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AZERBAIJAN

In Azerbaijan, torrents of social discontent against authorities in the capital, Baku, and around the country punctuated 2013, also a presidential election year. The 2013 presidential elections were the first elections after a term limit for the presidency was lifted in 2009, allowing Ilham Aliyev to be elected for a third time. The year also marked 20 years of unbroken Aliyev family rule.

Social tension rose throughout the year, emerging in various forms of protest: civil unrest in Ismayilli, protests of traders at Sadarak Trade Center, and downtown protests linked to the non-combat deaths and suicides of soldiers. The Internet and social media proved vital tools in the organization of mass protests that took place in Baku at the start of the year. As the government has effectively monopolized control over television, radio, and print media, Internet and social media remain “the cat that walked by himself” (in the words of Ali Hasanov, chief of the Socio-Political Department of Aliyev’s administration). Not coincidentally, street activity calmed down in the second half of 2013, coinciding with the authorities’ arrest of seven members of the *Nida* (Exclamation) youth movement, along with a young blogger, Ilkin Rustamzade, who was organizing large-scale events on Facebook that tens of thousands of people attended.

In this increasingly restrictive environment, independent media continue to struggle. Previously the laws were generally fair and the problems existed mostly in practice, for example through lax enforcement, low-level pressure, and the occasional arrest of outspoken journalists. Now, the government is taking steps to change the laws to secure tighter control over media. A law on defamation is still pending in the parliament, accessing foreign donor funding has become problematic, and court decisions continue to disfavor journalists.

Journalism continues to be a dangerous profession in Azerbaijan. The non-governmental Media Rights Institute (MRI) counted nine journalists and two bloggers in jail by the close of 2013. In all, five journalists and bloggers were arrested in 2013: four await court rulings; one has already been sentenced for nine years in jail.

In this year’s MSI, all objective scores fell substantially. The most dramatic change was in Objective 3, Plurality of News. Last year this objective was the only one to score in the “near-sustainability” range. It lost almost an entire point as many once-critical (if often partisan) voices adopted self-censored approaches for the sake of self-preservation. Although panelists agreed that the media’s professionalism has been helped by short-term training and capacity-building programs implemented by local and international organizations, the deteriorating situation has hurt professionalism overall; Objective 2’s score fell by half a point as a result. Although NGOs exist to support and protect rights for local media, they proved unable to prevent journalists from being jailed; Objective 5’s score dropped off by nearly two-thirds of a point due to this situation.

AZERBAIJAN at a glance

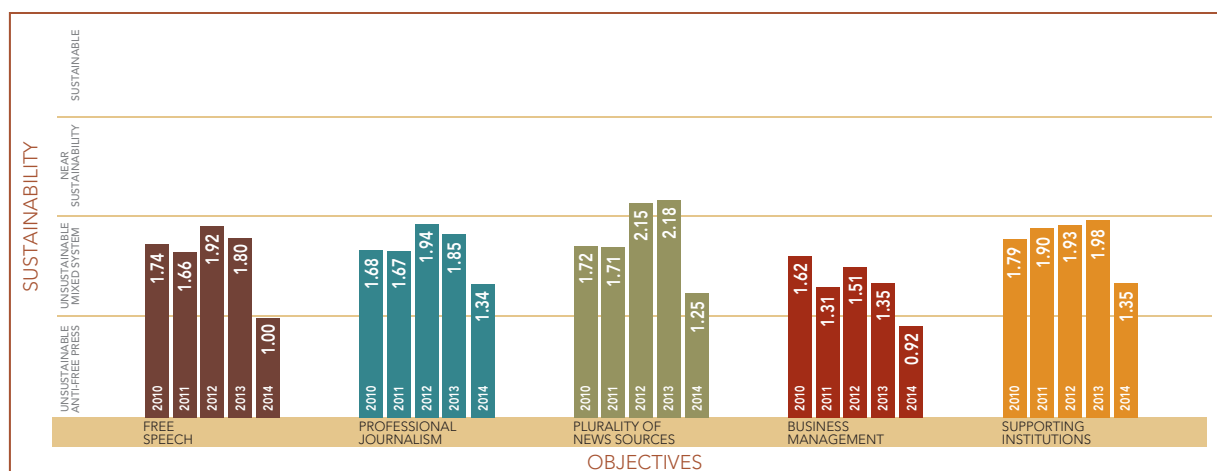
GENERAL

- > Population: 9,686,210 (July 2014 est. *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Capital city: Baku
- > Ethnic groups (% of population): Azerbaijani 91.6%, Lezgian 2%, Russian 1.3%, Armenian 1.3%, Talysh 1.3%, other 2.4%. *Note: almost all Armenians live in the separatist Nagorno-Karabakh region (2009 est. CIA World Factbook)*
- > Religions (% of population): Muslim 93.4%, Russian Orthodox 2.5%, Armenian Orthodox 2.3%, other 1.8%. *Note: religious affiliation is still nominal in Azerbaijan; percentages for actual practicing adherents are much lower (1995 est. CIA World Factbook)*
- > Languages (% of population): Azerbaijani (official) 92.5%, Russian 1.4%, Armenian 1.4%, other 4.7% (2009 est. *CIA World Factbook*)
- > GNI (2012-Atlas): \$57.86 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2013)
- > GNI per capita (2012-PPP): \$9,310 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2013)
- > Literacy rate: 99.8%; male 99.9%, female 99.7% (2010 census)
- > President or top authority: President Ilham Aliyev (since October 31, 2003)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations: Print: 36 dailies, 100 weeklies, 85 monthlies; Radio Stations: 9 AM, 17 FM; Television Stations: 23 (9 broadcasting nationwide, 14 regional)
- > Newspaper circulation statistics: Most widely read publications are the opposition newspapers *Yeni Musavat* and *Azadliq*
- > Broadcast ratings: Top three television stations: ANS-TV, Azad TV, and Khazar TV (AGB/Nielsen)
- > News agencies: Turan, Trend, APA, Day.Az, and 1news.az (all private); Azertaj (state-owned)
- > Annual advertising revenue in media sector: Newspapers: about \$1 million; Television: approximately \$30-\$40 million (author estimates; figures are not publicly released)
- > Internet usage: 2.42 million users (2009 *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: AZERBAIJAN



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2014: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES



CHANGE SINCE 2013

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

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Azerbaijan Objective Score: 1.00

All indicators under Objective 1 experienced much poorer evaluations by panelists this year. The only indicators that scored anywhere near the “near-sustainability” level of 2.00 were indicators 8 (access to and use of sources of news) and 9 (entry into the journalism profession); even these indicators, which had previously scored solidly in the 2.00 to 3.00 range, fell off by about a point each.

The constitution protects the freedom of speech, with a provision stipulating that in freedom-of-speech cases, courts should refer to the European Court of Human Rights. There is also a separate law on access to information. And yet, the tendency to restrict media, even within the bounds of the law, continued in 2013.

According to Qulu Meherremli, the freedom of speech and access to information in Azerbaijan is fragile and sometimes depends on the will of authorities. Moreover, he added, violations of the freedom of speech do not spur outrage in society.

In terms of broadcast licensing, the National Television and Radio Council recently declined to renew the license of a local station in Zagata, Aygün TV. The station director claimed that the Council had asked to buy the station; it

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.

refused and apparently lost its license as a result. Alasgar Mammadli said that the Council did not grant any new licenses to television stations in 2013; in addition, no FM radio stations were able to register in the regions of Azerbaijan. The law on cable television has not yet been adopted, and for now the National Television and Radio Council issues licenses for cable television.

Altay Goyushov of Baku State University, a blogger, said that precisely because television plays a major role in shaping public opinion, the authorities are not interested in making the licensing process fair and competitive. Government pressure is typically highest on media with the greatest audience impact. Therefore, placement of print advertisements, television licensing, and print media distribution networks all are used by the government as pressure points on the media.

The tax code exempts media, but not advertisements, from value-added tax (VAT). However, all technology and equipment is subject to 18 percent VAT at customs. The authorities, however, use taxes as a tool at their discretion to punish media. According to Shahveled Chobanoglu, of *Azadliq*, taxes are high enough that it can be difficult for media outlets to be profitable in Azerbaijan. But overall, there is no separate pressure on media in terms of taxes.

When it comes to market access, printing houses also face pressure from taxes. Qanun Printing House, for example, was audited and heavily fined. Qanun allegedly angered the authorities after printing election campaign materials (posters, flyers, etc.) of the main opposition's candidate, Jamil Hasanli.

As 2013 was an election year, many protests took place in Baku and certain regions, and some journalists were subjected to physical violence. On some occasions, in the regions of Saatli and Sabirabad, as well as in Baku, journalists faced police brutality, which went uninvestigated.

Khadija Ismayilova, an investigative journalist, emphasized the fact that Azerbaijan still has state media, despite prior commitments to abolish it after a public television service was established. She noted a new practice introduced in 2013: all private television channels and newspapers now have an assigned “censor,” a person sent by the president's office to exercise “quality control.” Recently, a journalist (Natig Javadli of *Bizim Yol*) and a “censor” were dismissed after an article that displeased the authorities made it into print.

After leadership changed at Ictimai TV (one of the public broadcasters) in 2013, more than 70 of its journalists were dismissed. Alasgar Mammadli said that AzTV (the state

Khadija Ismayilova, an investigative journalist, emphasized the fact that Azerbaijan still has state media, despite prior commitments to abolish it after a public television service was established. She noted a new practice introduced in 2013: all private television channels and newspapers now have an assigned “censor,” a person sent by the president’s office to exercise “quality control.”

television channel) functions basically without any base law regulating its programming.

Despite the commitment set by the National Action Plan on Protection of Human Rights to develop a legislative initiative to decriminalize defamation by 2012, a law on defamation was still not adopted in 2013. On February 22, 2013, the Supreme Court adopted a decision recommending that Milli Majlis (the parliament) amend the articles related to libel and insult. The parliament kept defamation as a criminal offense and also increased provisions for damages awarded almost tenfold.

Later, in June, the president signed a law that criminalized defamatory and offensive views posted on the Internet as well. The law made it possible to launch criminal charges against online activists who post such statements and to sentence them to as many as three years in prison.

Damages run very high in civil court cases. According to the law, in civil courts the burden of proof is on the journalist; in criminal cases claimants should have to prove that a crime occurred. In reality, according to Ismayilova, it is often the other way around when it comes to civil cases. When Ismayilova sued the pro-government newspapers *Yeni Azerbaijan* and *Iki Sahil* after they published insulting content about her, the court ruled that she must prove that the statements were untrue rather than the defendants proving the truth behind their statements. Thus, court decisions can be highly partisan.

According to 2012–2013 statistics by MRI, government representatives and civil servants accounted for more than 80 percent of people who sued for libel. The rest were primarily businesses or other individuals linked to the authorities in some way.

Regarding access to information, the panelists agreed that the situation has worsened dramatically. In fact, almost all information of public interest held by state agencies is closed. According to MRI statistics, out of 105 inquiries it made in 2013 to public agencies, they did not receive a single response in the manner prescribed by law.

Furthermore, ANS reporter Elnara Mammadova complained that a new system of inquiries designed by e-government initiatives has critically reduced journalists’ ability to report instantly. The new arrangement provides that everything is handled electronically, and within 48 hours the relevant public agency should respond to an inquiry. This gives an advantage to the print media, which tend to have longer turn-around time for publication.

The government is particularly protective of financial matters. “When the issue is money, they become particularly reactionary,” said Chobanoglu. He added that government bids are not transparent; the winners and losers of the bids are not announced or published, as required by law. According to Zahir Amanov, of *Cenub Xabarlari* (*Southern News*), the problems experienced in Baku plague the regions even more gravely. For instance, there is no information regarding financial allocations to local government budgets, and no one knows what kinds of decrees local government executives issue.

On a positive note, though, Ismayilova mentioned that in the past year, the Ministry of Finance has offered more information on its website. But changes to laws and other problems overshadowed the few positive developments in this realm.

Two NGOs—MRI and Multimedia Center—have been monitoring the transparency of information online since 2006. In terms of access to information, both pointed recently to a slight increase in terms of openness. The only exceptions are matters concerning budgets and government tenders, which continue to be more opaque. The panelists also commented on the limited access to the president; journalists were not able to interview him in 2013.

The panelists agreed that generally journalists are able to use the Internet freely, including to access foreign sources. Occasionally, though, websites are blocked, and there are some legal limitations to citizens’ access to media. Radio Liberty, VOA, and BBC have been banned in Azerbaijan. Additionally, satellite opposition channels are being jammed. There is also an informal ban on the re-translation of foreign television and radio in Azerbaijan. In Nakhchivan, the government banned cable television.

In terms of access into the journalism profession, new legislative changes stipulate that editors-in-chief should be

highly educated people. Furthermore, it is still the case that only state universities have journalism departments. The tendency is for the government to exert greater control over journalism through education and editorial staff.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Azerbaijan Objective Score: 1.34

Like Objective 1 above, every indicator suffered a loss in score this year. Only indicator 7 (technical facilities and equipment) stood out for receiving a score that is noticeably higher than the objective average.

The panelists generally agreed that despite some positive strides, particularly with independent media, professional deficiencies still exist among many of Azerbaijan's journalists. They believe that persistent problems with professionalism emanate from general pressure on the media, advertising bans, and distribution impediments, as well as the poverty in the field. As a result, many journalists leave the industry and move on to businesses or to government public relations and press offices.

The state's reluctance to provide information, detailed in Objective 1, also hampers journalists' efforts. It sometimes prompts journalists to publish reports without verification by government sources, which leads to libel claims against journalists. Journalists representing opposition media or undertaking investigative projects have particular difficulty finding sources to verify information on the record.

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).

According to Mehman Aliyev, director of Turan News Agency, self-censorship has increased, not only for journalists but also for online social media activists.

According to Chobanoglu, the problem lies not with professionalism per se, but in the serious, inherent lack of freedom that confines journalists. To support his claim, Chobanoglu brought up a comparison of government and opposition media circulation figures. Approximately 40 to 50 people watch programs on APA TV, a professional pro-government online television channel, whereas the audience of the "primitive and humble" opposition *Azerbaijan Saati* program on a Turkish television station is 20,000 to 30,000 people, he said.

It seems that in part, at least, the authorities use the discourse of "unprofessional journalism" as an excuse to pressure journalists and also as a response when they are criticized for violating the freedom of expression. Furthermore, Gulu Meherremli, of Baku State University's Department of Journalism, estimated that 90 percent of media do not comply with professional norms, because journalists are ordered to write stories from a partisan perspective. Alasgar Mammadli, a media lawyer with IREX-Azerbaijan, stated that there are no media, neither opposition nor government, in Azerbaijan capable of covering all sides of a story objectively.

The Press Council, the largest media organization, has adopted ethical standards in the form of a Code of Conduct developed with assistance from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). However, the Press Council has applied it selectively. The cases that Khadija Ismayilova and Rustam Ibragimbekov brought to the Press Council did not receive a response. At the same time, Avaz Zeynalli, editor-in-chief of the opposition *Khural* newspaper, was blacklisted after a complaint against him.

The panel emphasized the frequency of ethical lapses in stories on television and print media, particularly media's violation of the presumption of innocence (such as showing handcuffed accused persons), as well as disclosing the names and identities of victims of violence or trafficking. Ismayilova said that even media with reputations for professionalism display such problems. The lack of financial resources, which forces journalists to produce news and stories faster and less responsibly, is also a factor. Another practice that undermined ethical values in 2013 was the president's

Amanov commented, "Soon, we will be giving money on top of the newspaper to make people read it."

decision to give houses to some journalists—a practice seen as a sweetener to "constructive" journalists.

Self-censorship is a serious problem that is escalating significantly, as journalists constantly face the fear of harassment, physical abuse, and death. According to Mehman Aliyev, director of Turan News Agency, self-censorship has increased, not only for journalists but also for online social media activists. Goyushov emphasized that journalists resort to self-censorship when covering societal issues, not just the government. He claimed that there are issues and topics (related to history, religion, etc.) that he is reluctant to discuss openly in social media, due primarily to the public's possible reaction.

The panelists agreed that television and professional media do not feel free to cover all issues. Blogs and social media tend to stretch a bit further to cover controversial issues. Still, the fear of repercussions holds online journalists back as well; for instance, Facebook users tend to avoid "liking" some of the more critical content on the Web (e.g., anything about President Aliyev or his family), although they will venture to "like" milder criticism.

Salaries remain very low, both for opposition and government media. The panelists feel they are insufficient to keep journalists out of corruption. Furthermore, the panelists believe that government media representatives are paid unofficial (unaccounted) money on the top of the salaries.

Estimates suggest that entertainment programs have significantly replaced news and information programs for both radio and television. Radio Liberty stands out as an exception.

Turan Information Agency offers various specialized news content. However, it seems that there are few specialized journalists, and reporters mostly rely on the opinions of experts.

There are notable investigative journalists in Azerbaijan. In fact, the RFE/RL-Azerbaijani Service correspondents Khadija Ismayilova and Nushabe Fatullayeva, along with journalists Pavla Holcova and Jaromir Hason, won the 2013 Global Shining Light Award for their work in exposing questionable business deals involving the family of President Aliyev.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Azerbaijan Objective Score: 1.25

Objective 3 also saw every indicator lose ground this year. Only indicator 2 (citizen access to media) scored more than half a point higher than the objective score; it still fell short of breaking into the "near-sustainability" range by about a quarter point.

There is plurality of media, but generally more in terms of quantity than quality and diversity of news sources. The Internet offers the most in terms of plurality, followed by print media. Television and radio broadcasters are the least diverse sources of opinion or content. Amanov also mentioned that readers now appear more interested in scandalous, political news about official figures rather than news about culture or history.

The law does not restrict citizens' access to domestic or international media. The limitations tend to be more of an economic and administrative character; the Internet, for example, is expensive: 1 gigabyte costs AZN 3 (\$4). Internet illiteracy is also still a big problem for the majority of citizens in Azerbaijan.

Newspaper sales have been banned in the metro. In the rural areas, there are very few places to buy newspapers and many citizens cannot afford them. Amanov commented, "Soon, we will be giving money on top of the newspaper to make people read it." He added that newspaper kiosks now

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.

operate as a “library,” where people borrow a newspaper for a small amount (10 qepik), read it, and return it the next day.

State and public media do not reflect the views of the entire political system, the panelists said. In fact, there is no difference in the approach between state and public television stations and radio stations. There is only one public television and radio (ITV), and state television (AzTV) was expected to have been closed down based on Council of Europe commitments. However, now it turns out that there are two state-funded channels: AzTV and ITV. Both of them favor the authorities and neglect opposition political forces. State and public media do not fill the gap by providing longer public-affairs programs and in-depth reporting.

There is only one independent information agency, Turan News Agency. Local news stations typically do not use foreign information agencies. An important development is that foreign news agencies’ offices have been closed in the country, and their stringers are linked to the government of Azerbaijan—because otherwise the government does not give information to them.

In terms of producing news, ANS TV, Khazar TV, *Azadliq* newspaper, and Radio Liberty all create their own content.

Media ownership used to be more transparent because previously information about owners was public. Under the current law, it has become much more difficult to find this information, leaving people for the most part to guess at an outlet’s owner. Ownership became a commercial secret according to the law. However, there are no major corporations that own media, and there is zero foreign capital investment in media.

Broad information and news can be found in the Russian language, although less in Talysh, Lezgi, and Kurdish. Usually, the media are tolerant of minorities. *Talyshi Sado*, a Talysh-language newspaper, is not printed now but does have a website. There are some other minority-language media outlets, which are pro-government with small readership.

The distinction between local and national news is not very clear in Azerbaijan. In fact, journalists in Baku always report on regional news. Amanov, from Masalli, said that coverage of news from the regions is extremely challenging. According to Khalid Agaliyev, of the Media Rights Institute, the government feels threatened by some of the news sources that exist in the regions of Azerbaijan. ANS closed down regional offices in 2013, which can probably be explained by the unrest in the regions. The panelists also underscored the fact that there is no live broadcasting from the regions.

According to Mehman Aliyev, “After the abolition of political censorship, economic censorship was quietly introduced in the country.”

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Azerbaijan Objective Score: 0.92

Of all the objectives in this year’s MSI, Objective 4, which measures the media’s economic health, fared the worst. Most of the indicators suffered a significant drop in score, with only indicators 6 (market research) and 7 (audience measurement) remaining more or less static.

Agaliyev noted that it is rather difficult to calculate the income of media organizations because, for the most part, their business is not transparent. According to Mehman Aliyev, “After the abolition of political censorship, economic censorship was quietly introduced in the country.” This form of pressure included the destruction of the foundations of economic independence of the media, making them financially dependent on the state authorities. Its hallmarks include the authorities’ full control over the advertising market, a dismantling of the system of distribution of printed editions, and the increase in printing prices, Aliyev said.

Mammadli said that last year, the state allocated AZN 80 million (\$102,000,000) to the media. Of that sum, approximately AZN 8 million (\$10.2 million) went to private

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.

companies (around AZN 800,000, or \$1 million, for each private television station). Additionally, AZN 15 million to AZN 20 million (\$19.1 to \$25.5 million) was spent on distributing apartments to journalists and AZN 5 million (\$6.4 million) on grants to media from the State Media Support Fund. Both opposition and government media received apartments and grants, but as noted earlier, the program was used as a way to reward journalists friendly with the government. International grants also infused some additional support into the field.

The estimated advertisement market volume in Azerbaijan is AZN 50 million (\$63.7 million), which is less than the amount the state provides.

Mehman Aliyev commented, "According to the international standard for the media advertising market, which estimates the degree of stability and the free development of the media, the amount of media advertising should not be less than 1 percent of a country's GDP. In Azerbaijan, this figure has remained at just over 0.1 percent over 10 years. It is noteworthy that media advertising in 2006 totaled \$25 million, with a GDP of \$20 billion; in 2012, it was about \$109 million, with a GDP of \$75 billion. Maintaining this relationship with more than a three-fold increase in GDP is one proof of external control over the market. It should also be noted that the ratio of print and online media to television and radio advertising in developed countries was at the level 50:50, with only minor deviations. Recently, the balance has naturally tilted in favor of the first group, especially the Internet. In Azerbaijan, the imbalance of this ratio is high—the television and radio advertising market is 13 times higher than the market of online advertising and print media (\$100 million to \$9 million.) In addition, it is necessary to take into account that advertising typically flows only to government and pro-government media. On average, one print and online edition takes in \$35,000 a year without deducting taxes, which usually eats about 40–50 percent of the total revenue, despite the fact that practically the vast majority of them are not profitable."

The advertisement market is miserable, especially in the regions. There is no market competition, so businessmen can take advantage of the media in the realm of advertising. However, some businessmen complain that after paying for advertising, this display of wealth can make them a target for local authorities, who then harass them to pay bribes.

The major source of revenue for newspapers is in sales, although some funds come from the State Media Support Fund. However, this fund does not support regional newspapers. Proceeds from sales of newspapers are also affected by the ban on sales inside metro stations, which happened in 2013.

SIAR and McCann Erikson companies have done ratings for local television stations, which the president's administration references. According to those ratings, only 12 to 15 percent of the population watches Azerbaijani television channels. Turkish channels come in first, followed by Russian television channels.

Statistics on use of other media is suspect. For example, the increase in Internet use is real, but not at the level and speed announced by the government. For instance, the government claims that around one million secondary school students are Internet users, as all schools have Internet connections. But in fact, the panelists said, Internet use in the schools is very limited.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Azerbaijan Objective Score: 1.35

Objective 5 received the highest score of the five objectives this year, but like the other objectives it fell dramatically compared with last year. And, despite its place as the leading objective, it still is in the bottom half of the "unsustainable, mixed system" score category. Only indicators 3 (supporting NGOs) and 5 (short-term and in-service training) did not experience a lower evaluation by the panelists this year: they remained about the same and achieved scores a little more than a full point higher than the objective did overall.

The Press Council works under the full control of the presidential administration, although it is supposed to be an independent journalists' association. There are no efficient,

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.

functioning associations for journalists. The Press Council is dominated by pro-government newspapers and news agencies and defends the government's line. According to Ismayilova, the Press Council does not defend journalists; on the contrary, it assists the government in persecuting them. In the case of Avaz Zeynalli, editor-in-chief of *Khural*, the Press Council included him on a blacklist of journalists accused of racketeering. Additionally, the Press Council appealed to the Anti-Corruption Department to investigate Zeynalli's activity. Zeynalli was arrested in 2011 and charged with racketeering, intimidation, and forcefully demanding money. In 2013, he was sentenced to nine years in prison. Human-rights defenders agree that this was a fabricated case and that Zeynalli was persecuted due to his harsh criticism of the authorities.

NGOs that stand for media rights are doing a great job, according to the panelists. MRI and the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (IRFS) stand out as the most visible and active NGOs. MRI is providing legal aid and defense, as well as trainings for journalists in media law. IRFS does campaigning and advocacy work, as well as promotes new media.

However, they are able to operate only in the capital, Baku, as there are not enough resources to cover the entire country. Additionally, there is growing pressure from the authorities on NGOs that also operate in the regions.

There are no solid academic programs to train well-qualified journalists. Universities do not comply with current global standards, the panelists said. Furthermore, the government banned journalism departments at private universities, and now only a couple of state universities have either journalism departments (Baku State University) or journalism chairs (Baku Slavic University, the University of Languages). Panelists pointed to this as a sign of further tightening of government control over education, as quality journalism in the context of shrinking freedoms presents a bigger threat to the political establishment.

According to journalist Aynur Elgunesh, the university professors instructed journalism students not to attend trainings of the Dutch Journalism School in Baku, due to the fact that the students learn professional skills that are not taught at the university—thereby challenging the university's old and unqualified professors.

On the other hand, panelists gave good reviews of the availability of training for current journalists. These, however, are mostly supported with international donor funding and their sustainability is questionable should those donors be unable or unwilling to continue operating in Azerbaijan in the face of government restrictions on their activity.

Although the government's attitude toward licensing of print media seems to be liberal, there were cases when the authorities closed down newspapers and printing companies before 2013.

There are only 500 villages out of 4,000 that have access to broadband Internet. Fifty-three percent of the population is rural, and almost half of them cannot access good-quality Internet. Therefore, more than half of the country does not have access to alternative information online and on social media. Some may argue that the rural population in the villages can go online using mobile Internet platforms; however, the infrastructure for mobile Internet is not yet well developed. Even 3G is not available throughout the country for all the mobile Internet providers.

List of Panel Participants

Khadija Ismayilova, freelance investigative journalist, Baku

Shahveled Chobanoglu, reporter, *Azadliq*, Baku

Gulu Meherremli, professor, Department of Journalism, Baku State University, Baku

Khalid Kazimov, director, Regional Human Rights and Media Center, Baku

Elnara Mammadova, news anchor, ANS TV, Baku

Vusal Behbudov, democratization officer, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Baku

Alasgar Mammadli, media lawyer, IREX, Baku

Altay Goyushov, Facebook blogger; history professor, Baku State University, Baku

Tahmina Tagiyeva, Baku coordinator, Meydan TV, Baku

Gulnur Kazimova, reporter, Radio Liberty and Ganca.az, Ganja

Khalid Agaliyev, program director, Media Rights Institute, Baku

The following panelist submitted a questionnaire but was unable to attend the panel discussion:

Mehman Aliyev, director, Turan News Agency, Baku

The following panelist attended the panel discussion but did not submit a questionnaire:

Zahir Amanov, founder and senior editor, *Cenub Xabarlari* (*Southern News*), Masalli

Moderator and Author

Rashad Shirinov, independent political analyst, Baku

The panel discussion was convened on March 13, 2014.