

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

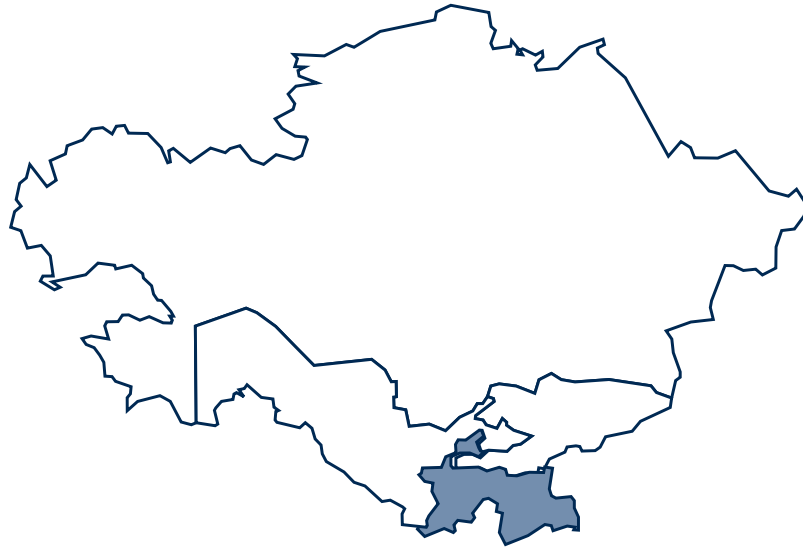
2003

Development of Sustainable Independent Media in Europe and Eurasia





"Tajikistan does not have legal norms for the protection of journalists, as we do not have any independent system of judicial power," a panel member said.



Introduction

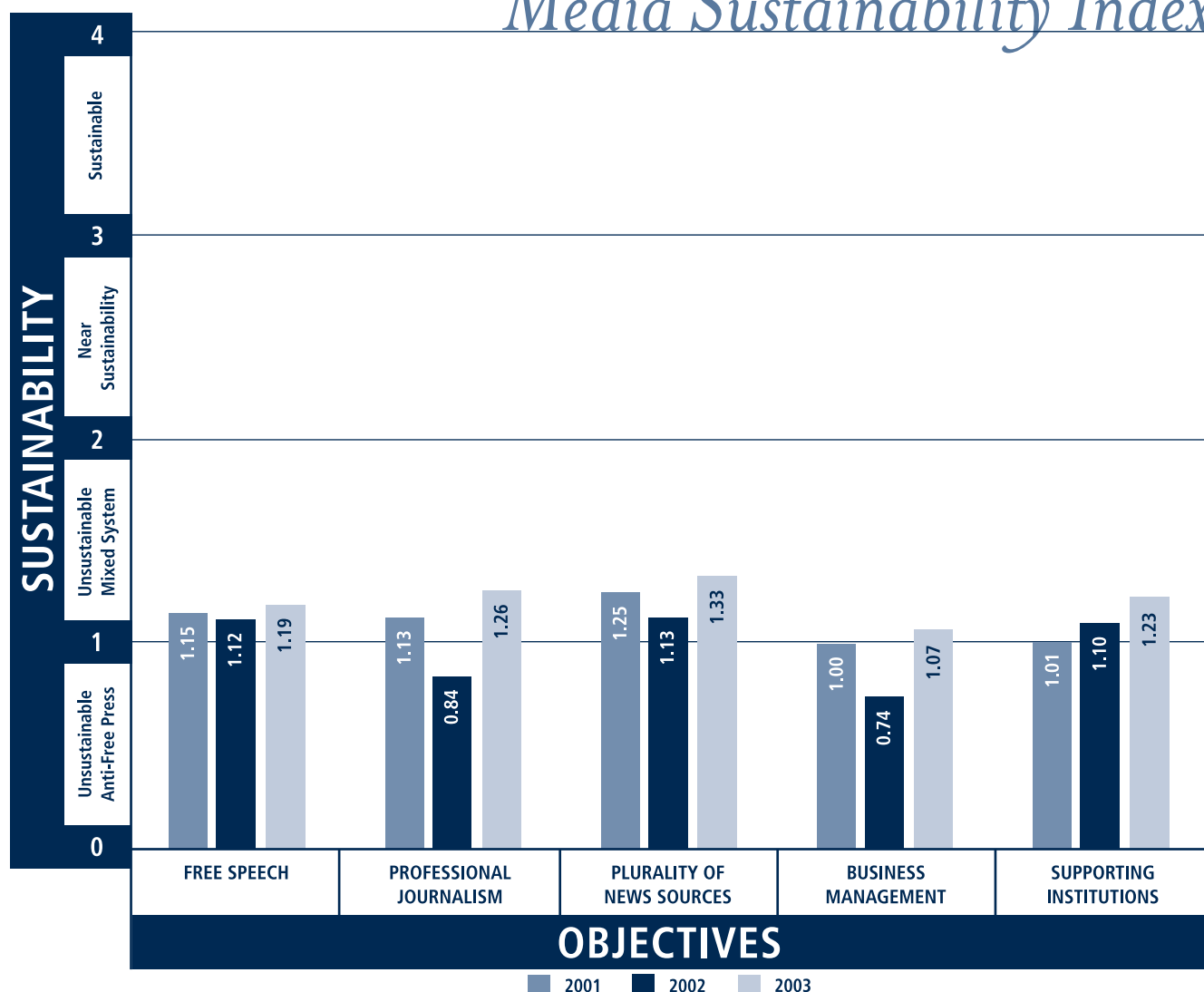
Tajikistan, now six years removed from its devastating civil war, is continuing the struggle to overcome the legacy of that turbulent period in its history. The destruction caused by the war, compounded by extreme poverty and a string of natural disasters that further hampered reconstruction, often relegates journalists and editors to working in dilapidated offices with obsolete equipment. The community of Tajikistani media practitioners has not rebounded fully since the war, when the authorities blamed the press for unleashing the conflict, and many journalists were either killed or fled the country. Journalists and editors have poignant memories of the brutal wartime deaths of their colleagues that continue to scare many into self-censorship. In late 2002, the government convened a task force to investigate political killings during the war, but as of 2003, only a few serious investigations had been completed. In 2003, the Supreme Court did convict and sentence two people as accomplices in the murders of two journalists working for international news organizations during the mid-1990s. However, media workers say they do not feel convinced that the government is committed to fully investigating all the slayings, and the fact that most have gone unprosecuted only serves to increase their anxieties.

Journalists in Tajikistan are facing another major problem—access to information. Overall, the administration of President Imomali Rahmonov has been largely inaccessible to the media. The unwillingness of the authorities to share information, a process that has been effectively regulated by legislation, leads journalists to publish unofficial data and then be summoned to court. Most government ministries and offices have no established mechanism for imparting information to the media, making it extremely difficult to improve media coverage for the Tajikistani public.

However, there is some reason for optimism in Tajikistan. In 2003, following the trend of previous years, the government continued slowly but steadily to return independence to the press. The number of non-state print publications is growing rapidly, and the competition among Dushanbe-based newspapers is tan-

Tajikistan

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

gible. Several media conglomerates now exist. Asia Plus, for example, includes a news agency, a newspaper, and an FM radio station. Charkhi Gardun publishes seven newspapers throughout Tajikistan. A third group, Tiroz, an association of several television stations and the first independent FM radio station in the country, is being formed. Dushanbe is the only CIS capital where one can see advertisements for the broadcast of local-language versions of Radio Liberty. In addition, some journalists have started to publish newspapers that contain pieces evaluating the performance of the authorities. *Nerui Sukhan* and *Ruzi Nav* are examples of this trend. For these reasons, the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) reflects the growth of pluralism and freedom of speech in Tajikistan during 2003.

Objective 1: Free Speech

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.19/4.00

As in all CIS countries, the Constitution of Tajikistan guarantees the freedom of speech. But in practice, the constitutional protection and the approximately 10 laws adopted since independence concerning the media are not implemented fairly or completely. Most Tajik media work for those in power in the government, and journalists do not feel fully empowered by the law. “Tajikistan does not have legal norms for the protection of journalists, as we do not have any independent system of judicial power,” a panel member said. “The Constitution of Tajikistan guarantees freedom of speech, but it does not guarantee the journalist’s security. In most cases the law is not observed, and state officials have ways to pressure the media. So far there have not been any cases of journalists asserting their rights in court, but freedom of speech is highly rated by society as a whole. There is a tendency towards improvement, but it is possible that this process is still under pressure.”

Another panel member explained, “In this country, there is the real possibility to freely express one’s thoughts, but it is another question whether a journalist who has challenged the authorities through investigative reporting, such as the issue of corruption, has to fear for his life. There are numerous instruments in which pressure can be applied to the journalist. There is no doubt whatsoever that he could be beaten up or killed.”

There are no laws that restrict access to information, but there are no laws that guarantee it. In practice, access to information is limited at best. Government officials and business executives are reluctant to provide

information to media, often giving the excuse that they are too busy. Access to information is generally easier for state journalists than for independent media. Access is also restricted by bureaucratic delays and the unwillingness of officials to assume responsibility for the information provided. Information is often obtained through unorthodox methods that too frequently verge on violating the law. It is also very difficult to get information from the “power ministries”—the military and police. People who work in those structures are often incompetent, and when they do give information, it has to be double-checked.

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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.

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Broadcasting licenses are issued by the Committee for State TV and Radio Broadcasting. This regulatory body has been reluctant to develop independent media outlets in Tajikistan. The committee is a monopoly, and the licensing process, based fully on the decision of members of the committee’s special commission, is viewed by many as corrupt. Obtaining a license is one of the most

difficult hurdles facing private media businesses. As one example, Asia Plus did not receive the license it applied for in 1998 until 2002. Even after receiving the license, editors run the risk of losing it if the outlet criticizes the government. Another critical problem facing the media is taxation. Taxes, especially the value-added tax (VAT), are viewed as greatly hindering independent media as well as other businesses in Tajikistan. In April, the media community filed an appeal to the government protesting the high taxation and asking for an exemption from the VAT, but it never received a response. Customs duties are also viewed as excessively high, especially since most specialized equipment, paper, and other supplies used by media are imported from Russia. In addition, according to the panel, taxation agencies have a tendency to raid independent media outlets after they publish material critical of the government. Such raids usually result in the journalists being fired and the media organization being shut down.

Journalists are often victims of attacks and threats, and memories linger of the numerous unsolved murders both during and in the aftermath of the civil war. A delegation from the Committee to Protect Journalists visited Tajikistan during 2003 to renew calls for investigation of the deaths of 29 journalists during and after Tajikistan’s civil war. “We believe very strongly that the only way the government of Tajikistan can combat the pervasive culture of fear and self-censorship lingering from the civil war is by aggressively investigating and prosecuting those

responsible for these murders,” the organization said in a letter to the government.

At present, physical repression of journalists seems to have declined, and no specific charges for crimes against journalists are pending. But the authorities have other methods of pressure at their disposal, and journalists feel unease about the potential for retribution for stories they might write. One panelist offered as an example of how “journalists can be made accountable for their articles” the case of a television correspondent who reported on the hardships of military service and the hazing of soldiers and was summoned to the prosecutor’s office. “The journalists are not protected as in the rest of the world,” the panelist said. In another case cited by the Committee to Protect Journalists, tax inspectors visited the independent weekly *Nerui Sukhan* after it published articles containing criticism of government policies.

Tajikistan still has a criminal defamation law under which journalists can be prosecuted for criticism of the president and administration officials. In cases involving criticism or insult of the president, penalties can include prison terms of up to five years. Although there were no prosecutions under this law during 2003, simply having the law active is enough to prompt most journalists and editors to practice self-censorship. There are other types of lawsuits pending against correspondents, and the inadequacies of the judicial branch also lead media workers to question whether such cases will be handled fairly.

Media managers are not appointed by political forces. In some cases, however, the government has blocked the printing of newspaper articles. In 2003, issues of two independent newspapers, *Ruzi Nav* and *Nerui Suhai*, were not produced because managers of a state-run printing press refused to print them.

Access to international news and information is limited. The Internet has improved the situation, but it is only available in urban areas and remains quite expensive. Media access to the Internet is limited by the financial resources of outlets. Some donor organizations are subsidizing media use of Internet resources in Khorog and other towns. The main source of foreign news for most of the population is from Russian government-run channels that are rebroadcast by state and private channels in Tajikistan.

Objective 2: Professional Journalism

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.26/4.00

There are individual journalists whose articles and broadcasts meet professional standards, but this cannot be said about journalism as a whole in Tajikistan. “Journalists do not always double-check their information. Their work is not always objective. In fact, much of it is subjective,” a panel member said. “Journalists try to verify their data, but so few have access to other sources of information, and the authorities do not provide them with correct information.”

Ethical norms have not yet been established in the media sector. Bribing journalists or paying them for coverage is not uncommon. Salaries for media workers are very low, so some resort to selling programs or articles to supplement their incomes. Journalism organizations do have ethics codes, but they are not widely observed. More likely to be followed are standards established by individual journalists and editors.

Journalists’ salaries at state newspapers run at \$15 to \$20 per month—and perhaps 50 percent more at state broadcast outlets—whereas pay at non-state media is approximately three times higher. The low rates at state-run media result in a high level of job turnover; however,

these outlets offer workers a certain stability as well as some benefits not matched by private outlets such as access to holiday camps, sick leave, and the generalized support of state organs.

Self-censorship is widespread. Topics that still are taboo include criticism of high-ranking officials and coverage of issues such as corruption, the security services, or drug trafficking. Journalists do not want to be in a position to have to defend themselves, while editors and media owners do not want to risk losing their outlets’ licenses or their livelihood.

At least one panelist felt local private television companies were capable of reasonably objective coverage: “Self-censorship at independent stations is a rare thing. Corruption exists in the state-run media, but it is not encountered in the independent media.”

Entertainment programs get more television airtime than news shows, and, panelists said, it appears that the more complicated the political and economic situation in Tajikistan, the more the broadcast schedule fills with entertainment offerings. Panel participants estimated that at times only 10 percent of broadcasting on television and radio is comprised of news or informational programs. Other material appears to be “news” but actually is coverage of the success of businesses or profiles of personalities paid for by the sources. According to a panelist, “The balance between commercial topics and the news is different in various media markets. In recent years, the number of news programs on TV has grown by 20–25 percent. Purchased programming amounts to 15 percent of the airtime, while in-house programming results in a 10 percent share. Yet, most of the media material is one-sided. The number of media outlets that work in compliance with international standards is very low.”

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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).

The technical capacity of media in Tajikistan is generally poor. For example, state television and radio stations do not have digital equipment. “Tajik journalists are in great need of new equipment. Journalists do not even have cassette recorders,” a panelist said. “In the last 10 years, the state has not done anything to update printing and other information technologies. The means of collecting, producing, and disseminating news meet only with the most minimal of standards. As well as being outdated, equipment is only available in Dushanbe and in northern parts of the country, in the Sogd region.”

There is no specialization in the journalism field, but initial attempts are being made to develop niche reporting. IREX, for example, conducted trainings on reporting about human trafficking.

Objective 3: Plurality of News Sources

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.33/4.00

There is some range of information sources available in Tajikistan, although many obstacles face people who want to be fully informed.

No daily newspapers are produced in Tajikistan, and those that appear weekly are both costly and very limited in circulation, especially outside of urban

areas. This is even truer for Russian newspapers, the only international publications available. Television and radio reach most rural communities, but reception is limited by power outages as well as poverty. A veritable information vacuum plagues the many mountainous areas of the country. “The lack of daily newspapers means we can’t really talk about the effectiveness of truthful and objective information,” said one panelist. “Information bulletins and news flashes in print or electronic media are practically beyond the reach of the population.”

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There is no law against obtaining information from the Internet, but many websites nonetheless are blocked by the state telecommunications provider. The issue is of somewhat limited practical importance at this point, however, because the cost of Internet access puts it out of reach for virtually all journalists.

State-run media do not accurately or fully reflect the country’s political spectrum. Parties other than the pro-government People’s Democratic Party do not have sufficient access to media outlets. Although government authorities cannot restrict citizen access to information, state media do not assist their audience in obtaining a full understanding of public affairs. Programming at state-run media outlets reflects the policies of the government, and journalists are barred from probing topics such as the economic situation, government spending, international assistance, or foreign investment.

Private media outlets have a somewhat freer hand to create independent news coverage. However, this material often tends to focus on local issues that are not particularly controversial, such as problems with community services. Media organizations also struggle against a relatively low demand for news programming

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.

among citizens more concerned with survival than with public affairs.

Media consumers are aware that the government controls most outlets. It is generally known that the names of the media “owners” appearing on the front pages of newspapers are not those who actually control the outlets. Media community insiders may know the true owners, but the broader audience has no way of finding that out.

The many limitations on media in Tajikistan mean that coverage of social issues is relatively limited. This includes subjects relating to minority populations, although a national newspaper is printed in the Uzbek language.

Objective 4: Business Management

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.07/4.00

Professional media management is nascent in Tajikistan. Some media-support organizations such as Internews offer seminars on business and financial management for media outlets. However, state-run media have no obligation to perform in the market, and private outlets find many aspects of their business outside of their control.

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.

For example, printing presses are all state-run, and the generally outdated equipment generates a poor product. So far, it has been too expensive for substantial private printing press operations to enter the market.

The state’s control over printing therefore gives it a powerful instrument for pressuring independent media. According to one panelist, the state printing monopoly *Sharki Ozod* “follows the orders of the executive office of the president.” The panelist said there had been “many cases in which the management of a printing press refuses to print the next issue of a newspaper.” In a case noted by the Committee to Protect Journalists, *Sharki Ozod* refused to print the independent weekly *Ruzi Nav* after coverage that included reports on “perks” for government officials. Similarly, print media counterparts and private radio and television companies are dependent on the government because their signals are transmitted by the state-owned communication facilities.

Distribution remains a major problem for Tajikistani newspapers as well. There is no formal distribution network, and newspapers rely primarily on newsstands and private vendors. Even in Dushanbe, there are few newsstands, and papers are mainly hawked on the streets by private vendors. Outside of the metropolitan areas, media organizations must rely on the postal service for distribution, meaning they are subject to government directives.

Some media outlets recently have started drawing revenues from more varied sources, including subscriptions, advertising, retail sales, and grants. However, the stagnant economy means that advertising is underdeveloped. In addition, some advertisers are afraid to place ads with independent media given the government attitude toward non-state outlets and the possibility that advertising might draw the attention of the tax authorities. There are several advertising agencies in operation, but they are used mainly by international organizations and companies. The small amount of available advertising is insufficient to ensure an economic base for most print media, which must look to circulation for revenues, but there are a few outlets surviving on the gradually developing advertising market. One panel participant

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by the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Zerkalo, although its usefulness is not fully established. Research is also conducted to some degree by individual media outlets, but this research is not always objective and only sporadic. There are no certified organizations doing audience measurements or ratings for broadcasters or auditing circulation for print meeting.

noted that “media owners can profit only by concealing the real circulation and advertising numbers,” lowering these figures to avoid paying taxes. Therefore, it is difficult to gauge the true figures for advertising revenues.

Some market research is conducted, primarily

Objective 5: Supporting Institutions

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.23/4.00

NGOs have not fully established themselves in Tajikistan, and civil society is weak. Professional media associations do exist, but so far they have not proven capable of protecting the rights of media and the interests of journalists. They conduct trainings and seminars for the professional advancement of journalists, as well as participate in developing legislative drafts. “There are NGOs that assisted in the protection of rights and freedoms of the journalists, but there are no NGOs that have been founded specifically for the legal protection of journalists,” one panelist said. The ability of media-support NGOs such as the National Association of Independent Mass Media of Tajikistan and Internews to support free press and independent media is limited, according to panel members.

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.

The Union of Journalists was founded during the Soviet era, but it fails to provide any real assistance to journalists. One of the union’s few activities is giving journalism awards. “All existing trade unions are subordinate to the government,” a panelist said. The creation of a new, more modern trade union was initiated in late 2003 by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the National Association of Independent Mass Media in Tajikistan (NANSMIT).

Journalism educational programs are generally of poor quality. Would-be journalists can study at two universities, but the curriculum is outdated. There is little opportunity for hands-on professional training to prepare students for work in the media field. After receiving their diplomas, many graduates work in other sectors, and the lack of journalists is palpable, especially those skilled in the Russian language. Several organizations such as the Pamir Mass Media Center attempt to provide support services for professional journalists.

Panel Participants

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Qurbon Alamshoev, independent journalist and editor,
Chatri Simin

Rustam Buriev, journalist and chairman, Mavji Ozod
television station, Vose

Turko Dikaev, independent journalist, Kulyob

Marat Mamadshoev, deputy editor, *Dushanbe Capital*
newspaper

Gulos Mamdloiqov, Pamir Mass Media Center, Khorog

Mematullo Mirsaidov, *Vororud* newspaper

Mirzo Rajabi, publisher and editor, *Nuri Nav*
newspaper

Khurshed Safarov, director, Independent TV and Radio

Saidumron Saidov, journalist, CMI, Khujand

Lalita Tyraeva, deputy editor-in-chief, *Tajikistan*
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