

---

---

*There has been significant progress compared with past years, when virtually no airtime was given to representatives of the opposition party on public television.*



# ARMENIA

The main political events of 2013 included the presidential elections in February, with the incumbent, President Serzh Sarkisian, winning the majority vote. However, the runner-up, Raffi Hovannisian, claimed electoral fraud and called for mass protests to contest the outcome.

Prior to the elections, state/public media outlets exploited the Electoral Code, specifically the 19th article on “Pre-Election Campaign through Mass Media,” which stipulates that each party be given a certain amount of airtime. For example, outlets would give opposition parties their allotment of hours during the mid-pre-election period and crucial airtime to the incumbent party, which could affect citizen perceptions. There has been significant progress compared with past years, when virtually no airtime was given to representatives of the opposition party on public television.

In autumn 2013, the visit of Armenia’s President, Serzh Sargsyan, to Moscow eclipsed even the presidential elections earlier that year. During the visit, President Sargsyan stated that the country would join the Customs Union (which comprises three countries—Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan), signaling a significant reversal in the country’s foreign policy. This policy change follows categorical overtures by President Sargsyan to sign the Association Agreement with the EU during the summit in Vilnius, which was scheduled for late November. Moreover, Vladimir Putin’s visit to Armenia in December brought protestors to the streets who were against the country’s bid to join the Customs Union. A number of international and local organizations issued a statement condemning police reaction to the protests, which violated basic freedom of expression and assembly enshrined in the national constitution. The public’s response to these dramatic policy shifts was thoroughly covered by the media and represented the varying opinions across Armenia. However, broadcasting outlets were more reserved and attempted to present the advantages and disadvantages of joining this union, despite often promoting benefits of the Association Agreement with the EU over the Customs Union.

Overall, the panelists recorded progress across many objectives and individual indicators for the 2014 MSI. They noted that freedom-of-speech rights and enforcement, albeit still needing considerable improvement, have progressed significantly over the years. The amendment to the law of copyright and adjacent rights, for example, was a step forward; however, the actual impact and results have yet to be determined. The panelists noted that over time, it will be important to see if original content replaces copied material.

# ARMENIA at a glance

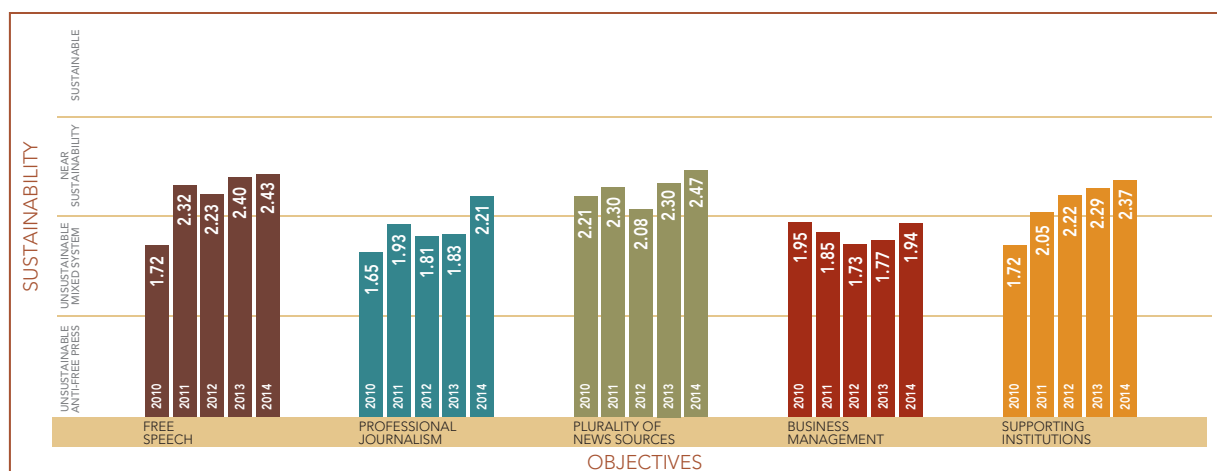
## GENERAL

- > Population: 3,064,267 (July 2013 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 (2012-Atlas): \$11.03 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2013)
- > GNI per capita (2012-PPP): \$8,820 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2013)
- > Literacy rate: 99.6% (male 99.7%, female 99.5%) (2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > President or top authority: President Serzh Sargsyan (since April 9, 2008)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations, Internet news portals: Print: more than 36; Radio stations: 21; Television Stations: 14 stations in Yerevan, 3 Russian relay channels; 26 television stations in regions; Internet News Portals: more than 220
- > Newspaper circulation statistics: Average reported circulation is between 1,000 and 3,000
- > Broadcast ratings: Top three most popular television stations are H1 (public), Shant TV (private), Armenia TV (private) (AGB Nielsen)
- > News agencies: ARKA, Armenpress, Arminfo, MediaMax, Photolur
- > Annual advertising revenue in media sector: \$70 to 80 million, estimated by panelists
- > Internet Users: 208,200 users (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: ARMENIA



## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2014: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES



### CHANGE SINCE 2013

- ▲ (increase greater than .10)
- (little or no change)
- ▼ (decrease greater than .10)

**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.

Scores for all years may be found online at [http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE\\_msiscores.xls](http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE_msiscores.xls)

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Armenia Objective Score: 2.43

The panelists were in agreement, as in past years, over the guarantees provided for by the constitution; however they asserted that the enforcement of free-speech rights has been far from ideal. However, it should be noted that as a whole, the freedom-of-speech environment has improved, despite instances where the government has interfered with the press in Armenia. For example, in December, against the backdrop of protests surrounding Vladimir Putin's visit, the panelists noted little or no coverage on television outlets.

According to the panelists, society generally places a high value on the freedom of speech and media freedom, as seen with the ever-increasing growth of online media platforms. More and more regular citizens take the time to contribute comments through Facebook under posts and articles.

However, the panelists argued over the parameters of free speech. According to Nelli Babyan, a reporter at *Aravot* newspaper, an online periodical, freedom of speech is an opportunity to "serve and present the truth," but many media outlets, according to Babyan, have abused free speech. The panelists, for example, disagreed over the use of quotations—whether one can publish all quotations and attribute it to freedom of speech. Samvel Martirosyan, a blogger, argued that one "shouldn't publish" quotations

"We have been approached several times before [to disclose the sources], but we have refused," Martirosyan remarked, adding that often they are asked to provide a written statement referring to the law that protects the confidentiality of sources.

that could incite hate or be seen as hate speech, including profane language. Edgar Vardanyan, of the Armenian Center for National and International Studies, added that it is "very difficult indeed to define the borders of what is acceptable to quote and what is not."

Violations of free speech often do cause public outrage, but this outrage is limited to small circles of the same people. "This has its reasons—the public at large doesn't like journalists, and there are layers of society that the public is always willing to protect." However, journalists are not among those the public wishes to protect, said Martirosyan. According to the other panelists, however, the journalistic community is often united in certain cases and continues to demonstrate a high degree of solidarity.

Armenian law respects the confidentiality of sources, but investigators make some attempts, without a court order, to disclose the sources. However, in practice, if the journalist/media outlet refuses to disclose, no further action is taken to force journalists to reveal their sources. "We have been approached several times before [to disclose the sources], but we have refused," Martirosyan remarked, adding that often they are asked to provide a written statement referring to the law that protects the confidentiality of sources. However, Martirosyan rhetorically questioned if this was indeed a form of pressure.

Some panelists said that the judiciary does not act independently, but they hastened to add that this absence of independence is not specific to just the media sector. "The judicial system, as an independent government body in Armenia, does not exist," Martirosyan affirmed.

The only media sectors that require licensing in Armenia are radio and television. There has been no competition in 2013, and the digitalization of the broadcast media has been postponed until July 2015, while the current analog licenses have been extended until December 2014. According to the panelists, the government, outlets, and citizens are not financially and logistically prepared for the digitalization process.

### 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 or registration of media protects a public interest and is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against media professionals, citizen reporters, and media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > The law protects the editorial independence of state of public media.
- > 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 available; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media, journalists, and citizens.
- > Media outlets' access to and use of local and international news and news sources is not restricted by law.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

---

Moreover, the panelists agreed that the licensing body is far from apolitical or impartial. They cited the case of A1+ TV, which was critical of the government and was shut down in 2002. However, the television station was not shut down by the government directly; instead, its existing license was not renewed. Since then, A1+ TV has applied 12 times in total, with little success. The station applied for a license within the 2010 competition and was once again rejected by the regulatory agency, the National Commission on Television and Radio (NCTR), for allegedly submitting fraudulent documents. Structurally, the NCTR is not apolitical, according to the panelists. It has eight members; half are elected by the National Assembly for a period of six years, and the other half are appointed by the Armenian president for a period of six years. Legally, the NCTR must guarantee freedom of the press and diversity, as articulated in Article 35 of the Law on TV and Radio, which enshrines the NCTR an independent regulating body.

Steadily over the years, market entry and tax structures in Armenia have been no different from other industries. Print media also enjoy a slight tax break, as they are exempt from value-added tax for distribution.

Crimes against media professionals, citizen reporters, and media outlets in Armenia occur mostly during the elections. According to Nelli Babayan, the police often come to “conduct formal interrogations and then leave.” Outlets receive a notice a few months thereafter, citing “lack of evidence” and thereby closing the case. Gayane Saribekyan, a reporter for *Hraparak* newspaper, stated that her crew was once attacked by a group when trying to shoot evidence of election bribery and could manage to shoot only the faces of the persons involved, as there were other people preventing them from entering the room. “Right after our complaint a case was filed but eventually closed due to lack of criminal activity,” Saribekyan said. Babayan provided an example of attempts to confiscate her phone, but again the case was later closed with the same explanation. The panelists also mentioned a case where the police officer was demonstratively dismissed (although later rehired) after he pushed and insulted a reporter. The panelists agreed, however, that in this case the reporter herself had also gone overboard.

Gayane Abrahamyan, a reporter at armenianow.com and eurasianet.org, asserted that “during the past couple of years” there has been “progress” made. The panelists also noted that there had been no violent or outrageous cases of crimes against journalists reported, although they expected some activity during an election year. “There has been significant progress,” said Saribekyan, adding that

“years ago it was very violent at some polling stations,” with violence against/between proxies, journalists, etc. Melik Baghdasaryan, owner of the Photolur photo news agency, noted that his photographers are generally “free and secure” even during rallies and protests.

Armenia has two public newspapers, two public television stations, and two public radio stations. In principle, the country’s Law on TV and Radio protects the editorial independence of state and public media and provides for their adherence to the principles of objectivity, democracy, impartiality, and diversity. However, according to Edgar Vardanyan, an expert at the Armenian Center for National and International Studies, “If we take this law and enforce it in Sweden, it’ll work flawlessly, but if we take into account that all five members of the Council on Public Television and Radio are appointed by the president, it becomes evident that in reality public media cannot be and are not independent.”

Libel has been a civil law issue since 2010. Although at first it prompted an avalanche of civil cases that could bring some outlets to the brink of extinction, the boom has faded away ever since, and recently there have been no significant cases during the reporting period.

In Armenia, widespread access to information remains an issue despite the existence of the legal frameworks. According to Armine Gevorgyan, a journalist with haynews.am and public radio, “The most closed structures are the City Hall and the State Revenue Committee.” However, the panelists couldn’t help noting some positive developments, compared with previous years. Among the most open institutions, the panelists noted, are the Police of RA and the National Assembly. Some panelists said, however, that the ability to obtain information varies from outlet to outlet and from journalist to journalist, depending on their position in the market and level of professionalism. Other panelists contended that access to information should not be dependent upon personality/status and that a system should be in place to facilitate greater access. “They should answer even the most stupid question,” Babayan added.

The media are not restricted from accessing or using any local or international news or news sources, as has been the case for several iterations of the MSI study.

Entry into the journalism profession is free and unrestricted. However, some panelists voiced the need for review of professional qualifications and experience to prevent the entry of inexperienced newcomers.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Armenia Objective Score: 2.21

There are journalists/media outlets in Armenia that follow professional journalistic practices. However, when examining the broader media landscape, over the years there have been reporters who have continued to not verify or fact-check all the information they present. Moreover, they do not consult a wide variety of relevant sources.

The panelists recounted many instances of ridiculous content emerging as a result of not verifying information. Martirosyan discussed an example where a fake letter to the media from a “reader” was published by many media outlets, which presented it as their own content. The letter voiced complaint over the desecration of a modern sculpture in one of the city parks. Other examples include “hot” articles published without the standard verification, resulting in the redaction of these pieces, which turned out to be false.

It has also been observed that the desire to print quickly has compromised the accuracy of published information. “We had information about an upcoming appointment in the city council from a very trusted source, but our editor told us we couldn’t publish it before we received verification from at least one more source. So we didn’t publish until hours before the other outlets,” Abrahamyan said. “Society doesn’t care whether they [the journalists] have used one source or two sources; once it’s written, they buy it,” Martirosyan said. “There is no public need for professional journalism. This is the problem,” he added.

### 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 and retain qualified personnel within the media profession.
- > 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 exist (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

“Society doesn’t care whether they [the journalists] have used one source or two sources; once it’s written, they buy it,” Martirosyan said.

Quite often journalists do not avoid subjectivity and subsequently do not pursue all sides of a story. Moreover, they seldom conduct the necessary background research or consult the technical experts on stories. However, truly independent experts can rarely be located, according to the panelists, and quite often present views aligned with a particular political party. There are journalists who function more as “activists” rather than members of the press, said Baghdasaryan. “There are also journalists who are intentionally provocative,” Martirosyan added. “Quite often, the provocateurs are the ones who are affiliated with political parties,” Saribekyan stated. Gevorgyan added that there are also many journalists who do not seek the “second side of the story,” and when you inquire, these journalists accuse you of possessing a “pro-government” affiliation.

Journalists seldom follow recognized and accepted ethical standards in Armenia. Journalistic organizations have developed ethical standards that are very similar to those accepted by international professional journalists’ associations, but these are not widely adhered to or recognized by the majority of media outlets.

Journalists from different types of media have developed their own codes of ethical standards they try to enforce them on their reporters/journalists. Some outlets make clear distinctions between news reporting and “advertorials,” while others don’t. Journalists have been practicing plagiarism for many years. However, the enforcement of the new amendment within the law on copyright and adjacent rights, which came into effect in October 2013, hopes to reduce plagiarism in Armenia. According to the amendment, any duplication of original content without the consent of the content producer should be contained in quotes, with the original source cited at the beginning of the story.

As stated in previous years, the panelists agreed that there is more self-censorship than direct censorship. “We belong to those countries where censorship is more in the form of self-censorship,” Vardanyan said. Self-censorship takes place on almost all levels of news production. Reporters and editors practice self-censorship due to a real or perceived fear of losing their jobs or risking their safety or well-being.

Most key events and issues are covered across media outlets, and according to Martirosyan, no event is deemed taboo. If a story is not covered by broadcast, Martirosyan said,

According to Vardanyan, “Although the opposition hasn’t been blatantly criticized [during the presidential elections],” the state/public media outlets have cultivated an image or “impression” that this opposition “is not so serious.”

then “it will certainly be covered online,” if not by at least some outlet.

Pay levels vary from outlet to outlet in Armenia but have traditionally been low. Little, if any, progress has been recorded. Nevertheless, it should be noted that low wages are not specific to the media industry. The reality is that most reporters have to work for multiple outlets to make ends meet. Sometimes they have to do this on a confidential basis, since some outlets require exclusivity. The overall quality of reporting is often compromised as journalists are stretched across different agencies. There is a great deal of rotation of journalists from one media outlet to another, and quite often they switch from a pro-government outlet to an ultra-oppositional one, and vice versa.

As in previous MSI reports, Abrahamyan cited a familiar indicator: The Armenian journalists’ profession has seen a preponderance of women, who represent nearly 75 percent of the profession. This is an unfortunate manifestation of a larger phenomenon that sees women in Armenia often entering professions that do not pay well.

As for the exodus of journalists to other industries, “since their overall background is not so strong, there’s hardly anything else they can do [but to report],” Martirosyan said. On the contrary, journalists can easily be replaced by mediocre specialists from other industries.

According to the panelists, entertainment programming eclipses news and information programming. “Even the news,” according to Martirosyan, has evolved into “entertainment programming.” Most outlets believe that the inclusion of more news-related programming may force audiences to switch to other programming; therefore, news programs are increasingly pushed out of prime-time and toward later hours.

The panelists agreed that the quality of facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news is modern and efficient, with the exception of digitalization. Today, most outlets have the minimum equipment required; however, Internet connectivity remains an issue. According

to Margarita Minasyan, the director and co-owner of Tsayg TV, “Internet in the regions” is still very weak, as stable fiber-optic connections do not exist. However, this gap in infrastructure, the panelists noted, does not affect the quality of journalism in Armenia.

Quality niche reporting and programming exist in Armenia, but this category of reporting is rare. Agriculture, ecology, health, and business are covered by niche reporters. Investigative reporting also exists but is, again, very rare. Often one journalist will cover a myriad of topics due to lack of human resources. According to Abrahamyan, these reporters are often not “professionally prepared in terms of education, experience, or even research to produce specialized reporting.” However, he added that the opportunity to cover a topic that is not within one’s specialization is welcomed, as it prevents journalists from feeling limited and provides an opportunity to develop professionally. Moreover, Vardanyan emphasized the importance of having training or experience in niche reporting, as journalists often ask “generic” questions that don’t get to the heart of a specialized report.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Armenia Objective Score: 2.47

There are multiple newspapers, magazines, radio stations, and even more online news sources in Armenia, with the latter number increasing every year. The proliferation of news sources enables citizens to corroborate stories and

#### MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE, OBJECTIVE NEWS.

##### PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > Plurality of public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet, mobile) exist and offer multiple viewpoints.
- > Citizens’ access to domestic or international media is not restricted by law, economics, or other means.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for media outlets.
- > Private media produce their own news.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge the 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
- > The media provide news coverage and information about local, national, and international issues.

obtain different points of view. For the most part, media outlets have an official or de-facto political affiliation; however, according to Babayan, there are also outlets that try to “genuinely” provide professional coverage that presents a myriad of viewpoints in their editorial policies. Vahe Sargsyan, a political analyst and freelance journalist, confirmed that given the multitude of sources with varying points of view, Armenian citizens do not have a problem obtaining information.

Citizens’ access to domestic or international media is not and has not been restricted by law. People in large cities have greater access to a number of media sources than people who reside in villages and smaller towns. The Internet has largely bridged this gap but remains more accessible for residents in the capital. Progress has been made toward increasing rural access to the Internet, as seen with the entrance of a new major, fiber-optics, triple-play provider in the market. This provider has entered from the regions downward toward the capitol, compared with previous providers, who initiated service from the capital, which would often result in little or no coverage for rural areas. The panelists noted that Internet access should continue to improve in the months ahead as more towns and districts receive coverage.

However, the panelists noted that the cost of good-quality, stable, high-speed Internet “where accessible” is still high enough for mass consumption, but competition should hopefully bring down costs in the future. “In some villages, when people turn on the computer, it automatically logs into Skype,” according to Sargsyan. This behavior is indicative of how citizens in rural areas use the Internet. Martirosyan noted that there is potential in the market for media outlets to capitalize on, such as identifying ways to promote services other than Skype and basic communication that the Internet can provide to citizens.

State/public media, although not independent from government, have lately become open to alternative views and comments; however, the quality of coverage is disputable. According to Vardanyan, “Although the opposition hasn’t been blatantly criticized [during the presidential elections],” the state/public media outlets have cultivated an image or “impression” that this opposition “is not so serious.” He added that these state/public media outlets have employed “tricks” whereby cameramen from these outlets have reportedly shot specific protestors or audiences members to project a caricature of members of the opposition. In some instances, Vardhanyan noted, state/public media outlets have deployed camera crews before the start of a rally to “shoot the few gathered” in order to highlight low attendance.

Public media outlets do not fill the gap left by commercial broadcasters. “In Greece, people protested when their public TV was shut down because their public TV, as opposed to commercial TV, was representing their [people’s] interests and covered issues not covered by commercial TV due to their own business interests. But [in Armenia], it’s quite the opposite,” Vardanyan said. Armenian public television has not lived up to its mission of providing cultural/educational programming, given the absence of this programming on commercial stations. However, this year, according to Minasyan, public broadcasters have modified their schedule/content considerably to also include cultural/educational programming and have discontinued numerous low-quality soap operas.

Armenia has several news agencies, including ArmInfo, ArmenPress, MediaMax, Photolur, and ARKA, that sell news to television stations, embassies, etc., because these agencies include a variety of stories in their feed, as opposed to outlets that choose a piece of news according to a political preference. According to Martirosyan, “Today, it is very difficult to differentiate between an online periodical and a news agency, [even] a radio from TV.” In other words, news doesn’t sell anymore because it’s readily available online, so the agencies must seek alternative means to generate money often through different projects, such as monitoring, research, etc.

Today, it is difficult to find any outlet that would pay for news from a news service, as a large amount of news is openly available over the Internet in Armenia. Photo agencies, however, continue to sell their work. Only television stations acquire unique video footage—from Reuters, for example.

Private media produce their own news and information programming, but other outlets re-circulate content as an affiliate of a national broadcaster, as an online aggregator, or as a flagrant plagiarizer. In some instances, regional outlets, such as Tsayg TV, even manage to sell some of their programming to other outlets. However, there are many online media outlets that merely amalgamate news and information from other sources/outlets that produce their own content. These outlets also repost Facebook posts of bloggers, citizen journalists, activists, etc., which ordinary citizens often perceive as original content.

According to Abrahamyan, “The sad truth is that the outlets that produce their own content and spend a significant amount of financial and human resources” to produce original content are often “outperformed” in revenue by “parasitic” outlets that “do not produce their own content.” However, the panelists agreed that these “parasitic outlets” have decreased in number. According to Martirosyan,



In Armenia, there are no organizations that produce consistent data on circulation. Print runs have decreased dramatically, as seen with Saribekyan's *Hraparak* newspaper in Yerevan. According to Saribekyan, the "3,000 daily copies" printed are barely sold.

"parasitic outlets" have "started to produce their own content" because they are able to generate more money, but there are still "online outlets that still do not have any reporters."

Transparency of online media remains a controversial issue. On the one hand, it could be stated that active citizens and the journalistic community have a general idea of which outlet belongs to whom. And quite often this is also evident from the content produced. The nominal directors are also easy to identify. According to Vardanyan, when an outlet belongs to an LLC, it is difficult to discern ownership and more important, funding, which results in many "contesting" the outlet's transparency. On the other hand, ordinary viewers/readers often have no prior knowledge of outlet ownership and cannot judge the degree of objectivity and impartiality of a particular news piece. Moreover, there are online media outlets that do not provide any contact information whatsoever, and it is even literally impossible to determine who is in charge of these "orphan outlets," according to Martirosyan. It is also difficult to contact the outlet to address the misrepresentation of facts, he added.

Conversely, there are other types of outlets that appear to be balanced, but the panelists questioned their genuine impartiality and sources of income. According to Abrahamyan, "online platforms" have become an "open field" for journalists to promote "sophisticated propaganda," which can often mislead citizens. The panelists also noted that there has been an emergence of pseudo-oppositional online outlets as well.

Minority-language outlets exist. Newspapers are printed in Russian, Ukrainian, and Kurdish, and public radio has been airing content in Russian, Kurdish, Georgian, and other languages. A project featuring the history, culture, and religion of ethnic minorities has been launched on public television, and Minasyan's Tsayg TV has aired a "series of programs describing how each ethnic minority celebrates the New Year." However, religion (other than the traditional) and sexual orientation are delicate topics to cover, and the resistance to the inclusion of such issues in the media

generally comes from society itself, which is not ready to consume this type of coverage on a regular basis.

Overall, the media provide news coverage and information about local, national, and international issues, and citizens access local news, information about other regions of the country, national issues, and international developments. Media with a nationwide reach report on significant news from regions outside the capital. Tsayg TV provides news products to different television outlets in the capital. However, the general volume and flow of information from the regions is relatively low. Although problems and issues are more or less covered, "an average capital resident has no general idea of life in the regions," according to Martirosyan.

Armenians turn to international sources for international news, as there are few broadcasting outlets that provide news in English.

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Armenia Objective Score: 1.94

There are very few media outlets in Armenia that operate or intend to operate as true for-profit organizations. For the most part, media outlets are set up to serve as a platform for political parties, which defy the purpose of being a self-sustainable profitable business. There are exceptions, though, and Minasyan's Tsayg TV is one such exception. Based in Gyumri, Armenia's second-largest city, Tsayg TV and radio have managed to achieve self-sustainability over the years. According to Minasyan, Tsayg TV develops business

#### MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED ENTERPRISES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

##### BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets operate as efficient and self-sustaining enterprises.
- > 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.
- > Government subsidies and advertising are distributed fairly, governed by law, and neither subvert editorial independence nor distort the market.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor the product to the needs and interests of the audience.
- > Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are reliably and independently produced.

plans that help secure financing and guide decisions on expenditures and personnel. Accounting and finances should be in line with the local standards to avoid problems with tax authorities. As for the international standards, few, if any, outlets employ managerial accounting, while financial accounting is used almost solely for the purpose of tax reports, Minasyan added.

The panelists raised doubt over the appropriate use of taxpayer funds by state or public media outlets—on soap operas, for example, but also for alleged pro-government news content. Public media have a guaranteed source of revenue from the state budget, but this in no way frees these outlets from political interference. Moreover, public television garners commercial advertising from the market, thereby competing with private/independent media outlets.

In Armenia, many outlets have just a few sources of planned income. For example, commercial announcements, video production, etc. are examples of other possible sources of additional income for mostly regional media outlets, aside from direct advertising. Moreover, the collection of subscription fees for television outlets included in cable networks is far from reality.

There are two major “triple-play” cable providers that carry the content of local stations but do not pay the stations in return. However, the local stations are in a good position, as the cable providers have enabled better coverage of their signal, as opposed to the free terrestrial signal.

Large advertisers indirectly influence media outlets’ content; negative news regarding an advertiser is often not covered, as outlets are naturally dependent on this income. The panelists brought forth a number of examples, including one case involving the largest telecommunications provider, which is also a prominent advertiser. The provider’s service had declined in the opinion of many customers, but this story was not reported by the media. In another case, a media outlet employee was fired for “liking” a negative comment on Facebook about a telecommunications provider.

This dependence is somewhat mitigated when/if the outlet receives the advertising through an advertising agency. It is especially true in the case of online advertising, where an advertiser pays the ad agency to place its ads on websites that are in the advertising network. Advertising agencies cooperate mostly with broadcast outlets in the capital (radio and television) and less with print.

Many companies use advertising in the media, and the largest advertisers are traditionally banks, telecommunications providers, insurance companies, etc. The advertising agencies are often “multiple-headed,” meaning that even if they participate in tenders under different company names, these

small companies basically belong to the same stakeholders. Thus, a small group of advertising agencies essentially controls the market.

Media outlets use both the services of advertising agencies and direct sales methods. Advertising is not well developed outside of the capital and major cities and is mostly concentrated in the capital. Local advertising is minimal, as the national ads/advertisers rarely reach regional outlets through ad agencies. The panelists noted that the recent establishment of a sales house could monopolize the ad market and leave the smaller outlets out of the game.

Media managers in Armenia feel pressed to use more and more ads as the only substantial source of revenue. However, they have at last come to “realize” (with the help of the advertisers) that long commercial breaks are not effective and that rather short and unexpected ad interventions can be more successful. This understanding is, of course, market driven and has never been a secret. Public media are also allowed to sell advertising, aside from being funded by the state budget. The panelists noted that news and information content are lost at the expense of entertainment programming, which generates more advertising revenue.

The government has provided subsidies for nongovernment print media since 1998. Around AMD 48 million (\$116,000) are divided among the approximately 80 print publications, including ethnic minority, regional, and children’s publications; literary journals and newspapers; and even reference books. The subsidies for regional newspapers are diminutive. For example, Pap Hayrapetyan, the editor-in-chief of *Sevan* newspaper, told the panelists that the newspaper receives around AMD 500,000 (\$1,240) annually as a subsidy. This amount is not significant enough to either subvert the editorial independence or distort the market. The average outlet receives AMD 300,000 to AMD 600,000 (\$750–1,500) per year.

In Armenia, media outlets do not use research consistently for the purpose of tailoring products to the needs and interest of the audience or to enhance advertising revenues. Moreover, research is seldom used as part of strategic business planning. High-quality market research requires substantial financial resources, and, even if accessed by the media outlets, rarely is thought to be of paramount importance. Thus financial resources are funneled elsewhere but market research. At most, the outlets conduct their own in-house research, which does not meet acceptable standards and very often is relegated to cold-call inquiries. Moreover, data are rarely analyzed, processed, or categorized according to more or less accepted professional standards. Professional third-party research is a rarity among

“In a normal country, the employer has to invest in its personnel [by paying for their training]; here they not only don’t make these investments but also don’t allow the journalists to take a leave of absence in order to attend the free trainings,” lamented Abrahamyan.

the outlets. And when conducted, it is often used by not-so-sophisticated advertisers.

In Armenia, there are no organizations that produce consistent data on circulation. Print runs have decreased dramatically, as seen with Saribekyan’s *Hraparak* newspaper in Yerevan. According to Saribekyan, the “3,000 daily copies” printed are barely sold.

The use of Internet statistics is also quite underdeveloped, as the data are rarely used to render meaningful analysis. Moreover, many online outlets, for example, monitor traffic but do not analyze audience demographics.

Armenia has two companies (AGB Nielsen and JFK) that produce television ratings data, but just for the capital city and the nation as a whole; they provide no ratings for individual regional towns. Martirosyan said that “every three months” ratings producers “give away gifts”—for an example, an iron to families “that agree to place People Meters in their homes.” Therefore, these data are inherently skewed toward working classes, according to Martirosyan, who said that “middle and upper classes” are largely left out, which incidentally are not of interest to the advertisers.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Armenia Objective Score: 2.37

In Armenia, there are no trade associations to represent the interests of media owners and managers or to provide member services. However, several professional associations work for the benefit of journalists: the Gyumri-based Asparez Journalists’ Club, the Yerevan Press Club, the Association of Investigative Journalists, and the Vanadzor and Goris press clubs. These professional associations try to promote journalism to the public through a positive lens. Their primary source of revenue is grants rather than dues/membership fees. The government imposes no legal restrictions to prevent the registration or functioning of these associations.

Among the active NGOs in Armenia that support freedom of speech and independent media are the Media Initiatives Center and the Eurasia Partnership Foundation–Armenia, which are jointly implementing a four-year Alternative Resources in Media project funded by USAID. The Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression is also active in Armenia. It works in cooperation with the media sector to promote freedom of speech and media independence. The Committee serves as a watchdog, closely monitoring violations of media freedoms. According to the panelists, some of these organizations provide legal support to journalists or media outlets.

The absence of quality journalism degree programs in Armenia continues to present challenges in professionalizing the media sector. Journalism degree programs do exist in many universities and colleges, private and public alike, but as rule these programs do not include sufficient practice-oriented training and are vastly theoretical. Therefore, young journalists who enter the profession often lack the requisite experience. According to Saribekyan, “The journalism program taught at Yerevan State University has nothing to do with today’s journalism.” He added that he is currently finishing a master’s degree program at the National Academy of Sciences and that his experience as a journalist has provided him with a better understanding of “modern journalism.” Gevorgyan went on to explain that “the professors there can’t answer simple questions pertaining to modern journalism, because they are not practicing journalists from the field.”

## SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of media owners and managers and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists’ rights and promote quality journalism.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs exist providing substantial practical experience.
- > Short-term training and in-service training institutions and programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of media equipment, newsprint, and printing facilities are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, cable, Internet, mobile) are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Information and communication technology infrastructure sufficiently meets the needs of media and citizens.

Moreover, media outlets are not satisfied with the quality of graduates emerging from academic institutions in Armenia because they possess solid theoretical knowledge but lack general awareness of the current global/local/international issues. The editors also possess very little experience to professionally “process/absorb,” train, and educate young graduates.

Short-term training opportunities that would allow journalists to upgrade their skills or acquire new modern skills do exist in Armenia. But working journalists, particularly those located “in the field,” have trouble attending training courses. “In a normal country, the employer has to invest in its personnel [by paying for their training]; here they not only don’t make these investments but also don’t allow the journalists to take a leave of absence in order to attend the free trainings,” lamented Abrahamyan. However, she noted that her outlets, armenianow.com and eurasianet.org, encourage their staff to attend trainings. Babayan stated that she knew of a free week-long training but that the outlet did not have sufficient funding to pay for staff to attend, and she was not prepared to forego a week’s salary.

There are no undue restrictions on importing or purchasing newsprint, software, video equipment, etc. Printing firms are self-sufficient enough to support the media. Again, the Internet has come to replace much of this, too.

In terms of media distribution channels, the panelists recorded no major impediments during the reporting period. There are two major cable network providers in Armenia that provide “triple-play” services—UCOM and Rostelecom. According to the panelists, the situation should improve in the coming years. UCOM claimed a few years ago that its services would soon reach Gyumri, the second-largest city in Armenia. The services have, in fact, finally reached Gyumri, but they are offered only in limited locations.

Online media outlets that wish to stream live theoretically come up against problems once they receive mass traffic. Therefore, the panelists have suggested that these outlets

require their own servers, which understandably are expensive to maintain in Armenia. The Internet has seen progress, but major improvements are required to improve quality, speed, and price throughout Armenia. Reliable and fast cable connections are available mostly in cities (mainly the capital); the rural areas still vastly depend on wireless Internet, which the telecommunications companies provide.

## List of Panel Participants

**Gayane Saribekyan**, reporter, hrparak.am and *Hraparak*, Yerevan

**Nelli Babayan**, reporter, *Aravot*, Yerevan

**Armine Gevorgyan**, journalist, haynews.am and Armenian Public Radio, Yerevan

**Samvel Martirosyan**, blogger, kornelij.livejournal.com; IT security expert, Yerevan

**Vahe Sargsyan**, expert, Armenian Center for National and International Studies, Yerevan

**Pap Hayrapetyan**, editor-in-chief, *Sevan*, Sevan

**Ashot Gomtsyan**, freelance journalist, Gyumri

**Gayane Abrahamyan**, reporter, armenianow.com and eurasianet.org, Yerevan

**Edgar Vardanyan**, expert, Armenian Center for National and International Studies, Yerevan

**Margarita Minasyan**, director, Tsayg TV, Gyumri

**Melik Baghdasaryan**, owner, Photolur photo news agency, Yerevan

## Moderator and Author

**Artashes Parsadanyan**, independent media consultant, Yerevan

*The panel discussion was convened on November 25, 2013.*