

# ARMENIA



## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2019

Tracking Development  
of Sustainable  
Independent Media  
Around the World



# ARMENIA

## AT A GLANCE

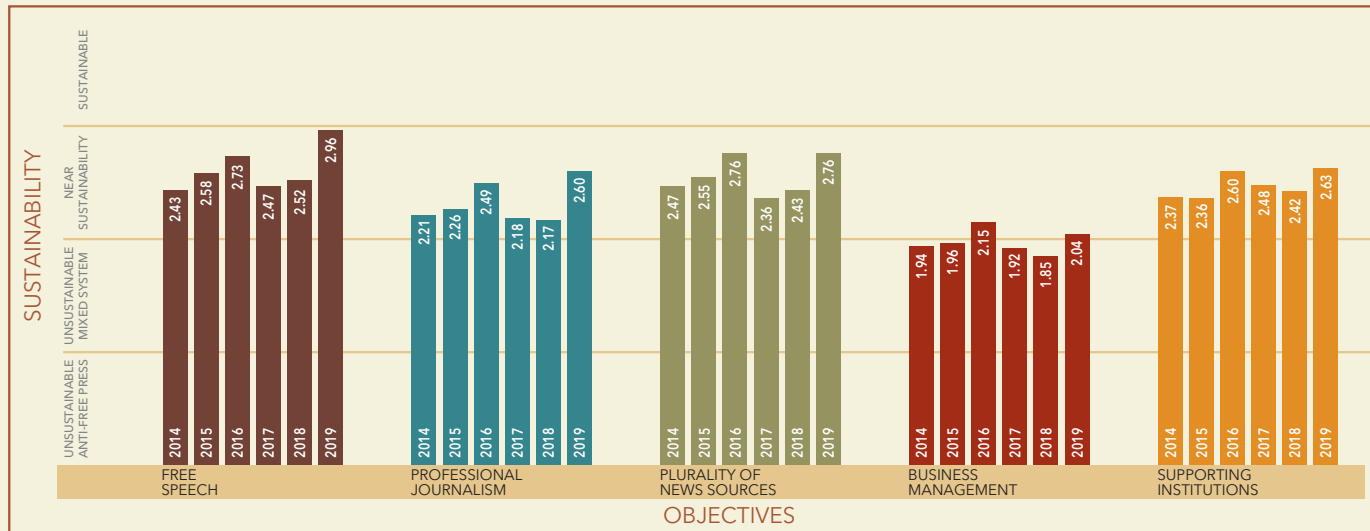
### GENERAL

- **Population:** 3,038,217 (*CIA World Factbook*, July 2018 est.)
- **Capital city:** Yerevan
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Armenian 98.1%, Yezidi (Kurd) 1.2%, Russian 0.5%, other 0.3% (*CIA World Factbook*, 2011 est.)
- **Religions (% of population):** Armenian Apostolic 92.6%, Evangelical 1%, other 2.4%, none 1.1%, unspecified 2.9% (*CIA World Factbook*, 2011 est.)
- **Languages (% of population):** Armenian (official) 97.9%, Kurdish (spoken by Yezidi minority) 1%, other 1% (*CIA World Factbook*, 2011 est.)
- **GNI (2016 - Atlas):** \$11.714 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2017)
- **GNI per capita (2017 - PPP):** \$10,060 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2017)
- **Literacy rate:** 99.7% (male 99.7%, female 99.6%) (*CIA World Factbook*, 2015 est.)
- **President or top authority:** Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan (since May 8, 2018) (\*This date will change; the new National Assembly will elect a new prime minister (almost certainly the same [Pashinyan].)

### MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations, Internet news portals:** Print: over 36; Radio stations: 20; Television stations: 17 (10 channels in Yerevan, the capital, including two Russian relay channels, CNN and MIR, intergovernmental television of CIS; seven stations with nationwide coverage, including one public station and RTR Planeta (Russian channel); 19 television stations in regions (8 digital, 11 with analogue licenses extended till next license tenders and one public station in Shirak region); Internet news portals: over 200
- **Broadcast ratings:** Most popular television stations are Armenia TV (private), Shant TV (private), and A TV, H1 (public). (assessed by panelists)
- **News agencies:** ARKA, Armenpress, Arminfo, MediaMax, Photolur
- **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** \$30–36 million (estimated by panelists)
- **Internet users:** 1.89 million (*CIA World Factbook*, 2016 est.)
- **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Average reported circulation is 1,000–3,000.

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### 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.



The Armenian revolution has injected hope for positive change into the media community. Although the country remains in the near sustainable category, every indicator improved from 2018, with the overall score increasing from 2.28 to 2.60. The most noteworthy change was the spike in the freedom of speech objective, which is now only .04 below the sustainable category. This jump can be explained by increased optimism that public pressure will create the political will that is needed to enforce the constitution's freedom of speech provision. The business management objective also crossed into the near sustainable category for the first time in two years due to a small opening in the advertising market after the revolution.

A momentous revolution, dubbed “velvet” by its leader, Nikol Pashinyan, changed the Armenian political landscape, turned the media world upside down, and made 2018 a truly unprecedented year in Armenia’s modern history. The then-ruling Republican Party triggered the revolution by nominating Serzh Sargsyan, Armenia’s president since 2008, as prime minister in March 2018—despite the fact that he had pledged not to run for that office after Armenia’s transition to a parliamentary system of government in 2015. A vast majority of Armenians rebelled and followed Pashinyan, of the opposition bloc Yelk (A Way Out), in civil disobedience and peaceful demonstrations that intensified when the National Assembly elected Sargsyan prime minister on March 17.

Demonstrations grew steadily in number and intensity; people blocked streets around Yerevan by day and gathered in the main square in the evenings. On April 22, Sargsyan and Pashinyan met in front of media, but the talks failed. Pashinyan had come solely to negotiate the terms of Sargsyan’s resignation, while Sargsyan came with the intent to negotiate the end of the demonstrations. Pashinyan said that Sargsyan had lost touch with reality. Hours after Sargsyan left the meeting, police arrested Pashinyan and some of his supporters—a move that fueled more demonstrations. The following day, Pashinyan and his supporters were released.

Hours later, Sargsyan resigned with a letter stating, “Pashinyan was right; I was wrong.” Eventually, on May 8, the National Assembly elected Pashinyan prime minister.

The National Assembly was later dissolved in November, as Pashinyan pushed for early parliamentary elections in a bid to replace his political opponents who maintained a majority in the National Assembly. The effort succeeded: Pashinyan’s My Step alliance won a landslide victory with 70.43 percent of the vote. Two other parties made it to the parliament: Gagik Tsarukyan’s Prosperous Armenia party with 8.27 percent and the Bright Armenia party with 6.37 percent of votes. The old-timers of the parliament, the Republican party and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, were shut out.

Although Pashinyan used Facebook livestreams to address and coordinate the people, the online media provided an instrumental push, streaming live from the streets and demonstrations, and “eyes from everywhere” reports of provocations and violence. “Everyone was a walking media outlet; everyone was streaming live,” Suren Deheryan, chair of Journalists for the Future, observed. The unfolding drama gave reporters an unprecedented chance to develop their live reporting skills. The historic revolution gave the media community a new spirit of hope for change, reflected in higher panelist scores for the year.

**OBJECTIVE 1:  
FREEDOM OF  
SPEECH**

2.96

Especially with respect to freedom of speech, the panelists drew a line between “before” and “after” the revolution. Constitutional provisions in Armenia guaranteed free speech before the revolution, but lack of enforcement had long been a serious issue, as previous MSI studies recorded. Whether enforcement will improve, however, remains to be seen during the upcoming months and years. The independence and integrity of courts, headed mostly by the same judges who were tightly connected with the previous regime, are open questions. However, the panelists expressed a sense of optimism given the political will of the current government, and the prime minister in particular. “The situation has changed,” Nelli Babayan, a reporter for Aravot, said, “Now media sue each other, but what are the courts like? I cannot assess this yet. The revolution took place, but has it taken place in the courts as well?” Avetik Ishkhanyan, founder and president of the Helsinki Committee of Armenia, said he believes the courts are now following the instructions of the authorities. However, Samvel Martirosyan, a media and IT security expert, said, “We haven’t had enough (media) cases yet to be able to assess the independence of courts.”

Edgar Vardanyan, editor-in-chief of detector.am, pointed to signs that the previous system of “telephone justice” (court rulings that followed calls from the authorities) will not be of the scope and intensity seen before the velvet revolution. The judges might opt for “self-censorship” instead, he suggested. “However,” he continued, “...it would also

be true to say that the judges have not changed, and it is impossible to establish democratic institutes overnight. A lot depends on the political will (of the authorities). On the other hand, we have witnessed some decisions that countered the interests of the current authorities but, instead, were most probably ‘negotiated with the judges’ by representatives of the previous authorities. Or, if there were no negotiations, it would prove that the courts have started functioning independently,” he added.

Society places a premium on freedom of speech and the media, even more so after the revolution, where they saw palpable results. The panelists debated whether some incidents qualify as free speech violations, though. Martirosyan believes that leveraging public pressure is seriously undermined, because most of the organizations tasked with protecting media rights have ties to the executive branch—a major conflict of interest. “A vivid example,” Martirosyan said, “is the disgraceful yerevan.today case.” He explained that the authorities, relying on a flimsy excuse, raided the outlet and seized some of its equipment. “The last time this happened in Armenia was in 1994. Rights advocates have been very unwilling to react to this case, and a discriminatory approach is obvious here,” Martirosyan said. Yerevan.today is thought to be associated with Robert Kocharyan, the second president of Armenia after independence, who was believed to be behind the leaked wiretapping of a conversation between the head of the National Security Service (NSS) and the Special Investigative Service (SIC). The NSS assumed that yerevan.today was instrumental in the wiretapping, as it published the content first.

“When confronted in private conversations, (media defense) NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] responded, ‘Oh, come on, they (yerevan.today) are not a media outlet,’” Martirosyan added.

Ishkhanyan agreed, “I also asked media rights advocate NGOs why they didn’t voice any concerns, and they responded with vague, even preposterous, answers,” he said.

“In terms of government pressure on the media, the situation has improved ... but in terms of public pressure on media, it has gotten worse,” Martirosyan commented, with many editors complaining that the public uses Facebook to exert pressure on the media through forceful insults and criticism in comment sections.

**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.

Media licensing applies only to broadcast media. Armenia's licensing body is made up of eight members, four of whom are appointed by the president and the rest are selected by the National Assembly. These eight members then elect the head of the body from among themselves for a term of six years. The most recent head began his term in May 2013.

Aside from licensing, market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries. That has been true for many years now. "The situation has been stable after having undergone many changes of the government. This has been institutionalized," Vardanyan said. There are no tax breaks for media, other than for newspapers, which enjoy exemption from value-added taxes.

Most of the past year's crimes against media professionals were recorded during the spring protests—and they included police attacks on the media. However, these were not as severe as crimes during the protests of 2015 and 2016.

Most of those earlier cases were either closed for various reasons (mostly owing to a lack of substantial evidence), or they drag on in court. Few, if any, verdicts have been achieved, even after the revolution. Ishkhanyan finds it interesting that so many cases are still under investigation, making him think they will lead nowhere. Vardanyan expressed hope that after local parliamentary elections in December 2018 and the introduction of the transitional justice system, many cases will be reopened or revisited, and the culprits punished. However, Martirosyan said, "I do not believe there are enough lawyers in the court system to investigate all these cases; they are so swamped with corruption cases that there is no time for these yet."

On April 17, a group of youth armed with bars, some wearing medical masks to hide their identities, smashed street signs and traffic lights in downtown

Yerevan. Arevik Sahakyan, editor-in-chief of factor.am—headquartered right above the scene—rushed out and started livestreaming the violence. When the youths noticed, they attacked Sahakyan, dragged her, tried to rip her badge, and hit her and the cameraman, Gevorg Martirosyan. A criminal case was filed and is still under investigation, but the hunt for the perpetrators continues.

Two days later, plainclothes police beat Tirayr Muradyan, a sut.am journalist, when he tried to film them. On April 20, Tehmine Yenokyan, an Iragir.am reporter, was filming people attacking protesters blocking the streets in one of Yerevan's boroughs when the unidentified attackers turned on her, hitting her on the head.

**"The situation has changed," Nelli Babayan, a reporter for Aravot, said, "Now media sue each other, but what are the courts like? I cannot assess this yet. The revolution took place, but has it taken place in the courts as well?"**

Then on April 21, police assaulted Radio Liberty's broadcast producer, Anatoly Yeghiazaryan, while he filmed them dispersing the protesters in one of Yerevan's squares. He was pushed to the ground, kicked in the stomach, and beaten, despite showing his press badge. Earlier in the day, another Radio Liberty journalist, Arus Hakobyan, was covering protests on the outskirts of Artashat when a man in plainclothes attacked her—right in front of police officers, who did nothing to stop the attack.

The law protects the editorial independence of the public media; however, the panelists have observed over the years that in reality the public

media—especially public television—have not served the public. Instead, public media have functioned as a government propaganda tool, headed by a board stocked with political appointees. Although the situation had been improving, with the panelists noticing significant progress in freedom for the public media in recent years, they had pointed to the persistence of informal blacklists banning people with certain views or affiliations from appearing on public television.

Since the revolution, the panelists have noticed unprecedented changes to the public television service—and the blacklists seem to have vanished. Any view, any opinion, any politician can appear on public television today, they said.

"I can't remember a time when the public service was as free as it is now, but what happens in the future depends on whether it truly understands what it means to be public—or it continues to exert pressure. This is not clear yet," Ishkhanyan said.

Still, some panelists believe that public television now favors the current authorities—with little, if any, criticism of the current government. The OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission's (EOM) interim report in November 2018 noted, "The public television, financed by the state budget, continues to be perceived as having a pro-government editorial policy. While several ODIHR EOM interlocutors noted improvements in media pluralism since the April 2018 events, some stated that public discourse is not conducive to criticism towards the acting government and, in particular, the acting Prime Minister."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Armenia, Early Parliamentary Elections, 9 December 2018: Interim Report." OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, November 28, 2018. Accessed at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/armenia/404591> on January 10, 2019.

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The decriminalization of libel in 2010 made it a civil law issue, immediately leading to an avalanche of cases against media outlets—and endangering the survival of some. At the end of 2011, a constitutional court ruling put an end to this, stating that monetary compensation should not be the primary penalty; rather, an apology or retraction should suffice, and financial compensation, if applied, should be commensurate with the outlet's financial resources. The following year the situation normalized, marking an end to dramatic cases threatening the existence of accused media. Courts now tend to favor the accused media rather than the claimants. In an example this year, the director of a polyclinic claimed AMD 2 million (\$4,132) and public refutation of defamation by *armur.am* over its article headlined "Made money on transporting corpses," accusing the director of charging extra money to transport dead bodies. The court cited the European Court of Human Rights' stance that in performing its duty to impart information and ideas on matters of public interest, the press is entitled to recourse to a degree of exaggeration or even provocation.

Other fresh cases include *news.am* suing *1in.am* reporter Sona Harutyunyan over her Facebook post linking the outlet with Kocharyan. *News.am* sued for AMD 2 million (\$4,132) and a retraction with public apology. *News.am* also claimed the same amount of money in damages to its business reputation, and a retraction by *Haykakan Zhamanak* for his article inferring that Kocharyan acquired *news.am* and a number of other media outlets.

Acting Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan also filed a claim against Boris Tamoyan, *politik.am*'s editor-in-chief, over an article claiming that Avinyan used marijuana at work.

The panelists noted, though, that civil libel cases could improve efforts to fight the spread of false information, which seems to be proliferating.

"We can consider these processes positive, provided the courts function independently and come up with fair verdicts," Ishkhanyan said.

Access to official information is mixed. Whereas before the revolution state officers were reluctant to disclose certain information, now the government representatives responsible for providing information sometimes lack the requisite ability or competence. Some panelists noted that a sudden increase in the volume of requested information after the revolution could explain this problem, as hopeful journalists began requesting more information—leading to jamming, similar to a DDOS attack.

"The minister vs. spokesperson correlations are at times also unclear; sometimes the minister takes the role of the spokesperson, the spokesperson takes the role of the minister," observed Martirosyan. "A lot of things are aired live, but press releases are less frequent—and journalists cannot watch all the livestreams and then skim the necessary information. There's no clear communication strategy," he added.

Media outlets' access to and use of local and international news and news sources is unrestricted by law or other means. The only issue remaining is the language barrier, which forces most Armenian journalists and media outlets to use Russian language media sources over western language alternatives—risking that international news will be presented through the prism of Russian propaganda.

Entry into the journalism field is free, and the government imposes no licensing or restrictions for journalists. This has been true for many years in the country.

### OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

2.60

**The panelists reported some controversial developments related to the quality of reporting. Journalists working in the field received an unprecedented chance to hone their skills during the April revolution, but the collision of conflicting camps, views, agendas, and fake news had a negative effect on objectivity. There are certainly many journalists who continue to verify and fact-check their material, but numerous others do not try to be objective and get all sides to a story; instead, they appear bent on delivering news through the lens of their own agendas.**

Some journalists became involved in protests and the political process, and ultimately ran for parliamentary seats. "When an editor-in-chief runs for an MP slot, I cannot assume his impartiality," Martirosyan said. "As I see it, today's problem in Armenian media is less fake news and more reflective of a global problem of impartiality in the media. Journalists are either MP candidates, or in the government, or hired to work against the government; the whole field is off its axis, with few journalists left trying to maintain objectivity," he added. "The recent elections had a negative influence on the media field, because a lot of good journalists and media professionals became involved in politics. It's good for politics, but for the media field it's a great loss," he said. "We need new, quality professionals (in the media)," Vardanyan agreed. Independent experts and analysts who are not associated with any of the political parties are needed as well.

Journalist associations in Armenia have developed ethical standards similar to broadly accepted standards developed by international

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professional journalist associations. However, these standards are not widely accepted and upheld. Individual media outlets also have their own codes of ethical conduct—some in writing, others less formal.

The panelists cited the publication of a photo of a general in jail awaiting trial as an example of a violation of ethical standards. It first appeared in *Haykakan Zhamanak*, and then a multitude of other media outlets posted it as well. “Later, *Haykakan Zhamanak* took it off and apologized, but when the others removed it they didn’t apologize; they just wrote that *Haykakan Zhamanak* apologized, thus not taking any responsibility for posting it as well,” Deheryan observed.

Media professionals also accept payments in exchange for certain types of coverage, mostly with the authorization and knowledge of the editors. Additionally, media often fail to make clear distinctions between news reporting and “advertorial” placements to alert readers to the fact that the latter is sponsored content.

Self-censorship continues as well. “Isn’t it clear that if a certain media is nourished from a certain place or subscribes to certain views, their editorial policy should be shaped accordingly and the reporters will self-censor themselves to conform to this policy?” Ishkhanyan asked. Reporters notice how their work is edited—to exclude certain people’s names, for example—draw their own conclusions, and self-censor, Babayan added. Martirosyan also mentioned a new factor driving even more self-censorship than before: public pressure from social media users, leading reporters, bloggers, and active social media users to avoid certain topics, people, or criticizing the current government. “Not everyone can stand being sworn at or verbally abused for a long time,” Martirosyan said. “I know of a case involving a well-known, quite reputable media outlet

that refrained from publishing a story because it was very critical (of the government),” Ishkhanyan added, “They decided not to mess with it”—not because they were afraid the government would come after them, but because of the public pressure. Martirosyan said, “At times I want to write about Nikol [Pashinyan, the current prime minister],” but then he talks himself out of it.

Journalists cover all key events and issues in Armenia; there are no truly taboo topics that the media avoid. Generally, though, if an event is not covered in one outlet, it is sure to be covered in another. The online media and, especially since the revolution, broadcast media cover most events—but depending on the ownership, the tints can be different. The media cover social issues, including religious and sexual minorities, but those topics still stir backlash from the public.

During the revolution, livestreams were mostly organized by the RFE/RL Armenian service, azatutyun.am, civilnet.am, and 1in.am. The broadcast outlets did not have their own streams but rather relayed the livestreams of other services—however, mostly not until the final days of the revolution, after Sargsyan’s resignation.

On pay levels for journalists, Gayane Mkrtchyan, a reporter for medialab.am, commented sarcastically that it must be because salary levels are so high that everyone moved to the parliament. “Other than the parliament, many journalists really want to migrate to other fields such as PR, press offices, NGOs, or other not so closely related fields,” Babayan said. There has not been a radical change in pay levels during the past few years. If anything, there might be cuts, because many outlets that had been sponsored by the people with ties to the previous regime will likely lose their funding. “I don’t think the (online) outlets can make enough money through advertising to be self-sustainable,” Martirosyan said, implying that

these are most probably sponsored by politically affiliated people.

To make ends meet, many journalists have to work for multiple outlets or take other jobs. More established journalists earn a lot more than new graduates. However, the panelists think it is unlikely that journalists would compromise ethics and seek payment in exchange for certain types of coverage without the knowledge of editors or owners, since Armenia’s media community is quite small and tight, and editors would quickly spot such behavior. Compared with other professionals, journalists earn just about the same—not more nor less.

**“As I see it, today’s problem in Armenian media is less fake news and more reflective of a global problem of impartiality in the media. Journalists are either MP candidates, or in the government, or hired to work against the government; the whole field is off its axis, with few journalists left trying to maintain objectivity,” he added**

Although in previous years the panelists often said that entertainment programming eclipsed news and information programming, this year they noted that news and information programming has become entertainment itself. This shift began during the heated pre-revolution days and still felt true by the time the MSI panel convened—a bit more than a week ahead of the National Assembly (Armenian parliament) snap elections. “The comedy shows aren’t interesting now, because the real, political life is more hilarious,” Deheryan joked.

Livestreams, ever since the revolution, are ubiquitous. Pashinyan made them so popular that now public figures who do not livestream stand out

more than those who do. Also, after the revolution, a culture of real, un-staged debates emerged. These were prevalent during the pre-election periods of municipal and parliamentary snap elections, when debates aired on almost all broadcast television channels and online media. Even public television organized a series of unprecedented debates, and the one featuring all of the candidates which lasted for more than three hours and was watched by a very large audience, the panelists noted. It was also broken up into pieces and memes shared on social media.

**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).

Armenia has long had strong enough facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing quality news. Many outlets now even have drones and equipment for livestreaming. Regional media, however, sometimes still rely on

old, worn-out equipment. “Outside of Yerevan, the situation is bad; you see the same old equipment, the same old furniture,” Deheryan observed. “I have been to different regional television outlets lately, and except for a few, the situation leaves much to be desired,” Ishkhanyan said. “The situation for newspapers (in regions) is very poor; previously we were able to receive grants and somehow meet the needs, but now the situation with the technical equipment is bad,” said Pap Hayrapetyan, editor-in-chief of Sevan.

Arevhat Amiryanyan, owner and editor-in-chief of *Vorotan*, commented that although her equipment is old, she managed to go live on Facebook from Sisian during the April protests.

Quality niche reporting and programming, with some exceptions, continues to be a problem in Armenia for the same reason as previous years—lack of funding from the market. Because Armenia is a small country, with a limited audience, it is difficult for any given niche media to be self-sustainable. The exceptions are usually in grant-sponsored fields (e.g., reporting on ecology or investigative reporting). “The quantity of niche reporting hasn’t experienced any increase; it is still quite rare, and the main reason remains the same—it takes a lot of financial, time, and professional resources,” Deheryan observed. “Fields like banking, economy, IT, telecommunications are strictly commercial, and one can rarely find truly independent coverage on these; they are mostly affiliated with companies,” Deheryan added. The same is true of healthcare reporting. There are many programs on healthcare, but the majority are infomercials featuring different clinics, hospitals, and medical services, rather than independent programs based on real audience interests.

**OBJECTIVE 3:  
PLURALITY  
OF NEWS**

2.76

**Armenia’s media landscape includes a plurality of news sources, offering multiple viewpoints. There are many news sources that people can freely check one against another. Nonetheless, it is rare for an individual media outlet to include multiple points of view. As a whole, however, Armenian media cover various political viewpoints. Readers should be able to organize their daily news consumption to gain a comprehensive picture of the news, Deheryan suggested. “Every media outlet wants to cover all the breaking news and hot topics from certain angles, so I think they do not miss an event. Compared to other countries in the region, I believe Armenia is very free in this respect, both for the reader and the media outlet,” he added.**

It would be safe to say—after the revolution, if not before—that media collectively cover almost all political viewpoints. There are multiple radio stations, newspapers (although dwindling in number and circulation), television stations, and myriad of online news sources. People increasingly rely on social networking tools, such as YouTube and Facebook, for news and information. Pashinyan publicized and popularized these to an unprecedented degree, using livestreams to address and coordinate his supporters before and throughout the revolution. He continued the practice post-revolution, even organizing Facebook Live public “press conferences,” where he would address questions with the most “likes” posted in the comments. This direct line with the audience, bypassing media, initially provoked some jealousy from the media. The live addresses—sometimes as frequent as several times



a day—tapered off once Pashinyan grew busier with governing, allowing the media to resume more of their traditional role.

**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.
- ▶ Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- ▶ Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are reliable.

“During the recent developments almost everyone depended on the Internet for news and information; it has become very accessible for all layers of society. Even some grandmothers have phones and browse news,” Mkrtchyan commented.

Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted by the government or by law. Domestic and international news sources are freely available online. Some international TV channels are even available through free terrestrial broadcasting, for example CNN, three Russian channels and MIR (the intergovernmental television

of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)). The situation has been stable for many years now. However, people in large cities have greater access to media sources than people in villages and smaller towns. Although Internet access has improved for rural areas, it still lags behind larger cities and the capital, in particular. Fiber optic cable Internet is very limited in smaller cities and almost nonexistent in rural areas, with few options beyond 3G or 4G Internet plans with traffic limitations. Rural audiences also have access to local television stations, nationally broadcast television, satellite, and Internet where accessible.

Last year's MSI panelists mentioned that the public television service had undergone significant changes, though much work remained. This year, after the revolution, it was transformed even further, the panelists said. However, Vardanyan warned that the progress should not be considered stable and institutionally ingrained; it depends largely upon the political will of the current government. Deheryan added, “If there are doubts (that the service could weather a setback), it means that the public television is still not independent from the current authorities even today.” One more immense sign of post-revolution progress for public television was a series of debates with all the candidates during the municipal and parliamentary elections. The unprecedented parliamentary debates lasted for several hours. As for the public radio, the panelists agreed that it continues to follow a public service model, as it had in previous years.

There are few news agencies left in Armenia. Photolur, which provides photos, is one; international agencies are mostly used for video footage.

Private media produce their own news and information programming, which, in essence, does not differ dramatically from that produced by public media. However, Vardanyan observed that media

outlets owned by or associated with a particular political power or party tend to concentrate on covering that party's representatives.

Most broadcast media produce their own news content. There are many online media that also produce their own content, but many others just aggregate news content from different online media and sources. Very few outlets produce their own international news with the help of their own journalists; they mainly rely on international media to cover international events and issues.

**“During the recent developments almost everyone depended on the Internet for news and information; it has become very accessible for all layers of society. Even some grandmothers have phones and browse news,” Mkrtchyan commented.**

Transparency of media ownership has always been an issue in Armenia. With broadcast outlets, ownership has been more or less obvious for average media consumers, but online media present more of a puzzle for most—even media professionals working in the field. “We make assumptions about ownership, but we cannot know for sure; it is totally unknown,” Vardanyan said. It is very difficult to track the real owners or benefactors, who often hide behind people officially registered as owners, directors, and shareholders.

“The Law on Television and Radio stipulates that political parties cannot have television stations, but we all know which television belongs to which party—Prosperous Armenia, Rule of Law, and Armenian Revolutionary Federation. I believe that this indicator is in the worst state,” Ishkhanyan asserted. Many online outlets do not even provide contact information or information about editors and

reporters. “At one conference, the participants were speaking in rounds, and two women introduced themselves as being from ‘Something’ News, when all of a sudden, a lawyer who was also present, said, ‘Oh, at last I’ve found someone from this outlet,’” Martirosyan said. “Every day we hear different things about acquisitions of this or that outlet, and you do not know whom to believe. For example, we do not know the owners of 24news.am, news.am, and 1in.am,” Ishkhanyan said. Business conglomerates and political parties often interfere with media management and editorial work. “A businessman who owns a television station (h2, thought to be politically associated with the previous government) was arrested, and the reporters and staff of the station joined the outcry against the arrest— notwithstanding the fact that criminal charges are brought against him (for bribery), they don’t take a neutral journalistic stand,” Babayan observed. “The same can be said about another television station (Kentron, perceived to be associated with The Prosperous Armenia Party and its founder, Gagik Tsarukyan). When someone from their party is featured (e.g., in a discussion or in the parliament), they focus on this person, giving full coverage of his/ her speech without interruption,” with less attention on other participants, Babayan added. “Yerkir Media (a television station perceived to be associated with the Armenian Revolutionary Federation party) was probably one of the best-watched stations with debates and critical coverage when they were not in the coalition (with the then-ruling Republican Party), but once they got into a coalition, that changed,” Ishkhanyan said.

Social interests are reflected and represented in the media, with a couple exceptions, such as nontraditional religion and sexual orientation. There is significant resistance to the inclusion of such issues in the media, coming mainly from the public.

“It’s a serious problem, and it’s getting even worse, because any attempt at discussing these topics devolves into hate speech,” Ishkhanyan said. “It’s not only that these topics are ignored, but the journalists are sometimes subjected to hate propaganda” while covering these stories, he added.

Minority-language media exist and are freely published and disseminated. The public radio has been airing programs in many minority languages, including Russian, Ukrainian, Greek, Kurdish, and others. Newspapers are also published in minority languages—Russian, Ukrainian, Kurdish, and Yazidi.

Citizens are able to get news and information about their hometown, other regions of the country, national issues, and international developments. While media with a nationwide reach report on significant events from regions outside the capital, news from the regions is still scarce. “Their choice is limited, no variety,” Vardanyan observed, adding that it is like visiting a provincial store that offers just a few brands. There are local media in small cities/regions, and for the most part they provide news and information about local developments. Public media devote time to regional issues through different programs or in the form of stories within newscasts.

Media in Armenia provide coverage of international issues, but as in previous years, this coverage has mainly been adapted from international media reports, since it is rare for outlets to have their own reporters abroad or to have the ability to send dedicated reporters to cover international issues. Therefore, to gain a better understanding of international developments, one has to turn to international sources—mainly in Russian sources and less often in English. “I imagine if a citizen wants to follow international news through Armenian media, he/ she will hardly understand what is going on in the world,” Vardanyan commented. “So if you don’t know

English, French, German, and don’t dig for more sources, you’ll end up having a distorted, inadequate idea of the international situation,” he added.

**OBJECTIVE 4:  
BUSINESS  
MANAGEMENT**

2.04

**Media outlets rarely operate as efficient, self-sustainable, well-managed enterprises—the market is too small, and the field is too crowded, Deheryan observed.**

Media seldom prepare and follow business plans that help them secure financing, guide decisions on expenditures and personnel, or plan for capital expenditures. Accounting and finance practices are mostly in line with internal revenue agency standards, but few outlets hire trained professionals to manage marketing and human resource functions—editors and journalists tend to shoulder that load as well. However, most media employ on-staff accountants and accounting departments, although smaller media outsource that work.

Deheryan expressed doubt that taxpayer funds going to public media is spent responsibly. In July 2018, a criminal case was filed alleging misappropriation of taxpayer funds for public television. According to the Prosecutor General’s office,<sup>2</sup> the public television had signed AMD 2.4 billion (around \$5 million) worth of contracts in the period

2 “A criminal case has been initiated on facts of alleged abuses at ‘Public Television of Armenia’ CJSC.” The Prosecutor General’s Office of the RA, April 7, 2018. (Accessed at: <http://www.prosecutor.am/en/mn/7179/> on January 10, 2019.)

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of 2015-2016 with different companies and sole proprietors to acquire television products—shows, series of programs, and films, as well as to rent the necessary production equipment. A sample check revealed that false or inaccurate invoices amounting to AMD 118 million (\$243,000)—four contracts' worth—were generated and used. Cross-verification with the state revenue agency revealed that these companies either did not have any employees, or they employed significantly fewer than the contract budgets indicated. In addition, rental equipment agreements signed with third-party companies, amounting to AMD 60 million (\$123,000), allowed for additional, unsubstantiated expenditures—for a public television division staffed with more than 50 professional directors, photography directors, lighting technicians, etc. and amply equipped with television production and field filming gear. In a number of cases, these contracts were signed with companies helmed by founders who sat on the boards of Armenia's public broadcasters at the time, though they have since left their roles. The investigation into this issue was still in progress when this MSI study was written.

"We can see that the (online) media are oversaturated with advertising, indicating a desperate need for funds," Vardanyan commented. "High turnover rates at media outlets also lead us to believe that they are not self-sustainable," he added. "If there isn't funding from the owner (clandestine, perceived, or real), the outlet cannot survive. Can you name a media outlet that is self-sustainable?" Ishkhanyan asked. Melik Baghdasaryan, the owner of Photolur, answered that his photo news agency is probably one of the only self-sustainable outlets.

Media outlets, including online media, typically do not receive revenue from multiple clients and sources but depend rather heavily on owners and benefactors—subjecting them to great influence

over their editorial policy. "The advertising revenue is just not enough to fully support a media outlet and assure their complete independence," Babayan said. Public media enjoy an adequate, guaranteed source of revenue from the state budget, although that does not guarantee their immunity from political influence.

### 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.

Many companies advertise in the media. Banks, auto insurance companies, home improvement superstores, telecom providers, wine manufacturers, and automobile dealerships continue to be the largest advertisers, along with bookmakers. Previously, both market principles and political or business influences dictated the placement of ads. Some online outlets were even unofficially declared non grata in terms of receiving ads from large advertisers with close ties to influential political circles.

Now, Babayan observed, "If previously the advertising spending was controlled (by government circles) and only select online outlets could receive advertising, now it is more liberal, and online outlets can also secure advertising." Other panelists also noted that after the revolution, the market was liberalized, and an influx of advertising flowed to online media, although the panelists were skeptical whether this translated into an abundance of financial revenue.

Aside from commercial advertising, regional media generate additional revenue from classified ads, holiday greetings, congratulatory messages, and scrolling messages (on television).

Advertising agencies do not work with all media. They mostly work with media in the capital and very rarely collaborate with regional outlets. In Yerevan, they mostly work with broadcast media, though recently with online media as well. They invest minimally in print outlets, given the low circulation numbers. During previous years, the panelists noted that a few players that nominally function as independent entities, but are perceived to belong to the same people, monopolize the media market. They include Media International Service, Armenia's only media sales house, (with exclusive rights to advertising inventory in major television stations), Admosphere Armenia (the only television audience measurement organization), and PanArmenian Media House (an advertising agency). After the revolution, the panelists speculated, this might change, given the monopoly's suspected link to the previous authorities.

"The share of Internet advertising is growing; a lot of advertising is drifting to the Internet. There are no reliable data, but based on different estimates by various ad agencies, it ranges from \$2-5 million and experiences an annual increase of around 30-40 percent—indicating a rapid reshaping of the ad

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market, especially considering that online viewing has increased tenfold post-revolution. The television stations are starting to lose the battle, although businesses are often slow to grasp these changes," Martirosyan said.

"There is no sensational, scandalous news in our media—no sex, no crime—but we manage to attract an audience. There are stories, analytical stories, that pull 20,000 readers. Imagine how much we would draw if we had that (sensational) type of content," Vardanyan noted.

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Facebook keeps tearing advertising dollars away from Armenia's market, offering a more efficient, traceable, measurable advertising platform. During the parliamentary snap elections of December 2018, candidates and political parties extensively advertised on Facebook. "The candidates spend hundreds of dollars (on their ads), and this money leaves the country—whereas this money could have been spent on local online media and stayed in the country," Deheryan observed.

Media managers feel increasingly pressured to use more and more ads as the only substantial source of revenue. This is increasingly evident in online media, and the situation got worse this past year. "Online outlets are crammed with advertising. I doubt it is something they're really happy about, but they are just forced to do this," Vardanyan said. The four sides of the screen are totally taken by banners,

mostly bookmaker ads. Sometimes, these pop up and cover nearly the whole page.

Public media—prohibited from selling commercial advertising in 2015—depend mainly on state budget funding.

Regional print media representatives were desperate because government subsidies of AMD 500,000 (\$1,033) of previous years were discontinued for independent regional print media for the coming years. Subsidies remain in place for minority-language print media, though.

"Since 1997 we had been receiving government subsidies under the program of funding regional independent print outlets. This year we received a letter that the program isn't going to be implemented, and that there is no such line in the state budget. We wrote a letter to the prime minister, which he forwarded to the minister of culture. She replied that such a program no longer exists, and the subsidies will be available only for the press with solely cultural content. A newspaper with solely cultural content will not sell in regions. How much can you write about culture in regions?" Hayrapetyan asked.

Market research is seldom used to tailor products to the needs and interests of the audience, or as part of strategic business planning or to enhance advertising revenue. Editors and journalists rarely tailor their products to market requirements or conduct professional third-party research or focus groups. "The television stations justify airing soap operas by saying that these are what the public demands, according to the market research," Babayan said.

"Detector.am also looks at the comments section under its stories posted on Facebook to see what the nature of discussions are, and how many 'likes,' 'shares,' 'views' they have, to inform further stories," Vardanyan said.

As in previous years, the only organization that produces television ratings in Armenia is Admosphere Armenia, which partners with the Nielsen Admosphere Czech television audience measurement company. Founded in 2015, it has provided ratings data since April 2016. These include digital broadcast as well as Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) viewership data, but they are not publicly available; they are sold to interested parties on a subscription basis. The subscribers include television outlets, advertising agencies, and advertisers (mostly banks and telecommunications providers).

Reliable newspaper circulation figures are not available; there are no organizations tracking these. Internet statistics for online media—used to present to advertisers and ad agencies—are mainly drawn from Google Analytics. "But as a rule, outlets do not have analysts who could properly sort out the analytical data, so if need be, they just give advertisers access to their data," Martirosyan said. Now, they also use Facebook Analytics, which in some ways provides more accurate demographic data, "because if Google Analytics tries to figure out age, gender, etc. through certain algorithms, Facebook requires users to provide that information when they register for an account. However, few outlets know about this newer tool," Martirosyan explained.

### OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

2.63

**Armenia has no trade associations to represent the interests of media owners and managers. However, professional associations—including the Association of Investigative Journalists, the**

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**Asparez Journalists' Club in Gyumri, the Yerevan Press Club, and the Vanadzor Press Club—work to protect journalists' rights and promote quality journalism in Armenia. They provide various types of support: advocacy for journalists' rights, trainings, workshops, legal advice, etc. For the most part, there are no dues; they are supported mainly through grants. The government does not impose any legal restrictions that would prevent the registration or functioning of these organizations.**

"We are probably one of the smallest NGOs (in terms of budget) that implements exchanges through seminars, workshops, trainings; we follow recent developments in the media field and try to share these with our colleagues in Armenia. We do not provide equipment to outlets, but rather support practical journalism and data-driven reporting. We do this with journalists currently working for various outlets, on a flexible schedule, without distracting them from their primary work," Deheryan explained about his organization, Journalists for the Future.

Ampop.am, a data-driven news website in the genre of explanatory journalism and data visualization, is an initiative of Journalists for the Future (JFF) NGO and Ampop Media (AM) initiative, funded by the Armenian Branch of Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES). The platform consol-idates journalist-researchers, data collectors, and designers to support local media. The US Embassy in Armenia also supports the project.

Another recent JFF initiative, in cooperation with the Berlin Journalism School, was a summer school with seven coaches from Armenia, Georgia, Germany, and Ukraine training journalists from Armenia and Georgia in mobile reporting and other topics. The German Federal Foreign Office's "Strengthening Cooperation with Civil Society in the

Eastern Partnership Countries" program supported the project.

The Helsinki Committee of Armenia, though not specifically a media NGO, also holds trainings and seminars for media professionals. One training it held, with support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), promoted public awareness to prevent discrimination and violence. It brought together about 20 participants from Yerevan, regional broadcasters, online media, and NGO representatives to discuss topics including human rights, domestic violence, and journalistic ethics.

The Asparez Journalists' Club, in cooperation with Transparency International and USAID funding, will continue to implement the five-year "Engaged Citizenry for Responsible Governance" project—organizing and livestreaming public discussions to help increase citizen access to independent and reliable information—until September 2019.

As in previous years, the panelists again observed that these organizations depend heavily on international donor funding.

There are NGOs that support free speech and independent media, including the Open Society Foundation (OSF), the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, the Eurasia Partnership Foundation Armenia (EPFA), the Media Initiatives Center (MIC), and JFF.

EPFA and MIC continue to jointly implement USAID's five-year media project, "Media for Informed Civic Engagement (MICE)," which launched in March 2015. The project aims to increase citizen access to independent and reliable sources of information about the government's policies and planned reforms, and to create demand for public awareness as a necessary foundation for participation and involvement through better journalism. MIC, supported by the US Embassy in Yerevan, also implemented a project titled "YouTuberPorting:

Mobilizing and Capacity Building of Young Video Bloggers." The project's core activity was the "I Am the Media" video blogging school. Sixteen motivated, ambitious young people with the most interesting ideas were selected from 100 applicants to participate in the school. The eight most successful participants took part in the VidCon annual online video conference in the United States to communicate with YouTube celebrities, participate in master classes, and learn about innovations in the field to take back to Armenia. Nick Nimin from the United States, a YouTuber and online marketing and online video promotion expert, conducted the video blogging school. Local experts and vloggers also participated, sharing their experience in the local context.

### 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.

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OSF supports media through various grants under its media program to foster independent, unbiased, and pluralistic media in Armenia by creating a progressive and favorable legal framework to regulate the field and harmonize it with internationally recognized principles and standards. The OSF media program's priorities include supporting traditional and new media to produce alternative content, investigative journalism, and efforts to ensure media ownership transparency.

Numerous journalism degree programs exist at both private and public institutions. However, they have changed little over the years, and the quality of these programs has not improved dramatically. The majority of the programs still do not include sufficient hands-on training to prepare young people to enter the profession. The best practical experience students can hope to gain from universities is if they are selected by working journalists who teach there to work in their outlets as freelancers—opportunities reserved for only the most promising students.

Student-run media exist, but they are rare and unpopular—and thus, are not good experimental sandboxes for students. “Whereas these student media, based on the novelty and enthusiasm they bring, could be leaders in the field,” Ishkhanyan said. He said, however, that the professors, who generally fail to encourage or inspire the students with their enthusiasm, are also at fault.

Media outlets are not always ready and able to absorb journalism graduates, who are mostly viewed as cheap labor to tackle the undesirable tasks the seasoned reporters reject. This, however, has a downside: The majority of the graduates are not ready to work as self-sufficient reporters, due to their lack of practical experience, as journalism schools are mainly limited to theoretical knowledge.

“Students arrive from high schools with a bulk of junk information, but they aren't open-minded;

and they haven't read books,” Deheryan explained.

“The schools try to involve practicing, well-known, seasoned journalists, but the latter do this as a favor—because the honoraria are ridiculous,” Deheryan said. Martirosyan agreed, commenting, “They (the seasoned journalists) are invited fragmentally, not as a part of the whole. There is no vision, no strategy and no system. The reporting is changing conceptually, but the teaching is not,” he observed.

“I'm invited to teach at YSU, Yerevan State University, haphazardly. One semester they might invite me, another semester they might choose not to; one semester they invite me to teach to juniors, another semester to graduate students. I never know who I'm going to teach,” Martirosyan added.

There are opportunities for students to earn journalism degrees abroad, but these are scarce and mostly available through independent universities and supporting grants and scholarships; only the most dedicated students pursue these chances.

Short-term training opportunities do exist and allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills. They are organized mostly by international organizations or local NGOs in partnership with—or funded by—international organizations. Nevertheless, as in past years, the main problem is that the editors are reluctant to let their practicing journalists attend this type of training, because they are understaffed and have trouble getting by without their leading reporters, even for one or two days. “There are good reporters who you want to see at your trainings, but they are busy during the week and just want to relax on the weekend,” Deheryan observed. “On the other hand, there are some ‘guest performers’ who are ready to attend every training and seminar, but they just do not produce any content after the training,” he noted.

These trainings teach modern techniques

and multimedia applications, mainly focused on journalism. The professional needs of other areas—editorial, advertising, and media management—are less frequently addressed and usually do not differentiate between different levels, such as entry, mid-career, or management.

The panelists agreed that there are not any restrictions on importing or purchasing newsprint, software, video equipment, etc., and that situation has been stable for many years in a row now.

There are very few printing houses in the regions, so print outlets mostly need to travel to the capital to print their newspapers.

**“The schools try to involve practicing, well-known, seasoned journalists, but the latter do this as a favor—because the honoraria are ridiculous,” Deheryan said. Martirosyan agreed, commenting, “They (the seasoned journalists) are invited fragmentally, not as a part of the whole. There is no vision, no strategy and no system. The reporting is changing conceptually, but the teaching is not,” he observed.**

With the ever-increasing penetration of the Internet, delivering media content to consumers is easier, faster, and more independent than ever before. One of the cable television networks, IPTV provider U!Com, started carrying the broadcast arm of the RFE/RL Armenian service, Azatutyun.

Ever since the switchover from analog to digital broadcasting in late 2016, the problem with private multiplexers persists for more than 10

regional television outlets. They are on the brink of extinction owing to a 2010 amendment to the Law on Television and Radio, which stipulated that there should be just one digital television station in a given region, carried by the public multiplexer. The private multiplexer would carry the others. The competitions for a private multiplexer announced by the National Commission on Radio and Television failed several times in a row due to the absence of interested applicants during the three-month period set by the law. An amendment to the law changed the three-month period to a six-month period; however, this will hardly help the situation, since the core of the problem is not limited time but the reluctance of potential investors to invest in setting up a private multiplexer with national coverage (which would cost around ADM 4.5–6.5 billion [\$10–12 million]). A 2015 amendment to the Law on Television and Radio, which allowed the entry of a private multiplexer, stipulated that it should cover an area not less than that of the entire Republic of Armenia. The owners of private regional television outlets push for legislative changes to allow smaller private multiplexers.

The existing information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure in Armenia can be said to meet the needs of the media industry. Media are able to offer citizens the products they believe consumers might want, such as digital broadcasting and Internet streaming of audio and video. Citizens are mostly able to access media as they wish. However, there are differences between cities and smaller towns and rural areas. In some rural areas, the only option is 4G Internet through phones or wireless routers. “Even shepherds can watch livestreams in the mountains,” Martirosyan said. Smaller towns have more limited broadband fiber-optic cable Internet options than those available in the capital city.

Poverty is another obstacle for some citizens hoping to gain Internet access. “When people have little to eat, they can hardly pay for the Internet,” Martirosyan said. “I believe the majority of people in villages and small towns likely do not have 5,500 drams (\$11) to buy 4G Internet,” Vardanyan said.

## List of Panel Participants

**Suren Deheryan**, chair, *Journalists for the Future* NGO, Yerevan

**Gayane Mkrtchyan**, reporter, *medialab.am*, Yerevan

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

**Edgar Vardanyan**, journalist and political analyst, editor-in-chief, *detector.am*, Yerevan

**Samvel Martirosyan**, media expert, IT security expert, Yerevan

**Avetik Ishkhanyan**, founder and president, *Helsinki Committee of Armenia*, Yerevan

**Melik Baghdasaryan**, owner, *Photolur*, Yerevan

**Arevhat Amiryan**, owner and editor-in-chief, *Vorotan*, Sisian

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

**Anahit Nahapetyan**, owner and editor-in-chief, *Tufashkharhi Arorya*, Artik

## Moderator and Author

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

*The panel discussion was convened on November 29, 2018.*