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# KAZAKHSTAN

A key trend in Kazakhstan this past year was the increased influence of global political and economic events on the situation in the country. It is no accident that marketing studies conducted in 2014 showed that a third of the population prioritizes consumption of international news.

The recent events in Ukraine, for instance, brought about a whole series of consequences in Kazakhstan, including a negative impact on the economy leading to a government decision to devalue the tenge. Hastily introduced legislation added criminal penalties for advocating “illegal, unconstitutional change of the territorial integrity” in order to ward off separatist activities. Another package of changes eroded civil liberties, including freedom of conscience and freedom of speech, criminalization of non-registered NGOs, and considerably insulating the government from civil society.

A growing divide in public opinion between Russian and Ukrainian supporters has led many to reconsider the national security of Kazakhstan. Provocative statements by a number of Russian politicians regarding the oblasts of Kazakhstan bordering Russia reinforced concerns that the Ukraine scenario might be repeated in Kazakhstan. Public discourse began to focus on risks connected to relations with Russia, including those related to information security.

Another important event was the signing of an agreement to create the Eurasian Economic Community, a personal initiative of Kazakhstan’s president, Nursultan Nazarbayev. As a result, fierce disagreement ensued on the benefits of the customs union, which led to the emergence of an anti-Eurasian movement that considers such unions a threat to Kazakhstan’s sovereignty.

In 2014 stricter legislation and law enforcement practices affected all civil society organizations and the mass media. Despite public opposition and appeals by mass media leaders sent to the president to veto the package of legislative amendments, by mid 2014 repressive amendments were added to the Criminal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure, and the Administrative Offenses Code. Even though most amendments entered into force on January 1, 2015, in 2014 there were an unprecedentedly high number of prosecutions of journalists, mass media outlets, and related organizations. Such changes highlight a clear trend whereby human rights are taking a backseat to internal security and stability.

# KAZAKHSTAN at a glance

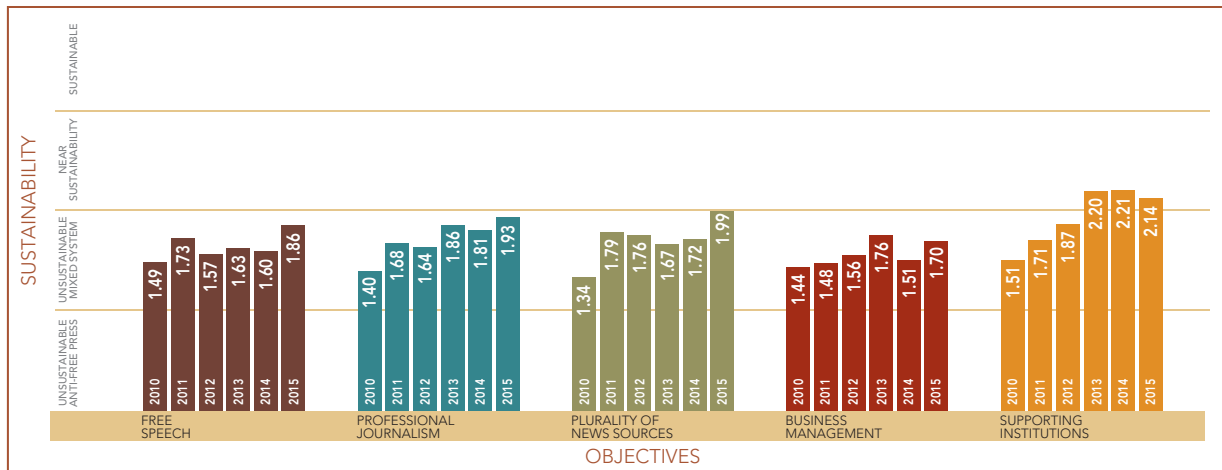
## GENERAL

- > Population: 17,948,816 (July 2014 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Capital city: Astana
- > Ethnic groups (% of population): Kazakh (Qazaq) 63.1%, Russian 23.7%, Uzbek 2.9%, Ukrainian 2.1%, Uighur 1.4%, Tatar 1.3%, German 1.1%, other 4.4% (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Religions (% of population): Muslim 70.2%, Christian 26.2% (mainly Russian Orthodox), other 0.2%, atheist 2.8%, unspecified 0.5% (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Languages: Kazakh (state language) 64.4%, Russian (official, used in everyday business) 95% (2001 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > GNI (2013-Atlas): \$196 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2014)
- > GNI per capita (2013-PPP): \$20,680 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2014)
- > Literacy rate: 99.7%; male 99.8%, female 99.7% (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > President or top authority: President Nursultan Abishuly Nazarbayev (since December 1, 1991)

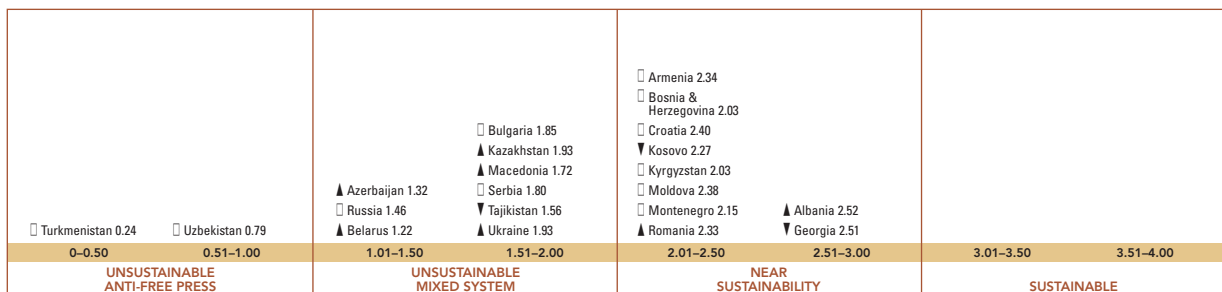
## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations: Print: 1357 newspapers, 503 magazines; Television Stations: 51; Radio Stations: 48; Cable Operators: 133; Satellite Operators: 6 (Government of Kazakhstan, 2014)
- > Newspaper circulation statistics: Top four, by circulation, are *Karavan* and *Karavan-Class* (private, weekly) circulation 500,000 combined; *Yegemen Qazaqstan* (state), in Kazakh, five times weekly, 201,750; *Kazhstanskaya Pravda* (state), in Russian, five times weekly, 100,000; *Ekspress-K* (private), in Russian, five times weekly, 100,000
- > Broadcast ratings: Top 4, KTK (private), in Kazakh and Russian; Channel 7 (private); 24 KZ (state), 24-hour news; Kazakh TV (state), satellite, in Kazakh and Russian
- > News agencies: 13 news agencies, most-used include Kazakhstan Today, KazInform, KazTAG, Bnews, Business Resource, RIA Novosti Kazakhstan, Interfax-Kazakhstan
- > Annual advertising revenue in media sector: Advertising agency statements vary widely. Estimated annual revenue in media is \$340 - \$360 million, distributed as follows: TV 84.8%, radio 3.9%, print 4.7%, outdoors 6.7% (2014 est., [kapital.kz/details/34070/kogda-rashody-ne-lishnie.html](http://kapital.kz/details/34070/kogda-rashody-ne-lishnie.html))
- > Internet usage: 5.299 million users (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: KAZAKHSTAN



## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2015: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES



### CHANGE SINCE 2014

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

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

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

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

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

Scores for all years may be found online at [http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE\\_msiscorers.xls](http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE_msiscorers.xls)

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Kazakhstan Objective Score: 1.86

As a result of the adoption of a series of repressive amendments to existing Kazakhstan law, freedom of speech, which is guaranteed by the Kazakhstan constitution, was at risk of disappearing. The media community and journalists did not see the decriminalization of libel and slander as promised by politicians, just as the draft freedom of information law was not adopted. On the other hand, a large number of new measures started referring to national security, even when not directly targeting media legislation. For example, in early 2014 the government adopted an executive decree, "Rules Applying Additional Measures and Temporary Limitations During States of Emergency," which addresses, among other things, "monitoring the means of mass information" and "the limitation or prohibition of the use of copying and reproduction technology, radio and television equipment, and audio and video recording technology, and the temporary seizure of sound amplification equipment." However, as of yet, the government has not enforced these provisions.

In April, President Nazarbayev signed law No. 200-V, "On the Introduction of Amendments and Additions to Certain Laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Questions of the Activities of Internal Affairs Agencies." The law amended several

### 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.

Furthermore, as noted by Galya Azhenova, director of the Public Center of Expertise on Information Disputes at the Adil Soz Foundation, the lack of details concerning the statute of limitations on law suits and the compensation amount for moral injury make media vulnerable to abuses in a system where "there can be no talk of an independent judiciary."

existing laws and permits the Prosecutor General's office to block Internet and mobile phone communications within the country for a limited period of time without a court order. Such action can be taken not only for dissemination of illegal information over such networks, but also in times of "mass public activities that violate the established order."

The same law introduced into the Criminal Code article 242-1, "Dissemination of Information Known to Be False," which provides a penalty of up to ten years' imprisonment and does not exclude liability for the dissemination of opinions, views, beliefs, and conjectures. This law includes a procedure for extrajudicial suspension of the dissemination of media products that are Internet resources. This undermines provisions in the law "On the Mass Media," which provides for suspension or termination of mass media, which includes websites, only by court order.

In early July, Nazarbayev signed a new Criminal Code, which increases criminal liability for extremism and terrorism and also provides for the criminalization of actions promoting the dissemination of radical ideologies, and a new Administrative Offenses Code that provides for suspension and closure of media outlets for technical violations. The new Criminal Code also introduced provisions for fighting organized crime, including in the sphere of information technologies. In comparison with the existing code, the new code broadens the grounds for defamation and keeps a penalty of three years' imprisonment. Special protection of high-ranking government officials was maintained.

In November 2014 Nazarbayev signed a law "On the Introduction of Amendments and Additions to Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan Regarding the Combating of Extremism and Terrorism," which introduced amendments to the Code of Civil Procedure and the Land Code, and 13 laws. The amendments to the Code of Civil Procedure include provisions for designating an organization or sources of information as extremist or terrorist.

Out of 22 applicants for 18 frequencies, the startup Alma-Atty 777 Corporation won 11 frequencies, while Avtoradio won the rest. Ruslan Nikonovich, general director of TV Art, said that even if procedures are followed, there is no effective competition.

During 2014, media organizations and the public actively opposed the proposed changes to legislation. As early as February, after the lower house of parliament had approved the first reading of the draft amendments to the Criminal Code and Administrative Offenses Code, a coalition of 12 NGO's named 20-shy Bap (after the article in the Kazakh constitution on freedom of media and prohibition of censorship) appealed to members of parliament, expressing grave concern about broadening limits on freedom of expression. In April, the Union of Kazakhstan Journalists and the Adil Soz Foundation presented a petition signed by more than 170 domestic and international NGOs and citizens to the president asking him to veto the package of draft laws; the president ignored the appeal. In May, members of 20-shy Bap coalition approached the UN Special Rapporteur and requested that he visit Kazakhstan to address the additional legal limitations endangering human rights.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) representative on freedom of the media, Dunja Mijatović, expressed concern regarding the changes to Kazakhstan's laws, fearing that this may result in "self-censorship or excessive control of content by the authorities." Analyzing the effect of the legal measures that had been adopted, Tulegen Askarov, a journalist with Forbes.kz, remarked that the Criminal Code and Civil Code take precedence over the media law that guarantees freedom of speech. Furthermore, as noted by Galya Azhenova, director of the Public Center of Expertise on Information Disputes at the Adil Soz Foundation, the lack of details concerning the statute of limitations on law suits and the compensation amount for moral injury make media vulnerable to abuses in a system where "there can be no talk of an independent judiciary."

The first institutional mechanism of official state censorship appeared in 2014. As reported by the portal Tengrinews, the chairman of the Agency for Religious Affairs, Marat Azilkhanov, will be required to clear with the authorities any items devoted to religion in state media. An item on the web portal Kloop.kg on Kazakhstani children undergoing military training in an ISIL camp demonstrates

the restrictions on covering certain subjects. The Ministry of Communications and Information sent a letter to the editorial offices of Kloop Media asking that they remove the material, basing their request on UN Security Council Resolution 1373 on counteracting terrorism and on the new law on the fight against extremism and terrorism. Following the refusal to remove the materials by Kloop.kg, a court case was opened and access to the article blocked.<sup>1</sup>

Media suffer a high degree of pressure and risk of being closed down if the content does not correspond to official expectations. For example, in 2014 *Pravdivaya Gazeta* was closed down on the basis of technicalities and the newspaper *Assandi Times* was closed because it was declared belonging to a single media organization, Respublika. In November 2014, the independent newspaper *ADAM bol* was shuttered after the Almaty city Bureau of Internal Policy brought a lawsuit claiming that the paper had published war propaganda contrary to the law in relation to an article on the conflict in Ukraine. After a November court order suspending the newspaper, a December verdict pulled its license; an appeal by the newspaper failed in February 2015.

Individually journalists also are subject to pressure. For example, Radio Free Europe reporter Orken Bisenov was arrested in Astana while collecting information on plans by local activists to protest the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union.

Panelists agreed unanimously that registration of print media with the Ministry of Culture and Information has become procedurally easier. Today it is possible for media to register and obtain a certification online through the government's web portal. After filling out the prescribed form and submitting the necessary documents, the applicant may pay the fee online, which is determined by the Tax Code. Within ten business days of the application date a scannable version of the registration is sent to the e-mail address indicated on the application. Registration is not required for print publications with a circulation of fewer than 100 copies; official, regulatory, and other documents; and court bulletins. Internet resources are not required to register, although they are considered to be mass media.

Instead of registering, broadcast media must obtain authorization to use a frequency. Over the last few years, media organizations, particularly the Kazakhstan Association of Television and Radio Broadcasters, have raised the question of suitable legal regulation of cable

<sup>1</sup> By order of the Kazakhstan State Communications Agency, the Kloop.kg servers were disconnected from the Internet and did not have access to all the materials on the site, while Bektur Iskender and Rinal Tukhvatshin were summoned to the State National Security Committee for Questioning.



television. As noted in a public statement by the director of the association's media support center, Sergey Vlasenko, "Formally, cable operators are identified as mass media, but in fact they are a means of communication since they do not create their own content... The present Mass Media Law does not address the relationship between cable television operators and TV channels and subscribers or the issues related specifically to cable television activities." Media advocates highlight the need to review licensing rules for cable operators.

Obtaining a license for new players or extending one for old licensees remains complicated and to some degree unpredictable. On November 10, 2014, the Ministry of Investment and Development released the results of a competition for television frequencies. Out of 22 applicants for 18 frequencies, the startup Alma-Atty 777 Corporation won 11 frequencies, while Avtoradio won the rest. Ruslan Nikonovich, general director of TV Art, said that even if procedures are followed, there is no effective competition.

Market access conditions and the taxation regime for commercial media organizations do not legally differ from other kinds of businesses.

Analysis of 2014 statistics on crimes against journalists and other media professionals compared with previous years shows at first glance a positive trend in all categories. For example, whereas Adil Soz monitoring in 2013 recorded 252 cases of denial or restriction of the provision of information, there were 215 known cases in 2014; the number of civil and criminal claims against media and journalists decreased from 101 to 67; impeding the professional activities of journalists fell from 45 to 29; cases of unwarranted arrests and detention of media workers decreased from 32 to 19. There were no professionally motivated murders of journalists in 2014, and more importantly, the crimes against journalists committed several years ago—the murder of Kyrgyzstani journalist Gennady Pavlyuk and the attempted murder of journalist and 2015 MSI panelist Lukpan Akhmedyarov from *Ural Week*—were brought to a judicial conclusion.

In the Pavlyuk murder case, the court handed down sentences of 38 years in prison for the three defendants, who had pled not guilty. One of the perpetrators was a member of the Kyrgyz security service. However, it is still not clear who ordered the murder.

Nonetheless, Azhenova said that attacks, threats, and damage to equipment happen every day. Despite the resolution of some of the high-profile cases described above crimes against journalists, media, and bloggers are not always carefully investigated, or the investigations do not produce any results. Existing legal mechanisms are

not employed to protect the rights of journalists in the performance of their professional duties.

The dependence of the editorial policies of state media on government policy is obvious. In 2014, for example, Aleksandr Tarakov was named the new chairman of the board of the newspaper *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, replacing Zhanay Omarov, who was appointed Vice Minister of Culture and Information. As noted by Diana Okremova, director of the North Kazakhstan Legal Media Center, "Editorial independence is in practice an ephemeral concept. Independent publications remain only in the remote regions and only in print, plus a few Internet resources. Of the television channels and newspapers, 95 percent are financed from the government budget. And the number is growing from year to year. Out of KZT 25 billion [\$135 million], KZT 20 billion [\$108 million] go to support the television channels Khabar, Kazakhstan, and Mir through direct financing. In this way the government clearly controls media content since the entire press is dependent on the government budget. Media are a propaganda tool and an instrument for shaping government information policy, but in no way independent businesses."

Adil Soz monitoring reported 35 libel cases in 2014, whereas there were 16 in 2013. While nobody was convicted in 2013, in March 2014, for the first time in Kazakhstan, an arrest order was issued against a journalist for libel. Former Member of Parliament Maral Itegulov accused the Aktyubinsk journalist Natalya Sadykova of using the pseudonym Bakhyt Ilyacova to publish on the *Respublika* website an article entitled "There Aren't Enough Contracts to Go Around," in which she deliberately libeled him, harming his business reputation. The judge issued a warrant against the journalist in absentia, since she had in fact fled to Ukraine having lost faith in the judicial system in Kazakhstan following her husband's imprisonment years earlier. *ADAM bol* editor Gulzhan Yergalieva was sued by the deputy imam of Imangali Mosque in Atyrau Oblast, whom the paper had accused of being involved in the war in Syria. In that lawsuit the court awarded damages of KZT 5 million (\$27,000).

Kazakhstan has no national freedom of information law. Kazakhstan law also lacks the concept of the public's right to know, which serves as the basis for unjustified limitations on the provision of information (e.g., information on the health and personal life of the president).

Adil Soz monitoring describes 215 cases of unjustified restrictions on access to information, which includes cases limiting access to information by journalists due to regulatory provisions, access to information for journalists of non-governmental media—especially private opposition media and bloggers—and limitations allowing the directors

of government agencies and other high officials who do not want to see any criticism of their activities.

Among the many cases of this kind, Adil Soz observed that in April 2014, on the pretext of a heavy workload, the government forbade journalists from being present at official meetings and informed them that they could obtain information about the proceedings at briefings given by the Central Communications Office. Officials of most agencies hide information on human rights violations, unresolved social issues, and ecological problems. As a result of the devaluation of the tenge, a large number of citizens lost their savings but no data has been released on this subject—and in any case it is a dangerous topic to write about.

The majority of panelists believe that today, thanks to the development of media technologies, it is not possible to limit the media's access to sources of information, domestic and foreign. From Chinese TV to Al Jazeera, from local web-based platforms to worldwide social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, information flows are accessible and media make use of these sources.

Traditionally, there are no barriers to entering journalism as a profession. Employment in the mass media sector does not require any special qualifications or experience. At the moment, the main barriers to practicing the profession are accreditation needed to attend government meetings and events and being affiliated with closed newspapers such as *Respublika* and its sister newspapers (e.g., *Assandi Times*).

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Kazakhstan Objective Score: 1.93

The case of the blogger's protracted April fool's joke regarding the filming of a Hollywood movie starring a well-known Kazakhstan actor shows how journalists do not attempt to cover events from various points of view, do not go to all the actors for comments, and do not strive to avoid subjectivity. Had reporters applied basic journalistic principles, the hoax would have been uncovered quickly. Frequently, journalists are forced to apologize and withdraw stories due to lack of facts and data.

In an interview to radio Azattyk, well-known journalist Kyandyk Shamakhaiuly gave this assessment of journalism in Kazakhstan: "The Kazakhstan media does not grasp the idea of objectivity. They need to avoid emotions, present concrete facts, not comment without understanding things, and present everything the way it actually is."

The panelists noted that any one type of media does not monopolize examples of professionalism: bloggers,

print, and broadcast journalists do produce good quality journalism, but only a few conscientious and highly professional reporters stand out. These include Irina Dorokhova (*Kursiv*) and Aleksandr Vorotilov (*Forbes Kazakhstan*), both Russian journalists working in Kazakhstan. However, as Askarov noted, The Eurasian Economic Union may contribute to a supply of new, quality Russian journalists who will in turn pose barriers to the development of Kazakhstani journalists and the status of Kazakh-language journalism.

The question of adopting a code of ethics has been vigorously debated in recent years, with the position of management, journalists, and media experts unchanged. In the less-than-free conditions, in the grip of censorship, and having to work on behalf of one powerful group or another, there is no point in adopting ethical principles of self-regulation.

Nevertheless, three times in the past decade public efforts to reach an agreement between media companies and journalists in certain regions or within certain types of media have been successful. The first was the creation in 2008 in the Karaganda Oblast, with OSCE support, of a council for journalistic ethics, the aim of which was to cooperate in the pre-trial settlement of disputes between citizens, organizations, and media. Today, as reported by the founder, the Media Life Fund consists of 30 journalists and media in Akmola, North Kazakhstan, Almaty, and other oblasts. The second attempt concerned the finalization of a code at the initiative of the Union of Journalists of Kazakhstan and the Major Editors Club in 2012. Neither of the codes has had any great practical significance. The observance of ethical standards is not institutionalized (with

## 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).

the exception of the Council of Ethics, the activities of which not one of the panelists could say anything definite).

The third effort took place in 2014 among bloggers, who created the Alliance of Bloggers of Kazakhstan. Bloggers decided to self-regulate “in order to improve the information environment,” to bring together Kazakh and Russian-language content in order to “know what’s going on in the blogosphere,” to secure for bloggers greater rights and the potential for gaining access to news, and to provide legal services to avoid libel. In fact, as noted by Askarov, “many bloggers did not even understand the need for disclaimers.”

The panelists also focused on the need for instituting ombudsmen in editorial offices, who would monitor the observance of ethical standards (particularly on coverage of ethnic, religious, gender, and other sensitive subjects), as well as monitor and raise issues of plagiarism.

At present, plagiarism is a common phenomenon. In the process of preparing this report, a large number of instances of plagiarism were identified, including instances of total appropriation of someone else’s material and publication of it in another media outlet under another name, or partial borrowing of the material or compilation from various sources.

The panelists’ discussion noted that some online resources, such as WikiBilim.kz and kitap.kz, have begun to promote Creative Commons licenses in order to establish principles of ethical use of other writers’ ideas and texts on the net. Individual bloggers, such as Nurlan Makhmudov, have shown a commitment to observing international intellectual property standards.

The panelists also recognized as problematic the current practice of giving gifts to editors and journalists, which may vary from direct cash payments to organization of trips and even long term “test drives,” in which car dealers supply their own vehicles to journalists for several months.

Media circles in Kazakhstan have long acknowledged that there is censorship and self-censorship. As proof of this phenomenon, the owner of TV Tan, the magazine *Forbes* etc., in an interview with journalist Bekzhan Idrisov of 365info.kz, noted that, although there are special correspondents and news bureaus of Kazakhstan’s state television channels in Kiev, at the time of EuroMaydan they did not file one story on the subject. A special series by Kaym Amanzholul on EuroMaydan was met not only with condemnation as a pro-Ukrainian position, but also with threats of reprisal from several government agencies.

In the words of journalist and civil rights activist Rozlana Taukina, “In Kazakhstan at this time there is little

However, as Askarov noted, The Eurasian Economic Union may contribute to a supply of new, quality Russian journalists who will in turn pose barriers to the development of Kazakhstani journalists and the status of Kazakh-language journalism.

high-quality journalism. For example, even items about corruption appear to be written to order. Because journalists practice self-censorship, many genres are not being developed. Indeed, journalism as whole is in a difficult position. Every year journalists are in greater danger.”<sup>2</sup> Kuandyk Shamakhauy supports this view, adding, “The greatest censors in the media are the editors-in-chief themselves. Fear of losing their job deprives both the journalists and the editors of creative freedom.”<sup>3</sup>

In fact, even criticism that appears seems to be made to order. On October 11, 2014, President Nazarbayev, in an expanded meeting of the government, criticized the work of Prime Minister Akhmetov’s government. He later realized that some of the criticism made at the meeting did not appear in newspapers and on television and ordered that it be widely covered in the media. Immediately after this, the government was subject to criticism on the daily news programs *Zheti kun* on Khabar TV and *Arta.kz* on Kazakhstan TV and in the latest issues of the newspapers *Yegemen Kazakhstan* and *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*. This information campaign found great resonance among journalistic circles, along with skeptical views. For example, the director of the state television channel *Yelarna*, Serik Abasov, wrote a joking post on his Facebook page: “The state-run media have replaced their long-lost teeth with removable dentures.”

No media, not even the blogosphere, allows itself to discuss the most controversial subjects, and this is not accidental. Rozlana Taukina, in an interview on radio Azattyk, said, “We’ve known for a long time that there is a special department in the National Security Committee that monitors the press, Internet, television, and radio. Their job is to neutralize the news. Professional commentators writing under various pseudonyms can sometimes even bring about the closure of a site because it uses uncensored expressions or advocates violence or overthrow of the constitutional

<sup>2</sup> <http://rus.azattyq.org/content/svoboda-pressy-kazakhstan/25370224.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://rus.azattyq.org/content/prensa-v-kazakhstane-kuandyk-shamahaiuly/25434957.html>



According to Azhenova, “The government is not concerned about analysis and the disappearance of socially significant programming can be attributed to its disloyalty to the political regime.”

order. I can’t rule out that there may be people like that among the civilian population. In any case, all this taken together represents a colossal threat to the destruction or prohibition of expressing one’s own opinion.”<sup>4</sup> As Kasym Amanzholov told Azattyk, “The most dangerous subjects are free elections, the events in Zhanaozen and the wealth of the president’s family.”

The International Federation of Journalists conducted a survey of 16 countries in order to determine the difference in pay of journalists as a function of their sex, age, and country. According to the survey, journalists in Kazakhstan earn 30 percent less than those in European countries, but greater than their colleagues in Belarus and Ukraine. The average monthly salary of a male journalist in Kazakhstan is \$1,052, while a woman can expect \$905.<sup>5</sup> These figures did not fully reflect the grim reality with regard to journalist’s income and the gaps between different categories of journalists. The actual monthly earnings of the majority of journalists in the regions equal those of teachers (about \$300 to \$350), which cannot be compared to well-paid workers.

At the same time, it can be said that there is a difference between the income of journalists working for media holding companies and those working for private opposition or regional publications, and even more so regarding media in the capital. An analyst or journalist in the capital receives more than \$2,000 monthly, which raises the average on earnings data.

Traditionally, regional journalists in Kazakhstan can receive considerable amounts of income through the ability to combine simultaneous jobs in several media outlets. As reported by the panelists, the possibility of combining jobs has been markedly reduced by the decrease in the number of regional print publications.

According to data collected by J’son & Partners Consulting, the largest share of genres on Kazakhstan’s nationwide channels are television dramas (39 percent), entertainment

programs (12 percent), and art films (11 percent), while news and information content have shares of 5 percent.<sup>6</sup> The panelists listed several news programs that have disappeared in recent years, such as *Yerkin Soz* and *Doda* (Channel 31), or programs that have lost their “sharpness,” such as *Aytuuga Onoy* (KazTV). According to Azhenova, “The government is not concerned about analysis and the disappearance of socially significant programming can be attributed to its disloyalty to the political regime.”

Even news programming might be characterized as entertainment in its own way. There is a popular anecdote among journalists about an elderly woman who is watching television and crying loudly. When asked what happened, she replies, “I want to live in Kazakhstan.” The other person, bewildered, informs her that she *is* living there, to which the woman breaks into great sobs and says, “I want to live in the Kazakhstan they show on Khabar!”

In the opinion of Lukpan Akhmedyarov, editor-in-chief of *Uralskaya Nedelya*, the reason that information programs are being squeezed out by entertainment programs is not so much political as economic. The television channel Tan last year began to introduce more information and news programs to replace highly profitable entertainment and has experienced a drop in revenue. But the owner of the channel considers these costs as an unavoidable for advancing the “information interests” of the government. Otherwise, much of the news programming of the past has migrated online.

The state-run media and media that are part of large media holding companies are much better equipped with regard to technology than in the other Central Asian countries. These media have revamped their technological base and are launching new multimedia services. Alongside this, they use modern means of reaching their audiences (online translation, blogs, Twitter, exclusive subscription services). For example, technological changes of this kind are taking place in the Kazinform agency, permitting it to become the leading news agency in Kazakhstan and Central Asia and to increase its number of users to 500,000 per day.

At the same time, a number of private regional media, particularly print media, are somewhat behind technologically. As Aleksandr Rozhkov, editor-in-chief of *Arguments & Facts Kazakhstan* noted, “Due to the shortage of funds, the editorial departments rarely acquire new equipment. There are also quality issues with the technical staff servicing the equipment, and Internet speed is often very slow. The technical problems lead to reduced competitiveness in getting out media products.”

<sup>4</sup> <http://rus.azattyq.org/content/svoboda-pressy-kazakhstan/25370224.html>

<sup>5</sup> [http://mojazarplata.kz/main/Zhenwina\\_i\\_rabota/zhenschiny-zhurnalisty-v-kazahstane-zarabatyvajut-na-14-menqshe-muzhchin](http://mojazarplata.kz/main/Zhenwina_i_rabota/zhenschiny-zhurnalisty-v-kazahstane-zarabatyvajut-na-14-menqshe-muzhchin)

<sup>6</sup> [http://json.tv/ict\\_telecom\\_analytics\\_view/obzor-rynka-televizionnogo-kontenta-v-respublike-kazahstan](http://json.tv/ict_telecom_analytics_view/obzor-rynka-televizionnogo-kontenta-v-respublike-kazahstan)

Participants in the conference “Regional Media Cooperation: Transformation, Consolidation, Development,” held in Aktau in December 2014 agreed unanimously that the development of specialized journalism is one of the most serious problems in the country.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Kazakhstan Objective Score: 1.99

Despite the variety of mass media genres and providers, readers and viewers receive practically the same message from the various media outlets. As a rule, all of the large media are concentrated in the hands of a narrow circle of people, who are affiliated with or dependent on the political powers. For this reason, the news picture can obviously have no variety. At the present time national media produce news that avoids expressing an independent opinion or is produced to order by the ruling elite. Despite the wide choice of media outlets, there is no coverage of the opposition.

For many Kazakhstanis, the upcoming transition to digital broadcasting may limit their access to important media content on television. Obtaining a set-top decoder or new digital television will cost a lot of money. Although according to the law “On Television and Radio Broadcasting,” the local government bears responsibility for assuring that vulnerable groups have access to digital television, the Kazakhstan National Association of Television and Radio Broadcasters is pushing to have the national

### 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.

government provide necessary conversion equipment free of charge to all Kazakhstanis.

Due to the economic constraints on printing, in part due to the devaluation of the tenge, many print publications have begun to move to the Internet, changing the profile of their traditional readers and making it more difficult for those not online to access their preferred media. According to the Kazakhstan Communications and Information Agency, there were 35 court orders over the past year that resulted in the blocking of 756 Internet articles.<sup>7</sup> The reasons cited for the orders were terrorism, religious or suicide propaganda, the advertisement of prohibited products or alcoholic beverages, glorifying narcotics use, and dissemination of pornographic content. According to a report by Mygord.kz, in 2014 244 sites having religious content were blocked.<sup>8</sup> Azaaz.org was blocked after posting a petition calling for the resignation of the president and government.<sup>9</sup> Meduza was blocked after posting an article entitled “The Ust-Kamenogorsk People’s Republic: Are the Russians Waiting for ‘Polite People’ in Kazakhstan?” This was classified as propaganda to incite ethnic discord and violate the country’s territorial integrity.

The Eurasian Economic Union, which in theory should increase the potential for the dissemination of Kazakhstani mass media abroad, could in fact place the media in an unfavorable situation due to persisting regulatory barriers within Russia that stifle the ability of media in border areas to reach Russia, while creating possibilities for the penetration of Russian media outlets into Kazakhstan.

Events in Ukraine have become a kind of litmus test for confirming to what extent the citizens of Kazakhstan have access to alternative sources of information on vital world events. Most panelists noted a clear predominance of Russian sources and Russian propaganda provided not only through Russian television and radio stations, but also through those media that are partly controlled (up to 20 percent by law) by Russian capital. Although it is possible to follow Ukrainian television channels, both by satellite and through the Internet, people do not do so due to language barriers.

Many events of the past year (e.g., events in Ukraine, mass poisonings in Berezovka, the sleeping sickness epidemic in the village of Kalachi) confirm that state media are biased and cannot be called independent. For unbiased news, users seek Internet sources and foreign media, while those who reside in remote villages must be satisfied with traditional pro-government print media.

<sup>7</sup> <http://dixinews.kz/articles/288>

<sup>8</sup> <http://mygorod.kz/?p=5517>

<sup>9</sup> <http://rus.azattyq.org/content/peticia-onlain-otstavka-nazarbaeva/25262258.html>

Meduza was blocked after posting an article entitled “The Ust-Kamenogorsk People’s Republic: Are the Russians Waiting for ‘Polite People’ in Kazakhstan?” This was classified as propaganda to incite ethnic discord and violate the country’s territorial integrity.

In addition to the news agencies Kazinform, KazTar, Inform kz, Kaz Today, Novosti-Kazakhstan, Tengrinews, Business-Inform and others, which have undertaken technology upgrading in the last year, the majority of portals—Forbes, Tengri News, Bi-News, 365 info—also prepare and distribute news wires. There are also start-up news agencies, such as ranking.kz, which provide the regional media with content. News from the portals and news agencies, as well as information from the blogosphere, are used by both the local and national media. Blog platforms also create their own “news wires.” The majority of private print media aggregate the news from all these sources.

Media outlets often produce their own news stories, including at the local level. In fact, panelists reported that regional television is prolific in the production of news. Stories are often created simultaneously by local media for use in their local market and tailored for sharing with national outlets. Rozhkov noted, “The content of private media differs to a great extent by the use of various news sources and more informal presentation of materials.”

As sanctioned by government decree No. 42 of April 30, 2014, 35 Kazakhstani media will be fully or partially privatized. This includes 27 municipal, district, and oblast newspapers, including 49 percent of the shares of the newspaper *Industrial Karaganda* and half of the shares of the newspaper *Our Kostanay* and *Rudensk Worker*. The municipal television and radio stations Dinar, Rudny Dausy, Radio Rauan, Mangistau-Media, and Shakhhtinsk Info plus Zhetysu Akparat media holding company will also be fully or partly privatized. In addition, the shares of the ZAN media corporation will be put up for commercial tender. Commenting on these decisions in an interview with the media, the chairman of the board of the Union of Kazakhstan Journalists, Seytkazy Matayev, expressed concern over “whose hands the press may fall into.”

Information on who one or another media holding company belongs to and what media are part of what holding company are not publicly available, as noted by panelists

Akhmedyarov and Rozhkov; they noted that most media gravitate around Syr Media and Akzhaiyk Akparat.

Foreign ownership is also somewhat murky. For example, according to the Kazakh office of TNS, Channel 31, the second most popular broadcaster in Kazakhstan, is actually a majority property of the Russian holding company STS Media. But in accordance with local law only 20 percent of it belongs de jure to a local corporation, Channel 31 Television and Radio Company. A Russian holding company owns 70 percent of Prim, which supplies Channel 31 with content, and 60 percent of the corporation Advertising and Marketing, which is the advertising department of the channel. These legal entities form the Channel 31 group, in which STS Media holds a 60 percent financial interest.

This is not the only example. The annual report of the German company Hubert Burda Media indicates that its share in Burda-Altai Press is 50 percent. And Trader Media East, a company registered in the Netherlands whose majority owner is the Turkish Doğan Media Group, owns 100 percent of the company Pronto-Akmola, the publisher of the newspapers *Iz Ruk v Ruki*, *Rabota Segodnia*, *Avtomaniya*, and others.

In Kazakhstan there has been a tradition of publishing media in the languages of ethnic minorities. Thirty-two of these are print media belonging to national minorities and published in 13 Kazakhstani ethnic languages. The largest ethnic newspapers operate with government support, receiving grants and other forms of financial support. The print media of the minorities include *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* in Russian and German; *Ukrainski noviny* in Ukrainian; *Koreilbo* in Korean and Russian; *Vatan* in Azerbaijani, Kazakh, and Russian; *Akhyska* in Turkish, Kazakh, and Russian; *Uygur Avazy* in Uygur; and *Aziya Bugun* in Uygur, Russian, Kazakh, and Arabic. Television and radio broadcast news and entertainment programs in 11 languages, including German, Uzbek, Ukrainian, Turkish, and Uygur.

At the same time, writing candidly about interethnic relations in Kazakhstan is tacitly banned. “Many media are left out of the process of discussing problems associated with interethnic relations. They try not to raise them or touch them, because this exposes them to prosecution on a number of charges,” said well-known media leader Reran Suleiman in an interview. His opinion was seconded in the same report by Irina Chernykh, chief research officer of the Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic Studies: “We are afraid to speak of interethnic relations. Here only the Kazakh-language media write about this. In the Russian-language media this is taboo because of

the possibility of exposing the publication to charges of fomenting strife. But if we keep quiet about these problems, some identity group or other is going to be closed down. And both theory and practice show that this results in radical actions.”<sup>10</sup>

Events in Ukraine and some publications and statements by Russian politicians and journalists have been a kind of catalyst for a discussion of the interethnic situation and media. The reaction of government agencies in the past year to statements about the civil and political freedoms of ethnic minorities has been prompt and sharp.

For the majority of regional media, events on the international front are not high priority news and their main focus is on local news. According to analysis by the Kazakhstan National Association of Television and Radio Broadcasters and the Baxter Group, regional news is deemed more important by local residents compared with national news. National media, on the other hand, actively devote a share of broadcast time to international news, while mostly ignoring local news, except when extraordinary events occur. As was the case in the past, the key newsmakers are the president, ministers, members of parliament, and the top managers in the regions.

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Kazakhstan Objective Score: 1.70

Over the last few years media experts have consistently noted the non-commercial nature of the operation of state media. The significant volume of guaranteed government support has deprived these media of the motivation to be economically efficient enterprises. Experts have stressed that there are no performance criteria to receive such support. One expert said, “The work of journalists has been evaluated by centimeters of newspaper space and minutes of airtime. And this is convenient for the government: there is no need to bother with actual performance.”<sup>11</sup>

Thanks to the Pravavoy Media-Tsentr Fund, in 2014 the public has been actively discussed the meaning of government support mechanisms and their effect on the media. In a controversial article Saule Isabayeva said, “From the viewpoint of commercial and monetary relations, the media view the government not so much as an investor delivering direct subsidies, as a regulator. The government in turn relates to the media not as a market entity, but purely as a subsidized

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.stanradar.com/news/full/9930-ispochennye-otnosheniya-kak-izmenilas-mezhetnicheskaja-situatsiya-v-kazahstane.html>

<sup>11</sup> [http://forbes.kz/massmedia/do\\_40\\_mlrld\\_tenge\\_vyirastet\\_goszakaz\\_v\\_smi\\_v\\_2014](http://forbes.kz/massmedia/do_40_mlrld_tenge_vyirastet_goszakaz_v_smi_v_2014)

sector of the economy. For this reason it is only natural that the large amounts that it disburses every year to conduct information policy are by and large not used transparently and effectively.”<sup>12</sup> In the past year the government has aimed to introduce criteria and monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the funds spent on government procurement. Thus, in an interview with Kazpravda.kz, the chairman of the Kazakhstan Communications and Information Agency (KPI), Askar Zhumagaliyev, said, “We’ve already developed a system in the KPI for the state media so that at the end of the year it will be possible to evaluate their work and draw conclusions regarding its effectiveness, looking primarily at the quality and popularity of the content.”<sup>13</sup>

Data on the revenues of the media are not publicly available, although expert opinion indicates that the television and radio companies are highly profitable. As to the print and Internet media, the Internet magazine Vlast organized an expert assessment of the 15 online media with the greatest profits and revenues, including four news portals (Zakon.kz, Tengrinews, Kazakh.ru, and Total.kz) and two blogs (Gonzo.kz and Yvision.kz). Experts believed that only the portal Zakon.kz had reached the level of self-sufficiency. As estimated by Shabkat Sabirov, the president of the Internet Association of Kazakhstan, the online advertising market is about \$10 to \$12 million dollars per year.<sup>14</sup> However, after a number of advertisements appeared on Facebook for the

<sup>12</sup> <http://camonitor.com/10580-.html>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.inform.kz/rus/article/2676583>

<sup>14</sup> Information of the correspondent of <http://kapital.kz/economic/34837/mozhno-li-zarabotat-milliony-v-kaznete.html>

#### 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.

Okremova said of this development, “Financing is increasing for one purpose: to strengthen government control over the media, to get as many journalist staffs as possible on the hook and make them loyal to the work of government officials...it’s nothing to be proud of.”

sale of brand-name merchandise in Almaty, users criticized bloggers for posting for pay and questioned the reliability of information provided by bloggers.<sup>15</sup>

Traditionally, the print media receive revenue from subscriptions, sales of individual copies, advertising, and government subsidies or private investment. In connection with the trend of newspapers migrating online, the revenue structure for this category of media is changing. The most recent changes for state media have included the formation of media holding companies, many of which have their own printing facilities and receive additional revenue from office rentals, printing services and so on (e.g. regional holding companies Akpara-Akh Zhaiyk, Atyrau etc.). As before, mandatory subscriptions by government and municipal officials guarantee a significant revenue stream. For non-government newspapers, the situation is more complicated. They are forced to compete with government media for advertisers and to attempt to get government contracts, while still maintaining some degree of independence. There is a difference in structure among the revenues of print publications as a function of language: the panelists stressed, “The majority of Kazakh-language media in the regions depend to a great degree on government help because advertisers turn more to the Russian-language media.”

For the state media, government advertising and subsidies represent a very significant part of their revenue. According to reports of the Pravovoy Media-Tsentry Fund, the amount of government financing of media practically equals the volume of advertising revenue of the media, more than KZT 38 billion (\$205 million).

Private investment is also a source of revenue for various types of media. According to the panelists, it has been reported that the Kazakh-language blogosphere has begun to develop rapidly not only because of advertising revenue, but also from private contributions and investments. In

<sup>15</sup> <http://kapital.kz/economic/34837/mozhno-li-zarobotat-milliony-v-kaznete.html>

particular, in 2014 one patron gave KZT 1 million tenge (\$5,400) to a blog. There is also a special competition under the name blogiada.kz aimed at improving the quality of the Kazakh-language blog content.

The main revenue source for broadcast media is advertising, although subscriptions are in first place for cable television providers. The paid television market in Kazakhstan is one of the largest in the post-Soviet territories. Almost half of all television viewers have cable, and in the cities that number climbs to 80 percent.

According to preliminary estimates, the total media advertising market in 2014 was between \$302 million and \$305 million, as against \$326 million in 2013, as the managing director of the communications agency group Dentsu Aegis Network Kazakhstan, Viktor Yeliseyev, reported to the agency Interfax-Kazakhstan.<sup>16</sup>

At the very beginning of the year the parliament passed laws prohibiting advertising of beer, other alcoholic beverages, and cigarettes in the media. Amendments were also proposed, although not eventually introduced, for banning pharmaceutical advertisements.

For private regional media, access to major local advertisers is frequently difficult since they are more interested in placing wholesale advertising orders through big agencies, getting discounts, and supporting media with whom they are affiliated.

Advertising agencies include both international advertising groups and local agencies, such as VivaKi, which is represented by the media agencies MediaVest, Starcom, and ZenithOptimedia Kazakhstan, or the WPP Group by Sky Central Asia, Rating Point, and Das Marketing. The local advertising agencies are Favorite Media Group, Advanced Style, MadGroup, Mozaic Media, Media Shop MSBP agency, Magma Kazakhstan, MediaLand ST, Whole Central Asia, Star Media Company, Shtab Media, Diamond Creative Studio, Informservis, etc.

The entry of Google Adwords, Yandeks, and Direkt into the market has made the Internet space an even more favorable investment with a good return. In the opinion of Askarov, “Kazakhstan’s advertising market is undergoing structural changes since a growing part of the advertising is now going to the new media... Another new phenomenon is the weakening of direct links between the ad executives and PR people and the media due to the rapid development of social networks, which do not need intermediary PR services.”

The law does not impose limitations on the volume of advertising, with the exception of how many times

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.interfax.kz/?lang=rus&int\\_id=10&news\\_id=9904](https://www.interfax.kz/?lang=rus&int_id=10&news_id=9904)



advertisements can appear per hour of air time or the calculation of newspaper space. But even with regard to these factors, there have been no precedents for monitoring or uncovering violations.

Despite the devaluation of the tenge, 2014 was a successful year for television advertising. According to data from Gallup Media Kazakhstan, television continued to have the highest audience capture and the maximum viewing time.<sup>17</sup> Print and radio, on the other hand, felt the effects of devaluation and the level of revenue fell, though not critically. As for Internet sites, the situation has changed somewhat. If advertisers formerly turned more to Russian-language sites, now advertising is also actively going to sites in the Kazakh language in part thanks to a special advertising agency bringing together several Kazakh sites.

According to data from the Ministry of Culture and Information a larger number of non-government media have equal access to government advertising. Okremova said of this development, “Financing is increasing for one purpose: to strengthen government control over the media, to get as many journalist staffs as possible on the hook and make them loyal to the work of government officials, including their failings and shortcomings. The vice minister says with pride that every year more and more independent publications are receiving government orders. But it’s nothing to be proud of.” The government, on the other hand, speaks of the democratization of funding for the purpose of promoting an information society in Kazakhstan.

The largest researcher of the media market remains TNS Gallup Media Kazakhstan, which works in partnership with such marketing campaigns as the specialized research company Ict-marketing, the consulting company J’son & Partners Kazakhstan, the business information and sociological and marketing research company Bisam Central Asia, the independent private company Key Points Ltd., the marketing research agency Brif, and the research company Komkon-2 Yevraziya. In discussing the question, the panelists could not recall a single case where a marketing study served as the basis for changing a media company’s advertising, promotional, or management strategy. Askarov said, “Up to now no full-fledged sales houses have been set up in Kazakhstan, nor have media measurers conducted any regular public opinion surveys or marketing studies by order of the media.” Although the Federation of Marketing, Advertising, and Public Relations has intensified its efforts over the past year to promote the use of research data by

<sup>17</sup> [http://mediakuryltai.kz/2014/11/17/prezentaciya-tatyany-starcevoj-analiz-mediapotrebieniya/?doing\\_wp\\_cron=1421663666.0126640796661376953125](http://mediakuryltai.kz/2014/11/17/prezentaciya-tatyany-starcevoj-analiz-mediapotrebieniya/?doing_wp_cron=1421663666.0126640796661376953125)

media, its efforts have focused on training personnel for the field and market research on goods and services.

For the regional non-government media, marketing studies have not yet become a feature of daily planning and management. Simple questions of survival are of greater concern to editors and owners.

Google Analytics remains the most popular source of statistics on Internet use among Kazakhstan’s media, although many sites use local services such as Zero.kz.

The print media have no reliable circulation auditing service, while the online media frequently engage in traffic cheating in order to attract advertisers. On the last score, negative information was recently released by the head of the Internet Association of Kazakhstan, Shabkat Sabirov, who asserted that a number of popular Internet resources sometimes use this to inflate their audience by a factor of five or six.

A repressive regulatory mechanism has arisen with respect to the non-government media, where the government considers a discrepancy between the actual and reported circulation as a violation of regulatory requirements and violators can be penalized, including even suffering closure. This does not apply to the government print media.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Kazakhstan Objective Score: 2.14

Among trade associations that actively promote the interests of their members, the leader is still the Kazakhstan National Association of Television and Radio Broadcasters (NAT). NAT continuously monitors changes in laws and regulations that affect broadcasters, explains to the public the risks and problems associated with the transition to digital television, and provides legal services, including those associated with licensing. In Azheova’s opinion, it is probable that NAT’s lobbying for its member’s interests has helped matters despite it being a difficult, even impossible, task. Nonetheless, NAT has had little influence when challenging the results of frequency tenders.

Other panelists noted that business is not yet ready to present a solid front and fight for its interests, particularly in the ideological sphere where the key interests of the country’s leading politicians are concentrated. For example, the panelists described the Kazakhstan Association of Publishers and Distributors of the Periodic Press as inactive.

In her article “A Trade Union of Kazakhstan Journalists— an Unachievable Idea?” Madiya Torobayeva concluded that

Askarov supported this view: “The level of corporate solidarity among journalists is very low, which is indicated by the absence in recent years of any mass actions, not only protests but even positive actions.”

the social vulnerability and professional fragmentation of journalists prevents the emergence of trade unions. Askarov supported this view: “The level of corporate solidarity among journalists is very low, which is indicated by the absence in recent years of any mass actions, not only protests but even positive actions.” Panelists noted that the Union of Kazakhstan Journalists’ director is owner of the National Press Clubs in Almaty and Astana and was once the president’s press secretary and a cabinet member.

At the same time the active development of the blogosphere has boosted the activities of the Kazakhstan Association of Bloggers, which discussed problems and identified development strategies in four blogger forums during 2014.

Last year a few human rights NGOs, led by Adil Soz, lobbied the parliament and the president to block repressive amendments to media legislation. At the request of the NGOs, international organizations reviewed the changes and made statements in support of the NGOs but as noted in Objective 1 to no avail. Panelists also identified the Legal Media Center Fund as a key partner.

#### 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.

As usual for the indicator covering journalism education, panelists decried the low quality of education received by graduates of journalism schools and unsatisfactory curriculum that focuses on outmoded theory. One positive exception was the creation of a student radio and television station at the Al Farabi Kazakhstan National University, the inclusion of national and international practitioners as guest lecturers, and adding a course on modern Internet technologies. Positive changes were also noted in the school of journalism of Suleyman Demirel University, which launched the student website *sdumedia.kz* and the specialized daily paper *Bir bet*.

As noted by Askarov, “The main problem continues to be job placement in the media of graduates of the leading national universities, not to speak of the graduates of Western universities, who come to Kazakhstan expecting higher salaries and better working conditions.”

Over the past few years, a number of NGOs, sponsored by international organizations, have been providing short-term training to students and practitioners of journalism. The Kazakhstan government has also supported these seminars. For example, the Adil Soz Foundation conducted seminars for journalists on media law and modern multimedia technology.

There are a few hundred printing houses in Kazakhstan, which have a high volume of print production despite the challenge posed by joining the Eurasian Economic Union and the increased payment of import duties for certain types of paper. Despite the fact that the majority of printing firms are privately owned, the panelists confirmed that pressure can be put on printing firms and other related companies that provide services to opposition media. “Printing is not politicized. Many companies are in private hands. But where media are being persecuted for political reasons and print runs of publications are seized, the printing houses are audited by the tax agencies or checked by the health and fire authorities,” said one panelist.

Sources of newsprint and media equipment are private. Likewise, with the exception of Kazakhtelekom, Internet providers are private. Private broadcasters are frequently dependent on the government companies that control transmitters. The government also owns the key newspaper distribution organizations like Kazakhstan Temir Zholy and the postal service.

Cable television is very popular in Kazakhstan. There are approximately 80 operators in the country, but the market rests on the three largest companies, Alma TV, Digital TV, and Alacast. In the opinion of the panelists, the public does not have an independent selection of channels in cable packages and the cable operators are not particularly

responsive to public requests to provide alternative news channels. Satellite dishes are used essentially in remote areas and small villages. The transition to digital television runs the risk of limiting public access to the news, since acquiring the reception equipment is expensive and the government provides receivers at no cost only to those classes of citizens recognized as vulnerable. Because of the problem of subscriber equipment, the transition to digital broadcasting in Kazakhstan was postponed from 2015 to 2016.

Kazakhstan has been the leader among the Central Asian countries and the Commonwealth of Independent States in the level of Internet capability. According to the Networked Readiness Index for 2014 it ranked 38 out of 148 countries (up six places from 2013). However there still is a difference between cities and villages, where Internet connection is slower and there are no Internet cafes or clubs.

In 2014 Kaztelradio launched two new national webcasting projects, GALAM TV and Telegazeta. GALAM TV webcasting makes it possible to view domestic and foreign television channels and Kazakhstani films and broadcasts anywhere in the world where there is access to the Internet. At this time the developers of the project are emphasizing mobile devices. The service is already available on smart phones and tablets operating on iOS and Android. In addition, GALAM TV can be viewed on personal computers using the browser and on ordinary televisions through the use of OTT set-top boxes. As of today GALAM TV viewers are offered 48 popular domestic and foreign television channels. By the end of 2014 there were 73,610 GALAM TV users. The Telegazeta project is a free news service that enables its domestic satellite and digital on-the-air subscribers to receive information about political, economic, and cultural events in Kazakhstan on their television screens. This means that all viewers of the domestic broadcast network OTAU TV can read up-to-date issues of newspapers on the day the print version comes out. The service is especially valuable for rural residents without Internet access.

## List of Panel Participants

**Lukpan Ahmediarov**, editor-in-chief, *Uralskaya Nedelya (Uralsk Week)*, Uralsk

**Ruslan Nikonovich**, general director, TV Art, Karaganda

**Esengul Kapkyzy**, blogger and journalist, Turkestan, Almaty

**Aynash Esalieva**, journalist, *Egemen Kazakhstan*, Almaty

**Karlyga Musaeva**, deputy head of Journalism Department, Kazakh National University, Almaty

**Aleksandr Rozhkov**, editor-in-chief, *Arguments & Facts Kazakhstan*, Almaty

**Shynar Sokurova**, manager of human resources, Kazakh Press Club, Almaty

**Tulegen Askarov**, financial journalist, Forbes.kz; instructor, KIMEP University, Almaty

**Asqat Yerkimbay**, head of new technologies and Kazakh language research projects, Vlast.kz; deputy director, Minber Foundation, Almaty

**Galya Azhenova**, director, Public Center of Expertise on Information Disputes, Adil Soz Foundation, Almaty

*The following panelists submitted a questionnaire but were unable to attend the panel discussion:*

**Olga Kaplina**, manager, E-event, Almaty

**Diana Okremova**, director, North Kazakhstan Legal Media Center, Astana

## Moderator and Author

**Gulnara Ibraeva**, media analyst, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

*The panel discussion was convened on December 11, 2014.*