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TURKMENISTAN

In an apparent bid to improve its international standing, Turkmenistan is opening itself up slightly to the world. During the era of Saparmurat Niyazov, the previous president of Turkmenistan, such a statement would have been unthinkable. For 20 years, the state lived under the dictatorship of Niyazov, who gave himself the name Turkmenbashi (“Leader of all Turkmen”). He died in late 2006, reportedly of a heart attack, and former Health Minister Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov became president in 2007. Observers denounced the election as neither free nor fair by international standards.

A member state of the former Soviet Union, Turkmenistan is a rather isolated Central Asian state but is one of the region’s largest exporters oil and gas. Turkmenistan is actively trying to expand its gas routes; Berdymukhammedov recently launched a new gas pipeline to China through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and to the Indian Ocean. Leaders of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and China attended the official opening of this important project in December 2009. Political observers say that the improved pipeline system is behind the country’s efforts to polish its international image.

Berdymukhammedov has made some improvements to the country’s pension, education, and health care systems. In addition, he abolished the law mandating visas to travel to areas of Turkmenistan bordering neighbor states. He also ordered the government to rewrite Turkmenistan’s constitution and legal codes, in order to meet international standards. Despite these gestures, the government continues to exercise strict control over the media, and freedom of speech is non-existent. The government owns virtually all outlets and dictates all content—mostly consisting of praise for the president. Citizens must look to satellite television, radio, and, to a limited degree, the Internet for their information needs.

Turkmenistan continues to draw the harshest international criticism for its repression of the freedom of speech. Once again, it landed on the Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) “Enemies of the Internet” list in March 2010, and was labeled one of the worst violators alongside China and North Korea. RSF warned the international community against falling for the recent overtures, saying, “Turkmenbashi’s successor has been preparing this diplomatic offensive for some time, but one should not pin any hopes on his government’s change in tone. The Turkmen regime is hoping to woo the international community with a new approach, but we urge its potential partners to look at the realities of a country.”¹

In the 2009 MSI, Turkmenistan scored 0.33 overall out of 5.00 possible, virtually unchanged from last year’s 0.32 and still reflecting an “unsustainable, anti-free press” situation. While none of the objectives changed dramatically, scores dropped slightly in objectives 1 and 2, and scores rose slightly in objectives 3, 4, and 5. The biggest drop was again in Objective 1, freedom of speech.

¹ IFEX, 23 September 2009. EU Trade Agreements Ignore Media Repression http://www.ifex.org/turkmenistan/2009/09/23/trade_abuses/

TURKMENISTAN AT A GLANCE

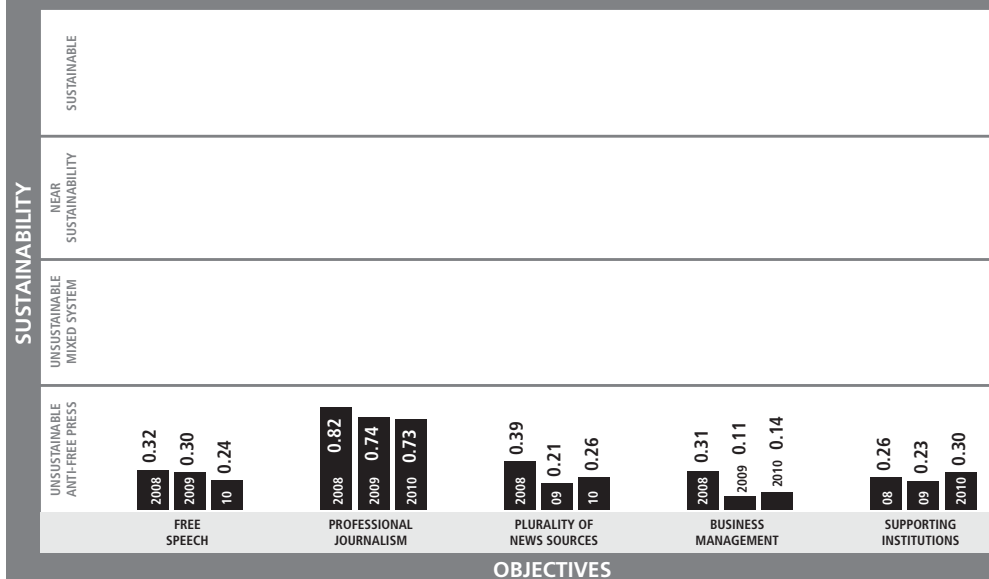
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 4,884,887 (July 2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Ashgabat
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Turkmen 85%, Uzbek 5%, Russian 4%, other 6% (2003 est., 2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 89%, Eastern Orthodox 9%, unknown 2%
- > **Languages (% of population):** Turkmen (official) 72%, Russian 12%, Uzbek 9%, other 7%
- > **GNI (2008-Atlas):** \$14.26 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **GNI per capita (2008-PPP):** \$6,210 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **Literacy rate:** 98.8% (male 99.3%, female 98.3%) (1999 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow (since February 14, 2007)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 24 national and local papers, 15 magazines; Radio: 5; Television Stations: 5
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top two by circulation: *Netralniy Turkmenistan* (Russian language state-owned daily), *Turkmenistan* (Turkmen language state-owned daily)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Turkmendovlethabarlary (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 75,000 (2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: TURKMENISTAN



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

Turkmenistan Objective Score: 0.24

Turkmenistan's score for Objective 1, down just slightly from last year's 0.30, reflects the deteriorating situation in Turkmenistan for freedom of speech. Indicator 2 (licensing of broadcast media) dropped to the lowest possible score. Among individual indicators, scores remained about the same, but there were dramatic drops in indicators 3 (market entry) and 8 (media access to, and use of, foreign sources). Only indicator 7 (public access to information) even attained a 0.50.

Freedom of speech is deteriorating in the country despite the fact that, on paper, the law provides comprehensive protection for freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Government officials either are unaware of laws or continue to ignore them. Although Berdymukhammedov announced his plans to reform media legislation, the panelists expressed skepticism. "The process is very slow, and the laws and regulations are not enforced because of the lack of political will of the government," one panelist said.²

According to another panelist, "We saw some willingness in 2009, on the part of Turkmen authorities, including those responsible for media, to open up a little bit and consider examples of media development in the region. Still, little has been done, and willingness does not make up for the lack of legal and social norms protecting free speech and access to information." Another panelist said, "Turkmenistan still operates on the basis of a 1991 press law."

The Turkmen government ignores its own laws, controls all blacklists, and employs harassment to control journalists who write anything critical of national policies. "There is simply no free speech inside Turkmenistan," said one panelist. "A culture of 'access' does not exist." For those reasons and because of the fear of persecution, Turkmen journalists are quick to refuse opportunities to contribute to foreign mass media outlets.

Article 28 of the new constitution (revised in September 2008) gives Turkmen citizens the right to freedom of conviction, expression, and information, provided that the information is not a state secret. The existing Law on the Press and Other Mass Media in Turkmenistan protects the freedom of the mass media and contains guarantees of freedom of information. However, one panelist said that these rights and freedoms remain on paper only. "What we have is state-controlled

² Due to the political environment in Turkmenistan, IREX did not conduct an in-country panel for Turkmenistan. This chapter represents desk research conducted on the situation, interviews, and the results of questionnaires filled out by several people familiar with the situation of media in the country.

media, without any attempt to create or facilitate the creation of a professional public or private media industry in the country," said one panelist.

In addition, Article 43 of the new constitution guarantees judicial protection of citizens' dignity, private and political rights, and freedom. However, several panelists commented that the constitution does little in practice. Those rights "are very often violated, and the citizens face persecution by undercover authorities," a panelist said. Another panelist added that "there is no legal protection available in cases of freedom of speech violations." According to another journalist, "Legal guarantees of free speech do exist, but the practice is similar to how things were done in the USSR—on paper, you had liberal laws, but their practical enforcement was very different."

The law states that libel and invasion of privacy are criminal offenses. The libel law gives special protection to government officials, public figures, the state, and state symbols. The burden of proof is on the accused, and convictions can lead to as many as five years in prison and a fine up to "30 average monthly wages," according to Turkmenistan's press law.

The government requires mass media to have licenses to function in Turkmenistan. Licensing fees differ, depending on the applicant. Government entities, for example, do not have to pay a licensing fee to launch a newspaper in Turkmenistan. Turkmen individuals or corporations, on the other hand, must pay "100 times the size of the estimated average monthly wage," as stated in the law. The State Publishing Association, Turkmenmetbugat, issues licenses, with approval of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Cabinet of Ministers. The government can reject an application for a variety of reasons, including a "negative" conclusion of the Turkmenmetbugat expert committee. "Private media outlets are denied licenses for political reasons," said one of the panelists.

The government owns and controls tightly all newspapers, magazines, television stations, and radio stations in Turkmenistan. All media organizations are officially censored, and journalists working for these organizations self-censor as a matter of professional survival. The president appoints and dismisses editors-in-chief. The only news agency in the country is the government's Turkmendovlethabarlary (TDH).

Furthermore, the president regularly and publicly tells the media what they should print and broadcast. During a meeting with Security Council of Turkmenistan in July 2009, he stated that "mass media has an important task for the patriotic upbringing of the young generation of the nation." The government forces journalists to cover key political events and issues, such as the president's meetings with foreign guests, as well as the development of the so-called

tourist destination, Avaza, including new hotel openings, new agreements signed with foreign companies, etc. All coverage must be in favor of the government.

All Turkmenistan journalists work for government media; the country has no independent media outlets. Those very few journalists who are brave enough to veer away and contribute to foreign media outlets must do so secretly. "Journalists working for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [RFE/RL] are blacklisted; they are not allowed to travel abroad for training," noted one panelist.

The panelists said that authorities continue to have no regard for freedom of speech. Security services keep tabs on the media by visiting their offices, opening correspondence, monitoring journalists' movements, and making it clear what subjects are permissible.

Turkmenistan's news is dominated by praise of the president, focuses disproportionately on the accomplishments, plans, and activities of government leaders. Material produced by the state news agencies, and subsequently broadcast on the state television and radio channels, differs very little. Turkmen journalists have few, if any, opportunities to work on their professional skills.

US Department of State 2009 Human Rights Report details several serious incidents in 2009 where Turkmenistan's government agents allegedly detained, harassed, and intimidated journalists and their families in 2009. Journalists working for RFE/RL seemed to be a favorite target, in

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.

particular. RFE/RL correspondent Soltan Achilova was accused of producing reports that criticized national policy, and she was interrogated for two days. She was not released until she signed an agreement to stop working for RFE/RL until she obtained formal press accreditation.

Also detailed in the State Department report, RFE/RL reporter Gurbandurdy Durdykulyev, in Balkanabat, was harassed in April. A Molotov cocktail hit his house, his house and car were vandalized, and his door was smeared with feces. The authorities disrupted the wedding of another RFE/RL reporter's family member, harassing the bride-to-be, and eventually turning off the electricity at the wedding reception. In July, the authorities pressured RFE/RL reporter Osman Halliyev to stop working for RFE/RL. When he refused, he reported that security authorities pressured administrators at his son's school to expel his son. According to the panelists, Turkmenistan citizens, too, are successfully intimidated into silence. "Crimes against journalists cause public outcry only outside of the country. People inside are afraid of protesting against such crimes," said one panelist.

As with all programs of study, journalism students must pass a number of examinations, including the state language, the sacred book of *Ruhnama*, and the history of Turkmenistan. The journalism program accepts only 10 students each year from the entire country. An admissions committee established by the Ministry of Education decides whom to admit to the program.

The US Department of State Human Rights Report on Turkmenistan noted that there is no independent oversight of accreditation procedures for journalists, the criteria is not clearly defined, and all foreign correspondents must apply for accreditation (and they only receive visas to cover specific events, such as conferences, where they can be monitored easily).³ One panelist noted that the licensing process is politicized.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Turkmenistan Objective Score: 0.73

This year's score for professional journalism slipped just slightly from last year's score, reflecting how little has changed in this area. The highest scores were awarded for indicators 6 (entertainment programming does not eclipse news) and 7 (facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient), following the state's efforts to modernize printing houses and television stations. All panelists assigned the lowest possible

³ US Department of State, 2009 Human Rights Report: Turkmenistan <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/sca/136095.htm>

score to indicator 3 (journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship).

All the panelists agreed that true journalism is nearly absent from Turkmenistan, as media exist exclusively for political gain. Panelists commented on the difficult conditions under which media members are expected to produce. "The local media environment remains under the strict control of the security agencies, and is used only to promote government policy and glorify the personality of Mr. Berdymukhammedov," one panelist said.

As an instrument of propaganda, journalism in Turkmenistan cannot meet professional standards of quality. "Turkmen journalists do not have the opportunity to show their professionalism," one panelist said, and a working journalist remarked, "The shortage of professionalism affects the quality of journalism." Turkmen journalists are not allowed to approach stories objectively or use diverse sources to produce news stories for mass media outlets. The very few journalists who contribute to foreign media outlets often do so under a pseudonym to avoid harassment.

Domestic journalists and foreign news correspondents engage in self-censorship due to fear of government reprisal, but official censorship persists as well, as the state continues to prohibit reporting on opposing political views or any criticism of the president. Journalists working for the state media produce pro-government reports under pressure of state censorship. "No independent reporting exists," said one journalist, while another journalist said, "Any coverage critical of government policies is banned."

The panelists gave various examples of governmental control of media leadership positions, including President Berdymukhammedov's sacking of Begli Aliev, head of Turkmenistan's state-run Altyn Asyr television channel. The channel announced that he was dismissed for "grave shortcomings in work and failing to perform duties entrusted to him." No report was found detailing the replacement for Aliev. In addition, the government fired Annamyrat Poladow, editor-in-chief of the government newspaper *Turkmenistan*, for "health reasons." Former editor-in-chief of *Art and Literature*, Amanmuhammet Repova, was appointed as the editor-in-chief of *Turkmenistan* on April 13, 2009.

Journalists cover key political events and issues in the country—but in favor of the government, and as approved by their supervisors. "Editors may prevent reporters from covering certain events," one journalist noted. "For example, the event connected with an armed clash in one of the residential districts of Ashgabat in 2008. The media covers no acts of protest. There is less talk about the spread of infectious diseases, like AIDS or swine flu." Newspapers and

the television channels all report the same thing—praise for the president. Even news about problems, such as natural disasters and public health threats, are avoided, according to a Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR) report.

Again this year, no new data is available on Turkmen journalists' salaries or whether they are sufficiently high to discourage corruption. However, this year's panelists said that pay levels for journalists are not high, but average. One MSI panelist in 2007 said that journalists' salaries are comparable to average civil-servant salaries, and another believed that they are high enough to prevent corruption. Another 2007 panelist did not feel salaries were high enough to discourage corruption. To put corruption into context: In its 2008 Corruption Perceptions Index report, Transparency International ranked Turkmenistan as one of the world's most corrupt countries, sharing 168th place (out of 180) with several countries, including Iran and Haiti.

This year, panelists said that entertainment programming dominates the local media in particular—a change from last year's assessment. Last year, this indicator earned a slightly higher score, and the panelists reported that people wanted more entertainment programming. The panelists this year said that people tend to get most information they need through television and satellite media. News programs are available according to a regular schedule.

Most journalists agreed that all media outlets are well equipped with advanced technological facilities. Last year's report noted the government's plans to build a 211-meter-tall television tower in Ashgabat; plans have moved forward, and the Turkish Polimeks Company is expected to have the tower built by October 2011.

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).

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Turkmenistan Objective Score: 0.26

Plurality of news sources improved just slightly over last year's score, although most indicator individual scores did not change dramatically from the previous year. Indicator 6 (ownership transparency) received the lowest possible score.

Currently, Turkmenistan has five television channels, including one international channel, four radio stations, 24 newspapers, and 16 magazines. The fifth television channel, known as Turkmen Ovazy, broadcasts music and came on the air in 2009.

According to the US Department of State's 2009 Human Rights Report on Turkmenistan, "The government continued its ban on subscriptions to foreign periodicals by nongovernmental entities, although copies of the Russian newspaper *Argumenti i Fakti* and other nonpolitical periodicals appeared occasionally in the bazaars."⁴ In June, the government began permitting state agencies and institutions to acquire subscriptions to foreign academic and scientific periodicals. However, officials continue to claim that foreign publications are widely available. "There are no prohibitions to accessing foreign press," said a teacher from the Institute of International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the Central Asian Media Conference, held in October 2009 in the capital city of the Kyrgyz Republic.

The US Department of States Human Rights Report on Turkmenistan noted, "Almost all print media were government financed. Except for the private but government-sanctioned Turkish newspaper *Zaman*, which reflected the views of the state newspapers, the government imposed significant restrictions on the importation of foreign newspapers."⁵ One panelist added that "people consider newspapers particularly untrustworthy, as they are full of propaganda; there are publications that are paid for and do not contain real information." The government controls radio and local television as well, but satellite dishes providing access to foreign television programming are scattered throughout the country. Citizens also receive international radio programs through satellite television access.

The panelists had mixed opinions on the reliability of domestic coverage by international news sources. Some state international broadcasters—for example, Azatlyk Radio (RFE/RL Turkmen Service)—cover topics that local sources do not.

⁴ US Department of State, 2009 Human Rights Report: Turkmenistan: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/sca/136095.htm>

⁵ US Department of State, 2009 Human Rights Report: Turkmenistan: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/sca/136095.htm>

Others say that international sources are often exclusively negative in their coverage of domestic issues. At least one panelist reported that people say that the number of information sources available in Turkmenistan has increased considerably over the past year. In particular, they mention an increase in Internet access and the number of international channels available on satellite television, inclusive of Russian and Turkish outlets. One panelist said, "Despite an oppressive media environment and limited sources of news and information, many people in Turkmenistan consider it easy to find the news and information they want."

People rely first on television for their information needs. Many households have two dishes—one to receive signals from Russia and one for signals from Turkey and Europe. These dishes receive hundreds of television and radio channels. "[People] are more likely to use Russian television stations for news and information—inclusive of ORT, Rossiya, NTV and Ren-TV channels—than they are Turkmen sources because of the variety of information and entertainment programming," said one journalist. Another panelist said that some people watch local TV-4, Yashlik, and Miras channels. In addition, the government television station TV-4 retransmits Russia's Channel 1 for about two hours per day—about 20 minutes of which is devoted to news.

RFE/RL's Turkmen-language broadcast, known as Azatlyk Radio, is the second major independent source of information in Turkmenistan and perhaps the best source of independent information on domestic affairs. RFE/RL correspondents are under severe pressure from the government, yet Azatlyk Radio manages to report—often comprehensively—on stories

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.

that local media will not touch. Listeners are attracted to information particularly about domestic events, including a broad spectrum of social interest issues. Foreign mass media outlets, including RFE/RL, approach many controversial stories that are not reported upon inside Turkmenistan. Examples include when Turkmen and Chinese workers clashed in eastern Turkmenistan, when Turkmenistan banned students from studying at foreign private universities, and a bus accident that killed 10 Turkmen children. In addition, no state media reported on Turkmenistan's denial of entry to US Peace Corps volunteers in August.

Internet access increased modestly during the year. Government-owned Turkmen Telecom remains the main provider to the general population. It continues to issue new Internet accounts to businesses and organizations, and reportedly began issuing new accounts to private individuals for the first time in years. Turkmenistan has approximately 15 state-owned Internet cafés nationwide, and multiple NGO-sponsored facilities, private businesses, and business centers have been granted Internet access. However, the government's administrative requirements for connection, including a signature from the local police station, continue to impede access. The government monitors citizens' e-mail and Internet usage, and cuts service for accounts used to visit sensitive websites.

Although the government reduced Internet cafe fees to approximately (\$2) per hour in April 2009, access remains prohibitively expensive for the average citizen, considering that the average salary in Turkmenistan is about \$200 (depending on the region).

Access to specific websites remains inconsistent. In March, the government allowed the Russian cellular telephone provider MTS to begin providing mobile Internet service to its business customers, including citizens. According to a Turkmenistan.ru news story, the government also granted free Internet access to disabled customers from some select secondary-level schools. In June, MTS was able to offer this service to all of its customers—more than 800,000 subscribers by year's end.

The content of government media outlets varies little, presenting only one point of view. For the last several years, the government has provided extensive funding to Turkmen mass media outlets, including television, in order to aid production of their own stories and programs. Before that, Turkmen television stations simply replayed certain programs over and over to fill airtime. But now, channels have the latest cut equipment, cassettes, cameras, and other technologies. According to the panelists, television stations have been equipped enough to produce live programs since 2003.

As a result of the firm state monopoly over the media, transparency of media ownership is not an issue. Everyone understands that the government owns virtually all aspects of the media sphere.

All media in Turkmenistan are in the Turkmen language. The only minority-language publications available are the national, general interest, Russian-language daily newspaper *Neytralniy Turkmenistan* and the advertising paper *Habarlar*, which is published both in Russian and Turkmen, according to *Kronika Turkmenistan*. Publications are not available in the languages of Turkmenistan's other minorities. About 20 percent of the people living in Turkmenistan are not ethnic Turkmen, though the figure differs from source to source. However, the US Department of State lists 72 percent of the population as Turkmen ethnic.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turkmenistan Objective Score: 0.14

Objective 4 barely changed from last year's MSI study. Indicator 2 (media receive revenue from a multitude of sources) dropped to the lowest possible score. Objective 4 (advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue in line with accepted standards) fell as slightly as well, but most other indicators rose just enough to score close to the objective average. Poor performance for this objective comes down to the government's dominance over the economy and its payment for all media expenses from the state budget.

Turkmenistan's economy, like all other aspects of Turkmen society, is controlled by the government. Its economy is one of the least free in the world, ranking 171 out of 179 nations in a 2010 Heritage Foundation report on economic freedom. "Regulation is opaque, enforcement is inconsistent, and cronyism is rampant. Foreign investors face a highly politicized and corrupt system. Financing is largely controlled by the government. Property rights are enforced intermittently, and corruption remains widespread," the report said.⁶

All domestic mass media are under strict state control and financed by the government of Turkmenistan. "Without private media, there cannot be a media market," one panelist said. "There are no media businesses, and there is no editorial independence." The only newspaper to approach independence, *Zaman*, is under control as well and has limited editorial independence, according to one panelist.

⁶ 2010 Index of Economic Freedom, Heritage Foundation. <http://www.heritage.org/index/Country/Turkmenistan>

Government funding, mandatory subscriptions, and a small amount of advertising support the state-run media. Given that Turkmenistan has no independent media of which to speak, and the government pays for all media, editors and media managers are under no pressure to worry about advertisements or other income issues. However, at least one study participant said that advertising is developing in Turkmenistan, with the rise of the foreign investment in the country's economy. "The private sector does use the print media and television for advertisement," another panelist added. Quoting a television journalist from the capital city, IWPR reported, "It is very difficult for an NGO to place an ad..."

Also, IWPR reported that a representative of an NGO in Ashgabat said that he asked state television to help him produce an advertisement to be shown on World AIDS Day on December 1, but it turned him down, saying that the health ministry would need to grant special permission.

"There are limited possibilities for market research," said one panelist. "Yet there are restrictions for media outlets to conduct in-country research to obtain information about the audience demographics and preferences." However, RFE/RL reported that it conducted an in-country survey with a small focus group in 2008 and 2009—the first time it had undertaken such a survey.

Broadcast media have no ratings system. The circulation figures that the government maintains for its print publications are inflated by the system of mandatory subscriptions. Government employees, who represent the majority of employed people in the country, have long been forced to subscribe to government publications.

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.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Turkmenistan Objective Score: 0.30

Short-term trainings organized by OSCE and UNDP offices in Turkmenistan lifted Objective 5 just slightly, with indicator 5 (short-term training opportunities) scoring well over 1.0. In fact, no other Turkmenistan MSI indicators even came close to 1.0. All other indicators remained almost the same as last year, and indicators 1 and 2 (trade associations and journalists' associations) received the lowest scores possible.

Turkmenistan has no trade associations or professional associations that represent the interests of the media, provide member services, or work to protect journalists' rights. In theory, the Institute for Democracy and Human Rights under the President of Turkmenistan exists to handle these functions. Yet "journalists do not receive support from this institution," one panelist said.

Essentially, Turkmenistan has no need for an association of media owners, since the government is virtually the only owner. The law does not protect workers' rights to form unions. Again this year, no new information available on unions is available, but at least two unions for journalists were operating in 2007. The Union of Journalists of Turkmenistan was founded in 1992 with a charter that included "the protection of [journalists'] interests against state and public organizations, founders, and publishers of the media," according to a 2001 IWPR article by Nazik Ataeva.⁷ But as reported in last year's MSI, this union is an ineffective, quasi-governmental organization that represents government workers to the government, according to a 2007 panelist familiar with its operations. The non-governmental Shamchirag Association of Journalists of Turkmenistan, which has existed for at least eight years, is apparently little better.

"There are also no non-state institutions engaged in media development; no professional associations except for the old Soviet-style Union of Journalists that seems to exist only on paper," added one panelist.

Workers in the NGO sector are subjected to the same kind of pressure as independent journalists. Most nominal NGOs are actually controlled by the government, and independent NGOs or informal organizations face government persecution. "NGOs supporting free speech and the independent media are prohibited in the country," confirmed one panelist.

Although the constitution and law provide for freedom of association, the government restricts this right in practice.

⁷ Ataeva, Nazik. June 1, 2001. "Obedient Turkmen Media." Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) http://www.iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=176174&apc_state=henirca2001

The law requires all NGOs to register with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and all foreign assistance to be registered with the Ministry of Economics and Development and the MOJ, and coordinated through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Unregistered NGO activity is punishable by fines, short-term detention, and confiscation of property. The government routinely denies registration to NGOs and other private organizations, using subjective criteria.

Journalism education is in its infancy, and short-term trainings are scarce. For students wanting to pursue a journalism degree, studying journalism abroad is the only way to study and train effectively.

In the panelists' experience, a candidate has no way to get admitted into the only journalism program of Turkmenistan without personal connections to top-ranking officials from the Ministry of Communications and Culture and/or the Ministry of Education. The reason is that the program accepts only 10 students per year from among the 115,000 to 130,000 students across Turkmenistan that graduate from secondary-level schools each year and wish to continue their studies at universities. The Ministry of Education has a policy to distribute equal admission from all five regions of the country, and of the two students accepted from each region, one is from the region's main city and the other from a rural area.

Two programs in journalism were established this year at the newly opened Institute of International Relations, which cooperated with the OSCE for short-term trainings. But according to one journalist, the programs "are all state-controlled, and access for study is limited." According to a teacher from the institute, Osman Hemzayev, the programs can accept up to 10 new students for the program.

"There are opportunities for students to get a journalism degree abroad, but it is problematic," one panelist said.

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.

Another panelist gave an account of an incident involving the government and an international group of journalism students. "This summer, about 50 students from the American University of Central Asia based in Bishkek were prevented from travelling at the Ashgabat airport. The Turkmen authorities gave no explanation for this ban. Journalism students were among the banned students. This bizarre situation created fear for the students studying abroad regarding whether they'd be able return to their home after their study."

Short-term training opportunities exist, but they are possible only with the support of international organizations such as OSCE and UNDP, and according to one panelist, "they are available only for journalists designated by the state." In 2009, there were training courses on writing about health topics and classes on general skills for journalists. A two-week course in November sponsored by the OSCE trained journalism students at the Foreign Ministry's Institute for International Relations. Specifically, the training addressed ethics for journalists, legal issues, press freedom, and the globalization of the media. It also helped students build writing and interviewing skills.

To regulate domestic printing and copying activities, the government requires all publishing houses and printing and photocopying establishments to obtain registration licenses for their equipment. Additionally, the government owns all publishing companies. Publications on topics that are out of favor with the government, including fiction, are not published. Channels of media distribution are under state ownership as well. Only some kiosks are in private hands.

In the panelists' experience, the Turkmenistan media sector has qualified journalists, but due to editorial pressure, expected self-censorship, and government control, journalists have no choice but to cover assigned events only, and in a pro-government way. To gently encourage Turkmen journalists despite these seemingly insurmountable obstacles, the panelists suggested that the international community concerned with freedom of the press should work with the government (such as the Ministry of Communications and Culture) because the top officials dictate what to cover and how to approach subject matter.

"I am not convinced they can achieve much," one journalist noted. "Even the best-trained journalist will have no room to maneuver."

List of Panel Participants

Due to the political environment in Turkmenistan, IREX did not conduct an in-country panel for Turkmenistan. This chapter represents desk research conducted on the situation, interviews, and the results of questionnaires filled out by several people familiar with the situation of media in the country.