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TAJIKISTAN

Conflicting trends pulled independent media in opposite directions throughout 2012, resulting in mixed scoring results largely similar to recent years. Self-censorship increased somewhat, but the panel noted increased attempts at professional and socially responsible reporting. Licensing, education, and taxation remained huge barriers, but professional associations have begun to consolidate their influence and become more effective. Technical limitations and electricity shortages remain a barrier to rural media development. Finally, a burst of online expression through blogs, social networks, and online news sites has opened opportunities for the estimated 25 percent of Tajiks who are Internet users, which in turn invited new efforts at state control of speech online.

Politics were volatile again. Military clashes in Khorog, the capital of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province, ostensibly sparked by the murder of a high-ranking intelligence officer, occurred in July, leaving dozens of casualties. The operation was accompanied by protests and attempts to control press coverage. Communication and travel bans were not lifted for a month, until a ceasefire and the capture of several leaders led to the withdrawal of government troops to their permanent posts closer to the capital.

Russian President Vladimir Putin came to terms with his Tajik counterpart, longtime strongman Emmomali Rahmon, on a 49-year extension of the lease for a Russian military base, in exchange for promises of extensive arms supplies. The agreement triggered a heated discussion in society and online. Tajikistan also won a commitment from Russia to allow Tajik citizens to stay in Russia without registration for 45 days, up from 15. Remissions from Tajik labor migrants are about half of Tajikistan's GDP, the highest ratio in the world. Tajikistan acceded to the World Trade Organization on December 10, after a process that took 11 years.

Tajikistan continued to face pressure from Uzbekistan over water and environmental issues, and from alleged Islamist extremists. The government responded to the latter by increasing pressure and control over religious institutions and leaders.

The panelists stressed the need to restart recently finished projects funded by USAID and the OSCE, and to continue USAID-funded training for journalists, with an emphasis on specialization and coaching multimedia journalists. While opportunities to increase openness through new media are great, the panel also dubbed 2012 the "Year of Pressure on the Internet," as the government attempted to counter the rapid growth in opposition activity online.

TAJIKISTAN at a glance

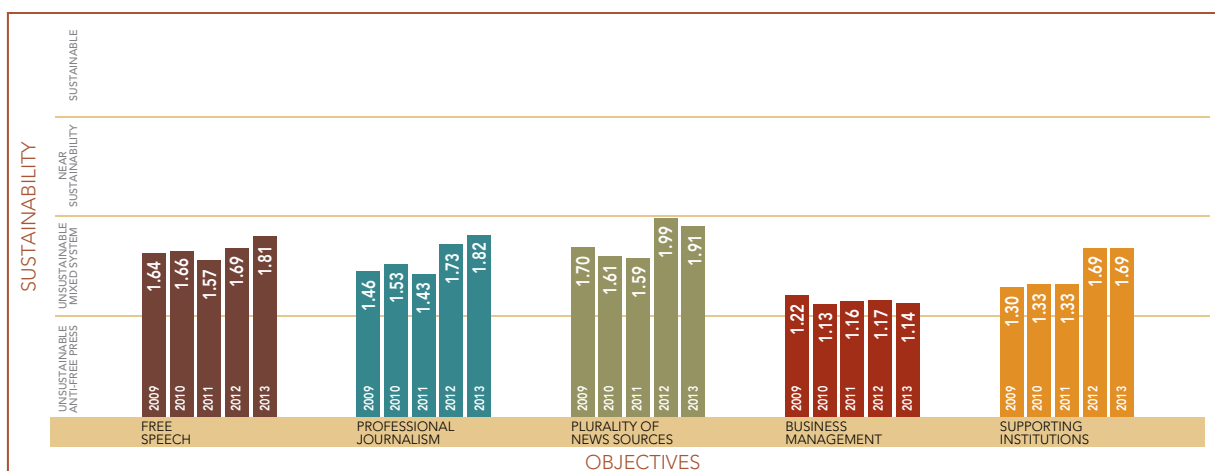
GENERAL

- > Population: 7,910, 041 (2013 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Capital city: Dushanbe
- > Ethnic groups (% of population): Tajik—79.9%, Uzbek—15.3%, Russian—1.1%, Kirghiz—1.1%, other—2.6 % (2000 Census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Religions (% of population): Sunni Muslims—85%, Shia Ismaili Muslims—5%, other—10% (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Languages: Tajik (official), Russian (widely used in government and business)
- > Gross Domestic Product: 6.522 Billion (World Bank Development Indicators)
- > GDP per capita: \$934.8 (World Bank Development Indicators)
- > Literacy Rate: 99.7% (male—99.8%, female—99.6%) (2010 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > President or Top Authority: Emomali Rahmon (since 1994, head of government since 1992)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > Number of print outlets, radio stations, television stations: Government figures tally 364 registered print outlets, 195 private, 89 state funded. Most are issued in Dushanbe, and more than half are issued irregularly.
- > Newspaper circulation statistics (total circulation and largest paper): state-run *Jumhuriyat* (Republic)—41 000 copies, ruling People's Democratic Party *Minbari Halk* (People's Tribune)—48,000, private *Oila* (Family)—15,000, *Asia-Plus*—14,000, *Charkhi Gardun* (Wheel of the World)—6,500, *Faraj* (Bitter Pill)—6000 and *Nigoh* (Opinion)—5000 copies.
- > Broadcast ratings: State-run youth channel Bahoriston TV (Spring), Poytaht (Capital); private SMT TV, CM-1 TV (Khujand). State-run radio Sadoi Dushanbe (Voice of Dushanbe); private Radio Imruz (Today), Radio Watan (Homeland), Radio Tiroz (Decoration, Khujand), Radio Sadoi Panchakent (Voice of Penjikent).
- > Annual advertising revenue in media sector: N/A
- > News agencies: Asia-Plus, Avesta, Ruzgor.tj, Pressa.tj, Ozodagon.com, Tajikta.tj, Tojnews.tj, and the state-run Khovar
- > Internet usage: 700,000 (est, 2009, *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: TAJIKISTAN



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2013: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES



CHANGE SINCE 2012

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

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

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

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

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

Scores for all years may be found online at http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE_msiscorers.xls

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.81

As in previous years, the Tajik media is governed by an array of laws and regulations, including the 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 TV and Radio Broadcasting, as well as multiple other articles of the civil and criminal codes.

The Constitution provides for the freedom of expression and bans censorship. Also, there are special laws concerning the media and television that guarantee the freedom of speech and access to information. However, when it comes to practice, they do not facilitate these freedoms to the fullest extent. Although articles on libel and insult have been transferred from the criminal to the civil codes, to fulfill President Rahmon's promise given at a solemn meeting devoted to the centenary of the first Tajik newspaper, other articles such as Article 137 banning public insult of the President of Tajikistan, and Article 330 banning insults against public officials have remained criminalized. The decree on criminal liability for libel and defamation on the Internet, which was passed by the parliament and signed by the president at the end of July 2007, is still troublesome.

Legislative acts concerning broadcasting and telecommunications, especially licensing, are far from liberal.

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

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

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

The Licensing Committee was created under the auspices of the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting, and those seeking to obtain a license face biases from the very beginning. Just like previous years, this Committee inhibits the licensing of a number of independent media outlets that are ready to begin broadcasting. The Committee is a closed structure and no representative of the independent media has ever been a member.

The fundamental law of the Republic of Tajikistan On Press and Other Mass Media was adopted in the last days of the Soviet era, and is clearly outdated despite numerous amendments and supplements made over the past 20 years. Following heated debates in the press on the necessity of radical changes to the Media Law, the Lower Chamber Council created a working group affiliated with the Parliamentary Committee on Media, which includes two representatives of civil society: Nuriddin Karshiboev, director of the National Association of Non-Government Sources of Media Information of Tajikistan (NANSMIT), and Kironshoh Sharifzoda, chairman of an NGO called, simply, The Journalist. Media representatives and the community have been fighting for this new bill for two and a half years. Finally, Tajikistan's lower chamber of parliament passed the new Law on the Press and Other Mass Media on December 12.

"Now, under the new version of the law, all media outlets in Tajikistan will be registered as legal entities, and state authorities will have to respond to journalists' inquiries within three days, and not sixty as it used to be, according to the previous version. A separate article is devoted to the journalists' responsibility towards the society and readers," said Olim Salimzoda, one of the authors of the new media law.

He added that the new law is geared towards the development of society, enhancing the level of information, the development of journalism, mass media freedom, and free registration, as well as journalists' accreditation.

While the Criminal Code contains articles that allow punishing those who impede journalists in their legal and professional activities (Article 148), as well as those officials who refuse to provide information to citizens (Article 162) though not a single charge has ever been brought against anyone under these codes. As last year, all the panelists stated that the implementation of the laws and regulations is still on a rather low level despite the fact that some people attempt to curb these freedoms.

According to the panelists who participated in the discussion, low legal awareness among journalists themselves, official impunity and opposition, failures of journalists to hold officials accountable for their illegal

“Now, under the new version of the law, all media outlets in Tajikistan will be registered as legal entities, and state authorities will have to respond to journalists’ inquiries within three days, and not sixty as it used to be,” noted Salimzoda.

obstructionism, and incompetent court decisions from a corrupt and biased judiciary hinder implementation.

As last year, the all panelists agreed on the inadequacy of law enforcement mechanisms concerning the guarantees of freedom of speech and access to information. “The authorities have lots of creep holes to circumvent these laws and interdepartmental decrees,” said Karshiboev, the NANSMIT director.

Panelist Khurshed Niyozov, director of the Center for Investigative Journalism, noted in turn that public officials of all ranks—from the government to law enforcement agencies—bar access to information in all possible ways, and nobody is held responsible for it. The panelists maintained that when quarterly press conferences of state ministries and departments were cancelled, the authorities promised to simplify access to information and conduct press conferences whenever necessary, even more frequently. This promise has not been fulfilled yet despite multiple requests from journalists.

Not everyone on the panel agreed. “During the past year, access to socially-significant information has really been simplified due to the improvement of official government websites and their use of social networks,” said the panelist Nazarali Pirnazarov, reporter for the private regional news agency Ca-news.org.

Panelist Ravshan Abdullaev, executive director of the Eurasia Foundation in Tajikistan, said that so-called “telephone justice” of civil servants is still thriving, but is now accompanied by SMS messaging. “This practice is widely used by the head of the State Communication Service, Beg Zakhurov, who sends letters and SMS messages to Internet and mobile communications service providers requiring them to block certain websites,” he said. Karshiboev noted that these SMS messages and letters are legally invalid.

Karshiboev described the active development of the so-called “response factory” when the state-run media use anonymous letters from readers to throw mud at opposition politicians, religious figures and independent media. “These

letters are usually published as an opinion of a reader or a common citizen of the country, whose last name has in most cases been cooked up,” he said.

Panelists noted that public opinion has been split for several years already. Most people maintain that free media are extremely beneficial for the state and community, whereas others claim that these media whip up tensions in society and libel the government. The latter also plead to limit the freedom of speech to prevent such cases, and Beg Zakhurov used this alleged “public outcry” as a basis for his recent order to block Facebook, which had become a platform for opposition politicians.

“State authorities do not stand aside either—the bravest journalists are called ‘hirelings,’ or ‘Tajikistan’s enemies.’ They are summoned by law enforcement bodies ‘for a talk’ and even deprived of accreditation,” said Pirnazarov.

Lawsuits against independent journalists are still common. Thus, panelist Mahmudjon Dodobaev, who worked as Jahonnamo TV channel director in Tajikistan’s second city, Khujand, until early October, told about his dismissal and a lawsuit against him because of a numerical error. When a part of the Korvon market, the largest consumer goods market in the country, burned in a fire in early September, his TV channel provided information on the victims with reference to Tojnews.tj. However, the data published on the agency’s website proved to be exaggerated, which caused Dodobaev to be summoned to the security authorities and asked for explanations. He referred to the data published on the website, but this information had already been removed. Dodobaev faced a lawsuit accusing him of libel and disinformation, and he was dismissed from his job. Panelist Kironshoh Sharifzoda, head of the Media Council, believes that the case could have been solved in out of court. “They just wanted to punish him publicly in order to scare other journalists, because no TV channel in the country besides his had reported on the fire in the market,” he said.

Officials often resort to threats in order to make journalists reveal their sources, even though the law stipulates that a journalist has the right not to reveal them, except for cases with a court order.

The Media Law explains how to protect sources of confidential information, stating, “A journalist shall have no obligation to name a person supplying information with the agreement to not divulge his/her name, except as required by a court of law.” On the other hand, there is an article in the criminal code that contradicts this, stating that if a person is called as a witness, she or he must testify.

All panelists mentioned again that there is an urgent need for a specific law protecting sources of information. Panelist

Khurshed Niyozov noted that officials do not use civil reclamation proceedings, but file a complaint directly with the Prosecutor General's Office. "When a lawsuit is sent to criminal proceedings, journalists have very little chance to prove their innocence," he said.

Panelist Kurbon Alamshoev, director of the Pamir Media Agency, maintains that licensing of TV and radio media outlets is still conducted behind closed doors. "The licensing procedure itself, as well as the work and composition of the committee are not yet transparent enough," he said.

Pirnazarov noted that the composition of the committee is unknown, but there are neither civil society representatives nor journalists among the Committee members.

Independent media outlets have been waiting for their licenses for many years. "The situation concerning licensing may only get worse due to the presidential elections in 2013, when Emomali Rahmon, who has already been in power for 20 years, is expected to run for election again," Pirnazarov believes.

This year, a license was only given to a TV and radio station in Sughd Province in northern Tajikistan. Panelist Rano Bobojanova, an instructor at the Faculty of Journalism of Khujand State University, said that granting licenses to TV and radio companies that broadcast in the north of the country was a political tool. "The government of the Sughd Province needs these stations as counter-measures to prevent the local population from listening to and watching the programs broadcast from Uzbekistan," she claimed. A large minority of the Sughd population are Uzbek speakers.

Sukhrobsho Farrukhshoev, spokesperson for the mayor's office in Kulyab, in southern Khatlon province, reported that two years ago the US-based Internews Network provided his city with the equipment for launching an independent TV station. "Nevertheless, despite the solicitation of the city authorities, our application was rejected by the Licensing Committee," he added.

There are still only two independent TV stations—Mavchi Ozod and Kurgonteppa TV—and no private radio stations at all in Khatlon Province. The situation in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province and the central Rasht Valley is even worse—there are no independent TV or radio stations there.

The panelists recommended that licensing be taken away from the State Committee on TV and Radio Broadcasting and transferred to an independent body.

Entering the Tajik mass media market is otherwise similar to other types of business—all one needs is funds. "Anyone having enough money can found a newspaper or a

"State authorities do not stand aside either—the bravest journalists are called 'hirelings,' or 'Tajikistan's enemies.' They are summoned by law enforcement bodies 'for a talk' and even deprived of accreditation," said Pirnazarov.

magazine. That is why there are tons of various newspapers with crossword puzzles and jokes stolen from Russian media, and publications characterized by low-level materials, incompatible with international journalistic standards, and scandalous articles," said the panelist Muhayo Nozimova, editor-in-chief of *Ovoza* and national coordinator of SCOOP, a Danish-funded investigative supporting project.

The procedure for printed media licensing is still rather cumbersome and non-transparent. A "single window" system for media outlet startups is still missing. The founding and registration of any media outlet requires approvals from at least five departments, including the compulsory registration as a legal entity. "Notably, refusal to register with official bodies does not prevent people from writing their own blogs, though there is a risk of getting the blog address or even the whole blog platform blocked by the Communication Service as a result of criticizing this or that public figure," Pirnazarov said. Abdullaev believes that this year bloggers have become more active and brave in expressing their political viewpoints.

Almost all independent media outlets have experienced pressure from the authorities for publishing critical materials, especially for reporting on the military operation in Khorog, which was absent in the official media. "Undesirable" journalists were denied access to information, rudely ushered out of ministries and departments, not allowed into press conferences, prohibited to shoot photos or videos, and demanded to publish retractions.

The Presidential Administration has tightened access for foreign journalists accredited in Tajikistan. Since early October they have not been invited to the President's meetings with international delegations, and official photo sessions have been ended. No one in the Presidential Administration has ever explained the reason for such measures.

Abdullaev and Pirnazarov, reported that bloggers claimed they had been threatened. "Bloggers from Blogiston.tj have said that they received messages with threats after posting critical posts on political issues," said corroborated panelist

Muhayo Nozimova. Blogiston.tj was founded by Rustam Gulov, a blogger from Khujand, publishes both personal blogs and aggregates and republishes information from across Tajikistan.

Sharifzoda said that officials are thoroughly monitoring such popular social networks as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The President's press service, as well as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Dushanbe Mayor, and many other officials have Facebook accounts.

Facebook is a venue of free discussions and political debates, and there are some humiliating posts about the president, his family, and the Tajik government. "Unlike print media, social network users often behave irresponsibly. During the Khorog military operation there were calls to overthrow the government and messages humiliating the President, which is punishable according to Article 189 of the Criminal Code," said Karshiboev. Limited access to Facebook in March and November led to an increased interest in this network among the Tajik population. According to Socialbakers, there were a little more than 29,000 Facebook users on March 4, and their number exceeded 45,000 by the end of November. The panelists noted that, as far as they know, some of the active Facebook users are connected to intelligence agencies.

Abdullaev described a flash mob that gathered near the building Dushanbe's main publishing house in November, 2012, during which about one hundred people formed a human heart, while people with photo and video cameras watched and recording everything.

The panelists noted that instead of creating normal conditions for the development of printed press, state authorities are creating barriers that hinder it. New tax code provisions that came into effect on January 1, may lead to the bankruptcy of some media outlets, as it imposes 18% VAT on paper, equipment, and distribution for the print media.

Violations of journalists' rights were reported in NANSMIT's monthly monitoring report of October 2012. Major violations in 2012 included unjustified restrictions on the provision of information of public importance or refusals to provide such information at all, unjustified summonses from law enforcement bodies; unjustified searches, and the beatings of three journalists.

Niyozov reported that a violent attack on Khikmatullo Saifullozoda, the editor-in-chief of the *Najot* newspaper of the Party of Islamic Revival of Tajikistan, which took place in March 2011, has not been investigated yet, the attackers have not been found, and case was transferred from Dushanbe to Saifullozoda's birthplace for unclear reasons.

"Government authorities are still restricting access to information in force majeure situations and accidents. This was especially obvious during the military operation in Khorog during July. Priority in such cases is still given to the state-run media outlets," said Murod Sotiev. He added that the government of the Khatlon Province requests written applications for access to information. Panelist Nosirjon Mamurzoda, reporter for Radio Ozodi (Freedom), the Tajik affiliate of RFE/RL, cited an example when one of his colleagues headed for Kumsangir District in order to write an article, but was stopped by the assistants to the District Prosecutor General, who demanded a full report on why he had come and what he wanted there. "The Prosecutor General announced that no journalist would be able to move around the district or receive any information without his permission," the panelist said.

Alamshoev added that it is still extremely difficult to obtain access to information in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province before a clerk receives approval from upper management.

The panelists noted that one of the prerequisites for the access to information is the journalist's professionalism and good connections in government agencies. Nevertheless, everyone agreed that the authorities are still dividing mass media outlets by giving priority to those that are state-run.

Despite the state authorities' stated aim to introduce e-government, their websites are not informative enough and rarely updated. "There are, perhaps, no more than 5–6 websites of ministries and departments that offer useful information, are regularly updated and have a feedback channel," said the Nozimova. That is why the sites of ministries and departments are mainly used by journalists looking for information rather than by the general public.

The panelists noted that local media outlets often use information from both local and international news agencies without reference to the source; and compulsory hyperlinks are not used, which is a breach of intellectual property rights.

Access to international news is open, though there are some factors that create obstacles. "These include a limited electrical supply in some regions from November to February, and the price of Internet services—from \$25 to \$70—which is quite high in comparison to the average income of the population," reported Abdullaev. Besides, the authorities continue to restrict access or completely block opposition websites that publish critical materials about Tajikistan, such as Fergana.ru, Centrasia.ru, Arianastorm.com, Mahalla.org, Lenta.ru, and RIA.ru, for the third year in a row.

Another, even broader channel of foreign news is TV—both cable and satellite—which has become widespread in Tajikistan. “Satellite dishes have become commonplace even in the most remote regions of the country, because local TV is nothing but holiday specials, concerts, and Presidential visits,” said panelist Alamshoev.

Practicing journalism does not require licensing, even professional training is not compulsory in order to start working as a journalist. In fact, anyone with a press card is considered a journalist. However, the absence of accreditation for reporting on some official events can be an obstacle for journalists.

Journalists are educated in six institutions throughout the country, but not all graduates are ready to work in the media. “Twenty-five journalists graduate from Khujand State University every year, and all of them are readily employed by media outlets,” reported the panelist Rano Bobojanova. At the same time, the panelists mentioned alarming factors such as the tight monitoring of journalism students and the prohibition of internships at independent media outlets. Students who earn degrees in journalism abroad seldom return to the country, according to the panel.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.82

Professional journalism in Tajikistan is still hindered by some obstacles, mainly by limited access to government information, especially for young journalists lacking

JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

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

connections. In emergency situations, government officials are afraid of providing information until they receive permission from higher-ranking authorities. Adherence to such a policy was demonstrated during the Khorog clashes in July, as well as during a riot following the fire at Korvon market, in September of 2012.

“Government officials are reluctant to be interviewed by journalists, claiming that they are extremely busy, or they use interviews for their own justifications,” posited Sharifzoda.

The cancellation of regular ministerial press conferences was widely decried. “These press conferences are the only places where a journalist can meet a head of a ministry or department in person and ask questions directly. Though you cannot be certain if an answer will be given,” said Dodobaev.

Journalists have started reporting events using several sources. “Journalists are trying to work according to international standards, and they use comments provided by all parties. It is also good that journalists are trying to make use of private lawyers, though, unfortunately, not every media outlet has their own lawyer for expert examination of their materials in order to avoid lawsuits,” argued Nozimova.

Pirnazarov, in turn, believes that not every journalist is objective in reporting on events. “A subjective approach of some experienced reporters became evident during the Khorog events this summer. While reporting on these events, journalists violated established norms, the basic principle of which is ‘Do no harm,’” he said. He further explained that the public met extremely emotional reporting with mixed reactions.

“The Khorog events led to more self-censorship, though they also triggered criticism of government actions,” said Niyozov. Only a few private Tajik media outlets can afford a balanced approach reporting, and the number of such media outlets is shrinking every year. Most non-government media outlets reflect their owners’ viewpoints, while the state-run media is little more than a tool for propaganda and war against political competitors.

“In view of such circumstances, most journalists have nothing to do but practice self-censorship. This is why many journalists quit their jobs, and analytical content is being replaced with entertainment. This process became more profound in 2012, as it affected even the most well-to-do media outlets in the country,” said Abdullaev.

Each ministry and department has its own, internal list of information to be kept away from the media. Each official has to relay a request to a direct manager until the request

Alamshoev added that the residents of the border districts of Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province (GBAP) prefer Afghan to Tajik television.

reaches both a minister and a department head. Such a chain of command significantly hinders a journalists' ability to report on key events and problems faced by the country. Even if they were granted, few journalists are capable of conducting a professional, well-prepared interview.

For instance, the security forces and the Ministry of Defense that took part in the military operation in Khorog did not provide the media with any information whatsoever. Journalists have been trying to obtain information about the owner of the offshore company IRS, which controls the Dushanbe–Chanak toll highway connecting central and northern Tajikistan, for three years already, but in vain. It is thought to be owned by the president's son-in-law, Deputy Finance Minister Jamoliddin Nuraliev.

The Ministry of Defense, as well as the State Committee for National Security and the Central Directorate of Border Control, provides journalists only with information that these bodies themselves find necessary to publish.

Risks incurred from publishing materials that criticize any aspect of public life make journalists resort to anonymous sources of information. Besides, the media has an unspoken rule not to criticize advertisers and tax authorities.

Bobojanova noted that mass media are still being used as a tool for blackmailing and score settling. "Managers of one of the farms in Sughd Province refused to give a bribe to an official, and then the *Tojikistoni Dunya* newspaper published mudslinging content about them," she said.

Besides, as panelist Dodobaev stated, independent newspapers such as *USSR* and *Tojikiston* suffer from regionalism, publishing attacks against northern citizens.

In addition to the president and his family, journalists are wary of attacking the top leaders of the parliament, the activities of TALCO, the State Committee for National Security, and the tax authorities. Niyosov and Nozimova admitted that, as editors themselves, they practice self-censorship concerning some 'closed' topics, especially after the military operation in Khorog.

Abdullaev said that the Asia-Plus Media Group, which owns the fiercely independent *Asia-Plus* newspaper and website, has published material he equated with PR for the Islamic Renaissance Party and its leader, Muhiddin Kabiri, on its

Islamnews.tj website. Islamnews.tj is a grant-funded project of the US-based National Endowment for Democracy.

As for social networks, the panelists noted that they do discuss such political issues as the personality of President Rahmon and his family that are never touched by mass media. "In addition to that, there are PR campaigns by private companies and flash mobs," said Pirnazarov. Some newspapers have recently started publishing articles based on Facebook discussions, and local political analysts began conducting on-line conferences of current problems online.

Another problem related to the development of professional journalism is the pay level. According to data presented by the panelists, salaries and royalties in the state-run media outlets are especially low and have not changed since 2010, despite a sharp rise in prices for food and energy over that time. Regional journalists still demand both food and money as a fee for press coverage of events.

Salaries in state-run and private media outlets are quite different. The average salary in the state-run media outlets is about \$120–140, compared to \$600 in the privately owned media outlets. On the other hand, state-run media employees of the TV & Radio Committee received housing benefits twice in the last three years, and some can receive a plot of land free of charge. Many journalists work for several media outlets to boost salaries, while some have left for Russia to work as general labor migrants.

State television journalists can make \$100–150 to shoot a thirty second advertising spot for an advertiser, while other camera operators earn a bit on the side at private shootings, such as weddings, concerts, and banquets.

Entertainment tends to replace news and information programs in TV and radio broadcasting. "Entertainment programs take up to 65–70% of airtime on state-run TV, up to 80% on independent radio and 55–60% on state-run radio," said Dodobaev. News programming does not exceed 25% of airtime on state-run TV and 20% in private radio and television.

Pirnazarov suspects that if these media outlets increase the amount of time devoted to news, their viewers and listeners will probably switch to the channels that offer more entertainment. "At the same time, young people tend to take more interest in politics than before," said Farrukhshoev. As last year, the panelists maintain that the only channel, which does meet the requirements of both the authorities and its viewers, is Bahoriston TV, which shows a lot of cognitive and educational programs for children and family viewing.

"In terms of both quality and content of their programs, state-run Tajik TV channels completely fall behind satellite channels as well as TV channels broadcast from neighboring countries," said Sotiev. Alamshoev added that the residents of the border districts of Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province (GBAP) prefer Afghan to Tajik television.

The panelists noted that truly independent printing houses do not exist in Tajikistan, there are only private ones, but even they stop printing undesirable newspapers on the government's orders. The panelists believe it is vital to establish an independent printing house sponsored by investors and completely independent of the authorities.

Adherence to professional ethics is self-regulated on the basis of the Code of Ethics for Journalists in Tajikistan, passed by the journalists' community in 2009. Last year, the Code was adopted by 25 more journalists' organizations, and now the number is close to 70. These ethical norms for journalists were formulated on the basis of the established standards set by international professional associations of journalists and adapted to specific features of national culture and moral values.

The Media Council is an NGO that monitors the observance of ethical norms by journalists, receives applications from interested parties, discusses them at its meetings, and makes recommendations, which are subsequently published in print media. This year, the Media Council discussed more than twenty applications mainly concerning the issues of objectiveness of materials, advocacy of immoral behavior, respect of personal privacy, honor and dignity.

However, the largest Tajik-language newspapers, *Nigoh*, *Millat*, and *USSR*, have not yet adopted the Code.

As for the technical equipment of media outlets, the panelists noted that they lack modern equipment. "All regional editorial offices have out-of-date computers, there are no voice recorders, photo and video cameras," said the panelist Murod Sotiev. "The same technical problem exists in the broadcast media, where many journalists have to use their own, privately purchased equipment," he said.

Sotiev and Mamurzoda added that there are no scanners, printers, or photocopiers at newspaper office in Khatlon, and access to the Internet is problematic due to seasonal power cutoffs.

Inadequate technical equipment often results in delayed information, as no news agency works round the clock. However, Dodobaev claimed that almost all independent TV stations in Sughd have modern HDV video cameras and video editing systems. State-run TV and radio channels upgrade their equipment almost annually.

"In the state-run media, journalists are afraid of losing their 'warm place;' stable though not too high income and the prestige of state employee status, so they refrain from writing brave articles and do not adhere to international standards of professional journalism," said Nuriddin Karshiboev.

Many print media receive Internet access and mobile communication from providers in exchange for advertising these services in their media.

The panelists generally agreed that there are very few really versatile journalists. "Most print media outlets do not have a full-time professional photographer. There are no people able to offer their expert opinion in the domain of, say, economics or culture," said Abdullaev.

Bobojanova claimed that due to financial hardships, Tajik media outlets cannot afford to have thematic sub-divisions or at least one journalist who specializes in a certain area.

The panelists maintained that no media outlet is interested in training their journalists in a specific field, there is no specializations offered by faculties of journalism in Tajik universities either.

Thus, there is no high-quality specialized journalism in Tajikistan, and this depends on the educational level of not only journalists, but also other professionals, such as analysts and economists. Moreover, the panelists stated that the professional level of many journalists working for state-run media is not inferior to that of those who work for independent media outlets. "In the state-run media, journalists are afraid of losing their 'warm place;' stable though not too high income and the prestige of state employee status, so they refrain from writing brave articles and do not adhere to international standards of professional journalism," said Nuriddin Karshiboev.

More than twenty investigations on social topics, economics, and human rights have been published this year. The panelists noted that the most daring materials devoted to such socially significant problems as torture, lawsuits, religious freedom and politics were published in the Tajik-language newspapers *Nigoh*, *Faraj*, *Ozodagon*, as well as the Russian-language *Asia-Plus*.

"Our Center for Investigative Journalism never starts investigating a topic until we have thoroughly researched

all of its aspects, but we are trying to be very careful with political issues,” reported Niyozov.

Alamshoev added that the SCOOP project has been very successful this year—ten journalistic investigations devoted to social topics, human rights, etc. have been conducted with its support.

The panel participants mentioned that conducting investigations is an expensive business—one has to travel all over the country and spend money on transportation and accommodation. “Also, conducting investigations requires more sophisticated professional equipment,” maintains Sharifzoda.

Pirnazarov believes that the problem stems from the fact that many media outlets in neighboring countries have already shifted to multimedia journalism. “As for our journalists, very few of them are able to shoot video and take pictures at the same time; therefore, journalists need special training to become multimedia reporters,” he said.

Journalistic investigations are not always conducted according to ethical norms, nor do journalists always check the facts, and this leads to conflicts with the law and authorities.

The panelists noted that the Tajik media desperately need comprehensive training for multimedia journalists, economic analysts, and legal education experts, with further internships with their colleagues in other countries, especially those in the Central Asian region.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.91

The panelists noted that the plurality of news sources that provide objective and up-to-date information has not changed. The state-run media in Tajikistan fail to meet standards of objectivity. “Today the state-run media do not serve society, nor even the state, but only the government. This is not their fault, but is their problem. This happens because the Constitution of independent Tajikistan, with its vague provisions, paves the way for exaltation of the state and government—all in one person,” claimed Sharifzoda.

He also noted that independent media are eager to serve society but cannot do so properly because there is no clear-cut distinction between the state, government, and society.

The first and second pages of such state-run media outlets, such as *Chumhuriat (Republic)* and *Sadoi Mardum (Voice of the People)*, are full of portraits and photos of the president

while trade, regional, city, and district papers feature heads of ministries and departments as well as reports on their successes. Nothing can be read about opposition, and not just that—even the leaders of minor parties are not mentioned.

“The state media reflects nothing but the viewpoint of the government and state administration while rejecting any alternatives,” said Abdullaev. The panelists also mentioned that online sources had surpassed all others, and that people often look for news on the Internet, especially during emergencies. According to experts, the differentiation between the country’s center and the outlying regions in terms of access to varied sources is increasing from one year to another.

“Nowadays readers can acquire necessary information from a number newspapers, magazines, FM radio stations, and Internet sites, and it is up to the reader to decide whether these media prepare their reports professionally enough, as people with access to various sources are able to compare them,” Nozimova said.

“Today, only a few newspapers and Internet sites in the country are trying to present opinions from all interested parties in their reports,” said Sotiev.

Representatives of opposition parties are denied the opportunity to express their viewpoints in any state-run media. “The state-run media look like identical twins—all newspapers publish the same material,” said Mamurzoda. The same can be said about all four state TV channels,

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE, OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

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

which show the same coverage during presidential visits and official speeches. Viewers often refer to fanciful state TV channels as the "Philharmonic Society," "Concert Hall," or the "Never-ending Holiday."

On the other hand, the panelists pointed out that independent media do give diversified coverage of socially significant events. "For example, the signing of the Agreement on the status of the Russian military base in Tajikistan was called beneficial by the *Business and Politics* newspaper, whereas *Nigoh* and *Ozodagon* vehemently criticized the document," reported Niyozov.

Nowadays, almost all newspapers receive news from local information agencies either free of charge or for a symbolic fee, and only BBC and Ozodi have subscription-based news feeds.

"Almost all the print and news media reprint news, but they seldom refer to the source, and hyperlinks are just disregarded. This is especially so when information comes from leading international agencies such as BBC, RIA, Reuters, ITAR-TASS, and Liberty [Ozodi]," said Pirnazarov.

News is not distributed by SMS as yet, though many media outlets do encourage their readers to report newsworthy events they have witnessed via SMS or MMS. Moreover, some have opened a special section for citizen journalists on their websites and newspaper pages. Tajik citizens have become active users of social networks, and if in 2008 the most popular was the Russia-based Odnoklassniki.ru, now most users people are more actively engaged in Facebook and Twitter.

The Internet is becoming more and more accessible in big cities, but not in rural areas where electricity blackouts are frequent in autumn and winter, as well as the high subscription costs. The price of Internet services has increased after the introduction of a 3% VAT, which is, of course, passed on to the customers.

According to the panelists, over 25% of Tajikistan's population of 2.2 million people has Internet access, a figure that includes those who visit Internet cafés. One of the reasons for slow growth is the lack of content in the Tajik language. "Some content in Tajik is presented on the governmental sites as a part of the so-called 'electronic government,' or within a regulatory and legal framework," said Kironshoh Sharifzoda. The information gap between young people, who live in the capital and often understand Russian and/or English, and their peers who understand only Tajik, is also growing.

"Society is ready to contact the authorities via social networks, which is illustrated by the example of the second

[most powerful] person in the country who opened a Facebook account, Mahmadsaid Ubaidulloev, and then organized a four hour on-line meeting with the activists of the Tajik segment of Facebook," said Abdullaev, referring to the Dushanbe mayor.

Not everyone can afford to buy newspapers, especially in the outlying regions, because their price increased several times this year, up 20% during 2012, or about \$0.40 per issue on average. "The further from the capital, the higher the price; for instance, newspapers published in the capital cost TJS 2 to TJS 3 (US\$0.40–US\$0.63) more in Khorog and Kurgan-Tube than in Dushanbe," reported Alamshoev and Sotiev. Low-income individuals exchange newspapers, and therefore receive their news later.

There is still only one daily newspaper, *Imruz News*, and three state-run papers are published twice a week, while all others are issued weekly, either on Wednesday or on Thursday. *Asia-Plus* is published on Mondays and Thursdays.

The overall circulation of all newspapers published in Tajikistan does not exceed 180,000–200,000 copies. Even the most popular newspapers lost about 10–15 percent of their circulation due to increased prices of paper and printing services.

According to the Press Department of the Ministry of Culture, 66 state-run newspapers are regularly published in the outer regions. Their circulation does not exceed 500 to 1,000 copies. Due to technical and financial problems, most of them are issued two or three times a month. As in 2011, only *Dieri Tursunzoda*, in western Tursunzoda, with a circulation of 4,000 to 4,500 copies, *Haqiqat Sughd*, from Sughd Province, and *Kulyab Pravda*, each with a circulation of 3,000 to 5,500 copies, remain profitable among regional state newspapers.

Civil society, supported by international organizations, is trying to expand public access to a broad spectrum of information. With the support of OSCE, information access centers have been established in the rural regions. The Republican Press Center in Dushanbe, complete with a library and Internet access, is especially popular among journalists.

In the winter and spring of 2012, electricity in most regions, except in four large cities, was available for no more than 2–4 hours a day.

Abdullaev noted that the Tajik national radio and television present information of public importance from the government's point of view only. "The twentieth anniversary of the sixteenth Session of the Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan, which gave rise to the basic laws of the country, was

celebrated by showing a TV series about those years—exclusively from the President's perspective," he added.

There are only eight independent TV stations in Tajikistan. Five of them are in Sughd, one in Khatlon, one in Tursunzade, and one in Dushanbe. Those in Sughd are better equipped than the others.

The panelists noted that for the past two years, Internet blogs and social networks have become a popular platform where journalists, politicians and other politically active citizens can present alternative opinions.

"However, during the past year the authorities started to pay more attention to civil journalism and social networks, and have tried to limit the flow of online information," reported Pirnazarov.

Although the decision of a website or some social network blockage can *de jure* be made by the court of law only, freedom of expression on the Internet is regularly violated in Tajikistan. This process has intensified in 2012, and now Internet providers speak about the decision to block access to this or that website upon receipt of a text message from the head of the country's Communications Service.

In fact, just one person can make the decision on the restriction of access to a certain source of information in the country. In most cases, such restrictions are political in nature. This summer, the head of the Communications Service, Beg Zakhurov, announced the establishment of a special group of volunteers, who would monitor all Internet materials concerning Tajikistan. "The blockage of access to Facebook was explained by requests received from those unknown 'volunteers'," reported Karshiboev.

State-run television has no balance, avoiding high-level corruption and border issues entirely. State-run TV tries not to show accidents, military clashes and natural disasters. The panelists also believe that such problems as gender, sexual and religious minorities receive either no or very little media attention, probably due to Islamic conservatism. Karshiboev noted that almost no independent media outlet has a clear-cut editorial policy. "I mean, it is hard to say what they may write about and which topics are taboos for them," he said.

Fifteen information agencies are registered in Tajikistan, but only *Asia-Plus*, *Avesta*, Ruzgor.tj, *Pressa.tj*, Ozodagon.com, Tajikta.tj, Tojnews.tj, and the state-run *Khovar* are really functioning. *Asia-Plus* is the leading agency, as it tries to present news from all over the country.

"All information agencies are affiliated with media corporations. Umed Babakhanov, a journalist and entrepreneur living in the US, owns *Asia-Plus* Media Agency.

Pressa.tj belongs to Oila, the private holding company owned by journalist and entrepreneur Sharif Hamdampur. Ozodagon.com is affiliated with the newspaper of the same name, while *Avesta* and Tajikta.tj are linked with the *Business and Politics* newspaper," said the panelist Nazarali Pirnazarov.

Three agencies—Pamir-Media, Khatlon-Press and Varorud—were temporarily shut down due to financial problems, related to the expiration of their grant funding.

All four channels of national television use only information provided by the state-run *Khovar* agency, though their international news coverage uses fragments of news shown on Russian channels, Euronews, CNN, and Al-Jazeera.

The panelists noted that information consumers, apart from a certain circle of media employees, do not really care about the owners of media outlets but are rather interested in the content, timeliness, and objectiveness of news coverage.

The panelists believe that the openness of information on who owns print media is confirmed by references to the founders in the newspapers' logos. "Readers and journalists are well aware of the fact that Orieno Media, which includes a newspaper and radio station with the same name, belongs to the Oriyonbank's chairman, the president's brother-in-law, Hasan Asadullozoda," said Niyozov.

According to Tajik law, foreign nationals are not allowed to found media outlets. Big commercial media corporations still avoid showing themselves and their interests openly in Tajikistan, while foreign capital is present in the media only in the form of grants and technical support provided by international donor organizations.

The quantity of media in national minority languages has increased. Twenty newspapers are published in the Uzbek and Kyrgyz languages. *Halk Ovozi* is published in Uzbek by the Tajik government. *Zamondosh*, *Ustoz*, *Skanvordlar* and about ten other newspapers and magazines in Uzbek are published in Dushanbe, *Dustlik* is printed in Khatlon Province, and *Hakikati Sughd* in Sughd Province. Also, one to two pages in the regional newspapers of the Sughd and Khatlon Provinces are published in Uzbek.

There is the *Sary Kol* Kyrgyz-language newspaper of the Murgab district, and one and a half pages of the regional *Paemi Jirgatol* newspaper in Jirgatol district is also published in Kyrgyz.

National TV and radio channels *Shabakai Yakum* feature 15–20 minute news programs in Uzbek. News in Uzbek,

Arabic and English are also shown on the first national and *Jahonnamo* channels.

The population of northern and southern border regions can also watch TV broadcasts from neighboring Uzbekistan. However, the Turkmen-language newspaper, which was once published in the Turkmen village of Jilikul, closed in 2011.

“Due to financial hardships, only three issues of *Ma’rifati Shugnon* newspaper in Shugnan (one of the languages of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province) were printed this year,” reported Alamshoev.

According to the panelists, national minority media are absolutely free and can develop without any restrictions in Tajikistan. On the other hand, Sharifzoda believes that interests of national minorities are not represented in the media and parliament. “Neither Russians, nor Uzbeks, nor other nationalities are allowed in the higher echelons of power and parliament,” said Abdullaev.

The panelists noted that the level of inter-regional information exchange is still low. People in Dushanbe are often unaware of what is going on in the neighboring cities and villages just a few dozen kilometers away. “No newspaper has a news bureau even in the regions neighboring the capital city, so there is no way they can receive timely information from the periphery,” said Pirnazarov.

Neither national nor independent printed and electronic media have correspondents abroad except for *Asia-Plus*, in Washington, Moscow and London, and *Khovar*, in Moscow, Ankara and Istanbul.

The panelists once more repeated that the division of media outlets into state-run and independent, which is constantly encouraged by the government, leads to polarization of opinions, and that the time has come to create a nationwide public radio and television corporation, which will present information from all the provinces and regions of Tajikistan.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.14

Although the mass media in Tajikistan are producing content that satisfies the demands of diverse population groups, media outlets have not become successful businesses yet. Bureaucratic and legal barriers, high taxes, and increased attention, in the form of unsanctioned audits, hinder their business development by tax authorities. “Independent media outlets, except for *Asia-Plus* and *Nigoh*, are managed in a haphazard manner, something like ‘a wild info market.’

Business plans, civilized marketing, and capital budgeting are still out of the question,” believes Sharifzoda.

Nozimova said that, having been a founder and chief editor for one and a half years, she has perceived that a newspaper with a circulation of more than 3,000 copies is sustainable. “And if the outlet attracts advertisers and other projects, it will be even more profitable,” she added.

The panelists believe that mass media as information banks do not have much profit, but if all existing opportunities are used, a media outlet may be able to return the initial investment within a year, just like any other business. On the other hand, the issue is whether a newspaper is able to stay afloat in the media market.

Business plans rarely budget capital investments. “International bookkeeping standards are not observed, almost all media outlets pay [under-the-table] ‘envelope wages,’ there are no qualified managers, and this hinders the stability of media outlets,” claimed Pirnazarov.

The state media, which is completely funded from the state budget, does not feel the need to draft business plans, manage capital investments or engage in market research, since their editorial offices are an integral part of the government. Besides, they have permanent sources of income, including “voluntary-compulsory” subscriptions by state institutions, enterprises, mainly paid by the funds of those organizations. For comparison, *Minbari Khalk* (*People’s Tribune*), the ruling People’s Democratic Party of Tajikistan (NDPT) publication, has about 40,000 subscribers, whereas the popular independent socio-political newspaper

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.

Faraj, which is opposed to the government, has about 400 subscribers. Also, advertising and paid commercials by state organizations, such as banks and state companies, as well as loyal or allied businesses, also advertise exclusively with state outlets.

Karshiboev reported that *Asia-Plus* is managing to sell subscriptions to its analytical materials, press and economic reviews, photographs, and videos, to private and foreign customers.

Some independent media outlets earn revenue by using their already existing production studios, engaging in actions, conducting investigations, producing music videos, advertisements, and PR materials, receiving grants, publishing congratulatory messages, selling photos and video materials, and other means. Some of these activities skate the line between advertorial and editorial content.

"Although *Faraj* does not have a business plan, we are sustainable; this year, we produced several additional issues featuring interviews with the leaders of the opposition, which gave us additional funds for further development," said Niyozov. He added that the success of an independent media outlet depends on its location, relationships with advertisers, and international donor organizations. "In order to increase their prestige in society and among potential advertisers, many newspapers exaggerate their circulation figures. For example, *Asia-Plus* indicates its circulation as 14,000 copies instead of the actual 8,000," he claimed.

The law on advertising, which governs advertising in the media, has been in effect since 2003. This law stipulates different attitudes for state-run and non-governmental media outlets. State-run electronic media may not devote more than 10 percent of their daily broadcasting time to advertising, whereas for non-government media the limit is set at 30 percent. The volume of advertising in the state-run print media should not exceed 25 percent while non-government periodicals are allowed up to 40 percent.

The reality is different, however, believes Mamurzoda. "The amount of advertising in mass media is growing from one year to another even though its volume is strictly limited by law," he claimed. He also noted that regional media outlets hardly receive any advertising from national firms.

The largest volume of advertising is inserted in three national TV channels, 2–3 state-run, and 4–5 non-state newspapers. *Asia-Plus* is one of the most profitable print media outlets in the republic. The newspaper is issued weekly and has 48 pages, with 14–16 of them devoted to advertising, though advertising in the newspaper is comparatively expensive at \$500 per page.

While advertising is the primary source of income for media outlets in other countries, it has not yet become a pillar for many Tajik media outlets. "One of the reasons for that is the lack of professionalism in preparing advertisements and advertising videos. Many producers are ready to pay the media NOT to be advertised," joked Nozimova.

According to a survey conducted by NANSMIT, the most advertised products are pharmaceuticals, followed by Internet providers, household appliances and mobile communications. The only fully state-run enterprise that advertises its products is Tajik Aluminum Company (TALCO).

"Since this small advertising market has already been divided, it is prone to unfair competition and cheating," said Karshiboev. Advertisers are afraid of advertising in the opposition Tajik-language media, including his *Faraj* newspapers. "Advertisers often give me money as financial aid though it is recorded as advertising," he said.

Tajik media usually work with advertisers directly, without employing advertisement agencies. Most advertisers just choose the most famous newspapers and those with the largest circulation. "There are many advertising agencies in the north of the country, but their advertisements are dull and unprofessional, or the same as those in other languages and just translated into Tajik," reported Farrukhshoev.

With the exception of the top few newspapers, most private, independent media outlets subsist either on grants, the volume of which has been reduced due to the world economic crisis, or on their founders' funds. Printing houses have become successful businesses, on the other hand.

There is only one large financial corporation in Tajikistan that has its own media business. Oriyon International Corporation, a daughter company of the OriyonBank, owns two radio stations, a daily newspaper, a monthly economic magazine, and an advertising unit. *Asia-Plus* media group has a newspaper, an FM radio station, a production-studio, and the first glossy magazine in the country, *VIP-Zone*, which was launched in 2008; besides, it also provides publishing services. *Oila* has three newspapers, a printing house, an information agency, and an advertising agency. Charkhi Gardun owns a printing house and four newspapers. All of them have managed to sustain themselves circulation and advertising, as well as by selling newsprint and providing printing services to the market.

"There is also an obscure media magnate, Umed Sattorov, who allegedly owns seven newspapers. Officially, he is an owner of the *Mushfiqi* printing house that prints 26 newspapers, invitations, postcards, business cards, *Caravan Megapolis* newspaper and *Dilkusho* magazine, with a total circulation of more than 25,000 copies," claimed Niyozov.

Unlike most regional media outlets, two radio stations in the Sughd Province, Tiroz and SM-1, bring high profits due to advertising and commercials. Johonnamo TV in Khujand and Gulyakandoz in Gafurov, also in Sughd Province, were described as profitable too.

The panelists mentioned that local advertisers still prefer television, as it is more accessible than newspapers and other media. However, famous international brands prefer to advertise on banners and billboards. Outdoor advertising is also widely used in the outlying regions. The quality of advertisements produced by local TV stations leaves much to be desired. Many advertisements are nothing more than ads from Russian, Turkish, and Iranian TV channels translated in Tajik.

All four national TV channels, as well as *Oila*, *Charkhi Gardun*, Oriyono Media, Radio Vatan and *Asia-Plus*, have their own advertising departments.

There are seven advertising agencies in Tajikistan. They charge high fees for their services; therefore, advertisers often deal with media outlets directly.

The panelists claimed that advertising in Tajikistan is nothing more than simple announcements, and rarely do they feature locally produced goods and services.

SMS advertising, including commercials, messages and greetings sent by mobile phone companies, are a new trend in the market. Unfortunately, advertising and market research do not focus on the reader's needs as all print media measure their popularity only in terms of circulation growth and sales.

The panelists claim that website hit counters and Internet rating meters are not always accurate as they count the number of clicks rather than actual users. Many online media conduct regular polls asking readers' opinions on various social, political, and economic topics.

Unlike state-run media outlets, independent non-government outlets are focused on advertisements, commercials, and PR materials. They also attract customers with certain discounts and individualized designs for ads.

Non-state regional TV stations and print media outlets often receive small subsidies from the budget of their local administrations.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.69

There are 17 NGOs in Tajikistan that are, to a certain extent, related to mass media, though their activities significantly depend on support from international organizations. Almost all these NGOs proclaim the defense of freedom of speech and independence of media to be their primary task. However, only a few NGOs, such as NANSMIT, the Media Alliance, the Union of Tajik Journalists, INDEM, and The Journalist NGO are systematically engaged in this. In addition to these, the rights of journalists and media outlets are supported by the Media Council, the Fund for the Defense and Remembrance of Journalists, the NGO Khoma, 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 Association of Television Journalists.

"The organizations that defend the rights of journalists in the country have a fairly strong standing. Nevertheless, they can seldom resist increased pressure exerted by authorities," said Mamurzoda. These days, they focus their efforts on conducting educational training sessions for journalists and on increasing the potential of all media outlets. "Unfortunately, these organizations do not have enough opportunities to develop media in the periphery. That is why media outlets in the capital have many more opportunities

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

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

Despite all the efforts of NANSMIT, the Media Council and donor organizations, journalists failed to unite in their own trade union because media magnates and owners of private media outlets oppose it.

for creative development than the media issued from the rural regions,” claimed Abdullaev.

There are several general business associations which defend the interests of media outlets controlled by their members. In late December 2010, with support from the OSCE, independent print media leaders founded the Association of Media Publishers and Distributors (Matbuot). However, this association has not yet begun working because of disagreements over its leadership among its founders.

Despite all the efforts of NANSMIT, the Media Council and donor organizations, journalists failed to unite in their own trade union because media magnates and owners of private media outlets oppose it. Nevertheless, NANSMIT has already begun establishing local trade union cells in the regions. “By the end of the year, we are planning to create frameworks for a media trade union in provinces with the help of the Finnish Foundation for Media, Communication and Development, and this initiative is supported by the Union of Tajik Journalists,” said Karshiboev.

The panel noted significant progress in the activities of media-support institutions, especially this year, when the pressure from the government on the opposition media increased, which can be illustrated by the lawsuits against *Asia-Plus*, *Faraj*, and *Ozodagon* newspapers. “Common efforts of these NGOs have produced significant results during pre-trial investigations against Ramziya Mirzobekova (*Asia-Plus*), the persecution of Zavkibek Soleh (*Ozodi*) and Daler Sharifov (*Safina TV*), and during the blockage of *Asiaplus.tj*, *Tojnews.tj*, and *Ozodagon.com* websites,” said Alamshoev.

Mamurzoda reported that apart from NANSMIT and the Union of Tajik Journalists, no NGOs and media associations in the Khatlon Province defend the rights of journalists and provide them with advice and training.

The newly-founded Association of Audiovisual Production Distributors aims to protect the interests of private broadcast media and production studios. Such associations subsist on membership fees, and seek grants for special projects. They are trying to integrate with similar international associations, but so far, in vain.

In accordance with its statute, the Media Council has dealt with issues related to incorrect publications, violations of ethical norms and plagiarism, trying to solve problems before such cases get to the courtrooms. “NANSMIT, the Media Alliance, The Journalist NGO, have conducted several joint events aimed at legal education and protection of journalists, access to sources of information, and actions for the protection of freedom of speech,” reported Sharifzoda.

The panelists noted that these media associations demonstrated solidarity during the media blackouts related to Khorog and the blocks of Radio Liberty and Facebook.

The Union of Tajik Journalists, NANSMIT, the Media Alliance, and The Journalist NGO also initiated a number of conferences and round table discussions devoted to the discussion of the draft law On the Press and Other Mass Media, and also participated in the preparation of this law. Besides, talk shows based on lawsuits won by journalists and print media outlets were produced for the independent SMT TV.

“In addition to legal advice, NANSMIT has provided legal assistance to the journalists Mirzobekova and Sharifov,” reported Niyozov. The organization is also engaged in regular monitoring of violations of journalists’ rights, freedom of speech, and access to information.

The panelists noted one move towards independence by the Union of Tajik Journalists, which had been seen as generally loyal to the government in the past, under the leadership of Akbar Sattorov. Sattorov openly defied the authorities by putting forward the opposition journalist Abduskayum Kayumzoda of *Ozodi Radio* for the Lahuti State Prize “for courage in coverage of political events.” President Rahmon, who was scheduled to present the prize, declined on learning that Kayumzoda was in the running. *Ozodi Radio’s* website was blocked by the authorities again in January 2013 “for technical reasons,” according to the Ministry of Communications.

Cooperation of local NGOs with international organizations that support freedom of speech is clearly visible in partnership projects, joint events and actions. The panelists noted cooperation with the European Union, Embassies of the USA and UK, Adenauer Foundation and Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Internews Network, Eurasia Foundation, NED, and the Open Society Foundations affiliate in Tajikistan.

Nuriddin Karshiboev noted that the reluctance of the government to cooperate with media associations impedes the protection of independent media and the promotion of freedom of speech.

As for NGOs and international organizations that support media freedom and provide journalists with legal aid, the

panelists mentioned the Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, and Nota Bene. The TajFEN network, founded in November 2010, has continued its work. The network includes the NGOs Bureau of Human Rights and Rule of Law, the Civil Internet Policy Initiative, the Union of Tajik Journalists, the Media Council of Tajikistan, NANSMIT, NGO Khoma, The Journalist NGO, and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting's office in Tajikistan. The primary goal of this network is the consolidation of media and human rights organizations for promoting the freedom of expression in Tajikistan.

Earlier this year, the journalists from Sughd Province supported by the media community opened a Journalists' Club in Khujand under the aegis of NANSMIT; and at least twenty journalists visit daily to discuss legal issues and access information.

The activities of the Union of Tajik Journalists and NANSMIT are funded only by international donor organizations.

The participants expressed their concern about the professional education of journalists, the overall level of which has not improved for several years. More than 200 journalists graduate every year, but the level of their training is low. There are no private or community-based institutions that train future journalists, so they are educated at eight state-run institutions, including even the Tajik State Pedagogical University. "Except for the Faculty of Journalism of the Tajik State University and the Departments of Journalism of the Khujand and Russian-Tajik Slavic Universities, all other universities have no basic conditions for the professional training of journalists," said Bobojanova.

The curricula of the Faculty and Departments of Journalism are overloaded with unnecessary theoretical subjects, and very few hours are devoted to practical training. "Stereotypes and Soviet-era mentalities inhibit the initiative of young specialists who are calling for the introduction of hands-on practical training and the involvement of practicing journalists from independent media outlets in the education process," said Sharifzoda. Nozimova added that those students who intern during their studies often continue working for the same outlets after graduation.

The panelists expressed their hope that once the Ministry of Education adopts the draft of the new credit-based education system, which was prepared by The Journalist NGO, with the financial support of the Open Society Foundation, practical training will find its rightful place in the curricula and enable future journalists to be competitive in the labor market.

Both local and international organizations conduct various preparatory and specialized courses for journalists, but the problem is that neither a practicing journalist nor a student

"Common efforts of these NGOs have produced significant results during pre-trial investigations against Ramziya Mirzobekova (*Asia-Plus*), the persecution of Zavkibek Soleh (*Ozodi*) and Daler Sharifov (*Safina TV*), and during the blockage of *Asiaplus.tj*, *Tojnews.tj*, and *Ozodagon.com* websites," said Alamshoev.

of journalism would be given a day-off to participate in such training sessions. "Thus, the choice is limited to what students can get from their educational institution and what journalists can get from their employers," said Abdullaev.

The panelists also noted another negative trend, which is growing from year to year. Practically all institutions of higher education that teach future journalists are discouraging them from working with the independent media by threatening them with expulsion. This year, the Ministry of Education issued a decree that prohibits students to participate in seminars and trainings conducted by international organizations. "The organization, which sets up such training sessions, needed to write an official letter to the rector of the educational institution requesting students to participate," reported Pirnazarov.

Alternatively, "Khujand State University does engage well-known independent journalists from print media, TV and radio in the teaching process," claimed Bobojanova.

The technical competence of the graduates is still very low. "Many of them are computer and functionally illiterate and even make elementary-school mistakes," added Sotiev. He believes the reason for this is their lack of practice. Students are given only 36 hours of practical computer instruction, not nearly enough to learn basic computing, online research, publishing software, and other requirements of modern journalism.

Students bribe their way into many seats at universities, and pay for the grades they receive from their professors. Thus, motivation to learn among students and confidence in the graduate's abilities among potential employers are both low.

The panelist Kurbon Alamshoev reported that the Open Society Foundation equipped the journalism faculty of Khorog University with a training TV and radio studio. The equipment was brought and installed, but the studio does not work though for some unknown reasons. Another cause

of low technical competency, according to the panelists, is the absence of up-to-date textbooks and learning aids.

Trainings are conducted, but most of them are short-term and do not bring about the desired outcome. Although there are programs for journalists to study abroad, very few go abroad for training, either because of their poor knowledge of English or because their employers are reluctant to let them go for a long time.

So far, students can study journalism abroad only privately, usually on funded programs in the United States, Turkey, Germany, and Iran. The government has an exchange student program covering tuition and accommodation to universities in a few former-Soviet countries: Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Belarus. This program has lately been limited only to those professions that Tajikistan needs, and they are mainly technical subjects. Therefore, very few Tajik students of journalism study abroad these days.

Most of the panel agreed that media outlets seldom hire graduates, as employers prefer to take more experienced journalists who do not need further training. Moreover, the initial salary paid to young journalists is very low. "In general, no more than ten percent of graduates stay in the profession," reported Karshiboev.

Most journalists in Tajikistan, about 70% of them, are women.

Workshops and webinars devoted to online journalism and using social networks have become very popular among journalists. All the courses and workshops are free of charge, and access to them is unlimited. The Institute for War and Peace Reporting, the Union of Tajik Journalists, NANSMIT, Open Society Foundation's Tajikistan branch and the NGO Khoma conduct these trainings.

The panelists stressed the need for long-term training sessions devoted to investigative journalism, writing news, analytical reporting, interviewing, specialization, legal issues and multimedia journalism.

"International donors are still contemplating the establishment of a permanent school of journalism, but they have not chosen the NGO to base the school in," reported Abdullaev.

The panelists noted that it was very difficult to attract practicing journalists from the state-run media outlets to trainings and seminars, since their editors are still reluctant to accept international standards or trust international organizations.

In-house training for its employees is being conducted only by the Asia-Plus media group, which has its own, independent school of journalism. Farrukhshoev spoke

about the necessity of conducting trainings and seminars for journalists in the rural regions.

As for the quality of printing and access to equipment, the panelists noted that access to printing facilities is subject to political restrictions and depends on the authorities' will. There are no restrictions on access to newsprint and equipment. "The *Sharki Ozod* complex, which prints up to 90% of all newspapers and magazines, gives priority to those who pay more," said the panelist Khurshed Niyozov. Almost all private printing houses are profitable businesses and purchase paper and plates themselves.

The panelists were unanimous in stating that it is of little use to talk about freedom of expression in Tajikistan until there is a private and independent printing house under the auspices of one of the international organizations. "Even private printing houses are controlled by the authorities, who can issue threats in order to stop printing any opposition newspaper," said Karshiboev. Dodobaev and Bobojanova maintained that managers of private printing houses in Sughd do not refuse printing newspapers on the authorities' request.

The best quality printing, according to the panelists, is provided by the Oila printing house that belongs to the media corporation with the same name, and by Intoshod part of the Charkhi Gardun Media Corporation.

The state-run printing house Sharki Ozod, as well as Charkhi Gardun and Oila media corporations supply newsprint in Tajikistan. The prices for services in the private printing houses Oila, Intoshod and Mushfiki are 15% higher than those in the state-run Sharki Ozod.

There are 83 printing houses in Tajikistan, and 10 private ones in Dushanbe for print newspapers. Seven printing houses function in the outlying regions: three in Khujand, and one each in Istaravshan, Kurgan-Tube, Khorog, Yavan, and Kulyab. All the panelists agreed on the need to expand access to independent printing houses, in order to serve the independent media as is done in Kyrgyzstan.

The panelists believe that the channels of print media distribution are still weak and politically loaded. "The newsstands that belong to Tajikmatbuot (Tajikprint) do not take opposition newspapers or print very few copies," reported Niyozov.

Pensioners seeking to add to their meager retirement allowances usually sell these newspapers. This is despite the plans of the stalled distributors' association, Intishod, which planned to install 40 news kiosks in Dushanbe.

Nowadays, each independent television and radio station buys its own transmitters, and their capacity is much weaker

than that of the state-run media. Practically all software used by the Tajik media is counterfeit and pirated.

The distribution of broadcasting frequencies is a monopoly of the government, which can prevent independent media from going on air since non-government media rent their frequencies from the government's Communications Service. "During the military operation in Khorog, Tajiktelecom and the Communications Service blocked all communication with the city through all the mobile and Internet service providers," recalled Dodobaev.

The authorities have prevented the establishment of one common independent channel that would broadcast throughout the whole country, despite the availability of technical facilities and the necessary equipment. There are five local cable channels in Tajikistan—in Dushanbe, Khujand, Tursunzade, Istaravshan, and Kayrakkum.

The four state-run channels of the national television system have already made the transition to digital broadcasting, but watching them requires buying a receiver, which costs \$100—a prohibitive price for most citizens.

As mentioned, blocks on Internet content are becoming more common. Almost 30 websites are currently blocked in Tajikistan. There have been attempts to break into the accounts of the most active users of Facebook and Twitter. Intelligence agencies are wiretapping mobile phones as well. "I met an opposition religious leader, Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda, in late November, and the next day my mobile phone was already wiretapped to such an extent that my SIM card was useless," said Karshiboev.

The government has not blocked blogging platforms yet, but it does monitor them. Although mobile Internet exists, it does not cover the whole country, and as soon as the electrical supply is shut down, 3 and 4G transmitters cease working as well. All TV and radio towers belong to Tajiktelecom, which is under the auspices of the Ministry of Transportation and Communications, and even those independent stations that have their own transmitters are renting part of the state-owned tower.

Overall, the media situation in Tajikistan is the same as for the previous MSI in 2012. Self-censorship continues to increase, and the professional level of most media outlets leaves much to be desired. The government attempts to restrict access to information, especially on the Internet.

The panelists concluded that certain training assistance from international organizations and donors, as well as political freedom, strict adherence to the rule of law, and amendments to current legislation, might help mass media in Tajikistan overcome their technical and professional hurdles.

List of Panel Participants

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Kurbon Alamshoev, director, Pamir Mass Media Center, Khorog

Rano Bobojanova, professor, department of journalism, Khujand State University, Khujand

Mahmudjon Dodobaev, director, private Jahonnamo TV channel, Khujand

Nuriddin Karshiboev, chairperson, National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan (NANSMIT); media expert, Dushanbe

Nosirjon Mamurzoda, reporter, Radio Ozodi (RFE/RL Tajikistan), Kurgan-Tube

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Muhayo Nozimova, editor, *Ovoza* newspaper; national coordinator, SCOOP Investigative Journalism Project, Dushanbe

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