

---

---

*Fearing the replication of a Ukrainian Maydan or Arab Spring, Tajik security agencies began the surveillance of almost all journalists working for private media, while the intelligence agencies or the prosecutor's office regularly summoned opposition print media editors to instruct them on what and how to write.*



## TAJIKISTAN

Election scandals, a spy scandal, an opposition movement named Group of 24 testing the waters with calls for anti-government rallies, border skirmishes with Kyrgyzstan, reports of Tajiks participating in jihad in Syria and Iraq, and government arrests of extremists made for a tumultuous 2014 in Tajikistan.

Fearing the replication of a Ukrainian Maydan or Arab Spring, Tajik security agencies began the surveillance of almost all journalists working for private media, while the intelligence agencies or the prosecutor's office regularly summoned opposition print media editors to instruct them on what and how to write. Radio Liberty correspondents and television reporters from Iran and Afghanistan used to have a presence in Khorog, but now all the international media reporters have left.

To further restrict the activities of independent media and reduce access to information, Tajikistan's parliament adopted an amendment to the Law on the Legal Status of Emergency Situations, giving the authorities the right to completely block or restrict Internet access and turn off mobile communications in case of unrest in the country. In addition, the Law on State Secrets, also adopted in 2014, replaced the Laws On Classified Information and the List of Classified Information that Constitute State Secrets. Now the heads of ministries and departments may manipulate the new law in order to hide information they do not want to share with journalists by classifying such information as state secrets.

In other media-related developments, the government continues providing financial support to, including updating the infrastructure of, all four state television channels for their full transition to digital broadcasting in 2015. The salaries of government television and print journalists have been raised. In terms of media growth, this year, two news media outlets launched under the auspices of *Faraj* and *Nigoh*. The Ministry of Culture registered four new newspapers and two magazines.

Other notable news stories of 2014 included the government's promise to establish a Public Council, including representatives of civil society, in response to accusations by human rights activists that Tajik law enforcement agencies have used torture. On the economic front, China pledged to invest \$6 billion in the Tajik economy over the next three years. The first major project funded will be the implementation of the Tajik part of a project aimed at building the Central Asia—China gas pipeline, which will increase the flow of Central Asian gas to China. Finally, Tajikistan's standoff with Uzbekistan over Tajikistan's water and energy resources, especially regarding the construction of the Rogun hydro-power plant, continued, prompting Uzbekistan to organize protests at the UN and the OSCE.

# TAJIKISTAN at a glance

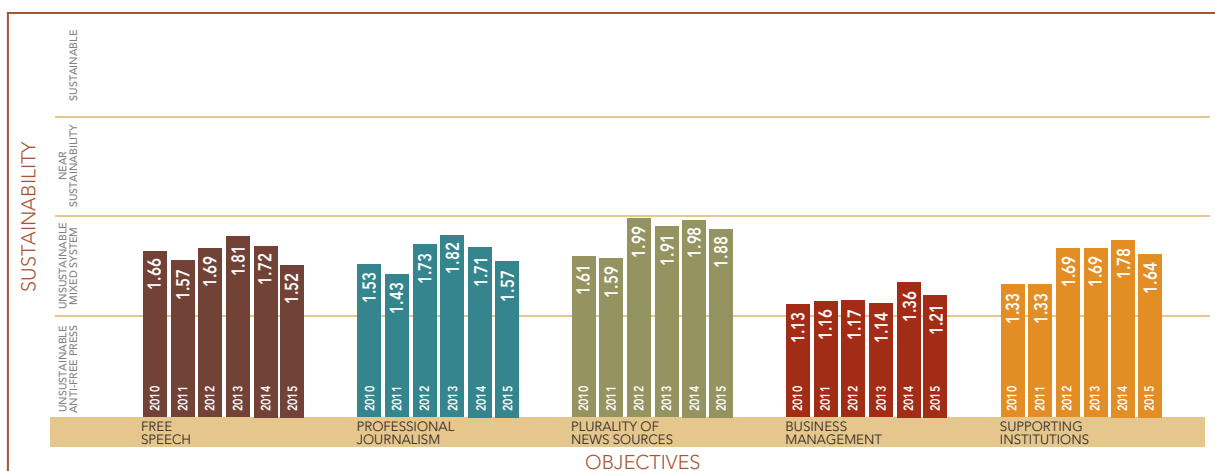
## GENERAL

- > Population: 8,051,512 (July 2014 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Capital: Dushanbe
- > Ethnic group (% of population): Tajik 84.3%, Uzbek 12.2%, Russian 0.5%, Kyrgyz 0.8%, other 2.2% (results of the 2010 Census of Tajikistan)
- > Religion (% of population): Sunni Muslims 89%, Ismaili Muslims 6%, other 5%. (Data of the Committee for Religious Affairs)
- > Language: Tajik (official), Russian enshrined in Constitution as a *lingua franca*
- > GNI (2013-Atlas): \$8.098 Billion (World Bank Development Indicators 2014)
- > GNI per capita (2013-PPP): \$2,500 (World Bank Development Indicators 2014)
- > Literacy Rate: 99.7%; male 99.8%, female 99.6% (2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > President and Head of the Government: Emomali Rahmon (since November 6, 1994)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations: 515 print media, including 330 newspapers and 120 magazines, have been registered in The Ministry of Culture; Television Stations: 35 (including 26 non-state); Radio Stations: 24 (including 16 non-state)
- > Newspaper circulation statistics: The largest (in terms of circulation) private newspapers are *Asia-Plus*, *Faraj*, and *Samak*; the largest state-run are *Jumhuriyat* and *Sadoi Mardum*
- > Broadcast ratings: Dushanbe's top radio stations are Radio Asia-Plus, Radio Imruz, and Radio Khovar; in Khujand: Tiroz and SM-1.
- > News agencies: News agencies: asiaplus.tj, avesta.tj, tojnews.tj, pressa.tj, ruzgor.tj, tajikta.tj, tajnews.ru, ozodagon.com, faraj.tj and the governmental Khovar
- > Annual advertising revenue in media sector: N/A
- > Internet usage: 1,288,242 (2013 est., [www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm))

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: TAJIKISTAN



## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2015: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES



### CHANGE SINCE 2014

▲ (increase greater than .10) □ (little or no change) ▼ (.10 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\\_msiscorers.xls](http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE_msiscorers.xls)

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.52

The information sphere in Tajikistan is governed by laws including the Constitution, including Article 30 guaranteeing the freedom of speech, as well as by the Law on the Press and other Media, the Law on Television and Radio Broadcasting, the Law on Information, the Law on the Right of Access to Information, the Statute on Licensing of Television and Radio Broadcasting, and numerous other articles in various civil, administrative, and criminal codes.

The Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan provides for the freedom of expression and prohibits censorship, and there are special laws on mass media and broadcasting that guarantee the freedom of speech and public access to information. However, in reality, they fall short of protecting the freedom of speech, although on paper they appear to comply with international standards.

“At meetings with the intelligentsia and in his addresses to parliament, the president always says that he is in favor of developing the freedom of speech and quotes the growing number of independent media. But no media in Tajikistan are truly free from the authorities,” said Mahmudjon Dodobaev, chief of the Information and Analytical Department for the Sughd Region administration. He claims that in cases of freedom of speech violations, the courts

### 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.

themselves do not fully understand the significance of the media, stereotypically perceiving journalists as people who can and should always be defeated, while the courts are there to remedy the situation.

As in the previous few years, the panelists expressed little confidence in the implementation of the laws. “The practical mechanism for implementing laws governing the media is used only in the interests of a particular group of people,” said Negmatullo Mirsaidov, editor-in-chief of *Varorud*. The panelists pointed out that there are certain risks regarding sustainability of the media in Tajikistan. “Regulatory agencies—law enforcement and the judicial authorities—constantly interfere with the implementation of the law. They are completely dependent on the Tajikistan authorities and carry out their will,” said Lola Khalikjanova, editor-in-chief of Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) in Tajikistan. Officials regularly interpret the law to their benefit, often referring to intra-departmental instructions that no journalist has ever seen. For example, as Zarina Ergasheva, of the Center for Human Rights, noted, the Communications Service can block access to any website simply by sending an SMS message to the Internet service provider. “But in most cases, [the Communications Service] deny having been given such instructions, blaming Internet service providers and their technical problems,” said Nazarali Pirnazarov, a reporter for the ca-news.org news agency.

Turko Dikaev, a reporter for *Asia Plus*, believes that when journalists are penalized and face pressure, they are often guilty. “Tajik journalism is mostly emotional, and specific facts are often ignored. We can seldom prove what we have written, and if an official desires it, the authorities have all the levers to render a journalist guilty,” he said. According to Dikaev, if one strictly sticks to the facts and international standards, the authorities can do nothing.

Officials keep threatening journalists in an attempt to find their sources of information, though the law allows a journalist not to disclose them, except for cases determined by the court. Khurshed Niyozov, who heads the Center for Investigative Journalism, said that they publish all their materials under pseudonyms in order to avoid problems with authorities. “And even still, each publication is followed by a visit from the prosecutor’s office or security agencies demanding that the sources of information and the real name of the journalist who wrote the material be revealed to them,” he said.

Ergasheva said that after publishing critical or analytical articles, she receives phone calls from the same agencies demanding her sources. “I am often called by high-ranking officials, who express the same demands and warn me that I will no longer receive any information from them,” she

Ergasheva said that after publishing critical or analytical articles, she receives phone calls from the same agencies demanding her sources. “I am often called by high-ranking officials, who express the same demands and warn me that I will no longer receive any information from them,” she added.

added. The Law on the Press explains how to protect sources of confidential information; there is an article, “special cases of non-disclosure of information,” with the following rule: “If a source has given information on the condition of non-disclosure of the information, the journalist may be required to disclose the source only by a decision of the court investigating the case.” Additionally, the Criminal Code has an article that contradicts the Law on the Press. It states that if a person is called as a witness, s/he is obliged to give evidence. Panelists unanimously called for the adoption of a law that protects the identity of sources.

Nuriddin Karshiboev, chair of the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan (NANSMIT), noted that the Committee for Language and Terminology also sends warnings to undesirable newspapers and looks for faults in the use of terminology in the state language.

The legislation on broadcasting and telecommunications, especially on licensing, remains non-democratic. The Licensing Commission, created by the government under the auspices of the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting, stipulates unequal conditions for those who wish to obtain a license. As before, the Commission blocks licenses for a number of independent mass media outlets that have the opportunity to start broadcasting. The Commission is still a closed structure, headed by Asadullo Gulomov, the chair of the Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting, with no representatives from independent media and civil society. Most applications are still pending in the Licensing Commission with no progress. The licensing process lacks transparency, and not all the applicants who want to launch radio and television outlets can freely obtain a broadcasting license. Many independent media outlets have been waiting for licenses for many years. Those who are planning to start an electronic media business must first register in the “Single Window,” where they are immediately required to present a document from the regulatory body—the State Committee for Television

and Radio Broadcasting (Comtelradio). They also have to present a list of equipment with certifications—all this even before obtaining a license.

This year, only two television channels and two radio stations in the Sughd region and one radio station in Tursunzade, near the border with Uzbekistan, received broadcasting licenses. The panelists believe that these stations received their licenses for the sake of information security—to mask out television and radio signals coming from neighboring Uzbekistan.

There are only two independent television channels—Mavchi Ozod and Kurgonteppa TV—and no private radio stations in the Khatlon region in southern Tajikistan. There are no independent television or radio stations that broadcast in Gorno-Badakhshan and the Rasht Valley (in the eastern part of the country), though candidates filed applications more than six years ago.

As for the transition of television and radio stations to digital broadcasting, the panelists pointed out that there have been many efforts to make the transition as smooth as possible; citizens’ requests regarding access to alternative sources of information were also taken into consideration. What was missed, however, is a technical point: the television system is now broadcasting via a different satellite, and many citizens in the remote regions of the country began complaining that even those with satellite dishes do not have access to Tajik television channels.

“We wanted to create a Public Radio in Khorog for the reason of information security, so that the residents of the city could listen to their own radio and not to Afghan stations, but it has already been rejected twice,” said Kurbon Alamshoev, director of the Pamir Mass Media Center in Khorog. The panelists believe that the application was rejected because Alamshoev himself is a well-known opposition journalist who used to work for Radio Liberty.

Many people applied for a license to launch a radio station in the Sughd region, but few of their bids proved successful. “Almost all of them consider radio a business, and not a creative work,” said Dodoboev. He believes that the authorities consider each additional independent television and radio station to be nothing other than a nuisance.

Nosirjon Mamurzoda, a reporter for the Tajik service of Radio Liberty in Khatlon Province, said that the nine areas bordering Afghanistan in Khatlon have expressed interest in establishing radio and television stations in Shaartuz, again for reasons of information security, as even the Tajik-speaking population watch and listen to Uzbek television and radio broadcasts. “We, a few journalists who wanted to help on this, went to local authorities, but

we were told that Khatlon is under control more so than other regions, which is the reason why the application was rejected," he said.

Private individuals from the southern Khatlon region, Gorno-Badakhshan, and central parts of the country still have not received radio and television broadcasting licenses. Over the past year, only a number of television stations in the north of the country received licenses and began broadcasting. "These measures are used by the authorities to restrict the number of electronic media outlets, which are much more difficult to control than print media, in order to establish total control over the media," said Karshiboev.

Zinatullo Ismoilov, director of the independent SMT TV, added that at the end of October 2014, the Tajik government adopted a decree: On Measures for the Implementation of Activities Aimed at Joining the WTO. "Paragraph five states that according to the government's decision, in 2015-2016 an independent regulator in the field of broadcasting shall be established; the Communications Service will be closed down and the Agency for Telecommunications shall be established instead, and the current licenses for audiovisual products canceled," said Ismoilov. According to his data, there are 29 active television channels: nine governmental, 15 independent and five cable. In addition, 31 active studios produce audiovisual products.

Anyone with some financial means may enter the media market, as well as any other type of business. Any businessperson unrelated to journalism but having sufficient financial resources can establish a newspaper or a magazine in Tajikistan. Therefore, the media market is full of inexpensive, but very popular newspapers and magazines, with crosswords and horoscopes stolen from the Russian print media. It was noted that materials published in these editions are low-quality and rife with grammatical errors.

Until 2013, tax authorities have strenuously desired all media to be subject to taxation, i.e. no matter whether they were separate legal entities or subsidiaries of other legal entities, they had to register with the tax authorities and pay taxes. But with the adoption of the new Law On the Media, those who can apply the new provisions of the law well enough have proven that a media outlet can work as a structural unit of another legal entity as, for example, three newspapers belonging to the Faraj NGO.

There used to be tax benefits for the media in the past, and newspapers were VAT-free—but such privileges expired after a five-year time period, and have not been extended, according to Niyozov, who publishes three newspapers. The licensing procedure for the print media is still complicated and non-transparent; one who wants to launch and register

any type of media must visit about four or five government departments and register as a legal entity as well.

Niyozov reported that the process of newspaper registration is confusing: if you have a Limited Liability Company (LLC), you have to register with the Ministry of Justice, whereas a commercial organization has to go through the Ministry of Culture and the tax office "Single Window." "Everything is done to complicate the registration of independent print media," he said.

The panelists pointed out that the tax burden for the media is heavy, but the same is true with other businesses. "Few media executives are able to pay 18 percent VAT and 25 percent from profits; therefore, we have to look for different ways to evade paying taxes, otherwise it makes no sense to work—since the profit of the print media drops considerably," said Niyozov.

Violations of the rights of journalists have been reported in the monthly monitoring by NANSMIT. More than 100 violations of the rights of journalists and media, 60 conflicts and charges against media and journalists, and the beating of two journalists were recorded.

When journalists get into trouble, few from civil society back them up; this even though the public otherwise value the media, often threatening officials that they will "contact the newspapers" as their last resort when they have a problem. "Only the colleagues and users of social networks, a tiny fraction of the public, express their support or rebel against violations of the freedom of speech," said Khalikjanova. The panelists believe that perhaps the media themselves bear some responsibility for the lack of civic activity in society, and that only international organizations and NGOs react to the problems of freedom of speech and the violation of the rights of journalists in Tajikistan.

"Many newspapers and other media fear backing their colleagues, preferring to remain silent and express support only on the sidelines. It is unlikely that someone would stand up if a newspaper were suddenly closed for publishing controversial material," said Ergasheva. There are ongoing psychological attacks on journalists via Facebook, which is, like other social networks, now being intensively monitored by the authorities. "All the dirt on the opposition and undesirable journalists is being poured on there," she said.

Panelists believe that the authorities themselves contribute to the fact that public opinion has been split for several years already. Some people consider free media to be of great benefit to the state and society, while others believe that the media stir up situations in society, slander the government, and are to blame for problems with the authorities or individual officials. In 2014, the so-called

“Many newspapers and other media fear backing their colleagues, preferring to remain silent and express support only on the sidelines. It is unlikely that someone would stand up if a newspaper were suddenly closed for publishing controversial material,” said Ergasheva.

“response factory” kept working, i.e., the government media continued using anonymous letters allegedly written by their readers in order to sling mud on opposition politicians, religious leaders, and the independent media. “Such materials are usually presented as ordinary citizens’ opinions and signed by invented names—mostly Russian,” said Ravshan Abdullaev, executive director of the Eurasia Foundation in Tajikistan.

When the director of the Communications Service, Beg Zuhurov, closed such social networks as Facebook, Twitter, Classmates, VKontakte—all of which have become a platform for free expression of opinions and statements of opposition politicians in the Tajik segment of the population—his decision stemmed from the marked influence of social networks in the minds of the most educated part of the population. Ismoilov added, “There is no Law On Social Media, which would reflect the interests of all segments of society, even though being a WTO member, Tajikistan must have social media.”

The panelists noticed a new trend in blocking websites in 2014: rather than blocking an entire site, its available bandwidth is reduced, and sometimes a site cannot be opened from a computer, though it can be accessed via a cell phone. Alternatively, a targeted DDOS attack on a website can be conducted, making it becomes impossible to open. The panelists pointed out that even now, in the run-up to the elections, the poorly protected servers of independent media are subject to DDOS attacks. “The online access to *Asia Plus* and *Ozodagon* is often denied because they do not have hosting services in diverse places,” said Abdullaev. Nevertheless, people have learned how to bypass such blockages.

Ismoilov added that state electronic media constantly receive assistance from the state in the form of higher wages, bonuses, municipal apartments, and plots of land.

There were eight lawsuits against journalists, two of which go back to 2013. The lawsuit of the case “Intellectuals against the *Asia Plus* newspaper and its editor Olga

Tutubalina” was filed in early July 2013. On February 25, 2014, the trial court ruled against *Asia Plus* and its editor in the lawsuit filed by five creative associations (the Academy of Sciences, the Writers’ Union, the Composers’ Union, the Artists’ Union and the Architects’ Union) and three individuals. The Court of the Firdausi district of the capital ruled that the newspaper and its editor, Olga Tutubalina, are obliged not only to publish a retraction, but also to pay TJS 30,000 (\$6,000) to the three plaintiffs. On October 28, 2013, the court of Matcha district found Mahmadyusuf Ismoilov, a journalist from the Asht district, guilty of extortion and fraud by means of misuse of an official position, and sentenced him to 11 years in prison, a three-year ban from journalism, and a TJS 5,000 (\$1,000) fine. On January 16, 2014, Ismoilov’s lawyer appealed the decision of the Sughd regional court in the Supreme Court of Tajikistan, but the appeal was rejected.

The case of a financial pyramid scheme, Qwestnet, against the journalist Orzu Isoev and Imruz radio drags on; the journalist is accused of libel and spreading deliberately false and offensive information regarding the company. In another decision, near the end of the year, the Ministry of Culture banned publication of *Nigoh*, a paper well-known for publishing sharp critical materials on many social and political issues. In November, the Ismaili Somoni District Court decided to ban further publication of materials related to the lawsuit between Tojiksodirotbank (Foreign Trade Bank) and its creditors. In another case, the owner of the market in Shaartuz district of the Khatlon region, Mukhibullo Sadulloev, sued *Samak* for failing to protect his honor, dignity, and business reputation. Niyozov also mentioned that the writer Askar Hakim is suing *Samak*, which belongs to the Faraj media corporation, for TJS 150,000 (\$30,000) after an article published in the newspaper wrote the word “intellectuals” in quotation marks.

Although Articles 135 and 136 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Tajikistan (covering defamation and insult) were transferred to the Civil Code of the Republic of Tajikistan upon President Emomali Rahmon’s initiative, Article 137 (insulting the President of Tajikistan) and Article 330 (insulting public officials) remain enshrined in the criminal code. Therefore, decriminalization of libel is not a panacea against legal persecution of journalists. There are also problems with photos of famous people taken from open sources who then later complain about the media that published them. The panelists concluded that introducing the public figure concept into current laws would help government officials cultivate a sense of responsibility to society and greater tolerance of criticism.

Karshiboev believes that many cases could be resolved administratively through the Press Council without opening

a criminal case and going to court. “Many cases were submitted to intimidate bold opposition journalists and newspaper offices,” he said. Humiliating journalists is another tactic. “For example, an official of the regional mayor’s office insulted Ashurbi Solehov, a journalist for *Kurgan-Tube*, claiming that she was poorly dressed and demanded that she be fired from her job,” said Mamurzoda. He noted that she received apologies after a group of journalists brought the issue to the attention of the regional chief.

Referring to access to information during major political events, Pirnazarov said that the Central Election Committee’s transparency has improved since the presidential elections of 2013. “The information is presented promptly, representatives of all media are invited, special press briefings for the media are held,” he said. Yet, prominent government officials still rarely agree to be interviewed by journalists.

According to Mamurzoda and Murod Sotiev, the editor of *New Khatlon*, the regional authorities of Khatlon usually require written requests for information. “It is still impossible to receive information over the phone in the regions; the officials explain this is due to the necessity of receiving their supervisor’s permission,” said Sotiev. In other cases, officials have denied journalists entry into open court sessions, with no explanation; the security and law enforcement agencies tend to give official information primarily to the state-run media. The panelists agreed that the decisive factors in obtaining information come down to the journalist’s professionalism, diplomatic skills, and the extent of their personal connections in the government. Nevertheless, the authorities still divide the media outlets into friends and foes, giving priority to state media.

Dodobaev, who heads the press service of Sughd province, offered another perspective—noting that private or independent media are the first to request information, which gives them an advantage in the competitive market over the state-run media that tend to lag behind in presenting information to the public.

According to Alamshoev, “Whenever something happens in our area, we mostly learn about it from Dushanbe. As for events associated with the rallies against the government in May, we were forbidden from covering them, and our steps were closely monitored. It’s a shame that many of our supposedly independent colleagues spy on us for local authorities,” he said.

The President’s Office also tightened access of foreign journalists accredited in Tajikistan: as of 2012, they are no longer invited to meetings of the president with international delegations, and protocol filming has also

been banned. This year, for unexplained reasons, the Foreign Ministry denied accreditation to two journalists from Tajik Radio Liberty and the Tajik branch of IWPR.

Thanks to the Internet, access to information for journalists has improved significantly, as many official websites of ministries and departments post documents, and some have their own Facebook pages. The panelists praised the press service of the Parliament and City Hall in particular on this point.

The local media use without government interference information provided by local news agencies and newspapers, as well as information provided by international news agencies—though referencing sources is rare, and hyperlinks are not used, constituting a violation of intellectual property rights. The panelists thought that Tajikistan’s entrance to the WTO in March 2013 would have tightened the requirements for using hyperlinks and reduce the use of unlicensed materials of other agencies and newspapers.

Journalism is not subject to licensing, and one does not necessarily have to have professional education in order to become a journalist. The new Law On the Media features a clear definition of who is a journalist: “An employee of any media, who works as a staff member or by contract and is a member of the Journalists’ Union of the country,” said Karshiboev. However, the absence of accreditation for reporting some official events may be an obstacle for a journalist.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.57

Professional journalistic work in Tajikistan is still hindered by obstacles, mainly by limited access to various governmental sources of information. Generally, the panelists expressed their concern about the level of professionalism, which has not improved in several years. So far, most media outlets do not have their own professional photographers, nor any experts or analysts as permanent staff members. Journalists working for government media still lag behind in professionalism, compared with their colleagues from independent media outlets. “The level of professionalism of the media is very low; they are working according to obsolete Soviet standards, and their coverage of any problems is based on their own vision and emotions,” said Pirnazarov.

The panelists said that *Nigoh* and *Ozodagon* newspapers and their websites, which have become popular, do not always present a balanced view and often violate ethical standards. Ismoilov said that the media is often one-sided—



either in favor of the opposition or the government. On the other hand, not all publications, especially journalistic investigations, are examined in advance or receive legal advice, which leads to problems with individuals or judicial authorities. As an example, the Somoni District Court of Dushanbe decided that *Nigoh* must cease publishing material on the Tojiksodirotbank commercial bank. That case set a precedent regarding the freedom of information, marking the first time a Tajikistan court decided to ban media coverage.

Pirnazarov believes that not all journalists are objective in covering certain events—as seen during the election campaign. Niyozov noted that some independent journalists share the opinion that if some colleagues criticize the leaders of the opposition, it means that they are working for the state security agencies. Non-government media usually reflect the opinions of their founders and owners, and those who pay for the publications. Government media is the source of official propaganda, acting as a mouthpiece in the fight against political rivals.

The panelists pointed out that there are not enough expert and analytical comments by specialists in almost all spheres, while there are many political scientists and analysts in the country whose comments are predictable, but, nevertheless, constantly quoted in the media. Many journalists do not raise sensitive issues because they have no access to information, or to confidential sources. “Besides, not every experienced and renowned expert or analyst will share his comments with an unfamiliar journalist for fear that his words will be quoted out of context,” said Niyozov.

#### 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).

Plagiarism is another persistent problem, for both print and electronic media. “According to the law, information materials are not subject to copyright and related rights; therefore, these materials are published in other media too. But on the other hand, it is unethical to reprint someone else’s material and sign it with a different name,” said Karshiboev.

The Ethical Standards of Journalism in Tajikistan, adopted by the journalistic community on October 30, 2009, is in place to guide journalists. The ethical standards are based on well-known standards developed by international professional associations of journalists, with the specific national culture and morality also taken into account. The code has not been adopted by such major Tajik-language opposition newspapers as *Millat* and *The USSR*, as well as the Oila media group, which was one of the founders of the Media Council.

The Media Council of the Republic of Tajikistan, a public organization, includes 75 editorial boards of newspapers and media organizations. It oversees the implementation of ethical norms within journalism, receives applications from interested parties, and makes advisory decisions. Karshiboev reported that in 2014 the Media Council monitored compliance with ethical norms, and there were fewer complaints of non-compliance than in 2013.

Yet ethical standards are rarely enforced, the panelists said. Despite the fact that the Media Council should monitor the implementation of these standards, many government and independent journalists take rewards or payments for their work. “Recently, the chair of one of the cities in the Sughd region decided to encourage journalists by sending them two kilograms of meat, and instead of declining the administrator’s offer, one of the journalists complained that the meat he received was not of the quality he had expected,” said a member of the Press Council, Ismoilov. In all the regions, journalists require a fee or reward in the form of money or food for filming or reporting. The panelists also said that a clear distinction between information and advertising materials are rarely seen in any print media, another violation of the ethical standards of journalism.

The media avoid touching on topics such as the president’s family and private life, access to natural resources, corruption in the highest echelons of power, or disputed territories on the border with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. State television tries not to show emergencies, military clashes, terrorist attacks, and natural disasters in the news. Gender issues, HIV/AIDS, informal groups, sexual and religious minorities are seldom discussed in the media, as well.

As for social networks, the panelists noted that interesting information can be obtained from blogs and social networks, which actively discuss political topics relating

personally to President Rahmon and his family that are never discussed in the media. “Nonetheless, materials about financial pyramid schemes backed by high-ranking officials, attempts of illegal seizure of successful businesses, and the children of officials involved in fatal car accidents, have been published,” said Pirnazarov, and some newspapers, such as *Asia-Plus*, *Ozodagon*, *Faraj*, and *Nigoh* have recently begun publishing articles based on Facebook discussions.

Self-censorship continues to be a very serious problem for the media in Tajikistan. The editors, journalists and even owners of most media, regardless of their ownership, are highly susceptible to self-censorship. “As usual, before important political events such as elections, the authorities exert explicit and implicit pressure on the independent media, editors, and individual journalists,” said Abdullaev.

The most critical materials are being published in the Facebook and V Kontakte social networks. On the other hand, fake groups aimed at discrediting dissidents are also actively using these networks—and often resort to rude insults and threats.

According to the panelists, salaries and fees in the government-owned media have increased over the past year, but they still lag behind the level of wages in the independent media, despite rising prices for food and utilities. The average monthly salary in the state media does not exceed \$170, whereas in private media it can reach \$900. Comteleradio employees have received subsidized housing, and they are also given free plots of land in Dushanbe’s suburbs. Many journalists work for several media outlets, or work in NGOs part time, and some of them have gone to Russia, Kazakhstan, and other countries as migrant labor.

Like journalism in general, ethical standards are not always respected in investigative journalism, as journalists do not always check the facts and do not include views from all sides, resulting in problems with the authorities and the judiciary. Still, investigative journalism has developed successfully overall. Thirty investigations devoted to social issues, the history of independent Tajikistan, corruption, economics, and human rights were published in 2014. The panelists noted that this year the most daring publications, especially in the genre of investigative journalism, were devoted to such socially relevant themes as torture, corruption, unfair trials, religious freedom, and politics, and were published in the Tajik-language newspapers *Faraj* and *Samak* and the Russian-language *Asia Plus*.

Each ministry and agency, especially the security forces, maintains an internal list of information not available to the media, which complicates the work of journalists. The Ministry of Defense and the State Committee for National Security and Central Directorate of Border Control consider

“Besides, not every experienced and renowned expert or analyst will share his comments with an unfamiliar journalist for fear that his words will be quoted out of context,” said Niyozov.

their activities to be state secrets, and publish necessary information only via the governmental news agency Khovar or government television channels. Furthermore, journalists who prepare critical articles are often at risk, prompting them to refer to anonymous sources. Also, all the media sticks to the unwritten rule not to criticize their advertisers or tax authorities.

Especially in broadcast media, entertainment programs are gradually replacing news. In 2013, television advertising revenues amounted to \$16.16 million, a sum that grew to \$16.94 million in 2014. Entertainment programs consume 70 to 75 percent of airtime on government television channels, 60 percent on public radio, and more than 80 percent on private FM radio. News programs occupy no more than 25 percent of government broadcast television programming, and up to 20 percent on private television and radio channels.

Ismoilov noted that private television channels find it too expensive to produce their own programs. “To prevent my employees from moving to government channels, I have to pay them more than they would earn there, so I prefer to prepare entertainment or music programs, for which sponsors can be easily found,” he said. Younger television viewers prefer soccer, entertainment, and talk shows to analytical or news programs, the panelists said.

The panelists generally agree that the only channel to meet the requirements of the authorities and the audience alike is Bahoriston TV, where educational and cultural programs for children, designed for family viewing, prevail. Furthermore, the quality and content of the government Tajik TV broadcasts are inferior to Russian television and channels from neighboring countries such as Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Iran.

Concerning media equipment, the panelists believe that the media lack modern technology, although the state media is significantly better off than that the independent media in terms of newer equipment and specialized, licensed computer software. Government television and radio channels upgrade their technical platform from the state budget every year. “Currently, the non-government media find it more and more difficult to compete with government

**“This year, the Ministry of Culture presented a number of local newspapers in the Khatlon region with two computers each, but they are outdated and unproductive. Many print editions do not even have access to e-mail and the Internet yet,” said Mamurzoda.**

publications, which leads to a gradual degradation of journalism in Tajikistan in general,” said Abdullaev.

Many print media journalists in Dushanbe purchase computers, smart phones, cameras, and other equipment needed for the job at their own expense; print media also commonly accept Internet and mobile communications equipment from companies in exchange for advertising. The situation is even worse in the regions: “Unfortunately, the equipment used by the journalists in the regions is outdated and cheap, and frequently breaks, hindering job efficiency,” said Sotiev. “This year, the Ministry of Culture presented a number of local newspapers in the Khatlon region with two computers each, but they are outdated and unproductive. Many print editions do not even have access to e-mail and the Internet yet,” said Mamurzoda.

Due to the lack of technical equipment, and the fact that no news agency works around the clock, information is often delayed.

The country still lacks high-quality specialized media, except for some glossy magazines devoted to advertising and recruitment, which are stuffed with puff pieces about successful businessmen. “The reason for this situation lies in the limited financial resources of these publications, their founders’ reluctance to invest in a new business, as well as the narrow-mindedness and lack of training of journalists,” said Karshiboev. In addition, few specialized training programs for journalists exist, and it is very difficult to obtain specific information from government agencies. “Journalists specializing in economics do not have enough access to data for qualitative economic analysis,” said Ergasheva. Niyozov also commented, “Many journalists do not distinguish between investigative journalism and the work of a private investigator. I have been repeatedly warned by the Prosecutor General’s Office that journalists behave as investigators. It also reflects poorly on the profession that investigative journalism becomes a kind of business and journalists receive money from customers.”

Still, the number of versatile Tajik journalists in the media has slightly increased over the past year; many of them snap photos on their smartphones and record their own video at press conferences. The panelists said that employers force journalists to use multimedia, but do not pay them for the additional skills.

In sum, members of the state media lag far behind those in the independent (private) media in terms of professionalism, ethics, pluralism, timeliness. This problem is rooted primarily in the state media’s management system, some panelists believe.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.88

There are many information sources in Tajikistan, providing consumers with broad choices, but the government media fails to meet standards of public access to objective and timely information. Nevertheless, in most cases, government media has greater impact on the public due to a wider broadcast footprint and broader circulation of its print media.

There is still only one daily, *Imruz News*, in Tajikistan. The only newspaper in Russian, *Asia Plus* is published twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays. The total circulation of all newspapers published in the country does not exceed about 190,000 copies—and due to rising prices for paper, plates, and printing services, even the most popular newspapers reduce their circulation every year. Despite that, in the

### 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.

capital, according to the panelists, the number of newspaper customers is increasing.

Niyozov said that the total circulation of his newspapers *Faraj* and *Samak*, is up to 16,000 copies. "But when very interesting material or investigations are published, circulation increases, and we even have to print additional copies," he said.

According to the Press Department of the Ministry of Culture, 65 government newspapers, with total circulation not exceeding 1,000 copies, are regularly published in the regions. Due to technical and financial difficulties, most of them come out irregularly, once or twice a month. "All the regional press is financed from local budgets, and they have no other source of income," said Sotiev.

Regional government newspapers that remain profitable include *Dieri Tursunzoda* (in Tursunzade, sponsored by the Talco Aluminum Plant) with a circulation of 4,000 copies, *Haqiqat Sughd*, from Sughd Province, and *Kulyab Pravda*, with a circulation of 3,500 to 4,500 copies. All government publications, including regional ones, enforce compulsory subscription at workplaces and educational institutions.

There are currently 13 independent television stations in Tajikistan, nine of which are in the Sughd Region, two in the Khatlon Region, one in the city of Tursunzade, and one in Dushanbe. The television stations in the Sughd Region are the best in terms of their equipment and financial situation.

Increasingly, though, online sources have crowded out other sources of information, and the urban population increasingly turns to the Internet for news. Most government websites, however, provide little information or are rarely updated.

The Tajik public now actively participates in social networks, especially Facebook and Twitter. The Tajik segment of Facebook features free discussions and political debates, though some posts and caricatures of the president, his family, and senior government officials are deemed offensive. According to the latest data, more than 52,000 users from Tajikistan are registered on Facebook, and more than a million Tajiks a day visit various international networks. "Internet blogs and social networks have become the most popular platforms for journalists, politicians, and other members of civil society to express alternative views," said Abdullaev. Dodobaev added, "In Sughd, social networks are a primary source for the local newspapers and television channels." The presidential press service also has its own YouTube channel, where video content is constantly updated, and many officials use Facebook to interact with the public. The panelists noted that the second most powerful person in the country, the mayor of Dushanbe Mahmadsaid Ubaydullaev, actively participates on Facebook as well. "He promptly responds to all requests by Dushanbe

residents regarding power cuts, water supply, and legal issues," said Pirnazarov.

However, Facebook is monitored. Ergasheva reported that the Agency for Language and Terminology criticized material written by *Asia Plus* correspondent Igor Lekarkin, in which he cited the opinion of a Facebook user that the Tajik language is dying because it is used by a limited number of people. "As a result, the agency sent a letter to the editor and the prosecutor general, and in the best case scenario the author may face expulsion from graduate school—and he has also been placed under surveillance," she said.

News distribution via SMS is very rare in Tajikistan, though some readers use it to inform newspapers and news agencies of interesting events in the city, emergency situations, and share information about power cuts.

The panelists agreed that modern consumers have broad choices—they can read newspapers and magazines, listen to FM-radio, watch television, or get the latest information from the Internet. *Asia Plus*, Radio Liberty, Avesta agency, Ozodagon newspapers and websites all have mobile applications now as well. However, just one phone call or SMS from the authorities can block access to Internet resources or prohibit the publication of an undesirable newspaper. Internet service providers that do not comply with the Communications Service instructions on blocking websites usually start experiencing technical problems. The Communications Service has even undertaken attempts to block the broadcasting of satellite channels.

Although formally the decision about blocking a website or social network can only be made by courts, such obstructions occur regularly. In 2014, the popular social networks Facebook, Classmates, VKontakte, and YouTube were blocked four times; in addition, access was blocked to more than 200 socio-political, information, and music sites. Still, despite hard pressure from the authorities and self-censorship, the number of publications representing viewpoints of all sides, including the opposition, is growing online.

Access to international news is mostly open in Tajikistan, and alternative information from abroad can be obtained from satellite and cable television. "Now even rural families in remote areas of the country have a satellite dish and a receiver, so they watch what they want, whether it is Iranian, Uzbek, or Afghan television channels," said Dikaev. There are some obstacles to access, however, including a limit on the electrical supply in some regions of Tajikistan from mid-October to mid-March, and the price of Internet services, ranging from \$20 to \$60—quite high in comparison to the average income. Since 2012, the authorities have restricted access or even completely blocked regional

**“Internet blogs and social networks have become the most popular platforms for journalists, politicians, and other members of civil society to express alternative views,” said Abdullaev.**

websites that publish sensitive information about Tajikistan, such as Fergana.ru, Centrasia.ru, toptj.com, Arianastorm.com, mahalla.org, lenta.ru, mk.ru.

Other obstacles include cost, especially for those who live in remote regions where the price of newspapers was increased several times during the year and grew by 15 percent overall in 2014, with the average price of a single issue being raised to \$0.50 or \$0.60. As before, poor people share newspapers, and often receive outdated information.

According to the panelists, more than 25 percent of Tajikistan’s population has Internet access. The Internet is becoming more and more accessible in big cities, but not in the regions plagued by electrical disruptions. Also, the monthly cost of Internet access, which varies depending on the provider and mobile phone operator, is beyond the financial reach of most citizens. The price of Internet service providers and mobile phone operators has grown after the introduction of a three percent VAT, which is borne by consumers.

The panelists believe that the state media today does not serve the public, but acts as a mouthpiece for the authorities. As before, representatives of the opposition are deprived of the podium in all state media, as demonstrated during preparations for the elections to the lower house of the parliament. During official speeches and the president’s visits, all four government television channels disrupt programming and show nothing but the head of state. Viewers inside the country often refer to the government television channels as “Philharmonic Society;” “Concert hall;” “Ever-lasting holiday screen;” and “our television pharmacy.”

According to Dikaev, a reporter for *Asia Plus*, all government media are modeled on the classic concept of press and journalism. “They are the organs of government structures at all levels that ensure the propaganda of the authorities, and not journalism in a professional sense of the word,” he said. The panelists said that government media have no problems in selecting their sources of information, as everything is determined by the editor-in-chief, that is, the model is the same as in government offices.

Ismoilov said that upon the request of the Committee for TV and Radio Broadcasting, he teaches the basics of television coverage to uncertified television journalists of government television. “When I tell them about the balancing of opinions and the necessity to use multiple sources of opinions, it sounds strange and incomprehensible to them,” he said.

Private channels cover a wider range of topics, with more professional presentation. Independent television stations are supported by Internews exchange news and other programs by a special ftp server. Currently, almost all the newspapers reprint news from the world’s leading news agencies for free, and news supplied by local news agencies for a symbolic fee.

Fifteen news agencies are registered in Tajikistan, but only Asia Plus, Avesta, TOJNEWS, ruzgor.tj, pressa.tj, ozodagon.com, tajikta.tj, tojnews.tj, faraj.tj and the government Khovar are particularly active. Asia Plus is considered the leading agency. All news agencies are affiliated with media corporations: Asia Plus is a corporation in itself, Pressa.tj belongs to the Oila corporation, Ozodagon is affiliated with the newspaper bearing the same name, and Avesta and tajikta.tj are tied to *Business and Politics*. Due to limited financial resources, news agencies have started to work as distributors of press releases. They also publish articles clearly commissioned by their customers and present promotional materials as important news events.

All four government television channels broadcast local information provided only by the state Khovar news agency, but fragments from Russian news channels, Euronews, BBC, CNN, and Al Jazeera are also used in preparation of foreign news blocks.

The panelists pointed out that consumers of information, other than journalists, do not really care about the owners of media outlets. “The reader is mainly concerned with the quality and content of the media, rather than its ownership,” said Khalikjanova. By law, a foreign citizen is not allowed to be a founder or owner of a media outlet, but the panelists doubt that there is no foreign capital in some media. “For example, all the editors know that *Millat* was funded by the Iranian Foundation named after Imam Khomeini,” said Niyozov. Officially, though, foreign capital is only present in the media in the form of grants and technical assistance provided by international donor organizations.

The amount of media in national minority languages has not increased in 2014: 20 newspapers are published in the Uzbek and Kyrgyz languages. *Halk Ovozi* is a newspaper in Uzbek published by the Tajik government; *Zamondosh*, *Ustoz*, *Skanvordlar*, and about 10 other newspapers and magazines in Uzbek are published in Dushanbe; while *Dustlik* is printed

in the Khatlon Region and *Hakikati Sughd* and *Kadriet* are published in the Sughd Region. Also, one to two pages of regional newspapers in the Sughd and Khatlon regions are published in the Uzbek language. *Kulyabskaya Pravda* in the city of Kulyab and *New Khatlon* in Kurgan-Tube are published in Russian. The Kyrgyz-language *Sarikol* newspaper is published in the Murghab district, and 1.5 pages of the local *Paëmi Dzhirgatal* in the Jirgatal area are also printed in Kyrgyz.

“There was a very interesting *Dishidak* newspaper in the Shugni language, but it was closed after just 10 issues; a Russian-language page in the Badakhshon regional newspaper was also closed,” said Alamshoev. Minorities do not buy or read newspapers and magazines in the Tajik language, preferring publications in Russian.

Issues related to national minorities are covered very rarely and in short articles; most such materials focus on the problems of the Pamiri—a national minority in southern Tajikistan—and eastern Roma (Lyuli) that live in the west of the country. Until now, the interests of national minorities have not been represented in the parliament or in the government.

The Shabakai Yakum channels of the government television and national radio allot 15-minute news programs in the Uzbek language, broadcast five times a week in the evening. There is also daily news in Uzbek, Arabic, and English on the Jahonnamo national news channel.

According to the panelists, national minority media is absolutely free and can develop without any limitations in Tajikistan, though the mandatory knowledge of the state (Tajik) language has lately become an obstacle for all categories of civil servants and members of the two houses of the parliament. “Neither Russians, nor Uzbeks, nor Kyrgyz have been allowed to the higher echelons of power and the parliament for more than 10 years. All the appointments are made on a regional basis or depend on proximity to the head of state,” said Khalikjanova.

The panelists noted that the level of interregional information exchange is still low. “People in Dushanbe are often unaware of what is going on in the cities and villages of central Tajikistan, just a few kilometers away, because no news agency has reporters there,” said Karshiboev.

So far, neither government nor independent print and electronic media post correspondents abroad or in the central and eastern parts of the country. The only exceptions are *Asia Plus* with reporters in Washington, Moscow, and London, and the Khovar state-owned agency with correspondents in Moscow and Ankara.

## OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.21

The mass media in Tajikistan produce content that satisfies the demands of diverse consumers. However, legal and bureaucratic obstacles and high taxes hamper the successful development of the media as a business, along with growing scrutiny from fiscal and other regulatory bodies, which often visit media outlets for non-sanctioned inspections. The panelists pointed out that these inspections are particularly frequent after the publication of material that is critical of the government. Additionally, after the fall of the ruble, newspaper prices rose, making it even more difficult for the media to survive.

The panelists noted that the success of independent media depends on their relationship with advertisers and assistance from international donor organizations. Many newspapers often overstate their circulation numbers in order to attract advertisers or exert pressure on competitors. For many outlets, the head of staff or the owner of the outlet makes all management decisions. Institutionally, many media outlets have not grown and do not aspire to do so.

Independent media outlets in Tajikistan are managed in a haphazard manner. Preparation of business plans, conducting marketing research, and planning capital investments—so far, all this is a vision of the future. “Although some broadcasters in the Sughd Region do make business plans, it seldom helps and is rather risky in an economically unstable country,” said Dodobaev.

### 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.

Abdullayev believes that the print media are no longer sustainable. "It is not interesting to read newspapers; except for *Asia Plus* and *Faraj*, the quality of materials has declined, and other newspapers publish nothing worth reading. This was especially true last year," he said.

Some editors have made attempts to work according to a business plan, in association with marketing experts. However, Niyozov said, "I do not consider the work of the local media sustainable and efficient, as lately almost all the newspapers are on the verge of bankruptcy, since no one can survive without grants from international organizations or sponsored and PR articles. Advertisers simply give money to *Faraj* for not being advertised. Nobody wants to be advertised in the opposition press." He said that *Faraj* does not have any business plan, but "we are still profitable because we often have to print additional copies each time an interesting article or a sensational journalistic investigation is published in our newspaper."

According to the panelists, government media, fully financed from the state budget, do not particularly need any business plans, capital investment planning, and market research, as their editorial boards are an integral part of government agencies. Furthermore, they have a constant source of budget replenishment: compulsory subscriptions by state-owned institutions, companies, schools and universities, as well as advertisements and paid announcements of government agencies, banks, and commercial structures connected with the authorities.

Abdullayev believes that the print media are no longer sustainable. "It is not interesting to read newspapers; except for *Asia Plus* and *Faraj*, the quality of materials has declined, and other newspapers publish nothing worth reading. This was especially true last year," he said. Mirsaidov attributed the noticeable drop in readership to the fact that many newspapers have opened their own websites.

In state institutions, subscriptions are usually paid for from the budget. For example, the paper of the ruling People's Democratic Party, *Minbari Halk*, has a circulation of 49,000 with about 45,000 subscribers; the governmental newspaper *Sadoi Mardum* has a circulation of 25,000 and 20,000 subscribers, and the parliamentary *Jumhuriyat* has a circulation of 40,000 and 35,000 subscribers. Yet all these

print media count the increase in circulation and sales as evidence of their popularity.

The *Minbari Halk* earns TJS 3 million (about \$600,000) from annual subscriptions, but these funds go directly to the People's Democratic Party, the owner. The popular independent socio-political—but opposition—newspapers *Faraj* and *Samak* have only 1,500 subscribers (although as noted above its total circulation is higher). A newspaper can survive and be profitable only if its circulation exceeds 5,000 copies.

Other income sources for some independent media outlets include production studios, printing plants, special events, investigations, production of clips and advertising, public relations materials, grant support, congratulations through content providers, and sale of photos and video content. *Asia Plus Media Corporation* is successfully implementing a subscription platform to its analytical materials, press reviews, archived materials, photos, and video content. In addition to its newspaper, it also has a news agency, a production studio, a radio station, and a glossy magazine.

The *Oila* media corporation has two newspapers, a news agency, two printing plants (*Oila* and *Mega*), *Oila* radio and television in the northern city *Pendjikent*, and an advertising agency. The *Charkhi Gardun* media corporation even has a restaurant in addition to its three newspapers.

Since 2003, Tajikistan's Law on Advertising has regulated media advertising, differentiating in its approach to government and non-government media. The advertising market in Tajikistan is very small, and the media are fighting for advertisements, though only a few media outlets tap advertising as a source.

Advertising placed by government agencies is only published in the government press, radio, and television channels. The state-owned *Safina TV* has a lot of advertisements, mostly devoted to medications and health and beauty products—earning the public labels "our television pharmacy" or "our television ambulance." *Ergasheva* reported that as all advertising is placed in the government channels, it lowers advertising prices, thereby depriving independent television stations of advertising as a stable source of income.

For the independent media, international organizations and non-profit organizations supply much of the advertising. But according to *Pirnazarov*, "The distribution of advertisements received from international development agencies among media outlets is often conducted according to a corrupt model." Experts pointed out that the entire advertising market is concentrated on television, where the system of advertising revenue distribution is opaque. According to official figures, the 2014 advertising

market amounted to \$12.5 million; the market lost over \$1 million in potential ads from mobile phone companies, which are informally forbidden.

The law stipulates that the amount of advertising shall not exceed 25 to 30 percent of the volume of state-owned print media and 40 percent of the non-governmental press, but not all media adhere to this rule. The duration of advertising material should not exceed 10 percent of the daily volume of broadcasting for state-owned electronic media, and no more than 30 percent for non-governmental media.

Although it is the main source of media income in other countries, advertising in Tajikistan is still barely developed. "A lot of commercials are nothing more than copies of Russian, Turkish, or Iranian advertisements translated into the Tajik language," said Khalikjanova.

When customers choose where to advertise, they mainly look at the media's rating or the number of visits to the website. According to research conducted by NANSMIT, pharmaceuticals are the largest advertisers, followed by providers of Internet services, home appliances, and mobile operators. The only governmental enterprise to advertise in the media is the Tajik Aluminum Company (Talco).

Most advertisers prefer to publish their advertisements in and establish cooperation with the most popular media, with the largest circulation. All four channels of the state television, as well as Oila, Charkhi Gardun and Orieno Media corporations, Vatan radio, Asia Plus and Khovar have their own advertising departments. Tajik media usually work directly with advertisers, not through agencies. "There are no advertising agencies in the regions of Tajikistan, except for the Sughd region; there's only ready-made outdoor advertising on banners and displays brought from Dushanbe," added Dikaev.

Advertising plays an important role in the revenue of electronic media. "Broadcasting companies in the Sughd region receive more than 65 percent of their income from advertising," Dodobaev said. Despite the fact that most regional media are not profitable, in the Sughd region media such as Tiroz, TRC Asia, and CM-1 yield a good return due to advertising and announcements as well as commercial and public relations programs. "Advertising takes up 12 to 14 pages out of 32 in *Asia Plus*, and its cost is the highest in the country—up to \$650 per column," said Dikaev.

Independent or private print media do not receive funding from the state, even though the new law on the media stipulates that the state guarantees them support; although in recent years, non-regional television stations and print media began to receive subsidies from the budgets of local governments. Most independent media subsist either on

grants, (which have significantly decreased due to the global financial crisis), or on the financial means of their founders.

Just one large financial group in Tajikistan—Orien International (Orienbank's subsidiary)—has its own media business, with two private radio stations, a daily newspaper, a monthly business magazine and an advertising department. "There is also a media mogul, Umed Sattorov, whom few people beside print media editors know, but who has eight newspapers. He is the owner of two printing plants that print 28 newspapers as well as invitations, greeting cards, business cards, the *Karavan-Megapolis* newspaper and *Dilkusho* magazine—with a total circulation of over 25,000 copies," said Niyozov.

The panelists pointed out that local advertisers still prefer television and radio, considered more accessible than other media and newspapers. However, the well-known foreign brands prefer to advertise on banners and displays. In the regions, outdoor advertising is mostly used. There is also a booming market of SMS advertisements, announcements, and congratulations sent by mobile phone companies.

Many online media constantly survey their readers on various socio-political, economic, and social issues. However, the panelists said that formal market research has become a luxury. "There are research centers that rank media image, but the confidence in these organizations' competence is low because their studies are often sponsored by interested parties," said Pirnazarov. For example, according to the results of one market research study, Asia Plus was called the most popular radio in Kulob, though it turned out that this radio station is not even broadcast there.

Some websites do not count the number of visitors but the number of page views, though there are counters of unique visits that capture the visitor by the IP-address. Karshiboev proposed to establish an independent commission for counting newspaper circulation and unique visits to websites for the sake of fair competition.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.64

There are no trade associations in the media, except for the Association of Broadcasters and Producers of Audiovisual Products, which was founded in 2012. Headed by panelist Ismoilov, it counts as members 18 television and radio broadcasters and production studios. The goal of this association is to protect the interests of private electronic media and production studios. The issue of the formation of the Association of Media Owners and of the Media Editors'



Club has not been resolved yet, because of disagreements between the owners of newspapers and other media. No media corporations or media outlets belong to the Association of Business Entrepreneurs and the Association of Small and Medium Business of Tajikistan.

Also, there are 13 journalistic associations and foundations and one creative alliance that are registered in Tajikistan. The panelists believe that they play a major role in the development of mass media, mainly in terms of offering educational seminars and trainings and defending the rights of journalists and freedom of speech. However, they face resistance from law enforcement authorities and the judiciary. According to their statutes, all media organizations should be engaged in the protection of the freedom of speech and media independence. "We are fighting to improve access to information, but neither officials nor many journalists are mature enough in legal aspects in order to know and understand the need for free access to information," said Karshiboev.

The panelists largely view NANSMIT as the most prominent among the professional media associations in protecting the rights of journalists, promptly responding to any problems with the media and monitoring the violations of journalists' rights. Ismoilov noted that NANSMIT provided legal advice and assistance to Olga Tutubalina, a journalist of the Nigoh newspaper *Kamari Ahrorov*, and Imruz News radio journalist Orzu Isoev in the past year, as well as Kamari Ahrorov and Mahmadyusuf Ismoilov. The organization also conducts annual monitoring of violations of journalists' rights, freedom of expression and access to information. In

2014, NANSMIT was repeatedly subjected to DDOS attacks, after which their website was offline on several occasions. As a result of the DDOS attacks, most archived files were damaged. "We are still closely monitored by the security services," said Karshiboev.

The Union of Journalists, which has more than 2,000 members, exercises far more independence from the authorities than in previous years, even though its head was appointed from above. The panelists believe the more journalists' organizations, clubs and associations that exist in the country the better it is for the development of freedom of speech and for solving the problems faced by the media.

There has been progress on the issue of founding the Union of Media Workers. A primarily territorial organization of the Trade Union of Media Workers has already been established in Kurgan-Tube, and they decided that they would work with the Department of Trade Unions of the Khatlon region as a separate union. "We do not divide the media into public and private, they can join a common union," said Karshiboev. He reported that negotiations regarding the establishment of the Trade Union of Media Workers are being conducted in the Dushanbe and Sughd regions.

Associations subsist on membership dues; they write projects in order to increase efficiency and receive grant support. Now they are trying to integrate with similar international associations, but so far in vain. The panelists agreed that no professional association of journalists can work effectively just with membership fees.

In addition, the Press Council, the Center for Investigative Journalism, and the Professional Journalists' Club in the Sughd region are actively involved in the protection of the rights of journalists and support the development of the media. "There are 10 independent electronic media in Sughd; almost all of them produce news programs and need legal assistance from these associations, which always come to their rescue," said Dodobaev. He highlighted the Journalists' Club in the Sughd region, which operates under the auspices of NANSMIT, in particular. "Any urgent problems can be discussed there, and officials are also invited there. Our journalists do not face their problems alone," said Dodobaev.

Currently, 17 local NGOs in Tajikistan support the media to some extent. Although sometimes appearing weak, Khalikjanova stated, "Nevertheless, there have been times when journalists and local human rights NGOs and international organizations united in their efforts, and the authorities listened to the campaign for the protection of the rights of journalists." The panelists noted the progress in mutual support within the journalistic community this year, when the government increased pressure on the opposition

#### 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.

media, for instance, during the trials of the chief editor of Asia Plus. Additionally, all media associations expressed solidarity in the face of fierce pressure from the authorities during the election campaign and blockage of the Facebook social networking website.

The cooperation of local NGOs with international organizations defending the freedom of speech can be seen in the implementation of joint activities and events. The panelists noted the cooperation with the OSCE, the U.S. and British embassies, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the Embassy of Finland, and U.S.-based National Endowment for Democracy. NANSMIT works closely with Amnesty International, Reporters without Borders, and the OSCE Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media. The Bureau of Human Rights and the Independent Center for the Protection of Human Rights also try to assist the media. Karshiboev noted, however, that the government's refusal to cooperate with media associations hinders the development of independent media and the freedom of speech.

The panelists mentioned that the level of journalism education at universities is still very low. "First of all, we need teachers-practitioners. We have to provide the departments of journalism with knowledgeable teachers who are able to work in any genre," said Abdullaev. Those who graduate from the faculties of journalism at universities are not ready to work in the profession. "First and foremost, it is necessary to reduce the number of students accepted to the schools of journalism," said Ergasheva. The panelists noted that it is necessary to prepare personnel that are able to work in any media edition right after graduation from the university. Niyozov said that he trains his employees himself. "All 12 employees of my two newspapers are my students, though only two of them graduated as journalists while the rest graduated as linguists, historians, and philosophers," he said.

There is no specialization in the universities that train journalists, apart from the Russian-Tajik Slavic University. A long-term problem in the training of journalists is rooted in the lack of practicing teachers, outdated software, and a shortage of technical resources at universities. The curricula of the institutions of higher education are outdated and do not meet modern requirements.

In the 2014 academic year, the Khujand State University journalism department opened an educational television and radio studio where students are trained by the professional staff of both government and independent television channels. Until recently, the faculties of journalism of the Tajik National University, Khorog State University, and a number of state universities barred students from interning with independent media.

**"First and foremost, it is necessary to reduce the number of students accepted to the schools of journalism," said Ergasheva.**

Students can study journalism abroad, in various programs in the United States, Germany, Czech Republic, Iran, China, and Turkey, only privately. The quota of the Ministry of Education and Science allows students to study only in the CIS countries—Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. However, lately, studying in other countries is allowed for the professions needing further work for the economic development of Tajikistan. Journalism students who graduate from foreign universities tend not to come back to Tajikistan; if they do return, they try to find a public relations job with international organizations.

Approximately 300 journalists a year graduate from the eight institutions of higher education. In 2014, a Department of Sports Journalism was established at the Institute of Physical Education. The panelists pointed out that fewer than 20 percent of graduates started working in journalism in Tajikistan, since most graduates become labor migrants and many women, who marry after graduation, are not allowed by their husbands to work in the profession. And yet, the majority of journalists in Tajikistan—more than 70 percent—are women.

The panelists noted that in 2014, NANSMIT and IWPR conducted many useful short-term training courses devoted to the safety of journalists' work, investigative journalism, journalism work in emergencies, and digital security. "It is nice that these organizations, along with Dushanbe, direct their efforts to media education in the regions, going there in order to solve the problems of institutional development on the spot," said Karshiboev. The panelists especially stressed the role of NANSMIT in conducting trainings and conferences related to the protection of human rights and the legal security of journalists. "Particular attention should now be paid to preparing multimedia journalists as this is the imperative of modern times," said Karshiboev.

Panelists believe that it is necessary to found a Center of Excellence for Journalists or an Academy for Professional Development of Journalists aimed at the systematic coordination of all educational and training programs of local and international organizations. The panelists noted that the Tajik media is also in dire need of multi-level training programs for preparing analysts on economic, political, and legal education issues, with subsequent interactive communication with their coaches and internship

---

---

with colleagues working in other countries, especially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

The panelists said that it is also very difficult to attract journalists from the state media to seminars and training sessions, because editors of these media are still reluctant to adopt innovations and international standards of journalism. On-the-job training and retraining is given only to the staff of the Asia Plus media group, which has its own Independent School of 21st Century Journalism, and the newspaper *Faraj*.

The panelists noted that though there are many private printing plants, access is restricted, as this type of business is politicized and depends on the authorities. “The Sharki Ozod complex, which prints up to 80 percent of newspapers and magazines, prints government media first, and then the independent newspapers, whose publishers pay more,” said Niyozov. Ultimately, there will be no freedom of speech in Tajikistan until at least one independent publishing house is established under the auspices of one of the international organizations—on that point, the panelists were unanimous. “All private printing plants are controlled by the authorities, and if one of them refuses to print a certain newspaper, the others will not print it either,” said Karshiboev. “Despite the fact that there are more than 70 publishing houses in Dushanbe, none of them will print a paper without the permission of the president,” said Niyozov. The Ministry of Culture’s ban on the publication of two issues of *Nigoh*, illustrated the problem. The business of newsprint and other components for printing newspapers is also monopolized by only three or four businessmen, including the owner of the Oila media corporation Sharif Hamdampur, who is close to the authorities and lobbies higher prices.

Regarding the quality of printing in private printing plants of Dushanbe, Niyozov mentioned Megatrend, Mushfiki and Intishor, owned by the director of the Sharki Ozod complex, whose motto is “Quality at an affordable price.” Newsprint and plates in Tajikistan are supplied by the government printing plant Sharki Ozod, and three or four other businessmen who control the pricing policy. Prices for services in the private printing plants Mushfiki and Megatrend are 10-15 percent higher than in Sharki Ozod. There are 78 printing plants in Tajikistan now, including 65 in Dushanbe. Also, 13 more printing plants are available in the regions: six in Khujand, two in Istravshan, one in Kurgan-Tube, one in Khorog, one in Yavan, one in Kulyab, and one in Tursunzade. All panelists believe facilities for printing independent media should be established in Dushanbe and the regional centers—Khujand, Kurgan-Tube and Khorog; otherwise, the development of freedom of speech will remain a problem.

The panelists claim that the lack of an efficient system of print media distribution prevents access to information in the remote regions of the country. “There is no system of centralized delivery; sometimes independent newspapers are even brought by passing cars. Government media can be distributed quickly; the editors themselves go to the regions. But newspapers are delivered only once a month, in big packs that no one needs anymore,” said Alamshoev. Furthermore, said Alamashoev, “Channels of print media distribution are politically loaded. Kiosks that belong to Tajikmatbuot (Tajikprint) rarely sell independent opposition newspapers, and if a critical article is published there, the authorities may simply confiscate the entire issue.”

Independent newspapers are only sold by public distributors—usually, elderly women and men past retirement age, who sell newspapers in order to supplement their meager retirement pay. The Association of Media Distributors, which was founded in 2012 with the support of the OSCE, has not begun operating yet, since editors and media moguls failed to come to an agreement on who would head it. According to the project, this Association was supposed to install 50 specially made modern newsstands in Dushanbe and its suburbs.

Not all independent television and radio stations have their own transmitters, and even if they do, the transmitters are not new and their capacity is quite low—up to 1.5 kilowatts. “As long as radio and television transmitters as well as publishing houses are not included in the list of strategic objects and are not provided for with an uninterrupted electricity supply, the problems for the regional and independent media will remain severe,” said Karshiboev. Almost all the transmitters belong to Tadjhikteleradiocom and are located within its territories, so broadcasts may be terminated at any moment due to any alleged technical problems. Once the transition to digital broadcasting is complete, the multiplex package will belong to the government, which means they will be able to disable any channel at any time. “Independent channels are being urged to join this multiplex, but this means total control, and any debt would result in disconnection,” said Dodobaev.

The four government television channels fully switched to digital broadcasting in 2014, but watching them requires purchasing a multiplex package costing more than \$150, which is too expensive for many citizens.

The Internet is, in fact, also controlled by the state, which tries to limit access to alternative sources of information. More than 200 websites are currently blocked in Tajikistan; there are attempts of hacking into user accounts in e-mail and such social networks as Facebook, Classmates, and Twitter, as well as wiretapping cell phones and Skype

---

conversations of opposition politicians and journalists. In October 2014, Internet and mobile communications were disabled without any explanation in the entire Sughd region for a week, and in Badakhshan for three days. The government has not blocked blogs yet, but it does monitor them: bloggers reported difficulties accessing their own pages on the Wordpress.com platform.

Mobile networks are used for Internet access and receiving SMS advertising. Reliability is not guaranteed: when the electrical supply is shut down 3G and 4G service also ceases to work.

## List of Panel Participants

**Ravshan Abdullaev**, executive director, Eurasia Foundation in Tajikistan, Dushanbe

**Kurbon Alamshoev**, director, Pamir Mass Media Center, Khorog

**Mahmudjon Dodobaev**, chief, Information and Analytical Department for the Sughd regional administration, Khujand

**Turko Dikaev**, staff correspondent, Kulyab region, *Asia-Plus*, Kulyab

**Zinatullo Ismoilov**, director, SMT TV, Dushanbe

**Nuriddin Karshiboev**, chair, National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan; chief, Press Council, Dushanbe

**Nosirjon Mamurzoda**, reporter, Radio Liberty, Khatlon Province

**Negmatullo Mirsaidov**, editor-in-chief, *Varorud*, Khujand

**Khurshed Niyozov**, director, Center for Investigative Journalism; editor-in-chief, *Faraj*, Dushanbe

**Nazarali Pirnazarov**, reporter, ca-news.org, Dushanbe

**Murod Sotiev**, editor, *New Khatlon*, Kurgan-Tube

**Lola Khalikjanova**, editor-in-chief, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Dushanbe

**Zarina Ergasheva**, media expert, Center for Human Rights, Dushanbe

## Moderator and Author

**Lidiya Isamova**, correspondent, RIA Novosti, Tajikistan

*The panel discussion was convened on December 13, 2014.*