

## Armenia

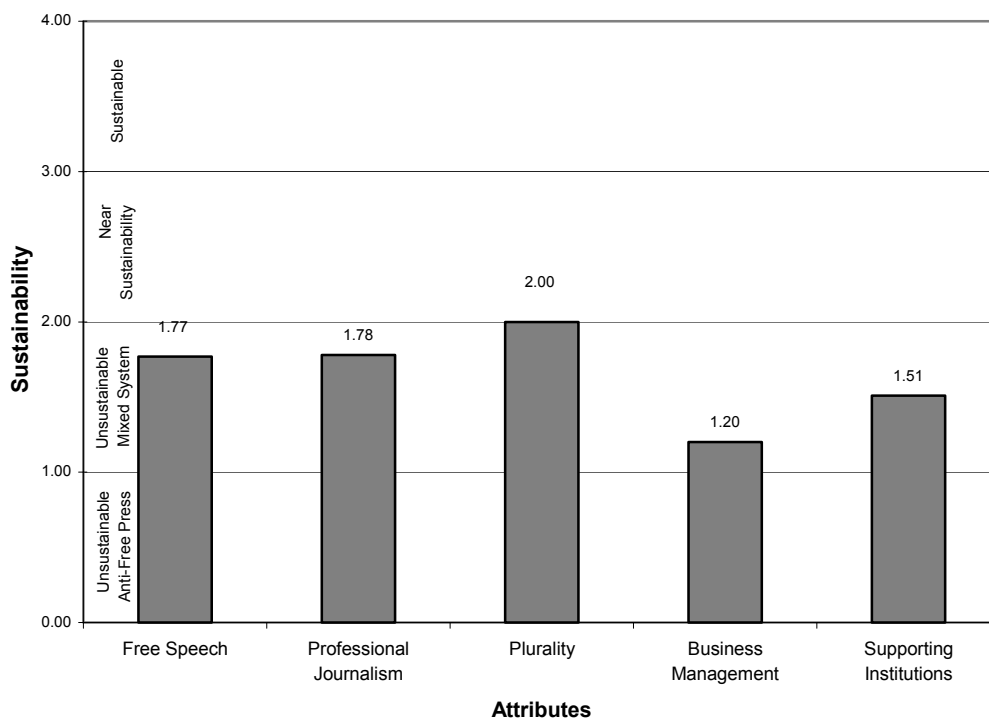
### Introduction

Armenia emerged from the collapse of the Soviet Union as an independent nation in 1991 shouldering an unusually difficult burden. It was embroiled in a long-standing conflict with neighboring Azerbaijan over the future of Nagorno-Karabakh, a predominantly Armenia enclave located in Azerbaijan. Armenia was also still reeling from the effects of a disastrous earthquake in 1988 that severely damaged the northwest region of the country, its industry, and its infrastructure.

Ten years after gaining its independence, Armenia is still struggling. While a ceasefire has been declared with Azerbaijan, no mutually satisfactory agreement on the fate of Nagorno-Karabakh has been reached. While Armenia has received massive amounts of international aid, what industry it had has largely ground to a halt and it does not have vast physical resources (such as gold or oil) that it can sell on the world market. Complicating this picture, Armenia has also experienced a tremendous out-migration of its population: many Armenians have emigrated to Russia, Eastern and Western Europe, Canada, and the United States. Politically, Armenia has been relatively stable—but this situation too was marred in the fall of 1999, when gunmen stormed the Armenian Parliament and shot and killed several members of parliament.

These troubles have greatly impacted the state of Armenia's media. As in other post-communist countries, the theory of legal protections of free speech remains to be defined in practice and applied in predictable ways to the daily work of journalists. The bleak economic situation is a real and overwhelming constraint on the development of advertising revenue for the independent media. Political sponsorship of the media is the accepted substitute for business performance: while ownership remains murky, allegiances can easily be determined through biases in reportage. Professional standards have been jettisoned largely in favor of economic survival, and a tradition of public service in the media has yet to be established.

**Media Sustainability Index - Armenia**



### Scoring System

- 0** = Country does not meet indicator; government or social forces may be actively opposed to its implementation.
- 1** = Country minimally meets aspects of the indicator; forces may not be actively opposed to its implementation but business environment may not support it and government or profession not fully and actively supporting change.
- 2** = Country has begun to meet many aspects of indicator but progress may be too recent to judge or still dependent on current government or political forces.
- 3** = Country meets most aspects of indicator and implementation of indicator has occurred over several years and/or change in government, indicating likely sustainability.
- 4** = Country meets the aspects of the indicator; has remained intact over multiple changes in government, economic fluctuations, changes in public opinion and/or changing social conventions.

The scores for all indicators are totaled and averaged for each objective.

#### **Each of the objectives can receive a score from 0 to 4:**

- Above 3: Sustainable and free independent media
- 2-3: Independent media approaching sustainability
- 1-2: Significant progress remains to be made; society or government not fully supportive
- 0-1: Country meets few of indicators and government/society actively opposing changes

On the bright side, Armenia has been accepted into the Council of Europe, and this will have a positive effect on the legal front (providing a body of case law on free speech from the European Court in Strasbourg) and in the interest in raising professional standards. Institution building also remains a serious challenge for the donor community and for Armenian journalism professionals.

#### **Attribute #1: Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information**

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

Constitutional and legal protections for journalists exist in Armenia but are ambiguous and generally misunderstood by journalists and enforcing authorities. Panel members discussed this topic vigorously, and the general conclusion was that while the constitution guarantees the freedom of expression, there are no adequate mechanisms in place to protect that freedom. Enforcement of vague laws is extremely sporadic and subject to the whims of private citizens and officials.

For example, the Law on Press and Mass Media adopted October 8, 1991, which treats print media as separate and distinct from broadcast media, guarantees the right of free speech. It states: “In the Republic of Armenia (RA) public mass media (PMM) are free and shall not be subject to censorship. The citizens of RA shall have the right to express their views and opinions and to receive reliable and timely information of each issue of public importance via PMM. In RA, no monopoly shall be allowed.”

This statement of categorical principle is clear, but supporting provisions are less so. The law prohibits printing of certain information, such as “state secrets”; however, the law provides no definition of a state secret, and it is therefore left open to interpretation by officials. The law prohibits the publishing of “false and unverified news reports” and “news that advocates war, violence, ethnic and religious hostility, prostitution, drug abuse or other criminal act.” The law also forbids newspapers to print “details of the private life of citizens.” Because there is no clear explanation of any of these prohibitions, government officials apply restrictions at their own discretion, and consequently punish newspapers for any perceived infraction. Panel members generally agreed that the existing media law is obsolete and impedes media development, and that a new law is needed. They also criticized its vagueness and the lack of enforcement mechanisms.

Another confusing aspect of the media law (apparently designed to protect journalistic sources) states that news media “shall not be required to reveal the source of its reports,” including the names of sources. The exception is that a journalist may be required to reveal a source if the information is involved in a court case. However, journalists misuse this provision of the law as a reason to only occasionally print or publish the source of their information. This is the legal reason why sources are rarely, if ever, cited in news stories and why stories read like commentary more than factual news reporting.

Libel is a criminal offense in Armenia, and is also vaguely defined. Newspapers and journalists can be prosecuted if their “reports do not correspond with the truth,” or if they “offend the honor and dignity of a person,” or “violate the legal rights and interests of organizations or citizens.”

One of the most recent cases involves the editor of a liberal newspaper, *Haykakan Zhamanak*. The newspaper is highly critical of the government, and its editor is frequently taken to court. The newspaper’s predecessor publication was closed down when it was found guilty of libel, so the editor simply started a new publication with a different name and continued to do what he had been doing in the past. The editor was given a suspended sentence and put on a year’s probation. In another related incident at the same newspaper, thugs working for a prominent businessman entered the editorial offices and assaulted the male members of the staff over what was perceived as an unflattering mention of the businessman in an article on a separate subject. Other newspaper offices have been attacked, prompting one editor to install an additional set of steel bar doors as protection for the staff.

Violations of the libel law are rare. In general, this is not because of fairly applied laws, but because journalists know what they can get away with. In many instances, political officials are simply inattentive to what is written about them. The panelists discussed the fact that a new law on Access to Information is needed; they expressed hopes that a good law might be the first step towards greater transparency in the work of government officials and bodies. They were very critical of the restrictions imposed by the government on a free press and claimed such freedom does not exist in Armenia.

Crimes against journalists and newspaper offices are not usually prosecuted. Only if a newspaper editor or publisher has the financial means to investigate and file legal actions on his own will a crime against a journalist or publication be prosecuted. MSI panelists had different views on crimes and harassment of journalists: some claimed that there were several cases of violent attacks against journalists, but others pointed out that the pressure on journalists today is less severe and that now violations of journalists’ rights are at least brought to the attention of courts. Indeed, they mentioned that the number of court cases has recently increased.

Similar legal problems have occurred with broadcast and television news media outlets because of the vague and ineffectual Law on Television and Radio, adopted on October 9, 2000. The law has raised the ire of electronic media outlets with regard to three specific problems:

1. The Armenian president has the exclusive right to appoint members to a governing body that regulates and licenses the electronic media.
2. Electronic media are required to devote 65 percent of their airtime to locally produced programs in the Armenian language.
3. The law forbids the advocacy of forcible overthrow of the government, war, racial discrimination, criminal activities, and prostitution, as well as the broadcasting of libel and “horror movies.”

The electronic media have generated some sympathy in the public for what they consider to be severe restrictions on their freedom. In general the public is apathetic to media law issues, but as noted by the MSI panel, Armenians also resent restrictions on their speech freedoms: as a panel member said, “we are already accustomed to having freedom of speech, so any violation irritates us.” The electronic news media are lobbying the parliament for revisions to the law, and apparently are finding some success. Panel members mentioned that they have recently formed a new Public TV/Broadcast Committee, which was characterized in the following way: “You can call it a censorship committee, it does not matter. What really matters is when is our TV going to become public?”

The law governing print and broadcast media is being revised to conform to generally accepted European standards. This is largely due to the recent acceptance of Armenia into the Council of Europe. Separate committees have been named in the parliament to revise media laws in Armenia in the coming two years.

**Attribute #2: Journalism meets professional standards of quality**

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

Journalism in Armenia rarely meets any generally accepted standards of fair, objective, and well-sourced reporting. Most newspapers represent the views of their sponsors, because almost all newspapers rely heavily on what are known as “invisible friends.” Other papers are openly sponsored by political parties and contain flattering articles about party members and policy while criticizing other viewpoints. Predictably, most of the content of party-sponsored papers is not objective or diverse. Panel participants noted that every editor sets up his or her own standards of journalism depending on the interests of the sponsoring political parties or powerful individuals, and journalists typically only cover topics that editors sanction.

Panel participants agreed that there are some journalists in Armenia with high professional standards, but not everyone agreed that Armenian journalism meets international standards of objective and reliable reporting. As one panelist said, “Armenian journalism does not correspond to international standards. But there are many real professionals.” Some of the factors that contribute to the low standards of Armenian journalism are low salaries, lack of technical equipment, and self-censorship. Because of low pay, journalists are often forced to sacrifice integrity for work to meet their basic needs. Panelists also discussed the fact that opportunities for professional growth in journalism are limited. The journalists on the panel were more critical than the NGO representatives and insisted that the quality of journalism in Armenia is at a very low level. The opinions of international experts were in line with the journalistic assessments. Panel members also mentioned that there is no sharp distinction between allegedly serious press and tabloids. Another participant added, “Considering the pressure on journalists posed by the shadow economy, the news coverage in Armenian newspapers is objective enough.”

Journalists usually have reliable sources of information, such as government officials or even government reports and press conferences, as well as personal sources and contacts. However, few reporters name sources because the Law on Press and Mass Media makes doing so risky. In general, the panel noted, Armenian journalists do not always check and review their sources of information. They rarely separate fact from comment, and often editorialize. Little attempt is made to verify, via personal research, facts on issues in foreign countries that concern Armenia.

The absence of a common code of ethics was considered by all the panelists to be one of the major weaknesses of Armenian journalism. Another aspect that was mentioned was “the difference between real professionals and young and inexperienced reporters, recently graduated from universities. It is hard though to call them real journalists ... and therefore hard to evaluate the general level of professionalism of Armenian journalists.”

Although policy varies from publication to publication, it is not unusual for newspapers to print stories and photos as news for a fee. Some newspapers mark such stories with an “R” for *reklama* (advertising), while others do not. As a result, it is often difficult for the average reader to distinguish between news and advertising.

Most newspapers will, on occasion, print commercial articles as news. This practice is a direct result of the dire financial situation of the country. Some editors say they do not condone the practice but are aware that some journalists submit stories for which they have been paid by the sources. Some editors overlook the practice because the reporters are paid so poorly and realize that the money supplements their wages. Journalists earn from US \$50 to US \$200 per month—if they get paid at all. This compares well to the estimated average monthly income for all Armenia, which is US \$17 per month, but is barely enough to support a couple or small family. Some publishers also accept direct payment, and charge relatively high fees, for placing stories or photos on the front page.

Journalists and editors practice self-censorship to the extent that their work must reflect sponsors’ viewpoints or those of the political parties’ supporting them. Newspapers that are clearly in opposition to the government generally present only critical commentary and stories, while government or political party newspapers present political officials in a more flattering light. The panel agreed that self-censorship is widespread among both editors and reporters. In general, journalists do not investigate corruption in high offices, because of predictable consequences. They often fear that either they will not be understood or that they could be repressed. Panelists discussed the direct coercing or pressuring of journalists over the past 10 years: beatings, arson, and vandalization of editorial offices were cited, as well as unresolved and unfair court cases. Panelists also mentioned some common taboo issues, like the situation in the army and the police, which many reporters avoid commenting on.

One recent case of pressuring involved the newspaper *Novoe Vremya* (New Times), in which the staff and editor clashed with the newspaper’s sponsor and refused to support the sponsor’s call for the removal of the current Armenian government administration. The sponsor then withdrew his support, removed computers and other equipment, and the newspaper was forced to suspend publication. The newspaper resumed publication after a month, but on a less frequent basis. In another case, the editor of a political party newspaper, in an interview, claimed his publication was independent and objective. However, when pressed, he admitted that unless the editors and reporters and their work reflected the party’s view, they would not be around long. This same paper, which is the most popular weekly in Yerevan, recently began a special monthly supplement on investigative reporting. However, the work is neither objective nor well sourced.

Newspapers in general do not do any investigative reporting, and the vast majority of news is political reporting on the doings of government and parliament. Arts, culture, and sport are generally allocated some space in most publications. The MSI panel added that economic or political analysis and niche

reporting is underdeveloped. One can rarely read professional, investigative articles on economics. In the field of politics, panelists claimed there were many biased articles reflecting the interests of small groups.

Only one newspaper in Armenia, *Delavoy Express*, currently concentrates on business and economic news. But this news product features neither aggressive reporting nor criticism of government officials or their policies; nor does it produce critical or investigative reports of private businesses.

**Attribute #3: Multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable and objective news**

Indicators
1. Plurality of public and private news sources (e.g. print, broadcast, Internet) exist and are affordable
2. Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted
3. State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are non-partisan, and serve the public interest
4. Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media
5. Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs
6. Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates
7. A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources

A plurality of public and private news sources exists in Armenia, but the delivery of objective news to a broad spectrum of people is limited. Because the vast majority of news outlets, as well as government agencies, are located and based in Yerevan, the majority of news is about people (mostly government officials) and events in the capital. News from the regions is covered, but usually only when a government official visits a factory in the outlying areas or conducts a meeting there. MSI panel participants discussed at length the lack of access to information in many regions of Armenia. They agreed that distribution of print publications in the regions of Armenia is very poor. The choice of TV broadcasting is often restricted to the government-owned National Television. Panelists also noted that journalists working at nationwide papers rarely cover news from the regions of Armenia. As one panelist said: “Unfortunately, when it comes to information availability, the country is split into two: the capital and the rest of Armenia. Information is unavailable not only from the remote parts of the country, but also from the other big cities.” Participants also stated that there are no legislative restrictions on access to international news coverage. International news is presented in translation from the BBC, Euronews, CNN and a variety of Russian broadcasters.

With the assistance of organizations such as Internews, a variety of small, privately owned television stations have been developed throughout neighborhoods in Yerevan as well as in small communities throughout Armenia. However, the scope and depth of their coverage is highly limited. Presently, there are only two television stations that broadcast nationally, Prometevs (independent) and National Television. Each carries a small amount of international news, about three to five minutes daily. There are some 41 independent television stations throughout Armenia, but they focus on strictly local or regional programming, including news. Some provide some national or international news, obtained from satellite, pulled off Russian television broadcasts, or broadcast from tapes provided by Yerevan stations.

In the smaller communities, newspapers do not exist. For example, in Guimri, the second largest city in Armenia, a regional station rebroadcasts national news and provides local Guimri news to the national station. But the city has only one weekly newspaper, providing news, and another one with television listings and prepackaged entertainment news and crossword puzzles.

Price is often cited as the largest single barrier to access to print media. Newspapers in Yerevan sell for 100 drams, which is the equivalent 20 cents (in US dollars). However, 100 drams is also the cost of a loaf of bread, and when asked, almost everyone replied that they prefer to eat rather than read the news—which, they are quick to add, is highly opinionated, badly written, and generally confusing. As a result newspaper circulation is extremely low; less than 5 percent of the total population reads newspapers. MSI panel participants confirmed that lack of money is one of the major obstacles to availability of printed

press and the Internet. The latter is still considered an elite source of information. Panelists pointed out that people do not buy newspapers because of their low incomes, but also because about 80 percent of the content of newspapers is political news. Participants were of the opinion that cultural and educational news was vastly neglected and that media was not covering women's issues and the growing activities of the nongovernmental sector.

Almost all newspapers are sponsored by political parties or special interests, and reflect the points of view of the sponsor(s). If every paper were bought and read, together they would reflect the views of the entire political spectrum. No single newspaper is a reservoir of balanced, nonpartisan perspective on political topics, and none is solely dedicated to serving the public interest. Panelists noted that state media often hide information from the public while trying to satisfy government officials' interests. News agencies, they claimed, were less biased in providing news. The exception is Armenpress, the state news agency, which restricts news topics and shifts accents intentionally.

Newspapers can generally be categorized as either pro-government or opposition. As noted above, the vast majority of news is dedicated to political and government-related issues, and TV stations generally provide the same sort of programming. Cultural and educational issues are generally addressed through sit-down interviews or discussions with cultural figures. Group participants mentioned that the official TV channels are better equipped and better funded than private or independent news media. State television was recently renamed "public television," but it still remains the supporting pillar of the powerful.

News agencies are a bright spot in Armenia. There are three main news agencies: Noyan Tapan, a multi-faceted agency that provides print, video, and radio broadcasts, as well as publishing an English-language weekly; SNARK, a print news service; and ARKA, which focuses on financial and business news. These news agencies come closer than any other news provider to offering objective, fact-based news. This is due in part to a growing demand for fact-based reporting. Most newspapers make extensive use of the news agencies while their own reporters and editors write opinion and commentary on the news items.

The larger, national television stations produce some of their own shows, but generally rely on outside programming. The smaller neighborhood stations produce their own news shows, which are generally oriented to local news and features and reach only local viewers.

Ownership of the news media, both newspapers and television stations, is not transparent. All newspapers considered semi-independent survive on money provided by sponsors. But newspaper editors are unwilling to divulge the names of their sponsors, saying that providing such information would be a violation of trust. Newspapers affiliated with political parties are quite open about their affiliation but insist that they are still independent. Some panelists mentioned that the issue of ownership and sponsorship of media is not a serious concern in Armenian society.

Armenia is a rather homogeneous country. Ethnic minorities exist in such miniscule numbers that coverage or lack thereof is an insignificant issue. The only significant "minority," if they can be called such, are Armenians who were forced out of Baku during the 1995-1996 war with Azerbaijan. These Armenians, as well as the Armenians who fled Karabakh during the war, constitute a minority that is written about as a separate group of people. For example, one recent story discussed the fact that when Armenians leave the country in search of employment abroad, they often abandon apartments that are in turn occupied by Armenians from Azerbaijan or Karabakh. MSI panel participants noted that there is no minority discrimination in the country in terms of media, and there are some local minority newspapers and broadcasts producing news in the respective languages of the minorities.

**Attribute #4: Independent media are well-managed businesses, allowing editorial independence**

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

News media outlets and supporting firms, including distribution and printing facilities and organizations, do not operate as efficient, professional, profit-generating businesses. Distribution and printing organizations and facilities are major problems in Armenia. Most panelists agreed that media business development is heavily dependent on the state of the economy and private business in the country. Experts concluded that given the dire economic situation in Armenia, positive changes in the near future were not to be expected. They claimed that media in Armenia is “not a profitable business and in fact, not a business at all. Media is simply surviving.” The panel discussion centered on how media could in general survive.

Panelists mentioned that most outlets are sponsor-oriented rather than reader-oriented, which does not motivate editors and owners to run the newspaper as a business. Only a few newspapers and TV companies operate as businesses. Panelists reiterated the fact that media are just tools to place more power and influence in the hands of political parties. Since media profit expectations are low, business people are not interested in investing in newspapers. The situation for media in the regions is much worse and proportional to the lack of any active business life, and to the lack of conditions for business operation. Many panelists felt that questions included in this part of the MSI survey implied that an advertising market already exists, and that newspapers are already being run as businesses. Since this is not the case, MSI panel participants considered the topics of this particular objective premature for Armenia.

The main printing facility, called Tigran Mets, is a part state-owned, part privately owned printing facility. Almost all of the newspapers in Yerevan are printed at that facility. Only a year ago, as the result of a Eurasia Foundation grant and a large loan, a competing printing facility was opened. The new printing facility is charging approximately the same prices as Tigran Mets. However, because of long-standing relationships and little or no financial incentive, almost all newspaper editors continue to print their newspapers with Tigran Mets. Part of their long-standing relationship involves the extension of small amounts of credit to the newspaper owners. However, since the competition of the new printing facility has been introduced, both printing facilities have made efforts to keep prices at a minimum.

The price of newsprint is a major portion of the printing costs in newspapers. Newsprint in Armenia costs about double the price in Russia, due to the small market and cost of transporting the newsprint. Because Tigran Mets continues to print most of the newspapers, its owner is able to purchase larger quantities of newsprint than his competitor and as a result has much more on hand at any given time, and at a cheaper price. The owner of the competing Gind print house says he can purchase newsprint for the same discounts, but only if more newspapers will use his printing press.

MSI panel participants mentioned that not long ago, state-owned printing houses and distribution agencies created obstacles to opposition media. There are currently several private printing houses but only one distribution company that operates ineffectively. The panel’s main target of criticism was the state-run Hayamamoul, the monopolist in the field of printed press distribution. Distribution is more of a problem than printing, all agreed. The newspaper distribution network is a system of 200 kiosks scattered throughout Yerevan and in some of the regions. Kiosk operators are guaranteed minimum amounts of income based on newspaper sales, but this minimum is far less (US \$20-US \$30 per month) than any



operator needs to make a living. Kiosk operators are therefore allowed to sell all kinds of things—tobacco, lighters, pens, notebooks, etc.—to help them to make a living.

This distribution system, however, keeps circulation numbers artificially low. Kiosk operators, in most cases, face a financial penalty if they are unable to sell all their newspapers. As a result, they only order from the distribution facility the amount of newspaper they know they will sell. This means that even if a kiosk could sell as many as 10 of any given newspaper on any given day, he will only order five because he knows he can always sell five—but maybe not 10.

This situation results from a distribution agreement Haymamoul has with newspapers: they can choose between a no-return policy and a return policy. With a no-return policy, newspaper editors are guaranteed a set amount of circulation and a guaranteed, though small, return on the circulation. If a newspaper chooses a return policy, the newspaper gets a higher percentage of the kiosk sales price but the cost of collecting the returns is deducted. For a variety of reasons, most editors select the no-return policy because they are guaranteed a specific amount of revenue from circulation.

However, the no-return policy is fraught with problems. One is that the printing house allegedly prints overruns (copies beyond the agreed number), sells them, and keeps all the profits. In some instances, when particularly controversial articles are about to be printed, the print runs will be stopped. Although such incidents are rare, they have been effective in instilling a form of self-censorship in the print media.

Newspapers survive mainly on circulation revenues, an average of 60 percent of their budgets, and undisclosed sponsorship, which ranges from 20 percent to 40 percent depending on the publication. Most newspapers say they earn about 10 percent of their revenue from advertising. One newspaper, *Iravunk*, which is a popular party publication, claimed it was a revenue producer for the political party. Panelists agreed that circulation in general is very low and that the revenues are too small to make newspapers profitable. They mentioned that only entertainment publications are able to have a larger circulation. One of the panelists shared his survival strategy: “We contacted Kapan’s former residents who now live in Moscow. They organized a subscription for us and we send them our newspaper.” Panelists also noted that the printing house prints some newspaper copies illegally, and editors cannot always define precisely circulation numbers and the level of popularity of a certain paper.

The only exception to this is the financial and business weekly, *Delavoy Express* (Business Express), which is totally supported by advertising revenues. However, instead of being an example for other publications, it does not take advantage of its self-sufficiency to be editorially independent. The newspaper provides neither controversial stories nor criticism of the government or other key institutions. This is why, said most panelists, the newspaper is “allowed” to exist.

Advertising agencies do exist. Newspapers are only beginning to develop their advertising departments. Panelists pointed out that in general advertisers prefer television because they know their advertisements will reach a much wider audience. The demographics support this, and are absurdly skewed toward television. Some 85 percent of all Armenians get their news and entertainment from television. Ten percent get it from radio, and only five percent get it from all newspapers combined, according to an October 2000 media market survey conducted by the Armenian Sociological Association. Logically, no retailer is going to advertise in a newspaper, since TV advertising costs are a better bargain. Newspapers are aware of this situation and, as a result, know that hiring advertising sales people and trying to develop income from advertising is an almost useless effort. Some MSI panel participants also mentioned that a lot of private businesses abstain from advertising in order to avoid attracting the attention of tax authorities.

No independent news media outlets receive government subsidies. The group pointed out that media have few expectations from government concerning financing. There is a small budget line for media support, but it is unclear what the criteria and principles of distribution are.

Because newspapers and television exist on low margins or depend on sponsors, none are willing to finance market surveys. Panelists agreed that because newspapers do not rely on the market for their incomes, they do not write stories for the market. Instead, stories are written to please the sponsors, be they private individuals, politicians, the government, or political parties.

**Attribute #5: Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media**

Indicators
1. Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services
2. Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights
3. NGOs support free speech and independent media
4. Quality journalism degree programs exist providing substantial practical experience
5. Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills
6. Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and not restricted
7. Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted

Panel participants agreed that Armenian professional unions, including journalistic ones, are extremely weak and cannot protect the rights of their own members. Neither are they effective in lobbying for journalists' rights. Some NGOs try to protect the rights of journalists and have started some educational programs. They are unable, however, to set a good example and boost respect for the journalism profession in Armenia. Panelists stressed the fact that some local human rights organizations help reporters, while others that claim to be in the service of journalism mainly collect funds from donors. Panelists concluded that in general institutions supporting media are undeveloped. The establishment of these institutions is closely connected with the strengthening of democracy in the country. Panelists said that if the poor interaction between the NGO sector and media was improved, together they could transform public opinion into a powerful factor in protecting freedom of speech. It was also mentioned that representatives of pro-government media were not inclined to support their media colleagues from the opposition.

A number of journalism institutions exist to represent the interests of news media, including the Yerevan Press Club and the Journalists Union. The Yerevan Press Club is closely aligned with the Journalists Union and is active in bringing public attention to political and legal issues that affect the news media and media outlet owners. A recent case is the above-mentioned broadcast law that imposed certain restrictions and requirements on radio and television stations. A large protest was generated, and participating television and radio stations ceased broadcasts for about an hour one day in protest.

The Yerevan Press Club is active in drafting and lobbying for reforms in media law. The organization has been active in lobbying changes to the current law regarding radio and television, and the revisions are reportedly moving through parliament. In addition, the club is involved in drafting extensive revisions to news media law that are required for Armenia to become a full partner in the Council of Europe. These changes and revisions must be adopted during 2002.

While such organizations exist, newspaper editors will band together informally when specific issues come to light that affect them all. One such case occurred late last year when about six editors approached Armenian President Robert Kocharian to stop the proposed privatization of the distribution system, Haymamul. Although the privatization is a good idea, the proposed implementation was potentially destructive to the entire print media. Each kiosk owner would have been made a private businessperson; but because the profits earned from newspapers are so small, the likelihood of the kiosk owners continuing to sell newspapers was zero, according to newspaper owners. Also, the proposal called for the newspapers to sign individual sales agreements with each kiosk owner. The sheer volume of such contracts made this idea unworkable. The newspaper owners appealed to Kocharian for help and he agreed that the proposal would have sounded the death knell for newspaper sales; he ultimately rejected the privatization proposal.

The situation is different regarding legal defense, however. When certain newspapers or newspaper editors or writers come under attack, either legally or physically, they are left to their own devices. No organization exists which provides any legal defense for journalists. Organizations such as the USAID-funded IREX/ProMedia in Armenia and the Committee to Protect Journalists stay abreast of all violations of journalistic freedom, as they become known. The American Bar Association, through its Central and East European Legal Initiative (ABA/CEELI), has provided some legal training for journalists, but not in the area of journalism freedom. The training has been about the judicial process in Armenia, such as it is.

IREX/ProMedia Armenia and Internews Armenia provide a full schedule of training programs for journalists to improve and expand their professional skills. These include workshops, seminars, and programs in Armenia as well as programs and internships outside the country, and are generally short-term training programs from one to three weeks in duration. IREX/ProMedia is the only organization in Armenia that is currently providing skills improvement training for both professionals and journalism students. Yerevan State University provides undergraduate and graduate degrees in journalism, and a number of private universities in Yerevan also provide undergraduate degrees, as does the Polytechnic Institute in Guimri. However, these universities' programs are steeped in the journalism theory of the former Soviet Union. Panel discussants pointed out that journalism students graduate with no practical skills, and called for the total transformation of the old Soviet style curriculum. Students are hungry for any and all instruction in Western-style, objective, fact-based journalism.

IREX/ProMedia Armenia is attempting to fill the void in the instruction of fact-based objective journalism, and offers private classes to interested students. The panel agreed that more training and seminars are necessary. Other organizations, such as the Swiss-based CIMERA, are currently investigating the creation of a journalism institute based in Yerevan that would provide various types of training to student and professional journalists in Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan.

### **List of panel participants**

1. Valery Aydinyan, political analyst, Member of the Board of the Public TV Broadcast Company
2. Sarah Petrossyan, journalist, *Azg* daily
3. Vahan Ishkhanyan, investigative journalist, freelancer
4. Vacheh Yepremyan, Editor-in-Chief of *Kapantsiner* daily (private newspaper)
5. Anahit Norikyan, Deputy Editor of *Kumayri banvor* weekly (private newspaper)
6. Stephan Gregorian, diplomat, political analyst, member of the political organization "Armat"
7. Rouben Naghdyan, sociologist, professor at the Yerevan State University
8. Silva Toumanyanyan, civilian; provided the views of non-media experts
9. Jina Sargisova, Executive Director of the Armenian Assembly of the Armenia NGO Center
10. Tamara Hovnatanyan, Program Coordinator of the Center for Democracy and Peace (NGO with some media projects)
11. Anahit Haroutunian, journalist, leader of the NGO Spiritual Armenia
12. Theresa Khorozyan, Adviser to Human Rights and Democracy of the OSCE office in Armenia