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SERBIA

In 2008, the two dominant political issues in Serbia were Kosovo's independence and Serbian relations with the EU. Presidential elections were held in January and February, and Boris Tadić was re-elected on a pro-European platform. In February, after Kosovo declared independence, protestors attacked foreign diplomatic missions in Belgrade. Although the Serbian government condemned the attacks, some members of the former government gave support to protestors.

Deep divisions between the governing coalition partners, President Tadić's Democratic Party (DS) and the Democratic Party of Serbia, resulted in the fall of the Serbian government in March 2008. Parliamentary elections were held in May 2008. The "For a European Serbia" bloc, led by DS, won the majority of parliament's 250 seats. A new coalition government took office in July 2008, and the new parliament ratified the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU in September 2008. In June and July 2008 accused war criminals Stojan Župljanin and Radovan Karadžić were arrested in Belgrade and transferred to The Hague.

Despite high economic growth rates in recent years, Serbia shows signs of instability. Unemployment is still a major challenge. According to the European Commission's Serbia 2008 Progress Report, "Overall, fiscal policy remained expansionary, ahead and after several rounds of elections, contributing to weakened macro-economic stability. The fiscal position therefore remains vulnerable, and fiscal policy would benefit from strong external anchors in the face of growing expenditures pressures and the ongoing financial crisis." But, as of December 2008, the international financial crisis has had a limited direct impact on the Serbian economy and its financial sector.

With regard to Serbian media, 2008 will be remembered for a return to institutionalized state interference and renewed politicization of the media industry. Top officials announced that the government has the right to influence the editorial policy of state-owned media. The government intentionally blocked the privatization of media owned by local governments, the Republic Broadcasting Agency's (RRA) allocation of regional and municipal frequencies pointed to strong political influence, and licensing transparency and accountability remain questionable. The European Commission report also identifies several problem areas in the Serbian media sector: "Serbia has not yet signed the European Convention on Transfrontier Television. There has been little progress in the area of electronic communications and information technologies. Preparations in the area of information society and media are at an early stage. The sector is adversely affected by the legal vacuum and inadequate institutional and regulatory capacity."

Serbia's score changed little this year, as some minor gains and setbacks canceled each other out. Scores for Objectives 1 (freedom of speech), 2 (professional journalism), and 5 (supporting institutions) remained the same. Objective 3, plurality of news, showed only a minor increase. The exception was Objective 4, business management, which did suffer a serious setback, sliding from 2.87 to 2.45.

SERBIA AT A GLANCE

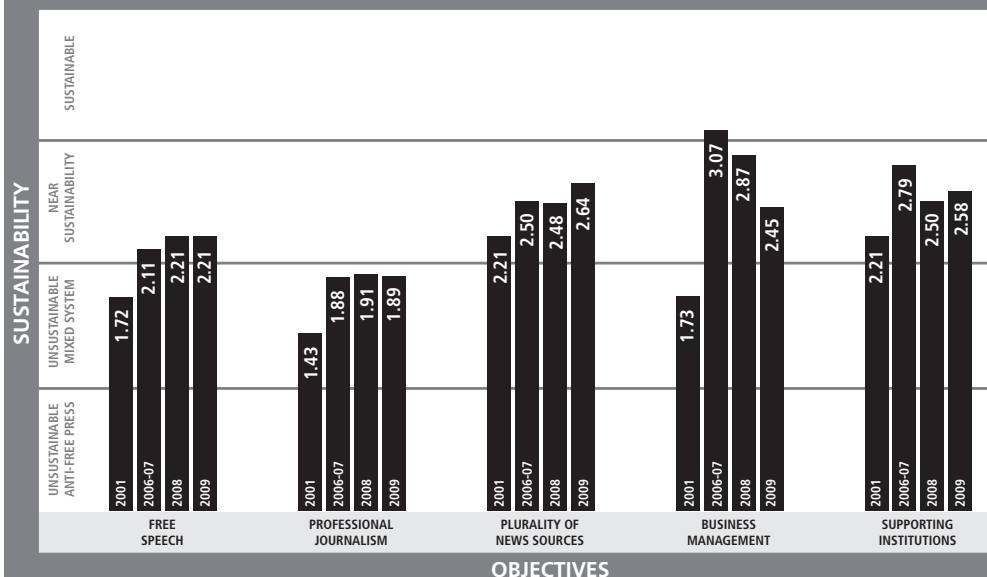
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 10,159,046 (July 2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Belgrade
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Serb 82.9%, Hungarian 3.9%, Romany 1.4%, Yugoslavs 1.1%, Bosniaks 1.8%, Montenegrin 0.9%, other 8% (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Serbian Orthodox 85%, Catholic 5.5%, Protestant 1.1%, Muslim 3.2%, unspecified 2.6%, other, unknown, or atheist 2.6% (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Serbian 88.3% (official), Hungarian 3.8%, Bosniak 1.8%, Romany 1.1%, other 4.1%, unknown 0.9% (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2007-Atlas):** \$34.97 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **GNI per capita (2007-PPP):** \$10,220 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **Literacy rate:** 96.4% (male 98.9%, female 94.1%) (2003 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Boris Tadic (since July 11, 2004)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 149 (dailies 19, weeklies 28, bi-weeklies 14, monthlies 69, others 19); Radio: N/A; Television Stations: 105 (RBA Belgrade)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** N/A
- > **Broadcast ratings:** top three television and radio stations: TV RTS 1, TV Pink, TV B92; Radio Beograd 1, Radio B-92, Radio S (AGB Nielsen, November 2008)
- > **News agencies:** BETA (private), FONET (private), TANJUG (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** Approximately \$275 million in 2008 (AGB Nielsen)
- > **Internet usage:** 1,500,000 (2007 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: SERBIA



Annual scores for 2002 through 2005 are available online at http://www.irex.org/programs/MSI_EUR/archive.asp

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

Serbia Objective Score: 2.21

Although the score for this objective is exactly the same as last year, several indicator measurements did change and most received scores well above or below the objective score of 2.21. Indicator 1, the legal framework, suffered a modest decrease in score but still fell close to the average. Indicators 2 (broadcast licensing) and 4 (crimes against journalists) increased a bit but still ended up about a point lower than the objective score. Indicator 5, the legal independence of state media, fell somewhat and remained well below the objective score. Indicators 3 (market entry), 8 (media access to international news sources), and 9 (free entry into the journalism profession) experienced no change but received, like last year, scores of about a point or more higher than the objective score.

This year did not bring any improvement in freedom of speech. Serbian media-freedom laws still exist and are in line with standards in developed countries, but their implementation is worsening. Given these conditions, O.K. Radio editor-in-chief Goran Vladković said, “everybody—including journalists—is taking care in what to say or write. Self-censorship and fear are effectively limiting freedom of speech.”

Because existing freedom of speech laws were passed six years ago and are outdated, the government announced plans for drafting new laws. The new laws essentially question the base principles of media freedom, as they again introduce the right of the state to establish new media. Panelists expressed skepticism regarding the potential new laws. “In principle, there is stabilization of rights and freedom of speech, but there are no improvements,” said Dragoljub Zarković, editor in chief of *Vreme*. And according to Lila Radonjić, chief executive officer (CEO) of the independent television production group *Mreža*, “The working group from the Ministry for Culture is proceeding with [the] practice of [the] non-transparent preparing of new laws under political establishment patronage. The law is stipulated to enable free speech, but there are rumors that the working group will propose solutions that will limit freedom of speech.”

In July, the state-owned Republic Agency for Telecommunications (RATEL) granted state access to all Internet communications without the need for a specific police order. This decision, aimed at combating cyber crime and terrorism, was later withdrawn by RATEL at the request of the ombudsman and under pressure from the commissioner for public information, Internet service providers, NGOs, and citizens.

In 2008, the RRA was tasked with allocating local frequencies and issuing broadcast licenses. The agency had nearly completed the allocations by the end of the year. However, RRA’s guiding principle was to approve every open frequency—a methodology that did not account for the huge number of licenses already allocated. Pirate stations proceeded in broadcasting, producing competition for those who paid all license fees and taxes to RATEL and RRA.

According to panelists, the experience with RRA was poor, and the agency was compromised as an independent regulatory body. “The process of license allocation was extremely non-transparent and politically biased,” said Vladković. “O.K. Radio did not get a regional license for purely political reasons, in spite of fact that in last decade, O.K. Radio always had several times better ratings than the state radio from Vranje that got the license. This year, the work on licenses is endless, without rational reasons, which produces and prolongs chaos in [the] media sector.”

“Compared to expectations and the tasks given to RRA by law, we can say that we do not need such an agency,” said Radonjić. “When RRA was formed, it was expected that chaos on the air would be stopped, that the number of TV and radio stations would be diminished, and that we would have order. None of that happened. The number of stations was not diminished significantly, and the huge license fees were used for filling the state budget.”

As compared to other markets in Serbia, there is no discrimination toward the media industry in tax treatment. This criteria has become market standard. The main problems are market saturation, due to the RRA issuing too many licenses, and excessively high licensing fees paid to RRA. Its fees are 10 times higher than those paid to RATEL, and both sets of fees are a burden to the electronic media, in particular.

As in 2007, crimes against journalists were not prosecuted in 2008. The number of criminal acts against journalists was high; in fact, more journalists were targeted this year than in previous years. This year was more serious due to the declaration of Kosovo independence. During demonstrations against the declaration, journalists were systematically attacked—regardless of their media affiliation—for the first time in Serbian history.

A number of journalists were threatened by different interest and criminal groups. Director and owner of the weekly *Vranjske*, Vukašin Obradović, said that he and his family received serious threats after the paper published articles on the criminal underground in Vranje. He informed the police, but he said the response was inadequate. During the period of the Kosovo demonstrations, several broadcast stations, especially B92, received numerous death threats as well.

Panelist Dinko Gruhonjić, president of Independent Journalists Association of Vojvodina, said that authorities have made some progress in addressing crimes against members of the media. "Police, for the first time, caught some attackers of journalists. Also, the investigation of the murder of [journalist] Dada Vujasinovic in 1994 was finally reopened."

Despite such efforts and the availability of evidence, such as video recordings of the attacks during the Kosovo demonstrations, no prosecutions were carried out in 2008. "A corrupt judiciary is prolonging processes for years," Vladković said. "The editor from O.K. Radio was attacked in the beginning of 2005. After the US Embassy asked for examination of that case, the prosecutor called this editor for the first time in March of 2008."

Serbian media laws do not favor public media, and laws are often discriminatory. In most state-owned media, editorial staff turns over when a new group of politicians comes into power.

Several large and influential media outlets—such as the news agency Tanjug, the dailies *Politika* and *Vecernje novosti*, RTS public service, and TV Studio B—are still partly or completely in state ownership and clearly under political control by the ruling party or coalition. This results in unfair competition with the two private Serbian news agencies funded by market profits. With the obstruction of privatization, a number of media still function under local state financing. Private media are not able to compete for municipal resources devoted to public information.

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.

Libel is still addressed in the Serbian Criminal Code. Journalists are always freed by state courts when charged with criminal libel, but verdicts in civil lawsuits are often handed down without regard to any legal criteria. Given these circumstances, the number of suits against journalists is enormous and growing daily.

The law on the availability of information is not selective, but in practice some institutions and state employees refuse to disseminate information to the media. In local areas, the situation is even worse—politicians refuse to give unfavorable information to the media, or media outlets are given unreliable data.

However, the situation is improving because of public pressure and the work of Commissioner for Information of Public Importance Rodoljub Šabić. Šabić has helped create an atmosphere in which a journalist's right to receive information is respected. All the panelists praised the commissioner, who has taken action despite inadequate state support. "Thanks to the commissioner's efforts, we now know how much information we don't know," said Voja Žanetić, a marketing specialist with MOSAIK Marketing Agency.

As in 2007, this year members of the media had no problems accessing international news or news sources. The rating for this indicator fell short only due to the media's low buying power, its single limiting factor.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Serbia Objective Score: 1.89

This objective score changed little this year, and most indicators experienced little change and received scores close to the objective score. There were a few exceptions. Indicator 4, journalists cover key events, received a somewhat lower score compared to last year, but still remained about three-quarters of a point above the overall score. Indicator 7, technical equipment, received a modest increase, which similarly put it at about three-quarters of a point higher. Indicator 5 (pay levels), while receiving a notably higher score, still fell about three-quarters of a point behind the overall score.

Professionalism in 2008 was influenced by Serbia's three election rounds. The long process of forming the new government resulted in undue pressure from public relations agencies, spin-masters and increased political pressure. Overall, journalist skill levels are low, and often semiprofessionals appear as "expert" guests on television and radio programs dealing with serious problems.

The low level of professional journalism and the increase of “Google journalism” are dominant trends in Serbian media. Journalism ethics codes exist but are not practiced; attitudes toward ethics vary from outlet to outlet. During the three election campaigns of 2008, political parties were acting as media arbiters and editors. No media outlets had the courage to be critical, which resulted in almost identical programming of party propaganda on different television stations.

Public relations agency spinning spread to more and more media during the year. The public relations industry in Serbia experienced rapid growth thanks to the elections, privatization revenues, etc. Agencies were able to acquire a foothold in the media because the sector was not prepared for such an influx of new information and money. Most outlets lack good journalists to do their own reporting, and editors are not facing the challenge of aggressive public relations managers and protecting professional journalism through critical treatment of public relations products. Journalists and media managers must be further educated to change their attitudes toward advertising and public-relations pressures.

“As editors and journalists, we are getting enormous quantities of trash from PR agencies, and our defending mechanisms are very modest,” said *Vreme’s* Zarkovic.

Almost all media report on key events and cover them well. The few themes that are not addressed are due to inadequate specialization among Serbian journalists or, especially in local media, self-censorship. Certain issues are covered exclusively by the same specialists.

Journalist salaries are around €300 per month—the average in Serbia, but absolutely inadequate to live a comfortable

life or prevent corruption. The average wage did not change significantly in 2008. In most local media, wages and corruption are even worse. Such low wages also caused a hemorrhaging of journalists to other professions, especially to public relations agencies during 2008.

Most media outlets feature entertainment programs, but Serbian media broadcasts include many news and information programs—arguably too many of them—and some have very high ratings. Citizens acquire information easily, as all national television channels broadcast information programs during the day.

The technical capacities of Serbian media are improving every year, and technology is efficient and modern. However, in circumstances where media operate with low revenues, their investments in technology improvement are diverting resources for other purposes, such as program improvement, resisting public relations agency pressures, improving niche and investigative reporting, etc.

There is some niche reporting, but it is unplanned and uncoordinated. Poor knowledge of political and economic issues—and a serious shortage of funds among most media outlets—is the main obstacles to better niche and investigative reporting. Private media outside Belgrade, mainly B92 and the independent production company Mreža, almost exclusively produce such reports.

Overall, the trend toward fewer quality journalists has worsened since the 1990s, leaving newsrooms without knowledgeable journalists or the experienced staff needed to fight corruption and counter public relations agency spinning. As observed last year, Serbia lacks journalism educators for special themes, so schools are not producing young specialized 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).

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Serbia Objective Score: 2.64

In 2008, plurality of news sources was the objective with the best score, and it increased slightly compared to last year. Much of the increase came from a much higher score on Indicator 6, transparency of ownership. Still, that indicator scored more than a point below the overall score. All other indicators scored close to the objective score, save Indicator 2, citizen access to media, which scored about three-quarters of a point higher.

Serbia has a plurality of news sources. Citizens can access various media outlets and compare and collect information. Sources of news are spreading, and new sources are

being created. Print media products are available all over the country, with distribution of print media improving constantly. Cable television access is spreading. Internet usage still has no serious limitation; in fact, subscription prices are decreasing, and the state has made moves to diminish the monopoly and improve Internet-access speed. This year, the swift expansion of blogs, cable, Internet, and SMS news continued, with the Internet used by about 24 percent of the population.

No cases of limitation of access to domestic and foreign media were registered. Through cable and satellite services, large numbers of citizens are watching foreign programs. In border areas, citizens can watch and listen directly to foreign programming; many ethnic minorities living in those areas watch programs from their native countries. Foreign magazines are sold freely and widely. The only weakness is the limited buying power of Serbian citizens.

Generally, panel participants expressed satisfaction with the media's coverage of the political spectrum. Government and opposition activities alike are covered by state media programs. (An extreme case is misuse of the RTS's second program by the oppositional Radical Party, which broadcast endless parliamentary sessions in which the party obstructed the body's work and their members far outnumbered other speakers.) In 2008, state television improved its programming and invested more money in advancing public-service programs.

Local media still under state ownership often represent only individual parties or coalition opinions. Fortunately, private media are present in most rural areas and they use a more

professional approach, providing information on all areas of the political spectrum. National territorial coverage by Channel 7 TV is very good, so citizens across Serbia have access to varied political information. The main problem under this objective is modest coverage of minority social issues.

Serbia has three national news agencies: two private and one state-owned. They are successfully producing relevant news. Although the services of all three are inexpensive and would be welcome by media outlets, most do not have funds available for a subscription. This is a reflection not of the price of services, but of the economic standing of most media outlets.

According to Vladković, news from local agencies is not as reliable as the larger agencies. "Small, local news agencies established with donors' money are few and very underdeveloped," he said. "Often they transmit news gathered from local media instead of vice-versa."

The privatization of the state-owned news agency Tanjug is not yet on the agenda. However, its negative role continues: In a market sense, Tanjug uses a discriminatory approach to competition, including dumping practices where it provides services free of charge; and in a political sense, Tanjug is in a position to favor state-originated news. The majority of Tanjug's revenue comes from the state budget, making Tanjug a biased player in the Serbian news agency market.

The practice of quoting agencies as sources of information is improving.

Many electronic media outlets produce their own news programming, with varying quality. Local news programs are showing signs of improvement, with live reports broadcast from the local area, but further development is needed.

Most of the panel participants said that they still believe that ownership of Serbian media is non-transparent. Serbia does have a law that obligates all media owners to register, and the state holds a register of all formal owners of private companies. But the panelists said that they believe that the real owners are hidden behind the formal owner or formal media buyer.

More serious is the continuing problem of blocking privatization efforts and the large number of media outlets under state ownership. To date, the state is the biggest media conglomerate in Serbia. In 2008, the Ministry for Culture announced the drafting of a new law on media conglomeration, but the draft has not been seen and public debate has not begun, contrary to ministry promises. The writing of the new law is one reason the Indicator 6 score improved in 2008, according to panelists.

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.

Although economic reporting is advancing slowly, Serbian print and electronic media outlets have not sufficiently covered social-interest issues, mainly due to a lack of knowledge of those topics by journalists and editors. Most segments of the population (vulnerable groups, the lower class, the young generation and non-ethnic minorities) are not represented sufficiently.

The state media's coverage of ethnic minority issues is poor, not surprisingly given the extremely low number of minority journalists. Only key minority events are reported in the majority language. Tanjug, heavily backed by the state, produces stories exclusively in the Serbian language, while private agencies, functioning on market revenue only, provide products in three minority languages—contributing greatly to public interest.

The complexity of minority programming calls for the state to take a more serious approach, especially after privatization is completed. Clearly, at present minority programs cannot be self-sufficient, as markets for minority-language media are too small. Last year saw a makeshift effort to shore up minority media when privatization of local public media was stopped under the excuse of saving minority programs.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Serbia Objective Score: 2.45

For the third year in a row, the score for Objective 4 has dropped and all indicator scores slipped at least moderately. All indicators, however, scored relatively close to the overall objective score. The score reflects the continuing problems of a saturated media market, budget shortfalls, deteriorating fair competition, and normal media development. However, 2008 was an irregular year for Serbian media, with elections and the long process of government formation in the first half of the year, and marketing agencies' reaction to the announced world economic crisis in the second half. Local media are in an even worse position than national media.

This "irregular" year had different consequences for different media. In general, national print and electronic media both had better results thanks to election days, while local media experienced what panelists said was, "the worst business year since democratic changes." The second part of the year was dominated by very cautious behavior by advertising agencies. Some agencies have frozen their budgets, with local media affected the worst. These factors led to a lower score this year for Indicator 1.

There are no formal obstacles for competitive business. Efficiency depends on the market and quality of management. Serbia has several profit-generating electronic media, magazines, and dailies, but too many individual media outlets are functioning at the break-even point. Media outside Belgrade are in a much poorer situation, having a market with lower buying power. Advertising agencies consider local-media ratings, but local advertisers make decisions based on political influence or corruption. Often advertisements are purchased with local media despite low ratings or readership.

Expenses increased for most local media outlets in 2008, between the huge fees owed to RRA and RATEL and obligatory investments in new transmitters.

For the past several years, Serbian media have earned revenue from multiple sources, which has become the industry standard. "Sources of media business are different: market, donations, subventions, owner's appropriations," said panelist Velibor Todorov, director of the privatized television station RTV Zaječar, "But there is no completely independent media—endangered sustainability is producing endangered independence."

In 2008 there were problems with all revenue sources, however. The international economic crisis later in the year resulted in slowed advertising sales, lower-than-average collection of subscription fees for RTS public service, and serious problems in arrears collections for all media.

All media outlets have the same problem of financial obligations to the state. All fiscal dues and agency fees must be paid in advance, and the rate of late payments in the country is growing. According to one local media

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.

director, media outlets owe the state 43 percent of revenue earned annually. The panel members concluded that because of such expenses, many local media outlets will close in 2009.

Advertising agencies are active in Serbia, and they show significant growth year after year. This year started equally optimistic, but the economic crisis diminished expansion in the second part of the year. The latest growth projection rate is only 10 percent, even despite three rounds of elections in 2008. The advertising market still has six or seven strong players, and competitiveness is strong. The main market for advertising agencies remains Belgrade, although larger towns are becoming a stronger market. Smaller local media, however, are still out of serious contention for advertisers.

As in 2007, this year the percentage of revenue from advertising grew for all print and electronic media. However, the percentage of donor funding is dropping significantly. Journal and newspaper subscriptions do not exist as a revenue category in Serbia. The expected drop in budget allocations to state media did not happen, as the government postponed media privatization.

The media receive no direct subsidies—except for the state-owned media, which have 66 to 100 percent of their expenses financed from the state budget. Subsidies to independent media were not registered.

The use of market research is now the industry standard in Serbia. Business decision-making based on research results is spreading, especially with electronic media outlets. The data on station ratings are reliable and used widely; foreign and domestic advertisers use them as the main criteria for advertising decisions. Small and local media are among the growing group of users that understand the importance of market research in their development. Ratings research is now funded by users, not from donations, creating stability and credibility.

While ratings data for electronic media are comprehensive, reliable, and in line with global standards, data on print media circulation are lagging behind. The ABC agency is addressing this issue, auditing the circulation of its members, but its pool of information is limited by the relatively small number of print media that have applied for membership. Nevertheless, data from some of the dailies and magazines with highest circulations are in, so progress is evident and the trend is positive.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Serbia Objective Score: 2.58

Objective 5 experienced almost no change in score. Only Indicator 2, professional associations, achieved any notable change, with a modest increase. Furthermore, all indicators scored very close to the overall objective score except for Indicator 6, access to printing facilities, which was about a point higher.

Last year's statement on Indicator 1 held true for 2008 as well: "The association of media owners in Serbia exists, but it is not well known publicly. It is considered to be a closed organization. The 'media association' is gathering a number of all kinds of media and is lobbying for mutual company interests."

In 2008, professional associations worked to protect the rights of journalists and promote the journalism field. However, the challenges they face are far greater than the effects achieved. Most of their activities were limited to public demonstrations in favor of the media or journalists. There are signs of a selective approach to journalism issues—the Independent Journalist Association of Serbia (NUNS) and the Association of Journalists of Serbia are addressing many of the same themes, while a number of important themes and problems are not afforded attention. In addition, the Association of Independent Electronic Media takes on a role of both a professional association and a trade association.

Association activities should be redoubled in local areas, where the problems of media and journalists are greater than in Belgrade. Young journalists deserve much better guidance from their professional associations.

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.

NGOs should be natural allies of media; but in practice, this is not the case in Serbia. The NGO sector is less active than several years ago, and only a few NGOs have a national presence. A number of NGOs are only declaratively for free speech—in reality, they are doing little or nothing.

Panelists had mixed opinions on the effectiveness of NGOs. “In the area of south Serbia, NGOs are interested only in themselves, and their influence on the targets for which they were established is marginal,” said Vladković. “In spite of that, donors are giving NGOs 10 times more money than to media, though obviously media have much more influence on civil society building processes.”

Todorov said that NGOs do have a role to play, given the current global economic situation. “NGOs and especially foreign donors are the only institutions helping local media actively through training, staff education, and technical assistance. That help should be continued, especially in light of [the] coming crisis when media won’t be able to invest in development,” he said.

Serbia has eight faculties for journalist education, but only one, Belgrade Faculty of Political Science (FPS) has practical lectures. FPS has formed an agreement with the Belgrade radio station Studio B to allow students to produce one hour of programming daily. Studio B has also provided the school with television access—three cameras with montage, which students use to produce a weekly program called “Public Defense.” A TV Academy was also established, offering three-month practical programs for young journalists. The Center for Media Professionalization was assessed poorly by panelists as an institution without a clear concept or specialist courses. There are also cases of “uneducated educators” in some schools.

Radonjić emphasized the need for quality education. “The authority and reputation of educators are equally [as] important as technical capacities and professional expertise, which are mantras for educational seminars in Serbia,” she said. “Specific education of journalists is especially important in Serbian towns outside Belgrade, in local and regional media. And besides classic journalism classes, specific tutorials are needed for editors.”

Media editorial offices have little interest in educational programs, however, especially given diminishing donor funds for education. The government also does not seem to recognize the importance of journalism education.

In spite of the clear need for training—especially for local media—short-term educational programs organized by international donors are diminishing dramatically. A number of donors remain in the country, but current economic conditions do not support market-based activities of this kind.

In previous years, NUNS brought foreign lecturers to seminars, but that practice has vanished. Most existing seminars are missing practical work. Electronic media skills have yet to be incorporated into education programs.

Today, newsprint buying and printing facilities are conducting business normally, following market needs.

As in 2007, this year Serbian media dealt with the problem of concentration of distribution channels. The outdated transmission network is still under state control, though more transmitters have been introduced after licenses were granted this year.

List of Panel Participants

Zlata Kureš, deputy general director, BETA News Agency, Belgrade

Lila Radonjić, CEO, Independent TV Production Group Mreža, Belgrade

Vesna Sladojević, deputy editor-in-chief, Radio Television Serbia, Belgrade

Suzana Jovanić, media specialist, Open Society Fund, Belgrade

Aleksandar Đorđević, press and information officer, EU Mission in Serbia, Belgrade

Voja Žanetić, marketing specialist, MOSAIK Marketing Agency, Belgrade

Slobodan Kremenjak, lawyer, Živković & Samardžić Law Firm, Belgrade

Dragoljub Žarković, editor-in-chief, *Vreme* weekly, Belgrade

Darko Bročić, director, AGB Nielsen, Belgrade

Goran Vladković, editor-in-chief, OK RADIO, Vranje

Dinko Gruhonjić, president, Independent Journalist Association of Vojvodina, Novi Sad

Velibor Todorov, director, RTV Zaječar, Zaječar

Author

Goran Cetinić, independent media consultant, Belgrade

Moderator

Dragan Kremer, program manager, West Balkan & Roma Media Programs, medienhilfe, Belgrade

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