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TAJIKISTAN

Notable political developments in Tajikistan in the past year included a summit of the presidents of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia, and Tajikistan in Dushanbe in late July. The leaders met to discuss energy cooperation and joint actions against terrorism, extremism, and drug trafficking. Another significant event was the launch of the Sangtuda-1 hydroelectric power plant, built by Russian company InterRAO UES (OJSC). However, Uzbekistan's withdrawal from the United Central Asian Energy System strained relations between the neighboring countries, as parts of Tajikistan are almost entirely dependent on Uzbek electricity in the autumn/winter period.

International terrorist organizations have increased their activities in Tajikistan. Groups include the Islamic Movement of Turkestan (formerly the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan), Al Qaeda, and Salafia, the Wahhabi fundamentalist Islamic religious movement. In 2009, the Tajikistan Supreme Court officially banned the activities of Salafia, whose ranks include more than 20,000 members, according to intelligence services. Also in 2009, the government adopted a new law on religion and placed Islamic religious education under the control of the Ministry of Education.

In 2008, Tajik authorities focused on opposition, civil society, and the mass media in anticipation of the February 2010 parliamentary elections. Specific setbacks for the media included increasing licensing problems and an official decree threatening to further limit information access. The decree paves the way for officials to charge journalists for information—up to \$8 per page or interview. Although officials have not moved to enforce the measure so far, the announcement elicited a strong reaction from the media community.

Although the overall economy and governmental control continued to oppress Tajik media, the sector saw several encouraging developments in 2009. The panelists perceived a slight drop in self-censorship, and the Community Council for Mass Media was established in late November 2009, with support from OSCE and the National Association of Independent Mass Media of Tajikistan (NANSMIT). Composed of independent and state media representatives, the council aims to improve the quality of journalism and media ethics. However, many journalists doubt its efficiency and legal capacity, and not all associations and media outlets supported the initiative.

In other developments this year, a new news agency, TOJNEWS, was established and is fully functional with its own website. The Tajikistan MSI panelists noted that some bloggers are starting to address issues typically avoided elsewhere. The government has completed drafting legal documents paving the way for a Farsi-speaking channel aimed at audiences in Afghanistan, Iran, and Tajikistan. In general, though, the panelists said that the Tajik public is largely apathetic about the media, and the public does not exhibit much interest in serious publications. Freedom of speech and its advancement in society is seldom mentioned, making the work of journalists much more challenging.

TAJIKISTAN AT A GLANCE

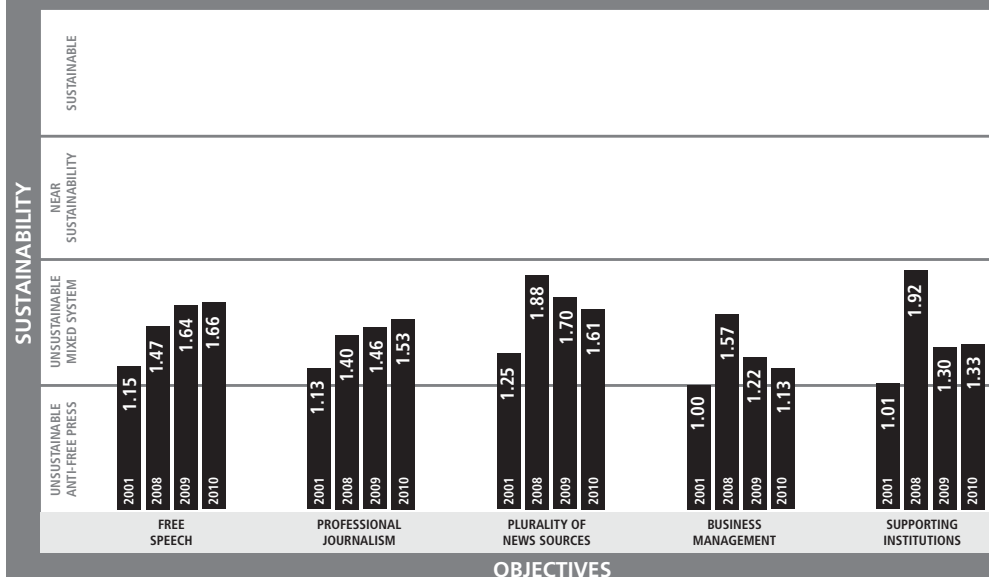
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 7,349,145 (July 2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Dushanbe
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Tajik 79.9%, Uzbek 15.3%, Russian 1.1%, Kyrgyz 1.1%, other 2.6% (2000 census)
- > **Religion (% of population):** Sunni Muslim 85%, Shia Muslim 5%, other 10% (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** Tajik (official), Russian widely used in government and business (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2008-Atlas):** \$4.074 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **GNI per capita (2008-PPP):** \$1,860 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **Literacy rate:** 99.5% (male: 99.7%, female: 99.2%) (2000 census)
- > **President or top authority:** President Emomali Rahmon (since November 6, 1994)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** 210 print media outlets, 22 television stations, and 10 radio stations
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics (total circulation and largest paper):** *Oila, Faraj, Asia Plus, and Charkhi Gardun*
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **Annual advertising revenue in the media sector:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Asia-Plus, Avesta, Varorud, Interpress-service, Tojnews, Zerafshan-times (all private), and Khovar (state-run)
- > **Internet usage:** 600,000 (2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: TAJIKISTAN



Annual scores for 2002 through 2006/2007 are available online at http://www.irex.org/programs/MSI_EUR/archive.asp

Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):

Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

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

Near Sustainability (2-3):

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

Sustainable (3-4):

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

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.66

This year's score for Objective 1 did not change significantly from last year's score. Most of the indicator scores stayed close to the overall objective score, except for indicator 2 (broadcast licensing), which was far lower than the average; indicator 8 (media access to foreign news sources), which scored nearly a point above the objective score; and indicator 9 (free entry into the journalism profession), which scored nearly a half a point higher than the objective score.

The Tajikistan information sector is subject to a number of laws and regulations, including the Tajik constitution, the Law on Press and Other Mass Media, the Law on Television and Radio Broadcasting, the Law on Information, and regulations on broadcast licensing, as well as numerous articles in the civil and criminal codes.

According to an analysis conducted by the Institute of Information Law Problems in Moscow regarding media laws in the former Soviet republics, Tajikistan has an average level of press freedom. Its score is 5 out of 13, which places it ahead of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. As noted in last year's MSI, the constitution proclaims freedom of the press and bans censorship, and there are special laws on mass media and television as well as guarantees on citizen access to information. Laws and regulations allow non-governmental media to determine which languages they use. Although the criminal code prohibits impeding a journalist's legal and professional activities, and bars officials from refusing to provide citizens with access to information, no one has actually been charged under these articles in the history of independent Tajikistan. Still, Tajik law has the framework in place to defend journalists' rights.

Theoretically, these laws should provide Tajik mass media with a favorable environment; however, the government implements the laws selectively. According to Turko Dikaev, the NANSMIT Coordinator in Kulyab Region of Khatlon Province and an *Asia-Plus* reporter, "Authorities refuse to admit that they cannot enforce their own legislation. The authorities only pretend that they want to enforce the laws, but enforcement is hindered by the corruption and the dependence of judicial and prosecutorial authorities of the country's leadership." Negmatullo Mirsaidov, editor-in-chief of *Varorud*, agreed, and noted, "The media is passive and does not demand law enforcement." Rano Bobojanova, head of the Center for Gender Research, added that court decisions are issued under pressure, and journalists who challenge the system are burdened by financial problems and audits.

Since 2007, NGOs and media associations have demanded repeatedly that the four criminal code articles on slander and defamation be abolished, but the panelists agreed that authorities are not likely to consider demands that would relax their control over the media.

Despite the fact that Tajikistan's population clearly prefers television, new television stations face complicated licensing procedures, stall tactics, and a lack of transparency in their attempts to secure licenses. The panelists agreed that broadcast licenses are not distributed in accordance with the law. Eight non-governmental electronic media outlets are still awaiting broadcast licenses. Since 2004 (in 2007-2008), broadcast licenses have been granted to the pro-state television station Simoi Mustaqili Tojikiston, the Imruz radio station (which is private, but has familial ties to the president), and the state-run Bahoriston and Jahonnamo television stations. A national public radio station, Farkhang ("Culture"), also received its license and began broadcasting in early 2009.

Noting that all the licensing committee members are government officials—not a single journalist is among them—the panelists emphasized that a public committee or an independent organization should issue licenses. According to regulations, the work of the committee should be transparent, and mass media is expected to publish reports on its activities; however, this is not the case. "The work of the licensing committee is not transparent; furthermore, it ignores applications, though it is required to respond within a month," said Vera Kulakova, director of Vatan, an independent radio station. "Thirteen applications from radio and television stations await the committee's decision, but licensing depends on the political situation, and clear preference is given to entertainment channels."

Saidumron Saidov, head of the Sughd Regional Association of Professional Journalists, mentioned that two television stations in the Sughd region have been waiting for licenses for four years already. "The licensing committee is incompetent and fears competition from independent outlets, and as long as it is comprised of Television-Radio Committee officials, they will never issue a license to their competitors," he said. And according to Kulakova, although no one can purchase a radio or television transmitter without a license, only those who already have a transmitter can apply for a license.

Dikaev described Internews's blocked attempts to start an independent radio station in Kulyab. "The Mayor of Kulyab agreed, but requested that they receive permission from the head of the Khatlon Province administration, who ignored their request," he said. Jamoliddin Saifiddinov, a reporter for

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the Avesta Information Agency, described a similar case in Kurgan-Tube.

The licensing committee has renewals at its disposal to use as another pressure tactic. According to the law, each broadcaster must renew its license every five years, though actual licenses are issued for various terms—sometimes for as little as a year. Samonien, a private company from Dushanbe, has been unable to resume broadcasting since 2005, even though various courts have overruled the licensing committee's decision to deny the license renewal. Finally, at the end of March 2009, the Supreme Economic Court ruled on the case—but in favor of the committee.

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 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 offended parties 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.

In terms of market entry, the situation has not improved over last year. Although media outlets can enter the market with relative ease (a newspaper can be founded by any citizen, even with no journalistic background), surviving in the market and simply making a profit remains extremely difficult.

Nurali Davlatov, deputy editor-in-chief of *Faraj*, said that the media market is saturated, all the niches are filled, and the competition is severe. Furthermore, the media is subject to more government scrutiny than any other kind of business. The authorities do not view the media sector as a commodity producer, and tax officials interpret the criminal code and tax code articles at will to pressure the media sector. Kulakova added that taxation of print and electronic media is different. The system for print media is simpler—they do not pay VAT, whereas electronic media pay all kinds of taxes.

Journalists are targeted frequently with lawsuits. In 2009, two journalists were charged in criminal courts. In one case, the court of the Rushan region of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province (GBAP) charged journalist Ozodbek Hosabekov with defamation for publishing an open letter in *Asia-Plus* titled "Where has the money gone?" The letter was addressed Deputy Prime Minister Asadullo Gulyamov and criticized local construction activities. Hosabekov was convicted and sentenced to 200 hours of compulsory community service.

The second case was against Pulat Umarov, the former editor-in-chief of the weekly *Tong*, published in Khujand in Sughd Province. He was charged with misappropriation of a grant received from an editorial board and was punished with a two-year suspended sentence. The panelists said that *Tong* might have been guilty of accounting irregularities, but it was singled out for extra scrutiny because it often prints articles critical of tax management.

Last year saw cases of journalist harassment and physical attacks. In January 2009, Abdulmumin Sherkhonov, a reporter for the independent *Pajvok*, was roughed up in the streets of Kulyab, Khatlon Province. The attackers, never identified, disappeared from the scene of the crime. Sherkhonov said that one of the attackers showed him a police ID card. The police later questioned three suspects, but none were law enforcement officers.

When an outlet publishes articles critical of the government, the authorities usually conduct a review to validate the facts and issue a response to the editorial board. Even in cases not ultimately brought to court, journalists face significant intimidation, and many panelists recounted tales of threats or pressure. Khurshed Niyozov, the head of the Center for Journalistic Investigations, reported a case involving a newspaper editorial that criticized the establishment of a joint communication center under the communication

ministry that was intended to control all of the Internet and mobile traffic. The deputy prime minister behind the plan demanded that the paper reveal the name of the author and threatened the paper with a lawsuit. Niyozov also recalled problems after a print publication ran articles criticizing Tajik Aluminum Company (TALCO).

Tajikistan showed some positive signs regarding freedom of speech, which may account for the slight increase in this indicator's score over last year. Nazarali Pirnazarov, the editor of *Events*, said that he believes that mass media have become stronger and they are not as easy to scare. Despite the fact that official clerks demand the names of authors, journalists are aware of their rights and are reluctant to reveal names, he said.

NANSMIT's media monitoring publication has described incidents of infringement of journalists' rights. The latest issue, from September 2009, recorded cases of authorities unjustifiably restricting or totally refusing to provide access to socially important information; law enforcement officers summoning journalists without justification; authorities performing unsanctioned searches and seizures that resulted in violations of the right to personal immunity; and journalists being publicly defamed for their professional activities. Panelists noted that journalists do not feel protected by the existing laws, and none of the frequent violations—rights infringement, persecution, lawsuits—evoke any social response, let alone public outrage.

Even colleagues within the media sector are not always supportive of one another. Khalikjanova said that he believes that media members have become more self-serving recently than ever before. Davlatov agreed, and illustrated with an example of a public rift between two Tajik-language newspapers, *Ozodagon* and *Nigokh*, that erupted into mud-slinging played out in the pages of their papers for several issues in a row.

Tajik bloggers still feel relatively safe, though they are few in number. According to Davlatov, the government has almost no idea of what bloggers are—at least for the time being. "We still need two or three years until their numbers increase considerably," he said.

Mirsaidov said that the state-run media benefit from a system of preferences, including permanent financial backing and compulsory subscriptions. State media representatives are always invited to press conferences and granted contact with newsmakers, because they belong to the president's press pool. The government rarely invites other reporters, mainly those linked to the opposition, even to fill seats, because they often ask "embarrassing questions." Pirnazarov noted that information is still traditionally "passed down," and

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independent reporters are not invited to parliament sessions, government meetings, or presidential receptions. All panelists noted the privileged status of foreign journalists accredited in Tajikistan. "Journalists who represent foreign, and especially Russian, media find it much easier to receive information from the officials than those who work for local, especially Tajik-language, media," said Niyozov.

Tajik criminal law covers libel and defamation. In June 2007, parliament passed a decree outlining criminal liability for libel on the Internet. By law, Internet service providers are responsible for libel, but according to the panel, to date no one has been brought to court under the Internet libel ruling. In addition, legislators have added criminal code clauses on slandering civil servants. In July, the court fined the editorial board of *Paykon* TJS 300,000 (about \$69) for criticizing the Tajik State Standardization Department; the court classified the statements as defamation.

The media community in Tajikistan reacted sharply to news that journalists might be charged for access to official information. The panelists unanimously criticized the new decree, issued in October 2009, which opens the door for officials to charge journalists up to \$8 per page or interview for information or to conduct interviews with officials. This applies to all media, print or electronic, regardless of the size of the outlet. Davlatov urged all media in Tajikistan to unite in their fight against the decree, which violates basic rights and might send newspapers into bankruptcy. The president's office assured journalists that the fee is just to cover the costs directly related to information provision—photocopying requested documents and/or materials, sending them by mail, etc.—and claimed that such a practice is common in all developed democratic states. But journalists are wary that clerks will interpret this decree as they see fit. In protest, the media community has issued statements jointly through the journalists' association and individually through various outlets. So far, officials have not enforced the rule.

Tajik citizens can access international news relatively easily, though they face some obstacles. First, the country has an unreliable electrical system that experiences widespread outages during the winter months. Second,

Niyozov recalled the media's challenge in covering the November 2009 failure at Nurek, the country's largest hydroelectric facility, which left half of the country without electricity. Reporters were unable to find any officials, who had all had turned off their mobile phones.

Internet services are prohibitively costly (\$35 to \$70) in comparison to the average income (equivalent to about \$25). Third, the government often monitors international information. The monitoring is evident when sites such as Fergana.ru, Centrasia.ru and Arianastorm.com—which publish critical information on Tajikistan—appear blocked, especially in the regions. Thus, the opportunity to learn about events in foreign countries is unrestricted, but access to news concerning Central Asia or remote areas of Tajikistan is limited.

According to the Ministry of Transport and Communications, only about 10 percent of Tajikistan's population uses the Internet. Tajik families who earn an average income tend to buy a computer and pay for Internet access. A still broader channel of foreign information—satellite and cable television—is becoming widespread in Tajikistan. Many citizens, especially those residing in cities, now use satellite dishes as a source of real-time and objective information.

Journalists do not need a license or professional education to enter the profession.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.53

The score for this objective went up just slightly from last year, and most indicators did not change dramatically. The biggest increases were seen in indicator 6 (balance of entertainment and news), which went up nearly a third of a point; and indicator 5 (pay levels) which went up a quarter of a point. The score for indicator 8 (niche and investigative reporting) slipped a little more than a quarter of a point.

Tajik journalists face significant challenges in collecting and publishing timely, accurate, and objective information. Limited access to official information and roadblocks to obtaining interviews and statements from government officials complicate the work. Sayfiddinov noted that in the regions, journalists must work increasingly harder to acquire

information from local officials. Officials must direct any inquiries to their direct supervisors, who in turn pass on the request to their supervisors. Consequently, a simple clerk or press secretary must receive permission for an interview from the head of the local administration.

The law on information further limits access to official documents by requiring a written request, after which the government must officially respond (verbally or in writing) within 30 days. Since public officials are key sources of information in Tajikistan, such procedures make it very difficult for journalists to provide timely coverage of key events and issues.

By order of the president, all ministries and departments must organize quarterly press conferences and provide a certain amount of official information on their activities during this period. However, some departments have been closed to the mass media since 2005. For example, the Ministry of Defense and the State Committee for National Security consider their activities to be state secrets. They provide information and press releases only to the state-run media, and only on an irregular basis.

Niyozov recalled the media's challenge in covering the November 2009 failure at Nurek, the country's largest hydroelectric facility, which left half of the country without electricity. Reporters were unable to find any officials, who had all had turned off their mobile phones. Citizens were unaware of the event for more than three hours. In another example, security and law enforcement agencies responsible for fighting militants this past summer in Tavildara, eastern Tajikistan, failed to provide reporters with reliable information. The panelists noted that in cases of *force majeure*, government

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).

officials refrain from providing any information until the presidential administration grants permission.

Journalism ethics remains a significant problem in Tajikistan. The panelists agreed that journalists widely employ unprofessional techniques. “Not only are ethical norms ignored; sometimes laws are even broken,” Davlatov said. “People who have been detained are often referred to as ‘arrested,’ their names are made public, photos are shared, and their privacy is violated.”

The panelists mentioned frequent changes in source quotes and interview transcripts, which causes problems for media outlets—especially print outlets, which then have to publish a refutation. The panelists recommended addressing these lapses by conducting more ethics training sessions for journalists, including compulsory education in legal issues, and internships in other Central Asian countries and Russia.

Journalists made some advances in addressing ethics in the past year. Between May and September 2009, OSCE, NANSMIT, and the journalists’ association organized a number of roundtables to discuss a proposed ethical code for Tajik journalists. The code was adopted at the end of October. The group established a new social institution, the Press Council of Tajikistan, at the same time.

Niyozov noted that not all Tajik journalists recognize the code or the council, however. “We are not sure the council is going to help journalists,” he said. “It could become just another bureaucratic tool, colluding with the authorities to suppress us; whereas the code, based on the German one, has several articles that are unacceptable for us.” Pirnazarov lamented that the code was adopted without prior discussion with journalists from all over the country.

Journalists have learned to cope with the risks of their work by compromising their professional standards, turning to self-censorship or using anonymous information sources. Kulakova said that although journalists try to respond to all the major, important events in the country and raise controversial subjects, self-censorship remains a major challenge for journalists, editors, and publishers. Saifiddinov noted that officials especially detest local reporters who write articles for independent newspapers published in the capital city. Saifiddinov said that even the opposition newspaper, *Millat*, has resorted to censorship lately, and he himself refrains from writing critical material to avoid problems with local authorities. Pirnazarov said, “Journalists can be prosecuted and face all sorts of pressure from the authorities for publishing critical material, particularly on religious themes or the political situation. Reporters often resort to anonymous sources, but this further exacerbates the problem. The authorities then imply that the journalist invented everything.”

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The panelists discussed several cases in which journalists were dismissed for publishing truthful and objective articles written upon their editors’ requests—which were excluded from the newspaper. Davlov said that such case caused him to resign from *Nigokh*. Given these circumstances, journalists tend to practice self-censorship and avoid topics perceived as off limits.

While the panelists acknowledged the undeniable prevalence of self-censorship, some said that every year journalists grow more aware of their rights and censor themselves a little less. As noted in last year’s report, a handful of Tajik newspapers, including *Faraj*, *Ozodagon* and *The USSR*, have displayed a willingness to conduct risky investigations of unfair trials, fraud and corruption, and forced migration. Pirnazarov added that some events, including lawsuits against independent newspapers, are covered only in blogs. The Center for Journalistic Investigations, headed by Niyozov, has helped to encourage the growth of the investigative reporting genre in Tajikistan. Niyozov reported that Tajik investigative reporters have explored issues including the 1992-1997 civil war, social topics, economics, and ecology. However, some panelists said that investigative reporters still do not present opposing viewpoints in their work.

Newspaper editorial boards frequently do not show backbone against the government, and many subjects are understood to be off-limits for the press. Examples include the president, his family, and key officials; the activities of TALCO or the State Committee for National Security; corruption in the supreme government bodies; and drug trafficking. According to Niyozov, “Everyone is aware of corruption in the state medical and educational institutions; however, it is rather dangerous to write about it. Papers then receive indignant phone calls from the ministries with a request to publish a disclaimer.” He claimed that whenever critical materials are published in his newspaper, the officials consider them pre-paid or tailored upon request.

Pirnazarov observed that many editors-in-chief and media holding executives view their papers as a type of business rather than as creative work. Hence, they accept an excess

Pirnazarov noted that newspapers are incorporating materials acquired from blogs. “The blogs of Salim Ayubzoda, the radio Liberty reporter in Prague, are extremely popular—they are reprinted by the Asia-Plus; Events, Facts and Commentaries; the USSR; and Nigokh newspapers,” he said.

of public relations and other pre-paid materials, which, in combination with self-censorship, cause Tajik journalism to fall short of professional standards.

According to the panelists’ data, salaries and royalties in the state-run media are especially low, and the rates have not changed since 2007-2008, despite the financial crisis and sharp rise in prices for food and oil. Although working for state-run media outlets is not easy, journalists often prefer to work there because this grants them an annual paid vacation, a sanatorium voucher at a reduced price, and paid sick leave—which is not the case at most private (independent) media outlets.

The panelists said that low salaries invite hidden advertising and journalist corruption. According to Mirsaidov, “Most materials published by the independent media are tailored upon request, though it is never revealed that these are PR or pre-paid publications.” Safarmo Butabekova, Khorog city radio station editor, reported that salaries in state-run regional media do not exceed \$25 a month, leading almost all regional journalists to work anonymously for other media outlets or Internet editions on the side. Saifiddinov shared that he has to work for three to five newspapers to be able to support his family.

Saidov said that private television stations, in northern Tajikistan at least, pay higher salaries than newspapers, thanks to advertising revenue. Also, some national media outlets have improved their situation again this year; the two state-run television channels raised staff salaries to an average of \$50 to \$60 a month, and they allow employees to earn extra wages by attracting advertisements and participating in the production of commercials. Their pay is still much lower than that of private, independent mass media, however.

Journalists working for foreign outlets still enjoy significantly higher pay. Their minimum income can be estimated from help-wanted advertisements of private media. An average salary offered in such advertisements is at least \$150 per month for a journalist and at least \$250 per month for an

editor. However, regional reporters’ salaries are significantly lower (20-25 percent) than those of their colleagues in Dushanbe. The panelists noted that nearly all of the best journalists work as correspondents for foreign media outlets in Tajikistan, while local journalists have to write for several newspapers and Internet editions.

Kulakova said that entertainment programs supplant analytical and informational reports. “There is no balance now, as ‘yellow’ press prevails over socio-political media. The overall reading level of readers is not high, and they demand [simple] materials,” she added. Davlatov said that newspapers seldom have their own news service, so they may wait for reports for almost a week. Even though the news has become obsolete by then, editors still have to fill up pages.

Electronic media devote up to 70 percent of their broadcasting time to entertainment programs. The four national state television channels allocate most time to entertainment programs and concerts. As a result, people have nicknamed it “forever holiday.” Kulakova charged that radio stations continue to fill the air mainly with pirated music and songs, while television broadcasts pirated material. The panelists emphasized the need for television and radio channels featuring national and regional news, and said that such outlets could be very popular.

The panel noted that not all editors and broadcast outlets have adequate technical equipment. Dikaev reported that journalists working for rural newspapers in particular lack recorders, cameras, computers, and other equipment. Butabekova said that the Gorno-Badakhshan radio station where she works is still using old equipment dating back to the 1970s, including worn-out magnetic recording tape.

Aside from some indications that investigative journalism may be improving, Tajik media have a shortage of highly specialized journalists. Lola Khalikjanova, editor-in-chief of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting’s office in Tajikistan, said that journalists trained in economics are needed especially.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.61

According to Dikaev, the overall circulation of all the newspapers published in Tajikistan does not exceed 200,000 copies. “The financial crisis caused the circulation of even the most popular papers to drop by 15-20 percent,” he said. Tajikistan has no daily newspapers; almost all publications are weekly and come out on Wednesdays or Thursdays. Davlatov

said that he considers the absence of daily newspapers “a shame for journalism.”

According to the panelists, mass media do not represent alternative viewpoints, and state-run media deny the opposition any chance to express their opinions.

International organizations continue to work with the civil society sector to improve information sources for citizens. OSCE has helped to open information centers in several regions, providing Internet access and a wide selection of periodicals. However, as described in last year’s report, due to Islamic customs these centers are hardly visited by women, except for NGO activists and public figures. The Tajikistan National Press Center and the Media Resource Center in Dushanbe are extremely popular with journalists because their services include a library of books on journalism, newspaper files, and access to the Internet and information from Tajik news agencies. In addition, a project subsidized by the Internews Network helped to establish local television studios in 14 regions of Tajikistan. These media outlets use modern digital technology and are much better equipped than their state-run regional counterparts.

However, the growing potential of regional media has not helped to improve inter-regional information exchange. Residents of the capital still stay informed of international events more easily than residents in towns and villages only a few miles away. Neither state-run nor independent printed and electronic media have reporters in the central part of Tajikistan.

While panelists said that SMS news service is still non-existent in Tajikistan, many newspapers have called for reporting on

“Satellite dishes and receivers have become more accessible, and many people can afford them now more than they could two or three years ago,” the panelists said.

interesting events via SMS. Pirnazarov noted that newspapers are incorporating materials acquired from blogs. “The blogs of Salim Ayubzoda, the radio *Liberty* reporter in Prague, are extremely popular—they are reprinted by the *Asia-Plus; Events, Facts and Commentaries; the USSR;* and *Nigokh* newspapers,” he said. According to his data, only the Tajik bloggers Nazzik and Ravshan provided interesting and honest coverage of certain socio-political events and touching on issues avoided elsewhere, such as lawsuits against independent newspapers. The public does not rely on social networks yet, as only one social network, *odnoklassniki.ru*, is available in Tajikistan.

Almost all private newspapers in the capital and large cities are sold out on Thursday or Friday. Due to the limited scope of delivery and small circulation areas, independent editions published in the capital do not reach the remote provinces. One panelist noted that citizens in GBAP cannot obtain news easily. The national printed press is delivered only to the administrative center of the province, the city of Khorog, and regional centers may receive newspapers more than a week late, if at all. Readers often resort to services of people who go to Dushanbe by plane, or pay a small fee to long-distance truck drivers to bring newspapers from the capital city.

According to the Department of the Press under the Ministry of Culture, 69 state-run newspapers publish regularly in the regions. The circulations of most do not exceed 500 to 1,000 copies. Due to technical and financial hardships, most of them come out only twice or even just once a month, and few have proven profitable despite their considerable circulation. The exceptions include the newspapers *Diyori Tursunzoda (City of Tursunzade)*, with a circulation of 5,000; and *Khakikati Sughd (Sughd Province)*, with a circulation of 4,000 to 6,000.

Despite the popularity of newspapers, prices are prohibitively high. The panel estimated that only 10 to 15 percent of the population can afford to buy newspapers. The retail price of printed media is quite high, typically TJS 1.00 (\$.23) to TJS 1.50 (\$.34). Dikaev commented that when people are faced with the choice between a newspaper and a loaf of bread, they choose bread.

On the other hand, the range of information received via Russian and other foreign channels is growing. Panelists

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.

Most governmental and state-run print media still rely on subscriptions, which are mandatory for government employees, as their primary source of income. Governmental media increase their circulations and ensure profits only due to subscriptions. Private media are more focused on advertisements, classifieds, and PR materials that also attract more advertisers.

noted the increasing popularity of satellite television in the countryside as well as cities. "Satellite dishes and receivers have become more accessible, and many people can afford them now more than they could two or three years ago," the panelists said.

The government uses direct and indirect ways to restrict citizen access to media. A severely limited electrical supply, which becomes scarcer every year during the fall and winter, cuts off rural residents from all sources of information (domestic and foreign). Battery-run portable FM radios become the main source of information during this period. In the winter/spring of 2009, some regions were almost completely cut off from all sources of information—they did not receive electrical power at all, while others were lucky to have it for four to six hours a day. The panel noted that during the fall and winter, electricity often appeared available only when programs about the president or important political events were broadcast. Any program of a local channel can be interrupted in order to show important Tajik political events, especially the ones in which President Rakhmon is involved. This is why residents of major cities have satellite dishes, according to the panelists.

Access to the Internet, especially in remote regions, depends on the electrical supply and other technical issues, and panelists suspect that authorities block access to foreign sites that they find objectionable. According to the panelists, Tajik viewers without satellite service have been deprived of receiving the Russian RTR *Planet* channel. The Television-Radio Committee of Tajikistan disconnected it for payment arrears. And the ORT channel, formerly broadcast by the television center of the Russian military base in Tajikistan, was terminated when its frequency was given to a local CMT channel.

Given that Tajiks often learn about events in their own country from Russian television channels and the Internet, the panel concurred that Tajik national radio and television

do not provide citizens with relevant, socially important information. Mirsaidov noted that Tajik television is especially lacking when compared to broadcasts of other countries.

Panelists agreed that all the state-run media are partisan, and that private (independent) lack the courage to fill the gap adequately. The media still tend to avoid showing accidents, military clashes, and natural disasters in the news. Typically only state television reports on these events several days later, and only after presidential security representatives can shoot footage. People learn about these events from various sources—some via the Internet, others by managing to phone relatives and acquaintances in the affected regions.

Tajikistan has eight news agencies: the independent Asia-Plus, Avesta, Varorud, Interpress-service, Zerafshan-times, TOJNEWS, Simonews, and the state news agency Khovar. They operate with varying degrees of success and try to cover news from all over the country. Three news agencies—Pamir-Media, Paem, and Hatlon-press—closed at the beginning of 2009 for financial reasons (their grants expired). The panelists praised Asia-Plus and Avesta for providing timely information online, though since 2007, half of Asia-Plus news has become inaccessible to free-of-charge users of the site. (It charges for some content; a newsfeed costs more than \$50 a month). In general, the high cost of services prevents many newspapers from subscribing to news from information agencies, and according to Davlatov, not all of them provide references to the sources of information. The websites of Avesta, Zerafshon-times, Khovar, and Tojnews are completely open.

The panelists said that material from the websites of BBC Radio, Radio Liberty, Reuters, AP, AFT, Itar-TASS, RIA News and other agencies are often used with reference to the source; some media outlets continue to use their information without paying, counting on their understanding that Tajik media outlets cannot afford to pay.

Saidov reported that state-run television depends exclusively on news provided by Khovar, whereas private FM radio stations and private television channels broadcast news provided by independent agencies.

Kulakova said that all Tajik FM radio stations broadcast in a similar format, and one can distinguish between them only during their brief news programs. One exception is the Tajik-language Imruz radio station, which specializes in news and analytical programs. Panelists noted also that most information agencies' material is devoted to international events, as they can be simply reprinted from other sources and they require no local resources.

Panelists Saidov and Dikaev mentioned the importance of inter-regional information exchange. Saidov said that the

electronic media produce few programs on their own—only short news reports, entertainment programs, and occasional talk shows. He said that he thinks that this happens because the professional level of journalists is inadequate. “Interesting television programs such as live television talk shows often fail because their anchorperson asks inappropriate or out-of-place questions. In the past, many production studios used to provide private companies with their products, but they all ceased operation after a licensing system was introduced in 2005.”

In general, media ownership is not considered highly transparent, though according to the panelists, ownership information is acquired easily from the Ministry of Justice. Only journalists are familiar with the sponsors of their publications and know in whose interests certain independent radio and television stations operate. The most influential political groups aspire to have their own electronic media outlets, or at least loyal outlets that allow access to a much broader audience than printed media. Some financial heavyweights develop their own mass media operations; for example, the *Oriyon* International Media Holding, which is owned by the head of the country’s largest private bank, Oriyon Bank. This group founded Imruz radio station, and has expressed an interest in setting up its own television company and advertising agency.

Aside from some local publications in the Uzbek and Kyrgyz languages, Tajikistan has very few minority media outlets. However, the first national channel does broadcast news in Uzbek, Arabic, and English. Uzbek ethnic groups have the widest choice of media outlets in their mother tongue: In addition to local media, there is a national governmental Uzbek-language newspaper, *Khalk Ovozi*, and a non-governmental newspaper, *Dustlik*, distributed in all places with a large Uzbek population. *Dustlik* is published by the Association of National Minorities of Tajikistan and addresses issues relating to the Uzbek diaspora. “There are no information programs in minority languages in the regions; the state television broadcasts some programs in Russian and Uzbek, and that is it,” Bobojanova said. “Residents of Sughd Province, who live close to the Uzbekistan border, can view Uzbek television, but no Uzbek newspapers are delivered there.”

Additionally, a newspaper in the Turkmen language is published in the Jilikul Region of Khatlon Province, where many Turkmen speakers live. Butabekova said that Kyrgyz-language newspapers with circulations of 500 copies are distributed in the Murghab and Jigratal regions of GBAP, where a large proportion of the Kyrgyz population lives, but these newspapers are printed in the Kyrgyzstan city of Osh and then delivered to Tajikistan.

Pirnazarov added that the most influential advertisers—commercial banks—seldom advertise in printed media and prefer the wider audience of television.

Although panelists agreed that national minorities are apparently free to develop their own media without any restrictions, Tajikistan continues to see a national trend of increasing chauvinism, accompanied by infringement of minority rights.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.13

Although mass media in Tajikistan have come a long way from performing the role of political mouthpieces, and strides have been made in turning out quality products and satiating the market demand for diverse information sources, Tajik mass media outlets are not profitable businesses. Most private (independent) media are subsidized either by grants or sponsors. One exception is that publishing houses have become profitable—but only because they agree to carry out simultaneous price hikes.

In a country where, according to official statistics, 60 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, a considerable part of the population’s income comes from a shadow economy. Despite efforts at reform, Tajik businesses

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.

Nevertheless, Niyozov added that all these organizations morally support journalists and organize their education. "Their main goal is to defend the journalists' interests, draft laws, and lobby our interests to the authorities," he said. He commented that the way associations defend the media resembles an obituary.

use a universal strategy of concealing revenue. According to the panel, the mass media follows the national trend, and hides revenue by publishing camouflaged advertising, reporting lowered circulation to tax authorities, and printing unrecorded copies.

Tajikistan still has a relatively low level of economic development, despite its abundant natural resources. The country has significant mineral deposits and rich hydropower resources—60 percent of all of those in Central Asia. TALCO remains the country's main industrial enterprise. Cell phone operators, Internet providers, commercial banks, international organizations, and embassies continue to supply the bulk of advertising revenue. Kulakova said that print media advertisements are not cost-effective enough, and advertisers prefer banners and television commercials, most of which are not produced by professionals. Pirnazarov added that the most influential advertisers—commercial banks—seldom advertise in printed media and prefer the wider audience of television.

According to Davlatov, advertisements fill up to 30 percent of newspapers and 10 percent of radio broadcasting time, and although television is supposed to devote the same 10 percent, the real figure is about 30 percent of broadcasting time. Niyozov noted that not every newspaper receives advertisements—most depend on their circulation and loyalty. "For instance, *Faraj* does not receive any advertisements," he added.

Grants from foreign donors continue to keep most regional media outlets afloat. Many close down as soon as the grant expires, as they usually do not develop business plans to ensure their long-term financial stability.

The panelists agreed that the practice continues of distorting print circulation figures. Some print media understate their circulation in order to lower tax liability; others overstate it to increase the popularity of their publications. Some printed

media, in conspiracy with printing shops, print off-the-record copies that are later sold tax-free. Camouflaged advertising and PR materials are yet another way to avoid taxes by concealing revenues. The panelists mentioned that the law limits television advertisements but the lack of monitoring enables television stations, especially those that are state-run, to conceal their advertising revenues.

Media managers use incentive programs to encourage journalists to attract advertisers, offering 30 to 50 percent of the total advertising fee as a commission. However, this practice can lead to journalists spending their time writing custom-made advertising materials. The owners of non-governmental outlets such as Asia-Plus, Charkhi Gardun, and Oila have created marketing departments to research existing and potential advertising markets.

Many successful editors develop other kinds of businesses to supplement their publishing income. The richest media company in the country, Charkhi Gardun (headed by Akbarali Sattorov, the Head of Tajikistan's Association of Journalists), purchased its own printing house in 2008. The company is also engaged in the delivery of newsprint, consumables, printing plates, construction, and other businesses. The media company Oila has its own advertising agency, Tyron, and a printing house, Oila Print, with state-of-the-art equipment.

Most governmental and state-run print media still rely on subscriptions, which are mandatory for government employees, as their primary source of income. Governmental media increase their circulations and ensure profits only due to subscriptions. Private media are more focused on advertisements, classifieds, and PR materials that also attract more advertisers. Tajik-language *The USSR* is the only newspaper printed in Dushanbe that is completely free of advertisements, and it enjoys broad circulation—which enables it to pay for itself, according to its editor.

The state does not subsidize any private (independent) media outlets. Panelists reported that in spring 2009, editors of the country's 10 leading newspapers applied to the government and the national bank, asking for an interest-free loan due to the crisis. Their request was ignored. On the other hand, according to Saifiddinov, the head of the Shaartuz regional administration (southern Tajikistan, Khatlon Province) helped the regional newspaper *Sadokat* and the regional publishing house by allotting \$1,000 from the regional budget to purchase computers and printing equipment. Earlier, the regional administration provided them with a new building and distributed lots of land among their experts.

Local administrations occasionally subsidize non-governmental regional television stations. Saidov reported that independent television stations in Sughd Province receive subventions

(one-time donations) from the local budget. Nevertheless, such scant sources of income lead either to closure of these media or their reliance on sponsors.

Market and rating surveys of the mass media sector are conducted sporadically and irregularly, and they use no research methodology. Mirsaidov believes that media outlets do not want to invest in them, while donors do not provide any grants for this purpose. Media owners continue to reject the idea that these surveys are necessary; they typically judge their publications' popularity by circulation alone. The panelists recalled that three years ago, the Zerkalo Center for Sociological Research conducted all surveys, and last year, the OSCE in Dushanbe conducted surveys. Now, surveys are not conducted at all. Only Asia-Plus and Avesta still conduct surveys by phone, in focus groups through their newspapers, or on their websites.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.33

Tajikistan has 12 professional associations: NANSMIT, the Media Alliance, the Association of Independent Electronic Mass Media, the Fund for Memory and Protection of Journalists, the Journalist Association, the Association of Publishers, the Association of Sports Journalists, the Association of Journalism Teachers, the Center for Journalistic Investigations, and the Association of Professional Journalists of Sughd Province. Tajikistan also funds one union: the Journalists' Union of Tajikistan (JUT). The youngest organization of media professionals, Media Alliance, arranges for the defense of journalists, makes public statements, and participates in court hearings against mass media employees.

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 in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

While some panelists noted considerable improvement in the activities of media-supporting institutions, some panelists, including Niyozov and Dikaev, said that the Journalists' Union remains a pro-governmental organization supported by the authorities. Nevertheless, Niyozov added that all these organizations morally support journalists and organize their education. "Their main goal is to defend the journalists' interests, draft laws, and lobby our interests to the authorities," he said. He commented that the way associations defend the media resembles an obituary.

According to Davlatov, "JUT and NANSMIT have lobbied for a new law on the press, but their efforts have been futile, [since] they are unable to conduct constructive dialogue with the government." Although media institutions have not succeeded in lobbying the parliament, some panelists said that they see a positive sign in JUT and NANSMIT working cooperatively, co-signing the common statement, and holding joint roundtables and conferences.

Others took a pessimistic view of the utility of associations and claimed that journalists have no sense of solidarity. Despite the efforts of several media associations, journalists often must protect their rights themselves, and media outlets do not support colleagues who run into problems with the authorities. Panelists recalled that neither NANSMIT, JUT, nor Media Alliance protected their colleague, Shukhrat Shodiev, who was arrested illegally in Uzbekistan and spent 20 days in jail in that country. No NGO in the country protects the rights and freedoms of journalists. The government does not react to statements by NANSMIT—only to international organizations such as the OSCE, Reporters sans Frontiers, and Freedom House. Niyozov said that he believes that NANSMIT can function only if it receives grants from international organizations.

Most panelists see the solution to these problems as the establishment of an independent, professional union for Tajik journalists, committed to protecting the rights of mass media, defending its members, and helping to solve conflicts between journalists and their employers. A few panelists suggested that this role might be filled by the Press Council of Tajikistan, founded in October 2009.

Regarding the role of NGOs, Bobojanova observed, "The activities of both international and local NGOs in support of media have declined, and there is no cooperation and solidarity among journalists either." Dikaev said that the mass media and their founders reach out to journalist associations only if they or their employees need assistance. "The JUT and NANSMIT can function only if they receive financial support from international organizations. Yet most NGO activities rarely reach the regions, except for carrying out rare seminars and trainings that are only for independent journalists," he said.

Formal professional training of journalists has not improved in the past year, according to the panelists. Tajikistan has one faculty of journalism and five departments of journalism, which teach about 100 students a year. The panelists claimed that the skill levels of the graduates are very low; students do not receive even the most basic computer skills training, much less experience practicing using professional software. Instructors employ outdated methods, and the course material is based mainly on the history of journalism. Kulakova said that higher education institutions lack an interactive approach. Furthermore, Bobojanova claimed that students still have no access to the Internet to complete their education, and no higher education institutions are providing access. She also cited a lack of opportunities abroad for students of journalism. In addition, students that do study abroad tend to not return to Tajikistan, or upon their return, arrange to work for international organizations or embassies.

Media leaders are seldom satisfied with the graduates' professional level, which does not correspond to current quality requirements. Therefore, both governmental and non-governmental media outlets compete to obtain good and promising journalists and entice them with higher royalties. However, none of them start selecting promising candidates while the students are still in college. Only about 10 to 15 percent of those who graduate from the Faculty of Journalism of the State National University start working in media outlets. There is no surplus of journalists because graduates do not want to, and many of them cannot, work in the profession. Working in mass media has become an occupation mainly for women.

Only Charkhi Gardun Holding and Asia Plus Media group conduct training and retraining sessions for their employees in the workplace. Panelists said that state media employees seldom attend seminars and training classes; their editors do not allow it. This accounts for the sharp difference between the professional skills of independent media journalists and state media journalists. For example, according to the panel, independent media present more references to authoritative and competent sources, whereas journalists within the state media outlets write in the first person, imposing their own opinions upon the reader.

The panelists stressed the hope that USAID-supported media projects might be renewed, and that Internews Network trainings for journalists would continue—with special emphasis on training journalists in various specializations, ethics, and legal issues and with the help of regional trainers or those invited from Russia. The Internews seminars devote a lot of time to advertising, management, and multimedia

journalism, and the panelists consider these training sessions to be the most efficient and fruitful for journalists. However, panelists also complained that international support is insufficient, and claimed that contrary to their mission, international organizations cooperate with no more than two or three media outlets, and deny assistance to others.

Panelists did suggest that the trainings conducted by NGOs and international organizations are too short (often one to two days) to lead to measurable improvement. Additionally, trainers from foreign countries do not understand Tajikistan's media environment. According to Kulakova, the trainer's level does not always meet expectations and requirements. "American or European experts, who are invited to conduct these trainings, do not understand the specifics of our work and try to teach something or conduct surveys," she said. Niyozov added that very few training sessions are conducted for Tajik-speaking media members.

The panelists said that all publishing houses in Tajikistan are private, but none are really independent. Several panelists noted that the state printing houses' monopoly continues, and the governmental printing house, Sharki Ozod, still chooses which editions to print and which to reject, often on political grounds. "Sharki Ozod always gives priority to the governmental newspapers and not to private ones," Niyozov said. He also recounted a conversation that he had with Akbarali Sattorov, the head of Tajikistan's Association of Journalists and director of a private media holding. Sattorov told him that if a phone call was received "from above," he would stop printing *Faraj*, which is considered an opposition newspaper. At the same time, according to the panelists, the prices charged by the private printing houses Intishod (owned by A. Sattorov) and Oila media holding are higher than the state house's prices.

Most private printing houses are still equipped with outdated machines. The panelists agreed that it would be ideal if Tajikistan could mirror Kyrgyzstan's system and open new printing houses for independent newspapers in Dushanbe and regional centers such as Khujand, Kurgan-Tube, and Khorog.

Problems persist in print distribution as well. The authorities have privatized Tajikmatbuot (Tajik Print) in the names of their relatives. The company is interested mainly in disseminating governmental editions; opposition newspapers can rarely be found in its kiosks. Public distributors, mainly retired women who sell newspapers and magazines, still must pay "interest" to Tajikmatbuot. Panelists suggested that an alternative distribution network be established, and that media outlets ought to devote funds for the network's operation (booths, delivery to other cities, etc.).

List of Panel Participants

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