

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

2008

**The Development
of Sustainable
Independent Media
in Europe and Eurasia**



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The recent political situation in Kyrgyzstan has led to numerous attempts to reform media laws. During rallies in 2006, for example, reforming the government's television channel was central to the opposition's demands. In 2007, several changes were made to media legislation. "The year 2007 could be a record one for changes to the legislation for the mass media, if law-making initiatives are successful," said journalist Alexander Kulinskiy.



KYRGYZSTAN

The overall political situation in Kyrgyzstan in the recent past has led to scrutiny of mass media activities and numerous attempts to reform mass media legislation. During rallies in April and November 2006, for example, reforming the government's television channel was central to the opposition's demands. In 2007, a number of significant legislative changes were made that impact the Kyrgyz media. "The year 2007 could be a record one for changes to the legislation for the mass media, if law-making initiatives are successful," said journalist Alexander Kulinskiy.

A new Kyrgyz constitution reaffirming the principles of freedom of speech and freedom of the press was approved by national referendum in October 2007. However, an article directly prohibiting censorship was removed, although it exists in the Law on the Mass Media passed in 1992.

In response to the 2006 protests, on March 26, 2007, the president signed a decree that reformed the State Television and Radio Company into the National Television and Radio Corporation (NTRC), and on April 2, he signed the Law on the National Television and Radio Corporation. However, after the law was signed, the process of introducing public control developed only gradually, and after just six months, the authorities had manipulated the situation and applied pressure that has stopped reforms.

Parliamentarians also proposed initiatives concerning the mass media in 2007. To regulate the Internet and make providers responsible for information they disseminate, Parliament proposed several draft amendments to the Law on the Mass Media and Law on Access to Information, which deems the Internet as part of the mass media. The previous Parliament approved the law on the NTRC, elected members of the NTRC Supervisory Board, and provided tools to implement the law. Unfortunately, the supervisory board was not a long-term entity and it could not help implement the law on the NTRC.

Another group, under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture and Information, worked on reforms and drafted laws on the mass media, but information on that process was limited. Some media workers had information that draft laws on publishing activities and on the status of journalists are ready; some others said that draft laws on television and radio broadcasting and on the National Council on Television and Radio Broadcasting have been drawn up.

Overall, however, panelists felt that many laws were not being implemented in a timely way, and that pressure on the profession had hurt professionalism. The overall score for Kyrgyzstan decreased from 1.97 last year to 1.78 this year. Although not a severe drop, the primary changes occurred in Objectives 1 and 2, free speech and professional journalism. These fell by 0.30 and 0.46, respectively, with Objective 2 being the lowest scoring of the five objectives. The other three objectives either fell slightly or, in the case of Objective 4, showed a minor improvement.

KYRGYZSTAN AT A GLANCE

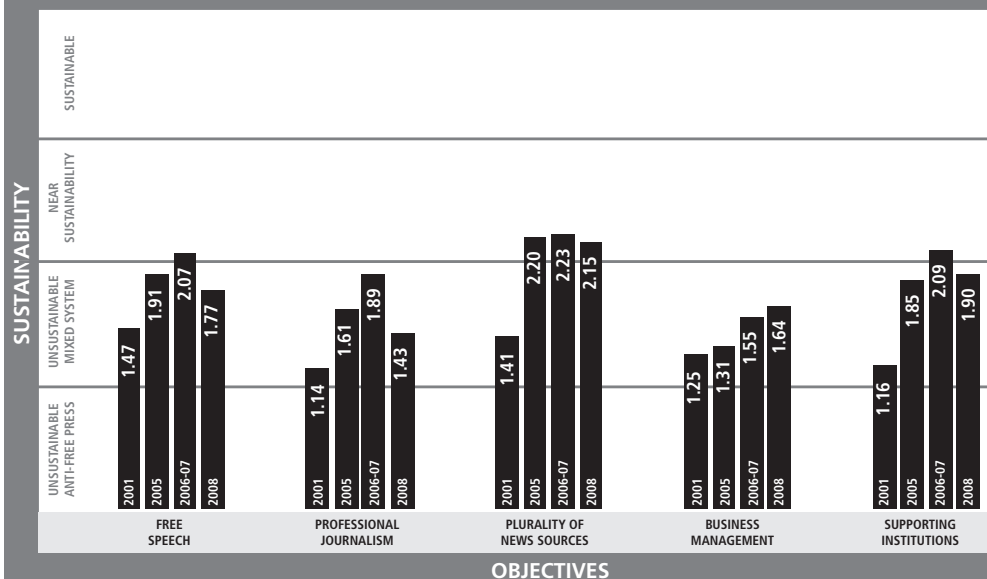
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 5,356,869 (July 2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Bishkek
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Kyrgyz 64.9%, Uzbek 13.8%, Russian 12.5%, Dungan 1.1%, Ukrainian 1%, Uygur 1%, other 5.7% (1999 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 75%, Russian Orthodox 20%, other 5% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Kyrgyz 64.7% (official), Uzbek 13.6%, Russian 12.5% (official), Dungan 1%, other 8.2% (1999 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2006-Atlas):** \$2.609 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **GNI per capita (2006-PPP):** \$1,790 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **Literacy rate:** 98.7% (male 99.3%, female 98.1%) (1999 census., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Kurmanbek Bakiyev (since August 14, 2005)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 4 main dailies, 4 other main papers; Radio: 6 main stations; Television stations: 7 main stations
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** top 3: *Vecherniy Bishkek* (private), *MSN* (private), *ResPublica* (private)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top three: *Piramida* (private), *Kyrgyz Public Educational TV* (private), *Ecological Youth TV* (private)
- > **News agencies:** *Kabar* (state-owned), *AKIpress* (private), *24.kg* (private)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 298,100 (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: KYRGYZSTAN



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

Kyrgyzstan Objective Score: 1.77

In general, freedom of speech has worsened in the Kyrgyz Republic, and the state is trying to limit journalists' access to information. Recently, key politicians have hastily demanded that the mass media be restricted. Deputy Prime Minister Nur uulu Dosbol has frequently insisted that the Ministry of Culture and Information strictly regulate mass media activities. These developments contributed to a loss of 0.30 points in this objective compared to last year. The indicator scores mostly did not fall close to the average. Indicators 8 and 9, media access to international news sources and free entry into the journalism profession, in particular scored much higher than the average. On the other hand, Indicators 2, 4, and 6, broadcast licensing, crimes against journalists, and libel laws, scored well below the average.

The legislative base that regulates Kyrgyz media activities remains one of the most liberal in the region, but often legislation contains contradictions and obstacles to freedom of speech.

Under pressure from community protests of April 2006, the president issued Decree #20, which called for legislation to improve freedom of speech. A government working group created a set of proposed changes and additions to laws on advertising, government tariffs, mass media, and the civil and criminal codes. The recommendations were intended to develop effective tools to protect the mass media. However, the government is still ignoring the recommendations, and journalists have not yet begun lobbying for their implementation. According to panelist Ilim Karypbekov, "The facts show that freedom of speech has grown worse. At present, it is not a question of developing freedom of speech, but of saving previous achievements."

Although the 2006 protests brought about some level of change, they were not free of controversy. As panelist Zhenishbek Edigeev noted, "At present, six men who participated in the opposition's April rallies are in prison. They only tried to express their own opinion."

In their evaluation of the law-making initiatives by various political entities, MSI panel participants noted several factors that necessitate further improvement of the legislation.

- Under the law, there is no concept of a "journalist."
- Changes to the law on advertising violate consumers' rights to access information in their preferred language. The mass media also has access limits, as advertisement texts must be published in two languages, Kyrgyz and Russian. In

the end, this proposal contradicts the Law on Mass Media Registration.

- Articles #127 and #128 of the Kyrgyzstan criminal code promote self-censorship and create grounds for censorship.
- There are no clear tools that guarantee journalists' rights to practice. For example, officials are obliged to provide information, but no action can be taken against persons who will not provide such information.
- The tools for protecting journalists in their professional activities are effective in name only. In practice, they depend on how authorities apply them. With regard to the courts, rather than favor the law and protect journalists' duties to publish news and inform society, they protect government officials' reputations, honor, and dignity. The judicial system has no firm scales to measure damage caused, or limits on financial awards to officials.

Kyrgyz society is not truly aware of the value of freedom of speech. The problem becomes evident in situations that are critical for journalists. When Alisher Saipov, a journalist and the publisher of the *Siesat* newspaper, was murdered in 2007, the community did not stand up in defense of freedom of speech. According to Antonina Blindina, editor of *Chuiskie Izhvestiya* newspaper, the mass media are responsible for that reaction. The people of the Kyrgyzstan cannot forgive the fact that those honest, objective newspapers that sought the truth and prompted the 2005 revolution have suddenly become supporters of the government and have lost interest in freedom.

Panelists were unanimous regarding Indicator 2, which addresses the licensing of broadcasting mass media. They noted that the printed media in the Kyrgyzstan are better off than the electronic mass media. Print media outlets are physically able to enter the market, and the registration procedure for a newspaper is quite easy. However, the National Communications Agency (NCA) makes acquiring a license almost impossible for electronic mass media. Issuing licenses and allocating frequencies have become tools for state control and influence, according to the panelists. Applicants receive no information on the length of the queue, terms for considering applications, or the availability and numbers of frequencies. According to Kulinskiy, "Licenses are only granted to those politically loyal to the authorities, and television broadcasting is only possible after overcoming a whole raft of unwritten obstacles."

The activities of the NCA are not transparent, and because it follows no clear rules for issuance, its decisions are politicized, according to Ilim Karypbekov, director of the Media Representation Institute (MRI), a media support and

defense organization. "The procedure for issuing a license with the National Communication Agency is absolutely opaque, and completely depends on governmental willingness," he said.

There have been cases in which licenses have been issued quickly and with no queuing. According to Karypbekov, these applicants were able to bypass almost 60 legal entities, none of which complained to the NCA or tried to get a fair result. "When rights are clearly infringed upon and unfair competition is present, no official applications have been submitted to the Media Representation Institute from aggrieved applicants," he said. "We repeatedly announced to the various mass media our readiness to go to court to protect their rights, but none of the mass media would risk protesting against the NCA, and they prefer to curry favor from the agency's officials by various methods. Because of this, the Media Representation Institute ceased its involvement."

Currently there are a number of proposals to improve allocation of frequencies and issuing licenses. The working group under the Ministry of Culture and Information suggests creating a national council on television and radio broadcasting, whose functions will include allocating frequencies, licensing, and control and regulation. The NCA itself, with support from the Soros Kyrgyzstan Foundation, has drawn up legislation resolving the allocation of frequencies, based on the United States model: frequencies are sold to communications operators that rent them out to television and radio stations.

Many participants said that the state has still not developed a policy or strategy for the obligatory changeover to digital technology by 2012, as the legislation and existing practices may not be ready by that time. The laws currently being drafted do not consider the coming change.

The results for Indicator 3, conditions for entering the media market, show a difference between Kyrgyz law and actual practice. According to the law, the way into the market for media does not differ from other type of business, and there are no preferences for the mass media. But according to the panel participants, involvement in the media business is more difficult and risky.

For example, if a print outlet or television station runs several controversial stories, it will be subject to the close attention of tax inspectorates, the anti-monopoly committee, and other agencies. In addition, in contrast to other types of business, the printed press is subject to a VAT levy twice: once when buying the basic materials and once when selling the media product. Government newspapers, however, get state support in the form of compulsory subscriptions or special subsidies for purchasing machinery and equipment, and receive tax

privileges (on VAT and tax from advertising). Government mass media that are budget-financed are not liable for taxes regardless of the value of the state subsidy and their own earnings. State-run media pay only income tax and deductions to the Social Fund.

During the panel discussions, the most heated debates were about government pressure on private media. The State Committee on Anti-monopoly Policy is used to combat disagreeable media enterprises. This institution will shut its eyes to the monopolization by certain pro-government media, yet it actively watches the activities of other media for compliance with the anti-monopoly law. The mass media that become objects of attention by the committee do not go to court, but prefer to pay up, knowing that the state has sufficient "legal" means to combat intractable mass media.

Another difference between the media and other types of businesses is that selling and buying such media outlets is linked to the republic's political situation. Public and political press outlets—and especially television channels—are only sold with the secret approval of the White House. The right to buy a developed media business is also approved by the authorities. Kyrgyzstan has a huge number of politicians and public actors who would like, and are financially able, to buy a television channel.

The majority of news-oriented papers are privately owned and do not aim to make profits. However, the successes of *Super Info*, a new entertainment newspaper for Kyrgyz-speaking journalists; *Avtogid Digest*, and; *Obustroistvo I Remont*

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.

(*Construction and Repairs*) magazine in 2007 prove that the specialized press can be quite successful in Kyrgyzstan.

With regard to Indicator 4, crimes against journalists, this year's study showed a drift away from democracy and towards autocracy. Kyrgyzstan was named one of 41 countries worldwide with "a defective democracy," according to a new survey by the Bertelsmann Foundation.¹

Kyrgyz journalists experienced an unprecedented year in 2007, encountering previously unknown hardships. A sad record was broken for the year in terms of crimes against the mass media. In addition to the killing of Alisher Saipov, more than 30 attacks on journalists and mass media representatives were reported. As a result of persecution, journalists Kairat Birimkulov and Turat Bektenov had to flee the country. Dozens of journalists continue to receive telephone and written threats every day. Offices have been set on fire, and the first-ever case of explosives being used to attack an editorial office was reported. Criminal charges have been brought in all these cases; however, nothing has been disclosed.

As a result of the worsening security situation, several important tendencies are being noted.

- Authorities only give lip service to reacting to crimes against journalists.
- The rate of unsolved crimes against journalists has given rise to a feeling of impunity and the belief that law enforcement employees are either the criminals or actively conniving with criminals.
- The prestige of journalism has fallen and journalism is not recognized as socially important. Public opinion appears to have turned against journalists, and attacks on and persecution of journalists do not evoke any strong protests.
- Conflicts are worsening between various journalist groups. Violent attacks on journalists have not become reasons for consolidating and protecting journalists' rights; rather, they have caused disagreements or resulted in studied non-intervention.
- Journalists have started understanding the professional techniques to enlist in extreme situations (rallies, demonstrations, etc.). They are the first "experts" who have been trained on various subjects related to extreme journalism, and they know how to correctly cover such important events for the country.

Many of the increased number of crimes against journalists are not receiving publicity and are not registered by law

¹ Since 2003, the Bertelsmann Change Index has thrice studied political and economic changes in 125 states. Leading industrial states (for example, Germany) are not included in this study.

enforcement organizations. But even the number of registered crimes against journalists shows a worsening situation for the year. In general, there is a lack of effective professional associations that members can trust to turn to for help. However, in April 2007, in reaction to increasing cases of attacks on journalists, Kyrgyzstan's media organizations demanded that the country's leadership and opposition leaders protect journalists.

Regarding guaranteed editorial independence for state-run media, panelists said that there is no such thing in the Kyrgyzstan. The journalists of the panel declared that editorial policy is an abstract concept for the majority of the mass media. What exists is a traditional practice of mass media dependence on founders, owners, executive directors, governmental authorities, and big business. Since all the leading media are held by the son of the president, there is little independence in editorial policy.

In spite of certain costs related to the authorities' pressure on government mass media, it is much more "profitable" for journalists and editors to be under the patronage of the government and government-related entities. The 2005 presidential decree reforming some government media has not resulted in a complete privatization of government papers, but government media that were temporarily deprived of the government's financial backing began to grasp the difficulties of surviving in the market. After receiving renewed government funding and reconsidering their position as government mass media, these outlets now have elected not to become private joint-stock companies because, as Azattyk Radio journalist Bektash Shamshiev noted, "they feel more comfortable with government support than sailing alone."

Panelist Andrew Miasarov noted, "The decree on privatization was fundamentally flawed. Newspapers have no fixed assets, there is nothing that can be turned into shares, and there was no real political will for privatization. In spite of public rhetoric, government officials made it plainly known: there will be no privatization."

With regard to Indicator 6, addressing libel, Kyrgyz law considers libel and slander criminal acts. The types and limits of journalists' liability for disseminating untrue information are identified in Kyrgyzstan's criminal code (articles #127 and #128), civil code, and the Law on the Mass Media. When personal, non-property rights such as honor, dignity, and business reputation are violated, civil and legal liability under Article #18 of the civil code arises only if certain conditions simultaneously exist. In practice, these articles serve as a tool to restrain and censor the mass media, threatening journalists with a criminal record (generally, if he or she is unrepentant), and providing a reason for journalists' self-censorship.

The civil procedure code states that plaintiffs should prove defamation or libel. A media entity found guilty must pay compensation as decided by the court. Impugned and aggrieved citizens have the right to demand that the mass media retract and refute the information.

Unsuccessful attempts to decriminalize libel and slander have been going on for almost 10 years in Kyrgyzstan. The last attempt was made by the current president, Kurmabek Bakiev. In spring 2006, a draft law was presented to Parliament with the aim of humanizing the criminal code and, among other various proposals, removing Articles #127 (libel) and #128 (slander). These proposals were rejected in the draft law approved by Parliament.

Journalists on the panel complained that due to a lack of professional solidarity, they have not been able to create a significant lobby to decriminalize libel and slander. They also believe that claims for huge amounts of damages would cease if the legal code stated that plaintiffs owe tax on the value of any settlements.

MRI reports that public prosecutors are issuing warnings to the mass media several times more often than under the previous regime. According to the panelists, 60 percent of all cases against the mass media are filed by government officials and leaders, and almost 75 percent of those cases are against the opposition mass media. As a rule, the government wins huge amounts of money from the mass media and journalists. Imprisonment is handed down extremely rarely; in 2007 there were no cases of imprisonment, but least five cases were recorded in which journalists were brought to trial.

Freedom of information is addressed in Kyrgyzstan's Law on Access to Information Belonging to Governmental Structures and Local Self-governments. It states, "Access to information includes free access to periodicals and television and radio broadcasts and information in cases provided by the law. This does not extend to confidential information or information that contains government, commercial, or service secrets."

Unequal relations and unequal access to information is a normal practice. The discussion participants noted that beyond government limitations, civil society institutions and NGOs in particular are even more closed to the mass media. The majority of NGOs do not have public relations spokespersons and do not understand information strategy techniques.

According to experts and media lawyers, there have been virtually no examples of journalists taking court action against those violating the right of access to information. Even though legal standards that help journalists are quite well developed, other factors prevent journalists from protecting their rights. Journalists' legal illiteracy is one factor. Another

factor is the contradictions in the legislation about the type and practice of journalists' work. Being on a production line and requiring efficiency, journalism as a rule does not wait for the terms negotiated in the legislation concerning government responses to citizen and organization requests.

But the key reason why journalists do not protect their rights on access to information is their distrust of the courts. The courts depend exclusively on supreme officials' political will. During panel discussions, Zhenishbek Edigeev noted, "Government officials can always prove they have the right not to give information, and both they and judges can subjectively decide how to determine 'socially significant' information...information can be declared secret."

With regard to Indicator 8, access to foreign information and news sources, the Kyrgyz government places no legislative limitations on foreign information. Any media entity with proper funding can sign contracts with world news agencies.

Panelists gave high ratings to Indicator 9, entrance into the field of journalism. After the Soviet era, when professional education meant so much, currently many people who see journalism as a mission and not an education have come into the field.

As in the rest of the world, the Internet has caused the borders between journalism and mass media audiences to become blurred. Journalist and non-journalist blogs and diaries have become part of normal practice for getting information.

Many practicing journalists in important positions in the private and government mass media have secondary or special technical education. In the past, editorial personnel confirmed their professional level based on the government's attestations and formal indicators (availability of higher education, work experience, etc.). At present, there are no such processes, and no organizations that could carry out such assessments legitimately. Even the leading government mass media, such as the NTRC, have had no attestations for over seven years.

The Ministry of Culture has often stated that it will certify journalists, thus introducing some kind of permission to work in the journalism sector. The ministry does partner with the journalists' union in such initiatives, but no real preparatory documents have been seen so far. A number of government structures have introduced pools of journalists that cover their activities, but only Parliament and the president's administration have introduced journalist accreditation.

However, security personnel do make distinctions. Anyone without media credentials covering protests will not be considered a journalist; thus, they can be arrested.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Kyrgyzstan Objective Score: 1.43

"In general, reporters' standards are not followed, and only some mass media adhere to objectivity principles. The mass media are perceived as a weapon to be used for fighting with and in reality, journalists fight information wars. There is no place for objectivity here," said panelist Bektash Shamshiev. This sentiment sums up why this objective has never exceeded a score of 2.00 in the seven years that the MSI has studied Kyrgyzstan, and developments this year resulted in a significant drop from 1.89 to 1.43. Most indicators scored close to the objective score. Only Indicator 7, modern equipment and facilities, received a score noticeably higher and it was the only one to exceed 2.00. On the other hand, Indicator 3, self-censorship, was the lowest, with a score more than half a point lower than the average.

Regarding balance in coverage, the elections present a good example of why panelists handed down lower scores this year than last. The Journalists' Public Association conducted media monitoring during the last week of the pre-election campaign for the 2007 pre-term Parliamentary elections in partnership with Internews Kyrgyzstan and the Taza Shailoo Association, with support from the US Embassy. This monitoring covered 45 newspapers, 12 broadcast media, and six Internet sites in Bishkek and Osh. The monitoring established the following:

- None of the mass media impartially covered the election campaigns.
- Analysis of advertising on private television channels shows that all private television channels were interested not in political bias but in the opportunity to earn as much as possible. In particular, this explains why advertisements for the Ar Namys opposition party were shown on such television channels as Pyramid and Channel 5—which many believe are owned by people close to the president.
- Only the national channel, NTRC, ran advertisements for all 12 parties that participated in the elections, being required to do so as a government mass media entity. However, the Ata-Meken Party and others were unable to run advertisements during prime time. They appealed to the Supreme Court, which ruled in their favor, but NTRC dragged its heels implementing the decision until the court forced them to with only two days to go before campaigning ended.

During a discussion of the election coverage, panelist Maxuda Aitieva said that the imbalance and journalists' bias cannot be explained simply by political procedures and pressure from the authorities. "The problem is also in the low level of

journalists' political and civil culture, as they do not separate commercial information from socially significant information. Journalists usually rush to earn money during elections," he said.

Last year did see one positive development. In contrast to previous years, none of the mass media launched a war in the newspapers and on broadcasts directed against other mass media. To all appearances, the Kyrgyz mass media are experiencing the end of the stage of information confrontation, in the face of a more real threat: becoming part of the combined media holding owned by the "first family."

Journalists in the Kyrgyz Republic do not follow a formal set of ethical standards. "Ethics in relations do not exist in the mass media's editorial offices, and neither do they pay attention to ethics when describing events," said Antonina Blindina. However, the majority of those who stand for approving ethical standards believe that resolving this issue will simultaneously promote greater professional solidarity and strengthen self-regulation in the media.

In 2007, at the Ninth Central Asian Mass Media Conference in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, participating countries discussed self-regulation of mass media. Journalists from other countries were ambiguous about the issue, but Kyrgyz representatives declared jointly that they accept the idea and created a new entity called the Committee to Consider Complaints against the Mass Media. The committee consists of nine members representing the mass media and civil society, and is intended to serve as an alternative to court proceedings. At the end of 2007, the committee began work on developing a code of ethics drawn up by the Journalists'

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).

Congress. Delegates from various media entities approved the code, but it is still not known what specific tools will be used to self-regulate the media and how the code will overcome the tradition of following owners' interests.

Panelists provided examples of government extortion and blackmail of journalists with their coverage or (non-coverage) of events and corruption claims. The government media are more inclined to such tendencies than private media, as their owners strictly control journalists' activities and they more clearly negotiate editorial principles in this aspect.

Ilim Karypkulov declared that the NTRC is an enterprise riddled with corruption. The newly appointed NTRC Artists' Board, under Melis Eshimkanov, identified a number of cases of bribe-taking and corruption. According to unconfirmed sources, law enforcement and local authorities had their own "price lists" for airing positive reports or to stop negative news from being broadcast. Investigative bodies are currently examining the majority of these cases.

Self-censorship is significant problem in the Kyrgyzstan. Government publications are still censored. Both the government and private mass media still maintain and use lists of undesirable people for writing articles and opinions. There are a number of closed and taboo subjects for the media, such as privatization, and opposition activities. None of the media cover international dissent or conflicts, in spite of the conflicts between local Kyrgyz and Dungan communities. The subject of the economy and politics is especially prohibited.

Another important inducement to self-censorship is economic dependence. The management of NTRC is discussing the problem of how to get donor assistance from government structures and agencies but not to become a hostage to this financing.

In a private conversation with Kulinskiy, his colleagues from the *Agym* newspaper explained how difficult it is for them to change their viewpoints and write in a completely different way than they did under the previous owner. Judging by *Agym's* pages, self-censorship has overcome journalists' values, ideas, and principles.

With regard to Indicator 4, reporting on significant events, the Kyrgyz media essentially do not cover intra-political developments, changes in privatization processes, or events related to the authorities' properties. During the most critical political and economic periods for the country, citizens traditionally get their news from other sources, such as Russian television channels and newspapers, *Svoboda* ("Freedom") Radio, or BBC broadcasts. News bulletins on the popular Channel 5 cover nothing but state press conferences, government conferences, or the president's trips and meetings.

Political news is so limited and banal that the media have stopped being effective. Recently, the UNDP Gender Project and SIDA of Sweden conducted monitoring of news broadcasts on NTRC, and their results showed that the same news story can be repeated for two to three days. For example, news on the president's trip to the southern regions and meetings in Karakul was broadcast 16 times on the NTRC news bulletins. The news item that the brave mayor of Karakul rescued an elderly woman from a fire and later received a government award was shown 10 times. However, none of the media reported the seizure of the entire circulation of two newspapers printed in an independent printing office.

Most print and electronic mass media use information from two national news agencies; clearly, the same news travels from one outlet's broadcast to another and from one outlet to another. According to Kulinskiy, the modern mass media do not take into account people's pyramid of needs.

Journalists' wages at government media are very low. According to the director of the Media Representation Institute, NTRC journalists earn KGS 6,000 to KGS 8,000 (\$160 to \$220) monthly. It is also difficult to earn serious bonuses for published work, as bonus amounts have not been reviewed since 1996 and the sum's value has changed significantly since then. Given rising inflation, editorial office employees cannot survive on salary alone. According to some experts, a state that sets such low wage scales presumes and secretly sanctions corruption and bribe-taking. In the private mass media, the situation is often even more dramatic. For example, panelists revealed that Pyramid TV employees have not received their salaries for three to four months.

Corruption thrives throughout government service as well. Panelists talked about "normalized" corruption practices in the Finance Ministry, as they take "compensation" at clearly identified rates: 10 percent of the payment value. To a large degree, government media are corrupt as a result of expectations and general practice.

Promised salaries serve as an attraction for journalists. For example, when Channel 5 was founded, journalists were promised \$1,000 per month. In reality, the salaries do not exceed \$500. When a new boss took over the NTRC in 2007, he started inviting the best staff from Channel 5 and Pyramid by promising salaries of not less than KGS 16,000 to KGS 20,000 (\$450 to \$550) and offering creative positions. Many experts responded, but in reality, they receive about half of the promised monthly salaries.

According to experts' estimates, the capital city's successful journalists earn from \$300 to \$500 per month. In the majority of regional newspapers, the journalists do not get bonuses,

nor is freelance work allowed. Print media journalists' average salaries are KGS 1,000 to KGS 3,000, and editorial offices have limited opportunities to attract advertisers. Radio workers in regions are even worse off, as they earn KGS 750 to KGS 1,500 per month.

The worldwide tendency of entertainment programs forcing out news broadcasts and mass media (Indicator 6) is also typical for the media in Kyrgyzstan. The total circulation of the entertainment-based print publications is several times higher than those covering more traditional news. Gossip publications provide lots of space for the activities of show business stars. On the heels of the Russian media, Kyrgyz newspapers (such as *Agym*) run anything-goes competitions with prizes that include a romantic supper with a variety artist or film star. According to journalists, the feedback from these articles is much higher than responses on the most critical social and political articles. On the NTRC, news and other information and analytical broadcasts do not exceed 20 percent, whereas entertainment broadcasts account for almost 80 percent.

No reliable research is available on media consumption in the country, but common sense and experience suggest higher audiences for Russian serials and entertainment shows. Kyrgyz media ignore copyrights in their pursuit of larger audiences, as unlicensed broadcasts are aired; and without doubt, ideas are plagiarized from Russian originals and sometimes from other local media.

Despite the fact that Indicator 7 (modern media equipment) received the best score of Objective 2 indicators, in general media equipment is dated and in need of replacement. At regional publications, some editorial offices still have no computers, and articles are typed on old typewriters. Printing is concentrated in two of the capital city's printing offices, but the majority of area and regional newspapers cannot deliver page proofs to the printing office and then collect the print runs. Because of this, the publishing conditions and quality of print are still at 1950s levels. Regarding the regional press in the south, the periodicals from Dzhahal-Abad and only one newspaper from Osh, *Itogi Nedeli*, are printed in an independent printing office. The newly-formed capital city press might have no alternatives for publication soon, because to comply with Kyrgyz's anti-monopoly legislation, the independent printing office has to limit the number of publications it can print.

Not all equipment is up to par at the Uchkun State Concern, where the majority of all publications are printed. According to experts, the Chinese equipment that was bought several years ago has a short working life.

At regional radio stations, equipment is deteriorating. The majority of independent stations were installed during

the past 10-15 years using grants from international organizations. But the grant programs have now virtually ended, and local radio stations have not become successful mass media enterprises. The majority still do not know their audience, what should be their content, or how to earn money. Regional mass media are experiencing serious shortages of creative personnel, management experts, and legal support as well.

Many television stations in the regions are suffering a similar fate. According to calculations by the Osh television station's director, the replacement of equipment of regional television and changeover to digital technologies will require at least \$1 million. However, there have been no potential investors in the region so far that would be able to bring television up to modern standards.

Even the capital city's private television studios and companies' ability to produce good programming is quite complicated. One of the first successful television stations, Pyramid TRK, is being choked by a lack of money and technical problems. Against a background of better equipped television channels (Channel 5, NTS, NTRC), this company is becoming less competitive, although the channel's employees more or less aim at a certain target group, including the city's poor small business owners.

Technical re-equipping of the private and government channels that support the current government will allow production of more of their own media products. However, the existing technical capacities are not even 50 percent used. The lack of qualified technical personnel has become a large problem. For example, through a Japanese technical grant, NTRC received new equipment including studio consoles, but no director can fully use them.

Relay systems cause even more concern. The country no longer has 100 percent television coverage. Reception of the national channel, NTRC, is only possible in 78 percent of the country, according to experts. The relays available in the regions are already obsolete and break down frequently. There are some regions in the country where neither Kyrgyz television nor newspapers can reach. The obsolete relays belonging to the Production Association for Relay Lines, Television, and Radio Broadcasting (RPO RMTR) distort NTRC's picture, and this issue has resulted in mutual criticism and finger-pointing between the two.

Quality specialized journalism scored fairly low among panelists. Although Kyrgyzstan has no real specialized journalism sector, some subjects are starting to be covered with regularity. Parliamentary journalism is developing, thanks to support from international organizations and the implementation of several projects designed to support and

develop Parliament's information strategies. Medical journalism is another important direction in Kyrgyz journalism. Articles on medical science are not highlighted in every newspaper, but they are frequent and they are quite interesting. In addition, many publications on health are available in the country, and the NTRC set up a special Television Clinic Project. The Ministry of Health is quite efficient at providing information through the its press secretary.

Crime reporting has become reasonably well developed. In addition to the specialized newspaper, *Delo* #, many journalists in mass media regularly write on criminal subjects. International organizations also offer support in this sector. The OSCE Center in Bishkek works to liberalize media's access to law enforcement sources, and to strengthen the role of the press services working with the Ministry of Interior's structural departments.

There are isolated undertakings in sports journalism as well. The president's instruction to support football and national sports involving strength (unarmed combat, self-defense, judo, wrestling, boxing) has provided a great stimulus to developing this specialization. The NTRC has been signing commercial agreements to broadcast football competitions for the second time.

Virtually no members of the Kyrgyz media conduct investigative journalism. Journalists have neither the time to conduct the proper research nor the willingness to take such a studied risk. High staff turnovers also result in a lack of journalists with the skill for investigative journalism.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Kyrgyzstan Objective Score: 2.15

This objective scored more or less the same as last year, with a drop of only 0.08. Most indicators scored along the same lines as the average, with two exceptions. Indicator 3, state media represent the political spectrum, scored nearly a point lower than the average. Indicator 2, citizen access to media, scored more than a point higher.

The availability of a plurality of news sources is under threat in Kyrgyzstan. Journalists widely discuss the possibility of a large media holding being formed that would include all the more or less successful media enterprises and stop any opportunities to develop independent media. The person behind this movement is Maxim Bakiev, the son of Kyrgyzstan's president.

Even now, the majority of media professionals and observers have noted a radical reduction in information sources in all

the media of the country, but especially in television and radio. Journalists' dependence on their editors' approaches to the positions of authorities and business group interests effectively eliminates the opportunity to use multiple information sources and well-balanced approaches. Even "branded" foreign studios and broadcasts (for example, Svoboda/Freedom Radio) have declared their objectivity and conscientiousness in delivering information, but they often hide their prejudicial nature and political interests.

Citizen accessibility to information varies significantly between Kyrgyzstan's regions, large cities, and the capital city. The capital has over 200 newspapers and dozens of radio stations, four cable television channels, and five television channels, but the situation in the regions is much different. For instance, the national press and popular social and entertainment newspapers are delivered to Batken Region approximately one week after being printed.

The delivery system represents the largest problem for printed publications. The two regional delivery monopolies, Kyrgyzbasmasoz and the Kyrgyz Post Office, are expensive but they do not guarantee efficient delivery to consumers. They neither remit money for subscriptions and newspapers sold in a timely manner, nor have they set up a system to deliver printed publications to the regions. According to Blindina from *Chuiskie Izvestiya* and *For You* newspapers, up to 80 percent of the cover price is attributable to distribution costs.

In addition, the authorities use the post office as a tool against undesirable mass media during critical political periods. "Besides the inefficient way post office employees work, these employees 'forget' to distribute newspapers

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.

containing articles critical of the authorities. They know they are monopolists and they dictate their conditions by not implementing certain obligations to the newspapers," said Yrysbek Omurzakov, chief editor of the *Tribuna* newspaper.

Another problem is organizing retail sales of publications. The capital city has made some developments and Kyrgyzbasmasoz has to compete, but it holds a distribution and sales network monopoly in the regions. High-circulation publications and successful business enterprises (such as *Vecherniy Bishkek*, *Agym*, and *Avtodelo*) have organized their own delivery channels, but the idea of consolidating deliveries and creating alternatives to the monopolies have not been developed.

In spite of an attempt to regulate the Internet, access to information is open and free. Some negative tendencies can be seen in this sector, including initiatives by MPs to regulate the Internet and denial of service attacks on websites of some newspapers and news websites, which have appeared more frequently during significant political events.

The number of Internet providers in Kyrgyzstan is stable and has not changed. According to research by international organizations, Internet access is available across 10 percent of the republic and is increasing in large towns and the capital. In the countryside, computerization is not well developed. The cost is high while quality and speed are quite low. In the towns, numerous resource centers have been opened with grants from international organizations, and Internet services are free for certain social groups, including students, journalists, and civil society representatives. Internet clubs and IP telephony are also quite widespread, as they are available in each regional and even area center. The cost of use in such centers is relatively low, between KGS 33 to KGS 55 per hour.

The price of printed publications continued to grow in 2007. At present, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, the market leader, costs KGS 11 to KGS 14 in the capital. The relatively expensive glossy magazines are also popular; that market has increased by 47 percent in the last year.

Panelists recommended several measures be taken in order to expand access to national mass media. Among them, one is to build an independent printing facility in the south to help further strengthen the media institutions in the region. At present, the aggregate circulation of southern publications is almost 100,000 copies, with at least five profitable entities. Second is that the issue of the politics and authority of RPO RMTR's relaying infrastructure should be resolved, as this organization is used as a weapon against "undesirable" media. In the future, RPO RMTR should be privatized,

averting a crisis for all independent electronic mass media and a totally imposed pricing policy for all government television and radio companies.

The state does not limit access to international websites or the foreign press, television, or radio broadcasts. In fact, the southern regions of Kyrgyzstan have become a platform for spreading foreign radio broadcasts from neighboring countries. The ability to subscribe to foreign printed publications is limited only by individual financial considerations and language skills. The difference in the volumes of the foreign media that are accessible to people vary depending on whether they live in a town or village.

Svoboda and BBC Radio are broadcast in Kyrgyzstan: two of the national radio channels broadcast four hours of BBC programs per week. News reports from world news agencies such as Reuters are bought and broadcast.

Chinese-made parabolic antennas are becoming more accessible and commonplace, and the capital has cable television. Television and radio broadcasts from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan can be received in various regions of the republic. The First Channel Worldwide Network (ORT) and RTR, Russia (with add-on television channels, such as Culture, TVC, and others) are the most widely watched in the country. Broadcasting in Russian for Kyrgyz television companies is not competitive, compared to channels from Russia. However, radio from Russia has practically been lost to local competition and control of frequencies.

Regarding the printed media in the capital, Russian titles have been leaders among foreign publications for several years. The *Argumenty i Fakty* newspaper, from Kazakhstan, is very active in the market now.

As discussed in Objective 2, there is no expectation of editorial independence at state-run media. Despite new laws making an effort to turn NTRC into a public service broadcaster, the ruling party in the end did not want to lose its main "megaphone." By manipulating the members of the newly elected Supervisory Board the authorities removed this structure from the decision making process.

Kyrgyzstan has two main news agencies, 24.kg and AKIpress. The Bishkek Press Center (BPC), another independent news agency, has also strengthened its position. In contrast to the two leading news agencies, BPC is trying to become a center for analytical information and expert assessments from the most prestigious experts. The Kabar State News Agency is losing out on part of the market, but it has priority in access to government information sources. The majority of mass media use these agencies as the main source for their news reports.

The prices for distributing information are quite acceptable, and access is open to all media. The media that have capital and revenue can also buy information from foreign sources, but at several times the price.

As reflected in the score for Indicator 5, original radio and television channel productions are limited. Even the NTRC, with its large technical and human resources, produces only six to eight hours daily of original programming. Information and analytical broadcasts make up 20 percent of NTRC's productions, and entertainment and educational broadcasts make up 80 percent. On average, other television companies produce even less of their own media product.

Efficient news several times per day, based on the CNN model, has been the goal and functional niche for the private Channel 5. In addition, the channel's news output has increased since it began. However, it does not report on multiple issues per day because its financial, human, and professional resources are limited. Pyramid's news is aimed more at city residents, whereas the NTRC news is supposedly aimed at everybody in the country.

The lack of a system of reporters' bureaus and the decay of regional television studios significantly reduces the capacity of regional news. The regions supply only a few reports per news bulletin, which usually contains 10 to 15 stories. News bulletins from television and radio studios do not give any serious, detailed information on world events, further isolating the country. The NTRC's attempts to open several bureaus in Russia, Kazakhstan, and China have not been supported by the state so far.

Radio stations (with the exception of the Europe+ Radio and, in some regions, the Azattyk+ Almaz Alliance) basically gather their own information, and their news bulletins are completely built on reports from news agencies and other mass media. However, many radio stations do not carry any news at all or retransmit foreign stations that provide listeners with news from other countries (for example, Echo of Moscow).

The mass media at various levels indulge in plagiarism and pirating of news stories because Kyrgyzstan has no copyright security law.

With regard to Indicator 6, transparency of media ownership, Kyrgyz law does not mandate disclosure of the ownership of mass media entities. But in the majority of cases, the traditional channel for information dissemination—gossip—reveals who owns which media enterprise and how and why the sale or purchase of the mass media took place.

As mentioned above, there are clear signs that a media holding group is being assembled that threatens to take

over all the more or less successful mass media businesses. This media conglomerate allegedly already includes the RTR retransmission (through RPO RMTR), such newspapers as *Agym* and *Vecherniy Bishkek*, MSN, and part of the Uchkun State Concern. The editorial policies of these media, along with the politically motivated declarations by foreign business representatives to invest in some media entities, are indirect proof of a holding company being formed.

Last year, the expansion of foreign investors in the national mass media continued. For example, Kazakhstan's 31st Channel (a holding of the Kazakh president's family) bought NBT, and the controlling interest in Pyramid was sold to a business person from Kazakhstan.

Indicator 7, regarding representation of public interests in the media, was rated low by panelists. In recent years, the republic's leadership has backed away from the rhetorical strategy of supporting ethnic variety, and it has no plan to support media programming for national minorities. Kyrgyz, Russian, and Uzbek government publications receive state subsidies, but those for Dungan (the oldest newspaper for ethnic minorities), Korean, or Azerbaijani newspapers do not. Being limited in finding revenue from advertising, these publications eke out a miserable existence and do not appear regularly.

National television no longer broadcasts in minority languages. Citizens are exposed to the culture of ethnic minorities only through Wheel of Life, a popular program covering everyday people's lives. This format does not cover critical issues on problems and conflict areas in diasporas, however. In addition, given the secondary and unequal status of media for ethnic minorities, their journalists and editors do not cover issues related to specific interests and problems of communities.

Panelists also noted that the Russian press has a decreasing presence because of the Russian-speaking population's continuing emigration. According to the Embassy of Russia in Kyrgyzstan, 44,000 people left to live in Russia in 2007.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Kyrgyzstan Objective Score: 1.64

This objective registered a minor increase over last year, moving from 1.55 to 1.64. Overall, panelists rated most indicators close to the average. Indicator 3, advertising agencies and the advertising market, was the leading indicator, while Indicators 6 and 7, market research and measurements of audience and circulation, were somewhat behind the others.

The mass media and related enterprises still operate as profit seeking businesses in the majority of cases, although do so inefficiently, in spite of the popularity of a number of publications. A number of economically successful media enterprises are either specialized advertising publications or are not oriented toward news. Examples of successful private media that combine news and entertainment content are isolated.

With regard to the media-related businesses for distributing and delivering publications, those businesses are government-owned. The retail system, Kyrgyzbasmasoz, is on the threshold of privatization, and this issue has not yet been resolved. In the regions, no alternatives exist to the government systems for delivery and distribution, and government structures seek more to hinder than develop the media market. Kyrgyzpochtasy (the Post Office) has huge debts to both private and government media. The postal service is also used as a means for the authorities to apply political pressure to the private media.

Regarding Internet sources, the 24.kg News Agency and AKIpress have played significant roles in developing the journalism sector. Last year, the 24.kg News Agency was clearly already well developed, and now it is on the threshold of sustainability. AKIpress News Agency was grant-funded initially, and although funding has stopped, the quality has continued.

The Kyrgyz media have several revenue sources. Among those sources are advertising; distribution (selling print runs and subscriptions); grants, and; various subsidies, including money from the state budget. Sponsorship is one of the main revenue sources for a number of private mass media entities established by influential politicians and businesspeople that see the publications primarily as tools for propaganda and agitation.

Advertising is still weak in the media business. In spite of the large growth in advertising volume due to increases in industries such as construction, satellite communications, and food, advertising is under a monopoly. The opportunity to acquire or increase advertising is more limited for regions than for outlets in towns or the capital. Non-news and specialty press receive essentially no revenue from advertising, earning 80 to 90 percent of their revenue from selling publications. Online advertising is still in its infancy, and Internet ads are more expensive than printed publications and on cable television.

The difference in advertising budgets for different types of publications is significant. In general, advertising broadsheets specialize in accepting and publishing advertisements, the rates for which are permanently increasing. At present,

the average cost per line is KGS 90 (\$2). Many media entities—including *Vecherniy Bishkek*, *Megapolis*, and *For You*—prefer to have their own advertising agencies, which often work with no fixed rates for advertisements.

The state makes subscription compulsory to a number of national newspapers and gives subsidies to the government mass media at national, regional, and area levels. Regional and area newspapers that owe money to suppliers of electricity, paper, and other materials receive subsidies from the state to cover nearly all their expenses. Government subsidies to private, authority-supporting media are in indirect forms: tax privileges, special rules on anti-monopoly policy, providing journalists with free trips as they accompany officials, etc.

Recent developments influenced the score for Indicator 3, advertising agencies and related businesses supporting the advertising market. Lenta Advertising Information Enterprise, owned by a member of the president's family, strengthened its market position this year and threatens to monopolize the advertising market. Lenta's assets include the Fifth Channel, Love-Radio, Pyramid TRK, RTR-Planeta (since 2008), and magazine and outdoor advertising in the Bishkek.

Numerous advertising newspapers (*Vecherniy Bishkek* in particular) and television fill the line advertising niche. The prices and volumes of line advertising are constantly increasing. At present, the Friday edition of *Vecherniy Bishkek* is 48 pages, and due to the large volume of advertisements, the editor and owner have kept the cover price at KGS 7 for a long time. The price per line ad in *Vecherniy Bishkek* is KGS 60 to KGS 80, and the price for box advertising varies, starting at a minimum of KGS 1,350. The prices for advertising

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.

in electronic media vary significantly, depending on the type of television. Cable television's owners promote goods and services with discounts and price variations of \$20 to \$25 per minute for permanent advertisers (satellite communications, casinos, Shoro, etc.).

NTRC does not have a firm pricing policy. In some cases, the difference between prices for various advertisers is huge, but there is no explanation for the privileges and discounts given.

The regional radio and television stations united under the Regional Television and Radio Broadcasters' Association jointly regulate advertising issues. However, low advertising volumes in the regions limit the contribution that advertising can make to an editorial office's budget.

This year's score for Indicator 4, share of media revenue as advertising, was affected by the growth of the advertising market. These advertising markets in the capital and large towns are not yet saturated, and worldwide producers and brands are coming into the market. Attracting advertisements from world agencies and companies in Kyrgyz is not feasible, however, because copyrights are breached in the media.

At the same time, the demand for advertising in such publications as *Vecherniy Bishkek* is growing such that the newspaper has to keep increasing the number of pages and reduce news and information coverage. Journalists and editors of competing newspapers believe that the playing field in the media environment is not even, given the privileges that the Anti-monopoly Committee gave *Vecherniy Bishkek* when it announced that the newspaper is a permitted monopoly (under the law, any single business controlling more than 35 percent of the market is subject to monopoly regulation; in this case, the government made an exception only allowed in a few prior cases). *Vecherniy Bishkek* continues to receive significant advertising from key sources in the limited advertising market, including from the government and international organizations.

The revenue from subscriptions plays a primary role for a number of government mass media. According to an independent printing office's data, a number of newspapers such as *Slovo Kyrgyzstana* are able to support their circulations at the level of almost 9,000 copies only due to subscriptions received. Revenue from subscriptions is not as high for private publications and popular tabloid newspapers, however.

Although no cases have been registered recently regarding direct state investment into private non-governmental mass media, the government has sufficient intervention tools to influence and interfere in editorial policy. Examples include halting of print runs of private newspapers, depriving electronic mass media entities of licenses to broadcast, and

making it very difficult to get a license extended. Other effective tactics include tax checks by the state and cutting off access to information from government sources. The government is also an important source of advertising.

With regard to market research, marketing companies in Kyrgyzstan have been working nominally for a long time, but none of the mass media have commissioned market research in order to build their development strategies. Management training under the Mass Media Support Fund emphasizes that editors and journalists must understand a publication's specific character, identify its target group, and cater to consumers' needs. However, these strategic components for success are foregone by the majority of the mass media. Ordering market research is impossible for the majority of the mass media due to financial weakness or modest means. Inviting world-renowned researchers such as the Gallup Institute is just a dream for the majority of private and government mass media entities.

The lack of serious research makes editors and journalists try to "draw in" their audiences when launching interactive broadcasts, organizing feedback, or running audience surveys.

A number of advertising agencies offer market research. Research companies include M-Vector, M'ADgroup Bishkek, SIAR-Bishkek, Dialection, and El Picker. The most recent large-scale applied research project was the 2005 SIAR Limited print media survey. In 2007, the Dialection Consulting Agency conducted market research into radio audiences for two specific stations in the southern regions of the country, which detailed the most important aspects of the radio stations' listeners. However, the reports that appear in various sources on calculated ratings and market leader positions are not trusted, and the sources do not pretend that the research is valid because they do not report the most important details regarding the conducted research.

The struggle for honest competition and to identify exact circulation numbers started with the development of the Mass Media Support Fund and the opening of an independent printing office. Newspapers that are printed in the Uchkun State Concern or Erkin Too Governmental Printing Office often either exaggerate circulation numbers or do not offer them. The printing office and its clients have not made any moves toward honest competition. Essentially, the state ignores non-observance of laws by many government and pro-authority publications.

Kyrgyzstan has no open source where information can be gathered on the circulation of publications. The independent printing company's status, and its close relationship with a number of US organizations and its representative international supervisory board, do not allow the authorities

to openly interfere in its work. However, there are other tools of influence—for example, pressure on the printing company's clients.

Studying Internet use in the republic began last year as applied academic research. Students and teachers at the American University of Central Asia's (AUCA) Sociology Department visited the regions and participated in the university's study. However, as often happens with academic research, their results are unavailable to the public at large or even to specialized expert groups.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Kyrgyzstan Objective Score: 1.90

This objective experienced a small decline from 2.09 last year to 1.90. A number of indicators received scores dispersed from the overall average. Indicators 1 and 4, trade associations and academic journalism programs received scores close to a point lower than the average. On the high side, Indicators 3 and 6, NGOs and access to printing facilities and newsprint, scored upwards of a point greater than the average.

As in previous years, the panelists noted the paradoxical situation with developing professional associations. On the one hand, Kyrgyzstan has many supporting mass media NGOs and professional unions, and their numbers are increasing every year. Each organization has its functional niche and wide circle of service recipients and members. MRI provides legal advice and support for journalists and the mass media; the Mass Media Support Center offers trainings and publishing services to its members; the Regional Television and Radio Broadcasters' Association helps find advertisers and regulates advertising issues; and the Journalists' Public Association monitors journalists' rights in the country.

On the other hand, NGOs are lacking in areas such as strengthening of professional consolidation, raising legal and civil awareness among journalists, and filing cases against government structures that violate freedoms and rights.

"Journalists remain an unprotected group due to a lack of developed and efficient NGOs," Kulinskiy said. "NGOs and the mass media try to support freedom of speech, but their individuality, multiple views, focus on grants, and weak contact with the target group and the state make it difficult to efficiently defend freedom of speech and journalists' rights."

Neither the media nor NGOs supporting the media have been able to resolve the problem of delivering and distributing printed media, organizing an association for print media, and working to protect the press's

interests. The initiative that was proposed at the end of 2007—creating a committee to handle complaints against the mass media—has not yet come to fruition. The selection of professionals for the committee's supervisory board at the Kyrgyz Journalist's Congress in December 2007 promises to move this initiative in the right direction.

The professional organizations that protect journalists' rights can be divided into membership and non-membership groups. There are less membership organizations probably because none of the associations has looked after the needs of journalists and the mass media. There has been no precedent that a professional media organization would actively protect the interests of its members and receive membership dues that would allow it to organize activities and be self-supportive.

Kyrgyzstan has one government-affiliated membership organization: the Kyrgyzstan Union of Journalists, the inheritor of the USSR's Journalists' Union. Although the union has neither the prestige nor influence of its predecessor, in 2007 it did actively work in partnership with a number of NGOs and international organizations to organize the Congress of Journalists.

The most widespread strategy of media NGOs is focusing on grant programs and projects. Only 15 to 20 NGOs are actively working in the freedom of speech and journalists' protection sector. They include Internews, MRI, Mass Media Support Centre, Journalists' Public Association, and the Bishkek Press Club.

Journalists often complain that their rights are often violated, and that from year to year involvement in journalism is becoming more risky. Representatives of the organizations that protect the mass media maintain that journalists do not

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.

want to observe their rights, as they resist taking to court those responsible for the hostile environment. But recently, journalists have expressed concern about the lack of solidarity within their profession. They are holding discussions on the need to jointly resolve their problems.

Indicator 4, regarding academic programs in journalism, also scored in the low range. Since the former Soviet republics have gained their independence, the codes on entering journalism have been removed and the significance of professional training for journalists has fallen into decay. Kyrgyzstan has experienced a long-standing crisis in journalists' education and traditional discussions on journalism as a mission and profession. The result is a huge number of people in the journalism sector who have had no professional training.

Panelists did not agree on the quality of training for graduates of various universities. Some said that journalists from the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University are better trained, while others felt that graduates from Manas University or AUCA are better. Kyrgyzstan has almost no experts with good theoretical knowledge and practical work experience, so institutions hire either faculty who have made a name in practicing journalism or those marginal academic workers who devoted their lives to studying journalism.

Journalism students sometimes have chances to study abroad. Several dozen young people have traveled to developed countries to study journalism, but the percentage of those who come back as experts with diplomas is small, and it is difficult for them to adapt to Kyrgyz practices.

Training for professional journalists (Indicator 5) is sufficiently available in Kyrgyzstan. International and local public organizations run educational programs for journalists and the media. They offer various thematic seminars and courses on legal aspects, reporting skills, covering children's issues, and covering gender and ethnic issues, but no courses are available in efficient media management, advertising sales, or media distribution technologies. Designers and paste-up operators occupy a special place in producing printed media. Training courses in modern international standards for these skills are conducted at the independent printing office of the Mass Media Support Center.

Several generations of well-known journalists and television workers and operators were trained in short courses offered by Internews. At present, other organizations (Bishkek Press Club, Mass Media Support Centre, Media Consult, and IMP) provide specialized short-term training courses. Almost all training course are free of charge, as they are part of grant projects, and journalists or operators can enroll simply by asking.

Kyrgyzstan faces challenges with regard to Indicator 6, private and independent printing enterprises. Printing became a profitable business in Kyrgyzstan long ago, and a large number of private, small printing companies and studios have opened. However, after the Resolution of the Government of the Kyrgyzstan, only a limited number of print businesses could print their periodicals with no problem. Among the sanctioned printing companies there are two governmental houses (Uchkun State Concern and Erkin Too Printing House) and the independent printing press, the Mass Media Support Center. The print business cannot compete with the government, however. The Uchkun State Concern always receives the most profitable and biggest orders—except from the opposition mass media, which are printed almost exclusively by independent presses.

Media distribution channels are also an issue in the republic, as described above. The government network for distributing and delivering Kyrgyzbasmasoz and Kyrgyzpochtasy print media is a monopoly. Yet in spite of high payments for delivery and the large number of printed media that have to apply to Kyrgyzpochtasy, the organization is in a sad state in many respects due to poor work practices and a lack of management technologies.

The situation with electronic media is also bleak. Regarding broadcast transmitters, virtually all of them are involved with RPO RMTR. This poses many potential conflicts, as it is unclear who will support and control the relays. Kyrgyzstan's two smaller private Internet providers (Elcat and Asiainfo) are desperately struggling to compete against Kyrgyztelecom's monopoly.

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