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QATAR

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Several dramatic and controversial developments affected Qatar's media sector in 2009. The government announced that it will unveil its first media law in 30 years by the end of 2010, to replace the outdated Press and Publications Law. For the last several decades, this law has restricted procedures on the establishment of newspapers and stipulated criminal penalties and prison sentences for libel and slander. The media community is not optimistic that the new law will work in its favor, though, as preliminary statements surrounding the draft of the new law hint toward greater regulation.

Another event that shook the media community was the resignation, under duress, of Robert Ménard, director-general of Doha Center for Media Freedom. Qatar's journalists have long suffered from the absence of a professional association to protect their rights, and Ménard ran afoul of the authorities by highlighting the need for an independent body to defend journalists. He claimed that Qatari authorities had "suffocated" the organization, and he protested the country's refusal to reform the "obsolete" and "repressive" laws governing the media that made it impossible for the organization to criticize any other country for imposing restrictions on media freedom.

Although the influential Arabic-language news television network Al Jazeera has raised Qatar's media profile, journalism in the country still has many hurdles to overcome. The constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press in accordance with the law, but the government limits these rights in practice. The state owns all broadcasting outlets, and most print outlets have close ties to the government. In response, journalists and publishers continue to self-censor due to political and economic pressures when reporting on government policies or material deemed hostile to Islam, the ruling family, and relations with neighboring states.

The growth of the Internet and new media is providing an alternative platform. Most news outlets have associated websites, and there were 430,000 Internet users by the end of 2009. But, the authorities continue to filter political criticism, material deemed offensive to Islam, pornographic content, and online privacy resources.

QATAR AT A GLANCE

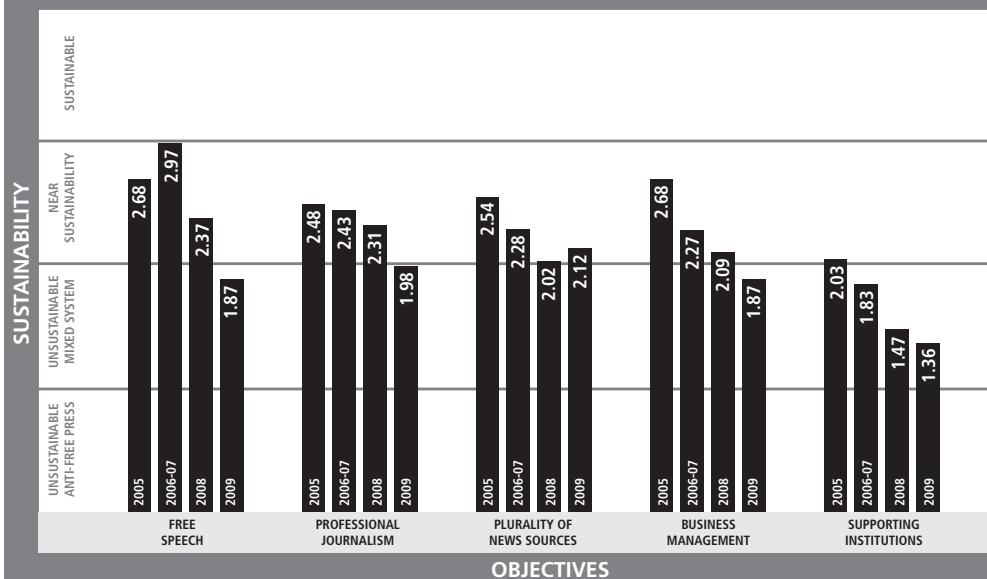
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 848,016 (July 2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Doha
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Arab 40%, Indian 18%, Pakistani 18%, Iranian 10%, other 14%
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 77.5%, Christian 8.5%, other 14% (2004 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** Arabic (official), English commonly used as a second language
- > **GDP (2008):** \$113.98 billion (*World Statistics Pocketbook*, United Nations Statistics Division)
- > **GNI per capita (2009):** \$87,989 (*World Statistics Pocketbook*, United Nations Statistics Division)
- > **Literacy rate:** 89% (male: 89.1%, female: 88.6% (2004 Census, *CIA World Factbook*))
- > **President or top authority:** Amir Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani (since June 27, 1995)

MEDIA SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 16 (6 newspapers, 9 magazines; Radio: 1 main station; Television: 3 main stations)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top 3 by circulation: *Al Ray* (privately owned), *Al Sharq* (privately owned), *Al Watan* (privately owned)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** State-owned Qatar News Agency
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** \$402 million
- > **Internet usage:** 563,800 (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: QATAR



Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1): Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2): Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3): Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4): Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Qatar Objective Score: 1.87

Despite vibrant coverage of international news by its flagship satellite television channel, Al Jazeera, the Qatari government continues to restrict all media from reporting on news critical of local authorities.

The panelists agreed that the constitution provides for freedom of speech and the press in accordance with the law—especially Article 47 of Qatar’s constitution, which guarantees freedom of expression. In practice, though, the government limits these rights. “The constitution guarantees freedom of expression. However, powerful families influence the content in the print and broadcast media, journalists practice a high degree of self-censorship, and reporters face possible jail sentences for slander,” said Ahmed Abdul Malik, a writer and former editor-in-chief.

The publications law governing the written press dates back to 1979, and has never been reformed, despite a dramatic transformation of the media landscape. This law imposes broad restrictions on the media. “The wording of the law allows a lot of room for interpretation, giving the authorities significant reach. At any time, the prime minister’s office can widen the list of what is forbidden, simply by notifying the media. Any breach of the rules can lead to a publication being banned, without any legal recourse, or the imprisonment of a journalist for denigration

“Qatari press laws stipulate prison sentences for a host of offences, including criticizing religion, the army, and the royal family. Most companies are directly or indirectly linked to the government, Qatari royalty, or a powerful family, and can exert huge pressure on media outlets to stick to positive news,” commented one panelist.

or defamation,” one panelist said. Journalists are forbidden from criticizing the government, the ruling family, or Islam, and such violations invite prosecution under the penal code. “Qatari press laws stipulate prison sentences for a host of offences, including criticizing religion, the army, and the royal family. Most companies are directly or indirectly linked to the government, Qatari royalty, or a powerful family, and can exert huge pressure on media outlets to stick to positive news,” commented one panelist.

However, Qatar will reportedly unveil its first media law in 30 years by the end of 2010—news that elicited both concern and hope in the media community. During its weekly meeting in December 2009, the state Council of Ministers reported that Qatar needs a new press and publications law to keep pace with the demands of the changing times. The Council of Ministers also stressed the importance of opening up channels of communication between journalists and government officials to make sure news is reported correctly. “The legislation is important to keep pace with the requirements of the future and current stage,” said Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabor al Thani, the prime minister and foreign minister, at a Council of Ministers meeting.

While the release of this much-anticipated law is an important step for Qatar, there already seems to be cause for concern. In an interview with Qatari daily *Al Sharq* on October 24, Minister for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Nasser bin Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al Thani stressed the importance of regulation and the need for more Qataris to work in the media—because any sector that is not supported by native staff can cause misunderstandings, in his view. “These statements have left journalists, especially foreign journalists, concerned that the new law might restrict certain types of speech,” one panelist said.

But another panelist expects that Qatar-based journalists will have more freedom under the new media law draft. According to the draft, journalists cannot be detained

LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

“In Qatari culture, people tend to take criticism personally even if it is objective and directed at institutions and procedures; thus, journalists are reluctant to criticize institutions—including media businesses—with influential owners,” commented one panelist.

for questioning by law-enforcement agencies—as is the case presently—without a court order. The draft stipulates that they cannot be jailed, but can be fined by a court for defamatory writings and the fines will start at QAR 50,000 (\$13,730) and upwards.

Journalists will have some rights to protect their sources, but could still be forced to disclose them if required by a court. They will also be free to write on all issues, except those related to national security and friendly countries.

Panelists agreed also that society does not seem to protect freedom of expression any better than the law. “In Qatari culture, people tend to take criticism personally even if it is objective and directed at institutions and procedures; thus, journalists are reluctant to criticize institutions—including media businesses—with influential owners,” commented one panelist. “What is needed is a change in mindset. If Qataris begin accepting healthy criticism as a path to progress and evolution, the problem of media freedom would be resolved automatically,” another panelist added. All panelists agreed that state-owned media, such as the Qatar News Agency and Qatar Radio and Television, receive preferential treatment for access to news. “These agencies often send delegations to accompany state officials on trips abroad,” said a panelist.

By law, all publications are subject to licensing by the government—and the panelists were unanimous that the media licensing process is extremely difficult, if not impossible, especially for daily newspapers. The concentration of media ownership within the ruling family, as well as the high financial costs and citizenship requirements to obtain media ownership licenses, continue to hinder the expansion and freedom of the press, according to the panelists.

According to the draft of the proposed press law, the authority to license and monitor the media will be vested in the Ministry of Arts, Heritage, and Culture. The publications division within the ministry will deal with the licensing of the print media, while the communications section will issue licenses for the electronic media.

Some panelists see the move as a ploy to bring back, under a new name, the disbanded information ministry that imposed media censorship until 1995. “The role the information and culture ministry played in the past in media censorship is well known; it is the same ministry with simply a changed name that is being brought back as the media licensing and monitoring authority,” noted one panelist. According to the draft, citizens who wish to apply for a media license need to be at least 21 years old, and should have at least passed secondary school. However, one panelist objected to the minimum age clause, arguing that when the voting age is 18 and the law declares a person adult at that age, they should be able to open a media outlet as well.

All panelists agree that crimes against journalists, such as physical attacks, unlawful detentions, or threats are rarely heard of or reported. “There were no reports of physical violence directed at members of the press during the year,” said one panelist, but many panelists pointed out that some journalists still suffer from several forms of intimidation. “While local journalists usually face warnings and threats whenever the government feels they have crossed a line, non-citizens employed by Qatari media outlets can face harsher measures, including termination, deportation, and imprisonment,” said Abdul Malik. Such disparity in the application of these laws for Qatari and non-Qatari journalists, who represent the majority of journalists in Qatar, is widely known. In one case, a foreign journalist was convicted and sentenced to one year in prison for slandering a Qatari citizen. As a result, most journalists resort to heavy self-censorship.

Libel still falls under the penal law. “The 1979 Press and Publications Law provides for...criminal penalties and prison sentences for libel and slander, including injury to dignity, as well as for closure and confiscation of assets of the publication. All cases involving the media fall under the jurisdiction of the criminal courts,” noted one panelist. Typically, though, few journalists go to trial because few are Qatari nationals. The government tends to react by deporting foreign journalists instead of prosecuting them.

However, Amnesty International reported that at least 11 foreign nationals were convicted of blasphemy in 2009. Three received maximum seven-year prison sentences for using words considered insulting to Islam. They included a Syrian convicted of “insulting Islam in a fit of rage” for uttering a blasphemous word when the credit ran out on his mobile phone in the middle of a conversation; the court also ordered that he be deported. It is not clear whether the government enforced prison terms for this man, or in the other cases.¹

¹*Qatar-Amnesty International Report 2010*. Available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/Qatar/report-2010>

All panelists agree that public information is not easily accessible; essentially, there is no freedom of information in Qatar. “The privilege of information access is not available to everyone, which is a core problem for journalists. Accessibility of information from ministries and government agencies is subject to a long and complex bureaucratic process—and journalists face the same obstacles attempting to obtain information from any private sector company,” said one panelist. Another added, “The problem with local journalists, insiders would tell, is that they suffer due to a severe lack of information flow. Government officials are hard to access, and open sources are virtually non-existent. Thus, in the absence of details, journalists are often forced to base their stories on half-truths.”

Although no laws restrict journalists from seeking news from global sources, the law authorizes the government, the Qatar Radio and Television Corporation, and customs officers to censor both domestic and foreign publications and broadcast media for religious, political, and sexual content prior to distribution, which limits access to some materials.

As last year’s MSI reported, the profession is relatively easy to enter, provided one is 21 years old—and Qatari nationals are encouraged to join the field. Restrictions apply to the foreign journalists who constitute the bulk of the field, however. All foreign journalists working in the country must be accredited by the Qatar Foreign Information Agency and sponsored by a local institution or the Ministry of Arts, Heritage, and Culture. However, journalists in compliance with these rules can still be barred from entering the country.

It also appears that the new law might impose more restrictions on professionals. According to the draft, all Qatari journalists are to be appointed under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Arts, Heritage, and Culture, while editors-in-chief must be university graduates and must possess at least five years’ experience in the media field. Expatriate journalists should have degrees in mass communication and must be accredited by a committee to be set up by the ministry.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Qatar Objective Score: 1.98

Critical writing is missing from the newspapers, partly because there is no will on the part of journalists to be critical and informative, and also due to under-qualified and untrained reporters staffing the dailies, according to the panelists. They largely agreed that the professional skills of journalists in Qatar lag behind those of other Gulf countries. Given

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the dominance of foreign journalists in the field, and the pressure they are subjected to, some panelists also suggested that it is unreasonable to expect them to take risks and work enthusiastically to promote change in a country that is not their own—and until more Qataris join the media, it is unrealistic to expect great improvement in professionalism.

As for journalists’ ethics, panelists agreed that there is no common code of ethics for journalism in Qatar, and they pointed out there is no effort from journalists, or by the Qatari Journalists Association, to formulate such a code. Despite the understanding that all journalists, both citizens and expatriates, must not accept gifts, donations or any kind of financial assistance, panelists last year reported that some journalists do accept gifts from government agencies in exchange for favorable coverage, or as a reward for backing off a critical story.

Most journalists based in Qatar are expatriates, and their employers hold on to their passports. Many are called in for questioning by the police when they displease the authorities or powerful private interests, thus many journalists are pressured into self-censorship. All panelists agreed that self-censorship is reportedly widespread among journalists and publishers due to political and economic pressures when

JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

“The salary of any journalist working in Al Jazeera is 10 times greater than any journalist working in print media,” said Abdul Malik.

reporting on government policies or material deemed hostile to Islam, the ruling family, and relations with neighboring states. “Since most journalists in Qatar are foreigners, they obviously want to stay clear of trouble. No one would want to be treated like a criminal for writing critically,” said one panelist.

Another panelist said, “The editors-in-chief practice self-censorship, as their main aim is to stick to their chair.” Still, some newspapers offer more leeway than others. Another panelist commented, “Recently, a number of popular Qatari columnists abruptly stopped writing for a local Arabic daily, and instead began contributing to a rival newspaper—because they had been unable to express themselves freely on issues of local significance, and their writings were consigned to the dustbin. So, they were prompted to switch to the other daily in the hope that they would find more freedom.” He added, “Never before in the history of Qatari media had such a mass switch taken place.” In the case of the columnists, allegedly the editor-in-chief of the newspaper concerned imposed restrictions on their writings and discouraged critical treatment of subjects he thought might lead to trouble.

Al Jazeera is an exception. The 24-hour Arabic television channel became increasingly popular as the first Arab satellite news channel to air critical coverage of Arab regimes and cover previously taboo topics. Several Arab regimes temporarily withdrew ambassadors from Qatar or shut down Al Jazeera bureaus in their countries in response. However, as a government-subsidized channel, Al Jazeera refrains from criticizing the Qatari authorities, providing only sparse and uncritical local news.

Pressure to maintain Qatar’s image abroad leads to self-censorship as well. For example, journalists covering financial issues grapple with serious obstacles to covering economic news, out of fear of being accused of damaging Qatar’s image and hindering Qatar’s efforts to attract foreign investment. Since news is particularly hard to access in this field, they often limit themselves to relaying official statements.

Key events are generally covered, and newspapers focus on many social issues. However, some important issues are ignored, such as problems suffered by religious minorities. Last year’s report underlined the media’s neglect regarding

the Al Murrah tribes that were expelled to Saudi Arabia after they ran into difficulties with the government.

Panelists agree that journalists’ pay in Qatar is relatively low compared to Gulf region standards. Salaries vary widely between reporters and photographers working in print media, and their counterparts working in Al Jazeera channel, known for luring—and retaining—some of the most professional journalists in the country. “The salary of any journalist working in Al Jazeera is 10 times greater than any journalist working in print media,” said Abdul Malik.

Panelists agree that news and entertainment programming are not in balance in the Qatari media, especially in Qatar Broadcasting Service radio and Qatar TV. “Entertainment is emphasized over serious programming, and most spending is earmarked for entertainment programming,” said Abdul Malik.

Most media outlets have modern equipment, reflecting Qatar’s general wealth, and public media’s equipment was recently upgraded. Newsrooms are computerized and are linked to news agencies and all newspapers, television channels, and radio stations have websites.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Qatar Objective Score: 2.12

There are a number of news sources in Qatar, with four Arabic dailies (*Al Watan*, *Al Rayah*, *Al Sharq*, and *Al Arab*) and three English dailies (*Gulf Times*, *The Peninsula* and

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens’ access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

Qatar Tribune). However, all newspapers are owned either by members of the ruling family, or businessmen with close ties to the ruling family, limiting the viewpoints offered—although there are differences based on the staff nationalities.

The situation is even more limited in the broadcast sector, as the state owns and operates all broadcast media, and there are only two television networks in the country—Qatar TV and the Al Jazeera satellite channel. While Qatar TV broadcasts mostly official news from a distinctly pro-government perspective, Al Jazeera focuses its coverage on international and regional topics, carefully steering clear of criticism of Qatar and its Gulf allies. “Al Jazeera is commissioned to focus on all news except local. The channel refrains from any criticism of its subsidizer, and covers local news only if it has an international angle to it—with no critical commentary,” one panelist observed.

The local radio station is slightly more accommodating to voices critical of government services and operations. Qatar Broadcasting Service presents English, Urdu, and French programs in addition to *The Holy Qur’aan* program.

Significantly broadening the choices, quality Internet access is easily available to all citizens. According to data from the 2009 International Telecommunication Union, 40 percent of the country’s population uses the Internet. But the government restricted the peaceful expression of views via the Internet and censors the Internet for political, religious, and pornographic content through a proxy server, which monitors and blocks websites, e-mail, and chat rooms through the state-owned Internet service provider. For example, the government blocked access to the ArabTimes, an Arab-American online newspaper, which at times published articles critical of the government. Authorities also blocked other sites such as boingboing.net, a technology and fashion site. A user who believes that a site is censored mistakenly may submit the web address to have the site reviewed for suitability—although the panelists were not aware of any websites that were unblocked as a result.

Generally speaking, most panelists agree that all media outlets in Qatar, except for Al Jazeera, present similar viewpoints. They also agreed that all of Qatar’s residents can access press publications due to their high income. Abdul Malik added, “Residents of small villages can also access media sources fairly easily because the country is so small.” As noted in last year’s report as well, television subscriptions are mostly free with the purchase of receivers that cost no more than \$200, and satellite dishes are available on the market.

While the cost may not be prohibitive, though, other obstacles apply. Panelists agree that foreign publications are

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allowed in Qatar, but the authorities also control distribution of foreign media in the country, censoring any content deemed to be contrary to the country’s political, religious and moral values.

There are no independent local news agencies in Qatar. There is one state-owned agency, Qatar News Agency (QNA), which supplies local media with non-critical news, such as coverage of government activities and events. QNA produces work in Arabic, English, Spanish, and Portuguese from 7 a.m. until after midnight. Foreign news agencies such as Reuters, Associated Press, and Agence France Press are not restricted; local editors make the judgment calls whether to publish their material or not.

Radio mostly produces its own programs, although it does import a small percentage of foreign Arab programming. Television, on the other hand, only produces limited programming. Furthermore, both radio and television are not independent from the government, and thus present little material that diverges from the government’s policies.

Influential people, many with close ties to the royal family, tend to monopolize media ownership. However, as reported in previous MSI editions, it is relatively easy to access information about the shareholders of private publishers in Qatar.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Qatar Objective Score: 1.87

Panelists agree that media companies in Qatar are successful and profitable—judging from their ability to develop facilities and expand their publications. “Newspapers are at best a business in Qatar, with profit-minded owners. Newspapers with the highest circulation thrive mostly on handouts and press releases, which tend to lavish praise on individuals or institutions, or consist of sales promotions,” said one panelist.

“Critical writing is missing from the newspapers, partly because of the close ties between newspaper owners and government officials. The owners do not want to lose the large amount of ads that come from government ministries and state institutions,” Abdul Malik pointed out.

As in the United Arab Emirates, Qatar’s favorable market conditions allow media businesses to thrive. The conditions are suitable for media businesses with sufficient capital to grow and prosper, particularly as human resources are widely available. Yet many panelists pointed out that business newspapers are the preserve of a few influential people; securing permission to launch new publications, whether dailies or periodicals, is not easy. Launching private radio and television stations is, similarly, out of the question. Furthermore, some panelists questioned the prosperity of state-run media outlets dependent on government funding—including Al Jazeera, which draws about half of its budget from state coffers. Given the country’s small population, subscription and newsstand sales are small, thus panelists believe the press needs to diversify its funding to gain true sustainability.

Currently, the bulk of the media’s funding comes from advertising. A survey by the Pan Arab Research Center shows that the advertising spending volume in Qatar grew by 12 percent in 2009, reaching \$402 million—despite

the global financial downturn—putting Qatar in fourth place compared other Gulf countries. Across the media sector, spending on television advertising was the greatest, followed by newspapers and magazines. Major banks and oil companies actively sponsor television and radio companies. For the media sector generally, banks and financial institutions remain the top advertisers, followed by the telecommunication service providers, automobile dealers, and real estate firms.

One panelist pointed to attempts by the government to monopolize the advertising business, now, as well—which is ironic considering that, at the same time, the government speaks of breaking monopolies and encouraging a free market economy. The government no longer provides direct subsidies to private outlets, as it did 15 years ago. Currently, the only form of indirect government support consists of bulk subscriptions and advertisements. “Critical writing is missing from the newspapers, partly because of the close ties between newspaper owners and government officials. The owners do not want to lose the large amount of ads that come from government ministries and state institutions,” Abdul Malik pointed out.

There are now three advertising agencies in Qatar belonging to influential figures in the country; privately owned Qatar Media (QMedia) is the most prominent. They tend to favor print media, believing it more effective than outdoor or broadcast advertising.

No formal statistics about Qatar newspaper ratings and circulation are available, but informally collected statistics show that the total circulation of the main five daily newspapers is about 100,000 copies per day. The top three, by circulation, are *Al Raya* (private, 18,000 daily), privately owned *Al Sharq* (15,000 daily), and privately owned *Al Watan* (15,000 daily). The two largest English newspapers are *Gulf Times* (18,000 daily) and *The Peninsula*.

INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED BUSINESSES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Qatar Objective Score: 1.36

A major shortcoming of the media sector is the lack of an independent professional association to provide protection for journalists. While the constitution grants freedom of assembly and the right to form NGOs, administrative obstacles, including the slow pace of procedures required to form such associations, limit this right in practice. The law imposes strict conditions on the establishment, management, and function of professional societies. Barred from engaging in political matters, professional associations must obtain

approval from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, which can deem them a threat to the public interest and deny their establishment. Professional societies must pay QAR 50,000 (approximately \$13,740) in licensing fees and QAR 10,000 (\$2,750) in annual fees. Registrations are valid for three years; after that, an association must register again and pay new fees. The law allows non-citizens to participate in private societies only when their participation is deemed necessary to the work of the society. The prime minister must approve their participation, and the number of non-citizens cannot exceed 20 percent of the total membership.

One panelist commented, "Qatar's government does not allow the formation of trade unions, syndicates, journalists' unions, and media organizations, leaving journalists even more powerless in the face of difficulties or possible jail sentences. With the total absence of trade union rights, there is no organization in Qatar able to defend them against their employers or the authorities."

During 2009, the government did not approve any new NGOs, and there are no independent human rights organizations. A National Human Rights Committee, consisting of members of civil society and government ministries, investigates alleged abuses. However, it is government-funded and the authorities appoint the investigators, compromising the neutrality of the reporting.

Ostensibly to protect threatened journalists and to promote the free flow of news and information around the world, the Emir established the Doha Center for Media Freedom in 2007, under the patronage of the Emir's wife Sheikha Mozah. Yet in practice, as one panelist noted, "The Doha Center has for months been struggling to keep its independence, and is under pressure from the Qatari authorities."

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

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In February 2009, the Doha Center for Media Freedom (DCMF) director-general, Robert Ménard, called for the establishment of an association to defend journalists in Qatar, saying that DCMF cannot work on their behalf. He said, "There is a vacuum because of the absence of such a union of journalists that the center cannot fill." Also early in 2009, DCMF found that the authorities denied visas for some threatened journalists, including some seeking shelter. In March, Ménard wrote an open letter to Sheikha Mozah on DCMF's website, telling her that "some people close to you and others you have appointed to senior positions at the centre were obstructing its activities," accusing members of the Qatari government of being unsupportive of the center's mission. The authorities did not appreciate Ménard's growing activism, and reacted with greater pressure on DCMF.

In March 2009, Hajar Smouni, head of research at DCMF and a former Reporters without Borders staff member, was prevented from leaving Qatar. Smouni was to have accompanied Ménard to Bahrain, to meet with Culture and Information Minister Sheikha Mai Al Khalifa and parliamentarians to discuss Bahrain's press law. On arrival at Doha airport, without explanation she was told she was forbidden to leave the country.

Then in May of 2009, Flemming Rose, the editor who published cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in the Danish press, arrived in Doha as part of a UNESCO-sponsored conference. His attendance sparked outrage among some Qataris, with much of the blame directed at Ménard. A Doha mosque denounced DCMF in Friday prayers, and the Qatari daily *al Watan* accused Ménard of inviting the "Danish satan" to Doha and insulting all Muslims. "Ménard should know there is a red line in media freedom which he cannot cross," the editorial thundered. In June, a member of Qatar's Advisory Council (a 35-member legislative body appointed by the Emir) called for Ménard's dismissal.

On June 19, 2009, Ménard, along with three other DCMF officials, stepped down. According to a report by Reporters without Borders, in Ménard's view, the authorities had "suffocated" DCMF, and he protested the country's refusal to reform the "obsolete" and "repressive" laws governing the media, which, he said, "made it impossible for the center to criticize any other country for imposing restrictions on media freedom." Furthermore, he added, "Qatari officials never wanted an independent center, one that was free to express its views without being limited by political or diplomatic considerations, and one that was free to criticize Qatar itself. But how can you be credible if you say nothing about the problems in your home country?"²

Reporters without Borders also expressed its disappointment with Ménard's treatment, noting, "Ménard and his staff were targeted as soon as they criticized press freedom violations in Qatar, although it was a prerequisite for the center to be credible. Several of the Emir's aides did not understand this."³

As last year's MSI reported, training options are limited for aspiring Qatari journalists, and current professional hoping to hone their skills. Journalism education is limited, and many of those who study journalism go into other fields. Qatar University's media department graduates usually go into government jobs; no more than 25 percent work in the media field.

The Al Jazeera Media Training and Development Center conducts training programs. Established in 2004 by Al Jazeera, it was set up on a commercial basis to conduct professional

² "Robert Ménard and staff leave Doha Centre for Media Freedom." Reporters without Borders website, June 23, 2009. Available at http://en.rsf.org/Qatar-robot-menard-and-staff-leave-doha-23-06-2009_33548.html

³ Ibid, Reporters without Borders.

training for journalists on a variety of media platforms, and it offers trainings to all media professionals. Since 2004, the Al Jazeera Center has provided more than 750 training courses for more than 7,500 trainees from Arab countries, Europe, the United States, and Asia. The most popular training categories include television news production, newsroom management, investigative journalism, interactive Internet platforms, and new media. A drawback is that registration fees for all of the courses are relatively high, around QAR 14,000 (about \$3850). As most journalists based in Qatar are expatriates, their newspapers generally do not show much enthusiasm for helping their staff obtain training, according to one panelist.

Training applicants are expected to have a university degree, preferably in media, or a minimum of two years experience in journalism. "In practical terms, this means that unlike other programs, which aim to improve the skills of people already working in the profession, the Al Jazeera center's courses are available to anyone who cares to fill out a form and pay the required fees," one panelist said.

Although advertisements aired for Al Jazeera's training feature shots of the network's reporters, writers, and anchors in action, the training center is actually located in a different section of Doha, a 20-minute drive from the television channel's headquarters. Still, the training emphasizes practical applications. The facilities include a complete television news set, although it is not a working newsroom.

As for restrictions on publishing, Qatar's open market economy allows newspaper publishers to freely import and purchase newsprint directly and through private companies. Panelists agreed that the government has no influence in the process.

List of Panel Participants

Ahmed Abdul Malik, writer and former editor-in-chief, Doha

Mohammed Abdul Ati, journalist and researcher, Al Jazeera, Doha

Hassan Bebba, writer and media expert, Doha

Fayssal Saouli, journalist, *Al Arab Daily*, Doha

A journalist based in Qatar also agreed to participate in the MSI panel on condition of anonymity.

Moderator and Author

Atef al Saadawy, journalist and human rights consultant, Gulf Forum for Citizenship, Dubai

The Qatar study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, Gulf Forum for Citizenship, Muscat, Oman.