news provided by local news agencies for free or for a nominal fee. However, only the BBC, Ozodi and several other television stations in the Sughd province have subscription based newsfeeds.

“Almost all print and news media reprint news provided by the world’s leading information agencies but they seldom refer to the source, and hyperlinks are simply disregarded,” said Zarina Ergasheva.

The panelists noted that, except for media workers, consumers are not very interested in media ownership, content or the objectivity of coverage. The panelists believe that the transparency of print media ownership and their founders are known quantities. “Both readers and journalists know that the Oryeno Media Holding, which includes the *Imruz News* and Imruz Radio, belongs to Hasan Asadullozoda, chairman of the Oryen Bank and the president’s brother-in-law,” said Zinatullo Ismoilov.

According to the laws of Tajikistan, foreign nationals are not allowed to establish or own media organizations. However, the panelists believe that there is no doubt over the presence of foreign investment in certain organizations. Foreign capital continues to be present in the media only in the form of grants and technical support provided by international donor organizations.

The panelists also believe that discussion on gender, sexuality and religious minorities continues to receive very little media attention. However, the national outlets operated by minorities are free and can develop without any restrictions in Tajikistan. There are 20 print media published in the Uzbek and Kyrgyz languages. The *Hulk Ovozi* newspaper, run by the government, *Zamondosh*, *Ustoz*, *Skandvordlar* and about 10 newspapers and magazines are printed in the capital and the Dustlik in the Khatlon province, and *Sughd Haqiqati* in the Sughd province. A couple pages of regional newspapers are printed in the Uzbek language in the Sughd and Khatlon provinces. The *Murghab District Sarykol* regional newspaper is published in the Kyrgyz language and the 1.5-page *Payomi Jirgatal* is the local newspaper of the Jirgatal District. Publication of minority language papers is funded by the government through local budgets. “Therefore, any independence in their editorial policy is out of the

question,” said Murod Sotiev. “Due to financial problems, the Shughnan-language [one of the languages of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region] *Marifati Shughnon* newspaper was printed only five times in 2013,” added Shonavruz Afzalshoev.

The Shabakai Yakum National TV and radio channels feature 15- to 20-minute-long news programs in the Uzbek language. News in Uzbek, Arabic and English are also shown on the First National and Jahonnamo channels.

In 2013, the media barely covered international relations, particularly the position of the Uzbek language population that represents a quarter of all people in Tajikistan. “This situation has been obviously affected by the explicit cooling and worsening of relations between the authorities of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan,” Zaraina Ergasheva explained.

However, the population in the northern and southern border regions of the country can freely watch Uzbek television programs, as the signal reception is quite good in the borderlands. Residents of the eastern and southeastern parts of the country can watch Afghan television programs without any problem.

All four channels of the state-run television use information only provided by the Khovar state agency though their international news coverage uses fragments from Russian channels, Euronews, CNN, and Al Jazeera.

The panelists noted that the level of interregional information exchange is still low. People in Dushanbe often do not know what is happening just a few kilometers away, in neighboring towns or villages, as there are no single central bureaus of newspapers.

None of the state-run or independent print and electronic media has correspondents abroad or the central part of Tajikistan, except for *Asia-Plus*, which has some in Washington, Moscow and London. The state-run Hovar has special correspondents in Moscow, Ankara and Istanbul.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.36

Media content in Tajikistan is designed to satisfy the demands of different levels of users. Legal and bureaucratic barriers, high taxes, and increased attention from fiscal authorities and other regulatory bodies subject the media to inspections that hinder the successful development of the media as a business.

Hurshed Nyezov noted that inspections from fiscal and regulatory authorities are frequent, particularly after

the publication of critical material. He added that after publishing a piece on the arrest of Zayd Saidov, his media outlet was visited by tax inspectors who levied a fine of TJS 20,000 (\$4,193) because their lease was not “drawn up properly.”

Independent media outlets in Tajikistan (except for the *Asia-Plus* and *Nigoh*) are managed in a haphazard manner. Business plans while necessary for investment planning, are rarely used, since no media has market specialists and competent managers trained in modern management that meet international standards. Azamhon Akbarov explained that that contrary to the norm, “My broadcasting company Asia has been drawing up business plans over the past two years at our own risk, since we live in a country where there is no economic stability.”

According to Lola Halikjanova, accounting practices are “old-fashioned” in Tajikistan, with “frequent double-entry bookkeeping” and wages paid to employees in envelopes—all factors that “interfere with the sustainable development” of the media business in Tajikistan.

Hurshed Nyezov cited *Faraj* as an example of an outlet that does not have a business plan, yet is self-sustained, and often “prints additional copies if the newspaper publishes an interesting article or a sensational investigation.” He noted that the success of independent media depends on its place of origin, relationships with advertisers and assistance received from international donors. (For example, *Asia Plus*, *Daybreak*, and *Kalam* from the National Endowment for Democracy).

Institutionally, many mass media outlets do not grow and do not aspire to, according to the panelists.

State-run media are fully funded from the state budget and therefore do not particularly require business plans, capital investment planning, and market research, as their editorial offices are part of the government structure. Moreover, they have constant access to income through mandatory subscriptions in government offices, businesses, schools, and higher educational institutions; moreover, advertising is facilitated by the government and freely flows from agencies, banks, and businesses close to the administration.

According to the Press Department of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Tajikistan, around 70 state-run newspapers, with a circulation of under 500 to 1,000 copies, are regularly published in the regions. However, “all regional press is financed on leftovers from local budgets and, except for subscriptions and rare advertisements, have no other sources of income,” according to Turko Dikaev. In comparison, panelists noted that a private newspaper requires a circulation of 3,000 in order to be self-sustaining.

Some independent media outlets earn revenue by using their already existing production studios, engaging in investigations, producing clips and advertising, public relations materials, and sometimes receive support through grants.

While advertising is the primary source of income for media outlets in other countries, it remains underdeveloped in Tajikistan. Advertising is found in only a few independent print media and television channels. “Many commercials are mere copies from Russian advertising translated into the Tajik language, while local advertising often lacks professionalism,” noted Zarina Ergasheva. Typically, advertisers look at ratings and media visits to a site.

However, some panelists argued that advertising plays an important role in the income of media in larger cities. “Advertising accounts for 75 percent of the revenues of Asia-1 Broadcasting Company,” cited Azamhon Akbarov. Moreover, Internet advertising and news tickers on websites of newspapers and news agencies are actively being developed.

Although most regional media outlets are not profitable, two radio stations in the Sughd Province, Tiroz and SM-1, bring in high profits due to advertising and commercials. However, the reality remains that the advertising market is not an important source of income for the majority of media in the country, especially in remote areas. “Advertising in the regions depends on the financial condition of small and medium-sized businesses, but not all of them advertise on television and in the newspapers, because they are afraid that tax authorities and other control and inspection structures would begin to visit them frequently,” Murod Sotiev added.

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.

Tajikistan's media outlets mostly work with advertisers directly without employing the use of advertising agencies. However, there are eight advertising agencies in Tajikistan, who charge high fees for their services. Therefore, advertisers find it easier to deal directly with media outlets. Most advertisers simply choose the most famous newspapers with the largest circulations. For example, "there is no advertising agency in the south of Tajikistan," explained Turko Dikaev, "ads can only be found on outdoor banners and billboards."

Since 2003, advertising in Tajikistan has been regulated by the Law on Advertising, which provides for a differentiated approach to state-run and non-state media. For example, advertising material must not exceed 10 percent of the daily volume of broadcast for state-run electronic media outlets and no more than 30 percent for non-state media. Advertising material should not exceed 25 percent of the volume in the state-run (printed) publications and 40 percent in the non-state media. Not all adhere to these limitations.

"Of the 32 pages of the *Asia-Plus* newspaper, advertising takes up 12 pages, while its price is the highest in the country, up to \$600 for a newsprint advertisement spread," cited Nazarali Pirnazarov. Among the state-run television stations, Safina TV absorbs most advertising with an emphasis on advertising for pharmacies and prescription drugs. That is why people often refer to Safina TV as "our television pharmacy."

Zinatullo Ismoilov explained that most advertisements are placed on state-run channels, some of which already having a sufficient number of advertising and good salaries for their employees, keep lowering advertising prices, thereby completely depriving independent television stations of a stable source of income. Moreover, government agencies advertise only in the government print media.

Independent or private print media do not receive any subsidies from the state. Although the new Law on the Media envisages guaranteed support from the state, as of yet this rule remains to be implemented. However, Ravshan Abdullaev was quick to point out that state-owned media already have access to "huge advertising revenues."

As for marketing research, the panelists noted that it is an expensive undertaking and very few media outlets can afford a study. According to Nuriddin Karshiboev, even if research is conducted, the results turn out to be "subjective with unclear samples and target groups, and no mention of who financed the study." However, many online media outlets continuously conduct surveys of readers on various social, political and economic issues.

According to Nyezov, many newspapers overstate their circulations in order to attract advertisers and exert pressure on competitors citing the *Oila* as an example.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.78

There are several business associations that continue to defend the interest of media outlets. For example, there is the Association of TV and Radio Broadcasters and Audiovisual Product Manufacturers, formed in August 2012, headed by Zinatullo Ismoilov, CEO of the independent SMT TV Station. It unites 19 television and radio broadcasters and production studios. The Association is designed to protect the interests of private electronic mass media and production studios, and garners membership dues. According to the panelists, the Association is attempting to integrate smaller international associations, but have been unsuccessful so far.

Despite the efforts of NANSMIT, the media council, and donor organizations to protect the rights of journalists, the lack of trade unions for media workers in Tajikistan continues to cause social insecurity for many in the profession. Media magnates and media owners primarily oppose the creation of a journalists' trade union, as panelists consider private and independent newspapers and television and radio broadcasters as especially vulnerable.

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.

“We were openly told by the Ministry of Justice that we could not be registered during a presidential election year, probably for the reason that trade unions have the right to nominate their own presidential candidate. But I am sure that we will be able to hold a founding congress to form the trade union in the first quarter of 2014,” Nuriddin Karshiboev affirmed.

However, the associations have come together at crucial moments to advocate for greater press freedoms. For example, the panelists pointed out that, in the face of fierce pressure from the authorities during the elections, all media associations expressed solidarity in connection with the blockage of the Ozodagon site and Facebook. Nevertheless, Karshiboev noted that the government is ultimately reluctant to cooperate with media associations, which impedes work to protect the interests of the independent media and the development of the freedom of speech.

Among professional media associations, NANSMIT is the most proactive, protecting the rights of journalists while responding promptly to issues that affect the community. The Union of Journalists, which includes more than 2,000 members, has become less dependent on the government in the past few years, despite the ongoing appointment of its directors by the administration. For example in October, the Union condemned the 11-year sentencing of Tajik Journalist Mahmadyusuf Ismoilov, found guilty for allegedly blackmailing and extorting money from a local woman. Ismoilov has maintained his innocence stating that the case was a form of retribution from local authorities who he criticized.

All media organizations are required to protect of freedom of speech and independence of the press according to the legal frameworks. In reality, only NANSMIT, partly the Media Alliance and the Union of Journalists of Tajikistan uphold these principles, along with the Press Council, the Center for Investigative Journalism, and the Sughd Province Club of Professional Journalists, who continually support the development of media.

“The organizations that protect the rights of journalists and freedom of speech have sufficiently strong positions, but their actions are not supported by society. They face opposition from the authorities, especially from law enforcement bodies and the judiciary,” added Abdullayev.

In 2013, NANSMIT was repeatedly subject to attacks from the government leading to a block on the website for two weeks. There was an unauthorized access to files containing information on violations committed against journalists. As a result, most of the files were corrupted. “The security services are trying to maximize control over our archives, e-mail correspondence and reporting, which effectively

hindered our work in 2013,” according to Karshiboev. He noted, however, that utilizing hosting services provided by a partner in Moscow was an approach to avoiding government interference.

Overall, the panelists were happy to note an increase in solidarity among journalists in the past year. There is growing pressure from the government on independent media as seen with the trial of Olga Tutubalina, editor-in-chief of Asia-Plus, and the detention of Abdurahim Shukurov, an Ozodagon information agency operator of the Ismoili Somoni District Department of the Internal Affairs in Dushanbe. The panelists believed that the media community had a hand in the release of Abdurahim Shukurov after 40 hours in custody. The community also gave support to websites that have been blocked by the government, particularly Asiaplus.tj, Tojnews.tj, and Ozodagon.com.

Today, Tajikistan has 17 local NGOs linked to mass media, though their activities are dependent on support from international organizations. This dependence has adversely affected sustainable development, as fewer international donors are funding programs to support Tajik media.

The existing partnership between local NGOs and international organizations is visible in the implementation of partnership projects, joint activities and events. The panelists noted the ongoing cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the US, Finnish, and UK Embassies, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, and the National Endowment for Democracy. Through international support, for example, NANSMIT continues to provide legal assistance to journalists and monitors violations against the rights of journalists, freedom of speech and access to information. In protecting the rights of journalists and freedom of speech, NANSMIT is working closely with Amnesty International, Reporters without Borders, and the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the OSCE.

Panelists noted that the Bureau of Human Rights—an independent center with branches in Khujand city of Soghd Oblast and Khorog, GBAO—assists NGOs, students of higher education, journalists, law enforcement personnel, lawyers, judges, and personnel of psychiatric facilities. However, Nuriddin Karshiboev was quick to point out that, “unfortunately, the protection of human rights has become a type of business for many NGOs—an opportunity to receive grants.”

Unfortunately, there are no NGOs and mass media organizations in Khatlon and the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province, except NANSMIT representatives and the Union of Journalists of Tajikistan, to protect the rights of journalists and provide them with consultative support.

Most mass media organizations and NGOs spend most of their efforts on training the journalism community through roundtables and conferences. "It is gratifying that these organizations, along with Dushanbe, direct their efforts at teaching mass media in the regions. They visit the areas, trying to solve problems of their institutional development on the spot," said Karshiboev. The panelists specially noted NANSMIT's role in providing training and conferences related to the protection of human rights and legal security of journalists.

The panel participants highlighted that *newreporter.tj* publishes news, announcements of grants, and training programs, also has a section for bloggers and its own live journal.

The panel participants expressed concern about the training level of journalists, whose general condition has not improved over the last several years. "It is difficult for journalists in the state-run mass media to perfect their skills as they are controlled and have to work within a set framework," Shonavruz Afzalshoev explained. "The level of professionalism within state-run media lags far behind their colleagues from independent media, as they have other criteria of professionalism and information presentation," according to Lola Halikjanova.

Participants believe that editorial offices are not able to recruit journalists who are specialized, except for the Russian-Tajik Slavonic University, which offers journalism training. There is no specialized journalism training offered at institutions of higher educational. Moreover, there is a shortage of practicing teachers, as well as outdated software and the lack of technical equipment students can access during their education.

All graduates coming to work in the media sector "need to be retrained," as they "have no practical experience," according to Lola Halikjanova. She reported that after three days of training conducted by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting in Khorog, the participants admitted that they gained more knowledge from the training than they had in four years of study at the university. However, Dilbar Samadova noted that Khujand State University students are interested in the profession rather than simply obtaining a diploma.

Tajikistan produces about 200 journalism graduates a year, "However, 50 percent of journalism graduates leave as migrants, 30 percent get married, and 20 percent work as journalists, primarily female," according to Hurshed Nyezov.

The panelists noted that journalists in Tajikistan are in urgent need of training to understand how to effectively analyze economic, political, and legal issues as well as

advance their communication skills through possible international exchange programs with colleagues from the Central Asia region.

There are no private or public schools that specialize in training media personnel in Tajikistan. However, there is training in eight higher educational institutions in the country, including the Dushanbe Pedagogical University and the Institute of the Arts. "Except for the Departments of Journalism at Khujand State University and the Russian-Tajik Slavic University (RTSU)," all other universities have no basic curricula for professional training students, according Dilbar Samadova. He added that Khujand State University does engage famous independent journalists from both print media and television and radio in the teaching process.

The curriculum of faculties and departments of journalism mainly use outdated programs, and devote only a few hours to practical training. Students continue to call for the introduction of hands-on practical training in the curriculum, Zarina Ergasheva added.

In 2012, with the financial support of the Soros Foundation, the Journalist NGO drafted the new State Standard for Educating Journalists curricula based on the Bologna credit system and educational system requirements, however the Ministry of Education and Science has yet to adopt the curricula.

Both local and international organizations conduct various preparatory and specialized courses for journalists, but the problem is that a student of journalism has to take leave from university and obtain permission from the dean's office to participate. "Worryingly, heads of the faculties or departments of journalism of all universities, except RTSU, in accordance with the Directive of 2012 by the Ministry of Education and Science, refuse to allow a student to attend a training if it is conducted by an international organization," according to Hurshed Nyezov.

As in the past year, practically all institutions of higher education that teach future journalists are discouraging them from working with the independent media often threatening students with expulsion according to the panelists. Zinatullo Ismoilov explained that one employee, who studied journalism at the National University, was requested by the dean's office to stop working in an independent media outlet. For his part, Hurshed Nyezov noted that Nuriddin Saidov, the minister of education and science, while visiting the Faculty of Journalism at the National University, asked second-year students if they were working with the *Faraj* newspaper. After four students had raised their hands, the minister reprimanded them shouting that the newspaper is an "enemy of the people!"

Currently, the technical competence of the graduates is still very low. "Having worked for six months as editor of a regional newspaper this year, I failed to recruit a staff of journalists, as the graduates of the faculty of journalism at Kurgant'yubn'sk University lacked basic computer literacy skills," said Murod Sotiev. The panelists believe little time is devoted to acquiring basic computer skills and understanding Internet journalism at universities. Moreover, the panelists noted the absence of up-to-date textbooks and learning aids. Short-term training does not bring about the desired outcome. Although there are internship programs for journalist and study abroad opportunities, very few go abroad for training because they have no command of the English language.

Unfortunately, not all media outlets are willing to hire journalism graduates, since their re-training requires time and money. Even more so, as young journalists request high starting salaries from \$300 to \$400. "Overall, not more than 10-15 percent of journalism graduates chose journalism as their profession in Tajikistan," reported Nuriddin Karshiboev.

Internet journalism and social networking classes and webinars have become very popular among journalists. All the courses and technical classes are free of charge, and conducted by IWPR, NANSMIT, Soros Foundation, and Homa Public Organization. "Our journalists especially need multimedia training. This is a necessary requirement of the times," noted Nuriddin Karshiboev. He said that there are fewer sources of funding for such courses, supposedly because the training has gone out of vogue. "We are now practicing performance training where there is less theory and more practice," Nuriddin Karshiboev added.

The panelists stressed the need for long-term training sessions devoted to investigative journalism, writing news, analyzing materials, interviewing, legal literacy and multimedia journalism. In-house training for employees is conducted only by the Asia-Plus Media Group, which has its own school, the 21st Century Independent School of Journalism.

The panelists pointed out that there was a lot of useful short-term training conducted by NANSMIT on the safety of journalists, digital security, and interaction with the press services in 2013. The panelists believe that it is necessary to set up a Center of Excellence for journalists that can systematically coordinate all training programs of local and international organizations.

As for the quality of printing and access to equipment, the panelists noted that access to printing facilities is subject to restriction, as this type of business is politicized and depends on the authorities' will, even when there is a large number

of private printing houses available. There are no restrictions on access to newsprint and equipment.

"The Sharki Ozod complex, which prints up to 90 percent of all newspapers and magazines, gives priority to the state-run media. Among independent publications, priority is given to the newspaper whose publisher is paying more," according to Hurshed Nyezov. Almost all private printing houses are profitable businesses.

The panelists were unanimous in stating that the freedom of speech in the Republic of Tajikistan will not truly exist until there is access to a private and independent printing house supported by an international organization. "Even private printing houses are controlled by the authorities, who can use threats to stop the printing of any opposition newspaper," added Nuriddin Karshiboev. However, Dilbar Samadova noted that the authorities do not control private printing houses in the Sughd Province, and they can print without any restrictions.

Panelists Hurshed Nyezov and Nuriddin Karshiboev pointed out that in most print houses, the quality is "low," however, the owner of the Mushfiki Printing House has purchased modern equipment guided by the principle—"quality at an affordable price."

The state-run Sharki Ozod Printing House, and another three or four businesses, control pricing, supplies the newsprint and plates in the Republic of Tajikistan. The prices for services in the private printing houses are 15 percent higher.

Tajikistan now has 87 printing houses, out of which 74 are in Dushanbe. There are 13 more printing houses in the regions—six in Khujand, two in Istaravshan, one in Kurgan-Tyube, one in Khorog, one in Yavan, one in Kulyab, and one in Tursunzade.

The panelists believe that the lack of an effective system to disseminate printed materials prevents access to information in the remote regions of the country. The channels of print media distribution are politicized. "The newsstands that belong to Tajikmatbuot (Tajikprint) carry few opposition newspapers and if any. If a publication contains an article critical of the government, the entire edition is "seized by the authorities" purchased off the stands, according to Turko Dikaev."

Independent newspapers are only sold by public distributors, who are elderly pensioners, for whom selling newspapers is an opportunity to add some extra income to their meager retirement allowance. "Over the last two years, the police have been forcing these elderly newspaper vendors out from the central streets of the capital, for allegedly 'violating public order,'" according to Nazarali Pirnazarov.

As previously discussed, The Association of Mass Media Distributors, founded in 2012, with the support of the OSCE, and has not started operations as media magnates have failed to reach an agreement as to who would lead the association. According to the initial project, this association would install 40 specially made modern newsstands in Dushanbe.

“Until radio and television transmitters” are freely available along with “uninterrupted electricity,” regional and independent media outlets will continue face issues when gathering, producing and distributing news, according to Nuriddin Karshiboev. Almost all transmitters belong to the Tadzhteleradiokom, which can terminate a broadcast at any time, citing technical problems.

Nowadays, each independent TV and radio station buys its own transmitters, and their capacity is much weaker than that of the state-run mass media. With rare exceptions, practically all software used by both the state-run and independent Tajik media is counterfeit and pirated. “The only licensed products used by independent media are anti-virus programs,” Ravshan Abdullaev explained.

Distribution of broadcasting frequencies and channels is a monopoly of the government, who can at any moment prevent independent media outlets from going on the air. These media outlets “rent” their frequencies from the Communications Service and Tajiktelecom, government proxies, who maintain control of the network.

In addition, to the ongoing transition to digital broadcasting, the state-run channels moved to another satellite that made it impossible for more than 15 percent of the population to watch the state-run television. The Communication Service and Tajikhteleradiokom govern all television and radio towers, and even independent stations have to use transmitters rented from the state tower.

The Internet space remains virtually controlled by the state, which limits citizens’ access to the alternative sources of information and news. Almost 20 websites remain currently blocked in Tajikistan; and ongoing attempts of hack into email accounts, Facebook, Twitter, Skype and the wiretapping of phones of journalists and politically active users. “After the appearance of the YouTube clip from the wedding of the President’s son, Rustam Emomali, with comments from the opposition politician and journalist Dodojon Atovulloev, the intelligence agencies have started an investigation into YouTube,” according to Hurshed Nyezov.

As in the past, the government has not blocked blogging platforms yet, but it does monitor these sites. However, bloggers reported cases of difficulty entering their page on Wordpress.com.

Mobile phones are used not only as a means of communication, but also for access to the Internet and for the reception of SMS advertising and music. However, during power cuts in the regions, both the mobile Internet connection and the stationary Internet become disabled, and 3G and 4G transmitters ceased to work.

In the past year, all ISPs had to raise their service prices due to the introduction of a three percent tax passed on to users. Tajikistan has 10 mobile phone companies and as many ISPs. Subscribers of mobile operators total 6.1 million, of which 25-30 percent use mobile Internet.

List of Panel Participants

Ravshan Abdullayev, executive director, Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia, Dushanbe

Azamhon Akbarov, director general, TRK Asia, Khujand

Shonavruz Afzalshoev, editor, *The Impulse*, Khorog

Turko Dikaev, staff correspondent, Kulyab region, *Asia-Plus*, Kulyab

Zinatullo Ismoilov, director, SMT TV, Dushanbe

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

Hurshed Nyezov, director, Center for Investigative Journalism; editor-in-chief, *The Faraj*, Dushanbe

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

Dilbar Samadova, chairperson, Department of Journalism, Khujand State University, Khujand

Murod Sotye, director, Paem Independent Information Agency, Kurgan-Tyube

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

Zarina Ergasheva, media expert, Center for Human Rights; reporter, *Asia-Plus*, Dushanbe

Moderator and Author

Lidiya Isamova, correspondent, RIA Novosti, Tajikistan

The panel discussion was convened on November 22, 2013.