

MEDIA

SUSTAINABILITY

INDEX

2004



IREX

THE 2004 MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX (MSI) PANEL CONCLUDED THAT THERE WERE VIRTUALLY NO INDEPENDENT MEDIA IN UZBEKISTAN, WITH AN UNOFFICIAL BAN ON REGISTERING OUTLETS THAT MIGHT OFFER NEWS OR INFORMATION NOT FOLLOWING THE GOVERNMENT LINE.



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zbekistan, the most populous of the Central Asian republics with 26 million citizens, has only the appearance of a democratic state. There is a parliament, reformed as bicameral in December 2004, along with several political parties, a constitutional court, and mass media. But in reality, power is highly concentrated: President Islam

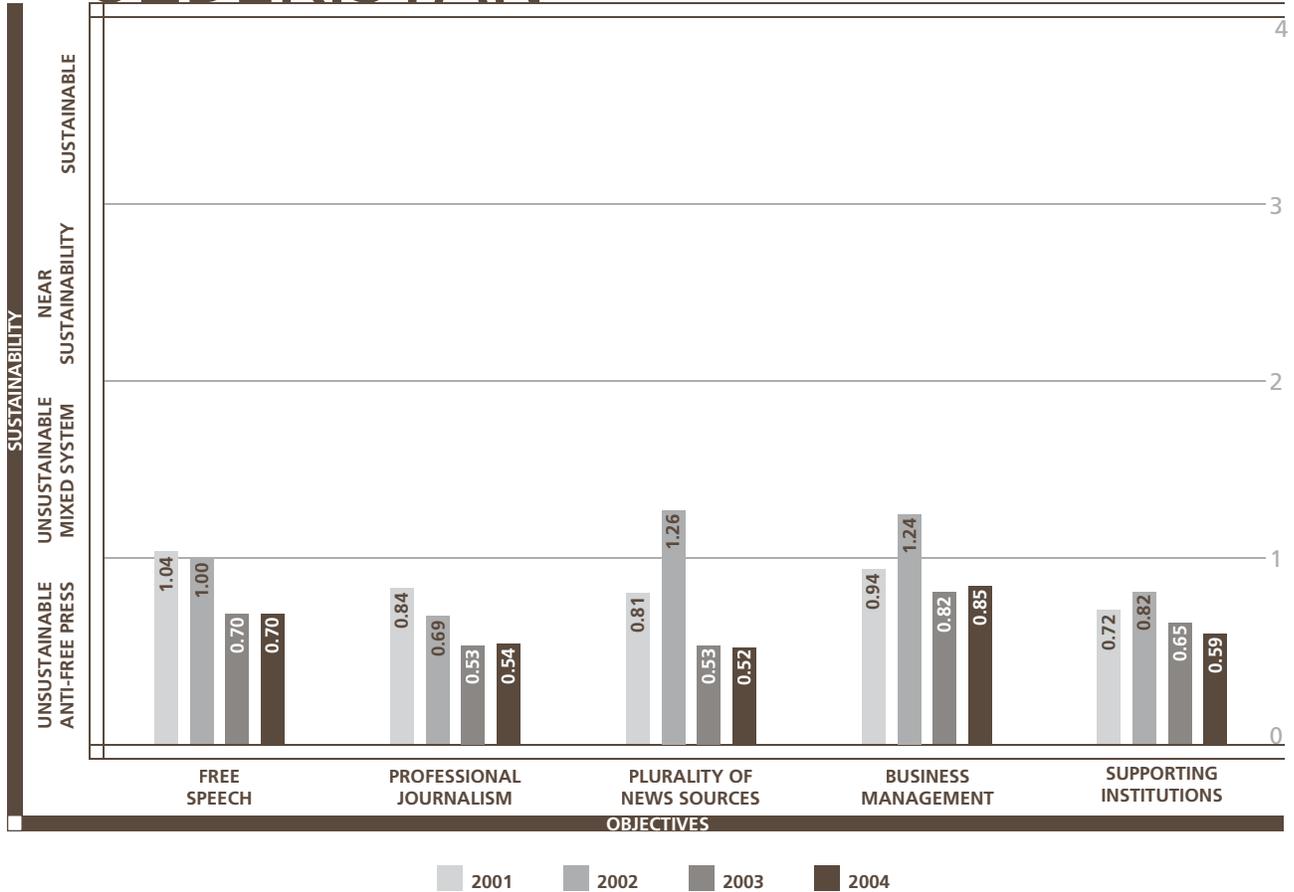
Karimov personally appoints officials from the rank of ministers down to the heads of the regional oblast administrations known as hokims. Political parties follow the same scenario, with five official parties established at the initiative of the president. Almost all sectors of the economy have been “privatized” by clans allied with the president. All the largest businesses belong to ranking officials and are subject to the direct oversight of the president. Travel restrictions, including with some neighboring countries, and a prohibitive levy on consumer goods imported by private entrepreneurs limit both investment and the growth of smaller businesses.

It appears the president aims to stay in power for as long as possible, and wants every government agency and the media to help. The 2004 Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel concluded that there were virtually no independent media in Uzbekistan, with an unofficial ban on registering outlets that might offer news or information not following the government line. Media, both state and private, serve government interests and exist in an environment of multilayered censorship and self-censorship. Despite the provision of the mass media law banning censorship, which is reinforced by the Constitution, the government strictly controls all information products.

With no professional standards supporting the media’s role in providing audiences with interesting and credible information, government newspapers are not popular and maintain their print run only by the mandatory subscriptions required of government organizations and agencies. The list of prohibited subjects is long, with border issues, child labor at cotton plantations, and migration just a sampling. Media can do little more than proclaim “Uzbekistan as a country with a great future.” As a result, journalists have few tools and little motivation to do better, and the public has lost interest in the media as a source of information,

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

UZBEKISTAN



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

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

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

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

increasingly turning to the sensationalized “yellow” press and entertainment programs. Only the Internet holds promise, with electronic editions offering some diversity of opinions and more objective information.

The 2004 MSI panel ranked Uzbekistan, with Belarus, as the countries with the least independent media among those assessed in Europe and Eurasia.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.70 / 4.00

Uzbekistan’s legal and social provisions should promote freedom of expression, but in practice the media are under strict control. The issuing and recall of licenses is completely politicized, determined only by whether a media outlet is providing information in support of the government. Crimes against journalists are not frequent or systematic, but this does not mean that journalists are well protected. Authorities pressure and intimidate journalists in ways that are more subtle or more difficult to prove, including selecting only journalists

Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information.

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

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

who have proven they are loyal to the authorities to attend briefings and press conferences.

The Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and press, and does not preclude establishment of independent media. Laws exist on mass media, protection of the professional activities of journalists, copyright, freedom of information, and related topics. But not only do the protections meeting international standards not work in practice, but they also are openly violated by the authorities. In addition, elements of the statutes limit the media. For example, the Law on Principles and Guarantees of Freedom of Information requires journalists to have the subject of their article approved. Although censorship has been abolished officially, Alisher Taksanov, a journalist from the *Times of Central Asia* in Tashkent, said provisions in the media law “set the legal basis for censorship by (media outlet) founders, and they use it.”

Theoretically, laws that do not conform to the Constitution and that violate the freedom of speech can be appealed to the constitutional court. In practice, however, appeals are not effective since the judges are appointed by the president. “The laws that are aimed at democratic development are not implemented

“The laws that are aimed at democratic development are not implemented due to the political will of the authorities, the interests of officials, and the attitudes of journalists and readers,” said Alo Khodjaev.

due to the political will of the authorities, the interests of officials, and the attitudes of journalists and readers,” said Alo Khodjaev, chief editor of the Tribuna website. “Therefore, legal norms and international standards are not complied with, and open expressions of protest are rare.” The Uzbek government also avoids the provisions of international treaties related to freedom of speech.

Some efforts to monitor free-speech violations are undertaken in conjunction with international media-support organizations, and Karim Bakhriev, deputy director of Internews in Uzbekistan, said 70 to 80 such infringements are identified monthly. “But the authorities try to ignore such data and suppress those who provide it. Information on the monitoring results posted on the organizations’ websites is blocked by the government, and the public has no access to it,” Bakhriev said. Corruption within the court system

makes challenging these violations very difficult, although journalists have won some suits.

The process of issuing broadcast licenses is not transparent. Licensing is in the hands of an interagency coordination commission comprised of representatives of the Uzbek Agency on Communication and Information, the Ministry of the Interior, the Council on National Security, the Press Agency, and one journalist.

"If necessary, the authorities can fire any journalist by accusing them of failing to meet professional standards," Alo Khodjaev said.

The process is thoroughly controlled by the government. Licenses are valid for only one year, and companies often start preparing for the next licensing process

immediately after obtaining a new permit. "This is the best way to keep people under constant control," said Taksanov. "When considering licensing documents, the members of the licensing committee always request security services to provide dossiers of people who have worked for or founded media outlets in order to approve candidates for editors. Only after this step do they decide on issuing a license, thus assuring the political loyalty of the participants."

Most of the television and radio stations experience problems during the licensing process. Tamara Prokopieva, director of Orbita TV in Angren, said her station paid approximately \$2,000 for a license in August but still did not have it by the end of the year. "A falsified document notified us of our failure to inspect metrological equipment, and the licensing process was suspended," she said. "Our transmitter was closed twice with no explanation from the Uzbekistani communications agency. People then began to help us defend ourselves by sending notes to the prime minister's office requesting the restoration of our broadcasting."

In terms of tax law, media have some preferential status compared with other businesses. For example, media do not pay the value-added tax (VAT), and the advertising tax is only 15 percent.

Libel is a criminal offense, and the criminal code has a provision concerning insult of the president. However, there are only a few examples of criminal cases, and most prosecutions of the media are according to the civil code. The panelists stated that government officials never bear responsibility for their actions to the public, as they report only to the president. However, Inera Safargaliyeva, chief editor of the Arena website, said:

"There are cases when journalists win lawsuits, and the number of successful lawsuits is increasing."

Crimes committed against journalists are not always punishable under the law because they are often perpetrated by the government. "Mostly these crimes are threats, harassment, and condemnation at official meetings and in official media," Khodjaev said. "I had to resign from the post of chief editor at Radio Grand after our founder was denied a license because of me. The government knowingly and cunningly uses all methods of oppressing the free press. Journalists are vulnerable, and there is no corporate solidarity."

Getting information is difficult for journalists. Tamara Prokopieva, director of Orbita TV in Angren, said, "Often ministries, agencies, and other government structures refer to the need to obtain clearance from higher government bodies. This is a waste of time, since eventually information becomes outdated. Information on the state budget or harvest is not available even for government media." Khodjaev said he was invited to the Foreign Affairs Ministry and interrogated about the source of information on salaries of diplomats that was published on his website. "They thought this information was not subject to disclosure," he said.

The MSI panelists said the government has tried to keep journalists silent about several specific issues, including the shutting down of the Open Society Institute in Uzbekistan and the decision by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, one of the largest investors in the country, to cease cooperation with the Uzbekistani leadership. Media regard elections as a partly closed topic, as evidenced during the December polling. According to the panelists, only 30 percent of Uzbekistanis turned out for the elections, but the government press reported 100 percent turnout.

Government media have more access to information, although they also have difficulties. Toshpulat Rakhmatullayev, a journalist and chairman of the Samarkand branch of the National Press Center of Uzbekistan, said: "Only government journalists are invited to the official events, while private media and Internet journalists are often left out." The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, selects only government journalists to attend its press conferences. Press secretaries at government ministries and agencies serve instead as "secret keepers."

"Media editors and staff depend on the authorities," said Khodjaev. "Often editors from party newspapers are appointed by the president's administration. Businessmen influence only the media that they own."

Large businesses do not have a balancing influence on government policy since they are mostly owned by government officials. Political parties are weak and only wield influence over small newspapers.”

Foreign programming is not restricted—so long as it conforms to the interests of the government. Entertainment shows are rebroadcast from Russian TV, which is preferred to local television by an overwhelming percentage of Uzbeks, but no politically oriented programs except for the “Vremya” news are aired in Uzbekistan. News from the neighboring republics is prohibited, and only a few media outlets will publish such information.

The only thing the authorities cannot restrict is Internet access, but sites that publish news about Uzbekistan often are blocked by Internet service providers at the government’s request, according to panel members. IREX and several other international organizations provide Internet access in almost all oblasts, but many journalists do not have the funds to make regular use of the Internet at work.

There are no restrictions on enrolling at university journalism programs or applying for media jobs. However, journalists without government accreditation can face problems gaining access to news conferences or official events. “If necessary, the authorities can fire any journalist by accusing them of failing to meet professional standards,” Khodjaev said. However, loyal journalists enjoy certain privileges such as international travel, awards, and even the chance to run for parliament.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.54 / 4.00

Media in Uzbekistan are not capable of promoting public discussion or assessing the policies and actions of the government. The poor professionalism among journalists results from both the lack of opportunity for journalists to gain and practice skills and the government’s control over information, according to the 2004 MSI panelists. There is no widely accepted ethics code, and media are filled with paid-for news articles and programming. On television, entertainment programs overshadow news programs, which must be cleared by the government. Further limiting the ability of journalists to inform citizens is the list of prohibited topics, the lack of specialized skills among reporters, and the out-of-date equipment at media outlets.

Verification of information is rare, too often sources

Journalism meets professional standards of quality.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

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

are not identified, and journalists’ opinions fill up news columns. Marfua Toktakhodjaeva, director of the Women’s Resource Center, gave the following assessment of journalists’ work: “There is no such thing as a plurality of opinions, alternative viewpoints, information on opposition members, or any viewpoint except the official one on domestic events, the economy, and so on. The government monopolizes commentary on

all important political events.”

Including alternative viewpoints is always risky in Uzbekistani media, and only a few representatives of the foreign media and in some cases local television

companies do work that approaches international standards regarding objectivity.

In 2004, the National Association of Electronic Media (NAESMI) approved an ethics code for broadcast journalists, but the MSI panelists said its benefits could not be seen. The Samarkand Press Center

“The public is not interested in serious events because of the one-sided presentation of the official viewpoint. There is one news program for every 10 entertainment shows at FM radio stations,” said Alisher Taksanov.

established its standards for journalists, and the Central Asia Media Support Center helped two newspapers, *Darakchi* in Tashkent and *Ikbol* in Andijan, draft their own documents. But violations of ethical norms are widespread. "Paid-for articles are published everywhere, and most journalists and media professionals accept gifts," said Alo Khodjaev, chief editor of the Tribuna website. "Management does nothing to stop it." Government agencies use their own tools to keep journalists in their pocket, including

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payments and opportunities to travel abroad.

Journalists are accustomed to fearing the authorities, and know they have few resources to protect themselves. Despite the official prohibition of censorship in 2002, self-censorship has become a way of self-preservation for editors and journalists. The Soviet-style censorship

structures were replaced by new ones in the form of "monitoring sections" that work for the government. The only difference is that censorship now is done after the fact: The editor can be fired for insufficient censorship. Most censorship is politically based, according to the MSI panel. Inera Safargaliyeva, chief editor of the Arena website, described one case: "A journalist's request to write an article about the well-known astronaut Salijan Sharipov, an ethnic Uzbek, was denied by the editor only because Sharipov is a Russian officer, and publication of the story could cause 'unpredictable' consequences."

Censorship in Uzbekistan extends to specific words, which cannot be mentioned or discussed, according to the MSI panel. Uzbekistani journalists are not free to cover corruption, or abuse of power in government ministries or the military. There are some unofficial limits on information that can be published on foreign debt and national currency reserves, as well as on neighboring Central Asian countries. Certain words are virtually prohibited, including ones meaning terrorist,

slavery, dictatorship, corruption, and poverty—except as they relate to other countries. Local and international security issues can be covered, as long as the coverage mirrors the official viewpoint.

Election coverage also faces limits. Aisulu Kurbanova, chief editor of Zamon.info in Tashkent, said that after publishing "information from an official source about the cost of elections in Uzbekistan, the existence of our newspaper was threatened. We have managed to keep our rights, but with great difficulty." At times, local media and Internet-based publications may have somewhat more latitude in coverage, according to one MSI panelist. Tamara Prokopieva, director of TV Orbita in Angren, said: "We publish information about protests against government policy, and there is no pressure from the authorities. For example, we may publish an article on why Angren businessmen disagree with a government decree."

Low salaries and low morale for journalists mean that many accept additional "rewards" for their work on written-to-order articles praising various companies. The average salary at a local media outlet is \$10 to \$15 per month. Journalists working on oblast media earn \$20 to \$25, and in the cities wages range from \$40 to \$120. Wages are generally higher at "yellow" press outlets. Staff turnover is high, and experienced journalists often start working as press secretaries or leave the country. Journalists may work multiple jobs to make ends meet.

Entertainment articles and programming dominate the media market. Alisher Taksanov, a journalist at the *Times of Central Asia*, said, "Entertainment programs constitute at least 70 percent of the total volume. The public is not interested in serious events because of the one-sided presentation of the official viewpoint. There is one news program for every 10 entertainment shows at FM radio stations." Uzbekistani media law does not dictate the balance between entertainment and news programming.

The technical capacity of the media, especially at the local level, could hardly be worse. Computers, photo equipment, recording equipment, and television cameras all are in short supply, even at state media. Panelists noted that there are few pictures in the media, and often newspapers use photographs taken from other sources. Regional printing presses use out-of-date equipment, and most local media travel long distances to find better printing facilities. Many outlets cannot afford to import equipment due to the high customs duties and only get good equipment when it is purchased through grants. Journalists also lack the means to transmit information in a timely manner

because few have cellular phones, often they have no transportation, and their old tape recorders do not allow for live transmission of reports.

There is little specialization of coverage due to personnel shortages, costs, and lack of skills.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.52 / 4.00

Despite Uzbekistan's economic woes, there has been an increase in the number of registered media outlets, from 412 14 years ago to 800 four years ago to 964 in 2004. However, this media growth in both Uzbek and Russian languages does not translate into a better-informed public. Not only are news sources unaffordable for many, but distribution does not reach remote rural locations and both state and private media are too tightly controlled by the government to fully inform their audiences.

In particular, information is less available to rural citizens who comprise a majority of the population. A major source of information is state television and radio. However, the number of television and radio

transmitters continues to decrease because of wear and tear and the lack of programs to replace them. Only 2 percent of the population can afford private print media, according to estimates by MSI panelists. Marfua Toktakhodjaeva, director of the Women's Resource Center, said, "The lack of information feeds rumors and fears," with local bazaars serving as more vibrant sources of information than the formal media.

There are no legal constraints on access to foreign media, but access is limited by government attempts to use whatever tools it can to set up an electronic "iron curtain." In 2004, Uzbekistan allowed the distribution of only two Russian newspapers, *Trud* and *Argumenty i Fakty*. Customs officials limit import of foreign publications, as does the Ministry of Culture. There is a list of newspapers that cannot be imported to or distributed in Uzbekistan. Internet sites carrying information about Uzbekistan are blocked at times, and retransmission of some channels is prohibited.

Marfua Toktakhodjaeva, director of the Women's Resource Center, said, "The lack of information feeds rumors and fears," with local bazaars serving as more vibrant sources of information than the formal media.

Information agencies are shut down, and this year the office of the international media training organization Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) was closed. "One may not publish materials from the blacklisted Russian and foreign media or even refer to them," said Inera Safargaliyeva, chief editor of the Arena website. These sources include the BBC, Reuters, Deutsche Welle, Agence France-Presse, IWPR, Centrasia, and Ozod Ovoz. In November 2004, the Moscow-based channel, TVS, quietly disappeared from most of the private cable television packages.

Rural residents, representing 60 to 80 percent of the population, receive their information mostly by radio. Many foreign stations are available on shortwave only, making Soviet-era radios very popular in rural regions where they provide access to Deutsche Welle, BBC, Russian Freedom Radio, and the Voice of Iran. Cable television companies are unwilling to extend their networks into outlying areas because the copper cables can be stolen, and the potential market is too poor.

There are no media allied with the unregistered opposition parties, including Erk, Birlik, Ozod

Multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable and objective news.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

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

Dehkanlar, and the Agrarian party. Virtually all private media also report from the government perspective. Inera Safargaliyeva, chief editor of the Arena site, said: "The government controls 51 percent of media. If we include media founded by commercial organizations that are also controlled by the state, this adds another 25 percent."

During 2004, bombings in the capital and parliamentary elections highlighted the effectiveness of efforts to suppress alternative viewpoints. However, there has

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been a rapid increase in the number of news and analytical websites that post news and commentary about Uzbekistan, with the number reaching about 30 by the end of 2004. "Printed pages of websites are highly popular, especially

during political campaigns," said Tamara Prokopieva, director of TV Orbita.

The staff and editors at the four news agencies—Uzbek Agency, Turkeston Press, Jahon (part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), and Karakalpak Agency—are under the strict control of the authorities. For example, at the Turkson Press information agency, the government owns a controlling share and the chief editor and other top officials are government appointees.

About half the television and radio stations produce their own news programs but are subject to questionable standards. Karim Bakhriev, deputy director of Internews in Uzbekistan, said, "News presented by state media is nothing but propaganda. For example, the program "Akhborot" covers government initiatives only. News programs by private companies must be cleared by the founders as well." Often these news programs are paid for, since this is the only way for editors to make money.

A long list of topics such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the environment are to be covered within certain boundaries. For example, it is generally prohibited to report on the low wages (less than \$20 per month) of schoolteachers, corruption at universities, delays in payment of salaries and pensions, and the dependence of the cotton industry on child labor. Discussion of the

controversial transition from a Cyrillic to Latin alphabet was largely absent.

The law allows for publishing minority-language media, but such newspapers have small circulation numbers and are distributed within the specific communities only. Several million Tajiks live in Uzbekistan, but the main Tajik newspaper, *Voice of Tajik*, publishes only 22,000 copies. The other, *Voice of Samarkand*, produces only a few thousand. No minority media have the ability to properly address problems such as education or cultural preservation, and such coverage could lead to conflict with the authorities. For the most part, journalists are left to praise the conditions for ethnic minorities in the country.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.85 / 4.00

There is no economic environment to foster the development of independent media businesses. Raising social and political issues is dangerous and unprofitable, whereas producing entertaining sensationalism is a better commercial bet. Overall, however, the advertising market is weak, and even government subsidies are low. Market research is only just starting, with few experts to carry it out and a high price tag attached to the results.

Independent media are well-managed businesses, allowing editorial independence.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

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

The printing industry is more developed than the media, with more than 900 printers in the country, all owned or controlled by the state but many of them not very modern. Alo Khodjaev, chief editor of the Tribuna website, explained, "Printing houses and distribution networks are efficient, but they pursue their own interests and not those of the media industry. I would say they practice a selective approach to printing."

Income for media comes from subsidies from founders, advertising revenues, grants from international organizations, and corporate sponsorship. Government newspapers are perhaps 80 percent reliant on subsidies, with only 20 percent of their income coming from advertising and circulation, according to MSI panel estimates. For commercial media, the ratio is in the range of 70 percent circulation and 30 percent advertising. However, these variations are not reflected in the quality of the publications because the outlets are so heavily controlled by the government regardless of their status as private or state owned, panelists said.

The advertising market is weak, especially in rural areas. There are several large advertising agencies owned by media-company owners who dictate where the advertising is placed. The newspapers *Trud*, *Tasvir*, *Optovik*, and *Prestige* have the largest agencies supplying them with ads. There are few successful businesses to advertise, however, and owners are afraid to attract the attention of tax officials by marketing their companies. Even in such a limited market, advertising may be refused for fear of official disapproval. Taksanov described how Avialeasing wanted to publish an article about aviation, but was refused because it competes with the state-owned airlines.

Only the sensationalist media are profitable, with higher circulation numbers resulting in more advertising revenue. The weekly *Darakchi* was offered as an example, selling 250,000 copies compared with the 50,000 circulated by *Khalk Suzi*, which is published by the parliament and the Cabinet.

Market research is very limited, is conducted spontaneously, and does not constitute part of a strategic plan, MSI panel members said. It is costly, and there is a shortage of trained professionals. In 2004, Internews conducted market research for the first time, rating nongovernmental companies in seven cities. Tamara Prokopieva, director of TV Orbita, said, "The results of this research allowed companies to evaluate the public interest on a variety of programs." There are no companies that can track the circulation of print media. State oblast newspapers hide their low circulation numbers to keep what advertisers they have from moving elsewhere.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Uzbekistan Objective Score: 0.59 / 4.00

A few formal professional organizations were created not to support the media but to promote government propaganda. Media interests are better protected by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), but these often have uncertain status. NAESMI was founded in 2004 and unites roughly 50 nongovernmental television and radio stations. Government appointees created the Creative Union of Journalists in 2004. The MSI panelists said these organizations were created by the authorities to hinder the rights and interests of non-state media.

In 2004, there was not a single case when these organizations protected journalists' rights. Tamara Prokopieva, director of TV Orbita, said, "For example, instead of protecting media interests by solving their problems and representing their interests within the government, the director of NAESMI is establishing a commercial organization that will create a television network." Journalists are forced to join NAESMI and the Creative Union of Journalists through various tactics, including the threat of withholding licenses, according to Alisher Taksanov, a journalist at the *Times of Central Asia*.

Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

A number of organizations, including the Committee for Freedom of Speech and Expression, the Union of Independent Journalists of Uzbekistan, Ozod Ovoz (Free Voice), and the Committee for the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of Journalists, were established by journalists. However, they are often unable to register officially. In 2004, the Committee for Freedom of Speech and Expression published articles on its website detailing infringement of journalists' rights and violations of freedom of speech.

NGOs that support journalists carry out their work in extremely difficult conditions and under constant government scrutiny. Karim Bakhriev, deputy director of Internews in Uzbekistan, noted that a court decision suspended his organization's activities for six months. The International Center for Journalists also faced

problems when trying to offer media training. However, these and other groups do manage to offer media workers some opportunities for professional development. IREX supports a media resource center in Namagan that provides technical resources, Internet access, and training

Tamara Prokopieva, director of TV Orbita, said, "Instead of protecting media interests by solving their problems and representing their interests within the government, the director of NAESMI is establishing a commercial organization that will create a television network."

workshops. Alo Khodjaev, chief editor of the Tribuna website, noted that media managers are often reluctant to send their employees for training because they are so short-staffed. Panelists felt trainings conducted by specialists from Russia and neighboring states were the most popular because of shared experiences and language.

Panelists noted that some government universities have attempted to update journalism education programs, but the curricula remain badly outdated and the resources limited. Study-abroad opportunities are very limited, and the government no longer supports them.

Nevertheless, journalists do find opportunities to develop their skills through various trainings conducted by local and international organizations.

In 2004, a government decree on the regulation of publishing activities set stricter registration

requirements for printing houses. As a result, Karim Bakhriev, deputy director of Internews in Uzbekistan, said, "The publishing house Ijod Dunesi that published Internews' collection Erking Suz (Free Word) was shut down." Television and radio transmitters are under the direct control of the government, and channel allocation is controlled by a special government-appointed commission. Print media are distributed by Matbuot Tartokuvchi (formerly Soyuzpechat), the central post office, and private distributors.

The Uzbekistani government, with the cooperation of Internet service providers, shuts down access to the Internet and blocks websites that publish alternative viewpoints. This censorship covers not only the websites of opposition parties, but also purely informational websites, including www.fergana.ru and the sites Eurasia, Arena, Svobodnaya Asia, Navigator II, and Ozod Uzbekistan (Free Uzbekistan).

Panel Participants

Alexander Hamagayev, editor, Tashkent International radio

Alisher Taksanov, journalist, *Times of Central Asia* newspaper, Tashkent

Alo Khodjaev, chief editor, Tribuna website (www.tribune.uz), Tashkent

Aisulu Kurbanova, chief editor, Zamon.info, Tashkent

Inera Safargaliyeva, chief editor, Arena website (www.freeuz.org); stringer, Russian service of radio "Freedom"; expert, Extreme Journalism Center, Tashkent

Karim Bakhriev, deputy director, Internews Uzbekistan, Tashkent

Tamara Prokopieva, director, TV Orbita, Angren

Toshpulat Rakhmatullayev, journalist, chairman, Samarkand branch of the National Press Center of Uzbekistan, Samarkand

Marfua Toktakhodjaeva, director, Women's Resource Center

Moderator

Elena Buldakova, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Observers

Mumtoz Abdurazzakova, regional director, IREX, Uzbekistan

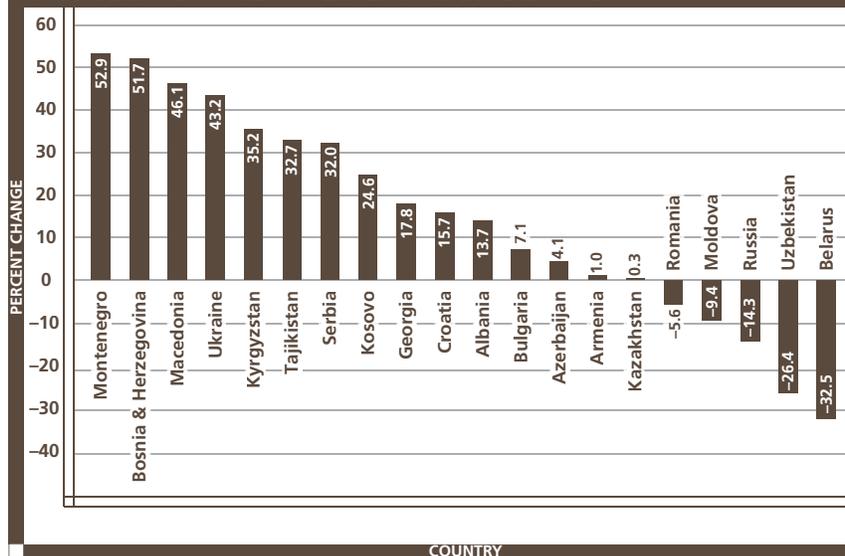
Julie Kim, political-economic officer, US Embassy

UZBEKISTAN AT A GLANCE

GENERAL (data from CIA World Factbook)

- **Population:** 26,410,416 (est. July 2004)
- **Capital city:** Tashkent
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Uzbeks 85%, Russians 5%, Tajiks 5%, Kazakhs 3%, Karakalpaks 2.5%, Tatars 1.5%
- **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 88% (mostly Sunnis), Eastern Orthodox 9%, other 3%
- **Languages (% of population):** Uzbek 74.3%, Russian 14.2%, Tajik 4.4%, other 7.1%
- **GDP:** US\$43.99 billion (est. 2003)
- **GDP per capita:** purchasing power parity: US\$1,700 (est. 2003)
- **Literacy rate (% of population):** 98% (According to unofficial data, however, it is much lower.)
- **President or top authority:** President Islam Karimov
- **Next scheduled elections:** Presidential December 2005

MSI AVERAGE SCORES—PERCENT CHANGE 2001–2004



INFORMATION IN MEDIA

- **Newspaper circulation statistics (total circulation and largest paper):** *Darakchi* (250,000 copies); *Prestige*, *Tasvir* (around 10,000 copies), *Molodej Uzbekistana*, *Narodnoe Slovo* (government paper), *Pravda Vostoka*
- **Broadcast ratings:** The most popular radio stations are Uzbegim, Eho doliny, Grand, Oriat FM, and Poitaht. The most popular television channels are Eshlar telekanali and UzTV-1 (covers all regions).

- **Number of print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** There are 968 registered media outlets, including 96 Internet providers. www.freeuz.org. There are 700 print media outlets and around 20 television and FM radio stations.
- **Number of Internet users:** No more than 3% of the population uses the Internet.
- **Names of news agencies:** Uzbek agency, Turkiston Press, Djahon, Karakalpak

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: UZBEKISTAN

