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MOROCCO

The 2009 MSI panel for Morocco documented a decline among media sustainability indicators. The overall average slipped two-tenths of a point in the tenth anniversary year of King Mohammed VI's accession to the throne. King Mohammed VI—who succeeded his father Hassan II on July 29, 1999—is the highest authority in Morocco. In keeping with his title as commander of the faithful, his authority is supreme, and he is accountable to no one.

The Ministry of Interior and the state's security services play crucial roles in controlling politics and the entry of political players to the field through elections, and they control the public media as well as a major part of the independent media. Even so, the king and his circle seem to grasp that he cannot rely on the old-style parties to protect his throne—those factions have weakened with age, have lost touch with the people, and strain to compete with the growing strength of the younger Islamic parties. Consequently, the king's supporters place him in the vanguard of the economic and social development meant to counteract the social degradation that fostered the sort of extremism seen in the 2003 Casablanca terrorist attacks.

The king endorses publicly building a modern and democratic society. In reality, his critics charge, he suppresses and weakens opposition parties and forges alliances that leave political clients beholden to the monarchy. In 2009, local elections further dimmed prospects for democratic development. The Party for Authenticity and Modernity (PAM), founded by Fouad Ali El Himma—a friend of the king—swept the local elections as well as took the lead in the second chamber of the Moroccan parliament. PAM's win prompted political figures to abandon their parties and join the new party in droves, to take advantage of PAM's influence and protect their interests.

The panelists expressed no surprise that something as insignificant as a poll carried out by the French-language magazines *TelQuel* and *Nichane* in July 2009, surveying the public's views on the monarch's 10 years of rule, led police to raid their printer and destroy 100,000 magazine copies. The police acted on the pretext that merely evaluating the king's work smears the monarchy's reputation. Another disturbing development is the disappearance of some of the major independent platforms—including *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* ("The Weekly Journal"), which criticized the monarchy's authority and control over vital economic sectors.

The panelists returned lower scores for all five MSI objectives this year. A report by the National Trade Union of the Moroccan Press (known by its French acronym, SNPM) covering May 2009 to May 2010, backs the panel's negative assessment. The SNPM assessment was based on indicators established by UNESCO¹ and found that adverse trends observed in previous years have intensified alarmingly—clearly threatening all progress made in the field of journalism and the media.

¹*Media Development Indicators: A framework for evaluating the development of the media*, Intergovernmental Council of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), twenty-sixth session, March 26–28, 2008, UNESCO reference no. CI/COM/2008/PI/3.

MOROCCO AT A GLANCE

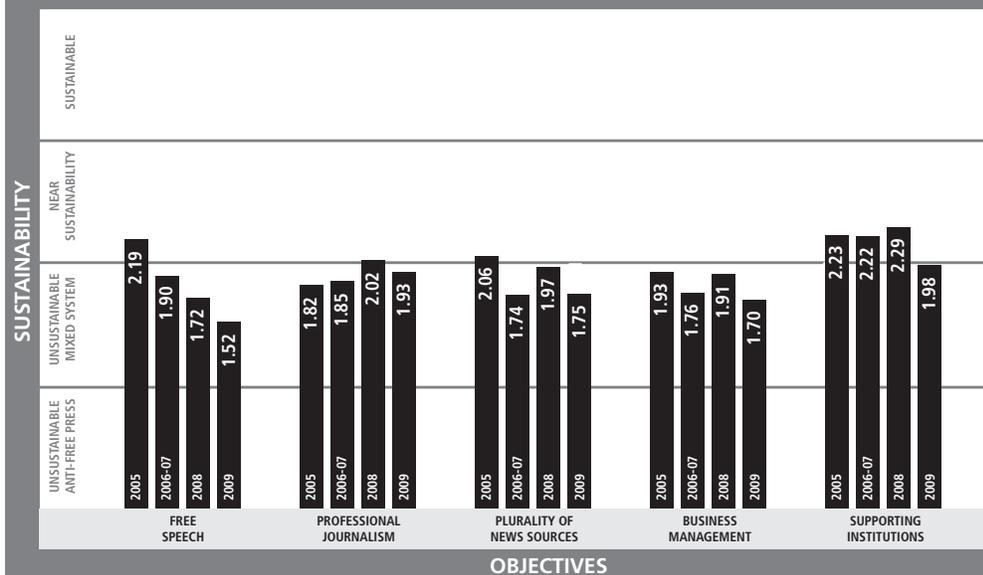
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 31, 627,428 (July 2010 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Rabat
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Arab-Berber 99.1%, other 0.7%, Jewish 0.2% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 98.7%, Christian 1.1%, Jewish 0.2% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** Arabic (official), Berber dialects, French often the language of business, government, and diplomacy
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas):** \$89.93 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$4,400 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **Literacy rate:** 52.3% (male: 65.7%, female: 39.6%) (2004 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** King Mohammed VI (since July 30, 1999)

MEDIA SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:**
Print: 285 Arabic, 90 French, and 9 Amazigh publications; Radio Stations: 13; Television Stations: 4
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** 300,000 daily
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Maghreb Arabe Presse Agency (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** \$262 million (Ministry of Information website, 2005)
- > **Internet usage:** 13.213 million (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: MOROCCO



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.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Morocco Objective Score: 1.52

Freedom of speech scores continued to decline in 2009, with a number of negative trends behind the deterioration. The major factors that panelists cited include the sense of increasing repression against independent newspapers, the imprisonment of journalists and bloggers, the disappearance of leading independent platforms, and outright bans on publications—the most direct attack on press freedom.

The Press Law of 2003 protects the freedom of expression. But often, security forces and a judiciary that cannot be called independent interpret broadly the sections of the press law that criminalize any “threat” to the monarchy, Islam, or territorial unity—rendering fragile any support for the freedom of the press. Civil society has increased appeals to advance debate on reforming the Press Law and passing a law guaranteeing the right of access to information, but those efforts have failed to date.

Panelists pointed to a number of recent cases of repression against journalists that illustrate the weakness of the press law and the growing insecurity of independent outlets. They referred to the circumstances surrounding the forced closure of the weekly news magazine *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* and then *Al Jarida Al Oula* (“*The First Newspaper*”); the destruction of issues of *TelQuel* and *Nichane* weekly magazines in July 2009; the closure of the independent

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.

Arabic-language daily *Akhbar Al Youm* (*Today's News*) without legal justification in September 2009, and the fabrication of criminal charges against its director, Taoufiq Bouacharine (also an MSI panelist); the detention of the blogger Al Bashir Hizam; and the imprisonment of another journalist, Idris Shehtan, in October 2009, for publishing an inaccurate story about the health of the king.

Near the end of 2009, judicial and administrative authorities liquidated Media Trust, the company behind *Le Journal Hebdomadaire*—considered by many Morocco’s most important independent platform. The official reason was failure to pay its debts. In February 2010, Hiran Mustafa, a journalist at *Le Journal Hebdomadaire*, wrote in an online commentary that most newspapers failed to report the initial news of *Le Journal Hebdomadaire*’s closure—a move he labeled political—although he said that a number of online discussion forums addressed the incident. He noted that later, other papers with ties to the authorities proceeded to cover Media Trust’s financial troubles to excess.²

Mustafa explained that *Le Journal Hebdomadaire*, which began in 1997 as *Le Journal*, focused mostly on finance and the economy originally, but gradually expanded into the political arena, including issues related to the royal palace. According to some panelists, the magazine showed courage in pursuing sensitive political topics. Its managing team, particularly under the direction of Aboubakr Jamai, developed it into a serious and professional independent forum—but at a price. After a heated struggle with the authorities, it re-emerged in 2000 as *Le Journal Hebdomadaire*. In a climate of building pressure against the independent press in Morocco, the management of the magazine’s editorial board has retained the same editorial line, according to Mustafa. During difficult times for Morocco and the press—including crackdowns following the terrorist bombings in Casablanca in 2003—*Le Journal* stood at the heart of the storm, suffering from prosecutions and financial harassment.³

Le Journal Hebdomadaire’s financial troubles date back to 2006, when a Moroccan court delivered a devastating blow and ordered it to pay MAD 3 million (approximately \$354,000 at that time) in damages in a defamation case filed by Claude Moniquet, head of the Brussels-based European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center. Moniquet claimed that *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* defamed him in an article questioning his group’s independence. The article was based on a report that his organization authored on the disputed

²Mustafa, Hiran, “Le Journal libdomadir:” The story of the assassination of the most important independent journalist platform in Morocco. February 2010. Available (in Arabic) at <http://www.hespress.com/?browser=view&EgyxpID=18430>

³Ibid, Mustafa.

Western Sahara. The article said that the report reflected the official state view closely—to a degree that suggested that it had been prepared at the government's request and had even been financed by the government. The article expressed the view that such reports did a disservice to the case of Western Sahara.

Jamai left Morocco after the 2006 ruling and a subsequent series of evidently politically motivated cases of harassment against his magazine. The harassment appeared to ease for a time, according to Jamai, but when he returned to Morocco in 2009 and resumed his critical journalism, the government intensified its efforts to drive advertisers to boycott the magazine. Jamai later noted that Trimedia, *Le Journal Hebdomadaire's* owner, could have paid its creditors if the authorities had refrained from regularly ordering advertisers to boycott.

In September 2009, the Supreme Court upheld the damages award in the Moniquet case, and the Commercial Court moved with unusual and surprising alacrity to liquidate the business. On January 27, 2010, authorities took control of *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* and seized its assets, just as the latest issue was being put to bed, and after a Casablanca commercial appeals court declared Trimedia bankrupt and the magazine's former publishing group, Media Trust, bankrupt as well. Initially, court papers were served and the journalists continued to work, but minutes later, bailiffs returned with locksmiths, removed the journalists from the premises, changed the locks, and sealed the facility.

In an interview after his return from "optional" exile, Jamai told *Al Hayat* that the political landscape is not yet able to absorb the experience of a truly independent press, or set the country on a true path of change.⁴ The panelists found the *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* story representative of the tragedy of the free press in Morocco and the impunity with which crimes against press freedom are committed. Mohammed Al Wafi, a journalist from Channel 2M television and chair of one of its two unions, shared his view that an important segment of readers has been deprived of a valuable publication. Al Wafi noted that large numbers of institutions and companies in Morocco fail to meet those same obligations, yet they have not been shut down or sued by the social security fund or the relevant ministry. Mohammad Hafeez, director and managing editor of *Al Hayat Al Maghrebiya* ("*Moroccan Life*"), spoke of a conversation he had with a director of a party newspaper on the closure of *Le Journal Hebdomadaire*. The director told him that if the authorities had sought to apply the same financial management standards to his newspaper, it would have closed down a long time ago.

⁴Ibid, Mustafa.

Lahidh Mohammed Alsassi, university professor of law and political activist, added that there are hidden figures within officialdom and in some independent media platforms that manipulate the newspapers from the shadows—which would be impossible without at least the tacit consent of the state. The newspapers affected most adversely are those with opinion writers such as Jamai and Bouacharine, known for taking a more critical stance.

Another major blow to the independent press came following a poll carried out by the French-language weekly magazines *TelQuel* and *Nichane* in July 2009. The poll assessed the outcome of the monarch's first 10 years of rule, prompting severe backlash from the authorities despite the fact that the poll yielded largely favorable results for the king. Minister of Communications Khalid Naciri declared that merely evaluating the king's work is damaging to the reputation of the monarchy, and on this pretext, police destroyed of 100,000 copies of the August 4, 2009 edition of *TelQuel* and its Arabic-language version, *Nichane*.

This event marked the second time that the authorities expressed their displeasure with *Nichane* and *TelQuel* in this way. In 2007, the authorities destroyed 100,000 copies of the two weeklies following the publication of an editorial that included a critical analysis of a speech delivered by the king. One panelist characterized the 2007 and 2009 seizures as illegal sanctions, outside the scope of the law and the judiciary.

Ahmed Benchemsi, the director of publication for *TelQuel/Nichane*, challenged the decision before the Administrative Court of Casablanca—but the court's ruling came as no surprise. The court found it no longer feasible to overturn the administrative decision ordering the destruction of the August 4 issues, because what had happened could not be reversed. Yet, if the court had ruled the administrative decision unlawful and struck it down, it would have established an entitlement to damages and would have allowed the magazines to be reprinted.

The panelists also pointed to their co-panelist, Bouacharine, as one of the most significant victims of the political repression of the media in 2009. His story shed light on the status of the independent press, and the extent of unjust and arbitrary treatment that sidelines the law itself. Bouacharine reported that the Saturday, September 26, 2009 issue of his paper contained a cartoon about the wedding of Prince Moulay Ismail, a cousin of the king. The cartoonist relied on the official communication on the event, which stated that the wedding would be held in the Moroccan style, and portrayed the Prince Moulay Ismail in traditional costume and fez, raised on an *amaría* in keeping with Moroccan tradition.

A few days later, 20 members of the security forces stormed the newspaper offices and closed down its headquarters without written authorization, and proceeded to confiscate issues ready for distribution. Later, citing the cartoon, the authorities shut down *Akhbar Al Youm's* parent publishing company. Investigations against Bouacharine and Kadar soon commenced, and the prince lodged a complaint on the grounds that the cartoon was abusive and a violation of the respect he is due as prince. Those charges were handled as a civil case under the press law.

The public prosecutor filed additional charges for insulting the national flag. The alleged insult was that the flag is drawn to resemble a Star of David. (Bouacharine also claimed that the leader of the Jewish community in Morocco was paid to issue a statement claiming that the cartoon was anti-Semitic.) It soon became clear that the public prosecutor was seeking to prosecute Bouacharine's case under relatively recent and tough criminal legislation that stemmed from flag-burning incidents in El Samara, Western Sahara, in 2005.

Furthermore, the authorities subjected Bouacharine to drawn-out questioning that dragged on to become a kind of detention. Similar practices have been seen before, and the panelists commented that the practice constitutes an unjust and arbitrary treatment of journalists. Authorities do not conduct interrogations at reasonable times or under reasonable conditions, and as such should be seen as an assault on journalistic freedom and journalists and an abuse of power, panelists said.

Akhbar Al Youm petitioned the Administrative Court to lift the physical blockade of its facility while the case was being prepared, but the various judicial authorities stalled until the kingdom's judicial commissioner produced a decision by the prime minister. It ruled that the police actions were legal under article 66 of the press law, prohibiting the public display of any publication harmful to youth or inconsistent with public morality. During the investigative phase, the Maghreb Press Agency (MAP) churned out a barrage of criticism and condemnation of the newspaper and its owner, leveled by nearly every political party.

The public prosecutor submitted that the cartoon was based on sarcasm and that it is forbidden by the Qu'ran to make people who might be better than oneself the butt of jokes; the defense countered that the cartoon neither mocked religion nor ridiculed the prince. In the civil case for disrespect against the prince, in October 2009 Bouacharine and Kadar were sentenced to three years' imprisonment and a fine of MAD 3 million (about \$395,000 at that time) in compensatory and punitive damages to the prince. The prince later withdrew his suit after an apology by Bouacharine to

the prince before the Court. In the charge of insulting the flag, the court handed the defendants one-year suspended custodial sentences and a fine of MAD 50,000 (approximately \$6,700), and upheld the Ministry of the Interior's initial closure of the paper. In December, the Court of Appeal in Casablanca endorsed the two verdicts and their penalties.

As a result of the prosecutions and harassment, Bouacharine was forced to acquire new equipment and set up another daily newspaper, titled *Akhbar Al Youm Al Maghrebiya* ("*Today's News of Morocco*"). The suspended prison sentences, meanwhile, weighed heavily upon him; he felt the threat even more keenly in the light of the imprisonment that same month (October 2009) of journalist Idris Shehtan, the director of *El Misha* ("*The Torch*"), which many took as a message to all journalists. Shehtan's story is detailed later.

To control bloggers reporting on student protests in the Taghijit area in the south, the authorities made use of laws designed to guard Morocco's reputation in the field of human rights, and publishing news that threatens public order. In a December 2009 public statement entitled "Enough of Being Gagged," the Executive Office of the Association of Moroccan Bloggers reported on events surrounding a decision by the Court of First Instance in Guelmim, in southern Morocco. On Tuesday, December, 15, the court ruled against blogger Bashir Hizam and Internet café owner Abdullah Boukfou and gave them prison sentences and fines for their coverage of the crackdown on the protesters. Security services subjected Hizam to several interrogation sessions, focusing especially on a statement signed by a committee of arrested students, his coverage of events, and his opinion pieces. Initially, he was charged with "tarnishing the country's reputation in the field of human rights and publishing offensive material on international sites." The second charge was amended later to "publishing incorrect news and facts liable to disturb public order," and ultimately, that charge became "incitement to hatred, racism, and violence." Boukfou was also found guilty and sentenced after the authorities raided the website club that he was running, arrested him, and confiscated the computers.⁵

In terms of licensing, Morocco has an open system for licensing and entry into the market for print media, involving permits regulated by the press law. The High Authority for Broadcasting Communication (known by its French acronym, HACA) is the body responsible for licensing television and radio, and as noted by previous MSI panels, broadcast license distribution is not transparent. According to a number of 2009 panelists, political considerations have influenced HACA's distribution of licenses to satellite television news

⁵<http://maghrebblog.maktoobblog.com/> (in Arabic).

channels, under the name Medi 1 Sat, together with 10 local or regional radio stations. HACA did not grant licenses to any independent television stations in 2009, and panelists took that as proof of the state's fear of the liberalization. At the beginning of the decade, the king issued royal decrees that established HACA and ended the state monopoly of radio and television broadcasting. The state facilitated the privatization of a single channel, Medi 1 Sat, in 2006, but then also intervened to renationalize the channel. Today, the government is Medi 1 Sat's majority shareholder.

Last year's MSI study detailed HACA's suspension of television licensing, despite first opening up a licensing competition. HACA justified its decision on the grounds of the weakened state of the advertising market and Medi 1 Sat's financial crisis. As for radio, typically most of the stations that receive licenses are more concerned with recreational activities, such as music and chat, or economic subjects, panelists noted.

Muhammad Al Aouni, a journalist with the National Radio and Television Broadcasting Company (known by its French acronym, SNRT) and chair of the new Organization for Freedom of Expression and the Media, commented that Morocco now lacks any private television station. He said that the dearth is a direct consequence of decisions by HACA, which essentially has succeeded in governing the content of television broadcasting. In that connection, he noted certain conflicts of interest regarding the statuses of several HACA members—some with links to PAM and the king in particular. Al Aouni said that he finds it difficult to imagine how members of HACA so closely associated with a particular political party could maintain their neutrality, especially since HACA is supposed to practice political pluralism in its official distribution of licenses.

Panelists said the monarchy has controlled HACA's membership composition since its inception. Some of its members have continued on even after their five-year terms expired;⁶ while on the other hand, some members that left HACA to take up other posts were not replaced within the legally stipulated 15 days. Indeed, some that quit over five years ago still have not been replaced. The SNPM 2009–2010 report detailed stagnation and even regression in HACA's ability to implement the powers granted to it by royal decree in 2002 and reinforced by the radio and television media law in 2005.

While the panelists did not name any instances of physical attacks on journalists in the period of study, crackdowns

⁶A total of four members out of nine, two of them appointed by the prime minister and the other two by the speaker of parliament. The remaining five members, who are appointed by the king and for no specific term of office, can be removed at any moment, but can also be kept on for as long as the king desires.

and harassment of independent media continued, including security force interrogations and degrading, inhumane treatment of journalists. As noted in last year's MSI, only print media outlets report on attacks against journalists—radio and television media do not address these crimes.

Mariam Alteji, a member of the association of Moroccan bloggers, stressed that charges have been brought against a number of Internet bloggers as well. They vary from charges related to violations of the respect due the king (as filed against blogger Mohammed Raji in 2008), publishing information prejudicial to the reputation of Morocco (as seen in the case of Hizam in connection with the events of Taghjiit in the South), and the still-pending prosecution of English-language blogger Abdel-Latif Owais, who wrote an article evaluating Morocco over the past 10 years. Another blogger, Ahmed Brkuk, from the town of Aymantanot, got into trouble for shooting and posting pictures of the police while they were chasing street peddlers. He was charged with publishing images damaging to Morocco's reputation.

Those were only some of the people recently prosecuted; the total list is very long, panelists said. Some people have been subjected to harassment without a prosecution following, others have been given jail sentences, served with summonses, and received warnings from the authorities.

While panelists found ample documentation of the growing repression of independent media outlets, the public broadcast media's alignment with the government has become more entrenched. Further, some former Channel 1 news managers harassed trade union members, panelists reported. The harassment is a bid to stifle criticism and initiative and to induce unionists to abandon their positions calling for transparency in management and professional performance.

Under the Press Law and criminal code, libel is a criminal offense in Morocco, and the judiciary has demonstrated a willingness to hand out prison sentences. The most serious case in 2009 culminated in Shehtan, of *El Mishal* ("The Torch"), serving a prison term. *El Mishal* has not hesitated to publish stories concerning the royal family's property in Morocco and other controversial subjects, and it has faced several prosecutions as a result, including one on charges of insulting a foreign head of state. That prosecution concerned the paper depicting President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria in a cartoon—which the panelists did agree was unprofessional.

Panelists felt that that matter might explain the subsequent harsh treatment of Shehtan for publishing a dossier under the title: "Scandals of the King's Aunts" in November of 2008. The issue was focused on the Omahzon family's alleged tyranny

over the city of Khenifra on the basis of its relationship with the royal family through marriage to the late Hassan II. *El Misha's* report referred to a number of abuses by the family against Khenifra residents that were ignored by the local authorities. The Omahzon, Mouhi, Ahmho Zayani Association filed a lawsuit against Shehtan and another journalist, Oamari, before the Court of First Instance in Casablanca. The court handed down a suspended sentence of three months' imprisonment, a fine of MAD 5,000 (\$600), and compensatory damages of MAD 250,000 (\$32,000) each.

However, the piece that ultimately led to Shehtan's imprisonment was an article published in September 2009 that questioned the king's health. Following the publication, the public prosecutor for the Court of First Instance in Rabat ordered the Judicial Police to conduct a judicial inquiry into Shehtan and two of his colleagues, who were prosecuted for "spreading false news and facts and incorrect allegations, in bad faith, and participation therein." Shehtan was arrested very shortly after his initial sentencing to one year in prison. The verdict also included fines of MAD 5,000 per journalist, and three months of prison for the other two journalists, Mustafa Hiran and Rachid Mahameed. Shehtan was not released until June 11, 2010, by royal pardon, after serving about eight months of his sentence.

Morocco still lacks legislation to guarantee the right of access to information. In 2009, anti-corruption association Transparency Maroc continued its appeals to fill this gap, with support from UNESCO and the Embassy of the Netherlands in Rabat. The association completed a study comparing Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia on the issue of corruption.

At the same time, the government continued to develop e-government services without legally obligating public institutions to maintain websites or defining their responsibilities in that regard. In 2006, the government launched a national portal, www.maroc.ma—which includes sections such as Institutions, Portrait of Morocco, Society and Culture, Practical Information, Invest in Morocco, and Major Projects, together with recent news. Another site, <http://www.service-public.ma>, is supervised by the Ministry of Public Sector Modernization and includes several windows and portals such as administrative and regulatory guides, public websites, references, forms, and advertisements.

On October 21, 2009, the prime minister issued a publication that established an e-government management structure. One branch is a ministerial committee on e-government, headed by the Minister of Industry, Commerce, and New Technologies and tasked with providing guidance and evaluation. A second branch, the supervisory committee, oversees the conduct of e-government practices within

ministries and public institutions on specific projects. A third branch is dedicated to program management.

Bouacharine identified the major problems, in his view, concerning information access. First, traditions and customs make for a culture of secrecy. Some information concerning the king and the royal family can be obtained but not disseminated, he said. For example, *Akhbar Al Youm* found itself in trouble for publishing a list of the king's 76 estates. Creating such a list gave an idea of each estate's needs in terms of cars, trucks, gasoline, etc., as well as began to quantify the taxes and customs duties that are not being paid, as the king is by law exempt from paying taxes.

Disseminating news of that kind can cost dearly. Another example is the case of Hassan Alaoui, journalist and director of *Economie & Entreprises*. He published an article on the fitting out of La Mamounia Hotel in Marrakech, criticizing the absence of any competitive bidding and suggesting that Primarius won the contract because it is owned by the ONA Group (the Royal holding company). Alaoui was prosecuted and sentenced to pay damages in the amount of MAD 6 million (about \$700,000).

There are also certain kinds of information that authorities do not want published in Morocco, even though such information is available from other sources. MAP, the official news agency, publishes Amnesty International reports if they come down against, for example, Algeria—but it leaves out the corresponding adverse reports on Morocco. Furthermore, authorities leak information to some newspapers and not others, so the playing field is not level.

The lack of investigative resources also hampers access to information. Panelists pointed to *The Washington Post* and its two-year investigation on the relationship between the CIA and the security sector in the U.S.; in Morocco, they noted, not one newspaper could undertake any similar investigation, not even for a month.

Al Aouni commented that public radio and television face tighter restrictions on information and discussion than print media, because the broadcast outlets reach many millions of viewers and listeners. He said that he wishes that the radio program he directs, called *Point of View*, could be a platform to discuss hot topics in the printed press—such as religious reform or reports by the Supreme Council of Accounts on financial fraud in public institutions and elsewhere. But no officials would agree to take part in any such discussion, he said.

Regarding restrictions on journalist access to foreign media sources, these sources are generally available and used by Moroccan media, although in a circumspect way when these

reports are about Morocco. However, foreign media have some problems working in Morocco. For example, Hafeez noted that the Ministry of Communications prohibits making recordings outside Rabat on behalf of foreign media without ministry permission—a decision made because of instances of unfavorable coverage broadcast by Al Jazeera.

In terms of entry into the profession, as reported in last year's MSI, becoming a journalist in Morocco is fraught with funding and training challenges. One panelist noted that key positions in public broadcasting are subject to political scrutiny, and called for the Ministry of Communications to issue press cards to allow journalists to attend and cover official events and press conferences. Foreign journalists must obtain accreditation with the Ministry of Communications.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Morocco Objective Score: 1.93

Objective 2 scores fell as well; gains in the 2008 score (2.02) proved unsustainable and the score returned to a score closer to 2006/2007's score (1.85). Panelists attributed the decline in professionalism to the financial poverty of independent newspapers, the growing influence of advertising in public radio and television programming, the predominance of entertainment programming among public broadcasters, and the media's self-censorship in relation to all forms of social protest.

Panelists agreed that the quality of reporting is poor. Alsassi criticized his fellow journalists, especially those in the

JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > 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).

weeklies, who seemed to want to write major stories—even cover stories—using only the telephone as their tool. As noted in last year's MSI, many radio stations do not comply with certain standards; stations sometimes mix Arabic and French languages, and in some cases, programs descend into triviality and questionable morality. The problems with professionalism extend to the print sector, as well.

Furthermore, ethical traditions are weak. Last year's panelists observed that too many journalists are content to insult, defame, spread false news, and commit libel, and little progress has been made with institutions developing their own codes of ethics—although SNPM has a responsibility to encourage such efforts.

Self-censorship is prevalent, starting from the palace and those close to it down to public radio stations—which have close political ties—to even the more independent print media outlets, where the panelists said they have seen an increase in self-censorship. Still, in general, the panelists believe the independent press are bolder and more reluctant to resort to self-censorship than party newspapers or the public radio and television media. The panelists also described increasing control over the public media channels, which all center on a single editorial line. Advertisers and the owners of powerful businesses dictate the terms of advertising, and programmers must set schedules and make content decisions based on requirements that advertisers set.

In terms of coverage of key events and issues, many issues are taboo for the press. As described above, any article that hints at questioning the monarch or his family is off limits. Yet, positive coverage of the king dominates much of the content on cover pages, and beyond; with his title worked into many headlines. Alsassi underlined the total absence of coverage of labor disputes or social protest of any kind as a black mark against the media. He noted also that Moroccan newspapers did not cover strikes at the principal national telecom company, Maroc Télécom, for fear of losing advertising business.

Regarding wages for journalists, Al Wafi said that a journalist on a monthly salary of MAD 6,000 (about \$700) with family and home commitments could not be independent, and could be put under pressure easily; as a result, either economic or political powers control editorial lines—and the public media are no different in that regard.

Back in 2005, after difficult negotiations, the SNPM trade union for journalists and the Federation of Moroccan Newspaper Publishers signed a collective agreement for professional journalists, setting out guidelines governing labor relations and conditions within the contractual press

sector. Perhaps most significantly, the agreement establishes a minimum wage for professional journalists at MAD 5,800 (about \$675) per month, accounts for seniority, determines annual leave guidelines, emphasizes journalists' right to social coverage and training, and defines journalists' contractual obligations. Despite this precedent, however, most press contracts still are not protected, and many journalists are not even entitled to social security entitlements.

The SNPM 2009–2010 report stated that the system of wages remains opaque, with no defined, negotiated wage scale. On the one hand, some institutions pay new appointees wages that exceed those of their senior colleagues, with no objective justification, and on the other, some journalists are paid barely the national minimum wage—let alone the higher minimum wage stipulated in the collective agreement for the press sector. Some journalists do not receive even the compensation stated in their contracts, which adversely affects their performance.

Some private news organizations claim financial crisis perpetually, asking their journalists to be patient—while income continues to roll in from ample advertising demand, and their managers show no signs of financial distress. The editorial offices of those newspapers also pulled back from granting the annual thirteenth month's wage, which Moroccan workers are entitled to receive at the end of the year, and failed to follow through on promises to adopt a cost-effective payroll system to ensure payment every three months. In general, the print sector has rich newspapers that are able to pay journalists higher wages than poorer newspapers—whose journalists are kept in a state of fear of losing their jobs entirely. In general, French-language newspapers pay better salaries than Arabic-language papers.

In the broadcasting sector, the public radio and television media enjoy better wages and working conditions than private radio stations. The financial status of radio stations is weak, with the exception of Atlantic Radio and MFM, which pay respectable wages in accordance with the collective agreement. Journalists' monthly wages at those two stations range from MAD 6,000 to MAD 12,000 (\$700 to \$1,400). At other stations, wages range between MAD 4,000 (\$465) and MAD 6,000 a month.

According to one panelist, most radio stations follow the requirements of the labor code and ignore the requirements of the collective agreement in the recruitment process. The stations in question are well aware of the requirements of the collective agreement and in particular the provisions relating to remuneration. They are aware also of their requirement to comply with the press law, as stated explicitly in the HACA agreement.

In addition, the press law requires unions to request that HACA ensure that contractors comply with the collective agreement's professional requirements—especially journalist's material rights, working hours, and working conditions. However, HACA has been shirking that task, and the panelists expressed the opinion that unions should demand this monitoring of pluralism and working conditions, whether by HACA or the Ministry of Communication.

Moroccan public television continues to lean heavily toward music and romantic soap operas. Hana Buchal, a broadcast journalist, said that Moroccan channels attach importance to recreational programs only, at the expense of news and information programs. For example, she said, Channel 1 rejected a cultural program made by her company on the grounds that "viewers need recreational programs." The channel told her company that if people want cultural material, they can get it from the Internet.

Reports before the Eighth Conference of the Moroccan Press Association documented a heavy emphasis on music, singing, and entertainment content on Channel 2M, the "Deuxième." 2M is a public channel and thus is required to strike a balance between various types of programs. However, it is noticeably lacking in documentaries, cultural programs, or public service programs, falling short of the awareness, sensitization, and services that the Moroccan citizen expects. Children's and youth programs are dominated by stereotypes, superficiality, and boilerplate models imported from the West—especially from France—in a type of blind imitation far removed from the true educational, social, and cultural environment of Moroccan boys and girls.

Advertising has also come to play a crucial role in television programming. The advertising department imposes the wishes of the advertisers upon programs and threatens to withhold advertising if certain actors are not used—transforming television into a tool of the advertisers.

Regarding the existence of quality niche reporting and programming, Moroccan journalists do cover extensively some topics, such as economics. However, the lack of investigative reporting is a serious area of concern. The panelists' general belief that investigative work is not feasible in Morocco also contributed to the overall sense of gloom regarding Objective 2. Hafeez remarked that investigative journalism is the most difficult kind of journalism, and requires both financial resources and qualified personnel—an extremely rare combination in Morocco. He gave the example of one successful report by his own weekly, *Al Hayat Al Maghrebiya*. The paper conducted a month-long investigation that exposed how a public bank sold its director a luxury apartment seized by the bank when the owner defaulted on

its debts. The director then advertised the apartment for sale in a number of newspapers—and paid off the newspapers to keep quiet about him.

According to Boucharine, unlike party newspapers the independent press do attempt to carry out significant investigations, and some have played a positive role in changing laws. For example, one investigation revealed that Al Majid, private adviser to the king and one of the masterminds behind his wealth, was able to purchase land at a fraction of its value. Several years later, a law was passed preventing the Ministry of Endowments from selling such land without special permission from the king or from an oversight board. One panelist noted that the law only passed after enough time had elapsed that the state could avoid the appearance of bowing to pressure from the press. As that time passed, the journalists at the center of the investigation had begun to despair, and wondered what the purpose of the investigation had been if it had no effect in the real world.

The panelists pointed to the case of Doha S.A. as an example of how quickly investigative reporting can be shut down. In that case, a large area of land—formerly a zoo in the most important area in Rabat—was sold off cheaply to the Doha company, which is believed to have links to the royal family. Despite the clamor from the press, and although members of parliament demanded the formation of a commission of inquiry, parliament quickly backed down when the chair and general manager of the company appeared with the king as he toured some of the company's projects.

Basher Al Zenaki, a freelance journalist, noted that in a case regarding the Social Security Fund, the press carried out detailed investigations into waste and theft by workers, but the press did not succeed in changing anything. The same was true with several major drug trials.

Still, the panelists remain convinced that investigations are not always futile. Even though journalists are thin on the ground, when cases have broken, sometimes investigations have led to change.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Morocco Objective Score: 1.75

The score for Objective 3 (plurality of news sources) fell also, mainly as a result of the panelists' critique that the official news agency, MAP, is biased in favor of influential forces, and lets nothing slip by that could damage the country's reputation. Furthermore, a number of MAP decisions have played a hand in restricting the plurality of news sources.

The role of the party press has declined significantly since 2000, when an independent press emerged, and especially after the main opposition parties received a share of government and now side with the king. This independent press plays a leading role in exposing corruption and calling for democracy, according to the panelists.

In the radio and television sector, in addition to Channel 2M, there is one regional station, Channel M, in the city of Laayoune in the Sahara region. With the spread of international satellite channels, citizens have expanding options for access to news. Because of poor domestic television programs, Moroccans are turning in droves to Arabic-language and French-language satellite channels. However, most channels transmit only for a limited number of hours and seem to not have high viewership. The panelists noted that since 2006, the policy of liberalizing the sector has not resulted in the emergence of independent channels—or even private channels. Although the state granted Medi 1 Sat a license as a private station in 2007, it converted the station to a public channel in 2009 because of “financial problems.”

The panelists did point to one positive development in terms of plurality of news sources: the continuing expansion in the number of Internet users. According to the national transport regulatory agency, the number of subscribers grew to 757,453 in 2008 from 526,080 in 2007. Citizens are migrating to the Internet as a source of information about Morocco itself and about issues such as corruption that may not receive coverage elsewhere. Unlike other countries in the region, such as

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.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > 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.
- > 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.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

Tunisia, Moroccans face no restrictions online—with the exception of the harassment that bloggers have experienced.

Many families and young people do not use the Internet for information and news, but rather for communication, entertainment, and other services. Families depend on the Internet to stay in contact with their children abroad—a much cheaper alternative to regular phone calls, as Internet access costs only about \$0.50 an hour. Internet cafés equipped with webcams facilitate keeping in contact. Young people communicate with the outside world in search of relationships that might lead to marriage, immigration, or job opportunities.

Also, the Internet is beginning to be used as a means of exposing bribery through the “video sniper” method. An example is an anonymous person posting a video of *gendarmes* taking bribes from drivers to bypass screening of trucks or cars, or turning a blind eye to moving violations.

However, Internet access is still a problem for many, given the high illiteracy rate and poverty in most cities and rural areas, coupled with Morocco’s patchy electricity supply and sparse telephone network. In addition, the international press remain limited in ability to access to the Moroccan market, as they are subject to administrative decisions for both printing and distribution. Printing requires the prime minister’s blessing, while the Minister of Communications is empowered to step in and shut down distribution if he deems a publication damaging to the “constants” of monarchy, territorial integrity, and Islam.

Morocco allows unrestricted entry to the biggest international newspaper and magazine titles, but their price is out of reach for most Moroccans. Of course, the Moroccan prices could come down if they were allowed to by the government, panelists noted, but the prime minister has not ordered such a reduction.

Eighteen foreign news agencies are represented in Morocco. The state news agency is based in Rabat, with 12 regional offices and offices in 18 countries. It puts out news in Arabic, French, English, and Spanish, and Moroccan newspapers receive a discount of 30 percent on MAP’s services. Despite the professionalism of MAP’s staff, it remains subject to the whims of the state, and has become selective in the distribution of some reports, in addition to adjusting others somewhat. Jamal Muhafid, acting director of MAP and a member of SNPM, said that the agency needs to reform to better exemplify neutrality and professionalism. Its board of directors must be a body with representatives from publishers, journalists, and the SNPM trade union, as well as the state. Currently, it is more like a government committee, Muhafid said.

The 2009–2010 trade union report devoted a large section to the question of MAP’s professionalism. The report said that since the appointment of its new director-general, Ali Buserda, in 2009, MAP had entered a deep crisis, represented by a decline in its observance of its public interest responsibilities and its proclivity to make major decisions without any objective study or analysis.

According to the panelists, MAP leaders cast aside agreements forged with the previous administration to develop mechanisms and regulations to address such issues; reneged on the previous administration’s commitments; and went out of its way to cut off labor relations and dialogue, including the contract that had linked the trade union and MAP administration since the beginning of the 1990s. The panelists noted that the contract must not only respect the laws in force in the country, but the even more binding accountability to the Moroccan people, as their taxes fund MAP. The current director-general explicitly and repeatedly “declares war on journalists,” panelists said, and active members of the trade union in particular, as shown by the frequent arbitrary dismissal decisions targeting a number of trade unionists.

There is no transparency of ownership of the private sector print media. Most publications do not disclose their ownership, even though the law stipulates that the owner must manage the larger publications. Banks, insurance companies, and other companies hold shares in many publications, especially French-language media.

As reported in last year’s chapter, there is a movement to encourage and spread the recognition of Amazigh language and culture. (Morocco’s pre-Arab population spoke Amazigh, and it is still used by people who identify themselves as Berber). However, efforts to launch a channel in Amazigh fell apart in 2008, with the Amazigh Network of Citizenship expressing regret that its opponents worked to block the channel.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Morocco Objective Score: 1.70

Objective 4 (business management) scores fell by about two-tenths of a point, primarily a result of chronic funding shortfalls and a lack of transparency in advertising. The panelists scrutinized especially the manner in which the broadcast advertising sector is managed. Panelists also criticized the methods and criteria by which the state distributes public support to the press, and the methods

and criteria used to measure advertising on the two national channels.

Concerning the business management of national television Channel 1, the 2009–2010 SNPM report stated that a crisis of content as well as human resources management lingers from the pre-conversion era. The report found no qualitative improvement, despite the passage of more than four years since the conversion of Moroccan Radio and Television to a national company. Panelists also held the opinion that a disregard for job descriptions has resulted in the appointment of unqualified people to positions of responsibility.

The national broadcasting company obtains its financial support from state subsidies, television viewer license fees (collected indirectly by an additional charge on citizens' electricity bills), and advertising income. In total, the state granted the station MAD 2.5 billion (\$290 million) during 2006–2008.

Al Wafi discussed the effects of the financial crisis on Channel 2M in 2009. He said that a shortage of broadcast advertising, which had dropped by 14 percent—to the benefit of billboard advertising—crippled the station's finances. Buchal explained that as a result of the current crisis, advertising companies had resorted to using billboards as their preferred method of advertising. Also, during 2008–2010, the state ceased funding Channel 2M. The channel enlisted the help of the union council in order to force implementation of a law that would deem Channel 2M a public channel. In exchange for the resultant mandatory funding that would lend it financial stability, Channel 2M agreed to advance public-sector broadcasting. The panelists emphasized that a public service

television channel should not be required to finance itself. In addition, Channel 2M was reputed to be paying taxes and fees to the state amounting to up to MAD 160 million (\$18.6 million) a year.

Al Wafi added that channels based in France or Gulf states with audiences in Morocco eagerly seek Moroccan advertising opportunities. The director-general of the Turkish channel MBC knocked on the doors of various advertising companies in Morocco to offer them 1,500 free monthly advertising slots as a sweetener. He could easily afford to do so because those advertisements would be shown in prime time in Morocco but 2 a.m. in Turkey.

Concerning the financial difficulties that newspapers face, Bouacharine said that the partisan press has been able to rely on party support. Their journalists are paid very modest salaries. The independent press, he noted, does not have such an easy time. The cost of printing and paper has increased, while the cover price of a newspaper has grown by a disproportionately low margin of only 50 centimes (\$0.06) over the last 10 years. Such numbers render it impossible for newspapers to survive on sales alone, and as a result, their client bases are mostly public companies or companies with close ties to the government. Their income from sales is estimated at 30 percent of total revenue at best, leaving newspapers heavily dependent on unregulated advertising. In political terms, an unstable market governs newspaper incomes, and their incomes barely allow them to survive, let alone thrive.

The Office de Justification de la Diffusion (OJD) checks newspaper circulations and has some degree of transparency. Despite the existence of that body, there are indications that advertisers do not act based on sales figures. Advertisers hold all the cards essentially, leading some newspapers to self-censor in order to please their advertisers, therefore making it almost impossible to find any criticism of Maroc Télécom—a major advertiser—in a Moroccan newspaper. For example, Maroc Télécom recently pulled its advertising from some newspapers for publicizing the fact that Maroc Télécom's workers had gone on strike.

Al Zenaki expressed the view that the advertising market has no proper structure; it is disorganized and its actions defy economic logic. Advertisers and advertising agencies delay payments and create cash-flow and budgeting problems for the newspapers. About a dozen known institutions receive the bulk of advertising, and the panelists described cartel-like secret agreements, with the principals meeting in secret to decide which outlets to promote and which to destroy. Panelists estimate that the advertising market is worth only about MAD 2 billion (\$233 million), with MAD 1.5

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.

billion (\$175 million) going to radio and television and the remaining MAD 0.5 billion (\$58 million), a rather low amount, going to the printed press.

The 2009 panelists voiced the same criticisms leveled by the 2008 panelists regarding government support and how it is distributed. In essence, support goes to party newspapers officially. In 2006, regular government support began with government subsidies to 50 newspapers in the amount of MAD 43 million (\$5 million). The distribution followed a set of agreements and charters agreed upon in the National Forum of the Press between the government (represented by the Ministry of Communications), the Moroccan National Press Union, and the Federation of Moroccan Newspaper Publishers. The program aimed to support journalism financially, enable journalism socially and professionally, modernize the press, and facilitate legal assistance through tax breaks and bank loan guarantees. The program intended to draw on public support in the form of financial loans to fund modernization programs, necessary expenses (paper, telephones, Internet access, etc.), and newspaper distribution abroad.

To take advantage of the subsidy, a newspaper must be legally sound; its column space devoted to advertising should not exceed half; it must employ a minimum number of journalists, and sign an agreement with its journalists guaranteeing their basic rights; it must publish its accounting records annually; and it must display its circulation in every issue. Despite the apparent clarity of these terms, however, the application process is far from easy. Since 2007, the Ministry of Communication, responsible for publishing circulation figures, has refused to publish detailed figures for the subsidy program and refused to publish even an annual report on the print media, radio, and television. Transparency has decreased markedly since 2005, when the Ministry last published a detailed account of the subsidies granted each newspaper.

Al Zenaki expressed his view that given the current situation, government subsidies are a good idea considering that media organizations have had to defray high costs. The expenses of daily newspapers can be as high as MAD 80 million (\$3.5 million) a month before taxes. However, political party newspapers do not face the same hurdles. For example, a political party that owns a newspaper and has strong ties to a ministry would not find its newspaper subject to the same magnitude of costs and taxes.

A closed circle of committees controlled by the Ministry of Communications and its public relations division make decisions on subsidies, then forward the recommendations to the institutional division that generates the funds, and in the

case of the print media, sets up matching obligations from foreign donors (such as France or Spain). Given the current conditions, strong newspapers benefit from the subsidy more than poor newspapers.

Bouacharine identified three problems in relation to the subsidies: first, the total subsidy of MAD 50 million or so is very small, given the large number of newspapers; second, the way the Ministry of Communications distributes the subsidies had little to do with any identifiable standard or norms; and third, a newspaper such as *La Gazette du Maroc* has to be thriving for at least two years before it is even eligible for subsidy—and by then, it no longer needs the subsidy. Another defect in the state subsidy system is that certain official newspapers and groups close to the state, such as the French *Le Sahara Marocain*, the Maroc Soir Group, and the Assabah Group receive subsidies, while displaying content and op/ed pages toeing the official line and giving priority to official activities and news about the king and the royal family.

Muhafid noted the lack of any independent body that can adjust the decisions of the Ministry of Communications and the Federation of Moroccan Newspaper Publishers. Journalism associations have no opportunities to participate in the process.

Hafeez added that government financial support for the print press expired in 2009, and the agreement needs to be renewed, but the renewal has been delayed pending the findings of a Ministry of Communications study of the fund. The study was initiated to answer criticism that the rules and objectives are not respected and funds are distributed unfairly.

For the printed press, OJD verifies newspaper circulation figures and provides up-to-date circulation figures, with assistance from the French OJD Group. According to the panelists, OJD is recognized as a reliable source of circulation statistics and has legitimized the circulation statistics of distribution companies such as Sochepress (Société Chérifienne de Distribution et de Presse) and Sapress (Société Arabo-africaine de Distribution) Group, which, as last year's MSI noted, advertisers depend upon for information.

The Interprofessional Center for Audience Ratings, an umbrella organization created in 2006 to measure radio and television, includes the national broadcaster, Channel SM, advertising agency Régie 3, the Moroccan Advertisers Group, the Union of Telecommunications Consultants, and Marocmétrie (regarded as the most important participant,

panelists said). According to Bouacharine, the ratings service led by Marocm trie, which had been established primarily by national television channels Channel 1 and Channel 2M, was not asked by those channels to provide ratings for other channels, such as the MBC Moroccan channels. Some journalists remain skeptical about the credibility of the ratings for public television, and see such ratings as a pure formality in order to show high audience figures and protect some programming interests of those channels.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Morocco Objective Score: 1.98

The perception that most political parties are losing their commitment to the concept of an independent press, combined with poor solidarity among journalists and low trade union awareness, led to lower scores for Objective 5 (supporting institutions). Although this objective typically performs the best, in this year's assessment it took a hit of about a third of a point.

The decline may be attributable to a combination of factors. Bouacharine pointed to weakening solidarity among political parties against press freedom and free speech, as the violations primarily affect the independent press—which is also the most critical of the political parties and their performance within the government. Furthermore, some previously independent newspapers joined in attacking the independent press, and helped justify repressions against the independent papers. Finally, the credibility of the SNPM trade union suffers from the continuing monopoly of party newspaper representatives within the organization;

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.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

the union's weak leadership; and the fact that many new journalists are indifferent or fearful about getting involved in union work, given their uncertain and fragile status.

The Federation of Moroccan Newspaper Publishers represents the interests of newspaper owners and operates as a publishers' union. As noted in the 2008 MSI, the federation helped establish a body to verify newspaper circulation figures, voiced complaints about the lack of rationalization and transparency in the commercial market, and decried the difficulty of obtaining government advertisers. The federation has also stepped up to fight press-related prison sentences. Some members of the publishers' federation also belong to SNPM, the major trade union.

SNPM is the only union in which all Moroccan journalists participate. As its 2009–2010 report suggests, it grasps the negative trends in the media—in particular the threats to the independent press—and works to raise awareness of these problems. However, this year's panelists expressed concern that SNPM is not standing up for journalists' rights to the degree that it should, at a time when independent journalists feel very threatened. Al Aouni said that the decline in independence is serious—and worse, is happening with the complicity of the profession, as in the case of the *Journal du Soir*. In his view, the lack of support from within the journalistic community is the most alarming aspect of this case. In many instances, publishers knowingly connive to suppress journalists, according to Al Aouni, and the SNPM sometimes turns a blind eye.

Al Aouni noted that the ongoing war on the freedom of the media prompted the creation of his association, the Modern Organization for the Freedom of Expression and the Media, in 2009. The organization is an alternative open to professors, journalists, artists, and the general public, in keeping with its view that the freedom of information is important for society as a whole, not just journalists. He emphasized that it does not regard itself as a competitor to SNPM.

Al Aouni said that part of the journalism associations' weak reactions could be explained by a number of factors: apathy among journalists, and the reality that some are not union-minded; the mix of publishers and journalists in the same union—with the publishers considering themselves journalists, although they are also employers with substantial power over journalists; and lastly, a serious problem within SNPM's leadership—which has alternated between the Socialist Union of People's Forces and Istiqlal since inception. As a result, partisan issues are reflected and fought out within the association, as well.

Alsassi expressed the view that it is paradoxical for the bulk of SNPM's leaders to be journalists representing party newspapers with declining sales. In his view, representatives of the independent press with the highest sales should lead the union. However, he said, sadly SNPM had become a closed shop. Bouacharine said that when he held office in the union, he had tried to open it up, but a large number of government employees eligible to elect in the governing body are delegated by the union's chapters in a number of cities. Often, they are not even journalists but educators operating in party blocs, getting involved and turning up to vote. Everything is arranged in advance, he charged, to maintain the dominance of the parties in the press union.

Despite their shortcomings, SNPM and the Federation of Moroccan Newspaper Publishers remain the most important communications link with the authorities to raise concerns about press-related legislation, garner support for the press or other matters of professional interest, and advise on the technical aspects that also affect distributors and publishers.

The panelists agreed, however, that supportive institutions remain constant despite the current turbulence. Human rights organizations, the union of journalists, and some lawyers remain committed to defending press freedoms and journalists' freedoms and rights. In addition, many international organizations, such as the Committee to Protect Journalists, Human Rights Watch, and Reporters Without Borders, bolster the Moroccan media.

Other establishments supporting the press, such as printers and distributors, are managed in economic terms as businesses—yet they are not immune to pressures from political authorities. For example, the major distribution company, Sapress—formerly owned by a group of political parties—has been turned over to the state. Independent newspapers took this as an ominous warning of what their future may hold. Since the 2007 arrest of the director of publication and journalists of *El Watan El An*, the Ministry of the Interior convened a meeting with the owners of publishing houses and threatened them with consequences if they did not monitor the content they set in type—particularly in matters relating to security and terrorism, and anything to do with the monarchy. As article 67 of the 2002 Press Law defines publishers' criminal responsibility, these threats from the ministry are tantamount to re-imposing pre-publication censorship, which Morocco ended officially in 1977.

Currently, Morocco has two major printing houses: Maroc Soir and Ecomédia's Ecoprint. Hafeez noted that the police destroyed issues of *TelQuel* and *Nichane* because authorities

were aware of their content before they went on sale. The newspapers send their content to the printing houses over the Internet in HTML format, with the source code also going to the relevant authorities. They can analyze the content of any issue and intervene before printing, if they deem it warranted.

List of Panel Participants

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