

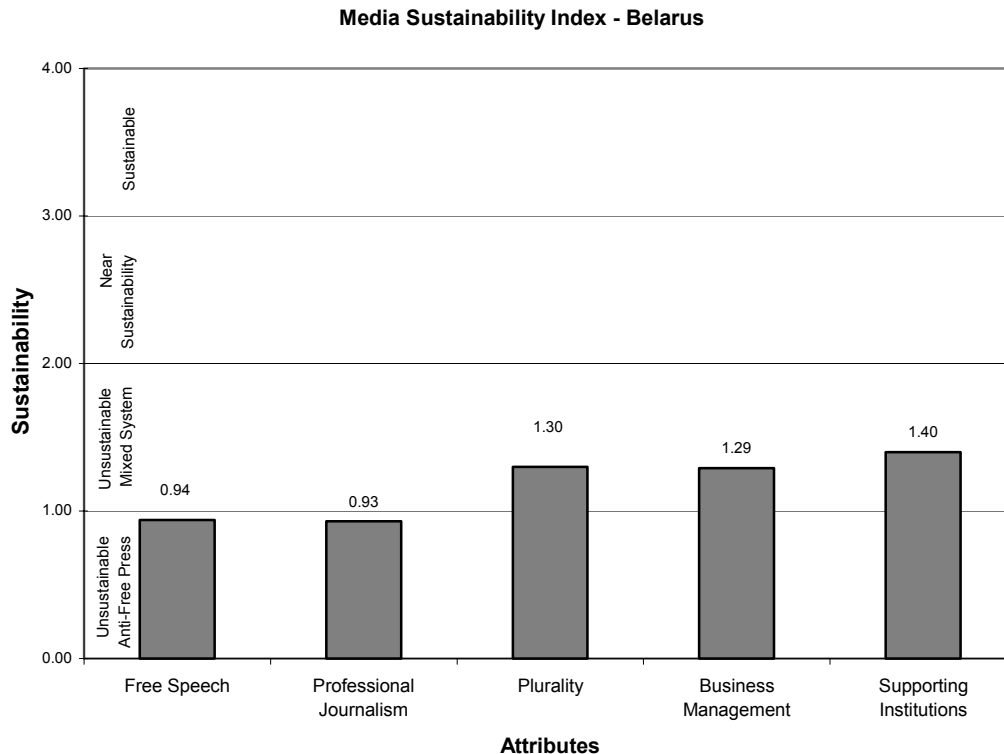
Belarus

Introduction

Belarus is a society in crisis. It is the only former Soviet republic that has overtly rejected the path of democracy and market reform, paying lip service to democratic values, but keeping a tight lid on expressions of dissent. The President, Alexander Lukashenko, is an authoritarian figure, with an almost paranoid fear of the West and his own domestic opposition.

The press is divided into two camps: the state, subsidized media, and the fledgling independents, which are trying to exist in an economy that cannot support them. The non-state print media is largely dependent on foreign donors for the funds to survive; any development comes as a result of grants and other forms of international support. This creates a tense situation of mutual envy and distrust. The private media deride the state press for not daring to assert themselves and kowtowing to a dictator. The state media respond with accusations that their “so-called independent” colleagues have sold out to the West, and have put their talents and their principles at the service of those who use their wealth to slander on the lawful government of Belarus. This is a highly polarized, unhealthy environment to conduct the kind of media research the MSI requires.

IREX/ProMedia in Minsk conducted its MSI panel study in two stages. First, in compliance with the rules set out by the MSI team, IREX invited representatives from state and independent media and from international organizations, and hired a trained sociologist and pollster to handle the session. The expected carping between state and non-state media was significantly greater than anticipated on the day.



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

Attribute #1: Legal 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 conditions 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

Belarus is a very contradictory country when it comes to free speech. The constitution guarantees free speech, and laws exist that aim to bring Belarus into the international sphere by harmonizing national laws with international standards. However, as elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, the written law often does not reflect actual practice. Media laws guaranteeing freedom and independence exist as well, but these rights and freedoms are quite often infringed with impunity.

There are many factors affecting Belarusians' ability to exercise their guaranteed rights. One factor is the "genetic fear" that many speak about—the legacy of the Stalinist years, when one wrong step could mean imprisonment or death. This widespread insecurity has been passed down through the generations and does have a significant effect on civil rights. Also significant is the paternalistic approach to governing that predates the Soviet years. Rights can be abrogated or infringed upon "in the interests of common good," and the rights of the individual in relation to the collective have never counted much. There is also a feeling among many Belarusians, arising from the phenomenon of government paternalism that those who make waves deserve to be punished. Outrage at infringements of free speech are rare, except for those orchestrated by human rights groups such as Charter '97, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, and others. These groups in turn tend to be viewed with distrust by many Belarusians as being "paid for by foreign money" and serving the propaganda interests of foreign governments.

Courts do provide a measure of protection, and in the past year several cases have been decided in favor of media outlets attacked for their frankness. However there are still many instances of "telephone law,"

whereby judges are instructed on how to rule in sensitive cases. The State Press Committee controls licensing; this was formerly the purview of the Ministry of Communications, but the procedure is now being revamped. On the books the procedure is fair, but violations are more the rule than the exception. A radio station like 101.2 can have its license withdrawn for being too controversial (1994), a television station like Channel 8 can have its frequency taken away and given to a city government organization just because it is convenient to the government bodies (late 2000). Commercial stations pay hefty “fees” for licenses (the going rate is close to US \$200,000), which is prohibitive to anyone without heavy backing.

While most would agree that the economic situation for all businesses in Belarus is uniformly bad, media are at an added disadvantage because of their sensitive political position. The fact that media must be registered with the State Press Committee makes it fairly easy to refuse market entry to those media outlets the state deems inconvenient. Taxes are high everywhere, but the special needs of the press—print and distribution—also make it more difficult for them to withstand pressure from above. Distribution is accomplished mainly through the mail system, a government monopoly, and independent newspapers pay much higher tariff than state-subsidized ones. Private print outlets do exist, but they are few; access to government print outlets is nominally equal for all, but there have been numerous instances where a printing house has refused to print a paper it considers too oppositionist. All of this results in a situation where the media face much more difficult conditions for entering the market than other kinds of business.

Crimes against journalists are fairly rare in Belarus compared with some other former Soviet republics (for instance, Russia). This does not mean, however, that the picture is rosy. Journalists may be detained, harassed, or even beaten in the course of their work, but arrests, imprisonment, and death are extremely rare. Two prominent cases can be mentioned here: Dmitry Zavadsky, a cameraman for Russian station ORT, disappeared one year ago and is presumed dead; and Pavel Sheremet, an ORT journalist held for over two months by the Belarusian government in 1997.

There are few investigative journalists in Belarus, but those who do attempt in-depth reporting on controversial subjects may be summoned to the prosecutor’s office or otherwise harassed. One young journalist from a major national daily had to hire bodyguards after publishing an article that explored the reasons for the murder of a regional official. In no case in recent memory has any state official been publicly reprimanded, or anyone prosecuted, for offenses against journalists. Nor do these cases cause much outrage in the general public. Independent journalists are painted as rabble-rousers or in the pay of foreign governments, and few Belarusians seem to worry about their fate.

While the law guarantees equal access to information for state and independent media, cases of violations are almost too numerous to count. Many regional newspapers have been told outright that the governor’s office, or the mayor’s office, has prohibited any state organizations from giving interviews or any other kind of information. The low level of professionalism in media complicates access to information; few journalists are willing to challenge government officials on legal grounds, demanding the information to which they have a right. Many journalists also do not know where to go for information, and this affects independent media more than state outlets, to which information is often readily given.

There is little real independence in either the state or the non-state media. The state media are directly controlled by the government and serve the government interests, while the independent media are forced to seek sponsorship to keep afloat in difficult economic times. This means that some nominally independent media outlets serve interests of political parties, which supply much-needed funds; others sell their services to businesses for hidden advertising. Still others rely on foreign donors, often trying to gear their coverage to what they feel the donors will want. All of these factors erode editorial independence.

Libel in Belarus is both a civil and criminal offense. At present there is a case, which is not being vigorously prosecuted, charging an editor with criminal libel for publishing an article saying that President Lukashenko is mentally ill. Criminal libel charges are fairly rare, however; much more common are “honor and dignity” cases, where the prosecution does not have to prove malice, or even falsity—it is

enough that the article in question caused “emotional distress” to the person described. Privacy laws make it difficult to write about public officials at all without opening oneself up to one of these charges. An official can claim emotional distress if his wife is described in unflattering terms, or even if she is described at all. Public officials, rather than being held to a higher standard, are afforded additional protection under the law. The president can sue almost anyone for almost anything. Fortunately, there have not been many cases where journalists have been imprisoned, or even fined for these kinds of cases. Often they are settled out of court.

Public information is available, but not always easy to access. Many government officials try to withhold information, and many do not deal with journalists from the independent press at all. As mentioned above, some of the fault lies with the journalists themselves, who do not always know their rights or the best way to go about exercising them. While the law guarantees equal access to information, the practice is that independent media are often disadvantaged when it comes to receiving what should be public information.

There are no formal restrictions on access to international news. The Internet has made that all but impossible. Most media outlets have access to the Internet, and shortwave radio transmits the BBC, Radio Liberty, and numerous other international sources into the country. Russian media are readily available (including television). In some parts of the country, residents have access to Polish or Lithuanian television as well. The problem, as ever, is financial. Many media outlets have access to the Internet, but have to restrict usage to a few hours a day. Subscriptions to foreign news agencies are almost prohibitively expensive.

Language is an emotional issue in Belarus, where the overwhelming majority uses Russian as their first language, even while claiming that Belarusian is their mother tongue. However, there are no laws promoting or restricting one or the other language at this time: both Russian and Belarusian are considered official state languages.

Entry into the journalism profession is largely free to all comers, and there is little interference by the government in admission to journalism schools. Unfortunately, Belarusian graduates are subject to the official “distribution” that existed in the Soviet Union: they have to work for two years wherever the government sends them. In practice, most journalism graduates can sidestep this requirement and gain their own employment.

Some news events require accreditation, and there have been instances where “opposition” journalists have been denied entry to specific events. However, journalists do not require a license, and anyone who wants to write and can get published can be considered a journalist.

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 exist (investigative, economics/business, local, political)

Belarusian journalists score extremely low on any scale of fairness and objectivity. This is due to several factors, the most important of which are the polarization of society and a long tradition of subjectivity in reporting.

Journalists, like society, find themselves split into two camps, “state” and “non-state.” The state journalists enjoy some privileges, notably easier access to information, and higher pay (state media outlets have a privileged economic status, which allows them to attract and keep the best of the journalists). Those who work in the non-state media often do so either because their professional qualifications are too low to allow them a place in the higher-paid state media, or because they see themselves as freedom fighters waging war against the authoritarian president. Neither of these conditions makes for fair and professional media. Panelists repeatedly told us that “Western” rules of fairness and objectivity cannot be applied to Belarus because the government media do not play by those rules; hence the independent media must do the same—i.e., fight fire with fire. This leads to much ranting and mud slinging on both sides, with the result that the reader often adopts a “plague on both your houses” attitude.

A few media outlets try to adhere to more professional standards: *BDG* and *Belarussky Rynok* in Minsk, and *Intex Press*, *Gazeta Slonimskaya*, and *Brestsky Kurier* in the regions. These newspapers enjoy wide popularity, especially in the regions. Nevertheless, the fact that so many newspapers in Belarus are donor-supported has undermined much of the incentive to improve the quality of reporting. Instead, editors and journalists try to anticipate and satisfy the tastes of the donor community.

For the most part, there is a great deal of “news” in the Belarusian media. While commercial publications do exist, they certainly do not eclipse news. The problem is not the quantity of news, but its quality.

The other major problem is a long tradition of exhortative journalism, going back to the nineteenth century. Belarusians, like Russians, see journalism as a social mission: the task is not so much to inform the reader as to shape him. This, combined with a very Soviet contempt for the “lumpenproletariat” leads to a situation where journalists and editors not only do not avoid subjectivity, they actively embrace it, seeing it as their moral and social duty.

Given the dire economic situation in Belarus, it would be naïve to think that journalists and editors would be immune from monetary inducements. But the practice of selling coverage is compounded by the political situation: political parties and other groups are willing to pay for favorable coverage in their battle with the president, and they do. Hidden advertising is common, as is political propaganda masquerading as news coverage.

Ethical standards have been developed by journalists’ associations, most notably by the Belarusian Association of Journalists, but they are widely ignored. This indifference seems to persist across the media spectrum, in all mediums and age groups. In the tense political situation in Belarus, self-censorship is common. Both in state and non-state media, editors and journalists cannot afford to offend the government. A careless word can result in a tax audit, a license being revoked, or, in severe cases, a media outlet being shut down. There are numerous examples of this: Alfa Radio, a popular FM station in Minsk and regions, was shut down for a day after they had announced an opposition demonstration. Since then, (approximately a year ago) they have been much more careful in their news releases. Business interests do not play as great a role as political ones; Belarus is a long way from emulating the media oligarchs of Russia, for example.

Key events may be covered or not, depending on the attitude of the central government. For example, when asked how his television station was planning on covering the presidential elections (September 2001), one director confided, “Frankly, I am not.” He went on to explain that, with so much invested in equipment and training, he simply could not afford to annoy the state structures.

There have been numerous cases of newspapers receiving warnings from the State Press Committee (after three warnings a paper can be closed) for mentioning demonstrations organized by unregistered groups. Since the state controls the registration process and prohibits the media from covering the actions of unregistered groups, they can effectively control coverage of organizations they find objectionable. Media will sometimes cover security issues—several newspapers ran a substantiated story about the defense

minister having been diagnosed as mentally ill—but this is rare, and retribution of one kind or another usually follows (the newspapers in question were issued warnings on other grounds soon after the articles appeared).

The economic situation in Belarus is, in general, extremely bad, and journalists are not paid better than average. Pay scales, especially in the independent media, are so low as to make corruption the rule rather than the exception. This results in selling stories or positive coverage in many cases, as well as hidden advertisements and endorsements. Political parties and groups in fact pay for many articles that go under the rubric of news. This seems to be more rife in print media than in the electronic sphere, probably because print is less regulated. The electronic sphere is much more tightly controlled and more vulnerable to attack from Belarusian authorities. While there is certainly some outflow from journalism into other, more lucrative professions, this does not seem to be a major problem, except in the provinces. In the regions, lower pay scales and a harder life make it all but impossible for smaller publications to attract and keep qualified journalists. This results in high turnover and lower standards.

Belarus, like Russia, is a country where serious news and literature have long predominated over entertainment. Compared to most Western countries, there is quite a lot of news on television and in newspapers. This does not mean, of course, that the news is fair and objective—only that the ratio of hard news to entertainment is surprisingly high. There are certainly entertainment and advertising publications, but not to the extent that they eclipse the more serious ones. The problem in Belarus is not the lack of information, but its reliability. Objectivity and fairness are largely absent all across the media spectrum.

Belarus is not well developed technically, and this has proven a major problem for the media. Many newspapers have so few computers that journalists have to write their stories by hand, and then have them typed into the office computer by a typist. Digital cameras, laptops, Internet access, digital recorders, and other accoutrements of a modern newsroom are largely absent. In television, where technology is king, this lack is keenly felt. In several media outlets, the lack of private transportation has made newsgathering problematic, especially, again, for television.

Distribution is another major problem. Most newspapers are distributed through the mail system, at prohibitive cost. Belarus would need major investment to create an alternative distribution system, but so far funds have not been available. International donors have contributed a great deal of money and technical assistance, but much more funding and development is needed before Belarus has the technical means to produce high-quality news.

Niche reporting exists, but not on a very high level. This is due to deficiencies in the education process (journalism faculties are fairly old-fashioned and Sovietized, with little emphasis on niche reporting), as well as constraints in the society. Investigative journalism is frowned upon, especially coming from the independent press. There are several business papers, but without the kind of depth of analysis that we would see in the West. Political reporting is often on the level of propaganda, although some exceptions do exist. There is some very good analysis in *Belarusskaya Gazeta*, a national weekly, and fairly good political reporting in *BDG* and *Belarussky Rynok*.

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

Most Belarusian citizens can afford newspapers, and television is widely available. The two main Russian-language stations cover the entire country, and the third Russian station, NTV, covers major cities. Belarusian National Television covers the entire country, and there is a network of independent broadcasters in the regions.

Russian television covers very little Belarusian news, and Belarusian Television is controlled by the state, so there is little plurality of viewpoints available to most television viewers. There is a system of independent regional television that provides somewhat more balanced coverage, but their news production tends to be sparse and cautious. In radio, the main state channel blankets the country in a cable system known as “Radio Tochka,” (“Point Radio” in English). There are good FM music stations, but they do little news, and tend to be cautious. With newspapers, the situation is a bit better. There are independent publications on both national and regional levels, and anyone who wants to buy newspapers can do so. Economic considerations do play a role; whereas in Soviet times people could afford multiple newspapers, now many stick to just one or two.

Obviously, city dwellers have access to a greater variety of sources than people do in remote rural regions. There are villages and collective farms where very little independent news is available. Given the expense of distribution, many independent publications cannot afford to spread their resources over a very wide area, and independent radio and television do not penetrate into some of these remote areas. Internet use is not widespread, although it is growing. According to a poll last year, fewer than 10 percent of Belarusians have ever used the Internet, and only a small number of those polled say they use it regularly. Universities provide access, and a system of resource centers throughout the country is also helping to alleviate the dearth of Internet services. For the next few years, however, the Internet will not be a major factor in Belarus.

Belarus has remarkably few restrictions on access to foreign news sources. Shortwave radio is readily available, Internet access is not blocked, and cable TV (including CNN and BBC World) is fairly inexpensive. In the capital, many subscribe to cable television, while in the regions this number drops. There are no legal restrictions on listening to or reading foreign news. There are not many foreign newspapers readily available, but this seems to be an economic consideration rather than an attempt by the government to restrict access.

State media are unfailingly biased in their coverage, controlled as they are by the government. During the recent elections, this bias amounted to wholesale attack on any opposition, or any other alternative viewpoint. There is no “public” media in the Western sense, only state media and independent media. While many independent media outlets, such as regional television and newspapers, are more or less nonpartisan, there are independent news sources that mirror the government’s bias. A national, independent daily such as *Narodnaya Volya* has no more integrity or credibility than the state newspaper, despite its “democratic” billing. It uses the same techniques of innuendo and mudslinging as the worst of the state media; only the targets are different. There is opposition radio—such as *Radio Racyja*, broadcast out of Poland—which tries to offer more professional programming and largely succeeds. But it is undeniably slanted toward the opposition, and the coverage tends to be one-sided.

Independent news agencies exist in Belarus, such as BelaPan and Radio Racyja, which is functioning more and more as a news agency. BelaPan is not cheap, but programs to provide it to regional newspapers have made it fairly affordable to the independent press. BelaPan is used widely, and Racyja is becoming better known and is occasionally cited even in the state press. The level of reporting in BelaPan is adequate, although not up to the standards of Russia’s Interfax, not to mention international wire services. However, it has the foundation of a good agency.

Very little independent broadcast media produce extensive news programming. While there exist 21 independent regional television stations, only half have their own news shows, and those are sometimes

as sparse as 30 minutes per week. Mainly, independent television tries to avoid controversy while catering to the needs of their viewing public. There are quite a few good FM stations in Belarus, but no “talk radio” on the scale of National Public Radio in the United States. Most are music stations, with only 3–4 minutes of news per hour. Some radio stations are doing a good job of covering the news—the new Unistar, broadcast by Belarus State University is a good example—but most avoid controversy. As cited above, Alfa Radio in Minsk lost its signal for an entire day, due to “technical difficulties,” right after it had broadcast news of an opposition demonstration.

Media ownership is nominally transparent, but there are cases where the real owners may not be apparent. In the case of government outlets, this is not a problem: everyone understands who “owns” the outlets and what that means for credibility (surveys show that independent news sources are more widely trusted than state-owned ones). But with private media outlets the situation is more complex. The information is supposed to be transparent, but often is not. For example, one major national daily, *BDG*, is rumored to be financed partially by state capital, although the owner of record denies this. Another national weekly, *Belarusskaya Gazeta*, is rumored to be backed by Russian capital, which it also denies. These rumors have had a negative effect on the papers’ credibility, particularly regarding the sensitive issue of union with Russia. In television, as well, ownership can be a thorny issue. City governments looking for means of control over independent television sometimes buy in through shell companies, or subsidiaries, to make their participation less apparent.

Most Belarusian media outlets do provide coverage of social issues and are not often hampered in this by the state. The real problem is lack of training in social issue reporting, and the resistance of official sources to giving statistics that may give a negative picture of the country. Belarus has a fairly homogenous population, although there are some religious differences that cause problems. The government has been cracking down on “sects,” and this sometimes results in harassment of activists in this sphere, although journalists have been writing about the harassment freely. There is some minority language media, and they are legal; there are some Polish-language newspapers in the Western regions.

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

Printing and distribution are sore points with the Belarusian media, tying up considerable capital and causing enormous political ill will. There are only two independent publishing houses in Belarus: Magic and Plutos. Of the two, Magic is the largest, printing many, if not most, of the major independent newspapers. However, Magic became entangled in a financial and political dispute with the government. The printing press was given to Magic by the Soros Foundation, and in late 2000 the government seized the press in settlement of tax debts that it levied against Soros. Magic’s major press is now sealed, and papers are being printed on an older machine, which is also now tied up in argument and acrimony. This press had been given to a Belarusian activist and publisher, Pavel Zhuk, who decided to use it for his own commercial purposes. At this point, papers are being printed at Magic, but many editors have moved on to other printing houses, since the quality and speed of the older press are not up to their standards. Some have gone to Plutos, and others have gone on to state printing houses. There seem to be adequate printing facilities, charging reasonable prices, available through the state network, but editors of independent newspapers feel vulnerable to political pressure. Independents fear that the state publisher will refuse to print them if they attempt to publish controversial material (this has happened to several newspapers in the regions, most recently to *Provintsialka*, a new paper in Pinsk.)

With distribution, the situation is worse. There is almost no home distribution in Belarus outside of the mail system, which is a state monopoly. The tariffs are extremely high, consuming up to 40 percent of a newspaper's revenue. Editors of independent papers say that they are being penalized by higher tariffs. Independent newspapers are assessed distribution costs up to three times higher than those of the state-subsidized press, and they claim that their money is going to subsidize the cost of distributing the state papers. There are some fledgling independent distribution systems in place: two operate out of the capital, and several are located in the regions. They are all associated with a newspaper or a newspaper network: an example is BelKP Press, which publishes *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, and distributes it and several other papers to central points in the regions. *Intex Press* in Baranovichi has launched a home delivery system in its region, and is now expanding. These distribution systems have promise, but much remains to be done.

The sources of media financing are varied, but not all of them promote better-run, independent media outlets. With the economy in ruins, Belarus has a very limited advertising market; in addition, low market-oriented culture makes it difficult for media professionals to take advantage of what opportunities there are there. Quotas on advertising also complicate the picture. Advertising cannot exceed 30 percent of space in a newspaper that is not registered specifically as an advertising paper, and enterprises cannot spend more than 2 percent of their revenue on advertising. Subscriptions and kiosk sales account for up to half of revenue, but prices are kept artificially low by state regulations, and in some cases newspapers lose money by raising circulation. The other half (or some cases as low as 30 percent) of revenue is supplied by advertising, but revenue earned by sales and advertising at best cover half of a newspaper's expenses. In television, managers supplement their income with private messages to clients, such as birthday greetings. For many regional stations, these are the main source of income.

All of this makes the private media vulnerable to pressure from a variety of sources. Political parties can buy space and favorable coverage in newspapers, as can businesses. Foreign aid organizations try to help, but their assistance often creates even more of a dependence mentality in beneficiaries, making them more reluctant to raise their own financing, and resulting in an increasing politicization of the press. Media recipients may see the aid as payment for coverage. For example, a panelist from one regional newspaper had received a grant from United States Information Service (USIS) to write about the third sector. He told IREX that he was relieved when the grant was over, because he no longer felt bound to write about NGOs in an exclusively positive light. Currently, most of the national and many of the regional papers are partially dependent on donors for survival. Television is less so, because much less donor money has gone into independent television, and only those outlets that have become financial self-sufficient are extant. Radio seems to be fairly profitable; it costs less to produce than television, and generates more advertising revenue.

Advertising is still on a fairly primitive level in Belarus, although there are agencies that work with all the media. Independent newspapers are in the worst position, perhaps because they have not been forced to aggressively develop advertising, relying as they do on donor funds. Television stations have also not been particularly aggressive in courting advertisers, but they do generate enough revenue to cover operating costs. When Belarusian state television decided to replace advertising from the Russian station NTV and with its own clients, the station found it was unable to attract commercial advertising. It had to fill in the ad time with Public Service Announcements, such as "Keep Your Entryway Clean" and "Don't Forget to Pay Your Taxes." (In general, Russian stations negotiate deals on advertising revenue with the Belarusian telecommunications industry, but NTV was selling its own advertising in Belarus.) Advertising accounts for less program time than in the West, generally taking up 3-4 minutes per hour. Advertising revenue in Belarus is too low, as are subscription prices. This has to do with the state of the economy and the level of state interference in the media sector.

Given the level of political polarization in Belarus, it is not possible that independent media would receive government subsidies. Unfortunately, this independence, though desirable in the abstract, cannot be perceived as an indication of sustainability.

There are market research firms in Belarus; one of the major ones, Novak, did a large project for IREX in 2000. However, the services of such organizations are beyond the means of most media outlets, so other than occasional projects like IREX's, media rely on amateur, in-house methods of customer research. In general, the same problems that plague the media in other spheres apply to marketing research. For those media outlets that have to rely on their own resources, contact with their consumers is important, and they will try, however imperfectly, to tailor their product to their clients' demands. For those media outlets who rely on donors, such information is less important; they tend to decide themselves what their reader wants, and to give it to him regardless. After the IREX survey, we did note changes in several of the major, better run newspapers in the country. One paper added a "city" section in response to readers' stated demands; another targeted men from 25-40, a sector that the survey showed was under-exploited in their region; still another paper changed its design. However, these cases are the exception, rather than the rule.

Circulation figures are suspect, since Belarusian papers are just as liable as others to inflate their figures to impress advertisers. A recent audit by the State Press Committee resulted in lowering the stated circulations of many national newspapers. With broadcast, the situation is more complicated, since there is no independent means (such as printing receipts) for assessing audiences. Media outlets rely on ratings agencies, such as Novak (above), and they often cannot pay for the services of a professional. They rely on amateur, in-house phone surveys, or make estimates based on the number of telephone calls they get to place private ads. In general, this basic market research not a major factor in broadcast policy.

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

There are embryo organizations such as the Regional Association of Editors and Publishers, and the Television Broadcast Network (TBN) that unites regional television managers, but these organizations do little to provide members with benefits or collective bargaining power. The Regional Association of Editors and Publishers organizes projects such as Plus TV, a color supplement that provides members with an attractive television-programming guide and also sells advertising. They also work with international donors to buy paper at bulk rates to distribute to members. TBN purchases programming collectively for members, and tries to unite regional stations in news exchanges and other projects, but many stations do not seem to have reaped many of the benefits. The Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) unites independent journalists and attempts to protect their rights through lobbying, legal advice, and professional training. However, BAJ's resources are not sufficient to address the myriad problems facing Belarusian journalists, and the matter is further complicated by personality clashes and other internal squabbles that limit the organizations' effectiveness.

Human rights groups such as Charter 97, the Belarus Helsinki Committee, and BAJ monitor violations of press freedom and publicize them. These groups exist throughout the country, and journalists have access to their help when needed. Unfortunately the Belarusian government does not pay much attention to these groups, so their watchdog function serves largely as a signal to the West, rather than a curb on government excesses.

There are journalism degree programs, but most do not prepare journalists for the real-world challenges. Journalism degrees abroad do not help much, since the language tends to be a barrier, and most programs that sponsor students for study abroad report low rates for Belarusian students returning home after their

programs. There are sufficient media outlets to absorb the graduates, but not enough qualified journalists to go around, and many of the best leave the profession because of economic concerns. There are also numerous short-term training opportunities, mostly run by international agencies. Instruction in everything from the very basics of journalism to ethics and management is needed, since many Belarusian journalists have no formal training. The most popular courses tend to be in computer-aided research, Web design, and other technical fields.

List of panel participants

1. Alexander Ulitenok, Editor of *Svobodnye Novosti*, independent weekly, circulation 35,000
2. Dmitry Likhuto, USAID representative
3. Viktor Malyshevsky, News Editor, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, independent daily, combined weekly circulation of over 400,000
4. Alexander Gulyaev, Vice President of the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) and deputy editor of *Den*, independent newspaper, published three times a week, combined weekly circulation 15,000
5. Beata Rozumilowisc, OSCE representative
6. Alexander Krugliakov, Public Diplomacy Section of the American Embassy, also host of a morning news program on Belarusian Television
7. Jean MacKenzie, Resident Advisor, IREX/Minsk
8. Alexander Parfentsov, Internews
9. Sieva Ragoisha, OSI
10. Sergei Krivin, Director of the Television Broadcasting Network, a group of 21 independent regional television stations