

BELARUS

INTRODUCTION

The past year has not been easy for Belarus. A bitterly contested presidential election left the authoritarian leadership unchanged, the opposition demoralized, and the press scarred by confrontation with the government. More than 15 months after the September 2001 elections, the effects are still rippling out. On Dec. 16, 2002, the editor of an independent weekly was sent off for two years of restricted freedom for material he had published during the September 2001 campaign. The material implicated President Alexander Lukashenko in theft of government resources. Two other journalists are also serving time for insulting the leader.

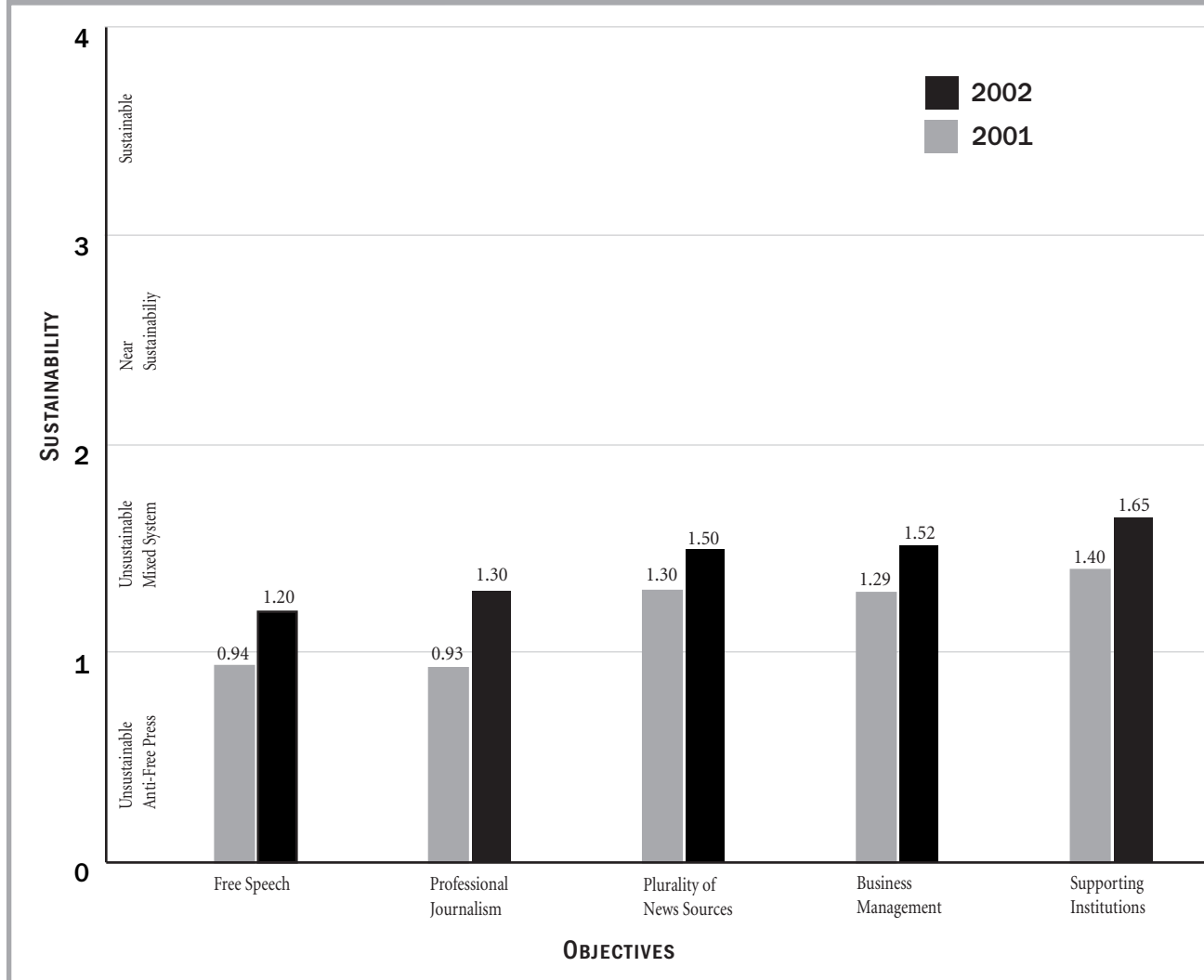
The economy has actually worsened. Lukashenko's rash election promise that he would raise the average wage to \$100 has all but bankrupted the state. An outmoded technical base is no longer able to provide the sophisticated technical goods for which Belarus was known in Soviet times; the population is aging, as the best and the brightest leave to pursue opportunities abroad. Repressive laws and exorbitant taxes stifle internal development, while a hostile investment climate blocks overtures from outside the country.

As relations with Russia deteriorate, Lukashenko's paranoia seems to increase. The much-publicized deportation of a prominent Russian lawmaker in October 2002 is witness to the Belarusian president's weakening grip on reality. As March 2003 local elections approach, the government's hold on the media is tightening. Newspapers have been closed, and others denied registration.

It would seem a strange time for optimism. Nevertheless, an objective analysis of the situation shows that, in the media at least, things are improving. While the outside environment may not be any more conducive to a professional, independent media than it was a year ago, journalists have, to some extent, learned to work around the limitations imposed from above. This has led to a broadening of the information base, and at least a glimmer of hope that Belarus will at some point catch up with its near neighbors to the West.

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BELARUS-MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX



OBJECTIVE SCORING

The averages of all the indicators are averaged to obtain a single, overall score for each objective. Objective scores are averaged to provide an overall score for the country. IREX interprets the overall scores as follows:

3 and above: Sustainable and free independent media

2-3: Independent media approaching sustainability

1-2: Significant progress remains to be made; society or government is not fully supportive

0-1: Country meets few indicators; government and society actively oppose change

INDICATOR SCORING

Each indicator is scored using the following system:

0 = Country does not meet indicator; government or social forces may actively oppose its implementation

1 = Country minimally meets aspects of the indicator; forces may not actively oppose its implementation, but business environment may not support it and government or profession do not fully and actively support change

2 = Country has begun to meet many aspects of the indicator, but progress may be too recent to judge or still dependent on current government or political forces

3 = Country meets most aspects of the indicator; implementation of the indicator has occurred over several years and/or through changes in government, indicating likely sustainability

4 = Country meets the aspects of the indicator; implementation has remained intact over multiple changes in government, economic fluctuations, changes in public opinion, and/or changing social conventions

OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

Belarus Objective Score: 1.20/4.0—This objective reflects solid progress over 2001, when Belarus received a score of less than 1. While the government has not been eager to guarantee the norms of free speech specified in the Constitution, journalists have become more savvy about exercising their rights. The higher score is indicative that Belarusian journalists have become more aggressive about defending themselves and less intimidated by government harassment.

The Constitution of Belarus contains all the required norms for protection of free speech, and Belarus is a signatory to international laws as well. But enforcement is far from uniform, and violation of constitutional guarantees is more the rule than the exception.

Since the 2001 Media Sustainability Index (MSI), the state has stepped up its attacks on the independent media, violating its own laws with regard to a newspaper that had been too outspokenly critical of the president, and revoking the registration of another with very little basis in law. But public outrage at these and other, more minor violations has not been great. In many cases the coverage of these issues is limited, and the public generally does not seem to care a great deal about the fate of

a few journalists who are perceived as overly “radical.” Belarusian society remains conservative and almost painfully polite—it is considered a breach of good manners to attack even the most corrupt politician.

Still, journalists are becoming more aggressive about defending themselves, as witnessed by the well-orchestrated campaign to publicize the fate of the three journalists convicted under a criminal law protecting the president from insult.

There has been some positive movement in the area of licensing; while it would be an overstatement to say that the procedures are fair and competitive, respondents seemed to think that the procedures are less restrictive than previously. Certainly preference is given to state media, and the threat of losing a license has kept most independent electronic media fairly quiescent. But some of the more egregious infringements have been remedied. Channel 8, which had its frequency yanked in January 2001, is now back on the air, and there are no pending proceedings against any other broadcast outlets.

Very little progress can be recorded in this area. Independent media are at a dire disadvantage vis-à-vis the state. Tax burdens are heavier, print media pay exorbitant fees for distribution and printing, and licensing requirements can be used to keep out any media outlet the state does not support. These mechanisms were used to close one newspaper in November 2002, and the financial burdens imposed have led to the demise of nearly a dozen others in the past year. If anything, the situation is deteriorating as the economy continues to decline.

Crimes against journalists are still fairly rare in Belarus, compared with some other former Soviet republics. But journalists are subjected to harassment, especially in the supercharged atmosphere of a political campaign. During the presidential elections and their aftermath, clashes between journalists covering street demonstrations and the police were frequent. Journalists may be detained, harassed, or even beaten in the course of their work, but arrests, imprisonment, and death are extremely rare. Two prominent cases come to mind: Dmitry Zavadsky, a cameraman for Russian station ORT, disappeared one year ago and is presumed dead; and Pavel Sheremet, an ORT journalist held for more than two months by the Belarusian government in 1997. Zavadsky’s disappearance and presumed death led to the prosecution and conviction of those deemed responsible, but the victim’s family do not accept the court results.

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

There are few investigative journalists in Belarus, but those who do attempt in-depth reporting on controversial subjects may be summoned to the prosecutor's office or otherwise harassed. One young journalist from a major national daily had to hire bodyguards after writing one of her articles, which explored the reasons for the murder of a regional official.

In no case in recent memory has any state official been publicly reprimanded or prosecuted for offenses against journalists, with the exception of the Zavadsky case, outlined above. The general public is largely indifferent to the fate of journalists harassed by the state. Independent journalists are painted as rabble-rousers or in the pay of foreign governments, and few Belarusians seem to worry about them.

Access to information is a very weak area of Belarusian law, and little progress has been made since 2001. While the law guarantees state and independent media equal access to information, cases of violations are almost too numerous to count. Many regional newspapers have been told outright that the governor's office, or the mayor's office, has prohibited any state structures from giving them interviews or any other kind of information.

This is complicated by the low level of professionalism among journalists. Few are willing to challenge government officials on legal grounds, demanding the information to which they have a right. Many journalists also do not know where to go for information, and this affects independent media more than the state, where information is often readily given.

There is little real independence, in either the state or the non-state media. The state media are directly controlled by the government, and serve the government interests, while the independent media are forced to seek sponsorship to keep afloat in difficult economic times. This means that some nominally independent media outlets serve interests of political parties, which supply much-needed funds; others sell their services to businesses for hidden advertising. Still others rely on foreign donors, often trying to gear their coverage to what they feel the donors will want. All of these factors erode editorial independence.

Belarus has little to brag about in the libel law sphere. As recent cases have shown, criminal libel is alive and well: Three journalists in the past year have been convicted under its provisions and are now serving sentences of one, one and one-half, and two years of restricted freedom. The law also affords greater protection to top officials. The greatest protections of all are

given to the president, who has a special law prohibiting anyone from insulting him.

Criminal libel charges are fairly rare, however; much more common are "honor and dignity" cases, where the prosecution does not have to prove malice, or even falsity. It is enough that the article in question caused "emotional distress" to the one being described. Privacy laws make it difficult to write about public officials at all without opening oneself up to one of these charges. An official can claim emotional distress if his wife is described in unflattering terms, or even if she is described at all.

Public information is available, although not all that easily. Many government officials try to withhold information, and many do not deal at all with journalists from the independent press. As mentioned above, some of the fault lies with the journalists themselves, who do not always know their rights or the best way to go about exercising them. Organizations such as the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) have been working intensively with journalists to train them in their rights and in the various ways of getting information, and most respondents feel that progress has been made in this area.

There are no formal restrictions on access to international news. The Internet has made that all but impossible. Most media outlets have access to the Internet; short-wave radio transmits BBC, Radio Liberty, and numerous other sources into the country; and Russian media are readily available (including television). In some parts of the country, residents have access to Polish or Lithuanian television as well.

The problem, as ever, is financial. Many media outlets have access to the Internet but must restrict usage to a few hours a day. Subscriptions to foreign news agencies are almost prohibitively expensive.

Language is a touchy issue in Belarus, where the overwhelming majority of people use Russian as their first language, even while claiming that Belarusian is their mother tongue. But there are no laws promoting or restricting one or the other language at this time: both Russian and Belarusian are considered official state languages.

Solid progress has been made in achieving entry into the journalism profession; at least respondents evaluated the situation much more positively than they had a year ago. Entry into the journalism profession is largely free, and there is little interference by the government in admission to journalism schools. But Belarusian graduates are subject to the official "distribution"

that existed in the Soviet Union: they have to work for two years wherever the government sends them. In practice, most journalism graduates can sidestep this requirement and gain their own employment.

Some events require accreditation, and there have been instances where “opposition” journalists have been denied entry to specific events. In one much-publicized case, a journalist denied entry to a press conference attacked police, kicked out a plate-glass window, and was jailed for three months for hooliganism. But journalists do not require a license; anyone who wants to write and can get published can be considered a journalist.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Belarus Objective Score: 1.30/4.0—Again, solid progress has been recorded in the area of professional standards. Journalists are better aware of their role and responsibilities as purveyors of information, and the overly politicized tone of many publications has been tamed. Much remains to be done, but the higher rating given to this indicator in 2002 reflects the efforts of foreign trainers who have worked with the Belarusian media over the years.

While several publications still adhere firmly to the “us” and “them” mentality of previous years, much

progress has been made in the areas of fairness and objectivity. This reflects the training efforts of foreign organizations, as well as a recognition on the part of the media that fair and objective information has a better chance of reaching a receptive audience.

It has been an uphill battle, due to the Belarusian polarization of society and a long tradition of subjectivity in reporting.

Journalists, like society, still find themselves split into two camps: “state” and “non-state.” State journalists enjoy some privileges, notably easier access to information and higher pay (state media outlets have a privileged economic status, which allows them to attract and keep the best of the journalists). Those who work in the non-state media often do so either because their professional qualifications are too low to allow them a place in the higher-paid state media, or because they see themselves as freedom fighters waging war against the authoritarian president.

Neither of these conditions makes for a fair and professional media. We are told constantly that “Western” rules of fairness and objectivity cannot be applied to Belarus because the government media do not play by those rules; hence, the independent media must do the same—fight fire with fire. This leads to much ranting and mudslinging on both sides, with the result that the reader often adopts a “plague on both your houses” attitude.

But more and more media outlets are adopting standards of fairness far higher than those that prevailed just a year or two ago. They are adhering to professional standards that are making their newspapers among the most popular in the country. The most prominent are: *BDG* and *Belarussky Rynok* in Minsk, *Intex-Press*, *Gazeta Slonimskaya*, *Brestsky Kurier*, *Vitebsky Kurier*, *Brestskaya Gazeta*, *Novaya Gazeta Smorgoni*, and several others.

For the most part, there is a great deal of “news” in the Belarusian media. While commercial publications do exist, they certainly do not eclipse news.

Given the dire economic situation in Belarus, it would be naïve to think that journalists and editors would be immune from monetary inducements. But the practice of “selling” coverage is compounded by the political situation: political parties and other groups are willing to pay for favorable coverage in their battle with the president, and they do. Hidden advertising is common, and political propaganda masquerading as news coverage is common as well.

Still, the situation is improving. There are very few instances of outright “buying” of journalists, but it

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

is still common for journalists to shape a story to suit a patron.

Ethical standards have been developed by journalists' associations—most notably by the Belarusian Association of Journalists—but they are widely ignored. There does not seem to be a major difference across the media spectrum, either by medium or age.

It is unarguable that, in Belarus's tense political situation, editors and journalists may be loath to tackle extremely controversial themes. Still, the situation is improving dramatically as professionalism increases. As media outlets learn to handle delicate subjects in a fair and balanced way, they are increasingly less vulnerable to state reprisals. It is also indicative of the peculiar nature of Belarus that most respondents equated self-censorship with responsibility, rather than fear. Self-censorship was seen as a positive factor that forced journalists or editors to weigh the consequences of their actions.

Over the past year, many print and electronic media outlets have covered topics that previously would have been unthinkable: strikes, demonstrations calling for the president's ouster, investigation into the disappearances of prominent political figures. Still, when the topic was handled professionally, few negative consequences ensued. In those cases, such as the conviction of three journalists under the criminal libel laws, where the state cracked down, it is at least arguable that the journalists tempted fate by unprofessional, overly politicized, and unsubstantiated accusations.

While the objective situation has not noticeably improved, Belarusian journalists have stopped being afraid to cover sensitive topics. This results in adequate coverage of key events, although there is still a tendency to shade coverage to avoid problems. But, in general, the situation has greatly improved since 2001.

The economic situation in Belarus is, for the most part, extremely bad, and journalists are no exception. Pay scales, especially in the independent media, are so low as to make corruption the rule rather than the exception. This results in selling stories or positive coverage in many cases. It also results in hidden advertisements and endorsements. Many articles that fall under the rubric of news are, in fact, paid for by political parties and groups.

While there is certainly some outflow from journalism into other, more lucrative professions, this does not seem to be a major problem, except in the provinces. In the regions, lower pay scales and a harder life make it all but impossible for smaller publications to attract and

keep qualified journalists. This results in high turnover and lower standards.

Belarus, like Russia, is a country where serious news and literature have long predominated over entertainment. Compared with most Western countries, there is quite a lot of news on television and in newspapers. This does not mean, of course, that the news is always fair and objective, only that the ratio of hard news to entertainment is surprisingly high. There are, certainly, entertainment and advertising publications, but not to the extent that they eclipse the more serious ones.

While several publications still adhere firmly to the "us" and "them" mentality of previous years, much progress has been made in the areas of fairness and objectivity.

The problem in Belarus is not so much that there is no information, but rather that the degree of reliability of the information is questionable. Objectivity and fairness are largely absent across the political spectrum.

Belarus is not well developed technically, and this has proven a major problem for the media. Many newspapers have so few computers that journalists have to write their stories by hand, and then have them typed into the office computer by a typist. Digital cameras, laptops, Internet access, digital recorders, and other accoutrements of a modern newsroom are largely absent. In television, where technology is king, this lack is especially keenly felt. In several media outlets, the lack of a vehicle has made news gathering problematic—especially, again, for television.

Distribution is another major problem. Most newspapers are distributed through the mail system, at all but prohibitive cost. Belarus would need major investment to create an alternative distribution system, but so far funds have not been available.

Donors have gone a long way to plug the gap, but there is still some way to go before Belarus has the technical means to produce high-quality news.

Niche reporting exists, but not on a very high level. This is due to deficiencies in the education process (the journalism faculties are fairly old-fashioned and Sovietized, with not too much emphasis on niche

reporting) and constraints in the society. Investigative journalism is frowned upon, especially coming from the independent press. There are several business papers, but without the kind of depth that one would see in the West. Political reporting is often on the level of propaganda, although some exceptions do exist: there is some very good analysis in *Belarusskaya Gazeta*, a national weekly, and fairly good political reporting in *BDG* and *Belarussky Rynok*.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Belarus Objective Score: 1.50/4.0—Most Belarusian citizens can afford newspapers, and television is widely available. The two main Russian television stations cover the entire country, with the third Russian station, NTV, covering major cities. Belarusian National Television covers the entire country, and there is a network of independent broadcasters in the regions.

The problem is that Russian television covers very little Belarusian news and Belarusian Television is controlled by the state, so there is little plurality of viewpoints available to most television viewers. There is a system of independent regional television, which provides some relief. The situation has been improved

in the past year by the addition of a second state channel, ONT, which provides more professional and slightly less biased news to the public.

In radio, the main state channel blankets the country in a cable system known as Radio Tochka (Point Radio). There are good FM music stations, and their news coverage is surprisingly complete and daring, a pleasant improvement over last year.

There are independent newspapers on both the national and regional level, and those who want to can buy whatever newspapers they wish. Economic considerations do play a role: whereas in Soviet times people could afford multiple newspapers, now many stick to just one or two. Also, the state has used economic levers (such as print and distribution costs) to make independent newspapers much more costly than their state competitors.

Obviously, those in cities will have access to a greater variety of sources than those in remote rural regions. There are villages and collective farms where very little independent news is available. Given the expense of distribution, many independent publications cannot afford to spread their resources over a very wide area, and independent radio and television do not penetrate into some areas.

The Internet is not widely used, although the number who use it is growing. According to a poll last year, fewer than 10 percent of Belarusians have ever used the Internet, and only a small minority of those say they use it regularly. Universities provide access, and a system of resource centers throughout the country is also helping to alleviate the dearth of Internet services. But for the next few years, the Internet will not be a major factor in Belarus.

Belarus has remarkably few restrictions on access to foreign news sources. Short-wave radio is readily available, the Internet is not blocked (although not, as yet, widely used), and cable television (including CNN or BBC World) is fairly inexpensive. In the capital, many subscribe to cable television, while in the regions this number drops. There are no legal restrictions on listening to or reading foreign news. But economic factors do combine to limit the influence of foreign news on the population. Far from everyone can afford cable packages, and Internet access is also limited by cost.

State media are unfailingly biased in their coverage, controlled as they are by the government. In an election period, such as Belarus underwent in 2001, this bias amounts to wholesale attack on any opposition, or any alternative viewpoint at all.

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

There are no “public” media in the Western sense. There are state media and independent media. While many independent media outlets, such as regional television and newspapers, are more or less nonpartisan, there are some independent news sources that mirror the government’s bias. A national, independent daily such as *Narodnaya Volya* has no more integrity or credibility than the state newspaper, despite its “democratic” billing. It uses the same techniques of innuendo and mudslinging as the worst of the state media; only the targets are different.

Independent news agencies, such as BelaPan and Radio Racyja, exist in Belarus. Radio Racyja is functioning more and more as a news agency. BelaPan is not cheap, but programs to provide it to regional newspapers have made it fairly affordable to the independent press. BelaPan is used widely. Racyja is becoming more well-known and is occasionally cited even in the state press. The level of reporting in BelaPan is adequate, and improving. Media Fact, a new agency built on the Russian Interfax model, is also gaining in popularity.

The situation in broadcast media is improving dramatically. A loose network of 21 stations is producing quality regional news. While this is not as extensive as one could hope—some air their own shows no more than once or twice weekly—the quality and quantity of independent news is considerably higher than one year ago. Radio is also becoming much more daring in news coverage, which significantly improves the information sphere.

Media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates. Media ownership is nominally transparent, but there are cases where the real owners may not be apparent. In the case of government outlets, this is not a problem: everyone understands who “owns” the outlets and what that means for credibility (surveys show that independent news sources are more widely believed than state-owned ones).

But with private media outlets the situation is more complex. The information is supposed to be transparent, but often is not. Rumors abound that one or another of the big dailies—such as *BDG* or *Belarusskaya Gazeta*—are backed by Russian capital. Other newspapers are rumored to have ties to state organs. These rumors can have a negative effect on the papers’ credibility, particularly regarding the sensitive issue of union with Russia.

In television, as well, ownership can be a thorny issue. City governments looking for some levers of control over independent television sometimes buy

in through shell companies, or subsidiaries, to make their participation less apparent. So far, there are few conglomerates in the country, and none controlling the media.

Most Belarusian media outlets do provide coverage of social issues, and are not often hampered in this by the state. The real problem is lack of training in social-issues reporting. Another problem is the resistance of official sources to giving statistics that may paint a negative picture of the country.

Belarus is a fairly homogenous country, although there are some religious differences that cause problems. The government has been cracking down on “sects.” This sometimes results in harassment of activists in this sphere, although journalists have been writing about this freely.

There are some minority-language media, and their existence is legal. There are some Polish-language newspapers in the Western regions.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Belarus Objective Score: 1.52/4.0—This represents a significant increase over last year’s score, and is especially startling in the face of Belarus’s sinking economy. In large part this is due to greater professionalism on the part of media outlets, and to the training

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

of organizations like IREX, which have taught them to be self-sufficient.

Printing and distribution are sore points with the Belarusian media, tying up considerable capital and causing enormous political ill will. In general, there seem to be enough reasonably priced printing facilities available through the state network, and this is the resource that most editors use. Even the most openly oppositionist newspaper in the country, *Narodnaya Volya*, is printed at the state publishing house. But editors of independent newspapers feel vulnerable to political pressure, fearing that the state publisher can refuse to print them if they attempt to publish controversial material. There is one independent publishing house in Minsk, Plutos, but it cannot handle the volume necessary; nor can it print broadsheets. The other independent publishing house, Magic, lost its printing press in a scuffle with the government over penalties for the Soros Foundation, which donated the press.

With distribution, the situation is worse. There is almost no house-to-house distribution in Belarus outside of the mail system, which is a state monopoly. The tariffs are extremely high, adding up to 200 percent to a newspaper's subscription price. Editors of independent papers say that they are being penalized by higher tariffs. Their newspapers are assessed distribution costs up to three times higher than those of the state-subsidized press, and they claim that their money is going to subsidize the cost of distributing the state papers.

There are some fledgling independent distribution systems in place—two out of the capital and several in the regions. All are associated with a newspaper or a newspaper network, such as BelKP Press. BelKP Press publishes *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and distributes it and several other papers to central points in the regions. Intex-Press, in Baranovich, has launched a house-to-house delivery system in its region and is now expanding. *Novaya Gazeta Smorgoni* has its own distribution system, as does *Brestsky Kurier*. These have helped to relieve the burden, but much remains to be done.

Still, there is positive movement in this area; the outlook is not quite so bleak as it was a year ago.

The sources of media financing are varied indeed, but not all of the sources contribute to better-run, independent media outlets. With the economy in ruins, Belarus has a very limited advertising market; in addition, low market-oriented culture makes it difficult for media professionals to take advantage of what opportunities there are. Advertising quotas also complicate the

picture. Advertising cannot top 30 percent of newspaper space in a newspaper that is not registered specifically as an advertising paper, and enterprises cannot spend more than 2 percent of their revenue on advertising.

Subscriptions and kiosk sales account for up to half of revenue; prices are kept artificially low by state regulations, and in some cases newspapers lose money by raising circulation. The other half of revenue is supplied by advertising (in some cases this is less, down to 30 percent), but revenue earned by sales and advertising covers barely half of a newspaper's expenses.

In television, managers supplement their income with private messages, such as birthday greetings. For many regional stations, these are the main source of income.

All of this makes the private media vulnerable to pressure from a variety of sources. Political parties and businesses can buy space and favorable coverage in newspapers. Foreign-aid organizations do what they can to help, but their assistance often creates even more of a dependent mentality in their recipients. This mentality makes the recipients more reluctant to go out and drum up their own financing, which increasingly politicizes the press. Media recipients see the aid as payment for coverage and try to please their "patron."

At this point, many of the national papers are partially dependent on donors for survival, while the regional press is unable to develop without outside help. Television is less tied into this world, because much less donor money has gone into independent television, and only those outlets that have found the means to survive are still extant. Radio seems to be fairly profitable. It has lower production costs than television and generates more advertising revenue.

Still, there has been progress. As donor money decreases, media managers are becoming more skilled in manipulating those resources that remain. While it is still quite difficult to make money in media in Belarus, it is being done. Many independent newspapers and all non-state television stations are turning a profit.

All signs point to a boom in the advertising market in Belarus over the next year, although it remains to be seen how much of the money will find its way to the independent media. Most media managers have little idea of how to work with advertisers, and it is a struggle to get them to develop media kits of generally reasonable price lists. Still, the picture is much rosier than it was a year ago. Revenue is increasing for both television and print, and more and more outlets are able to support themselves through advertising.

Advertising revenue in Belarus is too low. This has to do with the state of the economy and the level of state interference in the media industry. The state sells advertising on the state channels at minimal prices (sometimes as low as \$25 to \$50 per minute), making it difficult for smaller regional stations to make enough to support themselves. Subscription sales are declining as the government monopoly on distribution causes rates to rise. There has been some progress, but this is still a sore point for Belarusian media.

Given the level of polarization in Belarus, it is completely out of the question for independent media to receive government subsidies. There are completely state-run media, completely subsidized media, and media that are not tied to the state. This attribute does not make sense for Belarus. Panelists have no choice but to give it a perfect score, which will skew the overall objective score.

There are market-research firms in Belarus. One of the major ones, Novak, did a large project for IREX in 2000 and is carrying out a series of smaller ones in 2002–2003. But the services of such organizations are beyond the means of most media outlets. So, other than occasional projects like IREX’s, they rely on amateur, in-house methods of determining what their customer wants.

In general, the same problems that plague the media in other spheres affect them here. For those media outlets that have to rely on themselves, contact with their consumers is important. And they will try, however imperfectly, to tailor their product to their clients’ demands. For those media outlets that rely on donors, such information is less important; they tend to decide themselves what their readers want, and to give it to them regardless.

Circulation figures are suspect because Belarusian papers are just as liable as others to inflate their figures to impress advertisers. An audit by the state Press Committee in 2001 resulted in a lowering of stated circulation in many national newspapers.

The situation is more complicated with broadcast because there is no independent means (such as printing receipts) for assessing viewership. Media outlets rely on ratings agencies, such as Novak (above), and they often cannot pay for the services of a professional. They rely on amateur, in-house phone surveys or make estimates based on the number of telephone calls they receive to place private ads. In general, this is not a major factor in broadcast policy.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Belarus Objective Score: 1.65/4.0—There are embryo organizations such as Fund of Regional Editors and Publishers (FREP) and the Television Broadcast Network (TBN), which unites regional television managers, but these organizations do little to provide members with benefits or collective bargaining power.

FREP organizes projects such as Plus TV, a color supplement that provides members with an attractive television program, and also sells advertising. It works with foreign organizations to arrange seminars. FREP also works with international donors to buy paper at bulk rates to distribute to members.

TBN buys programming collectively for members and tries to unite regional stations in news exchanges and other projects, but many stations do not seem to have reaped many of the benefits.

In general, this is a weak area. While there has been some improvement, much work remains to be done.

The Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) unites independent journalists and attempts to protect their rights through lobbying, legal advice, and professional training. But BAJ’s resources are not sufficient to address the myriad problems facing Belarusian journalists, and the matter is further complicated by personality clashes and other internal squabbles that limit the organization’s effectiveness. BAJ is also seen by some

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

as too politicized, which keeps some more mainstream media managers from joining.

Human rights groups such as Charter 97, the Belarus Helsinki Committee, and BAJ keep an eye on violations of press freedom and publicize them. These groups exist throughout the country, and journalists have access to their help when needed.

The problem is that the Belarusian government does not pay much attention to these groups, so their watchdog function serves largely as a signal to the West, rather than a curb on government excesses. Still, the sector is growing, which provides moral support to journalists in trouble.

There are degree programs, but by and large they do not prepare journalists for the challenges ahead. Journalism degrees abroad do not help much because the language tends to be a barrier, and most programs that sponsor students for study abroad report low return rates. There are more than enough media outlets to absorb the graduates. The problem is the reverse: there are not enough qualified journalists to go around, with many of the best leaving the profession because of economic concerns.

There are numerous short-term training opportunities, mostly run by international agencies. Training in everything from the very basics of journalism to ethics and management is needed. Many Belarusian journalists have never had any formal training. The most popular courses tend to be in computer-aided research, Web design, and other technical fields. But there are still not enough quality training opportunities for those who want and need them.

There are two private printing facilities, but there are problems with one of these. A large number of independent newspapers print in government-owned facilities, which makes them vulnerable to political pressure.

Distribution has also been described elsewhere. Kiosks are government-owned and can be selective in the newspapers they sell or hide. Some transmitters are in private hands, but the government controls licenses. Access to the Internet is in government hands. There have been no attempts to restrict the flow of information so far, but the government monopoly ensures that any financial rewards find their way into government coffers.

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