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TAJIKISTAN

Tajikistan's trajectory of political intrigue and turmoil continued in 2015. Independent media still feel squeezed after the ruling political parties consolidated their hold on power and dealt with the aftermath of that process, which included more border violence with Kyrgyzstan, an attempted *coup d'état*, and more. Critical voices received continued scrutiny as the government tried to clamp down those crises, which reveal significant insecurity in the country.

The March 2015 elections introduced a new requirement for candidates: an examination written in Tajik. Because many opposition candidates were unable to pass the language examination, for the first time in 15 years, representatives of the opposition Islamic Renaissance Party and Communist Party were shut out of the lower house of parliament. Of note, the first session of the lower house of the new parliament took place without the participation of representatives of the country's mass media.

With parliament secured, in December, the Law on the Founder of Peace and Harmony and Leader of the Nation transformed Acting President Emomali Rahmon into the Leader of the Nation. The law provides that the wishes of the Leader of the Nation in regard to domestic and foreign policy must be respected after completion of his presidential term; it also provides for immunity from prosecution.

Immediately after the elections, the head of the Islamic Renaissance Party went into exile, fearing for his life. Later, 23 leading members of the party were arrested and Tajikistan's Supreme Court designated the party as a terrorist organization; it has now been legally abolished. In May the commander of the Tajikistan Special Operations Militia, a career officer who had received training in Russia and attended U.S. Special Forces courses, joined the Islamic State, explaining his decision as a protest against, among other things, restrictions on prayer and the wearing of traditional Muslim dress. According to official data, at least 500 citizens, including whole families, are participating in Jihad in Iraq and Syria.

In early September, Deputy Minister of Defense General Abduhalim Nazarzoda—a former opposition fighter—and gunmen loyal to him allegedly attacked police and military facilities in Vahdat and Dushanbe. Nazarzoda was accused of attempting a *coup d'état*, and, after a manhunt and shootout, was killed by government forces. This incident sparked a broader crackdown on dissent, which had already seen the assassination of the leader of Group 24, which had called for anti-government rallies in the past couple of years, in Istanbul and the government designating Group 24 an extremist organization.

Fearing repetition of a Ukraine-style Maidan popular uprising, Tajikistan's security services maintain total surveillance over almost all personnel from private and opposition media, who are constantly summoned by officials and told what they can print. New communications tools, while opening new opportunities for the free practice of journalism and open public discussion, also carry serious threats to security for Tajikistan's journalists and civil society activists.

TAJIKISTAN at a glance

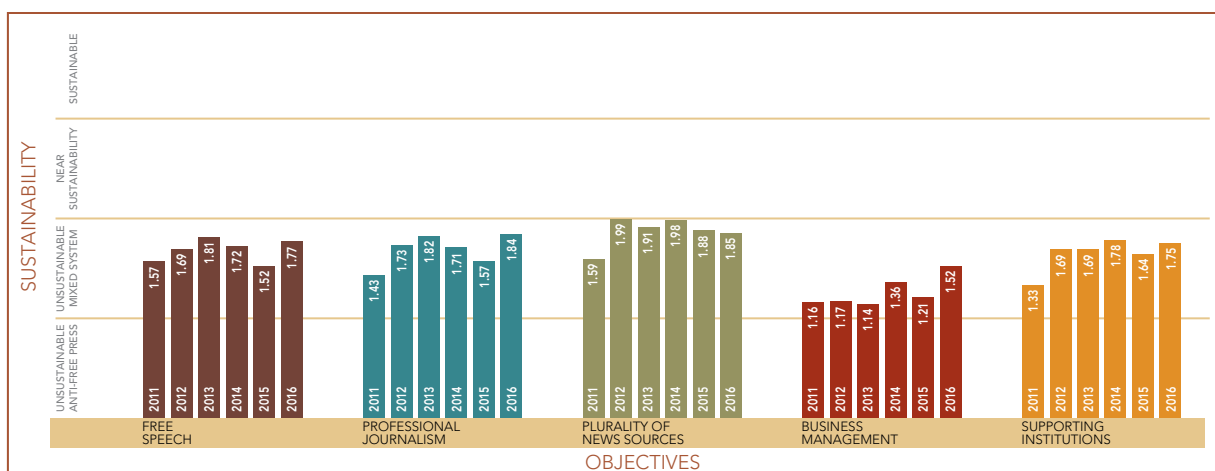
GENERAL

- > Population: 8,191,958 (July 2015 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Capital: Dushanbe
- > Ethnic group (% of population): Tajik 84.3%, Uzbek 13.8% (includes Lakai, Kongrat, Katagan, Barlos, Yuz), other 2% (includes Kyrgyz, Russian, Turkmen, Tatar, Arab) (2010 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Religion (% of population): Sunni Muslim 85%, Shia Muslim 5%, other 10% (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Language: Tajik (official), Russian widely used in government and business
- > GNI (2014-Atlas): \$8.948 Billion (World Bank Development Indicators 2016)
- > GNI per capita (2014-PPP): \$2,660 (World Bank Development Indicators 2016)
- > Literacy Rate: 99.8%; male 99.8%, female 99.7% (2015 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > President and Head of the Government: Emomali Rahmon (since November 6, 1994)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > Number of active media outlets: Print: 355 newspapers (253 non-state) and 225 magazines (125 non-state) (Ministry of Culture); Television Stations: 35 (19 non-state); Radio Stations: 24 (16 non-state)
- > Newspaper circulation statistics: The largest (in terms of circulation) private newspapers are *Asia-Plus*, *Faraj*, and *Samaka*; the largest state-run are *Jumhuriyat*, *Sadoi Mardum*, and *Narodnaya Gazeta*
- > Broadcast ratings: Dushanbe's top radio stations are Radio Asia-Plus, Radio Khovar, and Radio Orieno; in Khujand: Tiroz, SM-1, and Diyer
- > News agencies: asiaplus.tj, avesta.tj, tojnew.tj, press.tj, ruzgor.tj, tajkta.tj, tajnews.ru, ozodagon.com, farajjt and the government news agency Khovar
- > Annual advertising revenue in media sector: N/A
- > Internet usage: 1.3 million (2014 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: TAJIKISTAN



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2016: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES



CHANGE SINCE 2015

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

Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1): Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2): Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3): Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4): Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

Scores for all years may be found online at http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE_msiscorers.xls

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.77

Article 30 of the Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan affirms the freedom of speech and prohibits censorship. In addition the information space is regulated by law, including the Law on the Press and Other Mass Media, the Television and Radio Broadcasting Law, the Information Law, the Law on the Right of Access to Information, the regulations on television and radio broadcasting licensing and numerous other articles from the various codes, including the Civil Code, the Administrative Code and the Criminal Code.

In practice, however, these do not fully support the freedom of speech: while all laws in the area of mass media meet international standards, in practice they are generally not observed and exist only on paper. Recent summonses by state authorities in the area of Tajikistan's media also show that the hacking of e-mail and social media accounts of journalists and civil society advocates, the monitoring of telephone conversations, and other forms of cybercrime are damaging freedom of speech. There is also a danger in the form of theft of personal data of users of digital technologies (personal data and documents) and the physical tracking of people through access to geolocation data, IP addresses, and other digital location technologies. According to the data of the National Association of

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.

"The President and the speakers of both houses of parliament constantly talk about development of the mass media, of their free development. However, all the media in Tajikistan, to various degrees, are not free from the government," said panelist Nuriddin Karshiboev, the chair of the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan.

Independent Media of Tajikistan over last year, the above violations of law in cyberspace were used against nine journalists and civil society activists.

"The President and the speakers of both houses of parliament constantly talk about development of the mass media, of their free development. However, all the media in Tajikistan, to various degrees, are not free from the government," said panelist Nuriddin Karshiboev, the chair of the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan. In his opinion, the authorities do not recognize that the independent media and journalists are a "fourth estate," but instead want to view them as scapegoats. More than 30 journalists are listed by law enforcement agencies as "unreliable."

"In Tajikistan, the regulations often have greater force than the laws themselves. The supremacy of the law is ignored with regard to the activities of the mass media. This protocol removed all of our achievements in the area of freedom of the press and access to information sources," Karshiboev noted. He concluded, "As to violations of the freedom of speech, the judicial authorities perceive journalists as people who always must and may be punished. The courts themselves do not adopt measures to achieve legal reconciliation of the parties." In the opinion of panelist Turko Dikaev, a correspondent for Asia-Plus, in 2015 journalists lost to the authorities in all areas, gradually yielding their positions on freedom of speech.

All the panelists consider, as they have for several years, that the enforcement of the laws is at a low level. "The laws regulating the activities of the media only work for the government media," Dikaev states. The panelists noted that, as to the question of the sustainability of the media in Tajikistan, there are some risks since the mechanism for implementing the law is constantly being interfered with by the law enforcement and judiciary, which only carry out the political desires of the authorities. Officials always treat laws

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from the viewpoint of their own interests, most often on the basis of intra-agency instructions that journalists do not have access to.

The criminal investigation surrounding the September coup attempt has resulted in persecution of dissident journalists. In September and October 2015, there were at least three instances of the violation of the rights of four journalists by law enforcement agencies (unlawful summonses and violations of procedural rules in the course of an investigation, attempts to unlawfully obtain evidence against suspects, persecution, and intimidation of journalists). Further, there have been instances in which journalists were called into the office of the state prosecutor, where pressure was applied on them regarding their reporting. Two journalists were prosecuted for their articles about those events. “Almost all foreign correspondents accredited by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, after the anti-terrorist information against the former Deputy Minister of Defense was completed, were called into the ministry for a ‘prophylactic conversation,’” panelist Nazarali Pirnazarov, correspondent for Radio Svoboda-Ozodi, observed.

Recent summonses of media professionals by state authorities imply that law enforcement is hacking e-mail and social media accounts of journalists and civil society advocates and monitoring telephone conversations. According to the data of the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan over the last year, nine journalists and civil society activists were victims of violations of laws regulating cyberspace.

In 2015, the so-called “answer factory” continued to operate. Here, government media use planted letters from supposed readers and independent observers to compromise opposition politicians, religious activists, and independent media. “This year it happened particularly to Mukhiddin Kabiri, the leader of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, which was banned and declared extremist,” said panelist Lola Khalikjanova, editor-in-chief of the local branch of Institute for War and Peace Reporting.

The Press Law, meant to protect sources of confidential information, contains an article on non-revelation of information, which includes the following standard: “If a source has given information on condition that their identity not be revealed, then a journalist may be required to reveal the source only by court order in a case pending before the court.” However, the Criminal Code contains an article that contradicts the Press Law, stating that, if a person is called as a witness, he or she is required to give testimony.

Panelists noted that the public is indifferent to violations of freedom of speech. Citizens do not care that the websites of local media are blocked or what lawsuits are brought against journalists. The panelists felt that the authorities are helped because public opinion has been split for several years: part of the public believes that a free media is very important for society, while another part believes that the media complicate the situation and libel the government. “Many newspapers and other media are afraid to stand up for their colleagues, preferring to pray and express their support only behind the scenes,” Zarina Ergasheva, a correspondent for Sputnik said.

Regulations governing broadcast licensing remain undemocratic. The licensing council is fully controlled by the government’s Television and Radio Broadcasting Committee. As was the case previously, the commission has blocked the licensing of a number of independent media. “The commission has also remained a closed body. True, the new chairman, Tojiddin Pirov, has promised to publish a list of the members and to include on it representatives of the media, but, as before, there is still not a single representative from the media and of civil society,” panelist Zinatullo Ismoilov, director of the Media Academy, said.

Ismoilov pointed out the bureaucratic nightmare of licensing: “In order to obtain a license, it is necessary to register with the Ministry of Justice as a corporation, but that ministry requires a written confirmation from the regulator that there is a license.” Panelist Kurbon Alamshoyev stated that his NGO, Pamir Media in Khorog, wanted to create a public radio station so that the residents of the city could listen to their own radio station and not to Afghan stations. Over the last ten years there have been four rejections. The panelists noted that private individuals from the southern region, the Khatlon Oblast, the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region, and the central regions of the country still cannot obtain licenses for radio and television broadcasting.

If someone obtains a license, the media community only finds out about it when the station begins to broadcast. “In Asht, located in the Sogdi Oblast in the northern part of the country, Asht TV and Sadoi Asht radio appeared in

2015, and we don't know how they were able to obtain a license," Karshiboev reported. Rano Babajanova, a professor of journalism at Russian-Tajik Slavonic University, added that in 2015, a radio station appeared in Shahrinav (a regional center 30 kilometers west of Dushanbe). "The regional radio stations are supported by the local government authorities," she added. Panelist Akram Urunov said that in Khujand in 2015, the TV stations Tanin and Dier began broadcasting, with an airtime of up to 18 hours.

"There is a Tajikistan government decree of October 31, 2015, which clearly states that at the end of 2015, the issues should be resolved of abolishing production licensing and creating an independent regulator, the feasibility study of which is to be carried out with help of the OSCE," Ismoilov said.

Anyone having sufficient monetary resources can enter Tajikistan's media market, as they can in any other kind of business. But the panelists noted that recently, because of political factors, the process of entering the print media market has become complicated. The registration of print media must now take place through a single "tax window," but on top of that, it is necessary to obtain a decision of the Ministry of Culture, which bases its decisions on political factors. "For example, when the social and political newspaper *Dune* hired the opposition journalist Abdukayum Kayuzod, it was closed down specifically because of him. The specialists in the Ministry of Culture were afraid that, when he arrived, the paper would become an opposition organ," reported Karshiboev. He noted that the Language and Terminology Committee also issues warnings to out-of-favor newspapers, pressuring them to use terminology in the state language.

With the adoption of the new Media Law, those media that have been unable to become registered can operate as a structural subdivision of another legal entity, such as, for example, the three newspapers that make up the NGO *Faraj* (the Center of Journalistic Investigations).

The panelists noted that previously there was tax relief and the media were freed from paying VAT. But it turned out the relief lasted only five years and was not extended. "An 18 percent value added tax and a 25 percent income tax is a heavy burden even for media holding companies. For this reason, it is necessary to seek various ways of getting around paying taxes. Otherwise, the profitability of the publishing houses will drop sharply," said Zebo Tajibayeva, editor-in-chief for *Asia-Plus*. However, panelists felt that taxes are equivalent to other commercial sectors.

The panelists noted that no instances of attacks on journalists were recorded in 2015, but new forms of persecution appeared, particularly online or with other

new technologies. "Here blackmail is carried out against opposition and disapproved journalists. This year, two journalists, Kharamgul Kodiri and Khumairo Bakhtier, were bullied through Facebook for writing courageous and true articles," she reported. "There were nine instances of psychological pressure on journalists—bugging of telephone conversations, hacking of e-mail and social media accounts, distribution of information of a personal nature in order to discredit journalists, and threats in private communications, including from ISIS militants," reported Karshiboev. He noted that many journalists are afraid of publicity, but their colleagues at media outlets and human rights defenders must be informed.

Much of the pressure and harassment of media professionals comes from the government. As noted above, officials threaten journalists to learn their sources of information. Ergasheva noted that when journalists sign critical articles, they frequently resort to anonymity or pseudonyms. "After critical articles come out, highly placed officials frequently call to warn that in the future I will not be receiving any information from them," she added.

There are cases where journalists seek refuge in other countries, saying that they are being persecuted in Tajikistan. "Sometimes we don't even know who they are, where they worked or what the facts are concerning their persecution" Karshiboev said.

As in past years, the state electronic media receive preferential treatment from the government in the form of pay increases, bonuses and the provision of official housing and building lots. There is no editorial independence at such media. "Up to now, we do not have public media that reflect the interests of all layers of society. Even though Tajikistan, as a member of the WTO, is required to have public media," Khalikjanova said.

Articles 135 and 136 of the Tajikistan Criminal Code (defamation and insult) were moved to the Civil Code at the initiative of President Emomali Rahmon, but article 137 (insult of the President of Tajikistan) and article 330 (insult of government officials) remained in the Criminal Code, i.e. they are punishable as crimes. Thus, the decriminalization of defamation is no panacea against the prosecution of journalists. Observers continue to stress that the concept of a "public person" must be introduced into the law in order to give public officials a sense of responsibility to society and a tolerance for criticism.

The practice of government agencies bringing civil suits against the media continues and represents a serious danger to Tajikistan's journalistic community. In the years from 2013 to 2015 alone, according to the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan, the number of civil and

administrative cases involving media and journalists was 14, along with one criminal prosecution. In the first nine months of 2015, there were five suits related to the independent media and journalists. Regardless of the outcome of the cases against the media, they have a negative influence on the situation regarding the freedom of speech and expression. The exorbitant fines are a threat to the existence of independent media in the country.

Of the five lawsuits brought against journalists in 2015, two were lost. In the case of the financial pyramid Qwestnet, journalist Orzu Isoyev and radio Imru, were accused of spreading defamation and willfully false and insulting information with respect to the company. However, the company lost the case. A case was also brought against the newspaper *Samak*, in the Firdousi Regional Court in the city of Dushanbe, to protect the honor, dignity and business reputation of Inom Sadulloev, owner of a market in the Shaartuz Region of the Khatlon Oblast in the southern part of the country. The newspaper lost the case and paid the plaintiff TJS 15,000 (\$1,900). The writer Askar Khakim brought a lawsuit in the Firdousi Regional Court against the newspaper *Samak*, complaining that in an article they had placed the word “intelligentsia” in quotes. The newspaper lost the case and paid the plaintiff TJS 5,000 (\$630).

The director of a motor transport company in the city of Dushanbe brought suit against a journalist of the newspaper *Vecherniy Dushanbe*, Jamiliyu Khuseynova, for moral harm, due to an article she had written about deficiencies in the capital’s passenger transport sector. The plaintiff later withdrew the complaint and apologized to Khuseynova. The company Vodokanal of the city of Dushanbe brought suit against the newspaper *Tajikistan*, accusing it of distorting the facts in an article. The parties reached an out-of-court settlement.

Panelist Karshiboev reported that many cases were settled administratively by the Press Council, and so the criminal cases were not revealed and did not go to trial.

The panelists noted that Tajikistan needs a law concerning public figures, since there is a problem with open-source photographs of well-known persons being used, who later complain about their publication by the media.

The State Secrets Law was also adopted in 2014, replacing the former State Secrecy Law and the Law on the List of Secrets Constituting State Secrets. Now the heads of ministries and agencies, by manipulating the new law, may classify information they do not wish to give to journalists as a state secret.

“Last year, we were all pleased that a new Law on the Periodical Press came out. Access to information was

simplified and we became the subjects of information exchange. This was special progress,” Karshiboev said. He noted that all this was undone by the June protocol stipulating that all official information had to go through the government press agency Khovar, which thereby closed down access by independent media to information from official sources. In his opinion, this is a comfortable decision for the authorities, who, by referring to this protocol, may refuse to provide information and at the same time not be publicly accountable, even though the protocol is not considered to be a regulation.

According to panelist Nosirjon Mamurzoda, deputy editor-in-chief of *Novy Khatlon*, the authorities in the Khatlon Oblast provide information only if there is a written request. “They are all afraid to provide information without an agreement or OK of their superior,” he said. Ergasheva told how the head of the Dushanbe Economic Court did not allow her into an open session of the Sozidaniye business center case without giving her a reason. She remarked that the state media always have priority in receiving information from the security and law enforcement agencies. Panelist Mahmudjon Dodobaev, who works as chief of the press service of the Sogdi Oblast, stated that he does not have priorities of that kind, and provides information to all the media that ask for it.

The panelists noted that the determining factor in obtaining information is the professionalism of the journalists and the existence of personal contacts in the government agencies. However, thanks to the Internet and the fact that all the ministries and agencies have their own web sites, access by journalists to information has recently improved.

Access by foreign journalists accredited in Tajikistan to the president has been tightened since 2012. Some of them are no longer invited to the president’s meetings with foreign delegations and formal photographs are prohibited, except those taken by the state television channels and the personal photographers of the head of government.

Access to international news in Tajikistan is always open, although there are a number of inhibiting factors, in particular the daily limit on the distribution of electrical power throughout the regions of Tajikistan from mid-October to mid-March and the relatively high price, compared to the income of the population, for the services of Internet providers, which is about \$20 to \$60. The panelists noted that the local media are gradually using information from local press agencies and newspapers. Information from international press agencies is also being used, but rarely with reference to the source. In this connection, required hyperlinks are not being used, thus violating intellectual property rights.

As in past years, journalists are not subject to licensing and it is not required to have professional training in order to begin to work as a journalist. Who is a journalist is clearly defined in the new Media Law. "A journalist is a media employee who works on the staff or under contract of a media organization and is a member of the country's Union of Journalists," Karshiboev said. In this connection, however, the absence of accreditation to cover some events is a barrier to journalists performing their professional activities.

This year, without explaining its reasons, the Ministry of Internal Affairs refused to accredit two journalists of the Tajik service of Radio Liberty and the Tajikistan representative of IWPR. In addition, the Sputnik hub of the Russian agency Russia Today, has been unable to obtain accreditation in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and registration with the Ministry of Justice for a year and half, without explanation. "This infringement on the right to freedom of information and the fact that the office of a foreign media organization has not been opened in Tajikistan due to accreditation is not consistent with international standards. Accreditation is granted everywhere in the world in order to facilitate the working life of journalists," Karshiboev said.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.84

The panelists noted that the level of professionalism among the state media of Tajikistan is low, whereas the independent media have progressed much further in that regard. "It is not only the case that journalists of the independent media frequently take training courses that meet international standards, they also have a high level of competition and editorial requirements," panelist Dodobaev states. Up to now, in his opinion, journalists of the state media write in accordance with the outdated standards of the Soviet period, which uses the opinions of an author and where emotions are present.

In the opinion of Dikaev, the state media have nothing to do with newspapers and journalism in the classic sense. "These are organs of the government that provide propaganda for the authorities, and are not journalists in the professional sense of the word. This is even more the case since the selection of the subject matter is the prerogative of the editor-in-chief," he said. Panelist Mamurzoda reported that the oblast newspaper *Novy Khatlon*, actually works under the orders of the mayor's office of Kurgan-Tube, which determines the subjects of the articles. "If we publish critical material, this provokes a sharp reaction from the officials," he said.

A similar situation also exists in Khorog, where the oblast newspaper *Badakhshon* is published. "It does not have its own style. The articles concern the most important people in the country and the oblast. It is published once a week in Dushanbe and is available only by subscription," Alamshoyev reported.

The panelists noted that the popular newspapers, *SSSR* and *Ozodagon* and their websites, do not always provide balanced opinions, frequently violate ethical standards, and have become a "yellow" political press. Tajibayeva noted that almost all of the Tajik language media have a definite bias in presenting their material. "Because in the conditions we are now in, even a mere effort to produce objective material is considered a good result," she said. Karshiboev noted that some critical articles, particularly investigative journalism, are not always checked with a lawyer before publication and for these reasons, there are problems with various official personalities or with legal bodies. "There is a desire to report events objectively, but this is not always possible because of the absence of access to sources of current information and commentary from officials," he noted.

Babajanova reported that in Sogdi Oblast, three newspapers are published, including one in the Russian language, *Sogdiyskaya Pravda*, and one in the Uzbek language, *Sugd Khakikati*. "These newspapers criticize officials, address social problems and are popular with a positive image among their readers," she said. In her opinion, there is uniformity in coverage and the same subjects are addressed by almost all of the republic's newspapers. Concerning the problem of experts, she noted that Tajikistan has a limited pool of experts and analysts who comment on issues and situations. Frequently, as Karshiboev observed, the

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).

“The newspaper people did not hesitate to photograph, without permission, the heartbroken young mother who was carrying the body of her only child back to Tajikistan,” Khalikjanova said.

journalists themselves have begun using comments by their colleagues, since almost all the experts require payment for their commentaries.

Concerning the social media, the panelists commented that interesting information can be obtained from them and there is an active discussion of political subjects that are not covered in the media. Since 2015, several newspapers—*Asia-Plus*, *SSSR*, *Faraj* and *Ozodagon*—have begun publishing articles based upon discussions in Facebook.

Questions of professional ethics connected with the principles of self-regulation are resolved in accordance with the Ethical Standards of Journalistic Activity in Tajikistan, adopted on October 30, 2009, by the journalistic community. The ethical standards were developed on the basis of the recognized norms developed by international professional journalism societies, taking into consideration the national characteristics of culture and morals.

The public organization Tajikistan Media Council, which includes 76 newspapers and media organizations, monitors the observance of ethical standards in the activities of journalists. It receives appeals from interested parties, discusses them at its meetings, makes decisions in the form of recommendations and then publishes the decisions in the media. Karshiboev reported that in 2015, the Media Council surveyed the observance of ethical standards and that there were fewer complaints about their non-observance than in 2014. During the current year, the Tajikistan Media Council considered eight cases, primarily concerning ethical issues, the objectivity of articles and respect for privacy. Not all complaints are considered by the Media Council. “Unfortunately, not everyone knows the correct methods for complaining to the council about the press. When you explain to them that it is necessary to officially write out the complaint, many of them decline to do so. Our job is to settle claims out of court,” Karshiboev explained.

The ethical code has not been adopted by the larger Tajik-language opposition papers, *Millat* and *SSSR*, or by the Oila media group.

With regard to ethical standards, the participants in the discussion noted that they are rarely observed. As an

example, the panelists referred to articles about the death of a five-month-old Tajik boy who died in St. Petersburg. He was taken from his mother and unexpectedly died in an orphanage. “The newspaper people did not hesitate to photograph, without permission, the heartbroken young mother who was carrying the body of her only child back to Tajikistan,” Khalikjanova said. In the opinion of Ergasheva, many media made their name, and their money, from this tragedy, violating all ethical and moral standards.

Panelist Babajanova considers that Tajik journalism is a commercial enterprise run for profit and frequently ignores the real facts. “The media in pursuit of profit have deceived and misled their readers, although it is obvious who is ordering the material. This relationship of journalists to their publications frequently leads to inaccuracies and later to the journalists and newspapers having problems with the authorities,” she said. In Babajanova’s opinion, if they stick to the facts, to ethical standards and to international standards, there will not be any problems with the authorities.

Up to now, there has been a trend for many journalists, both government and independent, to accept compensation or payment for their work. “Some journalists in Khujande, demand compensation from whomever they are writing about for taking their picture,” Rano Babajanova said. She reported that there are specific rates for pictures. In all the regions, journalists require fees from their customers in the form of money or food products for photographs or reporting.

“Many complaints about journalists who take bribes are brought to the Media Council,” Ismoilov said. But he noted in this connection, that there are journalists who do their business honestly. The panelists noted that this has become a means of enrichment for glossy magazines. Photos and material on the cover cost at least \$2,000.00, and everyone they write about has to pay for that.

The journalists of the state television channels frequently do private part-time photography, including photographing weddings, anniversaries, concerts and other events. “At SM-1 television, there are stories of a business nature that are written for a price paid at the cashier’s window,” Akram Urunov noted.

The panelists noted that in the print media, one seldom sees a clear distinction between informational material and advertising material. “Even if we write material that it is of an advertising nature, the tax inspectors themselves carefully read all our articles and then draw their own conclusions as to their orientation,” Tajibayeva observed.

Another problem associated with the development of professional journalism is connected with the level of pay. According to the panelists' data, the pay and fees in state and independent media have increased over the past year, but they do not keep up with the increase in the U.S. dollar and the decrease in the exchange rate of the domestic currency, the somoni, by more than 34 percent. "For this reason, almost all of our journalists work for more than one media organization and that is why there are usually similar subjects and authoring styles. For example, in Khatlon Oblast, there is a journalist who works as the special correspondent for six central newspapers," Karshiboev reported.

At the same time, the price of products is growing, as well as that of public services and electrical power. "The employees of the Committee on Television and Radio Broadcasting receive an average of \$120, whereas the employees of one state television channel receive more than \$250, plus up to 20 percent in bonuses for advertising. They are provided housing at government expense and are given building lots in the Dushanbe suburbs for free," reported Ismoilov. "In the state newspapers *Sadoi Mardum* and *Jumkhuriyat* and in the party newspaper *Minbari Khalk*, the minimum salary is more than \$150," Babajanova said.

The advertising managers in the regional media are in a better position, receiving bonuses of 15 percent on radio and 20 percent on television. "Each year we review salaries, taking into account inflation and expenses. Our average pay at SMT-1 TV is around \$140. For this reason, my coworkers work part time at other television stations and accept advertising," Akram Urunov reported.

The newspaper and press service *Asia-Plus* has gone into life-support mode, keeping only two employees, while six have left voluntarily. "We have optimized all our expenses and gone into life-support mode and abolished the fee system. The average pay is \$350 to \$450. For placing material on the site, the author receives bonuses from the sponsors and business partners—a selection of products, a gym subscription, a visit to a beauty parlor etc.," Tajibayeva reported.

In the government oblast newspaper *Novy Khatlon*, ten correspondents have been kept for the regions, Mamurzoda reported. "Our average pay is from \$50 to \$80," he said.

With reference to plagiarism in the media, the panelists noted that the situation is not changing. As before, plagiarism flourishes in all of the print and electronic media. "According to the Media Law, no informational material is subject to authorship and related rights, so this material is published in other media. But from an ethical viewpoint,

"Many complaints about journalists who take bribes are brought to the Media Council," Ismoilov said. But he noted in this connection, that there are journalists who do their business honestly.

reprinting another author's material, and signing another name to it, is amoral," Dodobaev noted.

Almost all non-state media reflect the opinion of their founders and owners and those who pay for various forms of publication. The state media are always a propaganda resource for the authorities, playing the role of a mouthpiece in their fights against political opponents.

Self-censorship increased in 2015 as never before. "The newspaper *Asia-Plus* now has an editorial board that discusses and decides on the subjects one may write about, and which ones are taboo. We have a list of persons who are untouchable no matter what the situation—the President and his family, the security forces," Tajibayeva said. She noted that now the authorities can complain about anyone they want and that person will then certainly be called into the prosecutor's office or the State Security Committee. A tax or fire or health inspector will be sent, who will find a reason to close down the media organization.

Akram Urunov in turn, considers that self-censorship arises from the fact that journalists do not know their rights and obligations and do not have sufficient professionalism. "We (the newspaper *Asia-Plus*), in order to avoid sharp edges, have begun writing more and more about social subjects and culture," Tajibayeva said.

Khalikjanova believes that important political events in the country have caused the authorities to put pressure on the independent media and individual journalists. The panelists added that Tajikistan's media are afraid to print critical articles about the President and his family, the institutions controlled by the head of state's circle and the State Security Committee. In addition, as a rule, the media do not criticize their advertisers and business partners or the tax authorities.

The social media Facebook, Odnoklassniki and Vkontakte, are actively used to publish the most pointed materials. "Instead of raising the level of professional journalism, many international donors have begun supporting bloggers, believing that it is citizens' journalism," Karshiboev said. He thinks that dilettantes frequently write in the social media about politics and security and other users are beginning to listen to them and believe them. But fake groups have

become active in the social media to discredit dissident journalists. "They spread personal data, correspondence and text messages on the social media and are a threat to private correspondence," Ergasheva said.

Concerning the problem of covering international security, Ismoilov noted that some media write more about the Islamic State and radicalism than they do about other problems. "An especially large amount of material on this subject has been put out by the state press service Khovar during the last six months," Pirnazarov said. Many journalists do not raise crucial issues because they simply cannot get the information, since they do not have confidential sources.

It is the nature of television and radio broadcasts that entertainment programs outnumber informational programs. The panelists noted that the boundary between types of content is blurred and that the viewers need a variety of information. The youth segment of the television audience (up to age 35) does not watch analytical or news broadcasts, preferring football, entertainment programs and talk shows. The share of entertainment programs on state television is 70-75 percent of air time, while it is 60 percent on state radio and more than 80 percent on private FM radio. On state television, news programs make up no more 39 percent of the broadcasting, versus 20 percent on private television and radio channels.

Concerning the technical facilities of the media, the panelists noted that the media are experiencing a shortfall in modern technology. The technological equipment base of the state media is much better than that of the independent media. State television and radio modernize their technical equipment every year from the government budget, yet it was noted that the quality and content of broadcasts on state television are behind those on satellite channels and television from neighboring countries, such as Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Iran.

Tajibayeva noted that almost all of the new equipment in the media holding company *Asia-Plus* is obtained as a gift or with the aid of sponsors. But specialized licensed computer programs are not available to all the media. The representatives of foreign media accredited in Tajikistan have good facilities.

The regional television stations change their technical equipment only at their own expense. "When international organizations were helping, matters were better. At present, our equipment may be considered satisfactory," Akram Urunov said. However, the government continues to provide budgetary support and improve the material and technical

base of all four state television channels for their complete transition to digital transmission in 2016.

"In the newspaper *Novy Khatlon*, the computers are outdated ones that were issued by the Ministry of Culture five years ago. The editorial staff's photographic equipment is the same –of amateur quality. The correspondents have bought their own cell phones," Mamurzoda reported. Panelist Alamshoyev reported that not one radio or television station in Pamir has access to the Internet, there are no anti-virus programs and the computers are outdated.

In many editorial staffs of the capital's print media, the journalists buy their own computers, smart phones, photographic equipment and other technology they need for their work.

The panelists noted that this year there has been less investigative journalism in the local media, and to the extent there has been any, it has been about social issues. In 2015, a total of 15 investigations were published on social subjects, the history of independent Tajikistan and economics. "For the third year, the IWPR representative in Tajikistan has been developing the genre of journalism by training and bringing together a group of investigative journalists. This is very expensive and often dangerous," Khalikjanova said. The panelists noted that in the current year the most interesting articles on socially significant subjects appeared in the Tajik-language newspaper *Faraj* and the Russian-language newspaper *Asia-Plus*.

Currently, there are no high-quality specialized media in the country, despite the appearance in the last two years of three slick magazines in the areas of culture, advertising and business. "This situation is caused by the quite limited financial resources of the publishing houses, the lack of training of journalistic staffs and the fact that the readers are not prepared to absorb new content," Pirnazarov said. The panelists noted that there are no consumers for specialized journalism and that the lines between genres of journalism are often blurred. "There are few journalists who can write an article on economics clearly and that is understandable for the reader," Tajibayeva said.

The number of journalists in the Tajik media with versatile skills has increased somewhat during the past year. Many of them take their own pictures with smart phones and tablets at press conferences and try to record video content. "Many journalists are required to become all-purpose journalists. Journalists who write, have a broad understanding and specialize in a certain field are highly valued," Karshiboev said.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.85

According to official data, 580 media outlets were registered in Tajikistan as of May 1, 2015, including 378 non-state media (private, public, independent and those that do not receive subsidies from the government budget). Of this large number of independent media, 20 percent (70-75 media) publish regularly. Forty-four television and radio stations operate in Tajikistan, 28 of which are non-state. According to Ismoilov's data, there are now 31 active television channels in operation, of which nine are government channels, 18 are independent, and five are cable channels. Thirty audio and video production studios are also operating. Consumers have a wide range of choices for the information they receive.

According to estimates by the panelists, the numbers of the reading population in the capital and the large cities have begun to decrease because of the economic crisis. Tajikistan has only one newspaper that publishes daily, *Imruz-Nyus*. It has been experiencing financial difficulties and is on the brink of closing after it lost the sponsorship of the largest bank in the country, Orienbank, the head of which is the president's brother-in-law. Two state newspapers publish three times a week, one five times a week and the rest are weeklies that come out on Wednesdays or Thursdays. The Russian-language paper *Asia-Plus* publishes twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays. Its circulation fell by 40 percent in 2015. The total circulation of all the newspapers published in the Republic of Tajikistan in 2015 did not exceed 145,000 to 150,000, which is 40,000 copies less than in the previous year.

According to the data of the Bureau of the Press of the Tajikistan Ministry of Culture, 65 state newspapers are regularly published in the regions, the circulation of which does not exceed 500 to 1,000 copies. The majority of them, because of technical and financial difficulties, appear irregularly, about once or twice a month, since they are completely dependent on the local government, which has been reduced due to the financial crisis.

The regional state newspapers that are profitable are *Dieri Tursunzoda* in the city of Tursunzade, which enjoys the financial support of the Talko factory and has a circulation of 3,500, and *Khakikati Sugd* in the Sogdi Oblast, with a circulation of 3,000.

"Almost all of the ministries and agencies are represented on Facebook and answer questions and comments by users," Khalikjanova reported.

To the extent that the media reflect various opinions and political viewpoints, this is done in a quite veiled way. It was the general opinion of all the panelists that the only channel that meets the needs of the authorities and the viewers, all at the same time, is TV Bakhoriston, where educational, informational and cultural programs for children aimed at family viewing predominate. Private publications are more varied than state publications.

More and more frequently print media compete with the social media in providing information. Internet users more and more frequently have also begun get their information from social media. This has served as an impetus for both government and independent media to publish their pages in the social media and distribute their material there. The newspaper and press service *Asia-Plus*, *Radio Liberty*, and the *Ozodagon* website have mobile apps. SMS and RT news are not developed, although some readers send newspapers and press service reports about interesting events in the city and emergency situations and share information about

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.

Satellite and cable television is widely used to obtain alternative information from abroad. "Now, even a family in the remote regions of the country, or with a low income, has a satellite antenna and watches whatever channels they want. Cable television is particularly popular," said panelist Akram Urunov, the director of SM-1 television.

electrical power outages, which go under the heading of "People's News."

"The president's press office has its own YouTube and Facebook channels and regularly updates the photographs and video content," Pirnazarov said. In addition, many officials are registered with Facebook, where they communicate with users. "Almost all of the ministries and agencies are represented on Facebook and answer questions and comments by users," Khalikjanova reported.

"Social media has become the most popular platform for the expression of alternative positions by journalists, opposition politicians and other members of civil society," Ergasheva said. "We take opinions from social media, but rumors are also spread there and a lot of time is spent on checking them. But we use the social media to promote our activities and our publications," Tajibayeva said. According to recent data, more than 85,000 users are registered on Facebook in Tajikistan, which goes up to 180,000 on certain days, and more than a million Tajiks use various worldwide social media.

Many imitations have appeared in the social media, by creating look-alike pages of political figures. Radical Islamists, members of the Islamic State, have also started posting their own web pages. "Our special services are to blame, since they themselves pushed normally thinking people, who have a certain viewpoint, out of the Tajik segment of Facebook, using unauthorized methods to do so, resulting in radically oriented fakes appearing to take their place. Let them fight with these radicals now," Karshiboev said. In his opinion, the Tajik security services are fully capable of blocking these fakes or punishing them, but if they do not do so, it is because they need the fakes.

With enough money, any citizen in the country can have access to the Internet. It is becoming more and more available in large cities, although in the regions the situation

is complicated because of the seasonal limit on electrical power which occurs from October to March. The monthly prices that various providers and mobile communications operators charge for access to the Internet, also remains high, varying from \$20 to \$120, which is prohibitively expensive for more than half of the country's population. The low standard of living of the population does not permit every family to have a personal computer, but many of them have cell phones or smart phones that perform the basic functions of a computer. The cost for Internet Service Providers and mobile communication operators has gone up since mid-2014, due to the introduction of a 3 percent value added tax paid for by the user.

According to the data of the Tajikistan Association of Internet Service Providers, there were about 3.7 million Internet users in the country as of December 1, 2015, which is 50,000 more than in the previous year. Last year the role of social media in Tajikistan increased to the extent that they became the principal space for virtual communication, the expression of the users' views as citizens, hotly contested disputes and discussions on critical political, social and economic subjects. Especially popular with the local population is the social site Odnoklassniki, which has a page in the Tajik language. There are at least ten Tajik-language groups on Facebook. Many users of the Tajik segment of Facebook use the Russian and English languages to communicate, instigating dissatisfaction and disputes with speakers of the official language.

The residents of the regions that are particularly remote cannot allow themselves to buy a newspaper because of the cost, which goes up several times a year, increasing by 17 percent in 2015. The average cost of a single issue is \$.40. Poorer residents, particularly in the remote regions, exchange newspapers, frequently reading issues that are already outdated.

There are only two independent television stations in the Khatlon Oblast in the south of Tajikistan, Mavchi Ozod and TV Kurgonteppa, while there is not a single private radio station. Panelist Mamurzoda reported that individuals wanted to form a radio and television station in Shaartuz and the Khamadoni Region, since there the Tajik speaking population watches and listens to Uzbek and Afghan television channels, but they were refused a license.

Satellite and cable television is widely used to obtain alternative information from abroad. "Now, even a family in the remote regions of the country, or with a low income, has a satellite antenna and watches whatever channels they want. Cable television is particularly popular," said panelist Akram Urunov, the director of SM-1 television. Regarding the process of television and radio stations transitioning to

digital transmission, the panelists noted that many efforts have been made for the transition to be less painful, and issues regarding citizen access to alternative sources of information have been considered, but consideration has not been given to the technical moment at which our television system will be broadcast from a second satellite, and many citizens in the country's regions have begun complaining that, even if they have satellite antennas, they do not have clear reception or cannot see Tajik TV at all.

New amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Law approved by the country's security agencies and adopted by parliament on November 16, 2015, give the State National Security Committee the right to limit access to electronic communication in areas where antiterrorist operations are being conducted. At any given moment, limitations on access to electronic communications—the Internet, mobile communications etc.—may be introduced not only in specific regions of the country, but throughout the whole country, as required.

By law, a site or social media can be blocked in Tajikistan only by court order. But beginning in 2012, blockage or limited access to several sites has been taking place regularly.

In 2015, the popular social media Facebook, Odnolassniki and Vkontakte and the video hosting site YouTube, were blocked four to six times. Also blocked, were the sites of several local opposition media, such as Asia-Plus, Ozodagon, Tojnews.tj and *Faraj*. According to SMS reports, the blockage was carried out by the government regulatory agency, the Communications Service. Internet providers that did not immediately observe the Communications Service orders to block the sites began to immediately experience technical problems. The Communications Service even blocked for a certain time the broadcasting of satellite channel K+. However, users learned how to get around the blockage of the sites by using proxy servers and anonymizers to gain access to them.

The panelists noted that in 2015, the trend of previous years continues, of not blocking a site completely. Instead, when the authorities want to block a site, the signal is reduced, for example, so that the site cannot be opened on a computer, although it can be found on a mobile phone. Or a denial of service of attack might occur to deny access to the site. Nevertheless, people have learned to get around such blocking actions. For several years, the Communications Bureau, without any explanations, has simply sent a text message to Internet providers to regularly block access to any unapproved sites," panelist Pirnazarov said. In doing this, they did not once acknowledge that they had given such an order, always stating that "these are technical problems of the providers themselves." "The latter, fearing

repression by the regulator, comment on the closing of the sites anonymously," said panelist Zerbo Tajibayeva.

The state media in Tajikistan do not meet international standards in providing citizens with access to objective and timely information. The panelists consider that not one of the state media reflects the entire spectrum of the country's political life. They are too biased and only serve the narrow circle of people in power. Representatives of opposition political parties are unable to have a voice in any of the state media.

State TV attempts not to show emergency events, armed clashes, acts of terrorism and natural disasters in the news. The panelists noted that the media seldom cover gender issues, HIV/AIDS, informal groups, sexual issues and religious and national minorities.

Ismoilov stated that, for journalists of the state television channels, there is no such idea as the balancing of opinions. Reporting is done in the first person and the main thing is the opinion of officials. During official addresses and visits by the President, the four state television channels shut down all programs and only show the Head of State. But the state media have a greater influence on the formation of public views because of the wider range of their television signal, and the greater circulation of print publications.

Fifteen press services are registered in Tajikistan, but only eight of them are actually operating at the present time—Asia-Plus, Avesta, TOJNEWS, pressa.tj, ozodagon.com, tojnews.tj, *faraj*.tj and the government agency Khovar. The leader among these is Asia-Plus. In the past two years, because of financial problems and the lack of grants and competent management, the regional press services Varorud, Khatlon-Press, Payem and Pamir-Media, have ceased to exist.

"We (Pamir-Media) attempted to survive by holding press conferences and seminars in our meeting room, but for some unknown reason, the authorities were afraid to work with us," Alamshoyev said.

All the press services are affiliated with media holding companies: *Asia-Plus* with the *Asia-Plus* media holding company, press.tj with the Oida holding company, Ozodagon with the newspaper of the same name and Avesta and tajikta.tj with the newspaper *Biznes i Politika*.

When broadcasting the news, all four state television channels, in addition to the Khovar state press service, have begun using news from the press services *Asia-Plus* and Avesta, while in preparing their foreign news segment, they use fragments from Russian television channels, Euronews, BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera.

According to Tajikistan law, foreign citizens are not permitted to establish or own media organizations. However, the panelists are certain that foreign capital, in an amount not exceeding 25 percent, is present in a number of media. "For example, we know that the newspapers Millat and Ozodagon are financed by the Iranian Imam Khomeini Fund," Ismoilov said. Officially, foreign capital is present in Tajikistan's media only in the form of grants and technical assistance from foreign donor organizations.

Despite the fact that the law prohibits media monopolies, more than 90 percent of the electronic media in Tajikistan are state media.

The number of national minority media did not increase in 2015. Twenty print media are published in the Uzbek and Kyrgyz languages. They include the state-owned newspaper *Khalk Ovozi*, *Zamondosh*, *Tstoz* and *Skandorlar*. Ten newspapers and magazines are printed in the capital and *Dustlik* is printed in the Khatlon Oblast, *Sugd Khakikati* in Uzbek, *Sogdiyskaya Pravda* in Russian and *Subkhidan* in Russian and Uzbek in the Sogdi Oblast, along with *Kadriyet*, the newspaper of the society of Uzbeks of Sogdi Oblast. There are also one or two pages in Uzbek in the newspapers of the Sogdi and Khatlon Oblasts. The newspapers *Kulyabskaya Pravda* in the city of *Kulyab* and *Novy Khatlon* in the city of Kurgan-Tube are published in Russian. One page in Uzbek appears in the regional newspaper *Khakikati Jilikul*, and the regional newspaper *Takhti Khubod* also has one page in Turkmen and *Subkhi Shakhrituz* has one page in Uzbek. In the Kyrgyz language, there is the regional newspaper of the Murgab Region, *Sarikol*, and a page and a half in the regional newspaper of the Jirgatal Region, *Payomi Jirgatal*.

"A page in Russian is no longer printed in the oblast newspaper Badakhshon, in the city of Khorog, even though the residents of Khorog and other regions of the oblast do not buy or read newspapers and magazines in Tajik, preferring publications in the Russian language," Alamshoyev reported. "We in Kulyab, wanted to open a newspaper in the Uzbek language, but we couldn't agree whether to publish in the Cyrillic or Latin alphabet, which is now used in Uzbekistan. We sent a letter to the Uzbekistan Ministry of Culture requesting help with the typographic typeface, but they answered that could only respond to an official request from the Tajikistan authorities. So the matter has stalled," Dikaev said.

Issues involving the problems of national minorities are covered little and seldom. Basically, there is coverage of the problems of the Middle Eastern Roma (the Luli) who live in the west and south of the country. Since the year 2000, the

interests of minorities have not been represented either in the country's parliament or government.

Channel One of state television, and Republican Radio, have a 15-minute news program in Uzbek five times a week, and there is a single program of analysis that is broadcast on Sundays. Channel One also broadcasts news in Arabic and English, and news also is broadcast in those languages daily on the official information channel, Jakhonnamo.

In the opinion of the panelists, the national minority media in Tajikistan are free and can develop without limitations, but a barrier does exist at the present time, which is the mandatory knowledge of the state language (Tajik) for all categories of officials and deputies, for both houses of the Tajikistan parliament and at all other levels.

The panelists also noted that, as in previous years, the extent of information exchange among the regions is low. "The cities and villages of central Tajikistan have no correspondents of any central newspapers or press services. For this reason, news from this area always arrives late. We know what is happening in neighboring countries, but we do not know what is happening in neighboring regions," Mamurzoda said.

Up to now, neither the state nor independent print and electronic media have correspondents abroad or in the central and eastern part of the country, except for Asia-Plus's correspondents in Washington and London. The state agency Khovar has a special correspondent in two cities, Moscow and Ankara.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.52

The successful development of the media as a business is hampered by numerous legal and bureaucratic obstacles, huge taxes and a high degree of scrutiny by tax authorities and other regulatory bodies that frequently carry out surprise audits. The panelists noted that these audits become more frequent after critical articles are published. After the fall of the somoni exchange rate in 2015, the price of newspapers rose by 32 percent and survival became even more difficult. Many media are not growing institutionally because of the financial crisis.

Because of the financial crisis, the oldest newspaper in the capital, *Vecherniy Dushanbe*, which has published since 1968, ceased to appear beginning in early November 2015. Because of their personal ambitions, some newspaper publishers do not want to close their publications and are

cutting staff and reducing wages, while some are simply holding back pay for two or three months.

The state media do not feel the crisis since they are financed from the government budget and all of the state organizations pay for subscriptions from government funds or make their employees do so by simply deducting the subscription from their pay.

Almost all non-government media in Tajikistan are managed without business plans, marketing knowledge or the planning of capital investments. A number of television and radio companies in the Sogdi Oblast draw up business plans, but in the conditions of the financial crisis and the sharp drop in the somoni exchange rate, they are not very effective. Only short-term business plans, of three to six months, are most appropriate in forecasting. The panelists noted that last year, the Internews Network project in Tajikistan offered several visiting residencies on the optimization of newspaper editorial expenses that were quite useful and effective.

The state media, which are fully financed from the government budget, have no special need for business plans, planning of capital expenditures, or marketing studies, since their editorial offices are part of the government structure. Moreover, they have constant sources for supplementing their budgets—the mandatory subscriptions of state enterprises, businesses, school and universities and the advertising and paid announcements of government agencies, banks and commercial organizations close to the authorities.

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.

“This year the media are either losing what they have accumulated or are trying to find additional resources by giving huge discounts on advertising,” Tajibayeva said. “We drew up a business plan for 2016, but it estimates zero revenue in view of the fact that the economic crisis in Tajikistan has just begun,” she added.

The panelists remarked that the media of Tajikistan in 2015, ceased being self-sustainable enterprises. “This year the media are either losing what they have accumulated or are trying to find additional resources by giving huge discounts on advertising,” Tajibayeva said. “We drew up a business plan for 2016, but it estimates zero revenue in view of the fact that the economic crisis in Tajikistan has just begun,” she added.

The panelists consider that there has been a drop of reader interest in newspapers because many print publications have opened Internet sites. “Considering the influence of the economic crisis and the social and political situation on the activities of the media, it is impossible to foresee their development. On the contrary, in order to stay afloat, they have gone into self-preservation mode. When media live with the danger that tomorrow they will be destroyed, we can hardly speak of the sustainability and effectiveness of the media,” Karshiboev said.

In Tajikistan, there is one large financial group that has its own media business. That is the media holding company Orient International (a subsidiary of Orientbank), which owns two radio stations, a daily newspaper, a monthly financial magazine and an advertising department. “Also, there is an obscure media magnate, Umed Sattorov, who owns eight newspapers and about whom little is known. He is the owner of two printing houses that print 28 newspapers, visitor invitation cards, greeting cards, business cards, the newspaper *Karavan-Megapolis*, crossword magazines in Tajik and Russian and the magazine *Dilkusho*, with a total circulation of more than 20,000 copies,” Ismoilov reported.

The panelists noted that the success of the independent media depends on their relationships with advertisers and the help of international donor organizations. Babajanova reported that the presidium of the National Democratic Party also considers the appeals of the media as a form of help. “In November last year, the editor of the slick

magazine *Elita*, appealed there and received a grant," she reported. The majority of the private (independent) media operate either on grants, the number of which has considerably declined due to the worldwide financial crisis, or on funding provided by their founders.

A number of independent media also receive income from production studios, selling shares, producing video clips and public relations advertising, congratulatory messages, and the sale of photo and video content.

Advertising is not an important source of revenue for the majority of the media in the more remote regions, since businesses prefer outdoor advertising in those areas. Regional media continues to be financed from local government budgets and also earns income from written-to-order articles and public relations publications. The highest level of income from advertising is received by the government media that have the highest circulation in the country, from 20,000 to 35,000 copies.

Akram Urunov reported that for purposes of survival, SM-1 TV has lowered its advertising prices by 30 percent, lowered salaries by 10-15 percent and placed several members of the technical staff on unpaid leave. "The competitors, including the independent television stations in Khujand, are carrying on unfair competition by dumping their prices. For that reason, there was no way we could obtain the revenues we aimed at," he said.

The Advertising Law, which regulates advertising in the media, has been in force in Tajikistan since 2003. The Advertising Law differentiates between the approach to state and non-state mass media. The advertising market in Tajikistan is very small and the media frequently carry on an unfair fight to get advertising, while the potential of advertising as a means of obtaining profits is used by only a small group of Tajikistan's media.

Advertising from state enterprises is placed only in state print media and radio and television channels. Tajikistan's media generally work directly with advertisers and do not use the capabilities of advertising agencies. When publishing advertising, most advertisers only work with the most well-known media that have the greatest circulation.

"In Khujand, the television stations try to prepare the advertising themselves and help each other and other television channels, which frequently exchange advertising. There are three advertising agencies in the city which work primarily with foreign advertising," Dodobaev reported. The agency *Asia-Plus* has its own advertising service that determines prices itself. "The biggest advertisers have been

mobile operators, but because of the fact that the tax service levied huge fines on them in 2015, they slashed their advertising expenditures and some of them even pulled back their advertisements and cancelled their agreements," Tajibayeva said. In distinction to the state media, the non-state media are more strongly oriented to advertising, announcements and public relations materials and also get a lot of attention from advertisers as to their popularity among readers.

The advertising agencies Tak, A-Media, Tamosho, O, Bale and Tayron, operate in Dushanbe and the same media get advertising through them. "There are no advertising agencies in the regions of Tajikistan, except in the Sogdi Oblast. The remaining regions have outdoor advertising on banners and billboards that is prepared by advertising agencies in Dushanbe," Dodobaev said.

A distinction of the advertising market in Tajikistan's independent media is the large share of advertising from international organizations and noncommercial bodies. The panelists consider that the advertising market has been divided. First place in the advertising market is occupied by medicinal preparations and private medical centers, followed by advertisements for Internet providers, banks, home appliances and cell phone operators. The only state enterprise that advertises is the Tajik Aluminum Company (Talko).

Advertising for medicines and banks is generally placed on television. Among the state television channels, the most advertising is on TV Safina, where the prevalent advertising is for pharmacies, medicines and household chemical products. For this reason, the people call Safina "our television pharmacy."

Advertising occupies an important place in the revenues of electronic media. "More than 60 percent of the revenue of television and radio companies in the Sogdi Oblast comes from advertising," Akram Urunov reported. At present, the *Asia-Plus* media holding company takes 60 percent of advertising and state television 80 percent. Of the 32 pages of the *Asia-Plus* advertising, 10-12 pages are taken up by advertising, and its cost is the highest in the country, more than \$450 per page. Internet advertising in the form of crawls on the sites of newspapers and press services is growing.

Advertising departments exist in all four state television channels, in the holding companies Oila, Charkhi Gardun and Orieno-Media and in the radio stations Imruz, Vatan, *Asia-Plus* and Khovar.

The independent and private print media do not receive any subsidies from the government, although the new Media Law speaks of their guaranteed support by the government. In this connection, the Law on the Press and Other Means of Mass Information, clearly provides that the government can provide financial support to any media organization, irrespective of its form of ownership. "But the initiative has to come from the government, which may announce a tender, for example to reimburse the expenses for preparing and publishing public interest materials," Karshiboev stated.

The panelists noted that employees of the state television channels are dumping their prices for advertising, and in this way depriving the independent television stations of a stable source of income. The panelists remarked that almost the entire advertising market has gone over to state television, where the system for distributing advertising revenues is not transparent. According to official data, the advertising market in 2015 totaled more than \$12 million.

For the state electronic media, the length of advertising material may not exceed 10 percent of the daily volume of broadcasting, while for the non-state electronic media the corresponding volume is no more than 30 percent. The law provides that for state periodical (print) publications, the volume of advertising may not exceed 25 percent by volume, and in non-state periodical publications, 35 percent by volume.

With regard to marketing research, the panelists noted that this is an expensive luxury and at present, none of the media can allow itself to order a marketing study so as to use its results. "We do not know who our readers are. We wanted to conduct a study, using our own resources, in order to present it to our advertisers, but we couldn't find the funds," Zero Tajibayeva reported.

The exception is that many Internet media constantly conduct reader surveys concerning various policies, economic and social subjects. Some sites do not count the number of visitors, but the number of hits, as there are counters of unique hits determined by the visitors IP address. Recently, a number of media have been using the public statistics available on Live Internet and Open Star. "We are still publishing guest access for our advertisers on the closed counters of Google Analytics and Yandex Metrica. We do not close our own counters," Zero Tajibayeva said.

"Research centers exist that determine media ratings and image. They operate on grants, and whoever orders them can always determine the results. The results are only those that the person paying wants," Ergasheva says.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.75

In 2012, an association of television broadcasters and producers of audiovisual programs was formed dedicated to protecting the interests of non-state electronic media and production studios. Currently, 19 television stations and production studios are members of the association. The panelists noted that a project to form an association of media owners and an editor-in-chiefs' club failed, because of differences between the owners of newspapers and other media.

In recent years, professional associations have begun promoting the protection of journalists' rights of journalists and ethical standards. The panelists consider that they play an important role in the development of the media, primarily in their ability to provide consultation and information, legal support, the protection necessary for the operation of independent media and in their educational capacity through conferences, seminars and trainings.

At present, 16 branches of local non-governmental organizations that address certain media issues operate in Tajikistan. Thirteen journalistic associations and funds and one creative alliance are also registered in the republic. The professional associations of journalists and the organizations defending freedom of speech play a very important role.

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.

“Unfortunately, the unexpected death of Akbarali Sattorov, head of the Tajikistan Union of Journalists, in August of 2005, interrupted many of his plans for joint projects,” Ismoilov said.

Concerning the professional association of journalists and the professional association of the media, Karshiboev reported that there is a professional association of journalists in the Khatlon Oblast that has 150 members. In the Sogdi Oblast and in Dushanbe, the initiative has stalled because no one is prepared to take on the leadership. “We are prepared to accept into our professional union not only the journalists of independent media, but also those of state media,” he said.

Among professional media associations, the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan does positive work, protecting the rights of journalists, responding in a timely way to any problem in the media, following the matter through to the end, and monitoring violations of journalists’ rights. “At present, the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan is the only organization in Tajikistan that actually protects journalists, standing up for their rights and providing legal aid,” Khalikjanova said. In issues related to the protection of journalists’ rights and freedom of speech, the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan works closely with Article 19, Reporters Without Borders, the Committee to Protect Journalists, Amnesty International, and the office of the OSCE representative on freedom of speech.

“The National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan, in addition to provide legal counseling, also offered legal help this year to the journalists Orzu Isoyev and Karmari Akhroru and the editors of the newspapers *Samak* and *Ozvoza*,” Karshiboev reported. The organization also carried out daily monitoring of violations of journalists’ rights, freedom of speech and access to information.

At present, the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan is preparing an initiative to develop a law on the access to judicial information since there are many complaints from journalists that they are not given access to court sessions.

The Union of Journalists, which has more than 2,000 members, conducts itself more independently from the authorities than in previous years, although its head is named by the government. “Unfortunately, the unexpected

death of Akbarali Sattorov, head of the Tajikistan Union of Journalists, in August of 2005, interrupted many of his plans for joint projects,” Ismoilov said.

The panelists consider that no professional association of journalists can operate effectively only on the basis of membership dues. For an association to operate, it must write proposals and depend on partner organizations and branches.

Based on their articles of incorporation, all these media organizations protect the freedom of speech and the independence of the media. In reality, it is only the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan and in part, the Tajikistan Union of Journalists, that are concerned with these issues. In addition, the Press Council, the Center for Investigative Journalism and the Professional Journalists Club of the Sogdi Oblast are concerned with protecting the rights of journalists and supporting the development of the media.

The panelists felt that the organizations which are protecting the rights of journalists and the freedom of speech have quite strong positions, and they meet resistance from the authorities in the form of security and judicial bodies. In 2015, as in 2014, the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan underwent denial of service attacks several times, after which the site was unable to operate. “As a result of a DOS attack, a large part of our archived files were damaged and we were unable to restore them,” Karshiboev reported.

Concerning the support given to the media by NGO’s, it was noted that the Bureau of Human Rights, an independent center for the protection of human rights, attempts to provide help. There are human rights organizations in the country that protect the interests of the freedom of speech and of journalists, but there are not many. “This year, human right NGO’s did not react strongly to the violation of journalists’ rights. For them, the protection of human rights has turned into a business, a means of obtaining grants,” Khalikjanova said.

In the Khatlon Oblast, the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region and the eastern part of the country, the Garmsk region, there are no NGO’s or media associations that protect the rights of journalists and provide advisory support, apart from the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan and the Tajikistan Union of Journalists in Khatlon and the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region.

The panelists noted that all of the media organizations have declared solidarity, by means of severe pressure from the authorities, during the time of the pre-election campaign and the parliamentary elections and the blockage of Facebook and Odnoklassniki.

The panelists noted the poor quality of university education available for journalists. Not all graduates of the university journalism schools are prepared to work in their profession. The teachers in the schools of journalism complain that the academic programs are made more complicated by the Bologna rating system. Further, the panelists noted the fact that in the new testing program for university admission, if an applicant does not get the necessary number of points for a department where there is large competition, the suggestion is made that they enter the school of journalism.

Apart from the Russian-Tajik Slavonic University and Khujand State University, universities do not have specializations for the training of journalists. Perennial problems in the training of journalists are the lack of practicing teachers, outdated programs and the absence of teaching materials and technical equipment in the universities. The country has very good training programs for journalists conducted by several organizations with the support of international donor groups. But the university graduates who come to work for the publications are poorly trained and have to learn from the start because their level of training is unsatisfactory.

The teaching programs of the journalism schools and departments, which on the whole work on the basis of outdated programs, have few hours of practical training and a lack of technical resources.

At Khujand State University and the Tajik National University in Dushanbe, student radio and television studios operate, producing their own programs. "In Khujand, programs of the student TV are shown on the local state TV channels," Babajanova reported. The participants expressed the view that it is necessary to prepare graduates who, when they have finished university, can work for any publication. "Many graduates of the schools of journalism want to work in television, considering this work to be more prestigious than print publications," Mamurzoda said.

"Ten to fifteen interns come to *Asia-Plus* every year, but in the past three years, only two graduates have stayed on to work," Tajibayeva said.

People often enter journalism from other professions: historians, orientalist, lawyers and economists. "More than half of the journalists working in both the state and independent media do not have a degree from a school of journalism," Karshiboev reported.

The panelists noted that in 2015, there were many useful short-term training courses on security in journalistic work, research, the work of journalists in a state of emergency and coverage of border clashes that were conducted by the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan and IWPR. They consider that it is essential to form a center

for raising journalistic qualifications or an academy for the development of journalists with the job of systematically coordinating all the teaching and training programs of the local and international organizations.

In 2014-2015, the IWPR office focused on a target group of 20 journalists who went through a one-year multi-level training course on covering conflicts, gender issues, radicalization and elections. "We gave them smart phones and required them to write five articles each on subjects addressed in the training. We are now conducting an investigative journalism project and have trained human rights advocates and journalists in the regions. We have taught 60 persons, and ten journalists and three human rights advocates have stayed on in the project," Khalikjanova reported.

There are special internship and training programs available abroad for journalists, but very few journalists participate in them since a good knowledge of English or German is required to do so. "Short-term courses in the Deutsche Welle Academy are of particular interest to journalists," Dikaev said.

Mastery classes in Internet journalism and work in social media and webinars enjoy great popularity among journalists. All the courses and mastery classes are given at no cost and participation in them is unlimited. They are conducted by the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan, the Ebert Fund, the Internews Network and the 21st Century Independent School of Journalism. "Particular attention must be given at this time to training multimedia journalists, since this is a need of our time and there is a potential for working in prestigious media with good pay," Karshiboev noted.

The panelists noted the need to conduct long-term training courses and also training courses in investigative journalism, new writing skills, analytical economics and multimedia journalism.

The participants in the discussion noted that, as before, it is difficult to attract journalists from the state media to training seminars and courses, since up the now, the editors of those publications have not wanted to adopt innovations and international journalism standards. Only employees of the *Asia-Plus* media group (which operates its own 21st Century Independent School of Journalism) and the newspaper *Faraj* and *Ozodagon*, are permitted to have training and retraining in their workplace.

Concerning the quality of printing and access to equipment, the panelists noted that there is limited access to printing capabilities since this type of business is politicized and depends on the will of the authorities, even though there are a large number of private printing houses.

“There are 70 printing companies in Dushanbe, but not one of them will print a newspaper that in any way displeases the authorities,” Tajibayeva said. The panelists noted that an independent printing house is needed that is funded by donors, and does not accommodate the authorities. “Examples are the closed printing houses of the Islamic Renaissance Party and that party’s organ, the newspaper *Najot*, which is an indication that the issue is politicized. If any newspaper today does not please the authorities, there is not one printing house that will print it. For example, recently the newspaper *Nigokh* could not publish for three weeks,” Karshiboev said.

Karshiboev, referring to the quality of printing in Dushanbe’s private printing houses, highlighted Megatrend, Mushfinki and Intishor, which belongs to the director of the Sharki Ozod group and operates on the principle of high quality at an affordable price. The suppliers of papers and plates in Tajikistan are the government printing house Sharki Ozod and three or four businessmen who establish pricing policy. The prices for services in the private printing houses are usually 10 percent higher than in Sharki Ozod.

Currently, 75 printing houses are operating in Tajikistan, 60 of them in Dushanbe. Another 15 printing houses are in the regions—seven in Khujan, two in Istaravshan, one in Kurgan-Tube, one in Khorog, one in Yavan, one in Kulyab and two in Tursunzade. But the quality leaves something to be desired. All of the participants in the discussion noted that there is needed to create a printing capability in Dushanbe and the oblast centers—Khujand, Jrugan-Tube and Khorog—to serve the needs of the independent media.

The panelists consider that the absence of an effective operating system for distributing print publications inhibits access to information in the remote regions of the country. The association of news distributors formed in 2012, with the support of the OSCE, has not started operating as such since the leaders of the media have not been able to agree with each other, there were many founders and each one took the initiative on itself. Tajibayeva said that if a centralized delivery system were operating, the circulation of the newspaper *Asia-Plus* could be increased to include the Sogdi Oblast and the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region. “But up to now, there is no centralized delivery system and the independent media are sent out by private cars or by public distributors,” Mamurzoda said. In this connection, there still exists mandatory official subscriptions to state media, and for this purpose the editors themselves, or their deputies, go out into the regions.

The channels for distributing print media are politicized. The kiosks belonging to Tajikmatbuot (Tajik Press) frequently do not sell the copies of the independent opposition newspapers. “There have been cases where the entire issue of a newspaper has been seized due to critical articles,” Pirnazarov reported. The independent newspapers are generally sold only by public distributors, i.e. women and men of retirement age who supplement their small pensions in this way.

Not all independent television and radio stations have their own transmitters, and if they do, they are generally not new and are of low power—up to 1.5 kilowatts. All television and radio towers belong to the Communications Service and the Tajikistan Television and Radio Committee. Independent stations that have their own transmitters are nevertheless required to lease state towers.

All four state TV channels completely changed over to digital transmission in 2014, but to see them, viewers have to acquire a multiplex package costing more than \$150, which is not within the means of all the residents in the country. Moreover, for digital broadcasting, the state channels switched over to a second satellite, which made it impossible for more than 25 percent of the capital’s residents to view the state TV channels.

The Internet sphere is in practice controlled by the government, which attempts to limit access to alternative information by the population and the media. At present, more than 100 sites in Tajikistan remain blocked. There are cases of electronic tracking of IP addresses and billing and hacking of accounts on Facebook, Odnoklassniki, Twitter and V Kontakte, and eavesdropping of the cell phones, Skype and Viber of opposition politicians and journalists. The government has not blocked blog platforms, but they are kept under observation. Several bloggers have reported instances of difficulty entering their pages on WordPress.

“In some regions of the Khatlon Oblast, including the Kulyab region, the providers have introduced prepayment for Internet access, the speed of which has remained very low, and some sites are not available,” Dikaev said.

Ten mobile communications companies and ten Internet providers operate in the republic. There are 6.35 million mobile communications subscribers in the country and 25-30 percent of the population uses mobile Internet. Mobile communication are used not only as a means of communication, but also to access the Internet and receive SMS advertising and music. In this connection, when the electrical power is shut down, mobile Internet connections, stationary Internet and 3G and 4G transmitters are shut down as well.

List of Panel Participants

Kurbon Alamshoyev, independent journalist, Khorog

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

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

Zinatullo Ismoilov, director, Media Academy of Tajikistan, Dushanbe

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

Nosirjon Mamurzoda, deputy editor-in-chief, *Novy Khatlon*, Kurgan-Tube

Rano Babajanova, professor, school of journalism, Russian-Tajik Slavonic University; deputy chair, National Democratic Party, Dushanbe

Nazarali Pirnazarov, correspondent, Tajik service, Radio Svoboda-Ozodi, Dushanbe

Zebo Tajibayeva, editor-in-chief, *Asia-Plus*, Dushanbe

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