

International Relations

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Western Press Coverage of Environmental Controversies in the Caucasus: Filling the News and Information Gap?

Environmental crises confront Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The implications of these crises cross sensitive and disputed national borders and may affect economic, political, and cultural relationships on a vast geographic scale. At the same time, the countries' domestic press systems are subject to a range of legal, quasi-official, political, and economic constraints that discourage — and sometimes punish — or prevent aggressive but fair, balanced, and ethical news coverage of environmental controversies. This study uses content analysis of news stories and interviews with journalists to explore how two independent Western news organizations, US-based EurasiaNet.org and UK-based Institute for War & Peace Reporting, tried to fill the news and information void left by constraints on domestic media during a three-year period. Among the variables analyzed are news sources (experts, advocates, and non-experts), fairness and balance, and article topics.

Keywords: Georgia; Armenia; Azerbaijan; content analysis; environment; news media; EurasiaNet; Institute for War & Peace Reporting

The three former Soviet republics in the South Caucasus—Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia—face major ecological challenges. Among them are threats to the Caspian and Black seas, the ramifications of climate change for glacial melt, destruction of habitat and biodiversity, overfishing, radioactive and hazardous wastes, water quality and supply, deforestation, energy exploration, air and pesticide pollution, and environmental diseases. Other environmental problems include construction of hydropower dams, soil degradation, and hazardous tailings from mines. The implications of these and other eco-challenges cross national borders and may affect economic, political, and cultural relationships on a large geographic scale.

Recent studies exploring some of those environmental problems range from the natural sciences to the social sciences and public policy. For example, Rashid et al. (2013) examined the presence of *Vibrio cholerae*, the cause of cholera, in the surface waters of Azerbaijan, including reservoirs that supply municipal drinking water, while Magiera et al. (2013) studied sub-alpine grasslands in Georgia. Shiriyev (2011) analyzed energy politics and Azerbaijan's security in the Caspian Sea Basin; Kemkes (2015) looked at how natural capital can sustain livelihoods in a remote Georgian mountainous region; and Ismayilov (2015) discussed the interplay between Azerbaijan's energy resources and its foreign policy.

At the same time, the region's governments, burdened by limited economic resources, weak civil society institutions, perceived national security threats, and varying degrees of political authoritarianism rooted in their lengthy Soviet legacies—have demonstrated inadequate resolve and fiscal resources to tackle these complex challenges (Chatrchyan & Wooden, 2005).

Meanwhile, the governments and their proxies—the presidents' friends, relatives, and political supporters, as well as financial-industrial groups—still tightly control the “not free” press systems of Azerbaijan and Armenia; Georgia's media system is categorized as “partly free” (Freedom House, 2017). In its 2017 press freedom survey, Reporters sans Frontières (RSF) ranked Georgia 64th, Armenia 79th, and Azerbaijan 162nd among 180 countries. Overall, Azerbaijan's political, press, and human rights record places it among the world's most repressitarian states—meaning both repressive in human rights practices and authoritarian in governance (Freedman, Shafer, and Anatova, 2010).

In this context, this article looks at foreign coverage of environmental issues, specifically fairness, balance, and sourcing in stories about environmental and environmental health issues and events in the three countries during a three-year period, from 2012

to 2014. Its core assumption is that most environmental stories involve more than one perspective or “side”, that the principal contenders in these issues are identifiable, and that assertions about them in a news story can be isolated. It then becomes possible to analyze how news outlets treat the contending sides by measuring the prominence — where in a story they appear, and space — the number of paragraphs they receive in news stories. Because of the lack of prior research in this area, the goal of this study is to present a descriptive and exploratory view of the coverage.

State of the news media in the Caucasus

In a 2015 interview, Justin Burke, the editor of EurasiaNet, observed, “It’s much easier to operate now in Georgia and Armenia, especially on such matters as the environment, since that can be seen as not political.” He continued, “It’s now impossible to report openly in Azerbaijan. Our local correspondents have been pretty much hounded out of the country. Anyone who stays in Azerbaijan and tries to carry out what you might call the functions of an independent journalist risks arrest.”

The government of Azerbaijan is under increasing criticism from nongovernmental organizations that advocate for human rights and freedom of expression for its systemic abridgement of journalists’ rights and constraints on press freedom and, more broadly freedom of expression. One of the most prominent recent examples is the 7½-year prison sentence given to Azerbaijani investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova in September 2015. Ismayilova, the host of a daily program on Radio Azadliq, a Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) service, was convicted on what regime critics and press freedom advocates consider politically motivated, sham charges. Her investigative topics for RFE/RL and EurasiaNet include environmental issues, such as the controversy about a gold-mining operation tied to the family of President Ilham Aliyev (Fatullayeva and Ismayilova, 2012). The US State Department responded to the penalty with a statement saying it was “deeply troubled” by her sentence and by “reports of irregularities during the investigation and trial, including the apparent exclusion of witness testimony and other key evidence” (Ahmedbeyli, 2015). Authorities released her in May 2016 and she has resumed reporting for RFE/RL.

In August 2015, independent journalist Rasim Aliyev was fatally beaten. The reason remained uncertain, according to press reports, with some blaming a Facebook post he made critical of a popular soccer player, while others suggested it was in retaliation for his oppositional and independent reporting. Aliyev had formerly worked for Report-

ers' Freedom and Safety, a press freedom advocacy NGO that authorities had forced to close, and had been previously been attacked by police (The Guardian, 2015.)

Among other journalists targeted by the government, opposition journalist, press rights defender, and government critic Emin Huseynov fled Azerbaijan for Switzerland in 2015 to avoid prosecution on politically trumped-up charges (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2015). In September 2015, police searched the Baku apartment of RFE/RL contributor Islam Shikhali in connection with an investigation of purported tax evasion (RFE/RL 2015). Recently, the Committee to Protect Journalists (Said, 2017) warned of more restrictive laws about online media and more detentions and arrests of journalists and bloggers in Azerbaijan. Among them was the January 2017 sentencing of independent journalist Afgan Sadygov to two and a half years in prison on assault charges after he refused an official demand to delete critical reports from his website Azel. The organization also reported that the country had five imprisoned journalists as of December 1, 2016, more than all but eleven other countries; Georgia and Armenia had none.

There has been little research by mass communications scholars into how foreign news organizations report about public affairs in the Caucasus. A major exception was a 2015 analysis of coverage of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over the contested Nagorno-Karabakh region by UK media and the *New York Times* (Imranli-Lowe, 2015). That study examined how those media organizations selected and used news sources during their Western-centric reporting of the issue during the late Soviet era and into the early years of post-Soviet independence. Another exception looked at how a Christian-oriented press service covered religion-related news and conflicts in the region with its two predominantly Christian countries—Armenia and Georgia—and one predominantly Muslim country—Azerbaijan. That study examined the type and content of coverage, sourcing, and newswriting conventions in articles published by Forum 18 News Service (Freedman, Chang, and Shafer, 2008).

Any gaps in press coverage of environmental news carry serious public policy implications. Shallow or nonexistent coverage weakens the agenda-setting ability of the press, deters efforts to hold government and corporate interests accountable and transparent, impedes public awareness of threats to the environment and health, and reduces the capacity of international donors, funders, and multinational agencies to alleviate ecological perils.

The region's governments are opaque in their operations and reluctant to take steps to encourage citizen engagement on environmental issues. A limited exception is the

small network of fifteen Aarhus Centres¹ in Armenia and one in Georgia. (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2015). Their activities include trainings for journalists, such as an August 2015 “eco-educational” seminar for young journalists in Ararat, Armenia. “The aim was to introduce the children to the ecological functions of journalism, trends, environmental issues and coverage deficiencies, inherent errors, how to make material easier and the process of sending it to [an] audience in intelligible form, [and] the role of ecological education in journalism” (Armenian Aarhus Centers, 2015).

Two Western news organizations

This study content-analyzes news stories posted in English in 2012-2014 by New York-based EurasiaNet (www.eurasianet.org) and London-based Institute for War & Peace Reporting (www.iwpr.net). Both news outlets post in English; EurasiaNet also posts in Russian, and IWPR posts in national languages. We selected these long-established media organizations because they regularly cover a broad range of public policy issues in the Caucasus, use Western-style methods of newsgathering and news dissemination, and follow Western-style standards for fairness, balance, accuracy, and ethical reporting. While other Western news organizations such as the British Broadcasting Corporation, *Financial Times*, Reuters, and the Associated Press also report on the region, their coverage is either more sporadic or focused on a specific non-environmental theme, such as Forum 18 News Service, which covers religious freedom issues. RFE/RL concentrates on news pertaining to human rights and political rights, issues that sometimes intersect with ecological ones. To illustrate, RFE/RL reported on allegations that fish farms owned by the Armenian prime minister’s family are depleting the wells of villagers in Apaga (Simonyan, 2015).

IWPR describes itself as “an international not-for-profit organisation governed by senior journalists, experts in peace-building, development and human-rights, regional specialists and business professionals ... IWPR employs skilled staff and expert consultants in a variety of fields to support its capacity-building activities and to assist

¹ The centers are part of an effort to implement the 1998 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe’s Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. “By providing a venue where members of the public can meet to discuss environmental concerns, the Aarhus Centres strengthen environmental governance. They assist the public with participating in environmental decision-making and facilitate access to justice on environmental matters sensitizing the public and governments to their shared responsibility for their natural surroundings” (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe 2015).

in providing journalists, civil society, and civic activists with the basic and advanced skills and knowledge that support sustainable and positive change...” (IWPR, 2017).

EurasiaNet is part of the Open Society Foundations Eurasia Program. It provides “information and analysis about political, economic, environmental and social developments in the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus, as well as in Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Turkey, and Southwest Asia.... EurasiaNet.org advocates open and informed discussion of issues that concern countries in the region. The web site presents a variety of perspectives on contemporary developments, utilizing a network of correspondents based both in the West and in the region. The aim of EurasiaNet.org is to promote informed decision making among policy makers, as well as broadening interest in the region among the general public” (EurasiaNet, 2017).

Research questions

The research questions examine environmental issues covered by EurasiaNet and IWPR, the countries involved in those news events, the sources incorporated into the stories, and the balance of views in that coverage.

RQ1: How many environmental news stories did these news organizations produce and who wrote them?

RQ2: What environmental issues did these news organization cover in 2012-2014?

RQ3: With what frequency did news organizations cover environmental issues in each country?

RQ4: What types of news sources appeared in these stories and to what extent were issue experts and non-experts used as sources?

RQ5: To what extent do these stories reflect balanced reporting?

Methodology

Few published studies have incorporated content analysis of Caucasus news coverage in general and environmental coverage specifically. Major reasons for this omission in scholarship include the transient survival of many news outlets and the absence of comprehensive, accessible archives. Some press organizations in the region are short-

lived, perhaps established by a political party or aspiring politician in the run-up to an election. Due to inadequate circulation and advertising revenue, news organizations supported by international NGOs may go out of business when foreign subsidies end. Others are closed directly by regime action or court orders, including economically crippling libel judgments. Even longer-lived news outlets may maintain poor electronic archives accessible to researchers. Another factor relates to academic freedom: constraints on academic freedom may discourage or punish domestic media scholars, especially amid concern that their research may uncover weaknesses in how the press covers environmental controversies and other public policy issues.

The study supplements the content analysis with interviews conducted with journalists from the two media organizations.

Stories in this study focus on environment-related policies, events, research findings, and controversies. To be included, a story must have at least three paragraphs about the environment or environmental health. They may involve executive, legislative, or judicial, branches of government at local, district, national, or international levels. They also may involve businesses, NGOs, researchers, educational institutions, and/or multinational organizations. The study closely follows the protocol used in recent research about IWPR and EurasiaNet coverage of environmental news in Central Asia (Freedman, Neuzil, Takahashi, and Carmichael, 2016).

The data set includes stories by staff, freelancers, and correspondents, as well as stories they reposted from partner news organizations such as RFE/RL. Editorials are excluded.

The study defines a news source as a person, organization, or document that supplies information to reporters. A source is explicitly identified when reporters quote or paraphrase information from that source. In media studies, the means by which reporters publicly credit a source for a story is called attribution. Attribution is signaled when a source's name is linked with verbs such as "said" or "claimed". Attribution also can come from verbs denoting a source's state of mind, such as "thinks", "believes", "wants", or "feels". Broad categories of individuals to whom an assertion is attributed (for example, "residents say" or "experts state...") are not considered sources. Also, we assume that information that is not clearly attributed to a source originated from the reporter's direct observation of events or actions. Sources can be considered advocacy or non-advocacy as determined by their publicly declared position on an issue or event.

Our study classifies sources into three categories:

- **Advocacy sources:** An advocacy source is one whose assertions suggest a particular course of political or policy action or point of view on an issue. This category excludes assertions from expert sources intending to define or identify a problem.
- **A non-advocacy issue source** has not explicitly advocated a position on the topic in any relevant story. Instead, non-advocacy sources shed light on or explain some aspect of the issues it raises. An issue-expert source is any person cited in stories because of his or her institutional or background credentials to evaluate or interpret the issues.
- **Ordinary people:** These are non-expert, non-advocacy sources who comment on an environmental or environmental health issue—for example, “a farmer in Batumi”. The issue usually affects them or their relatives, community, or business.

Sources in these categories may be anonymous. If so, the reports or their news organization omit or change their full names in the story to keep their identities confidential. This is common in a region where people may fear official or unofficial repercussions if they are identified in the press as critics of government or other influential interests. For example, an IWPR article about storm damage in East Georgia quoted “one protestor, who gave his first name as Niko” (Jvania, 2013), while a RFE/RL partner story that EurasiaNet reposted quoted “an unnamed Azerbaijani expert” discussing a water-related border dispute (RFE/RL, 2014). The use of anonymous sources, while raising ethical questions under traditional Western professional journalistic standards, is understandable in a political context where anonymity may be the only—or at least the most effective—way to get ordinary people and, sometimes, activists, to comment on sensitive topics. A cautionary note about sources: As Soltys (2013) explained in the context of Central Asia, some environmental NGOs are “fronts” for government. That status is not transparent and may influence the opinions expressed by their experts and leaders, whether classified as advocacy sources or non-advocacy expert sources.

Intercoder reliability with two coders was calculated for all the reported variables using 14 news articles. Reliability scores, based on Krippendorff’s Alpha, ranged from 0.71 to 0.85 and were deemed acceptable for coding of the full sample and analysis. Two coders then split the sample in half and coded the rest of the articles.

Interviews with two EurasiaNet editors supplement our content analysis.

Results

RQ1 asked how many environmental news stories these news organizations produced during the three-year study period and who wrote them. The analysis finds that 56.5 percent of environmental stories originated from EurasiNet.org, and 43.5 percent from the Institute for War & Peace Reporting. In regards to the byline — the writer’s name —, almost half of the stories (48.4 percent) originated with partner news organizations, while the news organizations’ own staff, freelancers, or correspondents authored only 21 percent. Almost a third (30.6 percent) originated from another source.

Research question 2 asked about the environmental issues covered by these news organizations in 2012-2014. As Table 1 shows, energy accounts for more than a third of all stories in the data. The two other issues that received the most attention were water (11.3 percent) and animals and endangered species (8.1 percent). Almost 18 percent of stories focused on other issues that did not fit into the rest of the categories (e.g., tourism, parks, and landslides). EurasiaNet and IWPR paid limited attention to major global issues such as climate change—with only two stories—which may reflect the interests of the correspondents and their editors, their audiences’ perceived interests, or the relative ease or difficulty in covering more localized environmental controversies. We acknowledge some subjectivity in this type of classification because topics can overlap, such as agriculture and food or agriculture and water.

Table 1 - Issues covered

	Frequency	Percent
Agriculture	2	3.2
Animals and endangered species	5	8.1
Energy	21	33.9
Food	5	8.1
Water	7	11.3
Mining	4	6.5
Roads and transportation	3	4.8
Urban green space	2	3.2
Climate-weather	2	3.2
Other	11	17.7
Total	62	100.0

To answer Research Question 3, stories were almost equally divided in number among the three countries, with 11.3 percent focusing on more than one country, as Table 2 shows.

Table 2 - Country

	Frequency	Percent
Armenia	23	37.1
Georgia	19	30.6
Azerbaijan	13	21.0
More than 1 country in Caucasus	7	11.3
Total	62	100.0

Research Question 4 focused on types of news sources and how the stories incorporated them. Story length ranged from four to 44 paragraphs, with an average of 19 paragraphs per story. Reporters’ paragraphs ranged from one to 19, with an average of seven. Advocacy paragraphs averaged about eight per story, while experts’ paragraphs averaged 2.5 and non-experts’ paragraphs only 1.4 (Table 3)

Table 3 also shows that advocacy sources received the most paragraphs (ranging from none to 25), with approximately four per story, compared to 1.4 for experts (ranging from none to six) and 0.6 for non-experts (ranging from none to 14).

Table 3 – Descriptive statistics of paragraphs and sources

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total Paragraphs	4.00	44.00	18.94	6.91
Reporter Paragraphs	1.00	19.00	7.05	3.96
Advocacy	.00	11.00	3.87	2.56
Advocacy Paragraphs	.00	25.00	7.87	5.63
Expert Sources	.00	6.00	1.39	1.54
Experts Paragraphs	.00	16.00	2.55	3.12
Non-expert Sources	.00	7.00	.61	1.21
Non-expert Paragraphs	.00	14.00	1.37	2.89

As Table 4 shows, government expert sources (in 19.4 percent of all stories) were most commonly used, followed by interest group sources (17.7 percent of all stories). In addition, 21 percent of stories were coded as “other” source. For example a story on the Transcaspian pipeline quoted a man called an “energy expert” with no further attribution. Non-expert sources appeared in only 20 stories.

Table 4 - Type of expert sources

	Frequency	Percent
No experts	22	35.5
Government	12	19.4
Multi-government	1	1.6
Academic	2	3.2
Business	1	1.6
Interest Group	11	17.7
Other	13	21.0
Total	62	100.0

When advocacy sources are included, they tend to make their initial appearance between paragraphs two and five (56.5 percent of all stories) (Table 5). Expert sources appear for the first time primarily between paragraphs six and 10 (24.2 percent of stories) and paragraphs two to five (21 percent) (Table 5). As Table 5 shows, non-expert sources usually first appear in paragraphs 11 or later (14.5 percent of all stories).

Table 5 - Where advocacy, expert, and non-expert sources first appear

	Advocacy sources		Expert sources		Non-expert sources	
No sources	8	(12.9%)	22	(35.5%)	42	(67.7%)
Lead Paragraph	7	(11.3%)	2	(3.2%)	1	(1.6%)
Paragraphs 2-5	35	(56.5%)	13	(21.0%)	5	(8.1%)
Paragraphs 6-10	9	(14.5%)	15	(24.2%)	5	(8.1%)
11-on	3	(4.8%)	10	(16.1%)	9	1(4.5%)
Total	62	(100.0%)	62	(100.0%)	62	(100.0%)

RQ5 explores how balanced these stories are in presenting more than one side in an environmental controversy. The analysis shows that only 9.7 percent of stories incorporated a balance of sources, while 56.5 percent and 21 percent respectively favored one or other position (Table 6).

Table 6 - Balance

	Frequency	Percent
Favors A	35	56.5
Favors B	13	21.0
Balanced	6	9.7
N/A	8	12.9
Total	62	100.0

Finally, a cross-tabulation (Table 7) found that the Institute for War & Peace Reporting produced more balanced environmental news stories than EurasiaNet during the study period (22.2% vs. none for EurasiaNet.org).

Table 7 - News Organization Balance Cross-tabulation

	Favors A	Favors B	Balanced	N/A	Total
EurasiaNet.org	22 (62.9%)	8 (22.9%)	0 (0%)	5 (14.3%)	35 (100.0%)
Institute for War & Peace Reporting	13 (48.1%)	5 (18.5%)	6 (22.2%)	3 (11.1%)	27 (100.0%)
Total	35 (56.5%)	13 (21.0%)	6 (9.7%)	8 (12.9%)	62 (100.0%)

While some of the region’s unreported or underreported ecological issues are complex, politically dangerous, and geographically remote, others are visible, accessible, and relatively simple to cover. Audiences can easily grasp the nature of such problems that connect with their own lives and communities. Therefore, beyond our quantitative analysis, it is important to explore how foreign news organizations decide what environmental events and controversies to cover and how to do so.

Environmental coverage in the region has not been a priority for EurasiaNet, according to two of its chief journalists. Elizabeth Owen, its editor for the Caucasus, Moldova, and Turkey, said, “There generally has to be corruption or a political angle” to spur coverage. That leaves acknowledged gaps in coverage. Referring to mining, she said in a 2015 interview, “The [three] governments all have a tendency to look the other way at regulations when it comes down to mining deals. We’ve touched on this in the past, but when I look at this topic, it could be a news site all by itself”.

Expanding on the topic of underreporting about environmental issues, Owen, who is based in Tbilisi, said, “What’s frustrating is that there’s really a gigantic wealth of things to be pursued, but the logistics on the ground have to be kept in mind. As difficult as environmental reporting can be in the West, the difficulties are often compounded in this region. One impediment: the fact that “anything related to energy is seen as strategic, and you’re seen as a potential threat”. Another impediment: lack of accurate data. “Apart from NGOs, there’s not really a lively government interest in putting together always-coherent policies and programs. That can complicate things in trying even to find out what a government’s position”.

EurasiaNet editor Justin Burke in New York contrasted the organization’s environmental coverage of the Caucasus with that of Central Asia. “In Central Asia we’ve done

a little early warning reporting, especially about melting glaciers and things like that, but “nothing anticipatory” in the Caucasus. “Central Asia has the Aral Sea and water issues. That isn’t necessarily the case in the Caucasus”, he said in a 2015 interview. He identified soil degradation of agricultural lands as one underreported topic.

On a broader level, Burke continued, “We don’t have any set agenda other than to... perform classic watchdog responsibilities. We try to highlight issues in which there’s maybe a potential danger to public wellbeing or an issue that potentially is in the public interest. We’re a public interest news site that strives to uphold classical functions of a free press including the watchdog function. We try to identify good stories and write about them and highlight the pros, cons, or potential dangers and what happens after that. Hopefully the stories can provoke public debate and lead to changes that serve the public interest”.

Conclusion

Efforts to research non-domestic coverage of environmental issues in the Caucasus provides advantages and drawbacks. From the scholars’ perspective, advantages may include easier access to contemporary and archived content for analysis and the wider ability to present and publish their results outside the region in an atmosphere of academic freedom. Unfortunately, there have been few studies published about environmental journalism in the Caucasus. Given the public importance of environmental and environmental health news, we hope future content analysis and framing studies by scholars in and out of the region will contribute to a better understanding of how local private, state, and independent media cover—or fail to cover—such issues.

Foreign news organizations and their journalists—even their local freelance contributors—often operate more freely than their domestic media peers because their economic survival and physical safety does not depend as heavily on the good graces or honesty of governmental officials and regulatory agencies. Even so, they do risk the perils of censorship, website blockages, and expulsion of non-citizen journalists. Foreign correspondents may not be proficient in Russian and the national and ethnic languages of the Caucasus. Those who “parachute” in for short reporting stints may lack deep understanding of and appreciation for local cultures and history. That impairs their capacity to communicate with news sources and weigh sources’ credibility while possibly coloring their reporting. Transient journalists may also arrive and depart from the region with a sense of gloom-and-doom that they impart into their coverage.

Foreign media's coverage of environmental issues can inform and influence decision-making and policy-making about projects and financial commitments from international donors, funders, and environmental advocacy organizations such as the United Nations Environmental Programme, World Bank, Nature Conservancy, and United Nations Development Programme. Their reporting can also affect project and investment decisions by businesses that already operate in the region or are considering doing so.

In addition, foreign coverage can influence the news agenda for domestic media outlets because domestic press organizations sometimes reprint, rewrite, or follow up on foreign stories that they missed, lacked resources to cover, or feared to cover on their own. EurasiaNet's Burke (2014) said about one-quarter of his news organization's Twitter followers are journalists. The majority of audience members for these and other online Western news organizations live outside the Caucasus. About 26 percent of the EurasiaNet audience accesses the site from Eurasia, mainly in the Russian language, and Georgia ranks third in readership among the 15 former Soviet republics (Burke, 2015).

For IWPR, Russian speakers in the region are the major intended audience, but websites and newspapers in national languages sometimes use IWPR material as well.

The comparatively greater influence in the region of Russian-language rather than English-language media poses another limitation on the influence of Western news organizations. The reasons include geographic proximity, the stationing of more Russian media journalists in the region, the number of Caucasus citizens who work in Russia, and the fact that more residents of the region are fluent in Russian than in English.

In summary, these two Western news organizations do the type of reporting that domestic media often cannot due to official, cultural, economic, and self-imposed obstacles, as well as insufficient resources. Yet we believe that an observation about Central Asian journalists applies to their counterparts in the Caucasus: "This is certainly not to say that many journalists lack the professional skills or interest to report about and access such issues with a multiplicity of views and with factual accuracy" (Freedman, 2005: 313-314).

We are not naive and unrealistic enough to believe that significant liberalization of the media environment in the Caucasus will soon arrive. Complex factors such as the lack of public trust in the press, authoritarian traditions, legal and extra-legal constraints on the press, insufficient professional training and weak ethical standards, self-cen-

sorship, cultural and religious values, and inadequate media resources and economics combine to keep such aspirational changes beyond reach –for the foreseeable future, at least.

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