
The economic growth rate is still relatively low, and the income level of the population remains rather critical. According to official statistics, 64 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, and working abroad continues to be the main source of income for most males between 18 and 35.



TAJIKISTAN

Key events in Tajikistan last year included the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit, the Forum of Creative and Scientific Intellectuals of the CIS Member States, and the International Conference on Border Security in Central Asia. Another significant political and economic event was the launch of three units at the Sangtuda-1 hydropower plant. The international image of Tajikistan was tainted when it became known that the country concealed its inappropriate use of a \$47 million loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which then demanded that the loan be repaid. This ethical lapse caused donor countries and international financial institutions to request that the Tajikistan National Bank and the Tajik Aluminum Company be audited at the international level.

The Wahhabi fundamentalist Islamic religious movement Salafia has increased its activities in Tajikistan, and its ranks include more than 20,000 young people according to intelligence services. The split within opposition political parties is also growing; the Ministry of Justice of Tajikistan and Dushanbe City Court officially recognized Masud Sabirov as the rightful leader of the Democratic Party, while the faction headed by Mahmadrusi Iskandrov was proclaimed illegal. Iskandrov is serving a 23-year prison sentence for a number of charges, although his fellow party members consider him a prisoner of conscience. As a result of these developments, Tajik authorities paid special attention to opposition, civil society, and mass media as a means of preventing rallies, pickets, and political demonstrations, though some protests and pickets took place in Gorno-Badakhshan and Gharm in March and June.

Last year witnessed a consolidation of the national media intended to improve the government's image. A 24-hour national television news channel, Jahonnamo, as a counterpart to the Russian 24-hour channel Vesti. The government also supported all four national television channels and is paving the way for a Farsi-speaking channel aimed at audiences in Afghanistan, Iran, and Tajikistan. National and governmental printed media also received considerable support. Other expansion included the unveiling of two information agency websites, the addition of three new national newspapers to the country's existing 300 publications, and the launch of a new FM radio station.

The economic growth rate is still relatively low, and the income level of the population remains rather critical. According to official statistics, 64 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, and working abroad continues to be the main source of income for most males between 18 and 35.

Tajikistan's overall score suffered a noticeable drop of 0.19 compared to last year. Objectives 3 (plurality of news) and 4 (business management) received moderately lower scores, while Objective 5 (supporting institutions) suffered a large decrease of 0.62. On the other hand, Objective 1 (freedom of speech) increased slightly and Objective 2 (professional journalism) remained more or less the same.

TAJIKISTAN AT A GLANCE

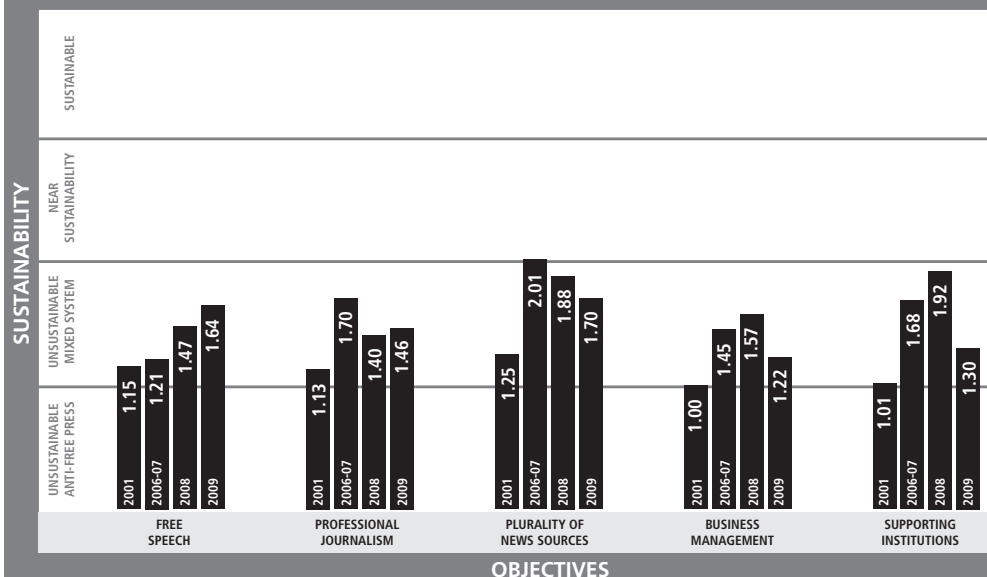
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 7,211,884 (July 2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Dushanbe
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Tajik 79.9%, Uzbek 15.3%, Russian 1.1%, Kyrgyz 1.1%, other 2.6% (2000 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Sunni Muslim 85%, Shia Muslim 5%, other 10% (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Tajik (official), Russian widely used in government and business
- > **GNI (2007-Atlas):** \$3.103 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **GNI per capita (2007-PPP):** \$1,710 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **Literacy rate:** 99.5% (male 99.7%, female 99.2%) (2000 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Emomali Rahmon (since November 6, 1994)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 286; Radio: 9; Television Stations: 22
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** top three: *Charkhi gardun, Oila*, and *Asia Plus* (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Tajikistan)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** top radio stations by region: Dushanbe: *Radio Vatan, Radio Imruz, Asia Plus, Radio Oriyono*; Khudzhand: *Tiroz* and *CM-1*
- > **News agencies:** Avesta, Asia-Plus, Varorud, Interpress-service, Pamir-Media, Hatlon-press, Zerafshan-times, Simo-news, Khovar, Paem
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 19,500 (2005 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: TAJIKISTAN



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

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.64

The score for this objective was nudged somewhat higher this year thanks primarily to increased scores for Indicators 4 (attacks on journalists) and 6 (libel laws). Most indicators received scores similar to the overall objective score, the exceptions being Indicator 2 (broadcast licensing), which was almost a point lower, and Indicators 8 (media access to foreign news sources) and 9 (free entry into the journalism profession), which were about three-quarters of a point higher.

The information sector in Tajikistan is controlled by a number of laws and regulations, including the Tajik constitution, the Law on Press and Other Mass Media, the Law on Television and Radio Broadcasting, the Law on Information, Regulations on Broadcast Licensing, and numerous articles in civil and criminal law. However, the existing laws are outdated, having been adopted in December 1990. Civil society, especially NGOs, supported the media sector in an effort to pass a new law on mass media, but their campaign failed.

According to an analysis of media law in the former Soviet republics conducted by the Institute of Information Law Problems in Moscow, Tajikistan belongs to a group of countries with an average level of press freedom. Its score is 6 out of 13, ahead of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. Indeed, the Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan proclaims freedom of the press and bans censorship, and there are special laws on mass media and television as well as guarantees on citizen access to information. These laws and regulations also allow non-governmental media to determine the languages they use.

Although liability for libel and defamation is covered by criminal law, clauses for slandering civil servants have been added to the criminal code (articles 135, 136, 137 and 330). Further, Parliament passed and the president signed the Decree on Criminal Liability for Libel on the Internet in June 2007.

In addition, the criminal code contains articles providing for punishment of those who impede a journalist's legal and professional activities, and of officials who refuse to provide a citizen with information (articles 148 and 162 of the criminal code). Although no one has actually been charged under these articles in the history of independent Tajikistan, the legal tools for defending journalists' rights do exist.

Tajik law theoretically ensures favorable conditions to media in Central Asia, but in practice they are selectively enforced. "The Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan does assume protection of free speech, but it does not grant freedom to the one who has delivered the speech," said panelist Hulkar

Yusupov, head of the Monitoring and Analysis Service within the media holding company Asia-Plus. "Such freedom is nominally protected by all articles of the law but in fact these articles do not really work. The biased attitude of the Public Prosecutor's Office and the absence of independence of the judicial system prevent these laws from being implemented." He also noted that all journalists working in Tajikistan feel their freedoms are compromised, and that younger journalists are especially vulnerable.

"Mass media are practically unprotected since lawmakers 'forgot' to specify clear and concrete mechanisms of implementing the laws that are supposed to regulate it," said panelist Turko Dikaev, National Association of Independent Mass Media of Tajikistan (NANSMIT) representative in Kulyab, Khatlon Province. "The very adoption of the law on criminal liability for libel on the Internet clearly demonstrates the attitude of authorities toward the mass media as additional trouble that hampers their work."

Media associations and NGOs have repeatedly demanded that the four criminal law articles on slander and defamation be abolished. According to Negmatullo Mirsaidov, editor-in-chief of *Varorud* independent newspaper of Khudzhand, Sughd Province, "Authorities are unlikely to consider such demands, as these articles are their leverage for restraining journalists, and the Public Prosecutor's Office often initiates a case when some journalist is to be intimidated or punished." He added that "law enforcement agencies—police, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the court—are the most corrupted ones in Tajikistan. Money can help to acquit a criminal and jail an honest person."

The panelists unanimously noted that the process of broadcast media licensing is not carried out within the provisions of the current law. Eight non-governmental electronic media are still awaiting licenses. Since 2004, broadcast licenses have been granted to pro-state television station Simoi Mustaqli Tojikiston and Imruz radio station. The state-run Bahoriston and Jahonnamo television stations have never received any official broadcasting license, yet operate unimpeded.

Panelist Qurbon Alamshoyev, director of the Pamir Media Center in Khorog, Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province, said he had been planning to launch a radio station for five years, but his papers were still being considered by the licensing committee. "Last year, licensing committee member Barakatullo Abdulfaizov told me my documents had been lost, but I have never received any official letter about it, nor was I informed of any decision with an explanation of the reason why my application had been rejected."

Alamshoyev said he managed to meet twice with the head of the licensing committee and the television and

According to the panelists, journalists have become frequent targets of lawsuits. Associations of journalists believe that journalists are being charged for their professional activity and for guarding the interests of citizens, society and the state.

radio committee chair Asadullo Rakhmonov; the former diplomatically told him, "We will solve your problem." All the licensing committee members are government officials.

"The licensing committee is incompetent, corrupt, and afraid of competition on the part of independent media; and as long as it consists of TV and radio committee officials, it is useless to seek a license—our opinion is just ignored," Mirsaidov said. "This system is a consequence of the government's well thought out policy to restrict the freedom of mass media, especially TV and radio, which are considered the most influential."

According to Internews Network expert Mansur Abdullaev, who teaches journalism at the Russian-Tajik Slavic University, "Issuing licenses is a political process. Six stations which have been waiting for licenses for four years already are financially supported by Internews Network—which the TV and radio committee claims to be a harmful foreign agency."

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.

Abdullaev said that the unused expensive equipment meant for these stations would now be passed on to Kyrgyzstan, where Internews implements similar projects for independent radio stations. Three television companies and two radio stations in that region have been waiting for licenses for more than three years. Abdullaev called such an attitude unpatriotic.

All panelists agreed that licenses should be issued by a public committee or a public council for mass media, as is done in other CIS countries, and that it will be important to make the identities of committee members public, since committee compositions are currently not publicized. Panelists also noted that the licensing committee in its current form (i.e. under the auspices of the television and radio committee) does everything to prevent independent mass media from receiving licenses because it fears competition.

Beside the lack of transparency in decision-making, such complicated licensing procedures rely on the fact that most mass media in Tajikistan, whose population clearly prefers television, are still print media. Fourteen out of 18 regional television stations have launched recently, with the financial and consulting support of Internews Network. According to the law, each broadcaster must renew its license every five years, though actual licenses are issued for various terms, sometimes for as little as a year. License renewal is another means of pressure from the authorities. For example, in 2007 and 2008, the licensing committee rigidly inspected all FM radio stations except for one, Oriyono Radio. The station's owner is the head of the country's largest bank and a relative of the president of Tajikistan.

Entering the media market is not difficult, but it is extremely hard to survive and profit. Aside from media enterprises having financial restrictions, media institutions are the target of more government scrutiny than any other kind of business. Tax officials find it difficult to perceive the media sector as a commodity producer, and try to interpret the criminal code and tax code articles in creative ways.

According to the panelists, journalists have become frequent targets of lawsuits. Associations of journalists believe that journalists are being charged for their professional activity and for guarding the interests of citizens, society and the state.

For example, two criminal lawsuits against journalists were filed in 2008. In August, the Public Prosecutor's Office of Sogdi Region instituted libel proceedings against journalist Tursunali Aliev under article 135 of the criminal code for criticizing one of the heads of the Zhabborasulov district. The charges stemmed from a satirical article entitled "It should shame the chairman..." that Aliev published in the *Tong* weekly newspaper. The court wanted Aliev jailed for two years, but the journalist was saved by Kokhir Rasulzode,

the chairman of Sogdi Region, who intervened and ordered a stop to the case. Legal experts think that the actions of Sogdi law enforcement in this case constitute deliberate persecution and served the interests of influential individuals who seek to intimidate journalists.

In September 2008, the General Public Prosecutor's Office, prompted by the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Tajikistan, initiated criminal proceedings against Dodojon Atovulloyev, editor of *Chagory Rus* newspaper and leader of the Vatandor movement. Criminal charges were instituted under several articles of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Tajikistan, including article 307 (public appeal to forceful change of the constitutional order of the Republic of Tajikistan) and article 137 (public insult of and libel against the President of the Republic of Tajikistan). Atovulloyev was also put on a wanted list.

The trial of three *Ovoza* newspaper journalists (Saida Qurbonova, Farangis Nabiyeva, and Muhayo Nozimova) was initiated by the singer Raikhona and lasted for more than half a year. The case ended in conciliation of the parties only in late 2007. Panelist Khurshed Niyozov, director of the Center for Journalistic Investigations and editor of *Faraj* newspaper, where the three journalists work now, said he has been called to the regional Public Prosecutor's Office seven times. He considers it "related to that trial of three journalists who are now working for his newspaper because although publicity and the Judicial Council's control managed to force Raikhona to agree to conciliation of parties, this resolution caused discomfort for the Public Prosecutor's Office, which was eager to hold the journalists criminally liable."

A journalist brought his employers to trial for the first time in the country's history. Sairof Mizrob, who used to work for Radio Ozodi (Freedom), charged his bosses with "unfair criticism of the Tajik government and libel against the President Emomali Rakhmon and his family." He had previously quit the job "on the grounds of disagreement with the terms of his employment contract."

Prosecutors consider trials based on critical articles to be a sign of mass media efficiency. After the articles have been published, the government usually requires respective organs to validate the facts and issue a competent response to the editorial board.

Threats to journalists come in forms other than judicial inquiries into articles. Practically every panelist recalled having been threatened or pressured by governmental offices or officials. They said any critical article can pose a threat to a journalist. This claim was supported by examples: Dzhurakhon Kabirov, a journalist with the independent newspaper *Millat*, was beaten up by Zainaddin Olimov, chairman of the Kulob

community from Khulyab, for having published a critical article titled "Do Not Muddy the Waters."

Until September 2008, cases of infringement of journalists' rights were published in the Monthly Monitoring by NANSMIT. Today, the public and media members can only occasionally find printed and electronic information on the violation of journalists' rights. Primary cases of infringement include unjustified restrictions or total refusal to provide access to socially important information, unjustified summons to law enforcement offices, violation of the right to personal immunity resulting from unsanctioned searches and seizures, and public defamation of journalists for their professional activities.

State-run media enjoy a system of preferences especially created for them. Representatives of these media are always invited to press conferences and granted contact with the "newsmakers" because they belong to the president's press pool (analogous with Putin's pool in Russia). Other reporters, mainly the ones in opposition, might occasionally receive an invitation to a government event to fill seats.

On the eve of World Press Freedom Day in May 2008, the Tajik Parliament passed a new law "On the Right of Access to Information." At first, the media community was pleased, but their enthusiasm quickly faded. Having read the new law, they realized that it only bureaucratizes access to information instead of improving it. Governmental organizations now have 30 to 45 days to respond to citizens' requests, and the law stipulates "reimbursement of expenses for providing information." In the past, according to article 28 of the former law on information, access to official documents required sending a letter of inquiry, and an official answer (written and oral) would need to be given within no more than 30 days.

All panelists noted the privileged status of foreign journalists accredited in Tajikistan. "Journalists who represent foreign, and especially Russian, media find it much easier to receive information from the officials than those who work for local, especially Tajik-speaking media," Niyozov said.

According to the Ministry of Transport and Communications, about ten percent of Tajikistan's population uses the Internet. Tajik families of average income tend to buy a computer for children and budget for Internet access. International news is relatively accessible, though there are some obstacles: power is unreliable, and for some the price of Internet services is prohibitively high, ranging from \$40 to \$80. In addition, international information is often monitored, as is evident when access is problematic for sites like Fergana.ru and Arianastorm.com, which publish critical information on Tajikistan. Thus the opportunity to learn about events

“The lack of competition from independent television stations allows state television to allocate most of its time to entertainment programs. As a result, people have nicknamed it ‘The State Philharmonic Society,’” Dikaev said.

in foreign countries is unrestricted, but access to news on Central Asia or remote areas of Tajikistan is limited.

A still broader channel of foreign information—satellite and cable television—is becoming widespread in Tajikistan. Satellite dishes have become a source of real-time and objective information for many citizens, especially those residing in cities.

Practicing journalism does not require licensing, and no professional education is required for a person who wants to become a journalist. The state does not assume responsibility for educating highly professional journalists, though the president often speaks about the necessity of a good education, including the journalistic type.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.46

The score for this objective barely changed this year, and all indicators scored close to the overall objective score of 1.46. However, some individual indicators did receive moderately different scores compared to last year. Indicators 1 (fair and objective reporting) and 3 (self-censorship) both slipped somewhat, while modest increases were recorded for Indicators 6 (balance of entertainment and news), 7 (technical equipment), and 8 (niche and investigative reporting).

Journalistic work in Tajikistan is hindered by multiple obstacles, chiefly by limited access to various sources of information. On the one hand, journalists are supposed to provide objective and timely information; on the other, their access to socially important information is restricted. Journalists face significant difficulty in securing an interview with comments from a government official of any rank. Officials must address the inquiry to their direct supervisor, who in turn passes it on to his or her own supervisor. Consequently, a simple clerk or press secretary must receive permission for an interview from “rais”—the head of the local administration. Since public officials are key sources of information in Tajikistan,

such procedures complicate the journalist’s task of providing coverage of key events and issues.

By order of the president, all ministries and departments must organize quarterly press conferences and provide a certain amount of official information on their activities during this period. However, some establishments have been closed to mass media since 2005. For example, the Ministry of Defense and the State Committee for National Security consider their activities to be state secrets. Only state-run media receive information and press releases from them, and even that is provided irregularly.

Risks related to criticizing any sphere of public life forces journalists to act independently, resort to anonymous sources of information, or even use flagrant lies. In the course of discussions, Murod Sotiev, director of the independent information agency Paem, put it this way: “Journalists and editors who dare to publish a critical article may be persecuted by phone or in some other way by the head of a local administration or other officials that are criticized. They or their editors often refrain from publishing further critical materials, due to self-censorship.”

Panelist Tuhfa Akhmedova, press secretary for the NGO Gamkhori, also noted the pressure to censor. “If journalists do not resort to self-censorship, they are threatened with dismissal. This is especially so in the state-run and regional media outlets.”

Panelists recalled several cases in which journalists were dismissed for publishing truthful and objective articles written upon their editors’ requests. These articles were excluded from the paper. Under such circumstances,

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).

journalists practice self-censorship and keep away from topics perceived as off limits.

Nevertheless, Masrur Abdullaev noted, "Journalists cover all the major topics and events, and though they still practice self-censorship, its scope is getting smaller every year." In his opinion, very brave articles in the genre of investigative reporting are published by Tajik newspapers *Faraj*, *Nigokh*, *Millat* and *The USSR*.

Investigative reporting, which had been extremely rare in Tajikistan, has now started to develop with the advent of the Center for Journalistic Investigations, headed by panelist Khurshed Niyozov. He said that within the last two years, they have published more than 20 investigations on social topics, economics and ecology, as well as the civil war of 1992–1997.

All panelists agreed that the four Tajik-language newspapers mentioned above publish the most daring materials and investigations. However, panelists Dikaev and Kurbon Alamshoev, director of the Pamir Mass Media Center, said that "these materials are often subjective and too emotional."

Dikaev said that editorial boards of almost all newspapers published in Tajikistan do not have their own opinion on the issues that their media raise. "They may criticize an official in one issue and praise him in the next one. Such an attitude devalues the printed word and lowers the prestige of mass media. Moreover, some critical materials are based on a single source of information or on so-called 'twin sources' which depend on each other," he said.

Although some media venture into risky territory, panelists said that most journalists avoid certain subjects. "Until now, the president and his family, the speaker of the Parliament, the activities of the State Committee for National Security, customs, corruption in the supreme government bodies, and drug trafficking are taboo subjects for mass media of Tajikistan," said Konstantin Parshin.

Hulkar Yusupov added that "such topics as aluminum and gold ore industries, scandals related to top government officials, financial operations, investment, and sponsorship, are still undesirable."

According to Niyozov, many editors-in-chief, media-holding executives, and heads of journalists' unions view mass media as a kind of business rather than creative work. Some media outlets run an abundance of PR and other pre-paid materials that, in combination with self-censorship, cause Tajik journalism to fall short of professional quality standards. Dikaev mentioned that local sources reported on the facts of bribery among mass media employees. "A regional journalist may write a commissioned article or even demand a sack of flour for PR materials," he said.

In the course of discussions, Murod Sotiev, director of the independent information agency Paem, put it this way: "Journalists and editors who dare to publish a critical article may be persecuted by phone or in some other way by the head of a local administration or other officials that are criticized. They or their editors often refrain from publishing further critical materials, due to self-censorship."

Alamshoev said that he believes that local officials and business leaders often use journalists to achieve their own goals. "Government officials and big businessmen use journalists as a tool for besmirching someone's reputation or settling old scores. This is done by leaking discrediting information to the press," he said.

All panelists agreed that in order to succeed professionally, journalists must have their own connections in the ministries and departments. "Good personal relationships play a key role in receiving confidential information, though our sources often require anonymity so as not to incur their bosses' displeasure," Yusupov said.

Another problem related to the development of professional journalism is the pay level. According to data presented by the panelists, salaries and royalties in the state-run media are especially low and their rates have not changed since 2007. Tuhfa Akhmedova reported that a journalist working for a state-run regional media outlet receives less than \$20 a month, and royalties are not paid at all. "That is why almost all regional journalists make some money on the side by working anonymously for other media outlets or Internet editions," she said.

The situation in some national media outlets has improved: the salary for the staff of two state-run television channels was raised to an average of \$40 to \$50 a month, and employees are allowed to earn extra wages by attracting advertisements and participating in the production of commercials. The national information agency Khovar has also increased its salary rates and royalties so that its average employee can now earn up to \$100 to \$120 a month. Despite this increase, their pay is still much lower than that in private, independent mass media.

Nit doloborem dolor se feugue vendrero et, commod te magna faciduis eros erilit labor sequisi. Giam, cor aliquipit laore enibh euisi ting esequip ea conulput del ulla faccum odolore te feum estie vel ute dolorem

Pay issues drive media talents, especially those who work for state-run television, to find additional sources of income. For instance, a television crew requests \$100 to \$150 for filming a 30-second outdoor spot for a news release; other employees augment their income by shooting private films.

The pay level of non-governmental journalists is significantly higher. Their minimum income can be estimated from job advertisements. An average salary offered in such advertisements is at least \$150 per month for a journalist and at least \$250 per month for an editor. The more popular the journalist, the greater her or his chances are to earn income at other outlets, both in the country and abroad. However, the salary of regional reporters with private newspapers is much lower than that of their colleagues in the capital city. The panelists noted that nearly all of the best journalists work as correspondents for foreign media outlets in Tajikistan, while local journalists write for several newspapers and Internet editions.

Because working for non-governmental media outlets may be difficult and risky, many journalists still prefer to work for state-run media that grant paid vacations and sick leave, which is not the case at most private outlets.

Professional ethics is a significant issue to be addressed. Panelists maintained that the mass media of Tajikistan are not yet ready to accept the Universal Ethical Code. Perhaps as an indicator of this, OSCE, NANSMIT, and the journalists' union last year organized a number of roundtables where they discussed a proposed ethical code for Tajik journalists. However, an agreement on the code has not been reached due to the differing interests of media editors and journalists.

In July 2008, Ittiloot va Muoshirat, a social action organization that includes several officials from Tajikistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, attempted to force media executives and media organizations to adopt its ethical code. The move caused protests among the leaders of the journalists' union, the Media Alliance, and NANSMIT. They refused to adopt the code without evaluation by media experts and their own members' approval.

In the meantime, journalists widely employ unethical approaches. "Not only are ethical norms ignored; sometimes even legal ones are violated," Parshin said. "People who have been detained are often referred to as 'arrested,' and their names and pictures are made public."

All panelists agreed that such a lack of professionalism and failure to comply with ethical norms are unacceptable. They recommended implementing more training programs for journalists, both in teaching general professional courses and conducting compulsory training in legal issues.

Electronic media devote up to 70 percent of their broadcasting time to entertainment programs. "The lack of competition from independent television stations allows state television to allocate most of its time to entertainment programs. As a result, people have nicknamed it 'The State Philharmonic Society,'" Dikaev said.

Parshin also spoke negatively of entertainment-oriented programming. "Television and radio have practically no format, and the air is mainly filled with stolen music and pirated copies of films and musical programs," he said.

All the panelists agreed on the necessity of creating national news and informational television and radio channels that would potentially become very popular, especially if they featured regional news.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.70

The small decrease in Objective 3's score compared to last year is attributable mostly to decreases in Indicators 5 and 6, independent broadcasters produce their own news and transparency of ownership. Further, Indicator 6 was the only indicator to not score close to the objective score, falling short by slightly more than half a point.

Several panelists observed a reduction in the level of news sources that provide the citizens of Tajikistan with objective and useful information. Rano Bobojanova, head of the Center for Gender Research and a reporter for *Bonuvoni Tojikiston* magazine, explains this rating: "Although the reading population grows from year to year, not everyone can afford to buy newspapers due to their high prices. Access to the Internet, especially in remote regions, depends on electricity supply and other technical problems. Mass media do not represent alternative viewpoints, and the opposition is denied any opportunity to express its opinion in the state-run media—it is just not allowed there. The high cost of services

prevents some newspapers from subscribing to news from information agencies.”

Parshin reported that SMS news service for mobile phone users in Tajikistan is non-existent. “There are blogs, but they are not professional enough, and they cannot be considered a source of news. There is an opinion that blogs are yet another invention of American intelligence services aimed at screening public opinion in other countries,” he said.

According to the panelists’ estimation, only 10 to 15 percent of the population can afford to buy newspapers. The retail price of printed media is quite high, typically TJS 1 to TJS 1.50 (\$.28 to \$.43—upwards of a tenth of the average daily income). At the same time, the demand for information is extremely high, and the printed press is a very popular medium. Niyozov thinks that the price for newspapers goes up because there is an informal cartel. “Editors and publishers thoroughly monitor each other, and discuss the matter of concurrent price increases in advance,” he said.

There are no daily newspapers in Tajikistan; almost all publications are weekly and come out on Thursdays. Dikaev said, “The absence of a daily newspaper in the country clearly indicates that something is wrong with Tajik journalism.” According to his statistics, the overall circulation of all newspapers published in Tajikistan is little more than 200,000 copies.

Almost all private newspapers in the capital and large cities are sold out by Friday. Due to the limited scope of delivery and small circulation areas, independent editions published in the capital do not reach remote provinces. Alamshoev noted, “In Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province, granting citizens access to information is very difficult. The national press is delivered only to the administrative center of the province, the city of Khorog, and regional centers may receive newspapers more than a week late, if at all. Due to the lack of local printing houses or their dilapidated equipment, even local newspapers are still printed in Dushanbe once a month.”

According to the Department of the Press under the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Tajikistan, 69 state-run newspapers are regularly published in the regions. Their circulation does not exceed 500 to 1,000 copies. Due to technical and financial hardships, most of them come out only once or twice a month. Very few have proven their profitability despite considerable circulation. Such publications include the newspapers *Diyori Tursunzoda* in the city of Tursunzade with a circulation of 5,000, and *Khakikati Sughd* in Sogdi Region with a circulation of 4,000 to 6,000.

Civil society groups supported by international organizations are working to provide citizens with access to various information resources. OSCE helped open information centers

*Giatio commy nosto dolobor eraessim in
eugiat lorem dolenim autem del iril ea
conullut lum vel do commy nulputpatum
vel dui bla faccumsan vel ut dolorem quat
inibh exer sit praestrud erosto con ut alit
aut alisl ip endre min ute velit praestrud*

with a wide selection of periodicals and Internet access in some regions. But due to Islamic customs, these centers are hardly visited by women, except for NGO activists and public figures. The Media Resource Center in Dushanbe is extremely popular with journalists. Its services include a library of books on journalism, newspaper files, and access to the Internet and information provided by Tajik news agencies.

Sharply limited electricity supplies, which are even scarcer every year during fall and winter, have become a real lesson in survival for citizens in remote regions. They are cut off from all sources of information on both domestic and foreign events. Nevertheless, electricity is always available when programs about the president or important political events are broadcast.

Panelists noted the growing popularity of satellite television in the countryside as well as in cities, due to higher accessibility of equipment and more affordable pricing. The scope of information received via Russian and other foreign channels is growing, which Abdullaev said is important for the Tajik people. “Tajik national radio and television do not

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.

Political pluralism in the country is ensured by the newspapers of political parties. Although not all parties have their own newspapers, the largest parties publish their own media.

provide citizens with relevant, socially important information. The population of Tajikistan often learns about events in their own country from the Internet and Russian TV channels. And while all state-run media are partisan, private ones do not have enough courage to protect social values.”

The satellite broadcasts of Russian channels are usually interrupted to show important political events in Tajikistan, especially the ones in which President Rakhmon is involved.

All the panelists pointed out the increased influence of Tajik-language media compared to 2007, although there still room for improvement. Dikaev declared, “Tajik journalism is present while being absent!” and all participants agreed.

The project subsidized by Internews Network helped establish local television studios in 14 regions of Tajikistan. These media outlets use modern digital technology and have much better equipment than their state-run regional counterparts. However, the growing potential of regional media has not helped to improve inter-regional information exchange. Neither state-run nor independent printed and electronic media have correspondents in the central part of Tajikistan. The panelists noted that news agencies provide more information on events in other countries, and residents of the capital find it much easier to receive information on international events than on those events that happened in neighboring towns or villages only a few miles away.

Rustam Buriev, director of Mavji Ozod independent television station in Khatlong Province, said that mass media produce very few original programs. “We mainly broadcast the programs produced by the Internews Network Open Asia and produce our own news coverage only twice a week. We cannot produce analytical programs either, due to the lack of professional TV reporters and experts,” he said.

In the past, many production studios provided private companies with their products, but they all ceased operations after the licensing system was introduced in 2005. Panelists said that Internews Network’s re-registration in Tajikistan gives hope for renewal of its projects and for the revival of the joint program of eight regional stations that was discontinued in 2006. This should fill the information vacuum in those regions.

Comparing Tajik television with broadcasts of other countries, Mirsaidov noted that it lacks socially significant information. “The media still tend to avoid showing accidents and natural disasters in the news,” he said. The panelists illustrated this with examples of floods, avalanches, terrorist attacks, and fatal traffic accidents that were shown by state television several days after the fact, once the president had sent a committee there. People learned about these events from different sources—some via the Internet and some via Russian television, whose reporters in Tajikistan are more efficient.

Tajikistan has ten news agencies, the most famous of which are independent Asia-Plus, Avesta, Varorud, Paem, Interpress-service, Hatlon-press, Zerafshan-times, Pamir-Media, Simonews and the state news agency Khovar. They operate with varying degrees of success and try to cover news from all over the country. The panelists especially praised the work of Asia-Plus and Avesta, which provide timely information online, beginning in the very early morning. However, Avesta is now available only to subscribers and Asia-Plus has partially limited access to its Web site since 2007.

All the agencies and newspapers often use materials prepared by such leading international agencies as Agence France-Presse, Reuters, and the Associated Press. Yusupov said that Asia-Plus accesses the agencies’ materials via the Internet, skirting the normal rules. “We do not pay anything to them. We use hyperlinks, and they are aware of it and close their eyes to it. They know that Tajik media outlets cannot afford a subscription, and if fines were applied, western journalists would consider it as a démarche against the democratic media in Tajikistan.”

Saidumron Saidov reported that state-run television uses only news provided by Khovar, whereas news provided by independent agencies is broadcast by private FM radio stations.

The public seldom knows who finances the groups that control some independent media. Only journalists are familiar with the sponsors of their publications and know in whose interest certain independent radio and television stations operate. There is a hierarchy within Tajik media, and television journalists, especially those who anchor talk shows and entertainment programs, are at the top. The most influential political groups aspire to have their own electronic media outlets, or at least loyal outlets that give them access to a much broader audience than printed media.

According to the panelists, in 2008 financial giants expressed interest in the development of their own mass media. Oriyon International was mentioned as the most prominent example. This media holding is owned by the head of the country’s largest private bank, Oriyon Bank, which founded the radio station Imruz in addition to the already existing Oriyono

Radio. The media branch of the company is also planning to set up its own television company and an advertising agency.

Tajikistan has very few minority media outlets. They are mainly local publications in the Uzbek and Kyrgyz languages. Alamshoev reported that newspapers in Kyrgyz with circulation of 500 copies are published in Murghab and Jirgatal regions, which have a large Kyrgyz population.

The first national channel has news programs in Uzbek, Russian, Arabic and English. Uzbek ethnic groups have a wider choice of media outlets in their mother tongue; in addition to local media, there is a national governmental Uzbek-language newspaper *Khalk Ovozi* and a non-governmental newspaper, *Dustlik*, distributed in places with a large Uzbek population. *Dustlik* is published by the Association of National Minorities of Tajikistan and deals with issues relating to the Uzbek Diaspora.

Dikaev also reported on a national minority newspaper in the Turkmen language that is published in Jilikul Region of Khatlong Province, where many Turkmen live.

All panelists agreed that national minorities are free to develop their own media in Tajikistan without any restrictions. Nevertheless, the Association of National Minorities of Tajikistan does not have its own offices yet despite its application to the government on this matter three years ago. Panelist Rano Bobojanova attributed the dearth of minority representation to increasing “national chauvinism, accompanied by the infringement of the rights of minorities.”

Political pluralism in the country is ensured by the newspapers of political parties. Although not all parties have their own newspapers, the largest parties publish their own media. For instance, the Islamic Renaissance Party in Tajikistan (IRPT) has two newspapers, two magazines and owns printing facilities both in Dushanbe and in the regions. However, only the president’s People’s Democratic Party is granted access to the electronic media, while Communist or IRPT MPs are only occasionally invited to participate in some television and radio programs.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.22

Drops in the scores of most of the indicators resulted in a notable decrease in score that pushed Tajikistan’s business management into the lower half of the “unsustainable, mixed system” category. Only Indicator 1 (media outlets operate as efficient businesses) and Indicator 3 (the advertising market)

The main advertisers in Tajik media have been cell phone operators, Internet providers, commercial banks, international organizations and embassies that are accredited in Tajikistan.

remained unchanged. All indicators scored similarly poorly; none deviated from the objective score by more than 0.30.

The dynamics of the development of mass media in Tajikistan over the past few years reveal that media outlets, which used to perform the role of political mouthpieces, are making a rapid transition to journalism that turns out quality products, satiates the market demand for diverse information, and is on the road to becoming a successful sector.

Despite its rich hydropower and mineral resources, Tajikistan still has a relatively low level of economic development. New financial groups with their own media are appearing in Tajikistan, however. These include Oriyon International, with its two radio stations and a monthly economic magazine; and Asia-Plus, which owns two newspapers, an FM radio station and the country’s first glossy magazine, *VIP-Zone*, that launched in 2008.

The panelists noted that the representatives of big business seldom sponsor media outlets directly, preferring advertisements, commercials and public relations materials. The main advertisers in Tajik media have been cell phone

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.

Yusupov reported that the media delivery system in Tajikistan is still far from perfect. Tajikatbuot (Tajik Print) has been privatized by the authorities, and this company is mainly interested in disseminating governmental editions.

operators, Internet providers, commercial banks, international organizations and embassies that are accredited in Tajikistan.

Panelists stressed that despite their apparent stability, many media outlets still subsist on grants and advertising. Babajanova said, "Most mass media in Tajikistan, especially the regional ones, are keeping afloat due to grants from foreign donors. Grants are given only to media outlets that have a clear-cut strategy for maintaining their financial stability."

Concealing revenues has become a universal strategy of Tajik businesses. Naturally enough, non-governmental mass media follow the trend and conceal their revenues by publishing camouflaged advertising, reporting lowered circulation to tax authorities, and printing unrecorded copies. The very fact that most economic activities are "in the shadows" impedes the growth of the advertising market. Most media, especially those in remote regions of the country, do not rely on the advertising market as a significant source of their income. Regional media still earn most of their revenue by publishing classified advertisements and sponsored articles. National media also suffer from poor capitalization and a low level of investment.

All the panelists agreed that the practice continues of distorting print publications' circulation figures. Some print media understate their circulation in order to lower taxes; others overstate it to increase the popularity of their publications. Some printed media, in conspiracy with printing shops, print off-the-books copies that are later sold tax-free. Camouflaged advertising and PR materials are yet another way to avoid taxes by concealing revenues.

The panelists mentioned that, according to the law, there is a limit on television advertisements. However, the lack of monitoring enables television stations, especially those that are state-run, to conceal their advertising revenues. The panelists also noted that all publishers are pursuing their own profits, there is little solidarity among them, and what solidarity exists concerns nothing but setting mutual price increases.

Yusupov reported that the media delivery system in Tajikistan is still far from perfect. Tajikatbuot (Tajik Print) has been privatized by the authorities, and this company is mainly interested in disseminating governmental editions.

On the other hand, public distributors, mainly retired women who sell newspapers and magazines, have to pay "interest" to Tajikatbuot.

Journalists from various media have an incentive to attract commercials to their outlets because 30 to 50 percent of the total advertising fee is a commission. However, this practice turns the journalist into a merchant who is engaged in writing only custom-made advertising materials. The owners of such big non-governmental outlets as Asia-Plus, Charkhi Gardun, and Oila have created marketing departments, and only these departments look for advertisers and research existing and potential advertising markets and their demands.

Many successful companies develop other kinds of business in addition to publishing. Charkhi Gardun, the richest and largest-circulation media company in the country, has recently purchased its own printing house. It is also engaged in delivery of newsprint, consumables, printing plates, construction, etc. The media company Oila has its own advertising agency, Tyron, and a printing house, Oila Print, with state-of-the-art equipment.

Most governmental and state-run print media still rely on subscriptions (which are mandatory for government employees) as their major source of income. According to Yusupov, "Governmental media increase their circulations and have revenues only due to subscriptions."

Non-governmental media are more focused on advertisements, classifieds, and public relations materials that also attract more advertisers. Yusupov said, "The Tajik-language *The USSR* is the only newspaper printed in Dushanbe that is free from advertisements, and it is the favorite edition for many readers. All other newspapers devote up to 20 percent of their volume to advertising."

Private regional television stations often receive small grants from local administrations. Bobojanova said, "Independent television stations in Sogdi Region receive subsidies from the local budget."

Scant earnings lead either to closure of these media or their reliance on sponsors. For example, Mavchi Ozod television station, headed by panelist Rustam Buriev, has a sponsor partnership in effect. "Our station works in cooperation with the local oligarch, the owner of Samar Company," Buriev said. "The TV station is located in the territory of the plant that belongs to this company, our employees receive their salaries from the plant, and they know that their founder will always find solutions to their problems."

Market and rating surveys of the mass media sector are conducted sporadically and irregularly. Two years ago, all such surveys were conducted by the Zerkalo Center for Sociological

Research. Now these surveys are not held at all. Media outlets do not consider sociological research necessary or worth the cost, and conduct their own surveys in the newspapers or on their Web sites. And Akhmedova said, "Media owners do not need [professional] surveys, as they judge their publications' ratings by circulation alone."

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.30

Objective 5 suffered the most severe drop in score this year, falling from 1.92—almost into the "near sustainability" category—to 1.30 in the bottom half of the "unsustainable, mixed system" category. All indicators fell rather dramatically, except for Indicator 6, access to printing facilities, which remained unchanged. Further, all indicators scored similarly as poorly as the overall objective score: none was more or less than 0.20 away from the objective score.

Tajikistan has eight associations and funds and one union of journalists: the Journalists' Union of Tajikistan, NANSMIT, the Association of Independent Electronic Mass Media, the Fund for Memory and Protection of Journalists, The Journalist Association, the Association of Journalism Teachers, and the Association of Professional Journalists of Sogdi Region. The newest professional media organization, Media Alliance, has 35 members from all over the country except for the Pamir. The organization arranges for the defense of journalists prosecuted for critical articles, makes public statements, and participates in court hearings against mass media employees, including the 2007 case against the three print journalists from *Ovoz*.

Panelists had mixed opinions on the progress and effectiveness of support institutions. Some said that NGO support of mass media is deteriorating. "Most NGO activities practically never reach the regions, except for carrying out rare seminars and trainings only for independent journalists," Dikaev said.

Some of the panelists noted the advances in the work of the Journalists' Union after its election of a new and energetic leader, Akbarali Sattorov, who heads the Charkhi Gardun Media Holding. Others were skeptical. Niyozov and Dikaev said that the Journalists' Union remains a pro-governmental organization, its managers have never visited the southern regions of the country in order to familiarize themselves with the situation media professionals face there, and it does not keep a list of union members. Abdullaev said, "The Journalists' Union of Tajikistan is making loud statements, but it never deals with problems. The organization has become

"Most NGO activities practically never reach the regions, except for carrying out rare seminars and trainings only for independent journalists," Dikaev said.

amorphous and turned into a department of Charkhi Gardun Media Holding."

The panelists also expressed different opinions on the activities of NANSMIT, the most prestigious NGO supporting media and journalists. Although some participants stressed its important role in protecting the rights of journalists and media outlets, others believed that the work of this organization declined considerably in 2008, the rigorous monitoring of infringements of the rights of journalists has practically ceased, and very few professional trainings and seminars were conducted. According to Dikaev, "NANSMIT can operate only if it receives financial support from international organizations."

Panelist Parshin of NANSMIT said that the "organization tries to provide journalists with necessary professional support. The monitoring of infringements of the rights of journalists is not supported by grants anymore, so it has been limited to publishing the data only on the nansmit.tj Web site, which is hardly ever read by anyone."

All the panelists agreed that the only solution to the union crisis is the establishment of an independent, professional union that would protect the rights of mass media and their journalists and help to solve intra-editorial conflicts between journalists and their employers.

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.

Abdullaev said, "The Journalists' Union of Tajikistan is making loud statements, but it never deals with problems. The organization has become amorphous and turned into a department of Charkhi Gardun Media Holding."

Although training programs of the Internews Network have been curbed since October 2007, all the panelists praised this organization for supplying equipment, supporting media management technologies, and training electronic mass media staff in the international standards of journalism and management.

The panelists expressed particular concern regarding the professional training of journalists, which had not improved in the past year. Tajikistan has one faculty of journalism and five departments of journalism that teach about 100 students a year. However, students graduate with very low skill levels. Most of their course material is based on the history of journalism, and they are taught using outdated methods. They do not receive even the most elementary computer skills training, much less experience with journalism software. "Students need access to the Internet to complete their education, and no institution of higher education can provide them with this," Abdullaev said.

Bobojanova said that students are also missing out on experiencing the media sector in other countries. "Although journalists sometimes study abroad, students of departments of journalism never do so," he said. "Studying abroad is a private enterprise, and such programs are available in the USA and Iran."

Once out of school, panelists said, graduates do not or cannot work in the profession. Yusupov said, "Only five to six percent of graduates are ready to work for newspapers, but more students could be attracted to mass media if they could be provided with year-round practice in print media. However, this initiative was rejected by the Ministry of Education and the deans of the faculties of journalism."

Both governmental and non-governmental media outlets compete to obtain good and promising journalists and entice them with higher royalties. However, none of them starts selecting while the students are still in college.

State media employees seldom attend seminars and trainings because their editors do not allow it. This accounts for the sharp difference between the professional skills of independent media journalists and state media journalists.

According to Yusupov, "A smart editor will always allow a journalist to attend training sessions, even if they are abroad," and mentioned short-term courses for journalists conducted by the OSCE Academy in Bishkek.

The panelists paid attention to the fact that independent media present more references to authoritative and competent sources, whereas journalists with the state media outlets write in the first person, imposing their own opinions upon the reader. "Government journalists are especially weak in conducting interviews and covering economic topics," Mirsaidov said.

In addition, most editors of state-run media outlets are extremely conservative and advocate "the purity of genre," whereas political essays and journalistic investigations come closer to international standards.

Only the Journalists' Union and the Tajik affiliate of the *Arguments and Facts* newspaper conduct training and retraining sessions in the workplace. All the panelists pointed out the dearth of trainings and seminars for electronic media, which are not conducted anywhere except by Internews.

The discussion of the quality of the press led to a discussion of printing houses and consumables. A group of panelists noted that the monopoly of the state printing houses continues. The governmental printing house Sharki Ozod still allows itself to choose which editions to print and which to reject, often on political grounds and by command "from above." Niyozov informed the panelists that "Sharki Ozod always gives priority to the governmental newspapers, and the price of paper, plates, and services for them is 15 to 20 percent lower than for independent newspapers."

The Oila-Print publishing house offers reasonable prices, modern equipment and full-color printing. However, according to Yusupov, "If Sharki Ozod refused to print a certain newspaper for some reason, Oila-Print would also reject it."

The panelists remarked on the necessity to imitate Kyrgyzstan by creating printing houses for independent newspapers in Dushanbe and regional centers such as Khudzhand, Kurgan Tube, and Khorog.

The panelists concluded their discussion with a statement that the current state of freedom of speech, independent mass media, commercialization, and the advancement of Internet providers indicate a quick pace towards a market economy. Certain assistance from international organizations, as well as political freedom and strict adherence to the law, might help mass media in Tajikistan overcome their technical and professional obstacles.

List of Panel Participants

Mansur Abdullaev, director, Internet Network; journalism teacher, the Russian-Tajik Slavic University, Dushanbe

Kurbon Alamshoev, director, Pamir Mass Media Center, Khorog

Rustam Buriev, director, Mavji Ozod TV, Vose District

Negmatullo Mirsaidov, editor-in-chief, *Varorud* newspaper, Khudzhand

Khurshed Niyozov, editor, *Faraj* newspaper, Dushanbe

Saidumron Saidov, chairman, Association of Professional Journalists of the Sogdi Region, Khudzhand

Turko Dikaev, reporter, Asia-Plus, Khulyab

Tukhfa Akhmedova, chairperson, Gamkhori Press Center, Kurgan-Tube

Rano Bobojanova, chairperson, the Center for Gender Research; reporter, *Bonuvoni Tojikiston* magazine, Khudzhand

Hulkar Yusupov, chief of the information analysis department, Asia-Plus, Dushanbe

Konstantin Parshin, expert, National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan; freelance journalist, Dushanbe

Murod Sotiev, director, Independent Information Agency Paem, Kurgan-Tube

Moderator and Author

Lidiya Isamova, correspondent, RIA News, Dushanbe

The panel discussion was convened on December 6, 2008.