

Who's Paying Attention to What?

Armenian and Azerbaijani International News Coverage – Empirical Findings and Recommendations for Improvement

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines media bias as it relates to international news coverage and more specifically the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. The report gathers data from existing sources and supplements it with that from newly carried out focus groups in Yerevan and Baku to add depth and clarity to what already exists.

The report finds that in the capital cities of both countries, there is generally a high demand for an independent and unbiased media. However, in the case of Nagorno Karabakh conflict, residents of Yerevan and Baku hold conflicting views on media freedom and consider that unbiased reporting on the conflict is problematic.

- Many Armenians are concerned that freer reporting on Nagorno Karabakh is a threat to national security and many journalists practice self-censorship when writing about the conflict.
- Azerbaijanis worry that normal coverage of Nagorno Karabakh will result in the younger generation forgetting about its significance. Instead, they believe that the news should serve to incite hatred and the need for retribution against Armenians.

Worrying comments about the decline of interest in local television news and increased reliance on foreign sources in the capitals of both Armenia and Azerbaijan also indicate a troubling level of citizen disengagement. Moreover, such disconnection may foreshadow a larger scale decline in the importance of national media coverage of current affairs if topics of interest and concern are not titrated with consumer demands.

- Residents of Yerevan believe that all the main television stations are controlled by the government and copy news directly from other sources while also manipulating stories in order to present an unrealistic picture of current events to the public.
- Residents of Baku feel that the television environment is polarized between opposition and government channels. While they also feel that coverage is copied from other news services, they believe the government channels generally avoid covering news and instead focus on non-controversial topics such as sports and beauty.

As a result of its findings the report recommends

- That the donor community should focus efforts aimed at strengthening the media on new technologies that rely less on governmental control and on providing the necessary infrastructure and education for the entire population of Armenia and Azerbaijan – not just the elites in the capital – to access these technologies.
- Journalists and donors should work together to create a more self-sustaining culture of journalist integrity which focuses on the creation of an ethical community of practice rather than legislating to control norms of journalistic behavior.
- Partners with the Armenian and Azerbaijani governments in the NGO and donor community need to continually stress to those

promoting biased media in both countries that accurate reporting can actually be in the national interest. The point should be made that objective reporting not only improves domestic stability, but is also in the long-term security and geopolitical interest of both countries.

INTRODUCTION

While the media can amplify existing tensions and reinforce differences, it also has the potential to build confidence across existing fracture lines by covering a wider spectrum of issues, diversifying sources, representing more voices than just the elite, and consciously eliminating bias from coverage. Monitoring results of media sources in Armenia and Azerbaijan document how inaccuracies in articles published by the leading newspapers in both countries “don’t add any new or necessary information, but rather [they] set a negative context in the public consciousness, which hinders dialogue and mutual understanding.”¹ Without more accurate and unbiased information about the other free of negative rhetoric and stereotypes, Armenians and Azerbaijanis will continue to see themselves as enemies without any common ground.

Therefore, EPF has initiated the ***Unbiased Media Coverage of Armenia-Azerbaijan Relations*** program to increase the amount of accurate and unbiased reporting on bilateral relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as on the Nagorno Karabakh conflict itself. The program aims to foster a cooperative network of editors, journalists and media NGOs from both countries.

It also takes into consideration the perception that “objective” reporting can be elusive for many mass media outlets throughout the world, some of which equate *objective* reporting with *boring* reporting. Journalists must produce a compelling product that sells, and the result can be that some issues are highly sensationalized. Theoretical questions about whether journalists can ever be truly objective also arise, so rather than aim for objective reporting on bilateral issues, the program seeks to address the issues of inaccuracy and bias as well as ethical and conflict-sensitive journalism – concepts that are more palatable to those whose final goal is to sell a product.

In order to better understand how those who consume the media perceive the current state of journalism, and to provide a modicum of baseline data, CRRC has carried out eight focus groups – four in Yerevan and four in Baku (for more information see APPENDIX 1). While several surveys have been conducted in Armenia and Azerbaijan on the level of public trust in the media as well as perceptions of bias, none delve much deeper than what is reported above or provide an overview of the extant literature on such matters. The following report is the result of focus groups and desk research conducted by CRRC to provide a preliminary assessment of public attitudes towards the media, especially regarding relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

No doubt this report, like any other, suffers limitations. The relatively small number of focus groups were conducted only in the capital cities of

¹ Yerevan Press Club, Yeni Nesil Journalists Union of Azerbaijan & Black Sea Press Association (2005). *What Can a Word Do?: Materials of Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian Press Analysis*. Retrieved September 20, 2008 from <http://www.ypc.am/eng/?go=act/studies>

Armenia and Azerbaijan and focused on individuals who actively consume news on politics and current affairs. However, this report seeks to substantiate all claims made by participants of the focus groups by including reference to other studies conducted in Azerbaijan and Armenia as well as expert interviews with media professionals in both countries as well as Turkey.

OVERVIEW

Many academics argue that the influence of the media is stronger in environments where alternative sources of information are limited. Some also posit that media affect is especially acute in environments where citizens depend on a limited number of media sources. In contrast, when citizens have alternative sources of information they are less subject to the potential effects of the media.² According to CRRC's Data Initiative, 67 percent of respondents in Armenia and 79 percent in Azerbaijan rely on TV as their main source of information about national politics.³ Other studies conducted in Armenia also suggest that while the number of media outlets is relatively high, they do not provide alternative political views.⁴ The same is true in Azerbaijan.

Moreover, some scholars argue that the media has more influence on those individuals with little interest or involvement in politics. Citizens who are well-informed and politically active have deeply rooted attitudes and are less likely to change their opinion based on new information.⁵ At the same time, those who are less knowledgeable and interested in politics are unlikely to be exposed to potentially biased messages disseminated by the media. Thus, those with a moderate interest and involvement in politics are the subgroup of the population most susceptible to media influence.⁶

According to CRRC's Data Initiative, the percentage of those who are *very interested* in politics, i.e. showing acute interest and most likely to have deeply rooted views, is not large in Armenia or Azerbaijan. Indeed, the majority fall into the category of people who, according to the theoretical framework discussed above, are most susceptible to media influence. Those who are either *hardly interested* or *quite interested* compose 55 percent of the population in Azerbaijan and 60 percent in Armenia. Thus, according to the argument, it is this group of people who are most vulnerable to media influence.

A powerful counter argument to the more conventionally held view of media development also exists. A distinct group of scholars, who take a more psychological approach to the problem, argue that misinformation is not simply the result of media bias, but rather due to individuals accepting various messages according to already extant perceptions. The argument

² Mughan, A. eds (2002). *Democracy and the Media: A Comparative Perspective*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

³ CRRC Data Initiative 2007

⁴ OSCE/ODHIR Election Observation Mission (30 May, 2008). *Republic of Armenia Presidential Elections 19 February, 2008*. Warsaw. Retrieved 23 September, 2008, from http://www.osce.org/documents/odhr/2008/05/31397_en.pdf

⁵ Mughan, A. eds (2002). *Democracy and the Media: A Comparative Perspective*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

⁶ Ibid.

is that individuals susceptible to being influenced are therefore inclined to “biased processing.”⁷

This study suggests that in the case of Armenia the two positions are not contradictory. Better informed and politically involved individuals are likely to have prior knowledge of the subject and are more selective in choosing media sources, often seeking out what they perceive to be the most objective information available. As the psychological theory posits, these people are often inclined to consider their existing attitudes and beliefs to be true and filter the news through this lens. Thus, they accept messages in order to maintain their original perceptions.

That is not to say that those who argue media bias influences public opinion are incorrect, even among serious consumers of the media. Indeed, the two sets of arguments are not mutually exclusive. The focus groups provide stark evidence that bias in the local media creates high levels of cynicism, apathy towards political involvement, and distrust of the government. It also pushes elites away from accessing the local media and serves as a means to fuel and perpetuate hatred. This is a role the media has and continues to play with regards to the conflict over Nagorno Karabakh.

However, the focus groups shed light on how an unbiased media could satisfy consumer demand for accurate information about the conflict. Indeed, the manner in which information is provided will play a significant role in the public’s understanding of Nagorno Karabakh, with both countries in dire need of a media strategy that can appeal to populations where ethnic solidarity and support of governmental positions on the conflict are the norm. Recommendations for such a strategy, as well as a broader one for the local media to provide better international coverage, are given at the end of this report.

⁷ Lee, R., Lepper, M and Hubbard M. (1975). “Perseverance in Self-perception and Social Perceptions: Biased Attributional Processes in the Debriefing Paradigm”. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 32:880-92.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The focus groups carried out by CRRC and supported by other studies conducted in both Armenia and Azerbaijan reveal remarkable similarities in the situation of freedom of expression and the independence of the mass media in both countries. Indeed, a plethora of quotes and statements from focus group participants are mutually exchangeable and would not seem out of context in either country.

Research continues to indicate that a variety of political viewpoints are not represented in the media despite the considerable number of outlets in both countries. In Armenia, the media is homogenous, and journalists practice self-censorship in order to avoid trouble with the government. In Azerbaijan, the situation is similar with the exception of a small but vocal print media which attempts to provide alternative information even though dissenting journalists presenting viewpoints contradicting or opposing the government are often persecuted by the authorities. Focus group participants support the conclusions of these studies.

Considering that the media is generally state-controlled in both countries, the national media was perceived to be biased by focus group participants. However, focus group participants in Armenia were more concerned with bias in the media than in Azerbaijan. One possible explanation for this is that Armenians are more interested in national and international politics than Azerbaijanis. In Armenia, 51 percent of the population is either *somewhat* or *very interested* in national politics whereas this stands at only 33 percent in Azerbaijan.⁸ A second reason for less concern with media bias in Azerbaijan could simply be because there is a lack of news on sensitive topics. As focus group participants noted, show business and other less controversial news tends to dominate content. A third factor that could have influenced concerns in Armenia is the 19 February 2008 presidential election when government restrictions were placed not only on the print and broadcast media, but also on Internet-based news sources.⁹

Indeed, as supported by the focus groups and argued elsewhere, presidential elections in Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2003 and 2008 respectively have resulted in yet another setback for the media in both countries. Studies on the aftermath of those elections reveal that the rights of journalists were violated in both and greater restrictions were placed on the independent media. Some studies suggest that this reaction from the authorities could be driven by the fear of the significant role the free dissemination of information played in "colored revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine in 2003 and 2004.¹⁰ Therefore, the regimes in both countries

⁸ CRRC Data Initiative 2007

⁹ As of the writing of this report the Azerbaijani presidential elections of November 2008 were still over a month away. The reaction to these elections by the Azerbaijani authorities will be interesting to compare with Armenia as they relate to the media.

¹⁰ Amnesty International (2007). *Azerbaijan: The Contracting Space for Freedom of Expression*. 2007. Retrieved 24 September, 2008, from <http://www.amnesty.org.ru/library/Index/ENGEUR550032007?open&of=ENG-AZE>

attempts to control the flow of information in order to avoid opposing views disseminated by the press potentially mobilizing the masses against them.

Despite likely government trepidation in both Armenia and Azerbaijan about attempts to enact regime change, the majority of focus group participants in both countries perceived the media in Georgia to be freer and less biased. This could be explained by the significant strides the country has made in terms of liberalizing society despite the large number of unresolved problems which still exist in its media, and particularly television. Also contributing to perceptions that the situation in Georgia is better might be the generally neutral and sometimes positive coverage it receives in both countries.¹¹ In contrast, Armenian and Azerbaijani news about the other is generally negative and serves to reinforce and deepen mutual prejudices in both societies. Interestingly, some participants in Azerbaijan perceived the media in Armenia to be freer than their own. However, all focus group participants in Armenia had negative perceptions about media freedom in Azerbaijan.

Nevertheless, there was still a general interest in receiving more news from the other side. Focus group participants in Armenia and Azerbaijan thought they should be better informed about the “enemy” and were interested in each other’s political and economic situation. However, this interest was only expressed after probing from the moderators. The reluctance to broach this topic should be more thoroughly explored to gauge whether it is related to self-censorship or the general lack of focus on the conflict by the media consuming public.

Participants in both countries expressed concerns that Nagorno Karabakh is not covered enough in the news and complained about the general lack of information on processes happening there. However, the reasons for this concern were different. In Armenia, participants were concerned that there is a growing gap between Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh, whereas in Azerbaijan, they were more interested in anti-Armenian propaganda rather than unbiased news. Keeping the memory of the conflict and territories occupied by Armenia alive among a younger generation of Azerbaijanis would encourage animosity toward Armenians, they argued.

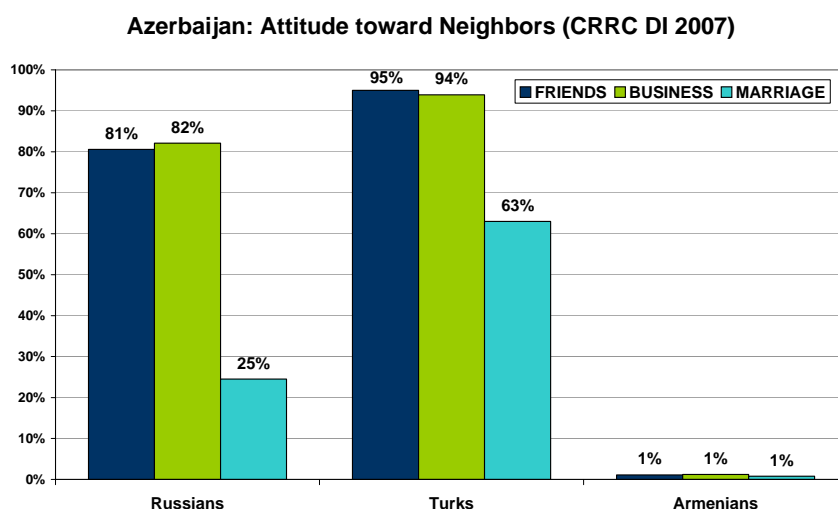
In both countries, focus group participants trusted official state information for news on Nagorno Karabakh rather than other sources. As discussed in further detail in the country sections of this report, this could be explained by the fact that both populations generally accept the official line on the conflict because Nagorno Karabakh is considered an issue of significant importance. As some focus group participants in Armenia mentioned, the government is aware of what information is most suitable to present to the public, and what can be harmful for national security.

¹¹ Yerevan Press Club, Yeni Nesil Journalists Union of Azerbaijan & Black Sea Press Association (2005). *What Can a Word Do?: Materials of Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian Press Analysis*. Retrieved September 20, 2008, from <http://www.ypc.am/eng/?go=act/studies>

Overall, participants in Armenia were generally more tolerant toward Azerbaijanis than vice-versa. However, there was some concern that the media does fuel hatred towards Azerbaijanis by representing them badly. In Azerbaijan, participants were more concerned that Armenians are not represented in the media badly enough and that journalists are not carrying out the role of fueling hatred among the younger generation.

CRRC's Data Initiative data also shows that Armenians are more tolerant towards Azerbaijanis. (See Chart 1 and Chart 2) This could be explained by the fact that Armenia won the war, the small size of the country, and the historical inclination for Armenians to engage in business activities with other countries. This probably also explains the relatively high percentage of Armenians who are interested in engaging in business with Turks¹².

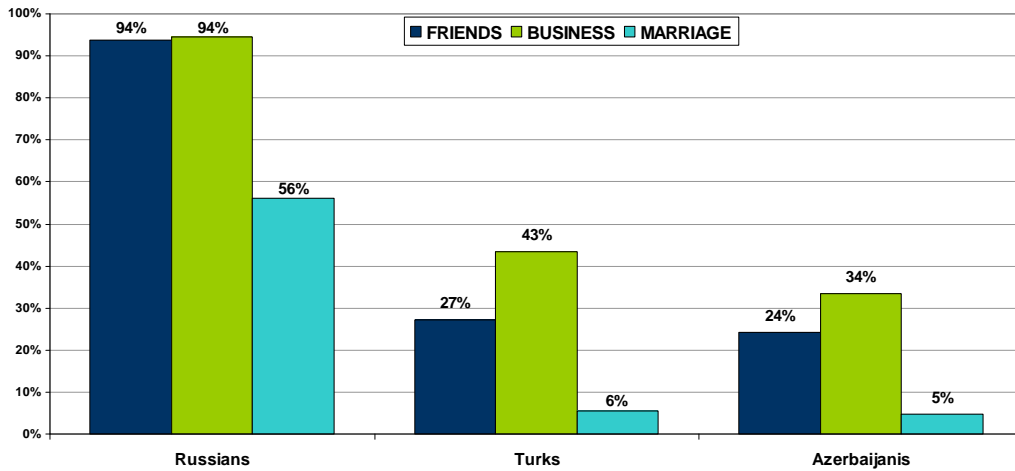
Chart 1



¹² Further probing of both these questions would be fascinating, but remain outside the scope of this report.

Chart 2

Armenia: Attitude toward Neighbors (CRRC DI 2007)



Despite the lack of trust in the mass media, and especially the broadcast media, it still remains the main source for informing public opinion in both countries.

Returning to our original argument in the introduction, it appears that the media has the potential to provide better information and to influence opinion in both Armenia and Azerbaijan. This is particularly true in areas where information does not exist or where it is discounted out of hand as false because the population does not trust the media.

However, entrenched opinion, regardless of the type of news coverage, should not be taken for granted. As shown clearly from the focus groups, more unbiased and professional coverage could form the basis for communication between Azerbaijanis and Armenians, although the cognitive lenses through which both view the other and the Nagorno Karabakh conflict will require much more than merely better news coverage in order to change.

ARMENIA

Section 1 Media Outlets

A relatively high number of media outlets, both state and private, exist in Armenia with four non-cable TV stations broadcasting nationally. In total, however, there are 57 publicly available channels broadcast in the country although the audience for nearly half of them is limited to Yerevan. Numerous radio channels also exist, but their role is limited to entertainment with the only exception being the re-broadcasts of Radio Liberty on public radio.¹³

Despite the large number of media outlets, as a number of studies show, the Armenian airwaves do not present alternative political opinions to consumers.¹⁴ Furthermore, journalistic investigation, commentary and analysis, and particularly that available on television, is not easily consumed by the general public. As one female participant of the focus group noted:

“There are enough media outlets, but the competition is not for gaining the trust of the public, but rather to gain the confidence of the top of the pyramid: whom to praise more to be better financed, to have more films and programs. They should work for their audience.” (Female, 18-40, Armenia)

While a small part of the population has started to rely on the Internet for information in the capital and other urban areas, the situation differs in the regions where the broadcast media is sometimes limited to Public TV as the only source of information. The dilemma is that although the public does not generally trust the national media, they have to rely on it as the main source of information as no alternative exists.

The homogeneity in perceptions of the media in combination with a higher level of political engagement compared to Azerbaijan probably explains why trust in the media is the lowest in Armenia among the three South Caucasus countries.¹⁵ Only 25 percent of respondents in Armenia either *fully trust* or *somewhat trust* the media.

“The whole world is biased. He who pays the piper calls the tune. The mass media supports those who have money and power, and not only in Armenia. In America there is American bias...” (Male, 18-40, Armenia)

“For those who pay more, their order will be carried out.”
(Female, 40+, Armenia)

¹³ OSCE (2006). *The State of Media Freedom in Armenia: Observations and Recommendations*. Retrieved 23 September, 2008 from http://www.osce.org/documents/oy/2007/05/24699_en.pdf.

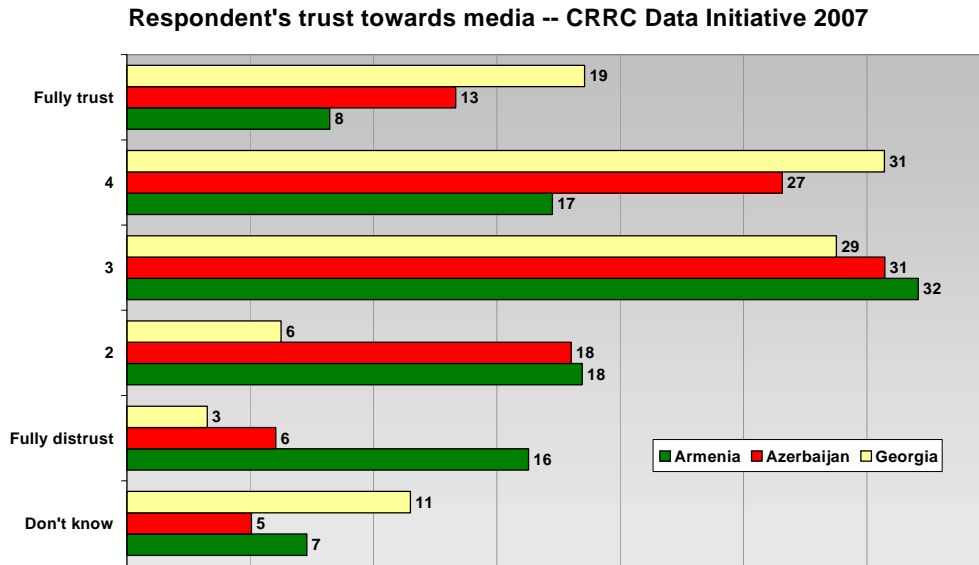
¹⁴ OSCE/ODHIR Election Observation Mission (30 May, 2008). *Republic of Armenia Presidential Elections 19 February, 2008*. Warsaw. Retrieved 23 September, 2008, from http://www.osce.org/documents/odhr/2008/05/31397_en.pdf.

¹⁵ CRRC 2007

"Both pro-government and pro-opposition media is biased." (Female, 18-40, Armenia)

In comparison, Georgia has the highest level of trust in media among the three countries: 50 percent of respondents in Georgia *somewhat* or *fully* trust the media vs. 9 percent of those who *fully* or *somewhat* distrust (see Chart 3).¹⁶

Chart 3



Focus group participants confirmed the results of the Data Initiative survey regarding the general distrust towards national media, and especially the broadcast media.¹⁷

"I don't trust TV because it doesn't correspond to the reality at all. There are cases when you witness something and they report something totally different." (Female, 18-40, Armenia)

Moreover, the participants were more skeptical towards political rather than social or cultural news which supports the hypothesis that political engagement creates lower levels of trust in the media in Armenia as compared to Azerbaijan.

"I don't trust TV concerning politics, but when it comes to other issues, I think there is something objective." (Female, 18-40, Armenia)

"I don't watch TV for news, just for cultural events." (Female, 18-40, Armenia)

¹⁶ This situation may have significantly changed in Georgia since the Data Initiative 2007 was carried out.

¹⁷ This issue was brought up by the organizers of the focus groups: during recruitment, people refused to participate in the discussion as they didn't trust the media and didn't want to discuss the subject.

As research and studies also suggest, trust in the media declines when the issue is considered as more controversial or simply as bad news. With less involving topics, more messages fall into the categories of acceptance and non-commitment, and are considered without extra judgment.¹⁸

The sense that bias is particularly salient in the coverage of politics and current affairs raises questions about the reason for bias in particular types of news coverage. Bias can come from a large variety of sources, including journalists themselves, media management, and the government. Focus group participants focused on control of the media by the State as the predominant reason for bias.

*"The major problem now is the control of authorities."
(Male, 18-40, Armenia)*

*"The reason is that very often I see that our national mass media doesn't have its own policy, especially the TV stations. Several TV stations are simply under pressure."
(Male, 18-40, Armenia)*

State-owned Public TV (H1) was considered to be the most biased because of its obvious alignment with the government. While Armenia has no specific laws or regulations that specifically favor government-financed media over private, H1 is afforded preferential treatment by the authorities. Firstly, it requires no license and secondly, it is exempt from regulations which limit advertising on private television to 10 minutes per hour.¹⁹ Moreover, all five members of its Board are appointed by the president²⁰ and some studies suggest that it is this political dependence which is one of the main reasons for the lack of objectivity and diversity in its news coverage.²¹ Focus group respondents concur with this position:

*"The fact that H1 is pro-government is without question. People learn about the president's visits and other important state news from H1."
(Male, 40+, Armenia)*

*"H1 is the channel of authorities. They show whatever is dictated."
(Male, 40+, Armenia)*

H1 has more access to information not simply because it is sometimes the only channel permitted to cover official events, but also because it has the most substantial budget of any media outlet in Armenia.²² H1's allocations from the state budget have in recent years grown exponentially, rising from

¹⁸ Gunther, A. C. (Summer, 1992). "Biased Press or Biased Public? Attitudes Toward Media Coverage of Social Groups". *The Public Opinion Quarterly*. Vol. 56, No 2.

¹⁹ IREX (2008). *Media Sustainability Index (MSI) - Europe and Eurasia 2008*. Retrieved 23 September, 2008 from

http://www.irex.org/programs/MSI_EUR/2008/armenia.asp

²⁰ OSCE (2006). *The State of Media Freedom in Armenia: Observations and Recommendations*. Retrieved 23 September, 2008 from

http://www.osce.org/documents/oy/2007/05/24699_en.pdf

²¹ Ibid.

²² A comparison with other large broadcasters such as *Shant* and *Armenia* would be a key point, but according to representative of both *Shant* and *Armenia* their budgets are "a commercial secret"

a reported \$5 million in 2006 to \$16 million in 2007.²³ Moreover, at least one report suggests that the government has applied pressure on large Armenian enterprises to advertise exclusively on H1 – further expanding the channel’s financial resources.²⁴

Having secured access to information, H1 strictly tows the government line in its coverage and does not broadcast a variety of opinions or interview those with opposing views. According to focus group participants:

“It’s a shame, when they present such a show on Public TV and something which couldn’t have happened in reality.” (Female, 18-40, Armenia)

“No, no, no, don’t even speak about H1. It provides low-quality, false news...” (Female, 40+, Armenia)

Nevertheless, the fact remains that Public TV has the widest coverage in Armenia and remains the main if not only source of information in most rural areas.²⁵

Among the channels mentioned by focus group participants as being more reliable – Shant, Kentron, and Yerkir Media – only the first has nation-wide coverage while the others are broadcast mainly in Yerevan. The participants also acknowledged that H1 is the most watched channel outside the capital.

“It depends on how widespread the media is. For example in villages, marzes – they watch only Public TV.” (Female, 18-40, Armenia)

“I think people mostly watch H1 in the villages.” (Female, 18-40, Armenia)

“The first channel [H1] is the channel of authorities. They show whatever is dictated whereas Shant provides a little truth.” (Male, 40+, Armenia)

“I trust Shant, Kentron, and Yerkir-Media.” (Female, 40+, Armenia)

State pressure on the media does not restrict itself to H1, however. A report by Freedom House indicates that while the government does not apply direct control or censorship over the media, it maintains a strong hold particularly on the broadcast media through informal pressure on its owners²⁶. Again, statements from focus group respondents converge with such reports.

²³ IREX (2008). *Media Sustainability Index (MSI) - Europe and Eurasia 2008*.

Retrieved 23 September, 2008 from

http://www.irex.org/programs/MSI_EUR/2008/armenia.asp

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ OSCE (2006). *The State of Media Freedom in Armenia: Observations and Recommendations*. Retrieved 23 September, 2008, from

http://www.osce.org/documents/oy/2007/05/24699_en.pdf

²⁶ Freedom House (2007). *Map of Press Freedom 2007*. Retrieved 23 September, 2008, from

"All kinds of media is being controlled, be it state-owned or private." (Male, 40+, Armenia)

While participants' eschewed control by the State when discussing the media, their stance on the issue of control and regulation was more nuanced when confronted with the issue directly. Though opinions regarding regulation and control of media differed across the focus groups, there was general agreement that while information should be accurate, the State should control its flow for the sake of national security.

"Of course, they should control as there are state secrets and country's interests that the media should not present to people." (Female, 40+, Armenia)

"The mass media follows certain principles and they know very well what information is needed to be objective, subjective, or half-objective so that it doesn't have side effects. Information in its entirety shouldn't be presented openly and freely. That wouldn't be correct." (Female, 18-40, Armenia)

The Male 40+ group generally thought that media should be regulated by the State through legislation and that control is acceptable if it is carried out by the government. The Male 18-40 group mostly thought that control of the media by the government is not only acceptable, but some even said it is necessary.

"The State should have control. It may give the right to the media to orientate, within legal norms, but control should be carried by a body, a structure which is unbiased and fair in its decisions." (Male, 40+, Armenia)

"The State should pay attention so that there is no leak of information in terms of international relationships which would be unfavorable for the State. The information should be accurate, but not unfavorable for the State." (Male, 18-40, Armenia)

However, there could be some misunderstanding of the meaning of the words *control* and *regulation*, with some focus group participants taking the former to mean the latter.²⁷ Regardless, they believed that there are limits to how much information should be provided to the population and that total freedom of the media could cause chaos. While some studies suggest that freedom of the press, unlike freedom of speech, should be conditional on the degree to which it promotes certain values at the core of freedom of expression,²⁸ the concept of regulation is vague and participants showed little understanding of how the media could be regulated without violating the basic tenets of a representative democracy.

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&country=7129&year=2007>

²⁷ In any follow up work it is recommended that concrete examples of the two concepts are provided and probing more thoroughly each idea individually (see Appendix 3 for the guide itself)

²⁸ Lichtenberg, J. Ed. (1990). *Democracy and the Mass Media*. New York: Cambridge. University Press.

The participants also emphasized that information which might result in a negative reaction should not be presented to the public, but this was also considered in a vague way.

Despite the lack of trust in the media, broadcast media remains the main source of political news for 67 percent of Armenians.²⁹ In contrast, radio is the first main source of information for one percent, and newspapers for two percent of respondents in Armenia. Interestingly, 22 percent of respondents receive information about national politics from family members, neighbors and friends. This makes social and family networks the second most popular source of information on national politics after TV.

For the informed denizens of Yerevan who participated in the focus group, the Internet served as a vital and trusted source of information³⁰:

"I trust newspapers and the Internet more because they express different opinions. You can read and analyze for yourself." (Male, 18-40, Armenia)

"I'd like to say that we use the Internet more because there are several sites where you can get objective information about Armenia." (Male, 18-40)

Indeed, participants preferred the Internet over the broadcast or print media because of the variety of opinions and lack of censorship.³¹

Again it is worth reiterating that focus groups were conducted only in the capital where people have more access to the Internet. CRRC data shows only 1 percent of respondents in Armenia use the Internet for receiving information about national politics.³² Only 4 percent of respondents have dial-up and 1 percent DSL or wireless Internet connections at home. Indeed, 86 percent of respondents in Armenia had no basic knowledge of Internet or E-mail.

While the Internet and print media might still have earned some trust in Armenia, the results of the focus groups show that trust in the media has significantly declined in the last decade.

The rejection of an application by the A1 + TV station to renew its broadcasting license by the National Commission for TV and Radio³³ (NCTR) in 2002 delivered the first major setback for freedom of media in Armenia. Until then, A1+ was considered the main media outlet that

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Given the limited scope of this project, which Internet sites focus group participants used could not be addressed. It is recommended that follow up focus groups particularly concentrate on this issue.

³¹ Interestingly, no one mentioned the commonplace refrain from Western countries that there is a lack of accountability and review process for material published on the Internet. (see for example Vedder A. and Wachbroit A. (October 28, 2004). "Reliability of information on the Internet: Some distinctions". *Ethics and Information Technology*. Volume 5, No 4. pg 211-215.)

³² CRRC, 2007

³³ The members of the NCTR Board are appointed by the president.

presented alternative political views which differed from the government. According to a 2007 report by Freedom House, most television stations have grown more politically aligned with the government since A1+ was taken off the air and remain selective in their reporting, routinely ignore opposition viewpoints in order to avoid the same fate.³⁴

The presidential election of February 2008 and its immediate aftermath delivered yet another blow to the media. The favorable coverage of then Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan, when compared to the completely negative coverage of other candidates, played a significant role in increasing the level of tensions surrounding the elections. According to the OSCE/ODHIR Election Observation Mission report on the presidential election, the state-owned *H1* did not treat the candidates equally despite allocating comparable airtime to their campaigns in its news coverage. Moreover, although the main opposition candidate, former President Levon Ter-Petrossian, was the most covered in terms of total airtime allotted, the majority of coverage was negative. Public radio adopted a similar approach while the state-owned *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun* newspaper gave clear preferential and generally positive coverage to Sargsyan in some 45 percent of its print space devoted to the elections.³⁵

Participants agreed that there was more trust in media in the years directly following Armenian independence, and that this had drastically reduced since 1998, and especially after the 2008 presidential election.

"Maybe before 1999 it was better. The whole family used to watch and we used to believe. Now we watch and we don't believe." (Male, 18-40, Armenia)

"I think in 1998 it used to be better than now. It's changing for the worse." (Male, 18-40, Armenia)

"My trust was greater before the last elections. Now I think there is more pressure from above." (Female, 40+, Armenia)

In addition to believing that press freedom had declined in Armenia, the majority of respondents believed that the media in Georgia, albeit with some shortcomings, is currently freer than that in either Armenia or Azerbaijan.

"In Georgia [...] they are more ahead. There is not only freedom of speech, but there are also no violations or bribes. People know that if they break a law they will be punished. It's more like it is in Europe." (Male, 18-40, Armenia)

³⁴ Freedom House (2007). *Map of Press Freedom 2007 -Armenia*. Retrieved 23 September, 2008, from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&country=7129&year=2007>

³⁵ OSCE/ODHIR Election Observation Mission (30 May, 2008). *Republic of Armenia Presidential Elections 19 February, 2008*. Warsaw. Retrieved 23 September, 2008, from http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2008/05/31397_en.pdf

Some, however, argued that Georgia and Armenia were equally free and it was Azerbaijan that is lagging behind.

“I think Armenia and Georgia are the same, but that Azerbaijan is behind. The protests during the last presidential election in Georgia indicate the level of freedom of speech there, or at least the struggle for freedom of speech. It was obvious on TV.” (Male, 40+, Armenia)

An exceptional few argued that the media is freer in Armenia.

“I think that there is more freedom of speech in Armenia and that it is less controlled and regulated by the State than in Azerbaijan and Georgia.” (Male, 40+, Armenia)

Probably demonstrating a high level of cynicism, some participants believed that there is no freedom of the press in any of the three countries.

“There is no freedom of speech – neither in Armenia, Georgia or Azerbaijan.” (Male, 40+, Armenia)

Certainly, Azerbaijan was considered to be the least free in the opinion of Armenian focus group participants.

“They [Azerbaijan] are talking more about their president on TV. It is being regulated by the government. They show good news but it doesn’t mean there is freedom of speech.” (Female, 18-40, Armenia)

Available studies also suggest that the media in all three countries does not adequately report events happening in neighboring countries. While the Georgian and Armenian media generally refrains from publishing inflammatory articles about the other, a study of the Armenian and Azerbaijani print media revealed that the majority of reports were mutually intolerant and unfavorable.³⁶ The generally negative coverage of Azerbaijan in the national media could also have influenced Armenian participants into believing that there is no freedom of the press there since it is unlikely that they have watched Azerbaijani television. The Country Coordinator of the Media Diversity Institute Artur Papyan also confirmed that “Azerbaijani media outlets have no influence whatsoever on the Armenian media landscape.”³⁷

³⁶ Yerevan Press Club, Yeni Nesil Journalists Union of Azerbaijan & Black Sea Press Association (2005). *What Can a Word Do? Materials of Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian Press Analysis*. Retrieved September 20, 2008, from <http://www.ypc.am/eng/?go=act/studies>

³⁷ E-mail correspondence with Artur Papyan, Country Coordinator, Media Diversity Institute, Armenia, October 17, 2008.

Section 2 Reporting

The dissatisfaction of focus groups participants with the control of media and bias in reporting concerned not only the local news, but also the media's international coverage.

"...Armenian mass media takes information from other channels. Often we can see the logo of other channels such as ORT [on reports]. It means they just take already existing material, and if there already exists a lack of information or if something goes wrong we get totally misinformed." (Male, 18-40, Armenia)

"...our reporters themselves receive little information about international events because of the lack of resources [...] or because they don't have specialists working in every country. And most information they do have is from other international channels." (Male, 40+, Armenia)

"I don't mean that they are doing it on purpose. Simply their professional level is very low." (Male, 18-40, Armenia)

Such quotes highlight several reasons for disappointment with international news coverage, and in particular:

1. the low professional level of journalists;
2. news being taken from foreign channels with inadequate or no commentary at all;
3. media outlets lacking the necessary resources to cover international stories;
4. media outlets enforcing self censorship with regards to the type of stories they cover.

According to a study of the media in Armenia conducted by IREX, news outlets sometimes have to sacrifice ethical reporting because they lack adequate financial resources to allow journalists to check information from several sources and verify or check facts..³⁸ However, such practices are relatively inexpensive and the question remains how to promote this type of behavior. As argued in the recommendations section of this report, a voluntary code of ethics and a community of practice is more important than simply money in order to remedy the situation.

Beyond the quality of reporting, participants were also generally unhappy not only with the quality of reporting, but also the focus of international news stories. For example, they thought that countries with large ethnic Armenian communities should feature more extensively in the international news.

"In countries where there is a large Armenian Diaspora. Any Armenian, irrespective of which country they are in,

³⁸ IREX (2008). *Media Sustainability Index (MSI) - Europe and Eurasia 2008*. Retrieved 23 September, 2008, from http://www.irex.org/programs/MSI_EUR/2008/armenia.asp

should feel themselves part of their homeland.” (Woman 40+, Armenia)

Interestingly, male participants noted that the focus of international news should be more on Turkey and Azerbaijan, considering that the public should be informed about those countries Armenia is in conflict with.

“I would like the mass media to concentrate on Turkey and Azerbaijan – two hostile countries. We can expect any hostility from them. They are accumulating arsenals and doubling their budget, and besides, the better you know your enemy, the easier it is to beat them.” (Male, 18-40, Armenia)

In comparison, to the male participants, some female participants generally agreed that Azerbaijan is presented badly in the media, explaining this as the result of existing bias and self-censorship in the media. They also believed that negative coverage fuels hatred between the two countries.

“I can say that Azerbaijan is presented badly in the media and that they [media] are trying to arouse a kind of hatred... I don't understand.” (Male, 40+, Armenia)

“Our news agencies give information that doesn't correspond to reality. They may speak about Azerbaijanis, but it may not correspond to reality...” (Female, 18-40)

“They may want to present the truth, but they may not be allowed.” (Male, 40+, Armenia)

However, with the exception of the Male 18-40 group that considered individual Azerbaijanis to be enemies and represented in the media accordingly, participants generally displayed a tolerant attitude. They blamed the conflict on politics and explained that the average citizen does not want war.

“Ordinary people – Armenian, Georgian or Azerbaijani – have never had enmity towards each other and will never have. It is done artificially, for political reasons...” (Female, 40+, Armenia)

“The Azerbaijanis are ordinary people like us.” (Male, 40+, Armenia)

“Peoples aren't enemies. They are made into enemies. This is policy. If states want to solve the problem of friendship they can do so in a few months.” (Male, 40+, Armenia)

Generally, all participants, including males, recognized the need for more information about Azerbaijan, but the importance of receiving news from there was only mentioned by some of the groups. Moreover, such responses only came after probing questions from the moderator.

“We can stay as enemies, but we should know about them. It's important.” (Female, 18-40, Armenia)

"If it is very important for Azerbaijan to be covered so that we are aware of our neighbor which is a hostile country."
(Male, 18-40, Armenia)

The need for more accurate information to be conveyed to the general public in order to provide a more secure environment is at odds with the idea that the State should regulate such kinds of information. Such differing positions demonstrate the lack of set public opinions on some issues as well as the ability to shape attitudes towards media coverage – a topic which will be returned to in the recommendations section of this report.

Focus group participants were also concerned that people in Armenia were not aware about the situation in Nagorno Karabakh and were concerned with a growing gap between both.³⁹

"I am sure they know the situation in Karabakh and Armenia very well in Azerbaijan. We can conclude that information remains secret only for our people. If Azerbaijan needs it, they know the information very well."
(Female, 18-40, Armenia)

"...We are unaware about what happens in Karabakh. There is some hostility between people from Karabakh and Armenia, especially between the younger generations. This happens because the mass media doesn't tell us what happens in Karabakh, what they think, and how they consider us. The same is true in Karabakh regarding Armenia." (Male, 18-40, Armenia)

Again, such views demonstrate the conflicting opinions Armenians have towards the dissemination of news and information about Nagorno Karabakh. On the one hand, they are wary that too much information could potentially be used against them, but on the other, there is the view that Azerbaijanis already have enough information and that it is the population of Armenia that is left in the dark about what is occurring in Nagorno Karabakh.

More information about how Armenians perceive Nagorno Karabakh is scant. According to one study conducted by the Armenian Center for National and International Studies, 29.6 percent are not satisfied with the information they receive and attempt to find more from other sources. Another 35 percent of Armenians are not satisfied with the official information about the Nagorno Karabakh peace process, but have no access to other relevant sources of information.⁴⁰

However, more depth is needed to make better sense of this information and whether it contradicts or refutes the qualitative data collected by the focus groups. While many participants opined that they did not know what

³⁹ The attitude of the population towards Karabakh and Karabakhis who are involved in Armenian politics is worth further exploration, but not the topic of this report.

⁴⁰ Armenian Center for National and International Studies (2005). *The Karabakh story: 17 years in progress*. Retrieved October 6, 2008, from http://www.acnis.am/pr/karabakh_story/Socio12eng.pdf

was occurring in Nagorno Karabakh, they tended to trust official news sources on this subject.

"I accept the way the State thinks." (Male, 18-40, Armenia)

"I may trust independent sources, but when we receive official information we have to trust it. As a resident of this state I should trust official information." (Male, 18-40, Armenia)

"Of course, and it would be wrong to turn an official information into a lie. I don't think TV is such a body that every lie can go into it." (Male, 18-40, Armenia)

Some of these apparently contradictory set of opinions from Armenian respondents can be explained by the fact that there is still not much debate about the question of Nagorno Karabakh's status. The population generally agrees with the State's position and is therefore more likely to accept information about Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan without predisposed judgment. However, they would like to receive more information regardless of whether it is controlled by the government or not.

AZERBAIJAN

Section 1 Media Outlets

Since Azerbaijan gained independence from the former Soviet Union, its media has been transformed from a state-run system into a variety of new media outlets. There is one state, one public and four private TV and radio companies that cover the entire country. In addition, 6 regional TV and radio companies operate within the country⁴¹ and there are over 2,000 registered newspapers although only 180-200 function in reality.⁴² However, despite the large number of media outlets, there is a lack of pluralism in the political views expressed and the independence of the media is declining.

Most media in Azerbaijan is aligned with the government and the few independent media outlets which do exist are continuously subjected to government pressure.⁴³ As Shahin Abbasov, Deputy Chief of Party at the IREX/USAID Media Advancement Project in Azerbaijan, commented: “the media in Azerbaijan is predominantly controlled by the government. All television channels are totally controlled by the authorities. The same applies to local radio stations.”⁴⁴

While the participants of focus groups confirmed that the media is biased in Azerbaijan, they explained this in terms of the polarization of the media between the government and opposition. These views could be based on stereotypes or outdated beliefs, as the opposition media used to play a stronger role in the country.

“In our case, except for some, most of the media is not independent. There is opposition and power media. Power media makes a lot of exaggerations in the news while the opposition media writes lies and insults.” (Male, 18-40, Azerbaijan)

“The media represents the interests of certain groups, but not national values.” (Male, 40+, Azerbaijan)

“Today’s media in Azerbaijan is divided into two parts: pro-government and pro-opposition.” (Female, 40+, Azerbaijan)

“They are divided into two in Azerbaijan, and whether they are government or opposition oriented, there are nearly no objective ones. They struggle in two fronts and earn money from publishing newspapers.” (Male, 18-40)

⁴¹ Yunusova, L. *Freedom of Word and Mass Media in Azerbaijan* (2007). Retrieved 20 October, 2008 from http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2007/10/27014_en.pdf

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper (2004). *Media, the Presidential Elections and the Aftermath*. Retrieved 3 October, 2008, from http://www.hrw.org/background/eca/azerbaijan/2004/1.htm#_Toc79222789

⁴⁴ E-mail correspondence with Shahin Abbasov, the Deputy Chief of Party at IREX/USAID Media Advancement Project in Azerbaijan, October 21, 2008.

Interestingly, the diversity of viewpoints expressed in the media was treated with mistrust and cynicism by most of the participants, identifying a conflation of different views on various issues and false or misleading information.

"You cannot rely on any of them [mass media]. Some of them report in one way, some in another." (Female, 18-40, Azerbaijan)

"It is a problem. They all report in different ways and you can get confused." (Female, 18-40, Azerbaijan)

This distrust of the national mass media has led many of the focus group participants to rely on Turkish channels and international news networks for news coverage instead. Representing a consensus of opinion across the focus groups, as one participant stated:

"Turkish media covers the news and provides better analyzed news to people, particularly in newspapers and TV." (Male, 18-40, Azerbaijan)

The popularity of the Turkish media in Azerbaijan can be explained by the mutual comprehensibility of the two languages and strong cultural and ethnic ties between the two countries. However, the role of Turkish channels is limited because they are only available in Azerbaijan via cable and satellite.⁴⁵ According to the CRRC Data Initiative, only 22 percent of Azerbaijanis have satellite dishes and 14 percent cable TV.⁴⁶ Moreover, it is important to take into consideration the fact that while Turkish media can be a reliable source for international news coverage, it provides minimal coverage of news about Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh.⁴⁷

Besides the Turkish media, however, an alternative source of information for Azerbaijanis, especially for those living in Baku, is the Internet. Indeed, it was this medium that was seen as a reliable source by the majority of focus group participants.

"The government cannot interfere with the Internet." (18-40, Azerbaijan)

"I basically use the Internet because in Azerbaijan under the conditions of monopoly it is just a waste of time. I try to learn from the Internet and foreign websites, be it in Azerbaijani, Russian, or English." (Male, 18-40, Azerbaijan)

However, the Internet generally continues to remain the privilege of those residing in the cities and even then, only for a minority. According to CRRC's Data Initiative only one percent of respondents in Azerbaijan use the Internet as their first main source of information for national politics.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ E-mail correspondence with Shahin Abbasov, the Deputy Chief of Party at IREX/USAID Media Advancement Project in Azerbaijan, October 21, 2008.

⁴⁶ CRRC Data Initiative 2007

⁴⁷ E-mail correspondence with Shahin Abbasov, the Deputy Chief of Party at IREX/USAID Media Advancement Project in Azerbaijan, October 21, 2008.

⁴⁸ CRRC Data Initiative 2007

Even so, according to another study, Internet access is generally unrestricted in Azerbaijan albeit limited to less than 10 percent of the population residing in larger cities.⁴⁹

Therefore, despite government control and public distrust of the media, broadcast media remains the main source of information for national politics for 79 percent of the population in Azerbaijan.⁵⁰ This perhaps indicates the distinct lack of citizen engagement with the Azerbaijani print media. Among focus group participants, for example, only a few relied on newspapers for news.

"I think the newspapers are preferred when compared to other mass media. They may be delivered late or may contain old information, but anyway, people read them."
(Female, 18-40, Azerbaijan)

Some studies also confirm the fact that newspapers are often distributed later and that news is first available on Baku-based television stations.⁵¹ This situation is especially true in the regions of the country. CRRC's Data Initiative data also shows that newspapers are not a popular means of information in Azerbaijan, with only two percent of respondents relying on the print media for news about national politics.⁵²

"I think facts are more accurate on TV. That's why TV dominates. TV provides more information than the newspapers." (Female, 40+, Azerbaijan)

Among the main reasons for this situation is that newspapers have a limited circulation. As one media observer stated, "there are some opposition newspapers in the country, but the print media industry is suffering a serious decline in Azerbaijan - newspaper circulation is very low and so the print media does not play significant role in shaping public opinion."⁵³

Moreover, in addition to its limited circulation, some studies suggest that the print media's lack of popularity results from existing biases and control by the State.⁵⁴ The government also controls the main printing houses and at times applies pressure on smaller independent presses not to publish independent newspapers and magazines. Furthermore, public officials often block access to information for journalists working for the

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper (2004). *Media, the Presidential Elections and the Aftermath*. Retrieved 3 October, 2008, from http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/eca/azerbaijan/2004/1.htm#_Toc79222789

⁵⁰ CRRC Data Initiative 2007

⁵¹ IREX (2008). *Media Sustainability Index (MSI) - Europe and Eurasia 2008*. Retrieved 23 September, 2008, from http://www.irex.org/programs/msi_eur/2008/azerbaijan.asp

⁵² CRRC Data Initiative 2007

⁵³ E-mail correspondence with Shahin Abbasov, the Deputy Chief of Party at IREX/USAID Media Advancement Project in Azerbaijan, October 21, 2008.

⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper (2004). *Media, the Presidential Elections and the Aftermath*. Retrieved 3 October, 2008, from http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/eca/azerbaijan/2004/1.htm#_Toc79222789

independent media. Police also harass and beat journalists covering opposition party events or protests.⁵⁵

Focus group participants seemed to agree that the media was freer immediately after independence, but believe that it gradually became more biased and controlled by the State over time.

"I used to believe from 1989 to 2005. Then control was strengthened." (Female, 40+, Azerbaijan)

"In the last 2-3 years there is an information monopoly; the media is too weak." (Male, 18-40, Azerbaijan)

"I think there are serious changes - in a negative direction." (Male, 18-40, Azerbaijan)

Studies confirm the findings of the focus groups that there is a general decrease in the freedom of media in Azerbaijan, especially after the 2003 presidential election. Such signs were noticeable in the pre-election period and were marked by an increase in the intimidation and harassment of journalists reporting on the opposition campaign.⁵⁶

Focus group participants did not believe, however, that the problems of media bias and control by the State were only present in Azerbaijan.

"In all three countries, there is a problem with freedom of speech. That is why European countries take these three countries as a whole. Democracy progresses with the same speed in all three countries." (Male, 18-40, Azerbaijan)

Nevertheless, most believed that the Georgian media is comparatively freer among the countries of the South Caucasus although opinions varied regarding Armenia. Some participants thought that the media was freer there than in Azerbaijan, for example, while others claimed the opposite.

"I think freedom of speech is relatively high in Georgia. However the situation is worse in Armenia when compared to Azerbaijan." (Female, 18-40, Azerbaijan)

"In my opinion, the situation is the same in Georgia and Azerbaijan. Georgia may be ahead of Azerbaijan in some respects, but the conditions are poorer in Armenia. The presidential elections in Armenia proved that there is no freedom of speech." (Female, 18-40)

"According to international reports, the situation is better in Georgia, but Armenia and Georgia may replace each other at some point." (Female, 18-40, Azerbaijan)

Only a few thought that Azerbaijan was ahead of Armenia and Georgia.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper (2004). *Media, the Presidential Elections and the Aftermath*. Retrieved 3 October, 2008, from http://www.hrw.org/background/eca/azerbaijan/2004/1.htm#_Toc79222789

“As a journalist I would like to say that I know more or less about their media. Let’s confess that the situation is better in our country. There is despotism in Georgia now and the media was forbidden in Armenia with Internet access banned. The media in Azerbaijan is more independent compared to that of other countries in the Caucasus.”
(Male, 40, Azerbaijan)

Section 2 Reporting

The focus groups also revealed a general concern not only with regards to bias in the national news, but also in terms of the quality of international news coverage. In particular, focus group participants complained that international news stories are taken in their entirety from foreign channels.

“As for the international news, it is copied from other channels and sources, such as Russian or Turkish.” (Male, 18-40, Azerbaijan)

Therefore, participants preferred external sources for international news in the form of Turkish channels or international news networks such as CNN and the BBC.

“While international channels cover the events in detail and on time, our channels do not present enough information and are late.” (Female, 40+, Azerbaijan)

“I think they do not cover international news sufficiently. I watch news on Turkish channels. They provide more analyzed, detailed and fresh news, whereas in our case, they show archive pictures accompanied with empty words.” (Male, 18-40, Azerbaijan)

As discussed earlier in this report, while Turkish channels might provide more timely and accurate international news coverage, they are still targeted towards a Turkish audience. Issues that concern Azerbaijan, and are of importance to its foreign policy such as coverage of Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh, might therefore not necessarily be represented.

The quality of the international news coverage was also not the only concern. Participants also complained that international coverage is often made up of irrelevant stories or news on show business.

“Unfortunately, the TV channels have been airing too many show business programs recently. Each program has its daily airtime. People are tired of show business news. 10 percent of people watch these programs, whereas the remaining 90 percent do not watch them.”
(Male, 40+, Azerbaijan)

Studies of the situation with the media in Azerbaijan also indicate that aside from occasional programs about the problems faced by internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, complete

with political overtones, there is little that otherwise reflects social conditions in the country.⁵⁷

And while both the Turkish broadcast and print media is one of the preferred sources of information for many participants, they still expressed a willingness to receive even more news about Turkey.

"More attention is paid to our neighboring countries: Turkey, the processes going on there, its economic development and any news about it." (Male, 40+, Azerbaijan)

The participants also believed that there should be more coverage of other neighboring countries in international news..

"There are countries that are close to Azerbaijan, such as Russia, Iran, Armenia, and Turkey. Their news should be more reported by the media. We do not need European news. I think more focus should be on neighboring countries." (Male, 18-40, Azerbaijan)

Interestingly, Armenia was mentioned by a few participants alongside other bordering countries, but without any specific emphasis. The importance of presenting news about the other side in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict was recognized by the participants only after the moderator probed deeper. Participants then complained that the media does not provide enough information about Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh with some emphasizing that it is better to know your enemy.

"They are our enemies and we must be aware of the processes going on there." (Female, 18-40, Azerbaijan)

The general concern, however, was not so much the lack of knowledge about Armenia, but rather the lack of anti-Armenian propaganda in the media. The general concern of focus group participants was that the younger generation is not informed enough about the war.

"I think they should be portrayed as our enemy so that the younger generation and children understand that our territories have been under Armenian occupation for several years and about how they maltreated our nation." (Female, 18-40, Azerbaijan)

According to the focus group participants, the role of the media should be to fuel animosity against Armenia and stress the need for revenge against Armenians.

"The responsibility or role of the national media is to report such news so that young people become even more patriotic when reading them, and have a sense of vengeance and bellicosity." (Male, 18-40, Azerbaijan)

⁵⁷IREX (2008). *Media Sustainability Index (MSI) - Europe and Eurasia 2008*. Retrieved 23 September, 2008, from http://www.irex.org/programs/msi_eur/2008/azerbaijan.asp

Such a perspective seemingly lies in direct contradiction to the earlier stated desire to prevent the media from serving as a propaganda machine and for it to become a source of unbiased and professionally produced news. Instead, with a collective trauma playing a central role in post-independence Azerbaijan, citizens say they want propaganda although this does not rule out unbiased news on the Nagorno Karabakh conflict in addition to other programming, particularly of a historical nature, that could serve as propaganda.

However, a more serious barrier to an unbiased media that focus groups participants specifically identified was that it is not fulfilling its perceived role in portraying Armenia as the enemy.

“Internally, we should raise our youth with the psychology that any piece of our Karabakh territory cannot be given to our enemies. It should be an issue to be promoted internally. I believe it will finally be effective.” (Male, 18-40, Azerbaijan)

Indeed, the need for journalists to fulfill this role was seen as particularly urgent by older participants in the focus groups. Arguing that the issue of Nagorno Karabakh is losing its urgency among younger Azerbaijanis, concern was expressed that later generations might not be as passionate about fighting again if such a need arose.

“Generally, the aggressiveness of the early 90s is abating. Both we and they are getting indifferent. They have their own social and economic problems and we have our own social problems already brought to the focus in media. But this problem still remains unsolved.” (Male, 40+, Azerbaijan)

Therefore, by constantly reporting on Nagorno Karabakh, it was considered that the media should keep the image of war alive and encourage animosity towards Armenia. Regardless, while participants did not trust official sources for local or international news, they did rely on them for news and information about Nagorno Karabakh.

“Of course, state TV reports true news. It is possible that they will hide some of the news, but not all of it.” (Male, 40+, Azerbaijan)

“In general, most TV media does report objectively on Nagorno Karabakh. ANS is different in a sense that it keeps reminding us of the topic. When you switch to this channel, you can see it there.” (Male, 40+, Azerbaijan)

Again, this could probably be explained by the mutual consensus of opinion in society on Nagorno Karabakh and the general acceptance by the public of the official stance towards the conflict. As a result, the population is more likely to accept information they receive on this topic from the government.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into consideration the problems brought up by focus group participants and revealed by other studies, this report sets forth the following recommendations:

To the Government of Armenia and Azerbaijan

Accurate reporting can be in the national interest

Traditionally, international watchdog groups have argued that media freedom is in itself a necessary component of democratic development. While undoubtedly a key element of democracy, this strategy has not proven fruitful in promoting media freedom to date in either Armenia or Azerbaijan.

Instead, the focus groups identify the need for a different strategy which promotes the idea that accurate and unbiased reporting is in the national interest. In both Armenia and Azerbaijan, for example, focus group participants expressed the desire for more accurate information about the other in order to defend their national interests. In the eyes of these citizens it is clear that self-delusion on the part of the government can lead to unfortunate results and that better informed citizens can play a more active role in defending their respective countries. Given attitudes in the South Caucasus, providing more reliable coverage of international affairs is unlikely to discredit either of the regimes in Armenia or Azerbaijan and might even strengthen them.

To the local and international NGO community and journalists

Promote a Bottom up Approach to Journalistic Ethics

This Eurasia Partnership Project seeks to address the urgent need for a voluntary code of ethics regulating journalistic behavior across the South Caucasus. Governments in democratic countries rarely succeed in imposing codes of behavior supported by the public.

As witnessed in Paraguay, a better strategy is to take a bottom up approach that succeeds because journalistic integrity is generally demanded by the public. Moreover, market forces will be guided by ethical journalism if given a kick start.⁵⁸ International donors and the NGO community can help fund and support media outlets and journalists adhering to certain ethical behavior until such a time that market forces take over. Training should take the form of sustained efforts over several months and not days or weeks, with proper feedback provided to journalists about the type of product required.

These trainings should aim to create media that:

⁵⁸ Ortega, B. (Winter, 2002). "Bringing Investigative Reporting to One of the Most Corrupt Countries in the World". *Knightline International*, pg 42-45. Retrieved October 7, 2008, from <http://www.knightline.org/i/ortega.pdf>

1. pays more attention to international news coverage and uses multiple sources, checks facts and provide adequate analysis especially in the case of television;
2. refrains from inflammatory reporting;
3. employs cheaper technological solutions to provide better international news coverage.

To the donor community

Embrace Web2.0 and the Technological Revolution

As shown by greater respect for the Internet as a source for news and information, a more thoughtful approach to training on its use, as well as promoting use among the general population, should be employed. Indeed, the focus groups demonstrate that one of the most important ways to change media culture is to lay the basic foundations for the provision of high-speed Internet. This should be one of the main goals for the donor community and particularly for the MCC in Armenia. In addition, the donor community should:

1. create cheap access to news through SMS technology or other mobile technology to people's cell phones;
2. work with mobile companies to lower the cost of online access to news websites via cell phones;
3. provide enjoyable and free trainings for those who have never accessed the internet, particularly in rural communities.

Train and promote a culture of ethical web journalists

1. provide seed money to the best Armenian and Azerbaijani web news sources. An example of such a successful project is www.civil.ge in Georgia;
2. ensure web journalists adhere to print media standards when publishing on the Internet. Eurasianet is an English and Russian language example of such a publication;
3. use video streaming, blogging and hyper linking to create interactive websites;
4. ensure web journalists publish an email address for an ombudsman who can consider any feedback or complaints seriously.

To the research community

Promote a Research Based Culture for Media Supporters and Providers

Provide research to better target media development support.

One reason for the failure of media development support programs has been their concentration on the print media when the majority of the population has neither access to or interest in newspapers. The same is true in Western countries and constantly conducting independent research to analyze public perceptions towards the media will greatly contribute to ensuring that international assistance in this area is more efficiently spent.

Specific research project suggestions that have emerged out of this small scale research project include the need to:

1. conduct similar focus groups to those convened for this report in the regions of Armenia and Azerbaijan;
2. further investigate the influence of the Turkish media in Azerbaijan;
3. examine the currently most popular Armenian and Azerbaijani news sites, their provenance and news coverage processes.

Train TV and other media outlets to conduct their own Market Research

While for a need for market research has emerged in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, understanding how best to conduct it on a sufficient level is severely underdeveloped. Furthermore, most research is more concerned with branding and, to a certain extent, television ratings. No research has been undertaken for television stations to better understand how citizens view their channels.

Trainings on how to conduct high level focus groups with television viewers is particularly recommended.

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GLOSSARY OF MEDIA SOURCES

ARMENIA

Print media

Hayastani Hanrapetutyun - daily, state-owned.

Aravot – daily, private.

Golos Armenii - private newspaper.

Azg – daily, founded by Liberal Democratic Party.

Iravunk - weekly, founded by Union of Constitutional Law party.

Yerkir – weekly, founded by Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaktsutyun, contains English-language pages.

Haikakan Zhamanak - daily, founded by opposition Democratic Homeland Party.

4th Ishkhanutyun – private, opposition oriented.

Television

H1 - From 2000 the National television was renamed into the Public television, and started using the "H1" logo. The channel has the largest broadcast area in Armenia.

Shant TV - was founded by Arthur Yerkzkyan in Gyumri, the second largest city of Armenia, in 1994. Currently it is one of the leading TV companies in Armenia and has nationwide coverage.

Yerkir Media – private, is popular for its political talk shows.

A1+ - was the most popular independent news channel until taken off the air in April 2002 by the Armenian government. Currently, the A1+ website provides daily news mainly on politics in Armenian, Russian, and English languages.

Armenia TV - was the first private Armenian TV channel in Armenia and broadcasts a variety of programming including the latest news, entertainment, political and social talk shows, historical, cultural, children programs, movies and sports.

ALM - private, on air since April 2002.

Radio

Azatutyun (Radio Liberty) Radio - Daily news, analyses and Real Audio broadcasts covering current events.

Amerikayi Dzayn - The Voice of America, which first went on the air in 1942, is a multimedia international broadcasting service funded by the U.S. Government through the Broadcasting Board of Governors.

Public Radio of Armenia - national, state-run.

News agencies

Arka - private, English-language pages

Armenpress - state-run, English-language pages

Noyan Tapan - private, English-language pages

Mediamax - private, English-language pages

AZERBAIJAN

Print media

Zerkalo, Echo – popular Russian-language independent newspapers.

525 – Azeri-language independent newspaper.

Xalq qazeti, Azerbaijan, Respublika – official state newspapers.

Azadliq, Hurriyyet, Yeni Musavat, Bizim Yol and Yeni Zaman – opposition newspapers.

Television

Az tv - official state channel. The channel is popular in the regions, especially among old people.

ANS (Azerbaijan News Services) - the first private channel in the country. The channel is mainly focused on political news. Among all TV channels, ANS offers comparatively more balanced coverage.

Lider TV- was established in September, 2000 by Media Holding. The channel is the second biggest news channel after ANS in Azerbaijan. A pro-government channel, it takes an aggressive anti-opposition stance. It also focuses on entertainment, especially sport telecasting.

ITV (Public TV) - was established in 2005 as one of the conditions of the European Council to the Azerbaijani government. The channel focuses mainly on public debates and programs, and tries to be neutral when dealing with government and opposition parties.

ATV and Space TV - are focused on entertainment programs, especially music, show-business and movies.

Xezer TV – a private channel, previously a Turkish channel, “**Samanyolu**”. Focuses on news, entertainment and music.

Turkish CNN – available through satellite TV only.

Radio

BBC - broadcasts mainly news in English, Russian and Azeri.

AZADLIQ (Radio Liberty) Radio - broadcasts in Azeri with some VOA insertions, is financed by the US Congress, offers independent news and analysis on political and social issues, and often raises debatable issues or presents alternative views.

ANS-CM - owned by ANS Company, news and music oriented.

News agencies

Azartac - state-run, English-language pages

Turan - private, English-language pages

Trend - private, English-language pages

APPENDIX 1

METHODOLOGY

CRRC Armenia and Azerbaijan offices conducted four focus groups in Yerevan and Baku, the capital cities of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Of those four, one was comprised of women under 40, one of women over 40, one of men under 40, and one of men over 40. CRRC recruited 20 people for each focus group to ensure the attendance of at least 10 participants.

Recruiters selected participants by stopping pedestrians at sampling points selected by country directors (at least two points per city). The only selection criterion beyond the basic gender and age breakdown noted above was that the participants must consume news for at least one hour daily.

CRRC Armenia faced challenges with the recruitment of focus group participants on the streets. One of the main reasons was the lack of trust from people stopped on the streets toward media. CRRC 2007 respondent lists were used to select participants.

ANNEX 2 FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE AND GROUP COMPOSITION

Armenia

- **Male, 18-40 age group – 25 July, 2008**
 - Group characteristics: 9 participants; average age of the participants 25.4; 5 students, 2 full-time employed, 2 part-time employed.
- **Male, 40 and over age group – 26 July, 2008**
 - Group characteristics: 8 participants; average age of the participants 59; 3 employed, 2 unemployed, 3 retired.
- **Female, 18-40 age group – 26, July, 2008**
 - Group characteristics: 8 participants; average age of the participants 21; 6 students, 2 unemployed.
- **Female, 40 and over age group – 27, July, 2008**
 - Group characteristics: 8 participants; average age of the participants 53.5; 5 unemployed, 3 employed.

Azerbaijan

- **Male, 18-40 age group – 2 August, 2008**
 - Group characteristics: 10 participants; average age of the participants 26.6; 6 employed, 3 unemployed, 1 student.
- **Male, 40 and over age group – 2 August, 2008**
 - Group characteristics: 6 participants; average age of the participants 54; 3 employed, 3 unemployed.
- **Female, 18-40 age group – 5 August, 2008**
 - Group characteristics: 11 participants, average age of the participants 25; 7 employed, 3 unemployed, 1 student.
- **Female, 40 and over age group - 4 August, 2008**
 - Group characteristics: 11 participants; average age of the participants 44.4; 8 employed, 3 unemployed.

ANNEX 3 FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

I. General International Coverage/Role of Media and Government

1. What media sources inform you the most when it comes to international news?
2. Does the national media provide satisfactory coverage of international stories and news? Is it of sufficient quality?

[Prompt] How is the situation when it comes to foreign politics, economics/business and culture?]

3. Which countries and regions should the media focus on?

[Follow up] What are the criteria to judge whether news in another country should be reported?

4. What is an appropriate amount of time after an event occurs for it to be covered in the media? Immediately, or after a certain amount of time?

[For those who say “some amount of time”] How much time?

5. Does the government have the right to regulate the media?
6. Does the government have the right to control the media?
7. Should journalists bear criminal responsibility for what they write?
8. Do you think that there is more freedom of speech in Georgia or Armenia compared to Azerbaijan?
9. In your opinion, do people consume different types of media depending on class and region? What kinds of people watch different television channels or read different newspapers?

[Prompt for AZB]: ANS, AzTV, ATV, ITV, Lider, Space TV; Zerkalo/Ayna, Azadlig, Azerbaijan, Musavat, Xalq.

II. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh-specific Coverage

1. What is the media's responsibility and role in reporting on the Nagorno Karabakh conflict?
2. Should the media [Azerbaijani or Armenian] media report the national news of the other side in the conflict if it is unrelated to your own, or on Nagorno Karabakh?

[Prompt] For example, should it report on local political, economic, or cultural issues in Armenia or Azerbaijan?

3. How are the people from the other side in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict portrayed in the media? Are there stereotypes? Where do they come from? Are some of them true?
4. How has media coverage of Armenia or Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh changed over time?

[Prompt for AZB] Is there any difference since the opening of BTC pipeline?

III. Review of Clips/Article Summaries

1. What do you think of this report?

[Prompt] Is it complete? Is it objective? Is it biased?

2. Is there any information which should have been included but was not?
3. How do you feel when you watch/read this clip/article?

IV. Accuracy/Bias

1. Whose perspective and opinion should the media present?
2. Should reporting be objective or subjective and include the opinion of the media producer?
3. What is media accuracy? What is media bias? Can you think of examples of media bias in terms of sources and stories?
4. Do you think media bias is a problem in your country [Armenia or Azerbaijan]? If so, why? What are the consequences? If not, why not?
5. Do you think that the accuracy and bias of your media [Armenian or Azerbaijani] has changed over time? Has it improved, gotten worse or remained the same?

V. Satisfaction/Trust

1. Are you satisfied with media news coverage?
2. How would you rate it on a scale of 1 to 10?

[Prompt]: How do different types of media compare (i.e. TV vs. print media vs. radio vs. online).

3. Which types of media do you trust most and why?

4. Which types of media don't you trust and why?
5. Which types of media do you trust most for reporting on Nagorno Karabakh? Which do you trust the least? Why?
6. Which types of media do you trust most for reporting on your country's [Armenia or Azerbaijan] national issues which are unrelated to Nagorno Karabakh? Which do you trust the least? Why?
7. Do you believe information about Nagorno Karabakh and your country [Armenia or Azerbaijan] from government-controlled sources (official media bodies of government agencies)?
8. Do you believe information about Nagorno Karabakh and your country [Armenia or Azerbaijan] from independent sources?
9. Does conflict-related information, as broadcasted by government-controlled sources (official media bodies of government agencies), generate patriotic feelings in you?
10. In what ways could the media be improved so that you would trust it?
11. Do you trust the media more or less than in the past? Why?

**[Prompt for AZB] Before and after 1993? Before and after 2003?
Before and after 2005?**