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KAZAKHSTAN

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Media in Kazakhstan suffered some disappointments in 2008, and old challenges and obstacles continue to hamper its performance. Several legal changes had been anticipated, and in a promising development, were written with input from media members and civil society. The changes would have liberalized media regulation and established the groundwork for future development of the sector. But ultimately, the proposed new laws were ignored by Parliament and replaced with proposed amendments to the existing law.

Severe political pressure affected both the operations and reporting by independent media. The government persists in trying to limit citizen access to opposition and independent media, with the result that it controls perceptions of reality to a degree. Society and government, especially in the regions, do not value freedom of the press.

However, some positive developments occurred, which is reflected in the MSI scores. Committed independent media outlets and supporting NGOs continued to push the media development and freedom of the press agenda. Thanks to more savvy media lawyers, media outlets are sometimes victorious in their court cases for libel or enforcement of freedom of information provisions. Training initiatives that promote better journalism and management practices are valued by media outlets and are in demand by journalists. More and more, market principles are being applied to management of media.

For the time being, Kazakh media has limited progress upon which to build. While all five objectives scored higher, none of the objectives attained a score of 2.00. Most of the improvement was observed in Objectives 2 and 4, professional journalism and business management, which increased by 0.60 and 0.51, respectively. The lingering problems will no doubt pose a significant challenge in the years to come, and the progress to date could be reversed with relative ease by the government, should it choose to do so.

KAZAKHSTAN AT A GLANCE

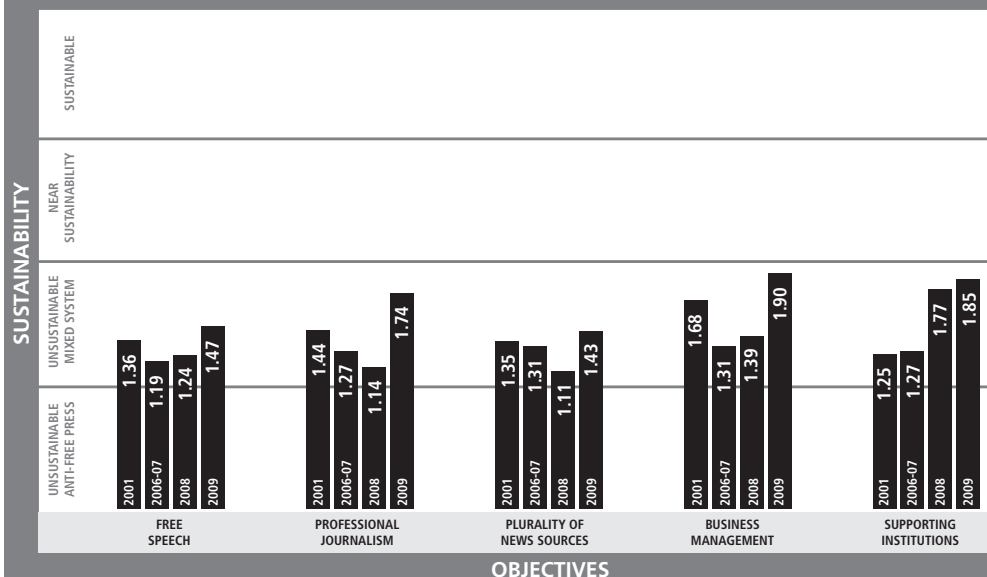
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 15,340,533 (July 2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Astana
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Kazakh 53.4%, Russian 30%, Ukrainian 3.7%, Uzbek 2.5%, German 2.4%, Tatar 1.7%, Uygur 1.4%, other 4.9% (1999 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 47%, Russian Orthodox 44%, Protestant 2%, other 7% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Kazakh 64.4%, Russian (official) 95% (2001 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2007-Atlas):** \$87.28 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **GNI per capita (2007-PPP):** \$9,700 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **Literacy rate:** 99.5% (male 99.8%, female 99.3%) (1999 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Nursultan A. Nazarbayev (since December 1, 1991)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 937 total, 5 main daily papers, 6 other main weeklies; Radio: 4 main stations, over 40 total; Television Stations: 14 local cable networks
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three: *Vremja* (private, Russian language), *Karavan* (private, Russian language)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top four television stations: Khabar TV, Kasakh TV (Kazakhstan 1), KTK (Kazakh Commercial TV), El-Arna
- > **News agencies:** Kazinform (state-owned), Interfax Kazakhstan, KazTAG, Kazakhstan Today
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** \$60 million (2007, Video International Analytical Center)
- > **Internet usage:** 1,901,000 (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: KAZAKHSTAN



Annual scores for 2002 through 2005 are available online at http://www.irex.org/programs/MSI_EUR/archive.asp

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.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Kazakhstan Objective Score: 1.47

Objective 1 showed modest improvement compared to last year, but freedom of speech still languishes in the lower half of what the MSI scoring system defines as an “unsustainable, mixed system.” Gains were recorded in indicators 1 (legal framework), 2 (broadcast licensing), 4 (attacks on journalists), 5 (legal preferences for, and guaranteed editorial independence of, state media), and 6 (libel laws). None of these improvements pushed the indicator scores above the objective average of 1.47; indicators 2 and 6, in fact, scored three-quarters of a point lower. Only indicators 8 and 9, media access to international news sources and free entry into the journalism profession, scored well above the overall objective score.

Kazakhstan’s law on the media has been repeatedly amended, mainly to abolish repressive amendments made in 2006. In January 2008, the government rejected a liberal bill mostly authored by NGOs; it was withdrawn from Parliament without being considered. The government announced that instead, it would start working on amendments to the existing law together with civil society. The Ministry of Culture and Information (MCI) led the work on the amendments, with advice from a working group that included representatives from six NGOs, four of whom were the authors of the previous bill. On December 10, 2008, the new changes were outlined.

The changes approved by the Mazhilis (the lower house of Parliament) were very controversial. On the one hand, they are positive and symbolic moves by the authorities just before the country becomes OSCE president.¹ On the other hand, media members feel deceived, as they had united and lobbied for the legal framework to be liberalized. No civil society representatives, nor members of the MCI advisory group, were allowed to participate in discussion of the amendments. A whole raft of proposals from the working group members was ignored. When discussing innovations in early December 2008, Parliament demonstrated an uncommon efficiency, as it speedily discussed and approved amendments to the law in two readings.²

A large number of NGOs asked the Senate to send back the bill approved by the Mazhilis to be amended. At the same time, the authorities published an open letter from 35 NGOs

supporting the most liberal and progressive amendments to the law on the media. Seitkazy Mataev, the chairperson of the Kazakh Journalists Union Board of Directors, noted that the majority of these organizations are not linked to the media and some of them are perceived as loyal to the government.

Media professionals have expressed disappointment because it seemed in September and October that the dialogue with MCI would lead to improvements. After the hasty approval of the imperfect amendments by the Mazhilis, it has become clear these efforts were manipulative and insubstantial.

Although the state often declares its adherence to democratic values and liberal ideology in its rhetoric, there are no tools in the legal framework that guarantee freedom of speech in practice. Legislation regulating the media, and journalists in particular, are among the strictest in the former states of the USSR.³ For example, the criminal code contains six articles protecting the honor and dignity of people, depending on their position. The code on administrative offenses names more than 50 separate offenses that can lead to a media outlet being suspended, closed down, or having their print runs seized. This includes such minor offenses as not submitting control and obligatory copies on time and violating the procedure for publishing circulation data.

A number of laws on national security and the fight against extremism allow the authorities to interpret and restrict the freedom of speech quite arbitrarily, justifying their actions as benefiting the government. “Currently, government interests override the public interest,” said Yevgeniy Zhovtis, director of the Kazakhstan International Bureau of Human Rights and the Rule of Law and well-known human rights activist.

The courts are not free, as is made clear by international organizations’ evaluations⁴ made in 2008. Panelists said that in court proceedings involving journalists, government employees are regarded as innocent, and therefore favored regardless of whether they are plaintiffs or defendants.

In general, Kazakh society is apathetic, although the popularity of opposition newspapers shows that Kazakhs prefer to have a plurality of media. Protecting freedom of speech is still perceived as a specific problem for a narrow professional group of journalists. In 2008, there were multiple incidents involving non-government newspapers, such as *Almaty Info* and *Taszhargan*, but the community did not defend the journalists. The majority of citizens distrust journalists and the media and think they are all representatives of the “yellow corrupt” press.

¹ The Way to Europe State Program was specially developed to cover Kazakhstan’s presidency of the OSCE in 2010 and it changes some legislation

² A clause-by-clause comparison of the changes in the law on the media can be found at www.izdatel.kz.

³ <http://www.medialaw.kz/index.php?r=1&c=3076>

⁴ In particular, the OSCE evaluation of the Freedom from Torture Program was discussed

According to panelists' assessments, controlling licenses for broadcast media permits officials to abuse their positions and exert unseen censorship. Panelists said that successful licensing results depend on money and the political situation. In 2008, the Committee for Issuing Frequencies once again relied on old stratagems and committed numerous violations of the tender rules. It gave 18 frequencies in the country's key cities to Era Television Company, a private entity. As listed below, panelists noted several facts and details of how the tenders were run.

1. In early July, MCI officials assured civil society and business associations' representatives (including panelist Sholpan Zhaksykbayeva, executive director of the Kazakh Television and Radio Broadcasters' National Association) that the tender would not be held before autumn. However, a tender announcement appeared in the press later in July, stating that documents had to be submitted by August 12.

2. Four tenders were submitted, and one of them (from the Tandem Radio Company in Aktau) was disallowed because it had submitted an incomplete package of documents. Two other companies (TV TOO from Kostanai; and Atyrau Regional Television and Radio Company, a government enterprise) submitted applications to acquire just one frequency in their respective cities. The fourth bidder, Era, was the only applicant for 16 television channels. However, paragraph 18 of the tender rules states, "If an application to tender has been submitted from only one participant during the designated term, the Committee shall declare the tender null and void and hold a new tender."

3. Era felt it was wrongly refused a frequency in a tender in 2007 so it fought to overturn the committee's unfair decision. The repressive sanctions following the public application resulted in a change in the company's ownership. According to the panelists, the new owner's close affiliation with the authorities helped ensure Era's successful application in 2008. In her letter of protest to President Nursultan Nazarbaev, Zhaksykbayeva wrote: "Society and the press actively discuss the probability of high-powered officials being linked to the ownership of Era Television Channel,⁵ as they are close to the government and, in fact, they own the Era Television Company either directly or through nominees."

4. The application documents submitted by Era did not contain all the required information. For example, nothing was mentioned about adherence to copyright and allied rights, and no date was shown for when the guarantee was paid. However, these details were not taken into

⁵ Articles appeared in a number of Kazakh media on the eve of the tender concerning the fact that Prime Minister Karim Masimov had recently become the owner of Era Television Company.

consideration when the committee members were making their decision.

The legislation of Kazakhstan does not single out the media as a special type of business and it provides neither additional conditions (for example, taxes) nor privileges. Privileges on VAT for the printed press were abolished several years ago and the media have been treated like any other type of the business since then. In 2008, however, a new draft of the tax code was approved that exempts newspapers and local broadcasters with revenues of less than \$300,000 from VAT. As the worldwide economic crisis continues, such support will at least allow local media to survive, as advertising revenue in 2008 alone fell by an average of 30 percent.

The panelists confirmed that there are significant obstacles to entering the television and radio broadcasting market. Unlike other types of businesses, entering depends entirely on the authorities' support and the possibility of getting a frequency and licenses. When ideological and political pressures are taken into consideration, a media company becomes a much less profitable and higher risk proposition. An indirect indicator of this is the fact that more television and radio companies are choosing a safe, exclusively entertainment media niche, as they do not want to risk raising their social and political profile.

Although panelists thought the situation has improved, crimes against journalists and the media are still frequent. Investigations into these crimes are delayed and information on the progress and results of investigations is either difficult

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.

to obtain or completely lacking. The most common crimes against journalists in Kazakhstan registered by the Adil Soz Public Fund in 2008 included threats, assaults (accompanied by the seizure of equipment and other valuables), limited access to news sources, and harassment.

Statistics from a number of rights protection organizations show that representatives of the opposition media suffer the most assaults and threats. In 2008, those most affected according to the monitoring reports were *Taszhargan*, *Law and Justice*, *Vremya*, *View*, *Svoboda Slova*, and *Liter* newspapers, and a number of media that are not controlled by the state, such as *Uralskaya Nedelya*, and *Akzhayik*.

Officials, businesspeople, and underworld figures are constantly engaged in cases against the opposition newspaper *Taszhargan*, and its staff members are under threat. Journalist Ermurat Bapi from *Taszhargan* reported at a press conference on May 8, 2008 that a bomb had been planted in his car (it failed to properly explode and he was unharmed) and that he was being spied upon. He said that he thought this was an attempt to influence his professional activities. Bapi declared in advance that he was physically and mentally healthy and if he were to be murdered, it should be treated as premeditated and not a fatal accident.

Bapi is not the only persecuted journalist. At the end of December, another journalist from *Taszhargan*, Artem Miusov, was stabbed three times by an unknown assailant. The attack is believed to be the result of an article titled "Poor Large Landowner" about a civil lawsuit between Almaz Kusherbaev and state officials. Journalist Sergey Hodanov from *Liter* newspaper was badly beaten not far from his office, and his attackers stole his cameras and other valuables worth KZT 1 million. Zhanat Kartamysov, an employee of the Temirtau City Tax Committee, threatened Helen Kulakova, a reporter from *Svoboda Slova* newspaper, because she published an article on arrears in the city budget and he demanded that she disclose the source of this information. Only the intervention of the Adil Soz Fund's representative office in Karaganda Region helped her deal with the threats from this government official. These and other crimes against journalists are common practice.

The investigations into murders or other crimes committed against journalists, when they are related to political issues, have little chance of being closed. Instead, the legal machinery and other authorities put pressure on the media and journalists seeking information about how investigations are progressing. For example, panelists reported that in the case of the 2007 disappearance of journalist Oralgaisy Zhabagtai Kyzy Omarshanova of *Law and Justice* newspaper, a secret gag order was issued to stop journalists from making any inquiries. The fact that crimes against journalists are not

properly investigated reinforces the feeling among journalists that they must protect themselves by censoring their work.

Kazakh law does not give advantages or preferences to any form of media, but in practice, assistance from local authorities and limits on access to government information have become the standard. Civil servants are forced to subscribe to government newspapers as a condition of employment. Local government administrations have even established pools of journalists and procedures to accredit or not accredit them, as a way to substantiate refusal to provide information. A significant regulator is the practice of limiting opposition media's access to information on key politicians and government institutions, while providing state media total access. For example, when the prime minister traveled recently to Kazakhstan's regions, the majority of opposition media had great difficulty covering all events planned, because local authorities broke the law and only accredited one or two journalists from non-government media in advance.

The courts are also continuing their policy of limiting access to information, as they fill their chambers with government media representatives, leaving no room for opposition reporters. "When we or other non-governmental regional media asked the mayor for information, he replied he was not obliged to answer opposition newspapers," said Tamara Eslyamova, chief editor of *Uralskaya Nedelya*. "Refusals and formal replies are given to almost 90 percent of all requests for information. We have already learned at our newspaper to phrase our written questions very politely and in great detail, so as to get at least some information from state officials."

Kazakh law does not protect the editorial independence of state media. In fact, the authorities interfere in the editorial policy of both government and private media. Khabar television station, for example, is completely censored, and in November 2008, the president's office decided who would run the Nurmedia private media concern. Regional governmental media are under the diktat of local authorities.

The Kazakh criminal code still contains articles on libel, slander, and damaging and offending the honor and dignity of officials. Panelists thought cases increased in 2008, and statistics from human rights organizations show that the overwhelming majority of criminal, civil, and administrative cases are filed against non-government media. Panelists said that journalists tend to be tried under civil code, and called court cases between officials and media representatives "authoritarianism with a human face." Several panelists gave multiple examples of journalists or ordinary residents receiving sentences after being accused of libel and slander. Others expressed concern specifically on the court decision to close the www.posit.kz website for spreading inter-ethnic discord.

Eslamova said that if journalists practice professional standards, they can possibly prove their innocence even in biased courts. An example was when her paper published an interview with the well-known violinist Marat Esengaliev, who criticized the chief of the regional sports department. The chief charged the newspaper with libel and damaging a person's reputation. The journalists were able to defend themselves in court by submitting a recording of the interview. Experts proved that they asked no leading questions and confirmed the accuracy of the quotation.

When media members bring suit, charging that their honor and dignity have been damaged as a result of politicians' public statements, dismissing the cases has become the norm. For example, in the 2007 case of Minister of Culture and Information E. Ertysbaev versus *Vremya* newspaper, the judge of the Sary-Arka Rayon Court in Astana defended the state official and rejected the newspaper's claim, on the basis that the minister's statements "were an expression of his subjective opinion, and the defendant's ethical opinion was debatable."

Vremya spent more than a year using the courts to restore the newspaper's reputation. Vindication came only after the minister was sacked in May 2008, and the Kazakh Supreme Court declared the newspaper innocent and "recognized that the information disseminated by Ertysbaev in the *Republic* newspaper and *Tochki nad I* broadcast on Channel 31 was untrue, and this information ruined the business reputation of the *Vremya* newspaper and its chief editor." The ex-minister was obliged to withdraw the information damaging the newspaper "by announcing in the same newspaper that this information is untrue."

The constitution, the law on mass media, and the law on providing information contain provisions regarding access to public information; however, the procedures for such access have not been defined in practice, and in most cases, acquiring especially significant information is impossible. As noted in previous sections, panelists said that state officials do not heed the law on the mass media, stating that this law specifically regulates the media sector and not their conduct.

The existing laws on government secrecy cannot resolve all problems, however, and must be significantly developed. The panelists quoted a long list of examples where rights on access to information from specific media and other community entities (for example, NGOs), have been violated. It is essentially impossible to access information on who owns the national media, monopolies, and many other enterprises, or actual data about the National Fund. Information about drafts of socially significant laws is also often placed on a "secret list." Panelists noted that bills on political parties and local government have been placed on the list after they were submitted to parliament for discussion.

One panelist recounted the story of *Kolos* newspaper. Journalists from *Kolos* submitted official requests for information to the Akkayin Rayon police department in the Northern Kazakhstan Region three times. The letters were returned to sender on the grounds that the family name of Chief Peter Martynuik was spelled incorrectly. It turned out the police chief of the region refused to accept the requests because his family name was written in the dative case, although in fact it was proper Russian.

Panelist Olga Kaplina said that she thinks that access to socially important information has grown significantly due to the "electronic government." However, journalists' functional illiteracy is problematic here, as they do not know how to correctly search for information. Today, it is clear that a framework of departments is being formed as a result of the "electronic government" and they are working more transparently and provide requested information. Unfortunately, access to information is also complicated in many other governmental structures, in spite of the changes made.

As a rule, state officials do not make comments or give effective interviews, and especially not by phone. The employees of *Uralskaya Nedelya* have started fighting state officials and departments, especially those who consistently ignore requests. The newspaper has set up a database showing dates and how many requests for information have been made, organized by government department. This database was submitted to the government Service Affairs Agency with a request that government employees be prompted to satisfy requests based on Kazakhstan's laws. The newspaper's editor, Eslamova, said that a little bit of movement has been made, although the local mayor is still causing a lot of fuss and bother.

The media can enlist world news sources via the Internet, which is becoming more accessible for the population in general. Most provincial media, especially those in Kazakh, cannot access the Internet because the license fee for legal entities is still very high (KZT 90,000 or about \$600). Many media find a way around this by registering as an individual at the much lower rate of only KZT 4,500 (\$30). Panelists noted the appearance of alternative suppliers to Kazakhtelecom, and legal entities can access the Internet via satellite for a monthly payment of KZT 16,000 (\$107).

Some media subscribe to feeds of world news agencies, including AP, Reuters, and the BBC. However, Kazakh media are responsible for all content when using foreign news sources. No legal provisions inhibit accessing such sources.

Entrance to the journalism profession is not regulated by the state. A professional education in journalism or any other

sector is not necessary to become a journalist today. Other professionals (physicists, mathematicians, engineers, doctors, etc.) work in the majority of the most successful social and political media. As noted above, however, accreditation is sometimes used by the government to limit access by critical media to government-sponsored activities.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Kazakhstan Objective Score: 1.74

Most indicators showed either minor or modest gains compared to last year, and received scores close to the overall objective score. The exception is Indicator 7, technical facilities, which received an increase of about one point and scored more than half a point higher than the overall objective score.

Professional journalism is a rare phenomenon at government and opposition media, the panelists said. "Government media and those linked to the authorities are still very Soviet, and the opposition media is a copy of the government media but with a negative attitude," Zhovtis said. In spite of the fact that a balanced opinion should be given by opposition newspapers and journalists personally, this professional standard is not always adhered to. Due to censorship and possible persecution, the opposition media, in general, try to use the opinions of two or three parties.

Subjectivism is visible in all types of media, as each editorial office has its own secret belief that government media paint a cheerful picture of reality, whereas opposition ones paint a sad one. Zhovtis stressed his own experience of working with government and opposition media: "If government media always think they should cut out criticisms in their interviews with me, the opposition ones not only sometimes reduce positive points, but they also fabricate some criticisms [and attribute them to] me."

Journalists encounter some obstacles in including balanced or expert opinions. Editorial offices do not have databases of experts, and many state officials and businesspeople do not want to be interviewed, as they are afraid of "showing themselves." Yaroslava Naumenko, a reporter for *New Generation* weekly newspaper, noted that journalists sometimes cannot reference an expert's opinion because editors think it is just hidden public relations for the expert. Panelist Olga Kaplina said that the media have a standard way of working with businesses, but only for their public relations purposes and not yet as providing expert opinions.

Journalists' ethics have been discussed repeatedly by the press in recent years, and attempts have been made to adopt

common ethical standards. But to date, no single document has been approved by journalists, and not many of them adhere to ethics in practice. Zhaksybaeva summarized the predominant feelings on ethics: "Under the existing legislation, the approval of ethical codes at a national level and the introduction of self-regulation will lead to a worsening of journalists' position and limitations on their rights."

Nevertheless, journalists continue talking about the importance of introducing ethical principles. The dominance of paid-for articles and stories with no reference support the need for an ethics code. A number of media NGOs, including Media Life from Astana, Media Net from Almaty, and the Northern Kazakhstan Legal Media Center Public Fund, are actively promoting development of a journalists' code of ethics.

However, some private print media have had their own ethics code for many years, and adherence to the code is written into each employment contract. Such rules apply at the Alau Television Company in Kostanai, Fifth Channel in Karaganda, Otyrar in Shymkent, and TVK-6 in Semei. The example of *Uralskaya Nedelya* deserves attention, because its ethics code was approved many years ago and employees use it effectively. Panelists came to the conclusion that an ethics code can be developed and become a useful tool if media legislation is liberalized and initiatives on ethics are "bottom up" and not "top down."

The manifold forms of authorities' pressure have led to self-censorship practices among editors and journalists alike. Only a small circle of journalists try not to censor their articles and so they and their media outlets are persecuted. "As Kazakh media serve the interests of the authorities, financial

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).

and industrial groups, and the opposition, media leaders are generally told how and what to cover," Zhaksybaeva said.

One case monitored by Adil Soz Fund is quite typical. "K. Petrov, the chief of the Aktauinsk Regional Akimat's Internal Policy Department, called E. Getmanova, the chief editor of *Diapason* newspaper, and expressed his interest in the fact that the editorial office had plans to cover the visit of the opposition politician Peter Svoik to Aktobe. When this was confirmed, the state official insisted that he write nothing about Svoik and declared, 'This issue is being controlled by the president's administration' and those newspapers that write about him 'will be put on the blacklist.' As a result, articles about Svoik's visit and his recommendations on how to rescue the country from the current crisis were only published in *Diapason*, whereas other media in Aktobe did not cover this event."

The existence of taboo subjects exemplifies self-censorship and censorship in the media. Overall, the media very rarely report protests, opposition meetings, or cases of mismanagement or crimes by local authorities. Panelists noted that the state exercises control over newspapers, and television especially. Taboo subjects cannot be broadcast, but opposition newspapers sometimes report on them. Likewise, opposition party leaders will not receive coverage on television and have better luck getting covered in the print media.

In particular, problems concerning inter-ethnic relations are taboo. The media strive to create an exceptionally bright and cheerful image of mutual cultural enrichment and cover all possible ethnic festivals, etc. The reality is different: Kazakhstan experienced an outbreak of inter-ethnic conflicts in summer 2008 and the media found themselves in the epicenter of these events, including the Otrar TV Channel with its weekly 15-minute broadcast in Uzbek.

Reporting of any problem facing the country's capital, Astana, is also taboo. The panelists joked, "Nothing bad has ever happened in the capital city, and it is always warm there."⁶ The media can never report on the family of the president of Kazakhstan, regardless of what they do and whatever influence they have on the country's politics and economy.

Censorship and self-censorship result in reported events sometimes bearing no resemblance to reality. Key events are underreported, distorted, or not covered at all. For example, in spite of stagnation in the economy and the problems in the country's financial and banking systems, the media are not allowed to cover these subjects. Since before last autumn,

⁶ If one takes into consideration that winters are very cold in Astana—perhaps the frostiest in the country—the panelist's degree of irony becomes understandable.

discussion of the global and national economic crises has been prohibited, and those opposition media that cover these problems have been isolated from the government media community. The crisis officially took place only when Nazarbaev publicly pronounced the word "crisis."

The panelists noticed a decline in journalism's prestige and the falling level of professionalism. In early 2008, many journalists switched to public relations work, then due to the increasing crisis and the shrinking advertising market, they had to come back to journalism. Good journalists also leave to join private companies and government press services.

In addition to persecution and pressure, low salaries contribute to the professionalism problem. Compared with similar professional activities (for example, public relations), journalists' salaries lag far behind. Within the media industry, wide differences in salaries exist. For example, journalists in Almaty typically earn between \$500 and \$800 per month, but some journalists make between \$1,000 and \$2,000 per month in the main cities of Almaty and Astana for writing "specially-ordered articles," as directed by their editors. The employees of local print media receive much smaller salaries, from \$100 to \$300 per month. Panelists said that, on average, the salary range for employees of regional broadcasters is \$300 to \$1,000 per month—comparable to other professions in the area.

Much of the private printed press pays some or all of journalists' salaries and expenses in cash (off the books), and none of them complain about this illegal practice. The nature of government media accounting also permits additional payments, bonuses, and pay other expenses from a special account.

There is not always a visible difference between the salaries for regional government and non-government media employees. According to the Uralskaya Nedelya's editor, the difference between the various media is insignificant in the region, and it varies from KZT 10,000 to KZT 15,000.

Kaplina noted an unfortunate recent tendency: all articles that mention the names of any commercial firms are treated as advertisements by the media. Businesses order these articles and programs and they do not include a disclaimer such as "this is an advertisement." This misleads viewers and corrupts journalists, as they cannot criticize business actions and measures but only praise them.

Kazakh television features no political debates or live programs. The increasing proportion of entertainment programs in the media, noted in previous years, continued in 2008. A striking example is Channel 31, where virtually all the most relevant information and analytical programs have ceased to exist and entertainment programs dominate. What the channel was proud of—flagship and popular talk shows,

special reports, etc., especially in the Kazakh language—have been replaced by poor quality Russian serials. With the start of NTS broadcasting on Channel 31, programs such as *Kym?*, *Yiman*, and *Burdas* in the Kazakh language and *News and To Dot One's 'I's'* and *Cross One's 'T's'* in the Russian language are no longer broadcast. News broadcasts in Russian and Kazakh have been reduced, and Channel 31's offices in Aktobe, Karaganda, Ust-Kamenogorsk, Aktau, and Shymkent have closed down.

The same trend is typical of most media. The only exception is KTK channel, where news dominated after the resignation of Rakhat Aliev. However, according to experts, what is happening in Kazakhstan is only a reflection of global trends: entertainment is what audiences want. Panelists said that media surveys show that the audience prefers to watch Russian television channels and Turkish soap operas while the news is being broadcast on other channels. It is no accident that Nurmedia, Arna Media, and other media conglomerates are working on developing the entertainment industry. Since producing competitive entertainment programs is costly, various television companies often buy and broadcast Russian entertainment programs.

Television ratings are not the only reason for the growing proportion of entertainment. The panelists said that the media is developed more easily without meddling in politics. Zhovtis said, "Since almost all TV and radio broadcasting companies are under the direct or indirect political control of the authorities, they do not take the risk of discussing acute social and political problems. As a result, entertainment programs are obviously displacing information programs and news broadcasts."

Good facilities and modern equipment for gathering information, producing, and distributing media are available in major media companies in the capital. Regional media use out-of-date technology or have no equipment at all. Regional publishers still cannot provide staff with computers, voice recorders, or cameras; most regional journalists purchase any equipment they need out of pocket. According to Galiya Azhenova, manager of the Adil Soz International Fund's Expertise Social Center, the Atyrau regional workshop for journalists revealed that only one of them was the lucky owner of a camera and the rest had no equipment at all.

The situation with television companies is much better. All the regional television channels have switched to digital technology, and five of them even have their own virtual studios. Credit for this technological advance is due to Internews Network, which has enabled media professionals to upgrade their skills through on-site training as well as grants for purchasing equipment.

Large television and radio broadcasting studios are also in a difficult situation regarding content. Evidence indicates that no Kazakh television or radio studio is above broadcasting unlicensed media content such as pirated movies and concerts. Even the wealthiest companies cannot afford to work exclusively with legal media content.

Last year the number of media specializing in economic or business topics increased. In particular, the magazines *Semeyny Budget* and *Lichnye dengi* were founded. The REC-studio in Almaty increased the number of economic programs from two to eight, due to the state starting a grants program to promote economic knowledge. Other media may be able to count on this support in the future.

Investigative journalism is still a rarity, but a few journalists dare to undertake these projects. During the discussion, panelists noted that a distinction should be made between different types of investigative articles. In particular, some journalists (the panelists cited a journalist from *Law and Justice* as an example) are investigating individual orders from senior officials. Typically, such investigators get mainly "compromising information" and have "patrons." Such investigations are often unplanned by the media outlet, rather are organized and authorized by government officials.

In other cases, journalists cannot easily get an editor's go-ahead for investigations. Editors avoid publishing compromising facts, especially if these investigations are linked to senior officials; and because investigative reports are time-consuming, they are expensive under the current circumstances.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Kazakhstan Objective Score: 1.43

The modest increase in score compared to last year, 1.43 compared to 1.11, can be attributed mostly to improved scores in indicators 4 and 5 (news agencies, and private broadcasters produce their own news and information programming). These two indicators also were the only two to score more than a half-point higher than the overall objective score. All other indicators remained more or less static. However, indicators 3 and 6 (state media reflect the political spectrum, and transparency of ownership) again seriously lagged this year, with scores nearly a full point lower.

Due to the relatively high cost of printed media, the average number of newspapers read by Kazakhs has fallen. There are disparities in the media market between cities and villages; in rural areas, the choice of media is more limited. Since local newspapers are cheaper than national ones and also contain news about rural areas, regional readers prefer local

publications. Moreover, opposition newspapers are not always available in the regions. According to panelists, in some areas such as Kustanai, the *Vremya* newspaper is impossible to buy and *Taszhargan* is not on sale in all regions.

A media consumption survey conducted by TNS Gallup Media Asia revealed a high proportion of citizens who prefer Russian television media, primarily because of the language. Also, more and more citizens are using satellite dishes to watch a wide range of television channels. According to the research, 34 percent of the population have already installed satellite dishes and have access to foreign media. "Public access to international media is practically unrestricted, except for several blocked opposition websites," said Zhovtis.

In 2008, the number of bloggers increased considerably in Kazakhstan; they fill a lack of information in the media. Bloggers are not active everywhere, but the more technologically advanced younger generation searches for and finds independent information. However, according to panelists' data, the level of Internet access is still very low and, in general, not more than 10 percent of the country's population has regular Internet access. One hour of working on-line in a private Internet café costs KZT 250 to KZT 300 (\$1.50 to \$2) on average.

Monitoring of news broadcasts on the Khabar Channel in 2008 showed that 78 percent of news coverage was about major newsmakers such as the president, parliamentarians, and the government. Few media highlighted opposition activity; rarely were events in the lives of ordinary citizens presented in the media as socially significant, which is why panelists talk of shortfalls covering all political life in the

country. According to Zhaksybaeva, media in Kazakhstan always serve somebody's interests: the authorities, large businesses owned by oligarchs, and the opposition, and therefore can be said to be engaged in politics. "Information in Kazakhstan consists not of the media but their owners in the person of the state, financial-industrial groups, and opposition leaders, all of whom consider the media as a tool for struggling for influence and resources," she said.

Non-government news channels are different from those of the official media, primarily because they cover a larger number of topics. The private channels do not confine themselves just to press conferences and meetings—they invite interesting people, cover relevant topics, and conduct audience surveys on various government initiatives. At the same time, in certain regions, press secretaries and representatives of the department of internal policy dictate the content of information programs and check the texts of journalists from both the government and private media.

In 2008, the number of national news agencies increased by one: KazTAG. As Zhovtis noted, "There are no local independent news agencies, except those that are government and pro-authorities."

Regional television companies can use material from the Internews News Factory information pool. In 2008, the information exchange database was expanded to regional broadcasting companies, so that currently 44 members contribute to the pool and are able to receive information.

Among the foreign news agencies, the most active are AP, Reuters, and the BBC. Relaying the reports of foreign news agencies is only allowed if they cover "approved" topics and issues; media editors will self-censor to avoid liability for reprinting foreign media reports.

Most television and radio channels produce their own news and other programs. All the regional television channels produce news in the Kazakh and Russian languages. Several television channels broadcast their own talk shows. The majority of government and national channels also produce their own news programs. According to the law, 20 percent of broadcasts by channels should be news, but what proportion of the other 80 percent should be information or entertainment is not regulated. Therefore, the trend toward entertainment content is purely a decision of editorial and media owners.

Kazakh legislation prohibits monopolies, including in the media. But no special law or regulation provides for transparent information about media owners, thus no one officially supplies these facts. When journalists try to guess or report their investigations about media owners or the presence of oligarchs in the media, such statements often

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.

result in legal action against the journalists with predictable victories for the “alleged” owners. Rumors are circulating in society about the owners of the media and what monopolies have been established (for example, everyone knows that the owners of Era TV have recently changed, but one can only guess who owns the company now). But verifying such rumors is not possible.

Foreign ownership is limited by law to a small percentage of the media.

In 2008, the strategy to create a “uniform opinion in the media environment” continued, by uniting the regional media into regional holdings. This resulted in replicating print and electronic newspapers in various regions into a united format with identical articles. This strategy has already been tested in several regions of the country, including Petropavlovsk and Atyrau, and according to panelist Eslyamova, “The appearance of such types of holdings has continued in the country, and internal affairs department employees [of local governments] often become informal employees of them.”

Kazakhstan has more than 40 media outlets for ethnic minorities in their languages, most of which are fully financed by public funds or through grant aid from the state. However, the minority media prefer the status of “cultural” editions, which are doomed to limited market presence and circulation. According to panelists, these media are more like booklets than real newspapers.

Regional television channels broadcast educational, children’s, gender, and legal programs. At least to some extent, these programs cater to public interest and address some segments of the population.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Kazakhstan Objective Score: 1.90

All indicators in Objective 4 showed modest improvement this year, resulting in a strong increase of 0.51 compared to last year. Further, all indicators scored very close to the overall objective score.

The legacy of Soviet-era authoritarianism has a profound effect on the perception that the media is an ideological instrument and not a business. Editorial business plans are an indirect indicator of the lack of purpose to make a profit and develop the business. Television companies have business plans in place and are moving towards market reality faster than the newspaper industry, which is not mature enough

to develop business plans. Panelists noted a few cases of successful development.

In particular, *Uralsky Vestnik* has had the largest circulation in the region for seven years and is consistently profitable, despite persecution by the authorities. Success has not been easy, however. The paper had to establish its own distribution system to lessen its financial and political dependency on the government distribution system; it has to constantly look for the most effective management strategies, etc.

The dream of each independent newspaper owner is to establish a complete newspaper that also has its own printing press. Some finally understand the essence of the media business and are trying to re-brand and improve the quality of their products (e.g. *Nasha Gazeta*, which, having improved its commercial appeal, has increased its circulation). Many regional newspapers are beginning to acknowledge the client-oriented nature of media and are doing their own audience surveys and introducing new management techniques. The limited print market remains a significant obstacle to the further development of more efficient management.

Any kind of investment and educational interventions have a much greater effect on private media. Panelist Olga Kaplina spoke of cases of government media misusing public funds when purchasing equipment. It turned out that some years ago, several public television companies bought expensive studio equipment that has still not been unpacked.

In general, the cheapest to run—and most profitable—media in Kazakhstan is radio.

The main sources of income are advertising, circulation revenue, subscriptions, receipts from the sale of media content, government orders, and sponsorship. According to TNS Gallup Media Asia, advertising revenues are falling quickly compared to 2007, particularly national television broadcasting.

The regional press has not yet felt the effects of the global economic crisis, possibly because they occupy a special place in the advertising market. For example, according to the editor of *Uralskaya Nedelya*, the paper managed to increase its advertising revenue in 2008. In 2008, a number of private regional newspapers tried new ways of running subscription campaigns. Despite past (and some current) mandates that civil servants and local officials must subscribe to official local papers, private newspapers have been actively competing for subscriptions. A striking example is *Rabat*, a Shymkent Holdings newspaper that has a larger number of readers than regional and city government newspapers. The reason was an innovative and aggressive advertising campaign launched during the subscription period for all the Shymkent media.

STS and the media seller Video International–Kazakhstan entered the advertising market in 2007 as the newest players to rival the politically affiliated Sellers’ House. In 2007, Video International Analytical Centre initially estimated the advertising market at more than \$200 million, then \$120 million, \$80 million, and, finally, they have lowered estimates to \$60 million. Panelists said that the large gap between expectations and reality was related to inclusion of major advertisers and advertising agencies in regional television and radio broadcasting.⁷

The advertising market is problematic due to a lack of ratings information for regional channels and programs. TNS Gallup Media Asia has little measuring equipment (people meters) in the regions and is unable to provide ratings of the regional media products.⁸ In 2008, the largest advertising agencies and advertisers turned to selling advertisements based on ratings; they cannot advertise on regional television and radio channels without ratings data.

According to one ratings survey, First Channel Eurasia, STS, and KTK have the largest share of television advertising, but in evening prime time, while those channels broadcast the news, most audience members switch to the El-Arna channel, an affiliate of Khabar, to watch Turkish serials.

According to Kazakh law, the volume of media advertising is limited and should not exceed 20 percent of television and radio broadcasting output.⁹ However, the media often violate these regulations, and given the opportunity, seek to exceed the legal share of income from advertising. To date, nobody has been punished for doing so. An increasing number of journalists and editors are not fully aware of the standards in this field. As the editor of *Uralskaya Nedelya* noted, “If an advertiser comes along, we are ready to find additional space for advertising, increasing the volume of advertising. We are constrained only by the reader, who starts to complain that there is too much advertising. Nobody else responds to this increase, neither the tax inspectorate nor anyone else.”

Some panelists clearly recognize that the availability of government subsidies stifles development of the market and competition. Others thought government grants are aimed at killing off opposition media, because it is then dependent on government subsidies and subject to government influence. Panelists believed that the latter is especially

dangerous during the economic recession, when profits from advertisements and revenue from selling newspapers falls.

There are examples of government subsidies given to private media. Special budget funds are unevenly distributed at various levels and do not fall into the hands of the regional media. The state has started to give grants to promote economic knowledge through supported programming.

Last year was not the first in which the media received state orders, but in 2008, the internal policy departments of *hakimats* (local governments) started visiting non-government media, urging them to participate in the competition for state orders. The subjects offered for these state orders are appealing and are in the public interest, so many independent media agreed to participate and successfully implemented their orders. In some regions, local authorities chose to not re-award grants to opposition media that had not become more loyal to the government. One example is TV Art, which, in the opinion of the head of the region, spent its previous grant improperly.

It is interesting that compared to the previous year, when many complaints were lodged regarding “sharing” the grants with corrupt officials to win allocated funds, in 2008 no such cases were reported—even though grants increased significantly.

In 2008, media leaders began to better understand the importance of audience research, updating media products based on survey data, and restructuring management strategies. However, the results of ratings surveys in the regions by TNS Gallup Media Asia did not meet the needs of local editors and owners, and some regional television companies had to order individual surveys. Rika TV (Aktobe), Alawi (Kostanai), and ART (Karaganda) carry out routine

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.

⁷ Advertisements are published based on circulation.

⁸ The main measurements are taken in Almaty and Astana; there are different opinions in the country concerning the number of people-meters: panelists believe that there are more than 1,500, whereas according to data of Kyrgyz advertising agencies there are less than 800 people-meters in Kazakhstan.

⁹ Article 8 of the Kazakh Law “On Advertising.” Article 9 explains that periodicals can choose what they advertise.

surveys in their area. ART has a market research specialist who conducts surveys via telephone or on the streets to get feedback on particular programs.

The lack of permanent ratings data has prevented large national advertisers from entering the regions. To alleviate this, Internews conducted an opinion poll on regional television programs and news topics in four regions: Shymkent, Sayrane, Rudny, and Temirtau.

Panelists felt that the research institutions are not very professional, especially at regional level. Yaroslava Naumenko said that during the training courses on media ratings in summer 2008, most regional editors were disappointed with the research method because it gave clearly unprofessional and even false data to fit their specific order for audience research and its feedback.

TNS Gallup Media Asia's switch from using "diary notes" to people meters has enabled it to collect more reliable and accurate data, and the overall situation concerning television advertising market share has been revised. In addition, the frequent updating of data and the ability to trace the dynamics of media development have become key advantageous factors.

However, monitoring of print circulation lags well behind. Circulation auditing efforts by the Chamber of Commerce and the Kazakh Association of Newspaper Researchers are increasingly seen as flawed. In 2008 *Uralskaya Nedelya* again tried to take the initiative to set up voluntary public monitoring and auditing of circulations, but yet again, it was ignored.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Kazakhstan Objective Score: 1.85

Although the score for Objective 5 stayed about the same compared to last year, some indicators did show movement. Panelists gave somewhat lower scores to indicators 2 (professional associations), 3 (NGOs), and 4 (academic journalism programs), while giving somewhat higher scores to indicators 6 (access to printing facilities) and 7 (apolitical distribution of media). Despite a modest slide, Indicator 3 still remained about three-quarters of a point above the overall score; Indicator 4 was about three-quarters behind. All others scored within a half-point of the overall objective score.

There are some functioning associations of publishers and owners of radio and television broadcasters. Among the most active are the National Association of TV Companies (NAT) and the Kazakhstan Association of Publishers. In 2008, NAT was part of the advisory working group that drew up

amendments to the media law, and was responsible for four of the nine amendments. Among the amendments was the abolition of dual licensing. Last year NAT gave legal support to two television companies seeking to avoid the state monopoly on transmitting by purchasing their own pole-mounted transmitters. In addition, NAT set up nine residency programs in various television and radio broadcasting companies.

Last year, the Kazakhstan Association of Publishers also held a number of very popular workshops devoted to increasing circulation, working with advertisers, improving marketing, and designing publications. All the workshops held by the association are on a fee basis; media are aware of the importance of such training courses and therefore invest in developing their potential.

Among the government-affiliated associations is the Association of Television and Radio Broadcasters of Kazakhstan (ATRB). Panelists did not know of any events over the past few years that the ATRB has held, but in 2008, it obtained four grants—while the very active NAT did not win any grants despite three proposals.

No journalists' trade union has been founded yet. A number of NGOs that could address similar issues are either virtually inactive or eke out their existence under political considerations; many are affiliated with the government and have to demonstrate "organized pluralism." These include the Club of Chief Editors, which just registered last year. The organization participated in competitions for state orders with incomplete documentation yet won seven grants. No panelist had heard about the results of these projects.

In 2008, the Business Media Association was founded by Asqar Tulegenov, a well-known journalist specializing in business journalism. He organized and ran a themed competition to help identify the best regional journalists covering economic issues. Tulegenov hopes this association will stimulate the activity of economic journalists in the regional media.

A number of NGOs are working to provide the media and journalists with legal, educational, monitoring, and advocacy support. Further, most media organizations have united to form a lobby group¹⁰ to facilitate amendments to media laws. The undoubted leader of these is Adil Soz Fund and its former regional offices, now independent NGOs and media law centers. Based on its monitoring of the protection of

¹⁰ These include Adil Soz International Fund for Freedom of Speech, National Association of Broadcasters of Kazakhstan, Legal service of the Mass Media Support Center, Pavlodar Center to Support Regional Journalism, TV Batys Info Public Association, Adyl Atka Public Association, Alliance of Regional Mass Media of Astana and Akmola Region Public Association, North Kazakhstan Media Center, and the Public Fund Media Net International Journalism Center.

freedom of speech, Adil Soz prepares open letters addressed to heads of departments and regions, asking that they become guarantors for observing the law within the area under their supervision. These letters are often effective, as the authorities at least always respond to them.

The work of Adil Soz is widely respected and accessible to everyone. Its monitoring results, analytical legal reviews, and commentary on current events are published without delay on its own website, and related media support organizations copy the information to place on their websites, including <http://www.medialaw.kz>. Through the support of Adil Soz and media law centers, it is possible to prevent threats and harassment of journalists and to win court cases. According to panelists, journalists and the media, supported by media lawyers, can win 90 percent of court cases if litigation is not politically motivated.

A notable trend of 2008 is that regional television companies have started to employ their own lawyers and hire media organizations to conduct employee training courses. As part of a legal project, Internews Kazakhstan, a local NGO affiliated with Internews Network, held several conferences devoted to intellectual property rights, trained lawyers of television companies, and funded a study tour to Bulgaria. NGO representatives, government agency employees, and parliamentarians studied the world experience of media management. For the first time in Kazakhstan, breakthrough training courses on management, television programming policy, and branding were held, which raised great interest in the media and proved extremely useful. Internews Kazakhstan received its first state grant to conduct four training courses for television managers, journalists, operators, and video supervisors. It received sponsorship from

Beeline, the Kazakh business telecommunications company, for five training courses in the regions.

Among non-media NGOs, several are active participants in the media sector. One is the Kazakhstan International Bureau of Human Rights and the Rule of Law.

Almost every regional higher education institution has a journalism faculty, and hundreds of people qualify as “journalists” annually. Professional journalists with work experience in the capital are in great demand by regional media. But according to Mataev, 90 percent of journalism graduates in the country do not work and will not work in the journalism sector. Often they find jobs in public relations and advertising. The graduates’ lack desire to work in the profession is due to teaching problems, a lack of professional skills and knowledge after they graduate, low salaries, and high risks.

Instruction at the journalism schools is in a very critical situation because teachers, who are often not linked to the profession, have to teach five or more subjects in parallel. The outdated curriculum and the study process bear no resemblance to reality. Curricula focus on studying philology, literature, and the theory and history of journalism, with minimal practical work. This inadequate technical education does not give the students knowledge of the planning processes (script writing, directing), design, photography, montage (page-proofreading) and other media production techniques.

Panelists thought that educational standards for journalists should be improved and the majority of journalism schools (especially regional) should be closed down. In autumn 2008, the journalism school of the Kazakh State University purchased new studio equipment; perhaps this will change the situation in the country’s key educational institution. Panelists noted that this should be used as the pilot site for introducing changes in the training of professional journalists.

Almost all the international organizations that support education and on-the-job training of journalists focus on more specialized, short-term courses and seminars. Subjects include parliamentary and business journalism, AIDS problems, alcoholism, violence against women and children, and promoting democracy. However, taking into account the high level of staff turnover in the press, basic workshops on professional skills are more effective. As Kaplina remarked, “Directors of TV companies are constantly asking for training courses, and the bosses of large media companies are ready to partially invest in training—for example, pay travel expenses of the staff to Almaty, where training courses are held. This lack of training courses, typical of 2008, is shown by the fact that there were 23 applicants per open spot for journalism education [at the state-sponsored trainings held by Internews-Kazakhstan].”

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.

In 2008, various international organizations conducted training workshops for the press on issues of media management. Several commercial organizations sponsored special seminars. For example, Beeline and Internews-Kazakhstan sponsored a series of regional seminars devoted to economic journalism. Hewlett-Packard contracted Medianet to organize sponsored training courses for journalists and the media on Internet technologies.

Zhovtis noted another important aspect of journalism education: "Where the media depends directly or indirectly on the authorities, it is not always possible to use the skills and qualifications in practice."

The monopoly on printing was abolished long ago, and printing houses are mostly private businesses. In some regions, newspapers that have received government grants can only print using the state or local authorities' printing houses. Due to several economic and technological problems, such as expensive printing presses and costly paper from Russia, local glossy magazines are printed better and cheaper abroad.

As with any profitable business, owners of the printing houses try to follow only market, commercial categories, but if they cooperate with non-government or opposition media, the authorities exert pressure and interfere with their activities. If the owners do not want to complicate their lives, they cooperate with the authorities and might break contracts, not fulfill obligations, etc. To avoid such difficulties, the major newspapers try to own the whole process, from printing to distribution.

Public distribution channels are usually used as a political resource. Print media seek alternative distribution networks, since Kazakhpochta, the government postal service, is generally inefficient and works selectively depending on who owns the newspaper. In large cities, various newspapers have managed to organize a media distribution system, but newspapers in rural areas are completely under the control of the government or associations connected with the local authorities.

The government's preferences in media distribution reach down to minutiae. Flying Air Astana, one can see what publications are welcomed by the government. Opposition media are not bought by the airline and it is impossible to find the *Zhas Alas* newspaper on flights. Thus, even with no state monopoly on the distribution system, the government still uses what tools of political pressure available to it to limit access of the opposition media to the general public.

Until recently, the state had a monopoly on ownership of transmitters. As mentioned previously, however, some broadcasters now have their own pole-mounted installations or lease the right to install transmitters on the roofs of suitable, privately-owned high-rise buildings.

List of Panel Participants

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Sholpan Zhaksybaeva, executive director, NAT Kazakhstan, Almaty

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Yaroslava Naumenko, reporter and blogger, *New Generation* weekly newspaper, Almaty

Seitkazy Mataev, chairperson, Board of Directors of the Journalists' Union in Kazakhstan, Almaty

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