

Introduction

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IREX

I am pleased to present the Media Sustainability Index (MSI), which analyzes and measures the current status and sustainability of independent media systems in twenty countries throughout Europe and Eurasia.¹ The MSI was designed in collaboration with USAID over the past year as a tool to measure the current state of media development, as well as to assess changes in media systems over time. Research for the country chapters and panel discussions of experts for each chapter were undertaken in May and June of 2001.

Several surveys and research studies have examined particular aspects of media systems, most notably the paramount indicator of a healthy media system, freedom of speech. The Committee to Protect Journalists, Freedom House, and others have prepared widely used and respected surveys and reports on aspects of free speech. IREX and USAID often rely on these surveys for analysis and assessment, and we also drew on them in developing the MSI.

However, the healthy and sustainable development of free and independent media depends on more than just free speech. IREX and USAID determined the need to develop a broader tool—one that would help media development professionals assess the state of independent media in a given country. Free and independent media must operate as sound businesses to avoid both the need for sponsors and patrons who may have political motives, and the possible capitulation to government pressure. Media outlets and journalists must be supported by trade and professional associations that represent their interests and protect the values of free speech and independence. Media outlets and journalists must employ sound professional and ethical journalistic and editorial practices to ensure the ability of citizens and policy-makers to gather the information necessary to participate in democratic and free-market institutions. The MSI seeks measure these and other factors that characterize a sustainable independent media system.

IREX also designed the MSI to be applied to any country in the world. Countries with advanced independent media, such as the United States and many Western European countries, can be assessed with the MSI; so too can repressive states such as Belarus or states in Asia, Latin America, or Africa. This first iteration of the MSI was targeted at European and Eurasian countries where USAID has significant media projects.

Conducting the research and preparing the analysis for twenty countries was a difficult undertaking. For each country a panel consisting of representatives drawn from local media, NGOs, USAID, and other international or local media actors gathered to measure their country's performance against the MSI indicators. The moderator or an IREX representative wrote up the findings of the discussion panel; the analysis in this report is based on the moderator's summary. IREX field and DC media development staff also separately analyzed each country's performance against the indicators. The ratings of the discussion panel and IREX were averaged to obtain the scores contained in this report. We believe this approach provides a unique and comprehensive view of media development, combining the perspectives of media "insiders" in each country with those of international and local media development professionals.

The study points to promising signs in some countries. Croatia, Bulgaria, and Romania appear to have the most developed independent media systems, although further development is needed before they can be judged sustainable. Other countries, notably Belarus, the Central Asian Republics, and to a lesser extent Ukraine, have poorly developed independent media. However, the analyses identify areas that hold

¹ Although Serbia, Montenegro, and Kosovo are legally part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, they were analyzed as distinct countries. Over the past several years, Kosovo has operated under UN supervision while Montenegro has operated as a separate country in many respects, including in its relations to media. This does not represent a political opinion on the current or future political status of FRY or its constituent members on the part of IREX or USAID.

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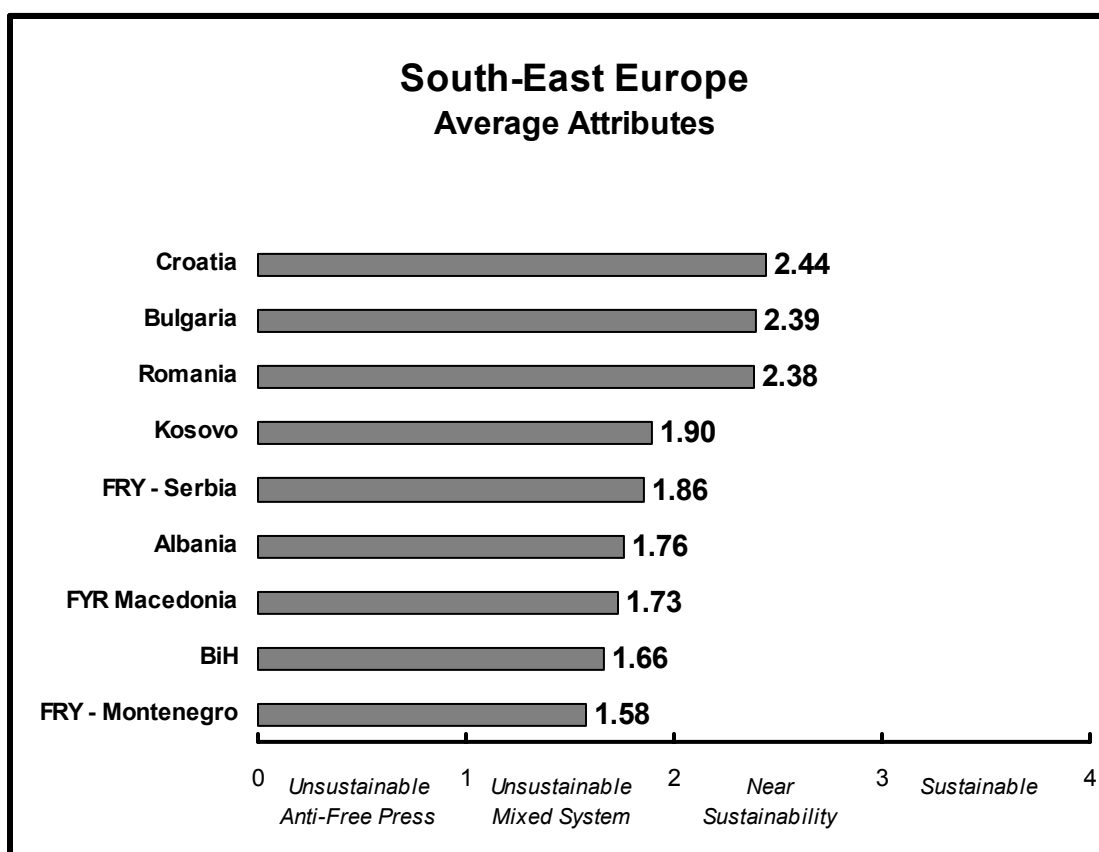
promise for development with the proper outside support. Several other countries have been through recent political upheavals—Serbia, Macedonia, and Kosovo in particular—but they also have good prospects for development if some level of economic and political stability based on democratic and free market principles is attained.

We have tried to make the analyses brief, but valuable for media development professionals working in the region, or professionals who are deciding whether or not to start a program. We hope you will find this report useful and look forward to your comments.

Executive Summary

At this point in time, ten years after the fall of Communism, it is important to stand back and make an informed appraisal of the development of independent media in the region. It is clear from reading the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) that there has been positive change and growth in the development of independent media in a short period of time. It also becomes clear that much more is needed. The road ahead is different for each nation but regional and sub-regional trends become apparent in reading the MSI.

The most positive trend towards media sustainability, at the time this survey was conducted in May-June 2001, can be observed in three countries in Southeastern Europe - Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania. Those three states have also made the most progress in the region in terms of inclusion into the European and North Atlantic economic and military integration processes. They are the only ones that have, on average, scored well above two on the MSI attributes, indicating they are nearing sustainability.



However, their success should not give cause to premature celebration. Like the other seventeen countries studied, Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania have just recently emerged from decades of communist rule and are still in the process of both solidifying their young democracies and establishing viable market economies. Therefore, the goal of a sustainable independent media is very much dependent on the success of those reforms. These states operate in an environment in which everything becomes political and society often becomes polarized. This not only provides the state with arguments to curb the right to free speech in the name of stability but can also impede the further development of professional journalism when media mirrors the political and societal polarization. Croatia, in addition to this problem, still struggles with the government's reluctance to completely relinquish its monopolist status as the

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preeminent news source and professional and trade associations' inability to provide its members with adequate assistance and other related services to fight this problem.

The lack of such relative success in the remaining countries of Southeastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) should not be interpreted too negatively. On the contrary, the accomplishments of the above three "leaders" should serve as benchmarks and symbols of what can be achieved with the proper political and economic support for media reform from the international community and the determined efforts of media professionals in the country. All six of this group went through considerable upheavals in their recent histories. They were often the arenas of either civil unrest, as in the case of Albania, or outright military conflict. Bosnia, Kosovo and Serbia just recently emerged from such conflicts that inflicted considerable damage to their societies. The media suffered as well and in some cases were active participants in the conflicts.

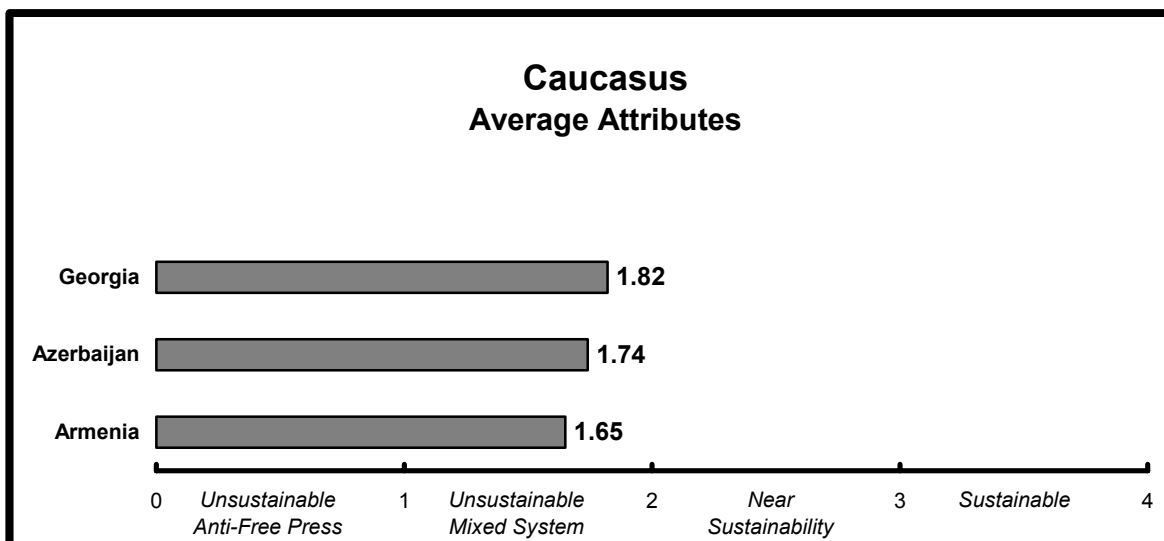
The situation in Macedonia and Montenegro, on the other hand, remains unsettled. Macedonia still faces the possibility of continued armed conflict between its Macedonian and Albanian populations whereas Montenegro is still wrestling with the question of succession from the Yugoslav Federation. Such environments tend to remove the issue of independent media and their rights from the top of the domestic reform agenda, except when pushed from outside.

According to the MSI survey, Kosovo has fared the best of this group of six, scoring on average just below two, indicating they remain an unsustainable, mixed system but are approaching the next level of development. However, Serbia and Montenegro do not fall far behind. All three have promising local associations and NGOs who push for rights of journalists and media outlets. All also offer a decent plurality of news sources although coverage remains biased towards the political. Kosovo, for example, had very little independent media prior to the 1999 war, yet a core of dedicated professionals managed to create an independent media sector that provides Kosovar citizens with a wide choice of news and information. Serbia too has a vibrant independent media that does offer citizens choice and can become sustainable with the appropriate outside support, internal reforms, and economic improvement.

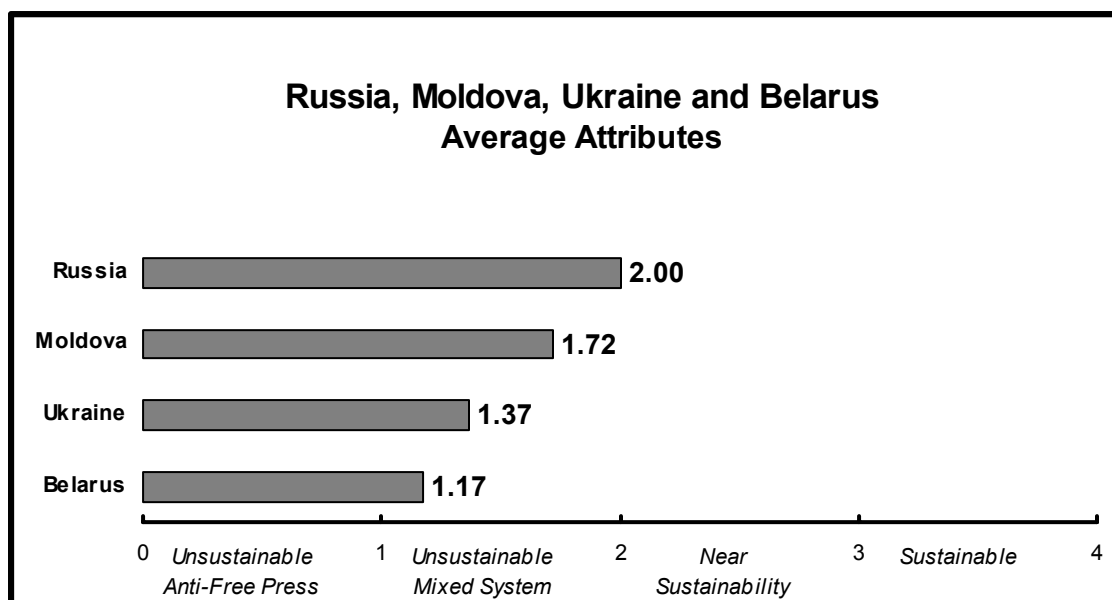
Montenegro has the weakest independent media sector of the three. Serbian media offer strong competition and the small population makes supporting media difficult. Nevertheless, the general state of journalism is weak with strong journalism found only in central media outlets, business management is poor, and the media law situation remains unresolved.

These last points also apply to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia, albeit to differing degrees. Although some progress has been made in the spheres of free speech and choice of media outlets available to citizens, Albania remains a highly polarized society which does not leave much room for dissenting views and fair reporting. This is also true for Macedonia and BiH, only that the division exists more along ethnic lines. Therefore, much more work has to be done in the advancement of free speech, professional journalism, the fostering of supporting NGOs and associations, and the application of sound business management.

Post-Soviet legacies, a weak economy, conflict, and poor development beyond capital city areas are major trends affecting media in the Caucasus. The dire economic situation for these three countries cannot be emphasized enough in terms of the impact it has on media development. From finding a profitable advertising base, to purchasing newsprint, to paying salaries, the lack of capital and the poor state of the economy are key problems facing media in the Caucasus.



It is in particular noteworthy that in all three countries, the lowest scores in the MSI survey were in the attributes for professional journalism and business management. Azerbaijan had the lowest score on average, whereas Georgia scored the best. None of the countries scored higher than two (nearing sustainability) indicating that while they have begun to make progress much work remains to be done in the media reform process. These scores not only suggest the poor economic climate but also highlight the region's Soviet past characterized by state control of media, businesses and universities. As private, commercial media struggle to compete with their state-run counterparts, the realities of what stands in the way of overcoming Soviet legacies abound. Notably, in the Caucasus, it was widely questioned by the MSI panels if it is even possible for media to operate as businesses, especially in light of a preconceived notion that it is an enterprise of the state.



The MSI survey of the other former Soviet republics of Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine continues to plainly illustrate the evident lack of a sustainable independent media in the former Soviet Union. Its results indicate how constant interference by the central governments and the gloomy economic situation are the key causes for the current state of affairs. Despite the collective failure to approach sustainability

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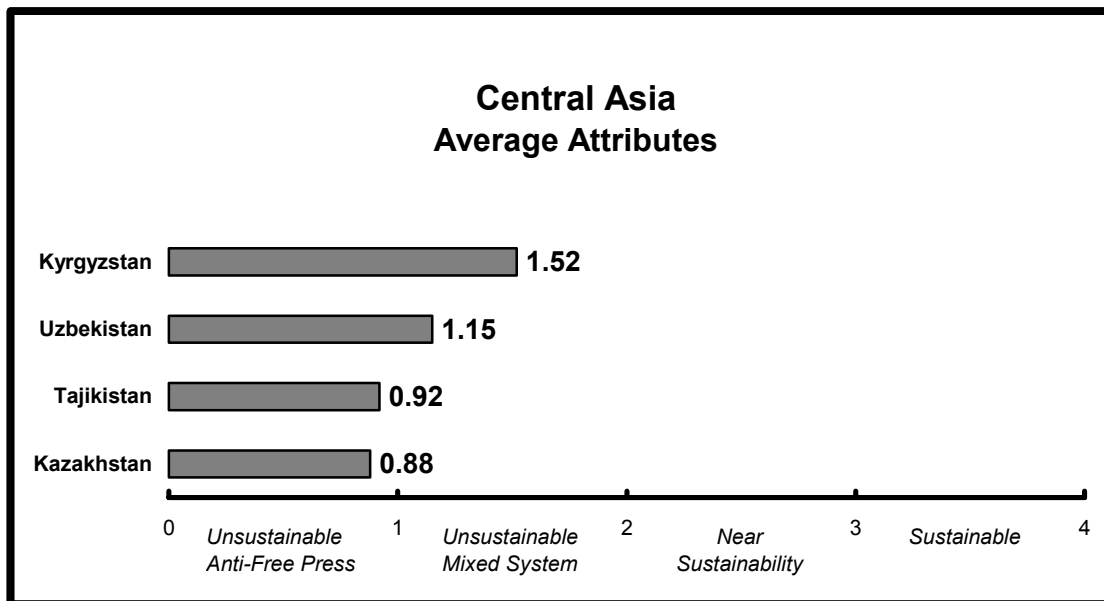
on all five attributes, one can nonetheless observe a divergence in results amongst the four countries. While Russia, for example, has made some progress towards sustainability in the domains of free speech, plurality of news sources and the creation of supporting, Belarus and Ukraine have registered little positive development, in particular when it comes to free speech and the state of professional journalism. The situation is specifically dire in Belarus scoring below one on both attributes (unsustainable and anti-free press).

Polarization between state and private media, the omnipresence of government interference in media affairs, and the exercise of censorship, both open and indirect, clearly suggest that the media in the four Western NIS states have a significant way to go before reaching sustainability. Although all four countries seemingly battle the same difficulties on their paths toward free and sustainable media, it has to be stressed that Russia is relatively the most advanced between them. Moreover, since Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine have century-old political and cultural ties to Russia, it seems unlikely that real change will take place in the former three countries unless Russia succeeds in developing a sustainable independent media. Russia's media continues to be strongly represented in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine, either as local reprints of major Muscovite papers or by covering these three countries with their TV and radio broadcasts.

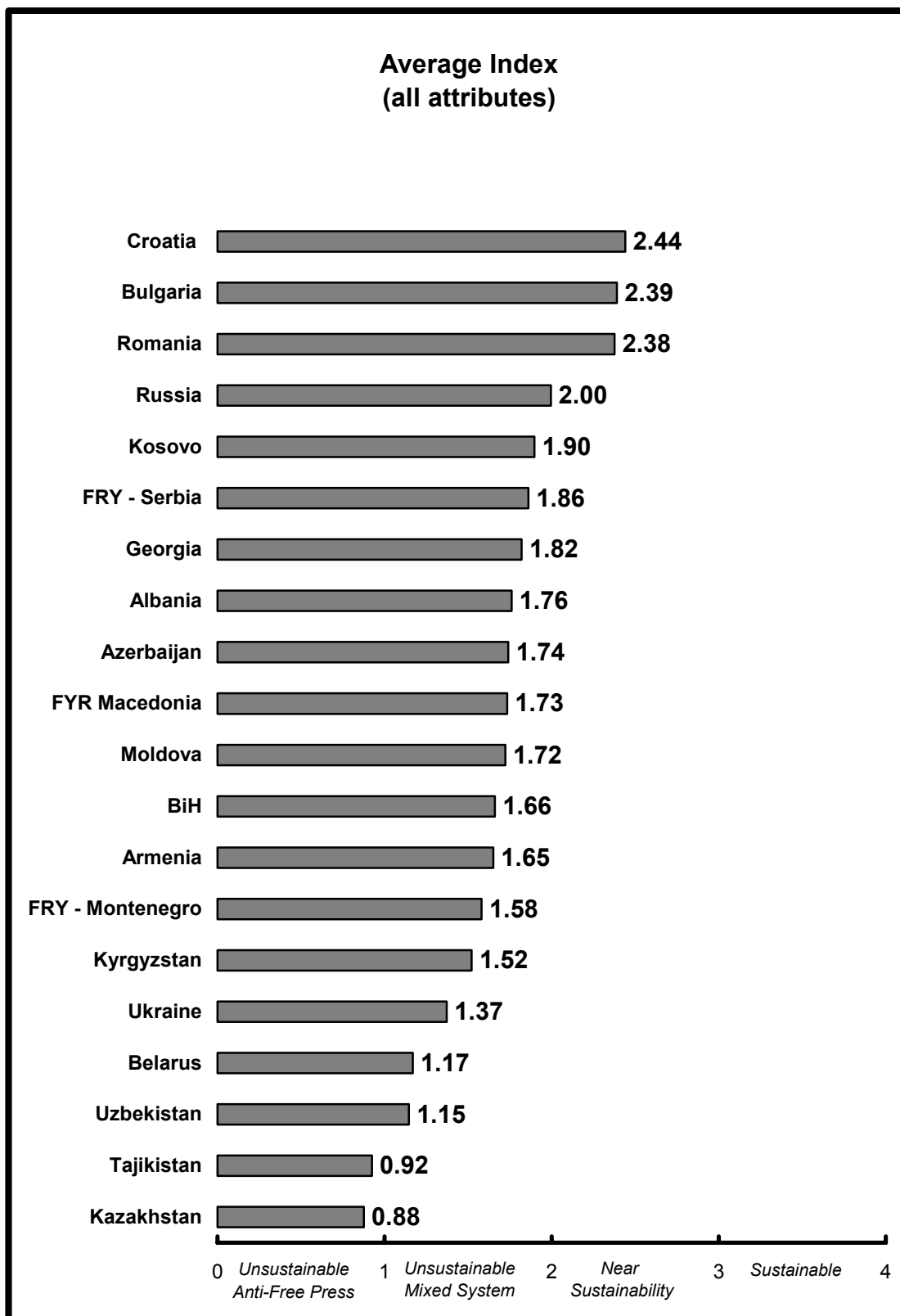
Lastly, the most negative development can be observed in the MSI results for the four Central Asian republics. All four countries demonstrate they currently have unsustainable, mixed systems on every attribute, illustrating a lack of progress in media development. Tajikistan and Kazakhstan consistently scored below one (unsustainable and anti-free press), suggesting the near total absence of success on any of the five sustainability attributes.² The overall results for the region suggest that government control of the media, as with society in general, is the root cause for many of the problems that lead to low levels of media sustainability. Central Asia thus exhibits many of the symptoms commonly seen in underdeveloped media systems such as poor legal protections for journalists, cautious editorial policies, and media businesses beholden to government interests. These symptoms derive from the governments' desire to control the flow of information.

Therefore, advances for independent media in Central Asia will depend on weakening the continual attempts of governments to control information. There will be no easy or quick solutions. Traditional methods such as training journalists and editors, improving business management of independent media, supporting legal reform, and developing supporting NGOs and associations will have a beneficial impact. However, true sustainability will require broad economic and political reform of these societies, a process independent media can help to encourage.

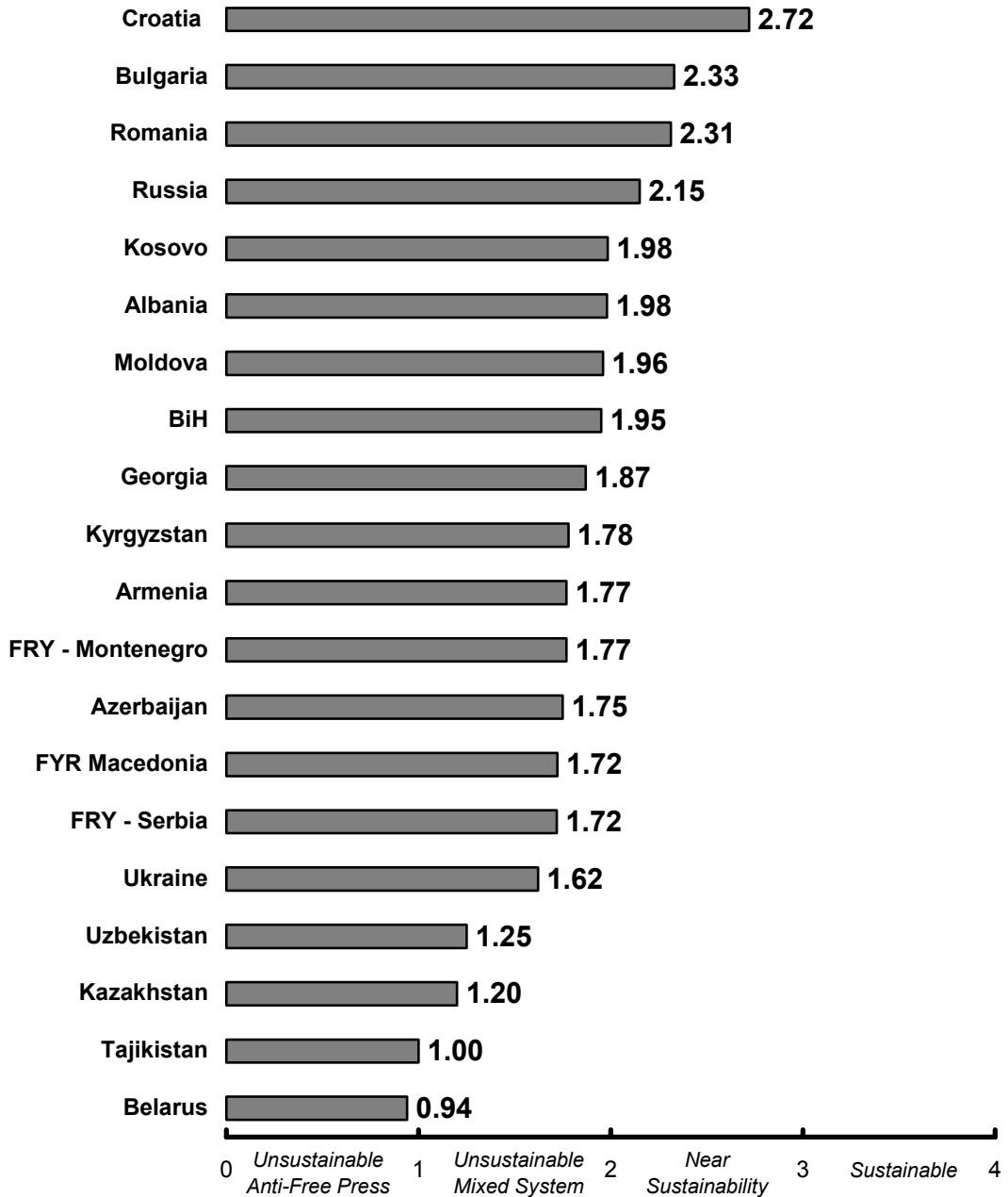
² Turkmenistan was not included in the Media Sustainability Index at the request of USAID.

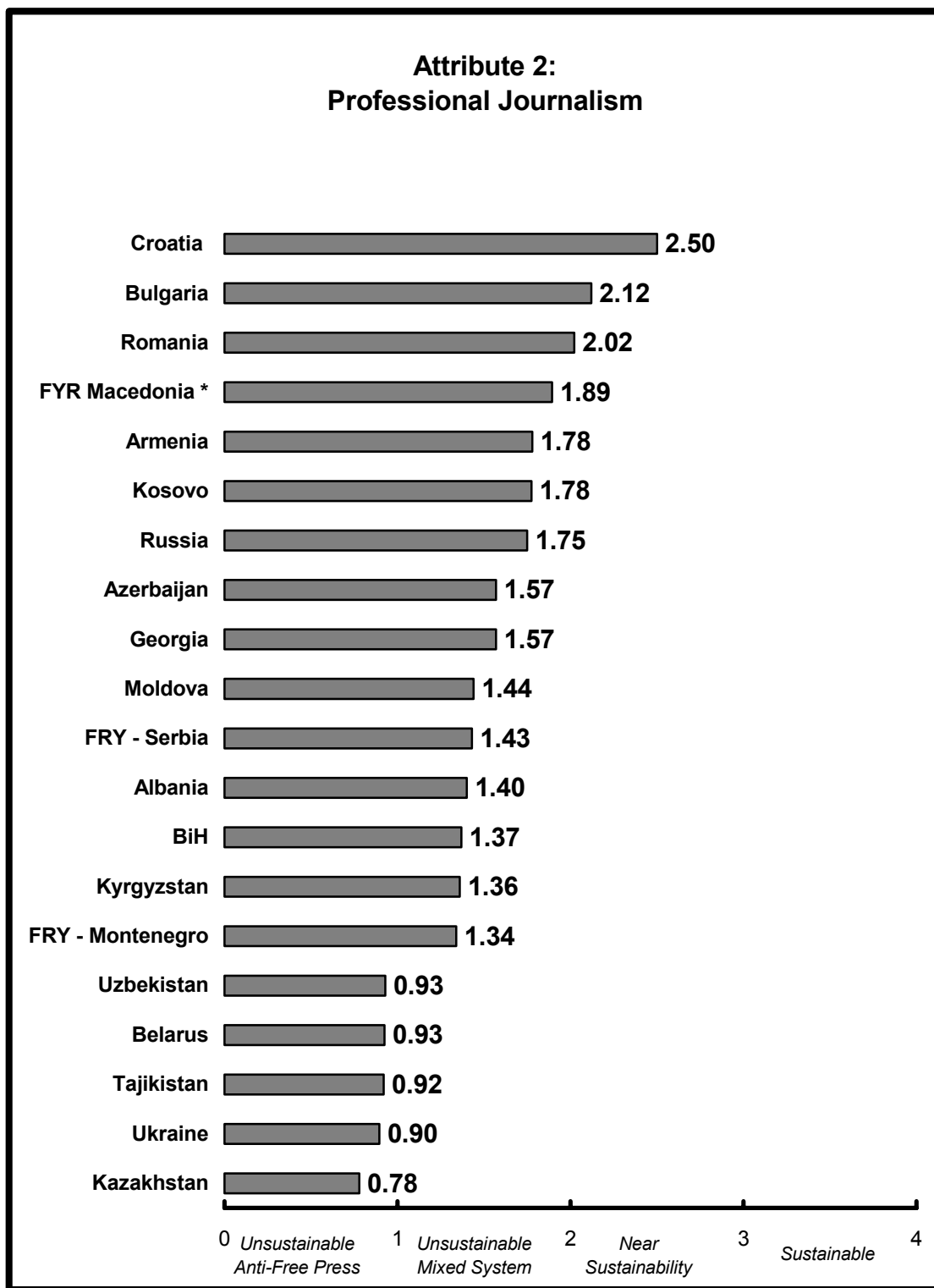


In sum, the Media Sustainability Index provides a picture that shows that the development of independent media proceeds in tandem with the development of free market economies and democratic systems. While the MSI did not study the relationship between these processes, it can be said that media is inextricably linked to free markets and democracies. Without the free flow of accurate information, citizens and policymakers cannot make informed political and economic choices. Without the free flow of information, citizens cannot exercise checks on the abuse of power. Without the free flow of information, businesses cannot make informed decisions that generate economic growth. Therefore, independent media serve not only as a barometer of the health of free markets and democratic processes, but also as vehicles to develop free markets and democracies.

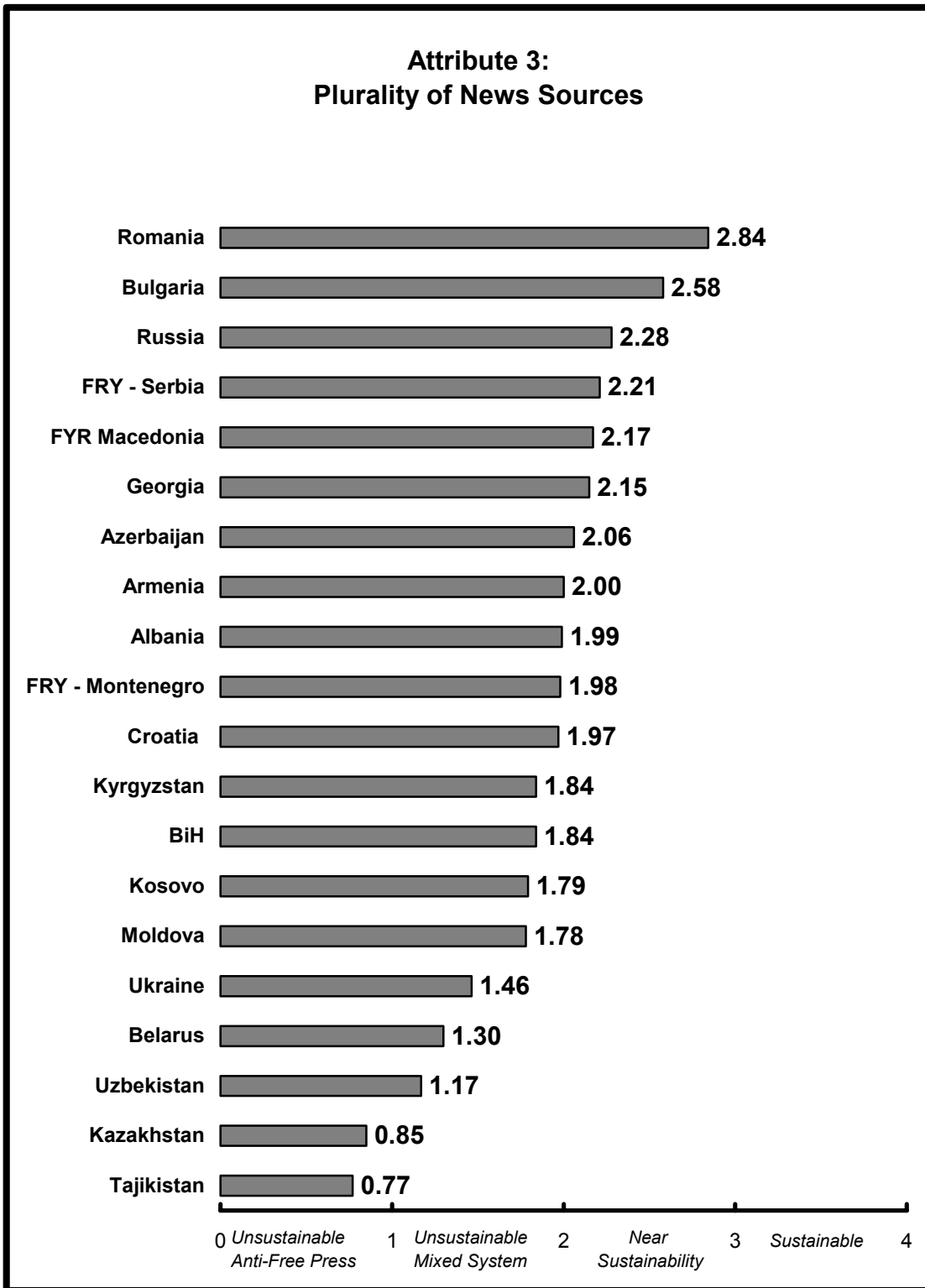


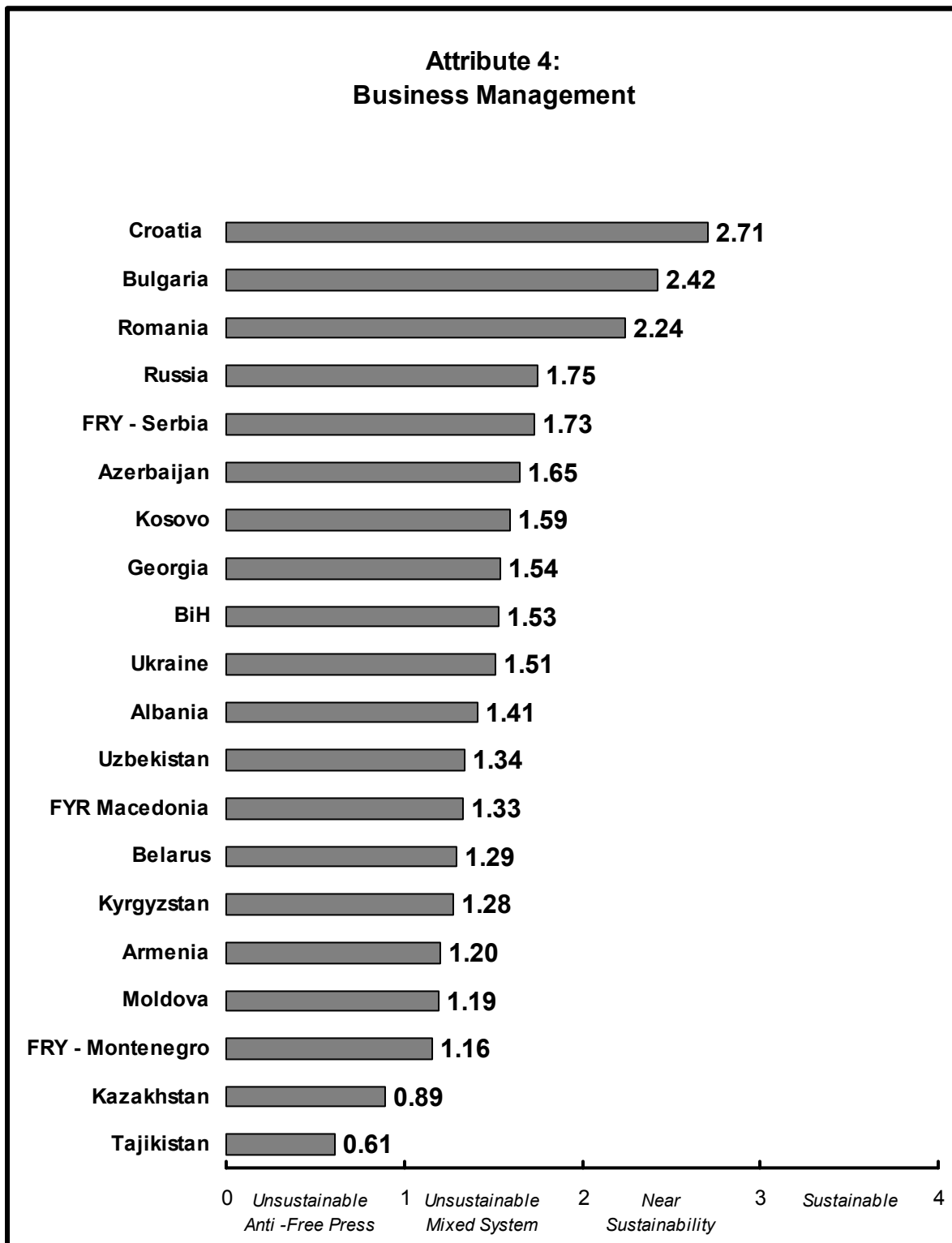
Attribute 1: Free Speech

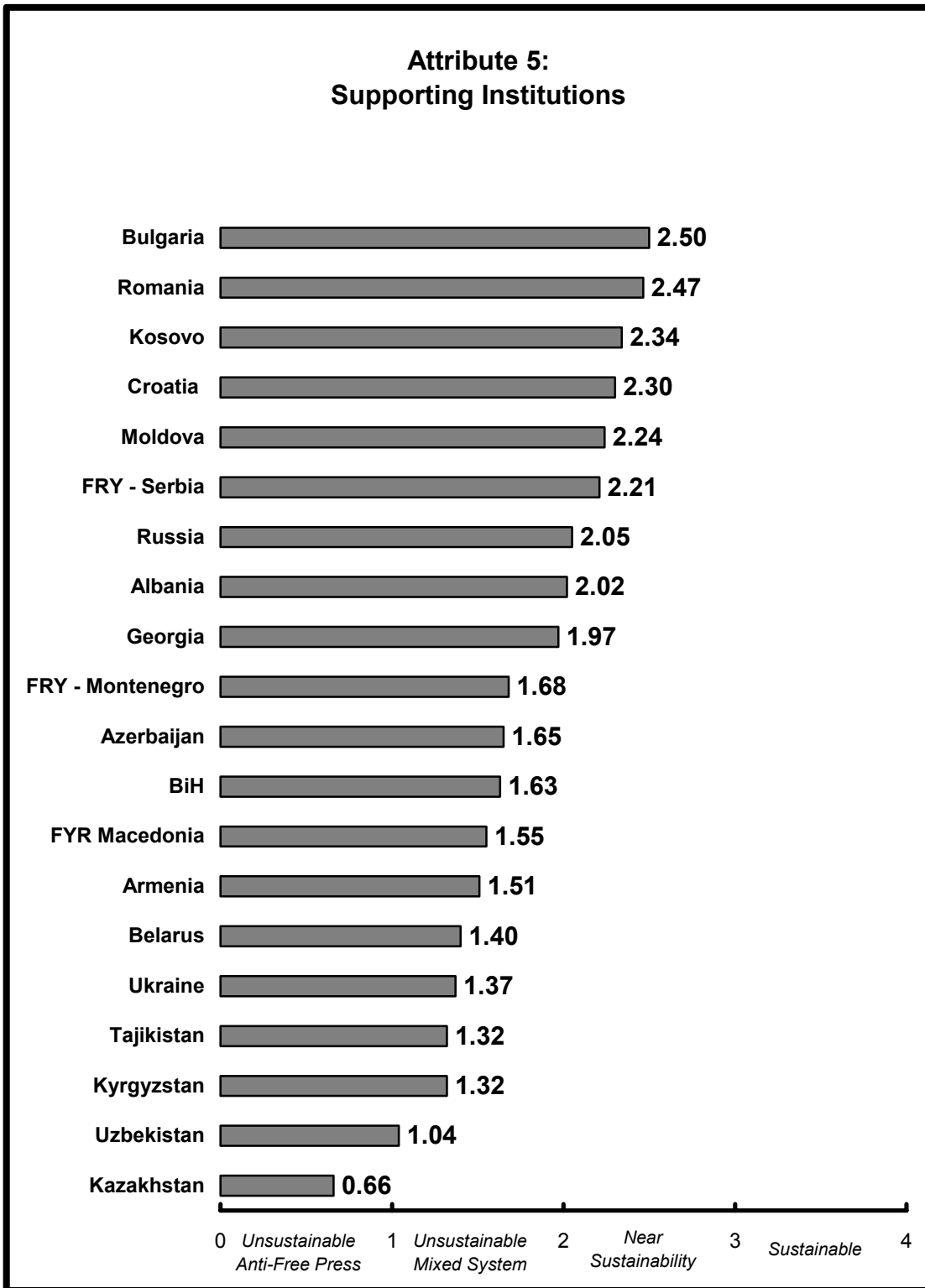




** Please see introduction on p.139 regarding significant changes in Professionalism since May 2001.
The rating above is based on May 2001 Research.*







Methodology

IREX prepared the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) in cooperation with USAID as a tool to assess the development of independent media systems over time and across countries. IREX staff, USAID, and other media development professionals contributed to the development of this assessment tool.

The MSI assesses five “attributes” of a successfully media system:

1. Legal norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information.
2. Journalism meets professional standards of quality.
3. Multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable and objective information.
4. Independent media are well-managed businesses, allowing editorial independence.
5. Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media.

These attributes were judged to be the most important aspects of a sustainable and professional independent media system and served as the criteria against which countries were rated. A score was attained for each attribute by rating seven to nine indicators, which determine how well a country meets that attribute. The attributes, indicators, and scoring system are presented below.

The scoring was done in two parts. First, a panel of experts was assembled in each country, drawn from representatives of local media, NGOs, professional associations, and international donors and media development implementers. Each country’s panel had a slightly different composition of this group, in some cases invited panelists did not attend.

The panel was provided with the attributes and indicators and an explanation of the scoring system. Panelists were asked to review individually. The panelists then assembled to discuss the attributes and indicators, and to come up with combined scores and analyses. The panel moderator, in most cases a host country media or NGO representative, prepared a written analysis of the discussion, which was subsequently edited by IREX representatives.

IREX in-country staff and Washington, DC media staff also reviewed the attributes and indicators, and scored the countries independently of the MSI panel. The panel scores and IREX scores were then averaged to obtain the final score presented in this publication. This method allowed the MSI scores to reflect both local media insiders’ views and the views of international media-development professionals.

I. Attributes and Indicators

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

Indicators
1. Legal and 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, and offended parties 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

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)

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 nonpartisan, 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

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

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

II. Scoring System

A. Indicator Scoring

Each indicator is scored using the following 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 changes 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.

B. Attribute and Overall Scoring

The averages of all the indicators are then averaged to obtain a single, overall score for each attribute. Attribute scores are averaged to provide an overall score for the country. IREX interprets the overall scores as follows:

3 and up - Sustainable and free independent media

2-3 - Independent media approaching sustainability

1-2 - Significant progress remains to be made; society and/or government not fully supportive

0-1 - Country meets few of indicators and government/society actively opposing changes