

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

2006/2007

**The Development
of Sustainable
Independent Media
in Europe and Eurasia**



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2006/2007

The Development of Sustainable Independent Media in Europe and Eurasia

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The World Bank noted positive changes in all economic indicators for Armenia during 2006, and the Armenian government signed a Millennium Challenge Corporation compact that will shape US assistance to the country for the next five years in a program focused on alleviating rural poverty.



ARMENIA

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Politics and the economy continued to dominate Armenian life as parliamentary elections approached in 2007 and the country marked 15 years of independence. Armenians faced steeply higher gas prices and a drop in the value of their currency against the US dollar, armed with an average monthly salary equivalent to \$138. On other hand, the gross domestic product (GDP) marked an unprecedented increase of 13 percent, primarily due to a nearly 42.3 percent increase in the size of the construction industry. The World Bank noted positive changes in all economic indicators for Armenia during 2006, and the Armenian government signed a Millennium Challenge Corporation compact that will shape US assistance to the country for the next five years in a program focused on alleviating rural poverty.

Against this backdrop, the Armenian media industry was little changed, according to the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel assessment. Its overall MSI ranking fell slightly—to 1.60 from 1.65—indicating a media sector not yet strong enough to ensure media freedom, journalistic professionalism, and a plurality of information sources for its people. The professional-journalism objective did show improvement, increasing to 1.80 from 1.66 the previous year. The plurality-of-news-sources objective rating also rose, to 1.81 from 1.69. However, some declines were recorded with regard to press freedom, the supporting institutions available to the media sector, and the management of media businesses.

MSI panelists attributed the business-management objective rating's decline to 1.34 from 1.50 to the availability of elections grants during what is referred to as the elections "harvest." Panelists from regions where only a few media outlets are able to survive as pure businesses noted that many still largely depend on grants and other supporting businesses. In the capital, Yerevan, panelists said that the majority of outlets are print media and that they rarely are solely businesses in Armenia. The supporting-institutions objective rating again demonstrated a steady decline, moving from 1.94 in 2004 to 1.49 for 2005 to 1.16 after 2006. Panelists noted that the nonexistence of trade associations and quality journalism degrees were still issues requiring redress.

In notable events for the media noted by the MSI panel, Armenia's first independent Television Audience Measurement diary system was introduced, generating Yerevan TV channel ratings data and making it available to the industry. Data certification and repeated assessments by an international accounting firm fostered increased advertiser confidence, established ratings as a common currency, and facilitated the adoption of audience-based management. This then boosted the television advertising market from 3 million to an estimated \$38 million, which, in turn, attracted a world leader in the production of ratings, AGB Nielsen, to install cutting-edge-technology "PeopleMeters" nationwide to provide national ratings. These steps led to the first independent and self-sustainable television ratings system for Armenia.

ARMENIA AT A GLANCE

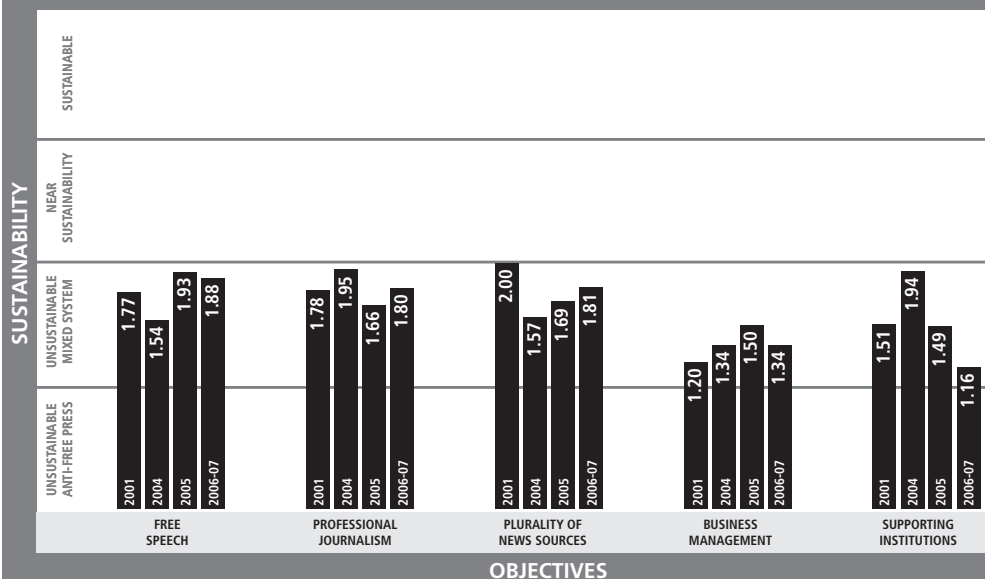
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 3.2 million
- > **Capital city:** Yerevan
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Armenian 97%, Yezidi 1.3%, Russian 0.5%, Assyrian 0.11%, Kurd 0.05%, Greek 0.04%, other 0.3% (Ukrainian, Jewish, Oud, etc.)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Armenian Apostolic 94% (the head of the church, the Catholicos of all Armenians), other (Armenian Catholic, Armenian Protestant, Russian Orthodox, Jewish, Greek Orthodox, Assyrian Nestorian)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Eastern Armenian 96% (official), Russian 2%, other (Western Armenian, English, French, German, Kurdish, Greek, Hebrew-Yiddish)
- > **GNI (2006-Atlas):** 5.799 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **GNI per capita (2006-PPP):** \$5,880 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **Literacy rate (% of population):** 98.3% (age 15 and above)
- > **President or top authority:** President Robert Kocharyan

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** 30 print outlets, 21 radio stations, 18 local television stations in Yerevan, 3 Russian relay channels (Channel 1, RTR, Kultura) and 1 relaying CNN, 31 television stations in regions
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** The average circulation for most popular newspapers is between 4,000 and 5,000 copies.
- > **Broadcast ratings:** The top three ranked stations are H1, Shant TV, and Armenia TV (1st channel)
- > **News agencies:** Armenpress, Noyan Tapan, Arka, Regnum, ArmInfo, Mediamax, Photolur, New Image, Spyur
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** \$38 million
- > **Number of Internet users:** 80,000
- Sources:**
 - > World Bank
 - > European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) Report on Armenia
 - > UNDP Human Development Report
 - > United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics
 - > International Monetary Fund

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: ARMENIA



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.

On the negative side, violence against journalists continued, including the attack on the editor of *Iravunk* newspaper, Hovhannes Galadjyan, and the threatening and abuse of a freelance journalist, Gagik Shamshian.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

Armenia Objective Score: 1.88/4.00

The MSI assessment found no significant changes among the indicators for this objective, with the exception of access to information, which panelists said has become more a norm than a rarity.

Legal norms protecting free speech correspond to internationally accepted standards, with the Republic of Armenia Constitution providing for free speech through Article 27 and the Law on Mass Media guaranteeing protection of the reporter's professional-duty performance. Article 164 of the Republic of Armenia Criminal Code provides for punishment, including for public officials, in case of hindrance to the lawful professional activities of reporters. "I have the impression that the laws are copied from elsewhere, other Western country laws," said Mnatsakan Harutyunyan, director of Hrazdan TV in Hrazdan.

However, there is no real freedom of speech in Armenia, panelists said, with the possible exception of print outlets that are "allowed" free speech because of their little impact due to low circulation. Crimes against journalists are

"I have the impression that the laws are copied from elsewhere, other Western country laws," said Mnatsakan Harutyunyan, director of Hrazdan TV in Hrazdan.

not rare, and with few exceptions the offenders escape punishment, panelists added. Armen Sakhlyan, president of Lori TV, brought two examples just from his media outlet: "We had our director, Narine Avetisyan, have his car tire torn with a knife on one occasion and windows broken on another." Both incidents followed critical reports and went unresolved by authorities. Panelists agreed that the violations do not cause public outrage and that their number has risen: the editor of *Iravunk* newspaper, Galadjyan, was attacked by two men outside his home, supposedly prompted by the paper's criticism of the authorities; Gagik Shamshyan, a freelance journalist reporting for *Aravot* and *Chorrord Ishkhanutyun*, was threatened and abused, and a reporter for *Zhamanak-Yerevan*, Arman Babajanyan, was sentenced to three and one-half years in prison for avoiding military service by means of falsifying documents. "Reporters are often prosecuted for activities not connected with their professional activity—other felonies are being 'discovered' with them," said Avetik Ishkhanyan, editor-in-chief of *Ditord* magazine and chairman of the Armenian Helsinki Committee.

All panelists rated the broadcast media licensing system low, agreeing that it is not fair, competitive, and/or apolitical. The members of the National Commission on Television and Radio (NCTR)—formed to regulate the broadcast sector, including issuance of broadcast licenses—are named by the president, which doesn't guarantee the NCTR's independence. The decisions made are neither transparent nor explained, panelists said. "Previously, the voting was done in front of you, and you could at least see the members' votes. Today, they just separate themselves in a private room and come up with the decisions," said Shushan Arevshatyan, director of Radio Van, Yerevan.

Libel remains a criminal offense under Articles 235 and 236 of the Criminal Code, and although this has not been enforced to date, the threat remains.

Panelists agreed that there are no special barriers to the public information, which is available and largely equally so for all media. In fact, panelists said access to information had gotten easier by the end of 2006, with officials aware of the Freedom of Information Act and cooperating willingly. In cases when journalists did not receive information, they

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

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing 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 offended parties 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.

“Reporters are often prosecuted for activities not connected with their professional activity—other felonies are being ‘discovered’ with them,” said Avetik Ishkhanyan

were able to apply to the courts successfully. These cases were not rated, and the courts agreed that the authorities were obligated to provide information access according to the law.

Panelists also agreed that access to international news and news sources is unrestricted. “There are many villages around Vanadzor that use satellite dishes as their source of TV broadcast,” said Haykaz Simikyan, president of *Vanadzoryan Khchankar* newspaper. Other panelists had additional examples, but they also noted that most were in the northern part of the country and that elsewhere poor villages do not present the same picture.

Finally, panelists were unanimous in that entry into the journalism profession is free and that the government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Armenia Objective Score: 1.80/4.00

MSI panelists continued to see weakness in Armenian journalism. They said the mass media are polarized and that there are very few independent media outlets. The majority of outlets are either pro-government or oppositional, with very few regularly offering multiple points of view from all sides of an issue. In fact, the panel members said, comments often are solicited primarily to provoke strong comments and make stories more provocative.

Information generally reflects the view of an outlet’s benefactor and generally is not checked against multiple sources—either because of bias or for lack of time in the rush to broadcast a story as quickly as possible. “To beat the competition, we have to air the story as fast as possible, even when there are few sources or just one, because if we don’t, the competitor will air it anyway, without consulting a wide variety of local and/or international sources, and we’ll lose to him our ratings,” one panelist said. “We can always come back at a later date and correct the information as needed.” However, there are certainly cases whereby not checking the facts is mere negligence, rather than time-pressure control. “I had to fire the reporter and the editor when they aired a story on one of the local businesses that happened to be

one of our advertisers, where they had a factual error which damaged the good name of the company, and we lost an advertiser,” said Margarita Minasyan, president of Tsayg TV in Gyumri, the second-largest city in Armenia.

Panelists agreed that the commercial content in the majority of outlets doesn’t prevail over the news reporting. They said some outlets mark outright that content is publicity, while others present it as news. Half of the outlets had developed their own ethical norms in written form and even have penalty provisions for violations. Others have their “unwritten codes.” There also are quite a few ethical standards developed by journalists’ organizations, most of which are in line with international standards but none of which are widely accepted or followed in Armenia. Violations of these ethic standards are not infrequent. One of the panelists, asking not to be quoted by name, described refraining from airing a story about an accident because one about another similar accident also had not been aired due to the involvement of an employee. “They (viewers) would spit on my face if I aired this one, because they would say ‘if you didn’t air that one, how could you air this one?’” Journalists generally do not accept payments in exchange for certain types of coverage, since most of the private outlets are tightly controlled by the owners and managers. However, there are cases when they accept favors and/or gifts in exchange for some favors, panelists said.

Journalists and editors do practice self-censorship, and sometimes even in cases where the authorities wouldn’t really care, panelists agreed. The fear of offending certain political circles or officials or the need to conform to certain business

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.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

interests do lead to widely spread self-censorship. “The devil is not so terrible as he is painted,” said Minasyan. “They [authorities] try you to see whether they can easily break your will by causing consternation,” she said, noting as an example her station’s broadcast of a film about an opposition-party leader irrespective of concerned calls not to air it.

Key events and most key issues are covered by journalists, panelists said. However there are many taboos as well, including security issues of local and international concern and the activities of business oligarchs. Niche reporting does exist, and although the need for improvement remains, panelists were increasingly optimistic about the prospects.

Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are not high and differ from sector to sector and from outlet to outlet. Higher pay is common at television stations, followed by radio stations and lastly print outlets. The difference is vast between the capital and the regions. Differentiation also must be made between the two large cities after Yerevan—Gyumri and Vanadzor—and the rest of the country, panelists said.

Entertainment programming doesn’t eclipse news and information programming. Rather, panelists said, each has its audiences, and entertainment programming is the main content of many outlets that capture ratings with widely watched shows about stars and sports.

Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are close to modern in the capital. However, panelists said that often this equipment is not fully used due to untrained personnel. “I remember an instance when the reporters from a capital television company could not use their super-modern satellite equipment to air live from a European city and had to go on air through a regular cell phone,” said one of the panelists, wishing to remain anonymous. The situation is completely different outside the capital, where the need is felt in all three stages—news gathering, producing, and distribution.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Armenia Objective Score: 1.81/4.00

Despite the relatively high number of the outlets, the Armenian public is not provided with varying views and news sources, MSI panelists said. Rather, there is a sort of “cloning.” “The same news is presented across the channels, and even the sequence of the stories is the same,” said Ishkhanyan, editor-in-chief of *Ditord* magazine and chairman of the Armenian Helsinki Committee. “Reporters follow instructions on which events to cover and which not to cover; therefore,

“To beat the competition, we have to air the story as fast as possible, even when there are few sources or just one, because if we don’t, the competitor will air it anyway, without consulting a wide variety of local and/or international sources, and we’ll lose to him our ratings,” one panelist said.

many events are not covered at all,” he said. “The picture is slightly different for newspapers, and they present more or less varied information. However, that’s due to their being so to speak ‘out of control’ because of their low print runs, which have little impact.”

Panelists agreed that people in the capital and the next two largest cities (Gyumri and Vanadzor) have greater access to media sources, compared with people in villages and smaller towns. Most rural areas are deprived of print media entirely. The situation is somewhat better with television, compared with radio, as there are relatively many local private television stations and several national channels, such as the public H1, Armenia, H2 and ALM, are relayed to 70–80 percent of the country. However, in the radio sector, there is only the newly formed Radio Hay network, which is said to be expanding to 20 stations nationwide but now is being limited to nine stations, with one additional private station in Gyumri and one in Vanadzor.

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.

Panelists said that often this equipment is not fully used due to untrained personnel. "I remember an instance when the reporters from a capital television company could not use their super-modern satellite equipment to air live from a European city and had to go on air through a regular cell phone."

Internet access remains at a low level even in the capital. Because of the low quality, most people only read online print publications. Those who do have better connections cannot afford to view online broadcast media because of extremely high prices per downloaded streams.

All panelists agreed that citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted and access to foreign news sources on the Internet is not blocked by the government. It is legal to listen to foreign broadcasts and read foreign news. Foreign print editions, other than Russian-language ones, are available only in selected places, and their affordability is a challenge. However, many Russian newspapers are available and relatively affordable.

Panelists also agreed that the public media throughout the country are not open to alternative views and comments. The only exception, they said, is during the pre-election period, when the public media try to look balanced because of numerous international monitoring initiatives. Interestingly, panelists noted that the public media fill a gap not filled by commercial broadcasters—namely, they go far beyond the level of questionable language and content some consider closer to obscene than that aired on commercial stations.

All of the panelists agreed that independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media and that there is no selectivity on their side as to the distribution of news. The services are affordable and in some cases even free of charge, and they are used by media outlets and cited as sources for the information presented.

Many private broadcast media, both local and national, produce their own news programming. However, it does not significantly differ from that produced by public media. Their ownership or affiliation to political, business, or other interests doubtlessly affects the type of news produced, panelists said. "All people know who factually owns which channels, or which channels are owned by which forces and/or people. However, it doesn't mean that the official ownership is transparent," said

Ishkhanyan, editor-in-chief of *Ditord* magazine and chairman of the Armenian Helsinki Committee.

Panelists noted the effect of the law that ostensibly prohibits political parties from owning television outlets. Some cited Yerkir Media as controlled by the Dashnakcutyun Party, ALM as factually controlled by People's Party and its leader Tigran Karapetyan, and so forth. The law also bars one entity from owning multiple channels, although panelists said this is often circumvented in practice. With regard to ownership transparency, Sara Petrossyan, a reporter from the Association of Investigative Journalists, said: "It's not only that they are not transparent officially, but also that the authorities won't let an uncontrolled stranger own a TV outlet, or won't let an owner abandon or sell his station voluntarily. It again has to appear in the hands of such people that are under [authority] control."

Journalists writing about national minority issues are not harassed, and minority-language media do exist and are legal. However, such media are mainly distributed among the representatives of those minority groups solely. Arevshatyan, director of Radio Van, said that the law requires broadcasts be in Armenian, with the exception of programs designed for national minorities. "We use this clause for airing our Russian-language programs, but we constantly have all kinds of problems with the Language Inspection," the panelist said.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Armenia Objective Score: 1.34/4.00

All panelists agreed that few media outlets operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses. Media face significant distribution problems, MSI panelists said, and only recently has market research been introduced for television.

Among the industries serving the media sector, printing facilities, concentrated in the capital except for those in Gyumri and Vanadzor, are private, not subsidized by the state, and could be said to operate as profit-generating businesses. Distribution firms are neither sufficient nor efficient in supporting the media, however, and pose a significant challenge, panelists said.

There is one major press distribution agency, Haymamul, the functioning of which panelists did not rate as efficient; the only other option is Haypost, the post office administration. Print outlets try to find their own ways of distribution. "Haymamul sells only 25 percent of our newspapers, and another 25 percent is sold by Haypost," said Simikyan, director of *Vanadzoryan Khchankar*. "For the rest of the copies we have developed our own mechanisms. For example,

we sell around 1,000 copies in regular food stores. If you sell through only one distributor, you are badly dependent on him and he can dictate you his conditions. But we have reached such a state that they turn to us to distribute our paper so that they can also have their profit from selling our newspaper." The monopoly distribution agency owes money to all of the newspapers and "if tomorrow it goes bankrupt in the court, all of the newspapers will go bankrupt," said Petrossyan, from the Association of Investigative Journalists. "Few Yerevan newspapers also have made such attempts (not to distribute through Haymamul) every now and then, but they all failed." Another panelist said, "We try to solve the distribution-options problem by posting an announcement to invite individual salespeople, and there have been cases when our salespeople were just beaten," said Anna Satyan, a reporter for the Russian-language newspaper *Novoye Vremya*.

The financing of private media actually depends on the type of the media and the content, panelists said. The revenues of television guides and classified-ad newspapers come mostly from print copy sales and advertising. Other print outlets must depend on other sources, such as grants, government subsidies, political funding, or oligarchs' support, because they cannot survive by solely copy or ad sales due to low print runs. For FM radio stations, the revenues come from advertising airtime sales, sponsorships, and in-house production studios where they produce ads and, in some cases, other programming. "In our station, the breakdown is as follows: 25–30 percent come from ad sales; 20–30 percent from production of ads for ad agencies, production of programming for stations in Moscow, Kazan, Saint Petersburg, Kiev, airtime sales (commercial programming); and around 10–15 percent are grants," said Arevshatyan, director of Radio Van, Yerevan. With the rise of the advertising market, many television stations

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can get revenues from ads, sponsorship and production of commercial films and commercial, in addition to other benefactor sources. "For example, our station revenue from advertising totaled to 45 percent during the year 2006, commercial films and ads produced in our production studio account for another 20 percent, and the rest is announcements, airtime commercial sales, and so on," said Sakhlyan, president of Lori TV in Vanadzor.

Panelists agreed that advertising quality in Armenia is quite low. "Armenia is perhaps the only post-Soviet country among CIS where there are no advertising festivals or contests conducted," said Arevshatyan from Radio Van. "The quality of ads is often influenced by the advertiser's taste," said Harutyunyan, director of Hrazdan TV in Hrazdan. Arevshatyan agreed but contended that they have found the solution for that: "I tell them we can place the ad the way you wanted it to be produced, but you'll see that it will have little impact, and if we do it our way, the sales will go up significantly. And it happens exactly that way, so they eventually yield to ours." Ad agencies work with outlets, but mostly with the ones in the capital and the two largest cities and almost exclusively with broadcast outlets. In the capital, ads take up a large portion of broadcast programs, and some prime-time shows include close to 30 minutes of ads in an hour, instead of the 10 allowed by law, panelists said. Some programs lasting 20 minutes have 10 minutes of ads in between.

Panelists noted that ad revenue as a percentage of total revenue is not in line with widely accepted international standards at commercial outlets, and the worst case is the print outlets, where the main source is subscription and distribution rather than advertising.

Private television stations do not receive government subsidies, but newspapers do, although panelists said their content is not heavily influenced by this. The sums are relatively low, though not insignificant in Armenia.

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.

With regard to ownership transparency, Sara Petrossyan, a reporter from the Association of Investigative Journalists, said: "It's not only that they are not transparent officially, but also that the authorities won't let an uncontrolled stranger own a TV outlet, or won't let an owner abandon or sell his station voluntarily. It again has to appear in the hands of such people that are under [authority] control."

In most regions, market research has not been conducted. In the capital, television ratings are produced by AGB Nielsen, which was introduced under a program of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) implemented by IREX. Circulation figures, by contrast, are available only from the newspapers themselves and are not independently reviewed.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Armenia Objective Score: 1.16/4.00

Little changed during the year with respect to the trade associations that represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services, the MSI panel concluded.

There are professional associations that work to protect journalists' rights, but the panelists agreed that their help is

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 in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

limited. "Other than using their space for press conferences, I wouldn't say there's much assistance from them," said Sakhlyan from Lori TV, Vanadzor.

There also are nongovernmental organizations that work in cooperation with media outlets to support free speech and media independence to the extent possible. These organizations provide legal assistance to the media outlets, get involved in reviewing legislative changes on media, and try to serve as watchdogs.

The situation with quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience remains poor. There are relatively many institutions, state and private, offering journalism degrees, but the quality of the programs is considered extremely low across the board. Young people are not prepared during the four to five years of study to enter the profession upon graduation, and the majority of them cannot put together basic stories when hired by media outlets, panelists said. "Graduates that have just left the school come to us, and they don't know even basic things; they don't know anything at all," said Arevshatyan from Radio Van. "We have to train them at our stations for at least another year after graduating [before they can produce material fit to be broadcast]," said Harutyunyan from Hrazdan TV.

Short-term training opportunities for practicing media professionals are quite accessible and are, for the most part, set up by international, rather than local, organizations. Most are free. IREX, through the Core Media Support Program for Armenia supported by USAID, extends an ongoing training opportunity for practicing media professionals through its workshops. On-site consultancies also are offered to all media outlet departments, including editorial, advertising, programming, marketing, and business management.

Panelists agreed that the sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands and not restricted and are managed as profit-making businesses. "I have my printing house, and we print around 13–14 newspapers," said Simikyan, director of *Vanadzoryan Khchankar* newspaper and its affiliated press. "Many of them have large amounts of outstanding payables, and I told them, 'Let me get this right—is your sponsor the mayor or the head of the marz administration, or am I? If I am, then at least put my name on your paper as the sponsor.'"

Similar to the previous year's MSI, panelists again agreed that channels of media distribution are not apolitical. Access to the Internet it is not controlled by the government. One positive change has taken place: the Commission for Public Services of Armenia limited the monopoly of ArmenTel for Internet services, and, according to the changes to its license, the company no longer will have a monopoly for transfer of the Internet data and international services for voice transmission.

Panel Participants

Mnatsakan Harutyunyan, President, Chief Editor, Hrazdan TV, Hrazdan

Karen Arshakyan, President, Chief Editor, Fortuna TV, Stepanavan

Arevhat Amiryan, Editor-in-Chief, *Vorotan* newspaper, Sisian

Anna Satyan, Reporter, *Novoye Vremya* newspaper, Yerevan

Shushan Arevshatyan, Director, Radio Van, Yerevan

Margarita Minasyan, Director, Tsayg TV, Gyumri

Armen Sakhlyan, President, Lori TV, Vanadzor

Haykaz Simikyan, Director, *Vanadzoryan Khchankar*, Vanadzor

Avetik Ishkhanyan, Editor-in-Chief, *Ditord* magazine; Chairman, Armenian Helsinki Committee, Yerevan

Sara Petrosyan, Reporter, Association of Investigative Journalists, Yerevan

Moderator

Artashes Parsadanyan, Deputy Chief of Party/Media Development Division, IREX, Core Media Support Program for Armenia