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TAJIKISTAN

On September 19, 2010, in Tajikistan's eastern Rasht region, a group of hard-line Islamic opposition militants opened fire on a military convoy. A total of 26 soldiers and officers were killed in the attack, and 14 were seriously injured. The government's growing concerns over Islamic terrorism came to a head in 2010 as a result of this incident and other disturbances, including a suicide bombing in Khujand, Tajikistan's first terrorist attack; and the escape of 25 highly dangerous criminals from a Dushanbe prison—among them mercenaries, drug traffickers, and members of the terrorist Islamic Movement of Turkestan. In response, on September 22, the government began a large-scale operation to eliminate insurgents in the region, and used the opportunity to step up censorship of some "inconvenient" independent media as well.

Since then, all communication with the region has been locked down, practically cutting off journalists from sources of information. On September 29, the authorities ordered the blocking of two local websites (avesta.tj and tojnews.tj) and three foreign websites (tjknews.com, ferghana.ru, and centrasia.ru). A few days later, the State Tax Committee, followed by government television cameras, conducted audits of all the country's private printing houses. Soon after, the houses refused to print the four independent newspapers *Farazh*, *Nigoh*, *Ozodagon*, and *Paikon*. Top brass in the Ministry of Defense appeared in television spots, accusing the private press of provocation and aiding terrorists and extremists by publishing accurate information about events in Rasht.

Despite the harsh censorship stemming from the incidents in Rasht, there have been some positive signs: NGOs and media associations are uniting in their response and their efforts, and Tajikistan's Internet community became more cohesive, sharing information on how to access blocked servers. Independent media plurality has grown, and online media are beginning to overtake traditional sources of information.

Other notable events in 2010 included the February 28 elections of the Majlisi Nomoyandagon, the lower house of Parliament. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which has never deemed an election in Tajikistan to be free and fair, said again that the 2010 elections failed to meet democratic standards. In addition, the media took note of signs of warming relations with Russia. For example, output from a Russian-built hydroelectric power station stepped up to full design capacity in 2010. This development is significant politically and economically, given the various tensions among members of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the rolling power cuts that affect Tajikistan in winter and shut down radio broadcasting, television broadcasting, and Internet access. Finally, after a three-year hiatus, the Committee on Television and Radio Broadcasting allowed the Russian television channel RTR-Planeta to air in Tajikistan.

# TAJIKISTAN AT A GLANCE

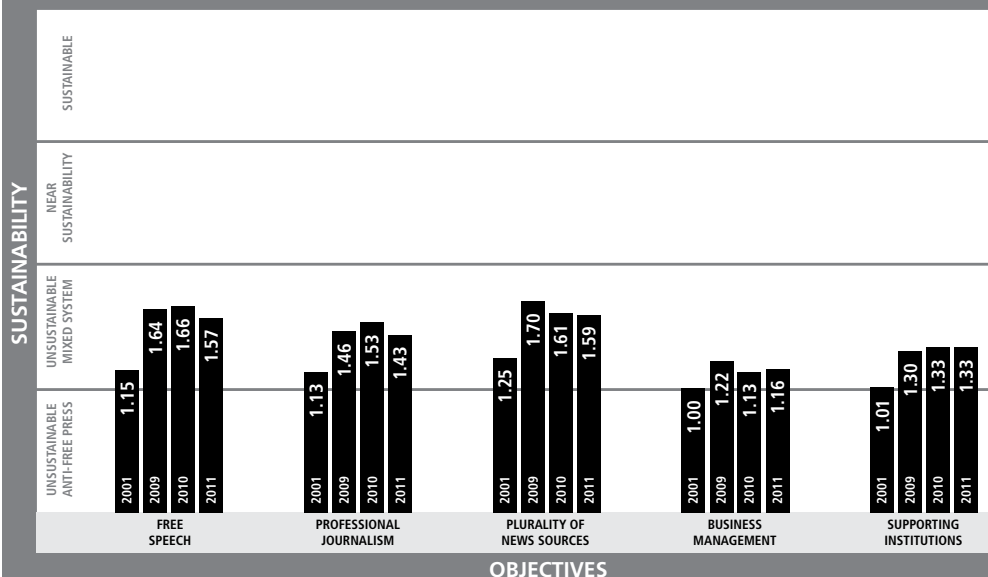
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 7,627,200 (July 2011 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, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% 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
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas):** \$4.841 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$1,950 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 99.5% (male 99.7%, female 99.2%) (Millennium Development Goals Report, 2009)
- > **President or top authority:** President Emomali Rahmonov (since November 6, 2006)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** 210 active newspapers, **25 television stations, and 16 radio stations**
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** The top three newspapers by circulation are *Oila*, *Asia Plus*, and *Charkhi Gardun*
- > **Broadcast ratings:** The top radio stations are Radio Imrüz, Radio Vatan, Asia Plus, and Orieno (Russian-language)
- > **News agencies:** Asia Plus, Avesta, Tojnews, Pressa.tj (private); Khovar (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 700,000 (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: TAJIKISTAN



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

### 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: 1.57

Objective 1 remained nearly the same as last year, with a slight decrease coming mostly from a lower score for indicator 3 (market entry and taxation). All the indicators scored close to the objective score, with the exception of indicator 8 (unrestricted use of foreign and domestic sources of news), which exceeded the objective score by about three-quarters of a point.

Ten laws in all govern the Tajik information sector. They include the Tajikistan constitution, the Law on the Press and Other Media, the Law on Television and Radio Broadcasting, the Law on Information, the Statute on Licensing of Broadcasting, and other chapters of the civil and penal codes. The constitution provides for freedom of the press and prohibits censorship, and special laws on the media and television guarantee the freedom of speech and access to information. However, on a practical level, they do not guarantee freedom of speech. Also, although the criminal code governs prosecutions for libel or slander, a supplement to the articles of the Penal Code addresses the defamation of public officials, and in 2007, the president signed into law a decree on criminal defamation over the Internet.

#### LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

##### FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing or registration of media protects a public interest and is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against media professionals, citizen reporters, and media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > The law protects the editorial independence of state or public media.
- > Libel is a civil law issue, public officials are held to higher standards, offended party must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily available; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media, journalists, and citizens.
- > Media outlets' access to and use of local and international news and news sources is not restricted by law.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

*Zinatullo Ismoilov, speaking as director of SMT independent television in Dushanbe, said that the procedure for obtaining a license is very involved and drawn out, especially if the authorities do not want to grant a particular license—for example, they might quibble over an extra comma.*

The Law on the Press and Other Mass Media was adopted back in the Soviet era (December 14, 1990). Despite numerous amendments and additions made over the past 20 years, clearly it is out of date. Therefore, members of both the lower and upper houses of the Majlisi initiated a new draft media law—which many independent media experts and representatives of civil society do not find in keeping with the spirit of the times. Media advocates expressed concern that the bill does not meet democratic standards of human rights or freedom of speech, does not aim to increase the autonomy or independence of journalists' creative potential, and does not create a legal framework for the free expression of citizens' views, beliefs, or opinions. The journalism community also expressed dissatisfaction that legislators designed the changes without taking into account contemporary realities in the media. The bill, which could be adopted in March 2011, is being considered by a parliamentary committee media working group that includes representatives of civil society.

The 1990 penal code allows for punishment for anyone impeding journalists in their legal and professional activities, as well as for officials that refuse to provide information to citizens. Although not one prosecution has ever arisen from either of those articles, the de jure possibility exists of defending journalists' rights. All of the panelists reported that officials do a poor job of enforcing laws and their implementation regulations. They attribute the problem to low legal awareness among journalists, the culture of impunity for state officials that do not uphold the laws, and the failure of journalists to hold officials accountable for their obligations under the press law on the right to information.

Junayd Ibodov, a jurist and media expert, agreed that there is a dichotomy between the law and its regulatory aspect on the one side and its practical implementation on the other. He noted that Tajik laws allow officials to close newspapers and block websites in the interest of national security in emergency situations, but he questioned the application of the law in some situations. He gave the example of when authorities cut off the Rasht region from all forms of communication, blocked websites, and stopped publication

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*Pirnazarov said that personal contacts are necessary to get any information at all, and almost always, the sources speak only on the condition of anonymity.*

of newspapers during the anti-terrorist operation. The correct procedures were not observed, he said; instead, the Deputy Minister of Communications sent out a forceful telegram to all Internet service providers (ISPs) demanding that the so-called undesirable sites be blocked. Western governments have protested to the Tajik Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the independent media highlight such problems repeatedly.

Turko Dikayev, a correspondent for *Asia-Plus* in Kulob, said that such actions by the authorities violate human rights, and show in stark relief that Tajikistan has no civil society and that civil liberties are of secondary concern to the Tajikistan people. No one stands up for their rights, but they protest if their electricity or gas is cut off or their economic rights are threatened. Lola Khalikjanova, editor-in-chief of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) in Tajikistan, agreed, noting that not a single reader stood up in support of *Farazh*, one of the blocked papers, although the newspaper is a favorite among the people and always sold quite a large number of copies.

Dikayev, however, highlighted a positive: Tajikistan's Internet user community became more united as they combined expertise to get around the government's server blockades. Now, he said, almost all journalists and other users know about proxy servers and anonymizers. However, the authorities also restrict access to—or even close down—opposition websites that publish critical information about Tajikistan. Such sites have included *fergana.ru*, *centrasia.ru*, and *arianastorm.com*.

According to *Varorud's* Khujand director Negmatullo Mirsaidov, Yusuf Rahmonov, the military prosecutor in Sughd Province, told journalists at an October press conference of the Jamaat Ansarullah movement's involvement in the September terrorist attack on the building that houses the Regional Directorate for Combating Organized Crime in Khujand. Yet the Office of the Provincial Prosecutor in Sughd objected to the release of this information, and forced all the journalists who attended the press conference to sign statements that they had misunderstood what Rahmonov said. Law enforcement officials did not know how to organize a retraction, and overreached their authority in their response, Mirsaidov said.

Speaking as a jurist, Ibodov noted also that the Press Law describes how sources of confidential information should be protected: Article 29 states that journalists can only be required to disclose confidential sources by order of the court. However, Article 352 in the Penal Code contradicts the press law; it stipulates that witnesses called to testify must oblige or face heavy fines. Dikayev said that he sees an urgent need for a law on the protection of sources.

Panelists were unanimous that electronic media licensing does not adhere to the law. At least eight non-government broadcast outlets have applied for licenses, but in 2010, authorities permitted the registration of only one independent broadcaster: the *Avis-Plus* radio station in Istaravshan, in Sughd Province in the north of the country.

Ravshan Abdullayev, executive director of the Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia in Tajikistan, Dushanbe, said that the non-state electronic media (i.e., television and radio) depend heavily on the bodies that allocate broadcasting frequencies and licenses. That sort of leverage prevents potentially independent media from going on air, and fuels self-censorship among media editors in organizations that do broadcast.

Zinatullo Ismoilov, speaking as director of SMT independent television in Dushanbe, said that the procedure for obtaining a license is very involved and drawn out, especially if the authorities do not want to grant a particular license—for example, they might quibble over an extra comma. Not a single journalist sits on the State Licensing Commission; the members are mainly government officials. Khalikjanova said that the commission denies licenses as a way to eliminate competition for the government media, and all the panelists agreed that a public commission or other independent entity should deal with licensing issues.

The panelists shared some specific cases of licensing problems. Ismoilov's station has a broadcasting license, but another channel—the Russian ORT station relayed by the Russian military base—broadcasts on the same frequency, also with a license. Consequently, SMT lost its advertisers, and its viewers lost an alternative source of information. Rano Babjanova, director of the Department of Information Analysis in Sughd Province and a journalism professor at Khujand State University, noted the case of television station Guli Bodom in Kanibadam, Sughd Province. The station had to re-register in 2010 and was denied, Babjanova suspects, because the owner criticized the authorities. In her view, the licensing process is corrupt, but proving that the decisions are political is difficult.

The media market is possible to enter, like any other kind of business. Any interested citizen, even without an education in journalism, can start up a newspaper. Even though Tajikistan

has set up a “one-stop shop” system to register with the tax authorities, media businesses must then obtain the consent of the Ministry of Culture as well. In the current market, and especially in the past year, media businesses have had difficulty gaining financial independence, as the authorities have been focusing more intently on media businesses.

Media businesses receive no special tax incentives. Murod Sotiyev, director of Paem news agency in Qurghonteppe (Kurgan-Tyube), said that the media pay taxes not on their profits, but on their income—which is especially challenging for the generally unprofitable provincial media. The state media are better off, thanks to permanent budget funding and compulsory subscriptions.

Ibodov said that throughout society and in the journalism environment, there is a strong feeling of dread and fear for people’s safety. Although the panelists did not report any physical attacks on journalists in 2010, authorities detained or threatened a number of journalists. From the beginning of the year, practically all independent media were under some degree of government pressure for publishing critical stories. Journalists considered “undesirable” are not allowed into press conferences, authorities take away their cameras and dictation machines, and the government demands retractions. Increasingly, journalism-related organizations believe that the government is targeting journalists as a result of their professional activities and for protecting the interests of citizens, society, and state.

The National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan’s August monitoring report marked a number of violations of journalists’ rights. As in 2009, the principal violations in 2010 include: unjustified restrictions on the provision of information of public importance, or refusal to provide such information at all; unjustified summonses from law enforcement bodies; ignoring the rights to a person’s inviolability, in the form of unwarranted searches and seizures; and public affronts to journalists for their professional activities.

The panelists noted that despite the law, journalists do not feel protected, and Tajik society does not respond to violations of their rights or persecution of journalists. Nargis Kasymova, an editor at Safina state television and producer at Vatan independent radio station in Dushanbe, said that society sides with the government, and people view clampdowns on journalists as fair responses to those who challenge the established order—as if “they got what they deserved.”

Mirsaidov gave an example of the lack of solidarity among journalists: the private, independent newspaper *SSSR* publicly insulted fellow journalists in Sughd, calling them “Uzbek

parasites” in one of its articles. Panelist Nazarali Pirnazarov, the editor of *Sobytiya*, noted that with its ethnic hate speech, *SSSR* also sows the seeds of interregional strife. Yet because *SSSR* has not signed the Tajikistan Journalists’ Code of Ethics, and does not recognize the activities of the Press Council that oversees ethics violations, journalists have no leverage over it.

All the panelists agreed that the state media operate under a system of preferential treatment. Official newsmakers invite state media to press conferences and provide other types of contact, and they are included in the presidential press pool. The government rarely invites opposition journalists to its functions, especially not those held in the regions.

The law prohibits media monopolization, but more than 90 percent of the electronic media are state media. Ibodov said that President Rahmonov’s political will is needed in order to prevent division of the media into “ours” and “theirs”—i.e., state and independent. Kurbon Alamshoyev, director of Pamir-Media independent news agency in Khorugh, expressed the view that the authorities deliberately stir up antagonism between government and independent media in order to break their unity and prevent them from defending their rights and interests. At a Qurghonteppe meeting of authorities, Saijon Sorbonkhoja, the deputy *mufti* of Tajikistan and chair of the Ulema Council of Khatlon Province, officially requested that the government stop the activities of all independent media, calling for elimination non-governmental publications or at least monitoring their activities. Sorbonkhoja blamed non-state media for people’s protests and hostility toward the government, and singled out *Farazh* and *Paikon* for their criticism of authorities.

Beginning in 2007, NGOs and media associations have raised the issue of abolishing laws on libel and slander. Despite open letters to the government and the Majlisi, the authorities continue to ignore these requests. In 2010, several lawsuits were pending against journalists. Court hearings continued for *Asia-Plus*, *Farazh*, and *Ozodagon* for publishing a statement by lawyer Solijon Jurayev that proved the corruption of two Supreme Court judges (Nur Nurov and Ulugbek Makhmadshoev) and a judge at Dushanbe City Court (Fakhridin Dometov). The plaintiffs are suing the lawyer and the newspapers for damages of TJS 5 million (almost \$1.2 million).

In November of 2010, law enforcement agencies in Asht district, Sughd Province, detained Mahmadyusuf Ismoilov, correspondent for the independent weekly *Nuri Zindagi*, under suspicion of committing defamation, criminal insult, and extortion. Ismoilov was detained for an article published in the independent *Istiklol* about the alleged unlawful conduct of law enforcement officers and what Ismoilov called the lack of justice in Asht district. Employees of the regional



prosecutor's office in Sughd Province demanded that the editor of *Nuri Zindagi* hand over copies of all stories under Ismoilov's byline for the entire period that he wrote for the newspaper, beginning in 2008. To date, authorities have not named Ismoilov's complainant. The newspapers *Faraj*, *Ozodagon*, and *Facts and Comments* all came to his defense, while the National Association of Independent Mass-Media in Tajikistan (NANSMIT) issued a statement regarding his detention and provided him with a lawyer.

Access to important public information has deteriorated under the Law on the Right of Access to Information, adopted in 2008. State authorities are allowed up to 45 days to respond to information requests from citizens. In addition, the law includes a provision on reimbursing officials for "expenses" for providing information. The 2009 MSI reported the journalism community's deep concern over an official decree allowing ministries and departments to charge up to \$8 per page for providing information or interviews; but to date, there have been no cases in which journalists have been asked to pay the fee.

Ibodov said that under the law, officials can be held liable for failing to provide information, but in practice that has not happened—as the lawmakers "forgot" to write into law any mechanisms to implement the provision. Getting interviews and comments from government officials of any rank on important issues of the day is an uphill struggle. Each ministry keeps a list of information to be kept from the media, and bureaucratic procedures for relaying requests up the chain of command complicate journalists' efforts significantly.

The panelists cited many examples of problems accessing information on major events, such as the escape of 25 high-risk prisoners from State Committee for National Security prison in August, the September 19 firing on the military convoy in the Rasht region, and the start of the anti-terrorist operation there in September. The agencies carrying out the operation in Rasht shared information only after it lost relevancy. On the pretext of not allowing the militants to have any communication with the outside world, the authorities cut off all types of communication links from the region, including cell phones, and restricted journalists' access. Pirnazarov said that personal contacts are necessary to get any information at all, and almost always, the sources speak only on the condition of anonymity.

*Farazh* Deputy Editor Nurali Davlatov said that, similarly, journalists had also been unable to obtain information about the owner of the offshore company IRS, which controls the Dushanbe–Chanak toll highway connecting the center of the country with the north as far as the Uzbek border. All media requests were simply ignored, or the company released non-answers. Also, for many years, independent media had

been unable to obtain any data on the financial activities of the Tajik Aluminum Company, the country's largest exporter; all queries on the matter were simply ignored. In another example of the failure to share public information, no officials publish their income in the press, despite a verbal instruction from the president.

The panelists agreed that in any natural disaster or emergency situation, officials are afraid to give out any information without permission from the Presidential Palace. Pursuant to a personal instruction by the president, all ministries and agencies gave quarterly press conferences, sharing a limited amount of information. However, since 2005, the press has been closed out of some departments—such as the Ministry of Defense, the State Committee of National Security, and the Central Directorate of Border Control—on the grounds that departmental activities are state secrets. Only the state media receive information from the agencies, in irregular and small doses. In one case, after airing a critical story about the activities of one ministry earlier in 2010, SMT was kept off all lists for state visits, access to parliament, and access to the Office of the President.

Furthermore, the panelists were unanimous that foreign correspondents in Tajikistan continue to have privileged access to information. Davlatov noted as an example that in the course of the Rasht antiterrorist operation, the foreign media—ITAR-TASS, RIA Novosti, BBC, and Svoboda—scooped the local media. Kironshoh Sharifzoda, director of the Association of Journalists, said that officials talk to the foreign media more readily, possibly because of their higher level of professionalism, and because their stories do not always come out on the Internet.

Media outlets have open access to foreign media, particularly through the Internet. However, constant online access is rare. Satellite and cable television, which have become widespread in Tajikistan, are broader channels for foreign news.

Journalists do not need a license, or even necessarily any professional training, to practice journalism, resulting in heavy turnover. However, officials do not always recognize or accept journalists' press service certificates and Ministry of Foreign Affairs accreditation for covering specific events or cases.

The state does not interfere with the selection of journalism students or their training, although the president often talks about the importance of a good education, including a journalism education, to improve the country's image. Ismoilov said that journalism students at local universities in state-financed cohorts, i.e., studying for free, do not get to work internships or jobs in the independent media.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.43

Tajikistan's score for media professionalism slipped slightly, reflecting overall stagnation in this area. Indicators 6 (balance of news and entertainment) and 7 (modern equipment and facilities) both lost some ground, which accounts for most of the decrease in score. Further, only indicator 4 (media cover key events) stood out, outscoring the objective by three-quarters of a point.

Although some panelists stated the belief that the level of professional journalism has risen, many obstacles impede journalist professionalism in Tajikistan. The severe restrictions on access to official information constitute a serious impediment, while the risks associated with providing critical coverage of any sphere of public life make journalists resort to anonymous sources of information, or even to flagrant lies.

Also, many newspapers are run by people lacking journalistic training, so papers often fall short of international standards of journalism and look more like tabloids. A few media outlets publish openly biased or nationalistic material regularly. Many journalists fail to check their facts, and frequent changes appear in the sources of quotations and interviews in ongoing stories—especially problematic in the print media. Abdullayev said that journalists have proven to be both unprepared and untrained to conduct effective interviews. For most journalists, the interview is no more than a list of questions, without paying attention to their subjects' answers or asking follow-up or supplementary questions as an interview progresses.

#### JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

##### PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well-sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption and retain qualified personnel within the media profession.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exist (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

*For example, plagiarism and blackmail are rampant, solidarity within the field does not exist, and hidden advertising flourishes.*

Currently, professional ethics are an extremely important issue in Tajikistan. Back in 2009, OSCE, NANSMIT, and the Union of Journalists of Tajikistan organized a series of roundtables to debate the proposed Tajikistan Journalists' and Media Code of Ethics, which was adopted in October 2009. However, not all media outlets in Tajikistan recognized the code or the authority of the Press Council that governs it. The council is tasked with monitoring ethical standards, and according to Alamshoyev, the Press Council held nine meetings in 2010 and issued statements on a number of breaches of the code.

However, panelists expressed doubts about the council's effectiveness. They said that council members expressed unflattering opinions about each other, serving as proof that it had rotted from within; and after a year's work, the council had not managed to translate the code of ethics into Russian. Sharifzoda shared his opposition to the Press Council and noted that, for example, despite sharp criticism directed at SSSR for hate speech, the paper has not responded with changes to its practices because SSSR does not recognize the code.

The panelists noted that many journalists violate ethical standards. For example, plagiarism and blackmail are rampant, solidarity within the field does not exist, and hidden advertising flourishes. Sharifzoda said that, as a matter of survival, editors cheerfully place public relations and other paid-for material. Abdullayev expressed the belief that *Asia-Plus* had recently been paid handsomely for promoting the Islamic faction, in a bid to generate support for the Islamic Revival Party and Islamic religious sects. In support of his belief, he said that he knows the views of the journalists working there, and that what the journalists think and what they write are obviously two different things. Khalikjanova gave another example of a common ethics violation: After a quarterly state press conference at the Tojikmatlubot, officials distributed envelopes containing TJS 20 (about \$5) to consumer cooperative reporters. The panelists noted also that often authorities use journalists to compromise people by dishing out dirt and sleaze, which then creates problems for the editorial office from the disgruntled persons named.

Dikayev said that the independent newspapers *Varorud* and *Asia-Plus* and the government newspapers *Sadoi Mardum* and *Jumhuriyat* have their own in-house ethics codes.



*Kasymova said that in her former position as a state journalist, she was obliged to conduct interviews in accordance with the strict rules of the Safina state television channel, but now as a writer for independent newspapers, she can afford to publish interviews on sensitive issues.*

Journalists and editors continue to cope with the pressures of their jobs by resorting to self-censorship. Abdullayev said that the level of self-censorship among Tajik journalists is quite high, and journalists often leave out important pieces of information in their work for fear of repercussions. Often business interests, as well as political considerations, drive self-censorship. Dikayev said that there are tacit agreements not to criticize a sponsor or an advertiser, but otherwise, sponsors and owners do not interfere. However, Babajanova reported that Tajikistan's largest cell phone company, Tcell (a subsidiary of the Swedish-Finnish company TeliaSonera), bought a transmitter for Provincial State Television in Sughd Province, and now influences the channel's editorial policy. Panelists also recalled several cases in which journalists lost their jobs after writing accurate and critical articles; for example, Rajab Mirzo, a journalist who displeased the owner of the Orieno-Media holding company, was forced to resign—first from his post as editor at the Imrüz radio station and then as editor of *Imrüz* daily newspaper.

In addition, editors censor critical articles about the activities of the tax authorities, for fear of inviting an audit. Sotiyev added that the regional authorities react badly when local journalists work for media in the capital; they monitor the journalists' work, and often call them in to account for their stories. Khalikjanova said that at any time, officials might use administrative levers such as tax laws; for example, they might track the proceeds from printing, and unpaid utility bills owed by "undesirable" media; then higher-ups would make anonymous phone calls to printing press owners, with the result that those newspapers are not printed anywhere. That is exactly what had happened in 2010, when every printing house refused to print *Farazh*, *Ozodagon*, *Paikon*, and *Nigoh*.

Mirsaidov commented that journalists do report on all major themes and events, but self-censorship lies in the details. Still, the trend is toward raising ever more sensitive issues. Along those lines, Mirsaidov said, the Tajik-language newspapers *Nigoh* and *Farazh* and the Russian-language *Asia-Plus* publish

a number of hard-hitting stories, including investigative work. But Sharifzoda disagreed, concluding that self-censorship is thriving and journalism does not meet professional standards of quality, especially not in the investigative genre. Kasymova said that in her former position as a state journalist, she was obliged to conduct interviews in accordance with the strict rules of the Safina state television channel, but now as a writer for independent newspapers, she can afford to publish interviews on sensitive issues.

Panelists underlined ongoing taboos in the media, including critical articles about the president and his family, the speakers of the upper and lower houses of the Majlisi, the activities of the Tajik Aluminum Company, the State Committee for National Security, or the tax authorities. Another controversial topic was the decision by Minister of Education Abdujabbor Rahmonov to bar women from wearing the *hijab* in high schools. Kasymova mentioned that she wrote a blog piece in support of the decision, which drew a heated response from readers and her community. People insulted her, the neighbors had stopped saying hello, and a colleague warned her that something might happen to her. Fearing for herself and her child, she became very careful, and she seldom blogs anymore.

Low pay also affects negatively the development of professional journalism. The panelists said that state media journalists receive especially low pay. For regional state media journalists, salaries are no more than \$20 a month, and generally, the government provides no other remuneration. In the capital, state media journalist salaries range from \$25 to \$100. Furthermore, these salaries are practically unchanged from 2009, despite the financial crisis and the sharp rise in food and energy prices. To cope, regional journalists accept flour, rice, vegetable oil, and fruit in exchange for favorable coverage in the press. Babajanova commented that in order to survive and feed their families, almost all journalists in the regions are forced to work anonymously on the side for other media or with Internet publishers, affecting the quality of their work greatly. Ismoilov said that state television journalists supplement their incomes by taking home \$100 to \$150 for shooting a 30-second story for the news broadcast, while others earn a bit on the side at private shootings. His co-workers at SMT independent television do not take money for shoots, much to the surprise and annoyance of their colleagues from the state channels.

Journalists in the non-government media earn significantly higher monthly wages, from \$150 to \$500. The panelists noted that most of the best journalists in Tajikistan work as local correspondents for foreign electronic and print media.

Sharifzoda said that entertainment dominates radio and television, with little analysis or news programming. On state

television, news programming occupies no more than 20 percent of airtime, and 25 percent on private radio. Ismoilov commented that no one pays for news programs, and thus they are not moneymakers. Nevertheless, his television channel, the independent SMT, devotes about 40 percent of airtime to news and analysis programming. Most of the airtime on FM radio stations goes to music, greetings, and quizzes. Only Radio Imrüz, which broadcasts in Tajik, specializes in news and analytical programming.

From a technical standpoint, most of the media in Tajikistan are poorly equipped—an especially acute problem in the regions. Sotiyev reported that in Khatlon Province, journalists have no printing equipment, such as scanners; desktop printers; or Risograph-type high-speed, multi-functional digital printing systems. Few have voice recorders or cameras, except for correspondents of major newspapers. Dikayev said that the Kulob district—which includes 10 regions—does not have a printing house; all of its newspapers must be printed in Dushanbe. Also, in contrast to Tajikistan’s four independent television stations, state and regional television and radio have poor, obsolete technical equipment.

Tajikistan still has few specialized journalists, and the panelists said that high-quality specialized journalism does not exist. Sharifzoda attributes that to the low level of professional training. Some journalists write small amounts of high-quality material in one area or another, but most journalists are generalists. Davlatov noted also that quality investigations are highly risky, courting danger with the authorities and prosecutors. The panelists noted that the monetary costs of investigative reporting are high also; investigations require travel and additional material resources, and not all editorial offices have deep enough pockets.

Still, there are promising signs that investigative journalism might be turning a corner, with the advent of the Center for Investigative Journalism. The IWPR office in Tajikistan is also working intensively and fruitfully in the genre, and often local newspapers pick up and reprint IWPR political and social investigative pieces. In 2009, more than 10 investigations on social topics, economics, and the environment were published. In 2010, *Asia-Plus* published many articles in the investigative genre covering health issues, trials, religious freedoms, and politics. Hard-hitting topics brought to light include the police’s use of torture against detainees; the illegal eviction of residents from homes slated for demolition; and problems in health care, particularly maternity wards. All the panelists agreed that the most daring investigative pieces run in the Tajik-language newspapers. Khalikjanova took the view, however, that the material is very often emotive and does not always balance different points of view. Furthermore, although readers might respond well, such reporting often lands journalists in hot water.

## OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

### Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.59

While the score for this objective is nearly identical to last year, in indicator scores made some offsetting movement. Indicator 3 (state media are nonpartisan and serve the public interest) lost ground and also scored half a point behind the objective score. Indicator 4 (news agencies) improved and scored ahead of the objective score by more than three-quarters of a point. The rest of the indicators remained static and scored within a half-point of the objective.

Although the Ministry of Culture registered 20 new newspapers and five magazines (18 private, plus seven trade publications) during the year, the panelists noted an overall decline in the amount of news sources providing objective, up-to-date news. However, new media are providing a growing number of options, and Ravshan Abdullayev commented that online sources have overtaken in importance all other sources of information. Over the past two years, journalists, politicians, and other socially active citizens have made Internet blogs and social networks an increasingly popular platform for an alternative to the state position. Tajiks participate actively in social networks. Although recently *odnoklassniki.ru* saw the greatest development, Twitter, Facebook, and *livejournal* are used widely as well. YouTube now features thousands of videos on Tajikistan. Most people are not aware of the possibilities of obtaining

### MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE, OBJECTIVE NEWS.

#### PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > Plurality of public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, internet, mobile) exists and offer multiple viewpoints.
- > Citizens’ access to domestic or international media is not restricted by law, economics, or other means.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the political spectrum, are non-partisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for media outlets.
- > Private media produce their own news.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge the objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.
- > The media provide news coverage and information about local, national, and international issues.

*At the same time, the demand for news is enormous, and the printed press is a very popular medium.*

news through SMS, although many media invite their readers to report newsworthy events that they see via SMS. Zafar Abdullayev, CEO of the Avesta news agency and *Fakty i Kommentarii* ("Facts and Comments"), developed an SMS text message system in support of his agency.

At the same time, the demand for news is enormous, and the printed press is a very popular medium. A new daily newspaper, *Imruz*, appeared; all other publications are weekly, with the exception of *Asia-Plus*, which runs twice a week. Of the new papers and magazines that the Ministry of Culture has registered, nine are to be published in Dushanbe, eight in Sughd Province, two in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region, and one in the Rasht region. As reported in the 2009 MSI, the total circulation figure for all newspapers produced in Tajikistan is less than 200,000. Dikayev reported that because of the financial crisis, the circulation of even the most popular newspapers fell about 15 to 20 percent, with the Russian-language media affected most severely.

According to the Press Department of the Ministry of Culture, 69 state newspapers are put out in the regions. Their circulations numbered no higher than 500 to 1,000 copies in 2010. Most of them come out twice a month, as a result of technical and financial constraints. As in 2009, of the regional state-owned newspapers, only *Dieri Tursunzoda* (Tursunzoda city, circulation 4,000 to 4,500) and *Haqiqat Sughd* (Sughd, circulation 4,500 to 5,500) remain profitable.

Currently, only four independent television stations broadcast in Tajikistan, two in Sughd Province and in the Khatlon region, one in Tursunzoda city, and one in Dushanbe. All FM radio stations in Tajikistan broadcast using much the same format, and can be distinguished from one another only by the times that their short news programs air. Most of the inhabitants in the largest cities have satellite dishes, and for them, obtaining news is not a problem. Satellite television is becoming more common in rural areas, too.

With the support of international organizations, civil society is trying to expand public access to a broad spectrum of information. News resource centers, offering periodical publications and Internet access, have opened in the regions. With the support of OSCE, information access centers have formed in the regions and are very popular among journalists. The Republican Press Center and the Media

Resource Center in Dushanbe offer free Internet access, journalism libraries, newspaper archives, and access to news feeds from various news agencies.

There is a large gulf between news available near the capital and the regions; for the most part, online news is available only in the capital. Sotiyev reported that because of the lack of Internet service in parts of Qurghonteppa and the surrounding area, his Paem news agency disseminates news through libraries—delivering CD-ROMs filled with news recordings. In the regions, even where Internet access is possible, traffic is very low. Especially in the more remote regions, Internet reliability depends on technical conditions, primarily with the erratic electricity supply. In the winter and spring of 2010, some regions received electricity for only four to six hours a day.

Cost is another barrier to media access. The Internet is not accessible for ordinary people, as 60 percent of the population is living below the poverty level. Monthly access rates from the various ISPs range from \$25 to \$60. According to the panelists, at most 15 percent of the population has access to the Internet, and that includes those who visit Internet cafés. Similarly, although interest in reading newspapers is growing every year, very few people can afford to buy newspapers because of the ever-rising cost. The cost of print publications is quite high, retailing on average from TJS 1.50 to TJS 2 (\$0.34 to \$0.45). Ismoilov reported that the further from the capital, the dearer newspapers are; for example, in Garm, in the eastern part of the country, newspapers cost TJS 5 (\$1.10). Russian and other foreign newspapers are generally unaffordable because of the exorbitant cost. Given that the minimum pension and wage equal about \$13.70 a month, people choose necessities over newspapers.

As described earlier, the government does not hesitate to censor when it objects to media coverage. Of the websites blocked on September 29, 2010, only Avesta and Tojnews have been unblocked so far. However, Abdullayev said that it should be noted that to date, the Tajik authorities have not tried to block blogging platforms or social networks. Also, no one has brought any criminal case against an Internet user for something said online, making the Internet the safest place to publish an alternative to the state view of events.

The state media, panelists said, do not reflect alternative points of view, but the independent media aim for balance in their coverage of events. Representatives of the opposition simply have no opportunities to appear on state media airwaves, nor do the state print media cover their views. The opposition's point of view was conspicuously absent in the run-up to the elections, and the only stories related to opposition news that appear on the Khovar government news

agency website are either critical or amount to mud-slinging. Ibodov added that the state media publish only one point of view—the government-sanctioned truth. Pirnazarov added that some private media are also forced to print dirt and sleaze, with the full knowledge of the Office of the President. In these cases, authorities send letters to editorial offices demanding that a certain story be printed. Ismoilov added that all television channels in Tajikistan, state or private, interrupt their own programming for the president’s public appearances or official visits.

According to the panelists, the state media definitely do not serve society’s interests, but rather the political interests of certain individuals. Abdullayev commented that Tajik state radio and television address socially relevant topics only from the government’s point of view, as in the voluntary-compulsory purchase of shares in the Rogun hydroelectric power station. Kasymova confirmed that a journalist has no way to work at a state channel and still report, unobstructed, in the public interest. There are also unwritten rules for covering political events.

Tajikistan has nine registered news agencies: the Khovar government news agency and the independent Asia-Plus, Avesta, InterPress-Service, *pressa.tj*, Simonews, Tojnews, Varorud and Zerafshan-Times. However, only Asia-Plus, Avesta, *pressa.tj*, and Tojnews are active currently. As a result of financial problems after grants dried up, two agencies, Pami-Media and Khatlon Press, went out of business and lost their registration. The lead news agency, Asia-Plus, is attempting to cover the news countrywide.

News agency sites are open-access, but access to much of the information is restricted to subscriber-only areas. However, access to the Avesta, Khovar, Tojnews, and *pressa.tj* sites is completely open, and only restricted partially on Asia-Plus. However, at a time when many print media are experiencing financial difficulties, not all newspapers are able to subscribe to news agency feeds. The Asia-Plus news agency feed, for example, costs from \$40 to \$90 per month, but Alamshoyev noted that it is free for regional media. In recent years, the print media have begun to make greater use of the services provided by international news agencies, including the BBC, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and websites of news agencies Reuters, AP, AFP, ITAR-TASS, RIA Novosti, and Regnum.

However, Pirnazarov noted that not all newspapers attribute their sources or provide links. Ibodov said that the laws and regulations in force place no restrictions on the use of local and foreign news, but in that process, very often local journalists violate the intellectual property rights of other sources of news.

*Mirsaidov said that local media base their news programming on local news, but the regional media rarely produce local news—rather, they broadcast or reprint news from the center. The panelists noted the low level of interregional exchanges of news.*

All four state television channels use agency news only from the State Khovar news agency, although they use excerpts from the news on Russian television channels and Euronews in their foreign news segments.

The electronic media produces very little of its own programming, except for short news broadcasts, entertainment programming, and talk shows. Babajanova said that in Sughd Province, the independent television stations CM-1 and Asia produce higher quality, more up-to-the-minute news segments than the state television channels.

The panelists noted that information consumers, outside of people working in the media field, are not particularly interested in knowing who owns media outlets. The most important thing for them is whether news is up to date. Sharifzoda said that some conditional confirmation exists about “chains” of newspapers surrounding their owners. The panelists commented that there is a reason behind the talk and rumors about the new newspaper *Imrúz* belonging to the oligarch Khassan Asadullozoda, the president’s brother-in-law.

To date, Tajikistan’s major commercial corporations have not become very involved in the media. Foreign capital (except for grants from international donor organizations) is not a factor, as Tajik law prohibits foreign nationals from owning media.

The media avoids covering many social issues, including the president’s family, border disputes, clergy, the religious establishment, or corruption in the higher echelons of government. State television does not show accidents, armed clashes, or natural disasters in the news.

In Tajikistan, the minority press is very small, with only about 20 print media that are mostly localized outlets. Mainly, these include publications in Russian, Uzbek and Kyrgyz, and Turkmen; news in Uzbek, Arabic, and English is available on state television as well. Uzbek ethnic groups have a wider choice of news in their language. In addition to the local media, they have *Halk Ovozi*, a national government newspaper; the non-government *Dustlik*; the popular newspaper *Tong*; and two magazines. Mirsaidov

said that people in Sughd Province, in the regions bordering Uzbekistan, watch only Uzbek television. Pirnazarov said that since 2009, *Karategin* has been coming out in Tajik, Russian, and Kyrgyz in the Rasht region. Khalikjanova shared her view that with the tendency toward strengthening the role of the state language, the Russian-language press will disappear gradually from the media market. The Kyrgyz *Sarykol*, printed in Kyrgyzstan, is available in Murghab.

Dikayev said that the national minority newspapers do not work on the most serious problems facing national minorities, but everyday topics. However, the panelists said that the national minorities in Tajikistan are free, and minority media can develop without restriction. Still, there is discrimination in the higher echelons of power, which admits no Russians, Uzbeks, or any other nationality.

Mirsaidov said that local media base their news programming on local news, but the regional media rarely produce local news—rather, they broadcast or reprint news from the center. The panelists noted the low level of interregional exchanges of news. Often, people in Dushanbe do not know what is going on in neighboring towns and villages. Neither the state nor the independent print and electronic media post correspondents abroad or in central Tajikistan, apart from the Asia-Plus bureau in Washington, DC, and the state agency Khovar in Moscow and Ankara.

## OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.16

The score for business management showed almost no change. The nearly negligible increase resulted from a somewhat higher evaluation of indicator 7 (audience measurement and circulation figures). Otherwise, no indicators showed any movement and all indicators scored close to the overall objective score.

Most of the media in Tajikistan are still in transition toward becoming successful businesses. Abdullayev said that the failure of many media outlets to become profitable and diversify their sources of revenue stems from mismanagement and the lack of strategies to ensure financial stability. According to Ismoilov, a newspaper must have a circulation of at least 3,000 to generate income, and it can support very few employees. The sector has a handful of exceptions that operate successfully and turn decent profits. For example, one major financial group, the Orient International holding company, has its own media business—including two radio stations, a daily newspaper, a monthly business magazine, and an advertising division.

In addition, the Asia-Plus holding company has a Russian-language newspaper, an FM radio station, and, since 2008, the country's first glossy magazine, *VIP-Zona*. *Asia-Plus* newspaper is considered the most profitable publication in the country. It publishes weekly and each edition includes 12 to 14 columns of advertising—out of about 48 columns total.

Other successful companies include the Oila holding company, with two newspapers, a printing press, a news agency, and an advertising agency; and Charkhi Gardun, which has a printing press and four newspapers. Most of the regional media are unprofitable and subsist on international grants. Mirsaidov noted an exception: the owner of Tiroz, in Sughd, has made the station into a profitable enterprise. However, most of its airtime goes to advertising and announcements.

Few media outlets follow a professional business plan. Mirsaidov said that putting together such strategies is virtually impossible, given the unpredictable demand. For example, in Sughd Province, people have started to buy fewer newspapers, and according to Mirsaidov's estimates, the circulation of the popular *Varorud* has fallen from 1,500 to 500.

Davlatov commented that OSCE invited a trainer from the Netherlands to teach business strategy and printing services, but the trainer could offer only limited help to some outlets, given the particular challenges they face. For example, he had no advice for *Farazh* editorial officers regarding when every printing house refused to print the paper.

The panelists held slightly differing views on the primary sources of media revenue. Ismoilov identified grants, sales of securities, advertising, and advertorial and public relations

## MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED ENTERPRISES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

### BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets operate as efficient and self-sustaining enterprises.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards.
- > Government subsidies and advertising are distributed fairly, governed by law, and neither subvert editorial independence nor distort the market.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor the product to the needs and interests of the audience.
- > Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and internet statistics are reliably and independently produced.



material as the primary sources. Pirnazarov said that the Tajik media cannot be described as effective businesses, because they depend almost entirely on advertising—a shrinking resource for most outlets, as one or two groups enjoy a near-monopoly. Advertising material is a hallmark of media based in the capital and the regional centers. Of those, the greatest volume of advertising goes to three state television channels, two government newspapers, and four or five non-state newspapers.

According to some of the panelists, non-governmental media are becoming more focused on securing advertising, announcements, and public relations material. However, other panelists disagreed. Davlatov said that the independent print media survive on sales primarily, and Khalikjanova said that most private or independent media operate on grants, their owners' funds, or in some cases, lucrative printing houses as side businesses. Abdullayev commented that another source of income for local media is photo and video material, which they can sell to foreign agencies and newspapers.

The panelists did agree that many media outlets still subsist on grants. According to Sotiev, regional media tend to exist on aid appropriations from the state budget, or on limited subscriptions. For the government and state print media, as before, compulsory subscriptions for government workers constitute the main source of income. Non-government regional television stations and print media also receive small subsidies from local government budgets.

The government continues to provide substantial financial support to all state media outlets. However, in 2010 the Majlisi discussed a proposal to cut budget funding for the government press. A Majlisi Namoyandagon member, Davlatali Davlatzoda, raised the matter on October 22 during a debate on the budget legislation for 2010. In his view, many ministries, government departments, and cities and regions publish media that play almost no part in providing the country with information or news, and the state wastes a great deal of state money on these outlets. The state-run media also suffer from weak capitalization and a low level of investment.

As in 2009, the biggest advertisers in the media are mobile telephone operators, Internet service providers, pharmaceutical companies, commercial banks, international organizations, and foreign embassies. Advertisers direct most of their support to *Asia Plus* and *Digest Press*, ignoring the Tajik-language opposition media in order to avoid any difficulties with the government in the future, according to some panelists. Other panelists suggested that for the most part, advertisers are unable to identify the best media partners or target groups, and tend to deal only with those

*Most of the regional media are unprofitable and subsist on international grants. Mirsaidov noted an exception: the owner of Tiroz, in Sughd, has made the station into a profitable enterprise. However, most of its airtime goes to advertising and announcements.*

they know; as a result, a few media tend to monopolize the limited advertising dollars.

Ismoilov said that in early 2010, the Committee for Radio and Television raised prices for airing advertising, and advertisers gravitated towards outdoor advertising instead. Prices have now dropped back, but so far, few large advertisers have returned. The panelists noted that advertisers now prefer television as a more accessible medium than newspapers. In addition, a market is developing in SMS advertisements, announcements, and greetings.

However, the panelists found that the major businesses rarely support the media through direct advertisements, preferring to place publicity, advertising, and public relations material with them instead. Some of the panelists expressed the belief that Tajikistan is seeing complete commercialization of the media, with back-to-back advertising. The Tajik-language media is stuffed with advertorials.

Tajikistan has five advertising agencies, but they charge high commissions for their services, and generally media houses find it easier to work with advertisers directly. Most advertising is not produced in Tajikistan; usually it comes from Russian, Turkish, and Iranian television channels and is translated into Tajik. Kasymova said that all four state television channels have their own advertising departments, as do Oila and Charkhi Gardun.

Since 2003, the Law on Advertising has been in force to regulate advertising in the media. The law differentiates between the approaches taken to state and non-state media. Advertising material must not exceed 10 percent of daily airtime for state electronic media or 30 percent for non-state media. Advertising must not exceed 25 percent in state periodical publications or 40 percent in non-government periodicals. The panel noted that state bodies give advertising only to media that are loyal to them. The state press prints advertising only from Goskomimuschestvo, the State Property Committee.



*As in previous years, 2010 saw little market research conducted over the course of the year. Dikayev said that Tsentr Zerkalo (Mirror Center) carried out market research on the popularity of radio, but it was flawed; for example, 98 percent of respondents in the Kulob region indicated that they listen to radio Asia-Plus—which does not broadcast there.*

As in previous years, 2010 saw little market research conducted over the course of the year. Dikayev said that Tsentr Zerkalo (Mirror Center) carried out market research on the popularity of radio, but it was flawed; for example, 98 percent of respondents in the Kulob region indicated that they listen to radio Asia-Plus—which does not broadcast there.

Khalikjanova said that problems with marketing and matching business planning to effective management present a major challenge for all media in Tajikistan. She said that market research studies in Tajikistan do not look at what readers need and find interesting; researchers are preoccupied with circulation and sales figures determining a publication's popularity. Khalikjanova noted that OSCE and the Soros Foundation have planned a media marketing strategy training program, and they are in the process of selecting the beneficiaries. In her view, however, it is still too early to say that the newspapers are becoming self-sufficient and sustainable.

Print media continue the practice of reducing print runs of publications in order to reduce taxes. As Alamshoyev put it, the circulation figures for independent newspapers do not always correspond to reality, as commonly the owners disguise income and circulation figures. Hidden advertising and public relations material are another way to avoid paying taxes.

Although some outlets measure online statistics, Pirnazarov said that Tajikistan's Internet meters and website hit counters are not always accurate. In addition, the measurements do not include a broad enough range of metrics; they tend to focus on clicks on individual stories rather than overall traffic to a site.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.33

Objective 5's score showed no overall change this year. Indicator 3 (NGOs) did improve and was the only indicator to score more than half a point ahead of the objective score. Indicator 6 (access to printing and media equipment) decreased in score, yet remained within half a point of the objective score. Indicator 1 (trade associations) did not change and remained the lowest-scoring indicator, lagging by more than half a point.

The media arena has no active associations on the business side; one publishers' association is no longer operating. The Association of Entrepreneurs of the Republic of Tajikistan is in operation, but not one media holding or outlet is a member. In mid-December 2010, the leaders of the independent print media established the Association of Media Distributors and elected Zafar Abdullayev to lead it. How active the association will be remains to be seen.

Currently, Tajikistan has 11 journalists' associations and foundations: NANSMIT, the Media Alliance, the Society of Independent Electronic Media, the Fund for the Defense and Remembrance of Journalists, the Association of Journalists, the Association of Publicists, the Association of Sports Journalists, the Center for Investigative Journalism, the Association of Teachers of Journalism, the Association of Professional Journalists of Sughd Province, and the

### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

#### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of media owners and managers and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights and promote quality journalism.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs exist providing substantial practical experience.
- > Short-term training and in-service training institutions and programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of media equipment, newsprint, and printing facilities are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (e.g., kiosks, transmitters, cable, internet, mobile) are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Information and communication technology infrastructure sufficiently meets the needs of media and citizens.

Association of Television Journalists. The sector has one union: the Union of Journalists of Tajikistan. The union and NANSMIT rely solely on financial support from international donor organizations.

The panelists underscored that media support institutions made significant progress in aiding the media in 2010, particularly as government pressure on the opposition increased. In October 2010, a group of media executives, journalism associations, and individual activists set up an informal coalition called the September 29 Committee, in honor of the date when authorities launched unprecedented, high-pressure propaganda against some of the independent private media.

Sharifzoda noted another display of cooperation in 2010, when two non-governmental journalists' associations, the Media Alliance of Tajikistan and the Association of Journalists, teamed up to provide legal education for young journalists and defend the freedom of speech. Ibodov said that even though previously non-governmental journalism associations played a relatively passive role in reviewing media legislation, they have revived that area of their work in recent years.

The Union of Journalists of Tajikistan, NANSMIT, the Media Alliance of Tajikistan, and the Association of Journalists were the prime force behind a series of roundtables to discuss the draft Law on Access to Information, and supplementary amendments to the Law on the Press and Other Media. While Dikayev noted that the Union of Journalists of Tajikistan does not protect journalists' rights and focuses purely on the creative side of the media, other panelists said that NANSMIT is working purposefully to protect the rights of journalists.

In November 2010, TajFEN, a network for promoting freedom of speech in Tajikistan, was organized under the auspices of NANSMIT. The network bridged media and human rights organizations to better protect the freedom of expression in Tajikistan. Participants include the Bureau of Human Rights and Rule of Law, the Civil Internet Policy Initiative Social Fund, the Union of Journalists of Tajikistan, the Media Council of Tajikistan, NANSMIT, Khoma, the Association of Journalists, the IWPR representative in Tajikistan, and the Tajik Association of Independent Electronic Media. In general, though, the panelists said that they see little solidarity among journalists. As Sharifzoda noted, not all media members came out in defense of their colleagues when the printing houses refused to print papers and the authorities shut down websites.

To date, attempts by a number of NGOs to establish an independent trade union to protect the interests of journalists have not been successful. Mirsaidov concluded that the media associations have not yet succeeded in establishing a productive dialogue with the government to lobby for their interests, or to protect the interests of the independent

*In October 2010, a group of media executives, journalism associations, and individual activists set up an informal coalition called the September 29 Committee, in honor of the date when authorities launched unprecedented, high-pressure propaganda against some of the independent private media.*

media and advance the freedom of speech. Most of the panelists judged that there is now an acute need to establish an independent trade union of journalists in Tajikistan, to resolve disputes between media outlets and journalists, including problems within editorial offices.

Cooperation is evident between local NGOs and international organizations that defend the freedom of speech, through partnership projects, joint activities, and events. Unfortunately, though, the panelists believe that the international organizations with a presence in Tajikistan constantly distance themselves from the NGOs operating in the media area. Some of the panelists feel that international NGOs continue to cooperate with only two or three media, refusing support to any others.

Of the NGOs and international organizations that successfully support media freedom and provide legal support to journalists, the panelists highlighted the work of the Khoma Association, the NGO Bureau of Human Rights and Rule of Law, Internews, and the Sughd Bureau for Human Rights. The Khoma Association conducted trainings for journalists, and held a competition among Tajik media on covering climate change. The NGO Bureau of Human Rights and Rule of Law promotes effective, accountable and transparent governance, including guaranteeing access to information, and improving the accountability of public officials. Also, in conjunction with media associations, they have held public hearings on topics such as preventing domestic violence. The activities of the NGOs do not often extend as far the regions; Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region, Rasht region, and other areas of central Tajikistan are particularly neglected in terms of media development support.

The panelists expressed concern about professional education and training for journalists. Panelists reported that the number of training opportunities has fallen sharply, and those that exist are lacking in quality. Tajikistan has one state-run faculty of journalism and five departments of journalism, where every year more than 100 people are

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educated, but so far no private higher education institutions in Tajikistan train journalists. Babajanova said that at the Faculty of Journalism at Khujand State University (in Sughd Province in northern Tajikistan), where she teaches, there is a balance between teacher-practitioners and theorists. Independent journalists are also invited to teach. She noted that 30 percent of Khujand State University journalism graduates change direction after graduation, although they stayed in similar lines of work.

According to most of the panelists, however, journalism graduates receive very low quality training. They expressed concern that apparently training does not include enough basic computer skills or specific software and training for online journalism—perhaps only 36 hours in a year. Alamshoyev reported that in Khorugh, the university's journalism department has been in operation for four years but it still does not have enough teachers for specialized subjects or adequate supporting literature. Dikayev added that the Journalism Department at Kulob University (in Khatlon region, in the south of the country) opened in early 2010 with 18 students, but the only specialization it offers is radio and television journalism because the department has no teachers skilled in any other media. Sharifzoda suggested that interactive e-learning could be effective for students of journalism in higher education, but that would be problematic, as only one university, the Russian-Tajik Slavonic University, has access to the Internet. Davlatov also observed that university journalism department administrators oppose allowing students to practice year-round in the independent media.

Students have some study-abroad options in various programs in Turkey, Iran, and the United States (where Tajik students rarely study journalism, as their English is not strong enough), but they can study only on a private, individual basis. Students can study officially only in a few Commonwealth of Independent States countries: Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Belarus. Furthermore, according to Khalikjanova, none of the journalism graduates from foreign institutions return to Tajikistan.

There is no surplus of personnel in journalism, because graduates either do not want to work in the profession or their skill levels are so low that they cannot find work. The panelists noted that media CEOs are almost always dissatisfied with graduates' level of training, because universities graduate students with little concern about their work quality or degree of professionalism.

Short seminars (lasting three to four days), work experience, and master classes are the most popular forms of training among journalists. Editors are extremely reluctant to grant study leave for any long period. All courses and master classes are given free of charge, but only staff of the Asia-Plus media

group have had training and upgrading in their workplace. Government media journalists attend seminars and training courses only rarely, as they do not acknowledge international standards. Additionally, not all media CEOs encourage their employees' desire for professional development, especially if the staff on the ground is thin. Consequently, there is a big gap between the level of training and education of state media journalists and independent media journalists, as well as a gap between Tajik and international standards.

A number of international and local organizations offer training. For example, the Khoma Association conducted a series of training programs on economic journalism, on Tajikistan's accession to the WTO, and creating a pool of journalists to cover the professional and economic problems of the country. Pirnazarov commented that currently, only the IWPR office in Tajikistan runs on-site training seminars for regional journalists on legal issues and international standards.

The panelists praised the high quality of Internews training programs; these programs spend a lot of time on advertising, management, news, multimedia journalism, and blogging. In the panelists' estimation, Internews offered the highest quality programs and was the most helpful to the country's journalists in 2010, for the second consecutive year. Furthermore, since the end of 2008, Internews Network in Tajikistan hosted the website [reporter.tj](http://reporter.tj), which publishes news, runs announcements about grants and training programs, hosts a live magazine, and includes a section for bloggers. Web tracking shows that the site is drawing a high number of visitors.

However, Tajik media outlets lost some international funding for training because of an incident in February 2010. Several leaders of the Tajik media criticized certain trainers from European countries, saying that the media need direct financial aid, not training with incompetent coaches. This resulted in a sharp backlash from the donor organizations, which then cut grants for training programs.

On the subject of print quality and access to equipment, the panelists observed that access to printing and typesetting facilities is subject to purely political restrictions. Although the country has private printing houses, according to the panelists, none are truly independent—as proven when they succumbed to government direction and refused to print *Farazh*, *Nigoh*, *Paikon*, and *Ozodagon*. It appears that the government warned private presses against getting involved. Dikayev expressed the belief that the government has used administrative leverage to pressure private printing houses as well, conducting tax inspections and cutting off electrical supply.

When Sharqi Ozod, a government printing press, refused to print *Farazh*, the director cited worn-out equipment and lack of capacity. Davlatov understands that this was just an excuse, given that the total print run for the two government publications *Sadoi Mardum* and *Jumhuriyat* alone totals more than 40,000 copies. The panelists commented that the appointment of the Sharqi Ozod director, a former member of the Security Council of the Republic of Tajikistan, was a very political move, and censorship has become more overt as a result.

Mirsaidov reported, however, Istaravshan has one private printing house—the only one that printed the newspaper *Varorud*. After other printing houses refused to take it, the director of the Istaravshan house said that until a court decision shut down the newspaper, he would print it.

However, the government places no restrictions on access to newsprint and equipment. Sharqi Ozod, *Asia-Plus*, Charkhi Gardun, and Oila supply newsprint currently. According to Sotiyev, it does not pay to be in the newsprint supply business in the regions without an accompanying side business. All of the panelists agreed on the need to establish printing and typesetting facilities to service the independent media in the capital, Dushanbe, and in the provincial centers—such as Khujand, Qurghonteppa, and Khorog. They pointed to Kyrgyzstan's facilities as a model.

Abdullayev noted that in 2007, the Eurasia Foundation delivered equipment for an independent printing press with a design capacity of five million copies a week. All the equipment had been transferred to Mukhtor Bokizoda, director of the Fund for the Defense and Remembrance of Journalists, but he had been unable to clear it through customs, as there was no permission from the government. It sat in storage at the U.S. Embassy until 2009, when USAID transferred it to Azerbaijan, where it now operates successfully at the Azerbaijani Farmers' Association.

Currently, each private broadcast station acquires its own transmitters independently, although a few years ago, Internews provided them. Now, private stations can generally only procure low-capacity transmitters. Although the government keeps an eye on blogging platforms, they have not blocked them to date. So far, mobile telecommunication devices are used primarily as a communication tool; there is no SMS news service. Mobile Internet connections are available, but for the time being, they do not cover the whole country—because as soon as the electricity in the regions was cut, the 3G transmitters also went out. Tajiktelecom, a Ministry of Transport and Communications body, oversees all transmission towers.

The authorities did exert influence over the distribution of independent media, as the Tajikmatbuot (Tajikprint) system is interested in selling only government publications. Opposition publications can be found for sale in Tajikmatbuot kiosks only rarely; they are sold by public distributors only—often elderly people past retirement age. The panelists expressed the hope that the recently established Association of Media Distributors would be able to establish its own effective alternative distribution network.

## List of Panel Participants

**Junayd Ibodov**, media expert and lawyer, Dushanbe

**Turko Dikayev**, correspondent, *Asia-Plus*, Kulob

**Lola Khalikjanova**, editor-in-chief, Institute for War and Peace Reporting-Tajikistan; blogger, Dushanbe

**Negmatullo Mirsaidov**, director, *Varorud*, Khujand

**Ravshan Abdullayev**, executive director, Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia-Tajikistan; blogger, Dushanbe

**Zinatullo Ismoilov**, director, SMT TV, Dushanbe

**Rano Babajanova**, director, Department of Information Analysis, Sughd Province; professor, Department of Journalism, Khujand State University

**Murod Sotiyev**, director Paem News Agency, Qurghonteppa

**Kurbon Alamshoyev**, director, Pamir-Media News Agency, Khorugh

**Akbarali Sattorov**, owner, *Charkhi Gardun*; head, Tajikistan Union of Journalists; blogger, Dushanbe

**Nargis Kasymova**, editor, Safina TV; producer, Vatan Radio; blogger, Dushanbe

**Nazarali Pirnazarov**, editor, *Sobytiya*; blogger, Dushanbe

**Nurali Davlatov**, deputy editor, *Farazh*, Dushanbe

**Kironshoh Sharifzoda**, director, Association of Journalists, Dushanbe

## Moderator and Author

**Lidiya Isamova**, correspondent, RIA News, Dushanbe

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