
According to various estimates, the digitalization process may last until 2011, 2012, or possibly even 2015, yet the panelists feel that the difficulty of the digitalization process is artificially exaggerated.



ARMENIA

Although Armenia's legal framework supports freedom of speech, ongoing concerns about the enforcement of laws and overall low awareness (both on the part of the authorities and journalists) of laws surrounding freedom of speech continue to hold back the media. Questions about judicial independence and ongoing violence and harassment of the media led journalists to decry the prevailing air of impunity. Self-censorship is now widespread in Armenia, especially on television.

The same concerns regarding the fairness, competitiveness, and political neutrality of broadcast media licensing carried over from last year, as the process of granting licenses is currently suspended while broadcast media undergo digitalization. According to various estimates, the digitalization process may last until 2011, 2012, or possibly even 2015, yet the panelists feel that the difficulty of the digitalization process is artificially exaggerated. Noting that the licensing process is not taking place independently from political influences, they viewed the suspension of license competitions as a means to limit the freedom of speech.

Journalists, especially the profession's youngest members, often do not follow professional standards of journalism, according to this year's panel. Journalists rarely conduct detailed verification of the information they present, they do not undertake preliminary investigations, and they often insert their own opinion into their reporting. The panel attributes these shortcomings primarily to inadequate formal-education programs and financial limitations—media outlets cannot afford to hire enough experienced specialists. The panel pointed to the need for more short-term training programs to help fill this gap.

This year's panel did note some signs of progress, for example, in the ease of market entry. Also, the Armenian government does not require registration to access the Internet or satellite television. However, remembering how the government blocked access to certain sites during the state of emergency declared in March 2008, journalists do not feel that this freedom is completely secure. Additionally, high costs associated with Internet use restrict access—a problem that is especially evident in regions. According to this year's panel, blogs are not yet a serious source of information for Armenians.

There were minor fluctuations in some areas, but overall, Armenia's score was virtually unchanged from last year, as many of the same problems continue to plague the media sector.

ARMENIA AT A GLANCE

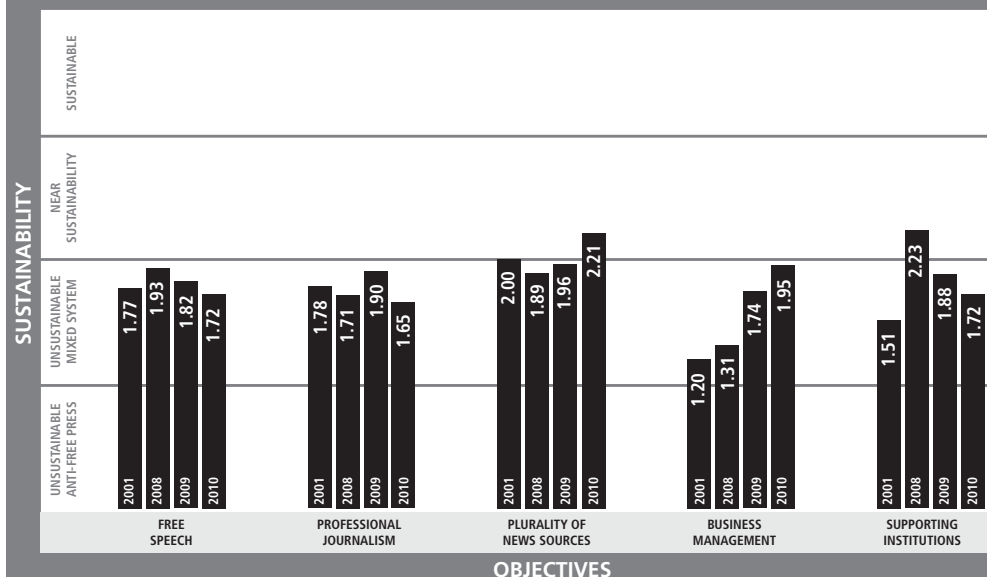
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 2,967,004 (July 2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Yerevan
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Armenian 97.9%, Yezidi (Kurd) 1.3%, Russian 0.5%, other 0.3% (2001 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Armenian Apostolic 94.7%, other Christian 4%, Yezidi 1.3% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Armenian 97.7%, Yezidi 1%, Russian 0.9%, other 0.4% (2001 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2008-Atlas):** \$10.32 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **GNI per capita (2008-PPP):** \$6,310 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **Literacy rate:** 99.4% (male 99.7%, female 99.2%) (2001 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Serzh Sargsian (since April 9, 2008)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print 36; Radio 17; Television Stations: 48 (includes local) (ITU)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** The maximum circulation cited is 9,000 copies and the average real circulation for most popular newspapers is 5,000. (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** top three television stations: H1, Shant TV, Armenia TV (AGB Nielsen)
- > **News agencies:** ARKA, Armenpress, Arminfo, Associated Press, De facto, EFE, FrancePress, Interfax, ITAR Tass, MediaMax, Medinform, New Image, News Armenia, Noyan Tapan, Photolure News agency, Regnum, Reuters, Rosbalt, Spyrur Information Center
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** \$70 million (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia)
- > **Internet usage:** 191,000 (2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: ARMENIA



Annual scores for 2002 through 2006/2007 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

Armenia Objective Score: 1.72

The score for this objective was virtually unchanged from last year's score. The panel scored indicators 1 (legal and social protections of free speech) and 3 (market entry) higher than last year, and the biggest drops in scores were recorded for indicators 6 (libel), 7 (public access to information), and 9 (entry into the journalism profession). Most of the indicators' scores varied widely from the overall objective average. Indicator 2 (broadcast licensing), indicator 4 (attacks against journalists), indicator 5 (legal advantages for, and guarantees for independence of, public media), and indicator 6 all scored about three-quarters of a point lower. Indicators 8 (media access to and use of international information sources) and 9 both scored more than a point higher.

Assessing Armenia's legal and social protections for free speech, the panelists had the same concern as last year: a gap persists between constitutional provisions and enforcement of the laws. Nevertheless, according to a majority of this year's panelists, there has been some progress in the enforcement of relevant laws.

Considering both positive and negative forces affecting free speech, the panelists noted some strengths; for example, the constitution assures freedom of speech in line with international standards, and there is an accompanying regulatory framework to support. Another positive factor is that the government does not require registration to access the Internet or satellite television, perhaps a significant reason that this year's score for this indicator went up. On the other hand, factors weighing down this indicator's score include poor enforcement of the laws, combined with a low level of awareness of the laws regulating the freedom of speech, both among journalists and law-enforcement bodies. Additionally, the courts do not act independently, according to the panel.

Gevorg Altunyan, a journalist from Armenia TV, commented, "Our country has a lot of work to do with enforcement of legal and social norms, because the accepted laws that could be considered positive, that could improve our situation, remain unenforced." Anahit Nahapetyan, editor of *Tuphashkharhi Arorya*, added, "In terms of legal provisions, we are now in the process of addressing enforcement mechanisms, and this is a complicated process."

The same concerns regarding the fairness, competitiveness, and political neutrality of broadcast media licensing carried over from last year, and the score remained essentially the same for this indicator, as the process of granting licenses is currently suspended. According to the panel, the licensing

body has justified the suspension on the grounds that the broadcast media are going through a complicated digitalization process. As a result, the licenses of currently operating broadcasters have been automatically extended, and no new license competitions are being held.

According to various estimates, the digitalization process may last until 2011, 2012, and possibly even 2015. Yet the panelists feel that the difficulty of the digitalization process has been artificially exaggerated; they provided examples from other countries where the digitalization process went very smoothly. Therefore, the panelists view the suspension of license competitions as a means to limit the freedom of speech and noted that the licensing process is not taking place independently from political influences.

Panelists observe no legal limitations concerned with media market entry, and the legal taxation mechanisms for the media are the same as in other industries. However, although overall the scores for this indicator improved slightly this year, some panelists brought up a concern regarding the taxation of print media. Even though print outlets are VAT (value-added tax) exempt, they have to pay 30 percent to newspaper delivery structures; the VAT exemption does not significantly help them. Mnatsakan Harutyunyan, president of Hrazdan TV, considers this fact an example of a law that exists on paper only. He said, "This example of VAT exemption shows that although there is a law. It is just formal thing; the media do not benefit from it."

Panelists recounted several cases of violence against journalists during 2009. They noted that those cases were not prosecuted

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.

appropriately and perpetrators of the crimes went unpunished. The panelists observed a pattern; the authorities portray these crimes as a matter of personal problems of the journalists and maintain that they are not related to any political issues.

For example, panelists discussed the case of journalist Nver Mnatsakanyan, which took place in May 2009. The journalist was beaten outside his home by two unknown assailants. The police proceeded with a criminal investigation, but the head of the police later declared that the case was not connected with the journalist's professional activity but rather was a case of mistaken identity. Journalists feel unsafe as a result of these types of cases. As one of the panelists said, "The problem is that there is an atmosphere of impunity; it is understood that crimes against journalists will not be prosecuted appropriately, and no serious punishments will follow." Describing the overall atmosphere, Mnatsakan Harutyunyan said, "An atmosphere of being unprotected exists. Even one case of violence is enough for journalists to feel insecure, and we are in a situation of despair now." For these reasons, this indicator was scored low.

The panelists assigned a low score to the indicator addressing preferential legal treatment for the state or public media. Even if the law does not specifically provide for preferential legal treatment, the public media enjoy some privileges. For example, they receive first access to official news. They also have a financial edge, as they are currently being financed by the state budget. The panel noted that in public media, some bias is evident, and news related to officials receives prominent coverage.

The score for libel also dragged down the overall score for this objective, as it is still a matter covered by the criminal code. The panelists recalled the legal ordeal of one journalist, who was condemned to three years in prison because he published an article about a high-ranking official. Mnatsakan Harutyunyan shared his concerns about the definition of libel in the code, as well as the steps to be taken following violations. He said, "I see some vagueness regarding the concepts of libel and reporting false information, and the burden of proof is not clearly defined in our country."

Panelists assessed the situation regarding availability of public information in relatively favorable terms, pointing to the fact that there is a law in place to facilitate access. Still, there are some issues concerning full enforcement of this law, because the Ministry of Justice still has not elaborated the mechanisms of enforcement. Journalists still encounter some obstacles when applying for information from tax or military structures, in particular. Information related to the income declarations of officials and decisions made by local governing bodies are also considered to be closed topics. Local governments are unresponsive when somebody applies for information, social

accountability is low, and they do not inform the public about decisions made. Panelists also pointed to a National Assembly decision that allows only the first 30 minutes of each session to be recorded.

One of the panelists described another information-access roadblock she encountered regarding the ecological consequences of some factories. They have a legal obligation to inform the public about their impact on the environment, but they never do, and this panelist was unable to get the information she needed.

There are now no restrictions by the government to access international news and news resources. However, while discussing this issue, the panelists recalled the state of emergency declared on March 1, 2008, when access to international sources was restricted. Although no such restrictions were reported in 2009, journalists understand that this threat always looms in Armenia. This possibility held the panelists back slightly in scoring this indicator. Additionally, they cited high Internet costs as another prohibitive factor in accessing and using international news in their reports.

There are no limitations for entry into the journalism profession, and entry into educational institutions is not controlled by the government.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Armenia Objective Score: 1.65

Objective 2 showed a moderate drop this year, primarily due to lower scores for three indicators: indicator 2 (journalism ethics), indicator 3 (self-censorship), and indicator 7 (modern equipment). All indicators scored very close to the overall objective score.

A majority of the panelists think that most journalists, especially the profession's youngest members, often do not follow professional standards of journalism. Journalists rarely conduct detailed verification of the information they present, they do not undertake preliminary investigations, and they often insert their own opinion into their reporting. Nahapetyan commented, "I have a very negative opinion about the level of professionalism of journalists. They present their work with little variation in language, very superficially, and they rarely conduct professional investigations."

The panelists discussed possible reasons behind this problem, including inadequate education and financial limitations—media outlets cannot afford to hire enough experienced specialists. Altunyan observed, "The quality of journalism is far from sufficient now, and the salaries of media specialists

are far from enticing. As a result, people who become journalists either have another source of income, or they are inexperienced." In general, the panel concluded that few media outlets adhere to high standards of professionalism.

There is now a committee of ethics within the Yerevan Press Club. This committee includes about 20 media outlets. Mnatsakan Harutyunyan called this committee a self-regulatory mechanism; its decisions are not legally binding, but it provides an ethical framework to guide media outlets. Although highly appreciative that the committee exists, panelists nevertheless doubt that ethical norms are followed by a significant number of journalists. They discussed several examples that should be considered as crude violations of journalism ethics, yet are typical for some media outlets that carry a lot of influence with their audiences. The panelists noted that there are several media outlets that create their own ethical codes and coordinate their activities accordingly.

Self-censorship is now widespread in Armenia, according to the panelists. This is due to several potential and real pressures and to the fact that most media are linked to a political power. Among the few independent media outlets, given all the different directions they can be pressured, there is a tendency to avoid controversial topics. Nahapetyan said, "They behave as if they are afraid of running into trouble. There is a great deal of fear, because writing a critical article can land journalists in unpleasant situations." Narine Mkrtchyan, president of the National Press Club, has found print media to be less affected by self-censorship, but because they have smaller audiences, they cannot significantly influence the overall media sector's score.

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).

Altunyan observed, "The quality of journalism is far from sufficient now, and the salaries of media specialists are far from enticing. As a result, people who become journalists either have another source of income, or they are inexperienced."

Regarding the coverage of key events and issues by the press, the panelists noted that it is difficult for print media to introduce key topics in a timely fashion, because television and the Internet are more instantaneous. Meanwhile, regional media get news about key events relatively later than media in Yerevan. As panelist Davit Eranosyan, director of Zangak TV, said, "As regional media get information about key events later, when central media have already covered the information, it is more beneficial for regional media to focus on local information."

Panelists tended not to link low pay levels of journalists with corruption. They think that low rates are not the crucial factor for cases of corruption in the media sector, because corrupt agreements tend to be forged at higher levels than ordinary journalists. Mkrtchyan noted a disparity between the salary levels of public and private media professionals; public media professionals have higher salaries and benefit from privileges like apartment subsidies as well. Some panelists touched on the fact that low salaries can lead journalists to leave the profession.

The panelists agreed that entertainment programming tends to eclipse news. Mnatsakan Harutyunyan linked this with higher public demand for entertainment programming, which compels media owners to respond adequately to this demand. Tigran Harutyunyan, vice director of Noyan Tapan news agency and printing house, countered that there are some media outlets where news and information programming prevails. He added that if someone has a need for information and the will to find it, there are options.

Armenian media still lack sufficient equipment and facilities to gather, produce, and distribute news. The panelists representing different media stated that to some extent, they all still have some equipment needs, which negatively affect their operations. The main negative impact cited was a decrease of timeliness and efficiency. The lack of financial resources in the media sector does not facilitate appropriate investments in equipment. The panelists also noted that there is a significant difference between print and broadcast media in this respect; print media can afford to operate with limited

equipment, but broadcasters cannot, and as Mnatsakan Harutyunyan stated, "Television in Armenia remains behind western television, by nearly 20 to 30 years."

There are two important issues the panelists took into account in discussing quality niche reporting and programming. First, the lack of financial resources makes having narrowly specialized journalists an expensive thing for a media outlet to develop and maintain. Therefore, journalists must be versatile and work on a number of different topics. Second, educational institutions do not now prepare journalists who are specialized in a specific area. Furthermore, some of the panelists think that most journalists tend to throng to political and cultural issues. Two possible exceptions would be sports and business, which continue to be fairly well covered.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Armenia Objective Score: 2.21

The increase in score for this objective was the net result of positive and negative movement of several indicators. Receiving higher scores this year were indicator 2 (citizen access to news media), 4 (news agencies), 5 (independent broadcasters produce their own news), and 7 (coverage of a wide array of social and minority interest topics). On the losing side was indicator 3 (state media are nonpartisan and serve the public interest). Many of the indicator scores also varied widely from the overall objective score: indicator 3 and 6 (transparency of media

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.

ownership) lagged well behind the overall objective score, while indicators 4, 5, and 7 all scored well above.

There was some disagreement among panelists regarding the existence, affordability, and plurality of public and private news sources. Some of them think that all the media provide the same information: it is enough to switch to one channel and instantly know what is being broadcast elsewhere. Some panelists, on the other hand, said that if someone is seeking news, he or she can search out information from different types of media sources or from media with different political orientations.

Although the panel concurred that citizens' access to domestic and international media is not restricted by the government, it is affected by financial and geographical limitations. The problems surrounding access are more acute in the regions, especially for rural populations, where access to the Internet, international and some Armenian television stations, and print media is more limited. In particular, the Internet is more expensive in the regions.

The MSI panelists agreed that public media have a partisan posture, and they generally fail to reflect public interest. One panelist said, "I would even mark a negative grade if possible, because there is nothing positive to say about this issue. The public media are extremely partisan; they toe a specific political line, which is impermissible. They do not serve public interests and even violate them."

As a result of abovementioned facts, public television has become a "microphone for government," in the words of one panelist. However, Tigran Harutyunyan added that in this situation, public radio should be considered an exception. He said, "I think public radio in 2009 came close to meeting demands in terms of provision of news; it seemed to be somewhat independent."

The panelists hold the work of independent news agencies in high esteem and noted that there are independent agencies that distribute news for print and broadcast media. A majority of the panelists felt that most agencies have managed to avoid political influences, though there are also some that work with only official information. One limitation of using the services of international news agencies is the high cost. In addition, some panelists noted that there is still a problem with citing sources.

Panelists pointed to progress in local media's efforts to prepare their own news programs; previously this was seen only in the capital. Now, regional media outlets try to keep a balance between their own and rebroadcasted news. The panelists said that blogs are not yet a serious source of news and information.

The transparency of media ownership remains low. The panelists argued that there is a lack of information about ownership, noting that business sectors tend to have their own media outlets, where they influence news content. Mnatsakan Harutyunyan said that several years ago, a law about the transparency of media financial affairs was adopted, but, in fact, no media representatives publish any information about their financing.

Panelists said that the press sufficiently reflects minority issues. Additionally, there are media outlets in minority languages, so according to the panelists, this aspect of the media environment is quite favorable in Armenia. The panelists did not report any resistance to covering social issues, such as those concerning gender, social convention, religion, or sexual orientation in the media.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Armenia Objective Score: 1.95

This indicator experienced a small increase compared with last year, as four indicators moved up modestly: indicator 2 (media rely on multiple sources of revenue), indicator 3 (the advertising market), indicator 4 (balance of advertising and other revenue), and indicator 7 (audience and circulation measurement). All indicators scored close to the overall objective score.

Media and supporting institutions vary by sector in terms of being efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses. For example, print media cannot be considered profitable because of large expenses and challenges involving

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.

However, outside of Yerevan and other big cities, the advertising market remains underdeveloped. Furthermore, there appears to be little demand for it there.

distribution. The problem of print media distribution is especially crucial because, according to the relevant law, any entity distributing newspapers should have a license—which costs AMD 5,000,000 (\$12,950) per year. This is the main obstacle holding back the emergence of new print media. However, printing houses, as well as television stations, are considered to be profitable businesses. In addition, panelists observed some improvements in the marketing strategies of some media outlets. They have started to create products that are more tailored to audience demand and are becoming more attractive to advertisers as a result.

The revenue sources most media outlets rely upon are not sufficiently diversified to protect them from pressures on their editorial stance. Some panelists noted that even if television stations obtain revenues from advertisements, as opposed to other sources, this does not guarantee independence. Regarding the question of whether there are alternative revenue sources for state/public media sources to avoid political influence, the panelists said that public television is financed by state budget. In addition to affecting its editorial policy, this also gives it a significant financial advantage over other television stations.

Panelists observed some positive changes in the Armenian advertising market, especially in terms of an increase in advertisement quality and the professionalism of specialists. However, outside of Yerevan and other big cities, the advertising market remains underdeveloped. Furthermore, there appears to be little demand for it there.

Advertising revenue plays an important role in the overall revenue sources of television stations, and that is the reason advertisements receive a lot of air time. The large portion of advertising on television is also justified by the fact that advertisement prices are quite low in the Armenian market, so television owners need to air a lot of advertisements in their broadcasts in order to make any money on them. Print media cannot rely on advertisements and supplement their income through subscriptions, sales, and other sources.

Some private media, mainly print outlets, do receive government subsidies. The decision to subsidize the media was made by Armenia's previous president, when the prospect of taxing newspapers was debated. According to the panelists, though, there are no other types of media that

Altunyan shared his opinion that NGOs operating in the field lack political neutrality. He commented, "There are some issues with NGOs that need to be solved. NGOs, as a rule, tend to have political allegiances."

receive subsidies from central or local authorities, including smaller, regional television and radio stations. In general, the panelists viewed subsidies for print media positively, mainly because they believe that without them, most print media lack enough readers to make a profit and survive.

Panelists noticed some improvements in applying market research to strategic planning. Although most media understand the value of market research, the cost is prohibitive for many outlets. Some media conduct market polls on their own periodically, rather than employing professional polling companies. This practice is mainly limited to television and radio outlets, however.

The reliability of broadcast ratings and circulation figures prompted significantly varied responses from the panelists. Some panelist pointed to examples of false or misleading survey results. Others noted that in some cases, such research has been carried out by unprofessional companies and cannot be considered reliable. Furthermore, media organizations typically lack the ability to purchase reliable data from more qualified companies. As a result, media outlets continue to lose potential advertising revenue from larger advertising companies, because the lack of accurate data poses a considerable problem.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Armenia Objective Score: 1.72

The score for Objective 5 fell slightly, from 1.88 in 2009 to 1.72 this year. Gains in indicators 2 (professional associations) and 3 (supporting NGOs) were offset somewhat by declines in indicators 5 (training opportunities for practicing media professionals) and 6 (sources of printing are apolitical). Most of the indicators received scores close to the overall objective score, although indicator 1 (trade associations) lagged behind by about a point, while indicators 2 and 3 scored about a point and little more than half a point higher, respectively.

There are still no proper trade unions for media professionals in Armenia. However, panelists said that there are associations

protecting journalists' rights in Armenia, including the Journalist's Union, the National Press Club, and the Yerevan Press Club. They have been active in issuing declarations condemning violations against freedom of speech and journalists' rights and holding press conferences surrounding these cases. Some more advanced associations offer legal consulting services for journalists and engage with international organizations to solve conflicts. One of the panelists noted, "If there were no such organizations, the atmosphere in the media sector would be much worse." These associations are not organized around specific media sectors at this stage.

Although there have been some positive developments in the work of NGOs to support freedom of speech, including several active regional NGOs that consistently defend free speech and react to violations, some problems remain and certain NGOs counteract achievements in this area. Altunyan shared his opinion that NGOs operating in the field lack political neutrality. He commented, "There are some issues with NGOs that need to be solved. NGOs, as a rule, tend to have political allegiances. For example, NGOs that are inclined toward the political opposition concentrate their support on opposition media. The same thing is true for pro-governmental NGOs as well."

Panelists claimed that even though education programs are well designed, higher-education institutions do not prepare high-caliber media professionals. Most panelists stated that they have encountered difficulties in trying to bring in younger journalists, because they are frequently unqualified, lacking even basic knowledge or journalistic skills. They believe that the problem stems from educational institutions that emphasize theoretical knowledge above hands-on practical training. Practitioners are not involved in the education process. Additionally, the panelists believed that

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.

the students are not highly motivated—a more widespread issue that extends beyond journalism programs.

Panelists said that there are not enough short-term training opportunities to compensate for the shortcomings in formal journalism training. Short-term training courses are mainly organized by international organizations, with some involvement by local NGOs. Altunyan commented, “There are no short-term educational programs in Armenia. There are some initiated by international organizations, but they train a very limited number of specialists.”

Regarding political pressure on newsprint facilities and printing houses, the panelists mentioned a case that occurred on October 2009 that called into question the independence of the courts. According to a court decision, the printing houses were required to print a certain newspaper, despite the fact that this newspaper was indebted to one of the printing houses. Panelists also noted that printing houses appear to discriminate against certain newspapers in terms of pricing policy, but this fact cannot be unambiguously attributed to political influences.

Panelists said that channels of media distribution remain mainly in private hands but noted that does not mean that they are apolitical. They discussed the example of the regional station, Gala TV; the station was closed, its transmitter was removed from the tower, and its broadcasts were suspended. The issue of print media distribution was emphasized once more; this problem is acute because there are few distributors, and they tend to concentrate their activity in Yerevan. However, financial restrictions to obtaining a license obstruct attempts at improving distribution.

List of Panel Participants

Karen Mikayelyan, vice editor, *Novoe Vremya*, Yerevan

Tigran Harutyunyan, vice director, Noyan Tapan, Yerevan

Mnatsakan Harutyunyan, president, Hrazdan TV, Hrazdan

Davit Eranosyan, director, Zangak TV, Martouni

Anahit Nahapetyan, editor, *Tuphashkharhi Arorya*, Artik

Husik Aristakesyan, editor and journalist, Shant TV, Yerevan

Narine Mkrtchyan, president, National Press Club, Yerevan

Haykaz Simikyan, director, Sim printing house, Vanadzor

The following participants submitted a questionnaire but did not attend the panel discussion.

Gevorg Altunyan, journalist, Armenia TV, Yerevan

Shushan Doydoyan, chairperson, Freedom of Information Center, Yerevan

Moderator and Author

Petros Petoyan, director, Marketing Communications Research Company, Yerevan

The Armenia study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, Marketing Communications Research Company, Yerevan. The panel discussion was convened on November 28, 2009.