

# TAJIKISTAN



## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

# 2018

Tracking Development  
of Sustainable  
Independent Media  
Around the World



# TAJIKISTAN

## AT A GLANCE

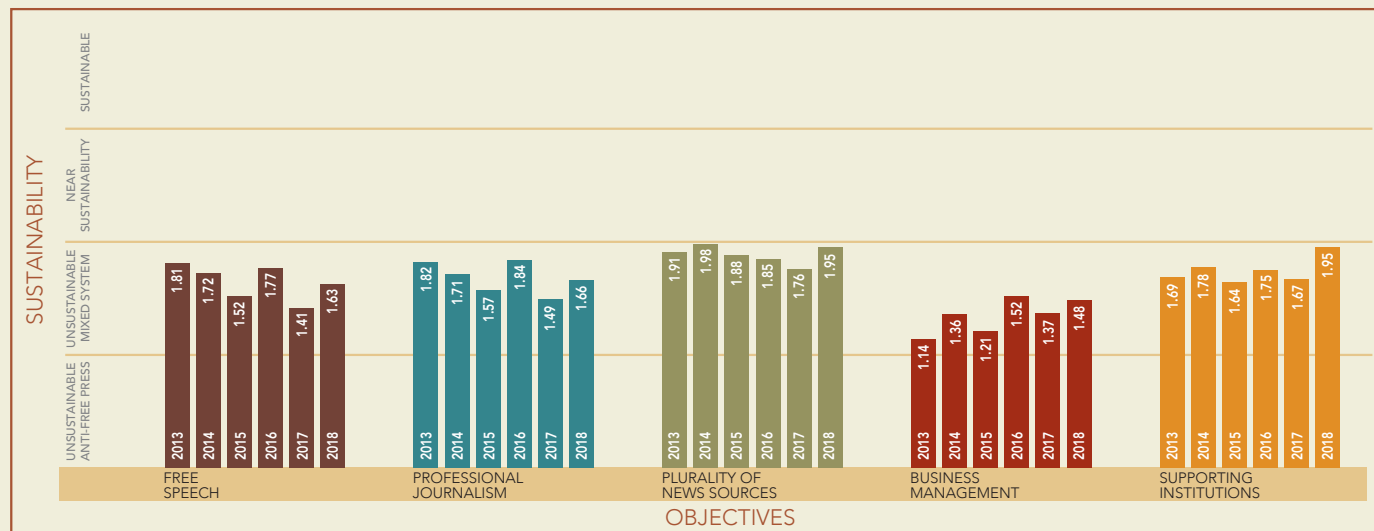
### GENERAL

- **Population:** 8,965,000 (December 2017; Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations)
- **Capital:** Dushanbe
- **Ethnic group (% of population):** Tajik 85.4%, Uzbek 12.5%, Russian 0.5%, Kyrgyz 0.8%, other 2.1 % (2010 Population and Housing Census, Republic of Tajikistan)
- **Religion (% of population):** Sunni Muslims 90%, Ismaili Muslims 6%, other faiths 4% (State Committee on Religious Affairs)
- **Language:** Tajik (official), Russian (in the Tajikistan constitution as the language of interethnic communication)
- **Gross domestic product (GDP):** USD \$6.94 billion
- **GDP per capita:** USD \$774
- **Literacy rate:** Adult male 99.83%, adult female 99.72%, youth (15–24) male 99.86%, youth (15–24) female 99.89% (UNESCO Institute for Statistics)
- **President and Head of Government:** Emomali Rahmon (since November 6, 1994)

### MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Number of active media outlets:** 367 newspapers (107 state, 260 nonstate), 239 magazines (110 state, 129 nonstate), 34 television stations (8 state, 26 nonstate), 30 radio stations (6 state, 24 nonstate) (Ministry of Culture)
- **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Largest independent (private) newspapers are: ASIA-Plus, USSR, Reklamnaya Gazeta, Faraj, and Samak. State newspapers are: Jumhuriyat and Sadoi Mardum.
- **Broadcasting ratings:** State TV: Jahonnamo and Shabakai Yakum (24-hour broadcasting). Digital broadcasting: Safina, Bakhoriston, Sinamo, Varzish, Shakhnavoz, and Dushanbe. Radio: In Dushanbe: ASIA-Plus, Khovar, Love Radio, and Imruz. In Sughd Region: SM-1, Tiroz, and Diyor.
- **News agencies:** 11 (1 state news agency and 10 nonstate agencies, although not all 10 are in operation). State-owned: Khovar. Nonstate: ASIA-Plus, Avesta, Tajikistan Times, Tajik TA, Ozodagon, Faraj News, and Sugd News.
- **Internet usage:** 4 million (December 2017, Association of Internet Service Providers of Tajikistan)

### MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: TAJIKISTAN



### SCORE KEY

**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 <https://www.irex.org/msi>



Tajikistan's scores showed improvement across the board in this year's study. The country's media sector, however, remains hamstrung by modest economic growth, legal practices that do not meet international standards, low levels of journalism professionalism, an underdeveloped advertising market, and outdated journalism education leaves the country in the Unsustainable/Mixed System category.

In 2017, a number of events impacted Tajikistan's society, politics, and economy. At the beginning of the year, Rustam Emomali, the eldest son of President Emomali Rahmon, was appointed mayor of Dushanbe, the capital city. He turned 30 in 2017, which makes him eligible to put forth a candidacy in the next presidential election. The president appointed his third daughter, Ozona Rahmon, as head of the executive office of the president. She was also elected to the senate, Tajikistan's upper house of parliament. In May, parliament approved amendments to the Law on Operational-Investigative Activities, which gives enforcement agencies the right to receive information on the websites that Tajik citizens visit. Parliament adopted these amendments due to the concern over the growing abuse of electronic communication. As announced at a meeting of parliament, more than 90,000 SMS messages are sent every day to residents from alleged extremists and terrorists with appeals to join their factions, and more than 80 percent of Internet users visit so-called "undesirable" sites run by extremist and terrorist groups. Citing the threat of terrorism, the National Security Committee now requires a total re-registration of subscriber identification module (SIM) cards in Tajikistan. Authorities have observed border violators, especially armed drug traffickers, using SIM cards from Tajik mobile network operators. Their card use reached a peak in the fall of 2017. Now only those in possession of a Tajik passport can obtain a SIM card. By government decree, foreigners can only purchase SIM cards from a mobile company's main office and only for the period

of time stated in their visas or temporary registrations.

The past year marked the beginning of a marked rise in trade, economic, and cultural exchanges between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Since 1992, relations with the two countries often have been strained. However, with the death of Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov in 2016, the conditions have improved. For example, airline flights have resumed between the capitals of Dushanbe and Tashkent, and trade volume has increased. Uzbek authorities also have stopped expressing concerns about the construction of the Rogun hydroelectric power station, and officials reached an agreement to resume the export of natural gas from Uzbekistan to Tajikistan.

The pace of economic growth remains modest at best, and the income level of the population remains quite critical. According to official statistics from Tajikistan and Russia, the poverty level of the population is 41 percent and labor emigration from the country remains at a level of 850,000 to 1 million people. For Tajiks aged 18–50 years, labor migration is the main source of income, especially those living in rural areas. Most migrant workers are men but the number of women is growing.

Tajikistan's Committee for Family and Women's Affairs enforced a dress code for most of the year. The committee has advised that the clothing worn should be in "the national tradition" and not "alien." The measure is aimed at reducing the prevalence of Islamic black hijabs and headscarves. Clothing designs in the national tradition are being developed as work wear as well as for social occasions.



**OBJECTIVE 1:  
FREEDOM OF  
SPEECH**

1.63

**The Tajikistan constitution guarantees freedom of speech, and parliament members have introduced reasonable laws on these freedoms. However, the laws also contain various directives and quasi-regulations. Many public servants and officials prioritize their enforcement over Tajikistan's constitutional laws, thus infringing on citizens' freedoms of speech and expression. For example, the Criminal Code (CC) of the Republic of Tajikistan contains criminal liability articles for insulting a representative of power (Article 330) and for publicly insulting the president of the Republic of Tajikistan (Article 137). As such, these regulations provide representatives of government bodies with special protection from criticism. The Paris-based international organization Reporters without Borders has criticized the state for its pressure on the Tajik independent press. The MSI panelists expressed the opinion that the government uses the pretext of countering terrorism to exert total control over private outlets, forcing them to sharpen self-censorship.**

All the panel members agreed that Tajikistan has a low level of implementing laws and legislative acts. This affects the sustainability of the media, as state and judicial bodies constantly interfere with the enforcement system. Nabi Yusupov, director of the NGO Media Consulting, said that "formally, there are mechanisms to protect the freedom of speech. But in reality, their implementation is unrealized, because we journalists do not initiate lawsuits against officials. And the state, in the interests of protecting bureaucrats, ignores cases when journalists are in the right."

All legal protections in the sphere of mass media conform to international standards, but such laws exist purely on paper. Nuriddin Karshiboev, chair of the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan (NANSMIT) and director of the Tajik Press Council, said that laws restricting freedom are written and enforced more often, "In the last year, legislation has been tightened, and the criminal code Law on Operational-Investigative Activity has been amended to incorporate Internet surveillance." He added that correspondence, website traffic, and social media comments are all monitored under the guise of fighting extremism.

Legislative acts on broadcasting and telecommunications, especially on licensing, remain undemocratic. "The Licensing Council is still fully under the state-controlled Committee on Television and Radio Broadcasting, and it's a monopoly that issues licenses to just one or two TV channels once a year," according to Zinatullo Ismoilzoda, director of the Media Academy of Tajikistan and chair of the Union of Journalists of Tajikistan. He said that several electronic media companies that have been in the market for 10 to 15 years were not permitted to renew their licenses in 2017. Although each company's case is considered separately, Ismoilzoda said, "The committee's workings remain nontransparent. There is a fear that control is being lost and a mistaken belief that independent mass media are easier to keep under control in the north of Tajikistan (where there are currently twelve independent television stations) than in the capital and other regions."

Ismoilzoda also noted that not all applicants who want to start up a radio or television and radio station are freely granted a broadcasting license. "To obtain a license, you need to register with the Ministry of Justice as a limited liability company, and it then requests written confirmation from the

regulator about the availability of a license," he said.

In 2017, the government implemented changes to the procedures for registering a media outlet. Zebo Tadjibaeva, the executive director of *ASIA-Plus*, described her experience with registration, saying "Before, we could extend our registration in the Ministry of Culture. [Now,] they introduced changes whereby we first had to make a request; [but] no one knew which form to fill in, and as a result, *ASIA-Plus* was working for three months without registration documents. Then the National Security Committee (GKNB) decided that the Ministry of Culture itself needed to make the request, and if the GKNB then approves it, the ministry will put us on the register." In her opinion, all state agencies want to take control of the media's activities.

The economic situation of mass media is deteriorating, as profits from advertising and commercial activities shrink while costs of expendable items and typographical services increase. In the last two years, the newspaper and magazine circulations have dropped by 50–60 percent, according to newspaper editors on the MSI panel and based on a survey they conducted with colleagues throughout Tajikistan. Karshiboev commented, "In such circumstances, it would make sense for the government to develop a program of support for the media, irrespective of its form of ownership. This is the purpose of the Law on the Periodical Press and Other Mass Media." Receiving money from the state budget limits media freedom, but this assistance is an acceptable way to prevent mass media in crisis from disappearing, panelists said.

State TV stations provide a wide variety of programming. Independent channels cannot compete against state television, as their digital satellite broadcasting and modern equipment are provided at state expense. The government

put significant effort into facilitating the transition process to digital broadcasting and considering the issues surrounding citizens' access to alternative sources of information. State TV has begun to broadcast via satellite, but many citizens in the country's regions lack clear access or cannot receive any Tajik television channels at all.

Journalists are being persecuted illegally. According to the panelists, this crime extends to journalists' relatives, with authorities exerting pressure on those who have left Tajikistan and even on elderly parents. With Facebook sometimes blocked in the country, Internet users post attacks

on journalists by means of proxy servers or anonymizers — although intelligence agencies vigilantly monitor this type of activity.

Panelists also reported that when important political events happen in Dushanbe, minibuses with blacked-out windows appear. These vehicles are fitted with several roof-mounted antennae that track telephone conversations and Internet traffic.

According to the panelists' observations, some segments of Tajik society believe that a free media sphere greatly benefits state and society, while other parts believe that the media themselves fuel the societal problems by pitting various strata against each other. As for the panelists, they believe that the authorities are to blame for promoting these divisions in public opinion. Journalists have a noticeable solidarity to protect the freedom of speech as well as help colleagues who have gotten into trouble.

In 2017, 10 journalists left Tajikistan, but only five of those were due to persecution and unsafe work in local reporting. "We need to make a clear distinction between those who really left for political reasons, and those who went for economic reasons," said Lola Khalikjanova, project manager at the Institute for War & Peace Reporting (IWPR).

The highest-profile case against a journalist was the December 5, 2017 arrest of Khayrullo Mirsaidov, an independent journalist from the Sughd Region and the leader of the Tajik national KVN satirical comedy troupe. Mirsaidov was prosecuted for embezzlement; incitement of national, racial, local, or religious hatred; forgery; and providing false testimony. The trigger for this arrest was Mirsaidov's appeal to President Rahmon, the prosecutor general, and the Sughd Region president. He had requested help for KVN's students by confronting the "corruption of Sughd Region officials." The Civil Society Coalition of Tajikistan, the International

Committee to Protect Journalists, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch all have called for Mirsaidov's release.

The director of the newspaper *ASIA-Plus* told the panel that she was called in by the State Committee for National Security and held for 12 hours over the headline "How we lost Samarkand and Bukhara," Tadjibaeva said. She noted that the pressure has affected the editorial staff's work, as evidenced by increased self-censorship in the publication. "Officials from the State Committee for National Security continue to dictate which topics can be written about and which ones cannot," she said.

Khurshed Niyozov, director of the Center for Journalistic Investigations and chief editor of *Faraj*, said that the legal system does not favor media. "Interestingly, not one of the infringements of the rights of independent media or journalists is investigated transparently or in full, and this is so there will be no precedent of punishment for those who persecute the authors of critically oriented publications."

Mahmudjon Dodobaev, director of SM-1 media company, observed that barriers on activity have worsened for regional independent media, and they face problems with print media registration and their legal statuses for taxation purposes.

The Unified Electronic Communications Switching Center, run by the state-controlled Communications Service (CS), also puts pressure on media freedom. "[Because] all Internet channels pass through this center, the overall transmission speed has decreased and the quality of communication has deteriorated," remarked Karshiboev. Although the law prohibits monopolization of the media, 92 percent of electronic media outlets in Tajikistan belong to the state.

The laws for libel and defamation were repealed in 2012. However, a law passed in

### Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information.

#### FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS

- ▶ Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- ▶ Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- ▶ Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- ▶ Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- ▶ State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- ▶ Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- ▶ Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- ▶ Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- ▶ Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

November 2016 makes the insult of the Tajikistan president in public media a criminal offense, punishable by up to five years in prison.

Access to information is one of the main problems for journalists in Tajikistan. The issue has become even more acute than in previous years, with authorities actively trying to prevent reporters from acquiring socially important information. “It is especially difficult for journalists who conduct investigations into violations of citizens’ rights,” said Khalikjanova.

**Nabi Yusupov, director of the NGO Media Consulting, said that “formally, there are mechanisms to protect the freedom of speech. But in reality, their implementation is unrealized, because we journalists do not initiate lawsuits against officials. And the state, in the interests of protecting bureaucrats, ignores cases when journalists are in the right.”**

At the same time, the state media constantly receive information from security and law enforcement agencies. Many government authorities are still working through the state news agency Khovar. Prosecutors, anticorruption officials, and courts all publish their information to the agency’s website without fail. The government has given major privileges to Khovar, issuing a decree that all Tajik ministries and departments must provide the state agency with answers to requests received from other media. “If you send a request and the agency does not answer you within three days, you can safely complain about it not responding within the time limits specified by law,” Karshiboev commented.

Nosirjon Mamurzod, a lecturer in journalism at Kurgan-Tube State University and deputy editor of *New Khatlon*, said that the authorities in the Khatlon region provide information only if they have a written request. They never meet the legally specified deadline of three days, and often coordinate responses with their immediate supervisors in the capital. Kurbon Alamshoev, director of the NGO Kuhkhoi Pomir (Mountains of Pamir), said that the head of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region has launched a Facebook page, where he shares news. “As for the press secretaries of other regional authorities, it is not even known whether they exist at all,” he said.

Media expert Rajab Mirzo said that, according to the public foundation “Internet,” 31 percent of ministerial and departmental websites are not updated and have no operational information, while some sites or links do not work. Panelists noted that the main way for journalists to obtain information continues to be through personal links within ministries and departments, and not from knowledge of the laws.

The presidential apparatus still filters the access of foreign journalists accredited in Tajikistan. Some reporters have long since ceased receiving invitations to the president’s meetings with international delegations. “When the president comes to the regions, a narrow range of media is allowed to attend the meetings — only those on the presidential press service’s list,” said Mamurzoda.

Access to international news in Tajikistan is always open, due to the many radio, television, and Internet portals. However, a range of factors inhibits access. One of the most significant is the annual limit on the supply of electricity in the regions, from mid-October to mid-March. Another problem is the high cost of Internet service access (USD \$30 to \$150 monthly) relative to the population’s income.

Satellite and cable television is used widely to obtain alternative information from abroad.

The journalism occupation is not subject to licensing and journalists do not need to have professional training to start working in the field. The new law on the media contains a clear definition of a journalist: a media employee who works on the staff of, or under contract to, a media organization and who is a member of the Tajik Union of Journalists. However, media workers often experience barriers to professional activity if they lack accreditation to cover particular events.

Tajikistan has eight higher-educational establishments where journalists are trained. However, upon graduation, they rarely are professionally prepared for or interested in working in the media.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

1.66

Experts on the panel agreed that professionalism among specialized journalists (political correspondents, parliamentary correspondents, etc.) has degenerated significantly in recent months. “The standard of quality of journalistic material has fallen,” said Negmatullo Mirsaidov, editor of the newspaper *Varorud*, “This is associated with increased pressure on journalists and the media and the outflow of some professional journalists from the profession.” Yusupov confirmed that “over the past two years, 50 percent of experienced journalists have left the profession for various reasons.”

Journalism depends primarily on sourcing accurate information, which often proves difficult. “In Tajikistan, even independent experts

## Journalism meets professional standards of quality.

### PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS

- ▶ Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- ▶ Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- ▶ Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- ▶ Journalists cover key events and issues.
- ▶ Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- ▶ Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- ▶ Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- ▶ Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

apply self-censorship for fear of pressure and consequences in their relationships, and as a result, their numbers have fallen sharply,” said Karshiboev. Panelists noted that it is specifically this lack of an extensive expert community that reduces the standard of published material.

Even journalists at the popular newspapers *Ozodagon* and *USSR* often violate ethical standards. According to the panelists, in 2017 the Media Council received multiple complaints about print and electronic media, in particular regarding ethical issues, objectivity of publications, respect for privacy, and plagiarism.

The extent of media plagiarism has not changed and is still prevalent in all print and electronic media. According to Karshiboev, “Since the law on mass media does not extend copyright and other related rights to informational materials, there is nothing

to stop them being republished in other media. Of course, it is unethical to reprint the material of another author, signing it with a different byline.”

Independent media have progressed somewhat in the area of professionalism, but state media still practice at a low level. Television broadcasts do not present a balance of opinions, and usually reports are written in the first person. Most significantly, broadcasters are merely acting as mouthpieces for officials’ opinions. Tadjibaeva said that even those viewpoints are not reported accurately. “Many editors believe that interviewing is the simplest genre and send out young and inexperienced journalists, so the quality of interviews is appalling. For this reason, officials have stopped giving interviews.” Mirzo also remarked that almost all officials complain that their words are distorted and taken out of context. According to legislative standards, a person that consents to an interview has the right to read the text, but Tajik media do not always comply with this rule.

The public organization Media Council of Tajikistan, which includes 88 editorial offices of newspapers, magazines, electronic media, and other media companies, monitors the implementation of ethical standards in journalist activities. The council accepts appeals from interested parties, discusses cases at meetings, and makes decisions on remedial actions (though these are purely recommendatory). Subsequently, the council publishes its recommendations in media outlets. To date, the largest Tajik-language opposition newspapers, *Millat* and *Pike*, have not adopted the council’s code of ethics.

The panelists observed that self-censorship seems to have intensified in the aftermath of the attempted mutiny by ex-Deputy Defense Minister Abduhalim Nazarzoda, and the trial of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan in September 2015. Self-censorship is spreading among journalists as

well as editors. Niyozov described his experience as *Faraj* editor: “Two or three times, we had to stop printing, as the National Security Committee demanded I remove an article. Only upon removal would the issue see the light of day.”

Tadjibaeva said that *ASIA-Plus* is forced to limit its subjects. “We have a list of people who, under no circumstances, can be criticized by advertisers and partners.” Zarina Ergasheva, editor of *Migrant*. tj, confirmed: “Often we are afraid to criticize state officials who serve as information sources, for fear of losing them as a source.”

Because intelligence services drip-feed information, thorough coverage of national security issues is impossible. Tajikistan’s National Strategy on Countering Terrorism and Extremism’s emphasizes working more closely with media and civil society, but information is still held back, and law enforcement and security do not favor partnerships. “Unfortunately, our special services are reluctant to contact and cooperate with the press, and they put forward their own version of how journalists should write, even though we could help them in the fight against security threats,” said Karshiboev. Khalikjanova added, “Events relating to national security issues are covered one-sidedly, with printed media doing a little better.”

Some events are covered only by bloggers, although their number is insignificant. Often the bloggers’ content is used by traditional media with no reimbursement. A very strong informational influence is social networks, where users publish various news, videos, and photographs. Often, after the publication of a post or a complaint on a social network, a news editor will ask a journalist to analyze the situation.

Wages are not keeping up with the rising prices and the national currency depreciation. “Virtually all editors and journalists are either moonlighting in

other media and online publications or are taking on extra work of some kind and looking for incentives and gifts on the side,” said Niyozov. Mamurzoda agreed, saying, “In all parts of the Khatlon region, television journalists and news crews demand a fee in the form of money or food for shooting an off-site report or writing an article.”

Salaries are higher at independent media, but recently, pay rates for state and independent media have become more balanced. According to the State Committee on Television and Radio, state staff receive an average of USD \$130 to \$140 monthly. Employees of the state television Channel 1 receive more — between USD \$150 and \$250, plus up to a 20 percent bonus for advertisement sales. In regional media, advertising managers are in the best position, as those working in radio receive bonuses of 15 percent, and those in television, 20 percent. “On average, salaries in the ASIA-Plus media company range from [USD] \$350 to \$400, and the authors of advertising materials on the site receive bonuses from sponsors and business partners, based on views,” Tadjibaeva reported.

The media sphere has no balance between entertainment and informational programs. Entertainment programming holds sway on television as well as radio. As Ergasheva noted, “The proportion of information to entertainment programs used to be 40 percent to 60 percent; now it is 30 percent to 70 percent. The share of entertainment programs is 70 to 75 percent of airtime on state television, 60 percent on state radio, and more than 80 percent on private FM radio. The state does have a [24/7] news channel, Jahonnamo.”

Ergasheva also commented that viewers have been spoiled by satellite channels, so television stations have to entice them with entertainment programs, talk shows, and sports broadcasts. The under-35 television viewer segment in particular

prefers this programming and does not watch analytical or news programs. Tadjibaeva said that newsroom staffing is another part of the problem. “People want [drama], but there are not enough journalists who can write about show business, even though one can make quality content out of it.”

Media companies do not have adequate modern technology. The material and technical bases of state-owned media are much better than at the independent media. Problems remain also at regional media, where printing houses have to make do with outdated facilities. Each year, state television and radio channels modernize their technical base using state budget funding.

**“An independent printing house that does not surrender to pressure from the authorities is needed,” Mirsaidov commented.**

In general, print media equipment is obtained from international grant providers. Many of these donor organizations hold competitions for media awards and now give journalists multimedia equipment as prizes instead of money.

Regional print media reporters use obsolete equipment, and journalists buy Dictaphones and smartphones out of pocket. “State-run media in the Sughd Region are provided with equipment at the expense of the regional authorities; independent television stations in that region have themselves begun to invest in modern and more convenient equipment for production of content,” said Dodobaev. According to Alamshoev, modern technology is available to journalists of state-owned media in Khorog, but they have problems with the Internet, which is expensive and unstable.

The country still does not have any high-quality

niche media. Panelists said that one reason is that readers are unprepared to digest new content. “No demand exists yet for specialized journalism, as there are simply no customers for it,” Tadjibaeva said.

Fewer journalistic investigations ran in local media in 2017, and those that were undertaken mostly dealt with social issues. According to Niyozov, “Almost 90 percent of the investigations conducted by Center for Journalistic Investigations journalists were not published. That is because this requires [an in-depth investigation], and the person who originally contacted us then quickly reaches an understanding with the person about whom the investigation was ordered.” In addition, journalistic investigation is expensive. “Usually the editorial board is not capable of paying for such work,” Khalikjanova confirmed.

In Ergasheva’s view, another issue in this matter is protection for journalists, because they become at risk of attack in exposing the details of a case. In Tajikistan, editorial offices are not capable of protecting investigative journalists from physical or legal threats.

None of the printing presses in Tajikistan are free from government influence. This absence affects the livelihood of private media, as printers can refuse to print a newspaper containing a critical article that would potentially provoke authorities. “An independent printing house that does not surrender to pressure from the authorities is needed,” Mirsaidov commented.

Newsprint and other consumables for printing newspapers are largely in the hands of three or four businesspeople. One of the owners is Sharif Hamdampur, who also owns the Oila media corporation and is very close to the authorities, often still acting as a stringer for the customs service.



**OBJECTIVE 3:  
PLURALITY  
OF NEWS**

1.95

**The quantity of Tajik information sources has increased in recent years, as many new radio stations and newspapers have appeared. But a number of outlets have problems with timeliness and objectivity.**

Most publications and broadcast media have created their own websites for posting news for their audiences, and some have apps for mobile phone users. Every year sees an increase in the number of consumers using social networks and reading news on their smartphones. The practice of using chat rooms in place of SMS messaging is developing, as chat rooms are cheaper to use.

The country's approach to mass media is outdated and needs to be reformed, panelists argued. "The government's desire to protect the information space is not wholly effective, because that is impossible under the conditions of globalization. The influence of media from neighboring and foreign countries on Tajikistan's information space can be detected," according to Karshiboev.

In Khalikjanova's view, the Tajik sphere has the potential to serve all media consumers' needs. "We need a program to support the media regardless of the type of ownership," she said. "This step would help saturate the information market so that Tajik citizens would not need to turn to foreign sources to find information about events in the country."

People in the large cities of Dushanbe, Khujand, and Kurgan-Tyube have more information access, media variety, and financial security than residents in the remote regions. For rural Tajiks, the most accessible media are radio and television because newspapers appear irregularly and are

not affordable for many. Regardless of the level of economic well-being, or the geographic location, almost every household has a satellite dish and cable television.

According to the panelists' assessments, regional residents, especially in remote locations, cannot afford to buy newspapers because prices go up several times a year. The average price of one issue plus delivery is now \$0.45 to \$0.50. Tajiks in outer regions also receive information through electronic media, television, and radio. Mirsaidov commented that some independent local publications appear to have become more cautious than state publications, as they have stopped writing critical articles on important topics and events.

State and government mass media have a stronger impact on formation of public viewpoint, due to the higher number of central television and radio channels and larger runs of printed media. "The state media mainly reflect the pulse of the government of the country and the opinion of the populace on vital topics," said Niyozov.

According to Mamurzoda, the circulation of most newspapers is no more than 2,000 copies, while the number of residents in the Kurgan-Tube region is more than three million. "Therefore, the impact of the regional press on the sociopolitical processes in the country and public opinion is minimal," he said, "State media in the regions only publish materials about the activities of the central and local authorities or write about public holidays. Criticism is not allowed, and in addition, there is not a single daily newspaper in the Khatlon region."

Tajikistan has not yet created any public media, even though providing such outlets is one of the conditions of its membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO).

According to Zinatullo Ismoilzoda, private media produce their news in house, and mainly reflect

everyday life for Tajiks. Unlike the state-owned media that focus on national and international news, they focus on local and regional stories. Tadjibaeva confirmed, "Private media publish their own news and differentiate themselves from the state media by expressing an alternative opinion."

The state does not require registration to gain access to the Internet, and citizens have the opportunity to read and analyze information from foreign websites. Tajik law states that the blocking of a site or social network can only occur by a court decision, except for "undesirable" international sites that promote extremism and terrorism. But service providers report continually that national and foreign websites are blocked, and since 2012, sites have

**Multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable and objective news.**
**PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS**

- ▶ A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- ▶ Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- ▶ Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- ▶ Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- ▶ A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.
- ▶ State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- ▶ Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are reliable.
- ▶ Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.

been blocked or restricted upon the direction of CS. Mirzo reported examples: “In 2017, the popular social-networking sites Facebook, Odnoklassniki [Classmates], VKontakte, and YouTube were blocked seven times. The sites of several local independent media such as *ASIA-Plus*, *Ozodagon*, *Faraj*, and *Avesta* were also blocked.”

Many faked users have created page-doubles of political figures, well-known opposition journalists, and human rights activists. Tajikistan has multiple pages belonging to radical Islamists and members of terrorist organizations such as ISIL.

Private publications have more diverse content than state outlets, but both are increasingly having to compete with social networks in order to broaden their reading audiences. Mass media organizations in the state-run and independent sectors have begun to launch social network pages, from where they can rapidly distribute their content. Readers turn more and more to sites such as Facebook, VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, and Twitter for their information. “Today’s users of information choose for themselves which sources of information to utilize — newspapers, magazines, FM radio, television, or the Internet — depending on their interests,” said Alamshoev.

According to the latest statistics from the Association of Internet Service Providers of Tajikistan, Facebook has more than 110,000 registered users in Tajikistan, and the daily number of Tajik visitors to Facebook is anywhere up to 150,000. However, these networks are not reliable sources, and their news stories can have a dichotomous tone. Readers have to look at where the story originated and by whom it was written.

Mobile apps are available for news feeds from outlets such as *ASIA-Plus* and Radio Svoboda, and are being utilized for communication. “Messaging services are now mainly used for conversations and

calls, while the Telegram app is becoming popular among advanced users,” said Ergasheva.

Any citizen with sufficient funds is able to access the Internet. According to the panelists, out of Tajikistan’s 8.5 million people, about 4 million users have access to the Internet, including by mobile devices. Despite its high price, Internet use is common in the large cities. Usage in the regions is much lower, due to the limited bandwidth and high cost for local residents. Depending on the provider, monthly rates for Internet access vary from \$50 to \$200. Such charges are beyond the financial reach of more than half of the country’s population.

**“Today’s users of information choose for themselves which sources of information to utilize — newspapers, magazines, FM radio, television, or the Internet — depending on their interests,” said Alamshoev.**

Eleven news agencies are registered in Tajikistan, but only seven are actually in operation. Those include the leading agency *ASIA-Plus* along with *Avesta*, *catoday.org*, *faraj.tj*, *tajikta.tj*, *pressa.tj*, *sugdnews.tj*, and the government agency *Khovar*. All the news agencies are affiliated with media companies. *ASIA-Plus* is owned by the *ASIA-Plus Media Group*, *rasa.tj* by the *Oila Corporation*, *Avesta* and *tajikta.tj* by the newspaper *Business and Politics*, and *sugdnews.tj* by *Faraj*. “In Tajikistan, there are three advertising agencies affiliated with the [state] Committee on Television and Radio Broadcasting,” Ismoilzoda said.

Tadjibaeva described her company’s services. “The agency *ASIA-Plus* shoots photographs and videos, and we produce infographics. In other words, we use all types of multimedia tools,” she said. *ASIA-Plus* gathers news from Facebook for at least

20 percent of its content and uses news from international news agencies, publishing via hyperlinks.

In order to survive, news agencies have begun to publish more advertising materials and press releases. Additionally, according to Tadjibaeva, *ASIA-Plus* has needed to make flexible arrangements with clients. “For many years now, we have allowed local newspapers to use our news for free. We have a few paid subscribers, and they receive bonuses in the form of news announcements and multimedia content. They can also post PR materials and press releases with us free of charge,” she said.

The panelists noted that media outlets still have almost no inter-regional exchange of information among their reporters. Centralized media usually take news from verified bloggers in the regions. The panelists also described a new program that improves statewide connections. With the support of the international NGO *Internews*, independent television and radio stations have created a tele-news bridge exchange. The participating outlets transmit information from all corners of the country and share programs with one another.

Dodobaez said that independent media in the *Sughd Region* broadcast their own news content, which is of higher quality than state media offerings. “When producing our news, we observe international standards, criteria, and ethical standards, which differentiates us in a good way from state television channels.”

According to the panelists, Tajik citizens today have little interest in who owns the media, and consider quality of information more important. The ownerships of most media are not secrets, and anyone can easily find this type of information. However, the media sector has some individual, commercially affiliated outlets with unknown founders and owners.

Tajik law limits the share of foreign capital to

## TAJIKISTAN

a maximum of 25 percent. As a result, attracting major foreign capital into the media sphere is out of the question. Tajik media do have a level of foreign investment, in the form of grants and technical assistance from international donor organizations and financial institutions.

To provide foreign news, state television channels use fragments from Russian television channels, Euronews, BBC, CNN, and Al-Jazeera. Today, almost all newspapers reprint free of charge the news from the world's leading and local news agencies.

The media tend to avoid any coverage of the family and private life of the president, prime minister, or local leaders in the regions. Also off-limits are coverage of corruption in the highest echelons of power, the activities of special services, and any business partners with whom a media company has an agreement. "These topics used to be written about in the newspapers and discussed openly, but now people are even afraid to speak out loud in their own kitchens," Yusupov said. Mirsaidov confirmed that "regional correspondents are afraid to write critical articles for the central newspapers, fearing pressure from the local authorities."

The state news rarely shows emergency incidents, clashes, terrorist attacks, or natural disasters. According to the panelists, few Tajik media provide coverage of problems, HIV/AIDS, topics of informal groups, or sexual and religious minorities.

In 2017, the number of national press outlets increased by two newspapers, with 22 print media now published in the Uzbek and Kyrgyz languages. Regional newspapers published in Russian are more popular than those published in Uzbek. Alamshoev said that the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region has only one newspaper, *Sarikol*, in the language of national minorities, and that only comes out every six to eight weeks. According to Mamurzoda, part of the problem is staffing. "There

is no one to write in the Uzbek language," he said. "There are no Uzbek-speaking journalists, so these regional newspapers are closing down."

Issues concerning ethnic minorities are covered in small reports and then only rarely. They mainly touch on the problems of Eastern Gypsies (Lyuli) living in the western and southern parts of the country, and Lokaitsi living in the suburbs of Dushanbe. Since the year 2000, national minorities have had no representatives in parliament or the country's government.

According to the panelists, national minority media in Tajikistan are free to develop without restrictions. However, in a blow to diversity, fluency in the official language of Tajik recently has become compulsory for all state officials and the deputies of the two parliamentary chambers.

Three state television channels broadcast analytical and news programs in Russian and Uzbek once per day on Channel 1, Safina, and Bakhoriston. Radio station Ovozi Tochik broadcasts once a day in Uzbek, Russian, and Arabic. Channel 1 and the national information channel Jahonnamo also broadcast news programming in Arabic and English. Khalikjanova said that stories about world events are propagandistic. "Most often, foreign news reports on the state television channels show negative news about murders or emergency incidents; that is, not from the point of view of usefulness, but from that of political engagement."

The Tajik government still mandates subscriptions to the state-owned media. To secure renewals, editors themselves or their deputies go out to the regions.

To date, none of the state-owned media nor electronic media have correspondents abroad or beyond the central and eastern parts of the country. Only one independent print outlet, *ASIA-Plus*, has a presence in Washington, DC and London. The state

news agency Khovar has its own correspondents in two cities, Moscow and Ankara.

The division of the media sphere into state and independent entities leads to a polarization of opinions and antagonism between journalists. In the panelists' view, a solution would be creating more neutral public national print publications, public television stations, and public radio companies. Founding all such media would require passing legislative acts, however.

### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

1.48

**The economic situation, an underdeveloped advertising market, and the lack of a fully-fledged market policy all lend an unfavorable outlook for the media. Tajikistan's media sphere ceased to be self-supporting in 2015. Only a high level of professionalism and competitiveness can make periodicals profitable, according to the panelists. "Advertisers have reduced their participation in the market, because of the economic crisis in 2017," said Khalikjanova.**

Tajikistan's independent media do receive a large share of advertising from international and nonprofit organizations but still are unable to grow. They try to stay in the market by any means possible, including public relations contracts, increasing circulation, and arranging promotions, roundtables, and conferences. "Independent or private print media do not receive any state subsidies, although the Law on the Press and Other Mass Media contains a paragraph stating that the state can provide financial support to any media regardless of the form of ownership," Niyozov said.

### Independent media are well-managed businesses, allowing editorial independence.

#### BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS

- ▶ Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- ▶ Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- ▶ Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- ▶ Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- ▶ Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- ▶ Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- ▶ Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

Revenues and subscriptions from state-owned media are guaranteed. They receive funds from the state budget, and advertisers prefer state-owned media. In addition, state media have steady sources of budget supplements — compulsory subscriptions for state institutions, enterprises, schools, and universities; advertising; and paid announcements from state bodies, banks, and commercial companies with close ties to the government.

Since 2003, media advertising has been regulated under the Tajik law on advertising, which differentiates between state and non-state mass media. Advertisements from government agencies are placed only in government print media or aired on state radio and television channels. Media organizations work directly with advertisers, making no use of the potential of advertising agencies. For advertisement placement, clients usually establish

arrangements with those publications that have large circulations. *ASIA-Plus* has its own advertising sales department, which sets its own prices.

Advertisements in independent media fill 30–40 percent of print space and 10 percent of air time. For state media, the figures are 20 percent for print space and 30 percent for air time. Advertising agencies such as Tak, A-Media, Tamosho, O, and Bale work in Dushanbe, and all buy advertising from the same media organizations.

The panelists said that almost the entire advertising market has gone over to state television, which usually charges commercially nonviable prices and where the advertising revenue distribution system is opaque. According to official data, the 2017 advertising market was about \$7 million. Dodobaev argued, however, that unbiased statistics are not available. “In Tajikistan, there is no objective marketing assessment of the advertising market or estimate of the monetary amounts that are circulating in the advertising market,” he said.

The largest share of the advertising market is made up of pharmaceutical companies, pharmacies, and private medical centers, followed by Internet providers, banks, household appliance distributors, and mobile operators. Out of all the state enterprises, only the Tajik Aluminum Company (TALCO) and the airline Tajik Air use advertising. Many print media receive Internet and mobile communications services in exchange for print advertising.

Internet advertising has developed through the use of crawlers for data gathering. “A number of companies began to advertise in the social network Facebook,” Tadjibaeva said. She added that pricing for Facebook placements is cheaper than in Tajikistan’s print media: Advertising on Facebook costs \$7 a week but in print media it is \$27/week.

All four state television channels have advertising sales departments, as do the media

holdings of Oila, Charkhi Gardun, and Orieno-Media, and radio stations ASIA-Plus, Imruz, Vatan, Love Radio, and Khovar. Most of the commercials on state media are lifted directly from Russian, Turkish, or Iranian advertising and are merely dubbed into the Tajik language.

Regionally, print media have hardly any advertisements. Most advertising clients make use of outdoor banners and street billboards instead. Often companies generate publicity using event agencies, bypassing the mass media.

**“Independent or private print media do not receive any state subsidies, although the Law on the Press and Other Mass Media contains a paragraph stating that the state can provide financial support to any media regardless of the form of ownership,” Niyozov said.**

Newspapers are sometimes involved in “black PR,” a practice in which business competitors are pitted against each other. The newspaper prepares negative public relations materials about the competitors and then agrees not to print it for a price.

The total circulation of all newspapers produced in Tajikistan in 2017 did not exceed 120,000 — a 40,000 drop in circulation from 2016. “Readers’ interest in newspapers continues to decline, because many print media offer Internet sites and social network pages,” Mirzo said. Most regional newspapers appear irregularly, perhaps once or twice a month, because the local budgets they depend on have suffered during the financial crisis.

Regional state newspapers that remain profitable are *Diyor* *Tursunzoda*, published in the city of Tursunzade, with financial support



from TALCO and a circulation of 3,500; *Hakikati Sughd* from the Sughd Region, with a circulation of 5,000; and *New Khatlon*, in Tajik and Russian, with a circulation of 8,000. “Before the crisis, the circulation of our newspaper *Faraj* was 8,300. Now it approaches 6,000,” Niyozov said. Its staff was reduced from eight to five journalists, and the advertising department works mainly on small contracts for up to \$700. Yusupov commented that some private newspapers increase their circulation by means of surveys and competitions.

Successful development as a media business is hampered continually by legal and bureaucratic obstacles, high taxes, increased scrutiny by fiscal and other regulatory bodies, and unauthorized inspections. The panelists noted that these checks usually occur after critical articles are published. They also said that some large companies pay the media for silence, so that nothing is written about these companies.

Tajik media rarely have formal management structures; usually the “management system” is just decisions made by the media director or company owner. Almost all non-state media are managed without business plans, marketing research, or strategies for capital investments. “Everyone tries to survive as best they can,” Tadjibaeva commented.

Panelists from the regions reported that during subscription campaigns, subscriptions go to the country’s state publications first, then to the regional and city newspapers. *Faraj* and *Sumak*, the sociopolitical newspapers in the Tajik language that are opposed to the authorities, only have 1,700 subscribers, with a circulation of 4,000–6,500 copies. This is extremely small compared to *Minbari Khalk*, the newspaper of the ruling People’s Democratic Party. It has a circulation of 40,000, more than 35,000 subscribers, and an annual subscription income of 3.3 million somoni (\$375,000). All print

media organizations regard circulation growth and profitability as evidence of popularity.

According to Karshiboev, the financial transactions of state radio and television channels are nontransparent. “They have a special account into which funds from advertising and other commercial activities are credited. This account is not audited,” he said. The panelists also pointed out that the Internet sites of the television Channel 1 and Safina are not in the .tj county domain, but are located offshore in Macau — giving the impression that this money is being laundered.

On the subject of marketing research, panelists noted that agencies mostly work at an amateur level, and the figures and other information they provide are not always reliable. “Once again, because of low wages, research companies do not always attract professional analysts, and their conclusions are adjusted to suit the needs of the customer, so the research is biased from the beginning,” said Yusupov. In addition, professional marketing is an expensive luxury that none of the media can afford.

Despite long-standing discussions among media stakeholders, Tajikistan has no independent audit-circulation body. The ratings and statistics of Internet page visits and users do not instill public confidence. Some sites count only the number of views and not the number of visitors, and apart from a few exceptions, media editorial offices do not analyze the traffic to their websites. However, site visits can be tracked from many statistical resources, and media managers and journalists understand all the criteria used for rating sites. Television and radio broadcasting companies compile their own ratings.

While all metrics for *ASIA-Plus* newspaper are open, not all Tajik media’s metrics are. “Thus, it is impossible to conduct research and compare the ratings of print media,” Tadjibaeva said. Circulations of printed publications are indicated in output data,

but in 2017, the numbers were inflated in order to retain advertisers.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

1.95

**Tajikistan has several trade unions, the largest of which is the Union of Journalists. Its board includes the heads of other journalistic organizations, such as NANSMIT, the Media Council, and the Media Alliance of Tajikistan. All journalistic organizations provide legal advice to journalists, promote their professional growth, and offer retraining.**

NGOs cooperate with journalists, but do not always protect them. Currently in Tajikistan, 17 branches of local NGOs related to various media issues are in operation. Thirteen journalistic associations and foundations and one creative union are also registered in the country.

Professional associations of journalists and other organizations try to defend freedom of speech, Ergasheva said, noting, “They make statements about infringements of journalists’ rights, but only international organizations listen to them.” According to the panelists, many media associations are powerless in the face of government actions, given that the associations cannot counteract them.

Several organizations deal with the protection of journalists’ freedoms. For example, the Independent Center for Human Rights constantly provides free legal advice and assistance to editorial staff and journalists on a project-by-project basis.

In recent years, professional associations have been established to protect journalists’ rights, ethical standards, and electronic media. The panelists

said that these associations play important roles in the development of mass media resources through advisory information; legal assistance and protection; and educational participation in conferences, seminars, and training sessions.

Tajikistan has no business associations for journalists, however. The only association that might fit into this category is the Association of Television and Radio Broadcasters. This association was created by the Internews Network project and includes 19 television and production studios as members. The association has grant support but weak management, so it has not yet made significant progress in advancing media interests.

Karshiboev said that NANSMIT is composed

36 media companies and issues licenses to independent freelance journalists. He continued, "In 2017, we signed an official partnership agreement with Reporters without Borders. We are now the authorized representatives of this organization for Central Asia — Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan."

The panelists noted that all media organizations have a statutory duty to protect the freedom of speech and the independence of the media. However, of all the media associations, Mirsaidov said, "NANSMIT, in its defense of journalists' rights, is the one that responds most effectively to any problem in the media." The Union of Journalists, which now has 2,400 members, is much more passive, according to the panelists.

Despite limited financial resources, NANSMIT and its partners held several events in 2017 on digital security. Karshiboev said, "In connection with the restriction of information access and the fact that, under the pretext of combating extremism and terrorism, control over the media and journalists has increased — which includes tracking our correspondence and email accounts — we held two conferences and three training sessions on legal, digital, and physical security for journalists. This was with the support of the Embassy of the Netherlands and Reporters without Borders."

The Sughd Region Journalists' Club operates successfully in the city of Khujand and under NANSMIT's patronage. "There, on premises allocated by the city's mayor, journalists meet regularly to discuss any pressing issues or problems. Officials are also invited to attend," Dodobaev said.

According to the panelists, no professional association of journalists can truly work effectively if funding is from membership fees alone — associations must apply for project-related grants and be supported by partner organizations to improve

operations. Authorities also cautiously view media organizations upon registration, especially if a charter contains any item on the protection of journalists' rights.

With regard to unions for journalists or media workers, Karshiboev said that a trade union of media workers in the Khatlon region has been in operation for three years and has 150 members. In the Sughd Region and Dushanbe, union initiatives are still hindered by the absence of a good leader, panelists reported. They also said that media owners are resistant to development of unions and their defense of members' labor rights and social benefits.

Last year, the state created yet another obstacle for NGOs, under which even media companies must now account to the Ministry of Justice for grants received. At any time, the ministry may audit the monies to verify the grant's target spending.

Eight universities from around Tajikistan produce about 300 journalists annually. More than enough journalism students are graduating yearly, in the capital as well as in regional centers. But the panelists noted that less than 10-15 percent of graduates enter the profession, as most of them take jobs outside Tajikistan.

Even though journalism training programs in higher-education institutions are currently undergoing improvement, the present level of training is outdated and inadequate. The country does not have enough professional journalists that can teach at universities, especially at regional schools, and many universities do not encourage students to practice in the independent media. Commenting on his experience at *Faraj*, Niyozov said, "We are ready to hire graduates, but all of them have to be extensively retrained, and none of them want to receive what they regard as a low salary."

Ergasheva had suggestions for improving journalism education. "Attention needs to be paid to

## Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media.

### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- ▶ Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- ▶ Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- ▶ Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- ▶ Sources of newsprint NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- ▶ Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- ▶ Printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- ▶ Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- ▶ Information and communication technology infrastructure sufficiently meets the needs of media and citizens.

the training of personnel that all media require — not just independent and state media. This requires an increase in short-term thematic courses by specialization and include the involvement of local and foreign specialists,” she said. According to her, the Media Academy of Tajikistan ran 13 such courses and four mastery classes in 2017. Seventy-five journalists from state and independent media were trained.

At this time, journalism students can study abroad only on a private basis, with various programs in the United States, Germany, United Kingdom, Czech Republic, China, and Turkey. Students at public universities can only study abroad in the CIS countries — Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine — and the government sets quotas for workers in the Ministry of Education and Science. In the last three years, these quotas for training abroad have been restricted to just those specialties necessary for work in the economic sector.

Yusupov lamented that a prerequisite for international training opportunities is familiarity with the English or Russian language. “Within Tajikistan, almost all training and seminars are held in the national language. Many journalists do not speak Russian well, so they are unable to participate in courses or in training programs abroad in order to upgrade their qualifications,” he said.

Mamurzod noted that the journalism faculties at Kurgan-Tyube University and Kulyab University have two student production studios. Khujand State University, Tajik National University, and Russian-Tajik Slavonic University in Dushanbe also have working student radio and television studios that produce their own programs.

For students that want to work in printed media after graduation, very few school facilities are available. Tadjibaeva said that *ASIA-Plus* has a program to make up for this shortfall. “Every year,

at least 10 to 12 students intern at *ASIA-Plus* to gain practical experience. But in the last two years, not one of them has later come to work for us.”

Apart from Russian-Tajik Slavonic University and Khujand State University, schools do not offer courses in specializations. According to the panelists, Tajik media badly need multilevel preparatory training for analysts on economic topics, political science, and legal education, and would benefit from internships with colleagues in neighboring countries. The journalistic field is currently dominated by professionals from other disciplines: philologists, orientalist, historians, translators, lawyers, and economists. “About 70 percent of journalists working for both state and independent media do not have a journalism diploma,” Karshiboev said.

**“Within Tajikistan, almost all training and seminars are held in the national language. Many journalists do not speak Russian well, so they are unable to participate in courses or in training programs abroad in order to upgrade their qualifications,” Yusupov said.**

The most popular forms of training are mastery classes on Internet journalism, the operations of social networking sites, and webinars. All courses and mastery classes are free of charge, and access to them is not restricted. They are run by NANSMIT, Internews Network, and the Independent School of Journalism Tajikistan—21st Century (owned and operated by *ASIA-Plus* for training their own employees as well), and the public organization Khoma. NANSMIT, Internews, and the Deutsche Welle Academy also provide useful short-term and longer-term training courses on the safety of journalists in emergency situations, digital security,

environmental safety, investigative journalism, and multimedia coverage of border conflicts.

According to the panelists, convincing journalists from the state media to attend training seminars has been difficult, as state publication owners and editors do not yet accept international standards of journalism. With president Rahmon’s founding of the Media Academy of Tajikistan, however, government publications have begun to send their employees to the academy regularly.

Remote regions of Tajikistan do not have effective operating systems for print media distribution. The Association of Press Distributors, formed in 2012 with OSCE support, was intended to improve national distribution. However, it went bankrupt before it could accomplish its goals, due to internal conflicts among the print media owners.

The channels for print media distribution are still politicized. Kiosks owned by Tajikmatbut often do not sell issues of independent opposition newspapers. The panelists reported that at times, newspaper issues are completely withdrawn from kiosks after an outlet publishes a critical article. Only the government media have a centralized system for delivering their newspapers and magazines, through the state enterprise Tajikpechat. Independent print media are forced to distribute their circulation through private distributors. Newspaper collection depends on the seasonal conditions of the distributor’s region, however. As one panelist described, in Dushanbe and other large cities, elderly people sell newspapers and magazines to pad their modest pensions.

According to the panelists, the most popular newspapers in the country are *ASIA-Plus*, *Faraj*, *Samak*, and *USSR*. In Khorog, the most popular newspaper is still *ASIA-Plus*, which retails at six somoni (\$0.53), against a wholesale price of three somoni (\$0.27). Readers also prefer this newspaper

because it is printed in Russian.

Tajikistan has 272 private printing houses and 37 state printing houses. Most of them are located in Dushanbe. Regional presses produce lower-quality products than those in the capital. Almost all independent media are printed at Oila media company's press, which is owned by Sharif Khamdampur.

According to the panelists, none of the private print houses can be considered truly independent, since they are susceptible to government influence. The government imposes political biases so that certain publications are left with no access to equipment. "It has been the practice for many years that if a newspaper does not suit the authorities, then none of the printing houses will print it," Karshiboev said.

Typography is a profitable business, and all the leading private printers purchase their own paper, plates, and film. The private printing houses in Dushanbe (Megatrend, Oila, and Mushfiki) have high-quality equipment. The printing house complex Sharki Ozod, owned by the executive office of the Tajik president, provides services at an affordable price but lower quality. Sharki Ozod and three or four additional companies supply newsprint and plates, and together set going prices. Private printing house rates are usually 5–10 percent higher than Sharki Ozod's, but the quality is slightly better, and the private houses have color printing facilities. And as Niyozov reported, "Sharki Ozod makes a lot of mistakes, and sometimes part of the print run is stolen from there."

Sources of equipment for the media are not politicized, but media face barriers with importing equipment such as transmitters for television and radio stations. "Import duties are very high for independent broadcasters, while at the same time, for state broadcasters, there are no restrictions on

buying equipment from abroad," said Dodobaev.

Not all independent television and radio stations have their own transmitters. If they do, they are usually low power — only up to 1.5 kilowatts. The state-owned CS and Teleradiocom have monopolies on frequency allocation and distribution channels. At any given time, the authorities can interrupt or close down the broadcasts of non-state electronic media, which rent their channels from the state.

Under the auspices of the state operator Tajiktelecom, the Tajik authorities created the Unified Switching Center (EKC) in 2016. EKC controls the incoming and outgoing traffic of international telecommunications services and the Internet. EKC's startup cost the country \$50 million. The authorities claimed that the EKC was established in the interests of security, to fight against terrorism and extremism.

In mid-January 2018, CS directed all service providers to run the Internet exclusively via the state data transmission network, which operates under the brand name Tojnet and belongs to the state-owned telecommunications operator Tajiktelecom. Prior to that, providers accessed the Internet through Kyrgyzstan and other countries. Mobile operators have expressed dissatisfaction with this regulation, as now they cannot purchase Internet access outside the country at the deeply cheaper rate they had. This has had a concomitant effect on the pricing structure; Tajikistan's Internet access is now considered to be the most expensive within CIS territory.

The authorities have stated repeatedly that all control measures in the field of telecommunications and the Internet are aimed at preventing the radicalization of society. But the panelists said that they believe that CS is pursuing economic benefits by becoming a monopolistic provider in the arena of Internet traffic. The authorities have obtained full control over Internet streams and

can now exert pressure on mobile companies and Internet providers.

Cable broadcasting is subject to compulsory licensing. The switchover to digital broadcasting has allowed cable operators to deliver more information from different channels. Currently, Tajikistan has six cable channels — two each in Dushanbe and Khujand, one each in Tursunzad and Kairakkum.

In the transition to digital broadcasting, the state television channels changed to another satellite. This shift prevents more than 20 percent of the country's inhabitants from being able to watch those channels. All the television and radio towers belong to CS and Tajiktelektradiocom; independent stations that have their own transmitters have to rent a state tower.

More than 300 websites are still blocked in Tajikistan. According to the panelists, the authorities engage in electronic tracking; IP address identification; bill scrutiny; hacking of social media accounts on Facebook, Odnoklassniki, Twitter, and VKontakte; and eavesdropping on conversations that opposition politicians and journalists have made on cellphones or via Skype and Viber.

Mobile networks are used for communication, Internet access, receiving SMS advertising, and streaming music. However, when electricity is turned off, mobile Internet communication, fixed Internet, and 3G and 4G transmitters are also switched off.

In general, the situation in the field of media development and freedom of speech has changed. The level of self-censorship has increased critically, and the professionalism of a number of media has faltered by publishing materials at the level of yellow press, in order to boost circulation. The Tajik authorities constantly restrict access to information, especially through the Internet, blocking the websites of opposition media and popular social networks in the name of national security.



## T A J I K I S T A N

The panelists concluded that Tajikistan media can overcome their technical and professional underdevelopment with the assistance of international donor organizations, the advancement of media associations, the strict observance of media laws, and the emergence of political freedom.

### List of Panel Participants

**Kurbon Alamshoev**, director, Kuhkhoi Pomir, Khorog

**Mahmudjon Dodobaev**, director, SM-1, Khujand

**Zarina Ergasheva**, editor, Migrant.tj, Dushanbe

**Zinatullo Ismoilzoda**, director, Media Academy of Tajikistan; chair, Union of Journalists of Tajikistan, Dushanbe

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

**Lola Khalikjanova**, project manager, Institute for War & Peace Reporting (IWPR), Dushanbe

**Nosirjon Mamurzoda**, lecturer in journalism, Kurgan-Tube State University; deputy editor, New Khatlon, Kurgan-Tube

**Rajab Mirzo**, media expert, Khoma, Dushanbe

**Negmatullo Mirsaidov**, editor, Varorud, Khujand

**Khurshed Niyozov**, director, Center for Journalistic Investigations; chief editor, Faraj, Dushanbe

**Zebo Tadjibaeva**, executive director, ASIA-Plus Media Holding, Dushanbe

**Nabi Yusupov**, director, Media Consulting, Dushanbe

### Moderator & Author

**Lydia Isamova**, media expert;

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