

**Media Assistance Concept Paper, USAID/Belarus**  
Mark Koenig, DCHA, USAID/Washington, May 15, 2002

**CONTENTS:**

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1. Sources of Information</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Basic Conditions of Belarusian Media; and Media Assistance Programs</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. Objectives/Strategy</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4. Media: Elections and Local Grassroots Democracy</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>5. Quick Sector-by-Sector Review of Opportunities for Media Assistance</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>6. Technical Assistance to Non-State Newspapers</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>7. Non-State Television (primarily regional TV)</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>8. Radio</b>	<b>19</b>

-----  
**USEFUL ACRONYMS:**

**BAJ:** Belarusian Association of Journalists

**CSO:** Civil Society Organization

**DFID:** U.K. government assistance agency

**GOB:** Government of Belarus

**IR:** Intermediate Result

**OSI:** Open Society Institute (Soros Foundation)

**SME:** Small and Medium Enterprises

**SO:** Strategic Objective

**TA:** Technical Assistance, including training, consultations, training materials, etc.

**WBI:** World Bank Institute

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report reflects an intensive month of interviews and media site visits in Minsk and nine Belarusian provincial towns. In general, despite very difficult conditions, the main media assistance program under IREX Pro-Media, and the smaller TV sector activities of Internews, appear to be providing effective assistance in needed areas. The main recommendations -- to help adjust media activities to changing economic, political and other conditions -- include the following:

- Media programs need to further increase their attention to the business development of media, so that non-state media sector can become more economically viable, and the most prospective media businesses can grow.
- Belarus' economic crisis, sooner or later, will require a liberalization of policies towards SME and markets. Journalists and media should receive training and support to help them cover this story more professionally.
- USAID's current grantee in media sector (IREX-ProMedia) is performing effectively in the newspaper and media law sectors, although possible potential improvements to the program are noted in Section 6 and passim.
- The Irex-Pro Media program began assisting regional non-state television stations only in 1999 – and suffered from a conflict between the IREX and its subgrantee, Internews, leading to a split between these two partners in mid 2001. Despite a late start and tensions among the implementing partners, the regional stations made good progress improving their equipment and raising professional news production standards. Given a promising start, work in the regional TV sector should most certainly continue. Guidelines for a rough division of labor between IREX and Internews are suggested in Section 7.
- USG-supported media programs, together with other international donors, should intensify efforts with the Belarusian media community – and also approach GOB authorities at various levels, if possible – to disseminate the best practices of independent, professional journalism from other countries and empirical evidence (e.g., recent World Bank research) documenting the significant positive effects that independent media can play to improve governance and accelerate economic development. See 6.C-D.

In addition to the main directions outlined above, this paper also suggests a wide range of other possible activities that might be considered, including: small-scale capital development projects for independent media, a study of subsidies to state-owned media, professional and legal preparation of media for regional elections, cluster grants to improve capacity and professionalism in reporting about specific issues, training to improve media coverage of CSOs, institutional development support for media sector CSOs, and more intensive work on media laws. Clearly, budget and other constraints will require focusing on a limited number of activities.

This listing of perhaps too many options is intended to spark further creative thinking among donors and implementers, including possible synergies of media sector work with other strategic objectives in assistance work -- such as economic development, more democratic local elections, and civil society development.

## **1. Sources of Information**

During my month in Belarus, I conducted site visits of 8 of 15 non-state regional television stations in Belarus (and met with the directors of 9 of 15 stations); 4 FM radio stations; and 10 newspapers (also meeting 2 additional newspaper chief editors). I enjoyed long meetings with the major media-related CSOs in Belarus (including BAJ, Foundation for Regional Press Development and the independent Television Broadcasting Network, TVS), and the two leading media survey research firms in Belarus (Novak and Nisepi).

The research included attendance of the Vilnius USAID partners conference (1-31 to 2-01), two IREX training seminars (investigative journalism on 2-09 and advertising, 2-26), and the European Media Institute/BAJ Conference on Reforming Broadcasting in Belarus (February 15-16). Contacts with assistance providers included site visits to both Internews and IREX-ProMedia, additional meetings with the chiefs-of-party of these two organizations (Aleksandr Parfentsov and Jean McKenzie) and consultations with IREX's chief media law expert (Natalya Dovner), business consultant (Dmitrii Tselok), and television consultants (Aleksei Kashker and Leonid Mindlin).

During free evenings in Minsk, I regularly viewed the news and analytic programs of the state-owned television channels, BT and STV. There are no private television stations broadcasting in Minsk, but I extensively viewed taped copies of the inter-regional non-state program produced by Internews, called *Rakurs* or "Perspective", as well as samples of local TV news from Pinsk *Varyag* and the four stations of the *SKIF* local TV network. As time permitted, I tried to scan as many national and regional newspapers as possible.

In DC, I also just received copies of IREX monthly reporting for early 2002, plus their TV sector assessment conducted by Russel Peasgood in March, 2002.

## **2. Basic Conditions of the Belarusian Media; and of Media Assistance Programs:**

My findings about the basic operating conditions of the Belarusian non-state media largely concur with the IREX's assessments in its quarterly report (Oct.-Dec., 2001), workplan (11-01-01 to 4-30-02) and Media Sustainability Index Report (2001). While the latter Index assigned low scores to all five studied attributes of independent media sustainability (legal norms, professional journalism, plurality and objectivity of news, business management and supporting institutions), I also observed specific success stories in all five attribute areas. These successes were often tied to USAID-supported or other foreign assistance work; and such cases (including regional media that are growing despite all barriers, developing cross-regional media projects such as Plus-TV, court victories in the legal defense of media, etc.) begin to show us a range of current and potential new activity areas where further media assistance work would strongly merit continued or increased funding. Promising options for future assistance are explored in Sections 3-8 below.

Much of the non-state media sector in Belarus has developed weakly, stagnated or even declined since the mid-late 1990s in terms of business viability, print circulation, audience reach by non-state television, advertising revenues, and other economic

indicators. The level of journalistic professionalism in many non-state media remains low to intermediate— although a substantial number of domestic non-state information sources provide factual, balanced news and analysis (e.g., Minsk-based newspapers such as *Beloruskaya Gazeta* or *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*, regional newspapers such as *Brestkii Kurier*, *Belapan* news agency, plus some national FM as well as local television newscasts). Belarus’ political, legal and economic environments hinder the development of the country’s non-state media for many reasons, including (a-d):

a. Highly uneven economic conditions that disfavor non-state newspapers:

Subsidies to state-media (combined with higher taxes, printing, newsprint, distribution and other costs to non-state media) require that independent newspapers charge much higher subscription and cover prices than their state-owned counterparts. Newsstand prices for independent papers are often twice to five times higher than for their state-owned competitors – a luxury that an impoverished majority of Belarusian citizens can ill afford on a regular basis.

b. Hostile political and legal environment against independent media:

Political authorities also use legal, licensing or administrative mechanisms to threaten, fine or shut down media that become too independent. Illustrative cases in the Minsk broadcasting market include domestic FM Radio Racyja (shut down in 1996) and TV Channel 8 (currently off the air after five prior shutdowns). The Editor-in-Chief of the independent Minsk weekly, *Svobodnye Novosti*, Alexander Ulitenok, said his paper had been so severely fined by a court law suit that his paper lost the financial resources needed to maintain his earlier, significantly larger print-runs.

c. Result: Overwhelming Dominance of State Media among Domestic Media:

The large print-runs of state-supported newspapers exceed the overall circulation of non-state papers by about *tenfold*. Some cities and regions of Belarus, notably Gomel and Mogilev, lack a any free press at all -- at least in the form of non-state papers with circulations more than a few hundred copies. Two state TV channels (BT and STV soon to be supplemented by a third state-owned channel, BT-2) monopolize the small domestic share of the Minsk TV market – although Channel 8 hopes to return soon with a weak signal on Channel 11 (maximum Minsk audience for Channel 11 with its current antenna and transmitter would reach only about 400,000 viewers).

d. Secondary Result: Growing Market Share of TV/Newspapers from Russia:

Because the quality of Belarusian state-owned media is so poor, Belarus’ media market remains wide open to domination by the much more attractive Russian media. Russian television channels (ORT, RTR, NTV and RenTV) command overwhelming shares of the market, while BT lags far behind with only a 13% share of the audience. Russian newspapers such as *Argumenty i Fakti* and *Komsomolskaya Pravda* enjoy large, expanding circulations: print-runs of the latter paper’s popular Friday edition, in particular, nearly doubled last year to over 330,000 copies.

Successful growth by competing Russian media puts tough competitive pressures on domestic Belarusian media, but also provide some lessons and suggest some niches where non-state media might grow in Belarus. Russian media are more professionally produced and marketed, and enjoy greater autonomy from GOB political controls, compared to Belarusian state media. The success of Russian media practices implies that a combination of better business management practices by non-state Belarusian

media – and more balanced, professional coverage of *local Belarusian news* (where Belarusian non-state media can enjoy a decisive comparative advantage over their Russian and Belarusian state-controlled counterparts) should afford a promising strategy. There is a worldwide tendency for media audiences seek *local* news over national or international news, and the provincial non-state media in Belarus should be in a position, with proper ongoing business development and legal assistance, to respond to this information demand.

- Independent Belarusian Enjoy Media Important Niche Opportunities and Very Considerable Public Opinion Impacts:

Despite highly unfavorable conditions described above, some private newspapers, periodicals, television studios and FM radio stations have nevertheless managed to maintain their market share or even grow. USAID assistance efforts should focus sharply on this minority segment of the Belarusian media: These more professional and business savvy media outlets represent the best current and future hope for developing a free press in Belarus. Just a small number of these media are needed: As few as one-three economically viable professional non-state media in any given media market (if they can begin to capture a significant market share) may already suffice to place competitive pressure on remainder of that market to provide the public with more objective and balanced information.

Notably, survey research indicates that non-state media command very significantly higher *credibility* than state-owned media. Although the circulation and broadcasting signals of state-owned media enjoy up to ten times the capacity of non-state media, the public opinion impact of the small non-state media sector turns out to be almost as influential as the official state message carried by the state media according to Nisepi survey research.

- An Additional Challenge: Donor-Dependent Media:

Attempting to respond to a very difficult media environment, some Western donor organizations have provided generous material grants to selected Belarusian non-state media, especially newspapers. But this short-term strategy has encouraged some media to grow too dependent on international largesse, which is unhealthy from the perspectives of both the long-term business development of these media outlets and, to a lesser extent, their responsiveness to audience preferences. Tactics are proposed below (Section 6.C. and passim) to encourage media and media professionals to move in the direction of long-term business self-sustainability.

- Belarus' Larger Economic Crisis, and its Potential Consequences:

Before proposing a media sector strategy, it is important to understand that Belarus confronts a grave economic crisis – which fundamentally affects all sectors, including the media, in particular. Unlike virtually all its surrounding neighbors in the region, the Lukashenko regime has avoided needed market reforms as well as democratization. This tactic “worked” in the short-term since Belarus inherited from Soviet times a relatively more advanced economy, labor force and capital stock compared to most other former Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR) – which meant that Belarus could remain frozen in its Soviet-style economic patterns and successfully export its goods to other NIS markets, especially Russia, for several years.

After a decade of painful, yet essential market reforms, the economies of countries neighboring Belarus are evolving to a point where Belarusian products are losing their ability to compete. In particular, Russian industry is upgrading its capital plant, meaning that Belarusian exports to its largest trading partner will likely decline. Unfavorable GOB policies toward SME, and unsustainable macro-economic policies are creating an increasingly grave economic crisis. An unprecedented number of state enterprises are entering bankruptcy, and a beleaguered private sector is less able to earn profits or pay taxes.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze Belarus' economic crisis in detail, or to predict its political consequences. Whatever political scenario emerges, GOB is likely, sooner or later, to belatedly recognize the need to undertake market reforms and to liberalize conditions for privately-owned small and medium enterprises (SME). Non-state media are themselves SME, and (as public forums of mass communication) these same media outlets would be well placed to report about and explain to the public the economic reforms as they (finally) begin to unfold. Accordingly, an important component of the strategy outlined below calls for increased attention to the linkages between media, SME associations and economic reporting.

**3. Objectives/Strategy:** Given scarce resources, USAID should maintain its focus on already launched program directions in the newspaper and television sectors, pursuing the four Intermediate Objectives (IRs) spelled out in the IREX-ProMedia II Program Description:

- IR#1: Media Business Development: Publishers and station managers effectively manage media enterprises
- IR#2: Professional Journalism: Journalists provide citizens with objective, fact-based, and useful news and information
- IR#3: Legal Enabling Environment: The legal and regulatory framework supports free speech and the rights of private media
- IR#4: Media Sector Association Building: Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of the independent media

Effective work in the media development sector depends very critically on a mix of local expertise, long-term planning and long-term commitments; and therefore those existing programs that have demonstrated effectiveness should be continued as much as scarce funding permits. Ongoing sector activities (in the newspaper and TV sectors, respectively) and IR priorities should, of course, undergo adjustments and fine-tuning to changing conditions in order to maintain or augment results.

An overarching strategy for media assistance might include the following elements and adjustments to current programs:

- Given the economic crisis now facing Belarus, media assistance programs need to redouble attention to the *business development* of media outlets themselves (IR2) and also to *economic reporting*. Media activities can also support development in the advertising sector and facilitate public discussion about economic reform and the role SME can play in economic development;

- Belarus' economic and other problems are closely linked to the general weakness of independent media and other democratic control mechanisms over government, an unbalanced power relationship that contributes to poor governance at all levels, and hence (among many other problems) poor economic performance. Stated in more positive terms, World Bank and other empirical research reveals strong positive correlations between the strength independent media, good governance and economic development. The empirical and conceptual reasons how independent media reinforce political and economic development need to be made more assertively by media programs supported by the Western donor community.
- Media program coordination with other USAID programs could be notched up so that media activities more effectively complement other IRs in such areas as *civil society development and rule-of-law*.
- Media activities can promote grassroots democracy at the local level, particularly during upcoming local election period (see section 4)
- Given scarce resources, improved coordination with other USG and international donors (and attracting added funding from other donors) are vital. For example, DemCom – perhaps with greater advisory input from IREX – can help by shifting away from a subsidy approach (very partially counterbalancing GOB subsidies) to supporting *small capital development projects*. Also, World Bank Institute (if an outside funder can be found) might be able to provide assistance in the areas of economic specialty reporting and the use of media to promote regional/national economic development and improvements in governance.
- Other prospective opportunities, including the growing FM radio sector, will also be noted below as potential areas for future work.

#### **4) Local “Grassroots” Democracy and the Local Council Elections of early 2003:**

A tall professional firewall should stand between campaign activities during elections (e.g., government pressures, party and candidate advertising, candidate image-making, etc.) and media reporting. To help independent media retain professional autonomy from election period pressures, media assistance can include:

- Training media professionals about legal compliance with election laws and regulations, balanced fact-based coverage, and stressing issues more than personalities during and before election periods;
- Investigative journalism training in the critical area of campaign finance;
- Training how to organize and host debates among candidates – and possible support to facilitate such forums in full compliance with local laws;
- Voter education through PSAs and information programs: voter rights, voting procedures, registration information, etc.
- Monitoring of media contents, with timely reporting, to encourage balanced professional coverage by all media – including state media. In the event of failure (i.e., unbalanced contents by any given media outlet) at least there will be well-documented transparency revealing this imbalance.

Upcoming local council elections in early 2003 provide opportunities -- but also carry dangers – for non-state regional newspapers and TV stations. *On the one hand*, local non-state media in Belarus often find professionally constructive *modus vivendi* with city, raion and oblast authorities. Local non-state TV stations and newspapers can criticize shortcomings in local life up to a certain point, providing feedback to local authorities about the problems they face; but these same media can also provide a forum for local authorities to present their case before their constituents.

In my regional travels, I observed several cases of limited, constructive independence by local media in their relationships with local authorities in such towns as Polotsk, Baranovichy and Pinsk. Non-state television stations, for example, can provide local authorities and civil society representatives alike with forums – including live call-in television shows – which allow for quite frank interactions among local constituents and political leaders (in and out of power). This kind of grassroots communications is needed for Belarus to develop leaders for the future who are able to communicate with mass audiences effectively. Somewhat more liberal-minded local authorities may actually welcome varying degrees of independence of local media – since professionally autonomous reporting and analysis helps them escape the sterility of one-sided state-controlled propaganda and receive honest feedback from their constituents and local journalists.

The situation in partially free regions (where one or more local media outlet enjoy at least some degree of professional independence) is not ideal from the perspective of a fully-developed democracy, but constructive criticism by emerging quasi-independent private media is probably the best intermediate / developmental result we can hope for under Belarus' currently authoritarian conditions .

*On the other hand*, upcoming the 2003 election cycle may pose dangers for the regional non-state media. Many local and regional government officials may use the elections to the local councils as a period to clamp down on local media in their attempts to help ensure that the officially-supported candidates win.

Several steps can be taken (*better sooner rather than hurriedly on the eve of elections*) to accentuate the positive roles media can play, while also helping to defend or mitigate against intensified efforts to restrict the media during election periods:

- Business development of local media should continue with minimum interruption so that media outlets become more economically self-sustaining and independent from economic pressure; and legal preparations (legal seminars and legal “audits”) can be accelerated so that local media outlets are less vulnerable to administrative-legal pressures and inspections.
- Obviously, training on election reporting and election law should take place significantly in advance of elections.
- Reporting during the year before the elections can be more issue oriented, so that the elections become more issue oriented (and less personality oriented).
- Horizontal exchanges of information among local media can be supported, and national (Minsk-based) non-state newspapers can be encouraged to improve the

quality of their local reporting -- so these national papers (less vulnerable to local political pressures) can objectively report about local elections in jurisdictions where local press are suppressed.

## 5. Quick Sector-by-Sector Review of Opportunities for Media Assistance:

- Newspapers: Existing USG resources are probably sufficient, although it would be much better to shift assistance as much as possible *away from simple grants* (which make newspapers grant-dependent, perhaps focused too much on perceived donor wishes and too little on audiences) and toward a strategic mix of TA with capital infusions to those newspapers that demonstrate the best combination of professional content, good management, sales and ad growth, and business savvy.
- Non-State Regional TV: In the early 1990s, the donor community may have paid insufficient attention to television, the very medium that often reaches the largest audiences. Typically in post-Communist societies, 80% or more of audiences rely on TV as their most important source of news and information. *Local TV news*, in particular, enjoys the potential to develop into the most popular among all news forums – people often want to know what is happening in their own region first, before news from elsewhere – especially when local TV news reporting moves away from old Soviet-style talking heads at official meetings (*offitsioz*) toward modern people-oriented reporting, fact-based coverage of real local problems, greater objectivity, and multiple points of view. Moreover, because local-level politics are often less sensitive than the national level, more leeway may exist for franker exposure of local problems by regional TV stations than enjoyed by their national-level counterparts. As will be noted in the TV section below, much more can be done in this belated area of media development.
- FM Radio: If significant additional USAID funding could be found – or, equally OK, if another donor with strengths in the radio sector (e.g., BBC/DFID) could be found – the comparatively low costs of radio, the growth of the FM market and audiences, and room for much more professional radio news reporting make FM radio a very promising potential area of future development support.
- News Agencies / News Websites / Internet Access for Media: These remain worthy areas for continued assistance.
- Shortwave: Audiences are very small, and costs high. Not recommended as a high priority, although existing Radio Liberty might be improved and/or used as a training facility. Nisepi polling in September, 2001, suggests that Radio Liberty Belarusian Service reaches a maximum audience (occasional listeners) of up to 8.6% of the population; RL Russian Service, 5%; Baltic Wave, 2%; and Radio Racyja, 1.8% (latter two audiences barely exceed statistical margin of error).
- Extra-territorial FM would be a challenging option, requiring high-level political decisions by neighboring countries plus major investments. Cross border FM should be considered as an option, however, if press conditions in Belarus deteriorate further.

- Stay Focused in Current Areas: If resources remain limited, USAID should surely remain focussed on already-launched programs, i.e., print and regional TV only. It is far better to assist two sectors effectively than servicing all three mass media sub-sectors poorly and/or unprofessionally. In partial compensation, IREX appears likely to receive support from the U.K. for a small radio-training program.

*The remainder of this concept paper provides a more detailed range of possible program activities in the newspaper, television and (in less detail) radio sectors.*

## **6. Technical Assistance to Non-State Newspapers:** (Continue IREX program, with some programmatic adjustments)

**General Comments:** The regional and central newspapers I visited all praised IREX for the quality of its technical assistance programs, and its knowledge of the difficult conditions of the non-state press in Belarus. Training in the areas of journalism, business development, ad department development, legal support, and accounting/financial advice received favorable reactions from regional as well as Minsk-based newspaper personnel. In many cases, newspapers provided specific evidence on how IREX TA had led to improved economic or reporting indicators. For example, *Intex* in Baranovichy significantly increased its advertising revenues as the result of training and local ratings research. (Dima and I witnessed how the newspaper's Ad Department was using the NOVAK ratings research to convince clients of the value of advertising in *Intex*). Accordingly, TA for non-state newspapers should continue in the four main current directions (a-d, below) ... *possibly adding new initiatives: (Single astericks\* denotes a recommended new initiative; while a double astericks\*\* denotes an especially recommended new initiative)*

**A)** As elsewhere in post-Communist transitional systems, **journalism training** remains an ongoing need in Belarus. IREX provides effective basic as well as more advanced professional training in the areas of verification of facts, balanced reporting from multiple points of view, investigative journalism, specialty reporting, ethics, etc.

On Saturday, February 9, for example, I attending the closing session of IREX's new intensive investigative journalism workshop, led by the Moscow Times journalist, Evgeniya Borisova. The participants said they found the tough professional standards set by Borisova (e.g., verified facts, balance, concise writing) to be very useful for their professional development. They also appreciated the six months of planned follow-up work via the Internet as a way to practice and incorporate new professional habits: Participants will email monthly materials to Borisova, and she will make professional comments and provide re-editing assistance.

*Here are some possible media program synergies with other USAID/USG programs:*

- \*An area of potentially increased journalism training attention is civic journalism: i.e., coverage of CSO work and citizen activists in such areas as social welfare, environmental defense, labor unions and business-related issues. Civic journalism can help newspapers produce more interesting news stories, helping boost circulation. CSO activists are often the most avid readers and purchasers of local newspapers. Ideally, the business incentive behind civic journalism (increased circulation) helps make this kind of reporting economically self-sustaining.

- *\*Combined Specialty-Reporting Training + Media Campaigns, “Cluster grants”:* Civic journalism training can sometimes be combined with a cluster of targeted small grants to pertinent CSOs, specialists in a selected issue area, and media (preferably multi-media: radio, TV and/or newspaper) to improve the quality of media reporting, advocacy, and action in a particular issue area. Such programs should include a training component for journalists and CSO activists alike, so that journalists understand the value of the story and CSO activists learn how to get their story to the journalists in a suitable package. In Saratov, for example, the Eurasia Foundation awarded a coordinated cluster of small grants to newspaper and radio reporters, a local tax law specialist to draft new legislation, and a local SME organization to engage public opinion as well as the oblast parliament to pass streamlined tax legislation for local businesses. The issue was systematically addressed by a series of public meetings, a monthly full-page newspaper review of all points of view, and extra radio coverage. Local television jumped in to provide extra coverage without grant assistance, since local business taxes since became a hot issue. Use of media campaigns should be highly selective – to avoid making media overly dependent or oriented to receiving grants. Ideally these would be carefully selected one-time campaigns that would leave behind a capacity and interest by media and CSO communities to cover a previously insufficiently addressed subject. Possibly cluster grants could become a joint strategy used by NED/DemCom together with USAID media and civil society programs.

**B) Other Content-Related TA:** (graphics/lay-out training, photo service, facilitation of wire/news agency services, internet connections, etc). These areas of TA remain very useful for client papers and should be continued.

**C) Media and SME Business Development Support:** IREX is performing well in this area, but still stronger efforts would be merited. Notwithstanding an extremely poor if not outright disabling environment for the advertising sector, non-state media enterprises and private businesses as a whole – indeed, *precisely because* an improved enabling environment for SME is so crucially needed for the future development of Belarus’ economy and civil society -- a greater stress on the long-term business development of the media sector needs to become a higher priority area of work.

IREX already provides training for advertising department staff and also conducts related market research in selected markets such as Brest and Baranovichy. Market and ratings research is costly, but IREX should continue to conduct selected periodic market studies of at least the largest regional markets – and then show local media how they can use such data to market their media’s advertising capacity to current and potential advertising clients. Trained media advertising department staffs can, in turn, use such data to demonstrate to local business the value and importance of advertising as a method to increase local demand in general and for their products specifically – thereby stimulating local/regional economic growth.

*Other potential business/SME initiatives by Media Program:*

- *\*Increased local market research capacity:* In addition to selectively purchasing regional market research studies and disseminating the research results for training purposes, IREX can concurrently assist local Belarusian providers develop greater

autonomous capacity to conduct representative sampling (especially in the regions), ratings services, and market research. To a considerable extent, this expansion of local survey research capacity occurs automatically when research is purchased, but there may be other ways to further assist the growth of ratings/survey capacity in Belarus (e.g., facilitate consultations with foreign specialists; or make survey orders on a regularized, long-term schedule). Use of assistance funds will likely be more efficient if IREX supports comprehensive media research (ie, print as well as broadcast media sectors, possibly coupled with market and advertising market-related research) in selected local media markets.

- *\*\* Economics Reporting (and possible synergy with IFC or post-IFC press conferences on SME-related issues):* Given the large economic challenges facing Belarus, many of the biggest stories for Belarusian journalists in coming years will revolve around economic reforms, the development of SMEs, the banking system and financial conditions, macro-economic and fiscal policies and general business conditions. These all represent complex issues, especially in Belarus, where experience with market economies and private enterprise remains minimal. Considerable additional training would prove timely to help bring the Belarusian journalism and media community up to professional speed on how to report about these complex economic issues in ways accessible to their mass audiences. With regard to possible synergies with other USAID programs, I was told that IFC conducted an effective series of press conferences regarding SME-related issues. At risk of venturing beyond my scope of work in the media sector, I would recommend, due to the salience of the economic problems facing Belarus, that every effort be made to find funding to continue IFC or IFC-type SME support activities. If the SME-related press conference activity could be continued, it could be complemented nicely by more professional coverage by journalists with supplemental economic journalism training. *One important programmatic footnote:* Any SME-related press conference activity should be administered by a separate provider – and not by the media program. Journalists and media require a professional distance from their subject matter, so that they can cover all sides of the issue in professionally balanced way. That professional distance would be potentially compromised if the provider of their economics journalism training was concurrently organizing press conferences about the topic of the journalists’ stories, in this case, SME-related issues.
- *\*Possible joint economics and journalism program with World Bank Institute:* Recent World Bank empirical research across 97 countries shows consistent, strong correlations between the level of non-state media development ... and improved governance as well as stronger economic development – a dynamic which for a variety a reasons operates much more weakly when media are state-owned and/or state-subsidized. WBI with Canadian CIDA support now has new “journalism and economics” programs starting in Russia and Ukraine, and one IREX-Belarus management consultant, Dmitry Tselok, recently received WBI training. Perhaps CIDA or another donor could be encouraged to fund a small WBI economics journalism training component as part of the IREX business training curriculum? WBI might also present its recent study of 97 countries to as many media professionals and government officials as possible in Belarus. (Also, see more below under Legislative Advocacy, II.E)
- *\*\*Small-Scale media capital development projects* (including small grants and/or loans if EBRD remains in Belarus). Despite conditions that are comprehensively

unfriendly to SME growth (particularly SME of the non-state media variety), some non-state media are sufficiently well managed to cover their costs, or to set aside modest resources for capital growth. The best managed non-state media might benefit if a grants and/or loans program could be established which could facilitate small-scale capital infusions into projects that would permit further self-sustaining growth by these media. Examples of small (or larger) capital development projects might include computerized circulation, advertising and/or business management systems; alternative newspaper delivery systems (already proposed by IREX); independent kiosk networks; expansion of newsprint purchasing cooperatives; regional newspaper advertising cooperatives, etc. Grant proposals would actually resemble business plans – and preparations for such a program could provide media managers with increased training in financial planning and in drafting business plans. As one option, would DemCom consider establishing a special competition for grants to the drafters of the best business plans?

- D) Media Law, Media Legal Defense:** (auditing/book-keeping classes/consulting also included in this category). IREX is providing training and consulting in the areas of media-related law, regulations and business accounting rules. Newspapers and television stations consistently valued this activity very highly, suggesting that legal and accounting consultations should be continued.

IREX should also continue to provide legal counsel to newspapers facing legal problems. In many instances already, such interventions by IREX lawyers have helped media to win legal cases and continue operating.

*\*Media Law Drafting & Legislative Advocacy:* See Association Building, below.

- E) Association Building:** IREX has good working relations with BAJ, organizing joint training programs and other events. Facilitating the further institutional development of BAJ and other print sector associations as progressively better managed and self-sustaining CSOs represents a likely area for technical assistance.

- *\*TA to assist Institutional Development of Media-Sector CSOs*, including BAJ, Foundation for Regional Press Development, Association of Belarusian Publishers and Editors (ABPE) and the Independent Association of Broadcasters of Belarus (IABB, which could also work with Internews). Consulting and other TA might help these organizations update mission statements, strengthen boards of directors, expand membership and activities, tighten financial management procedures, clarify organization rules, etc. Some work in this direction has started, but evidently more effort is needed. Institutional development of media-sector CSOs may also be an area where Counterpart could assist.
- *Maximize joint IREX-BAJ/other press association projects and (likely) Internews-IABB activities* to help these organizations acquire improved capacity to carry out training events, festivals, legislative drafting and industry advocacy of important issues. We (Larisa and I) were very impressed by the energetic entrepreneurship the *Foundation for Regional Press Development* – which successfully launched a regional paper-buying cooperative arrangement, training seminars (coordinated with IREX) and an interregional TV schedule and advertising insert called “Plus TV” among an expanding group of over 25 regional non-state newspapers. These

shared activities among regional newspapers across Belarus have engendered a growing sense of cooperative activities and shared corporative interests in the still emerging regional non-state press industry. IREX work with the regional press Foundation, BAJ and other associations is already well established, but probably more can be done.

- *\*Possible New Joint Initiatives (IREX + Foundation for Regional Press Development):* In my discussions with these two organizations, two specific program ideas came up as possible areas for cooperation: (A) *Improved information exchange* among regional newspapers, involving greater horizontal sharing of local news via Internet and provision of (and/or assistance improve) analytic articles about important public issues such as social welfare programs, privatization and unemployment; and/or (B) *Launching new regional newspapers* in “dark” regions where no significant non-state papers exist, such as Mogilev or Gomil. Option B might involve identifying teams of business and newspaper professionals who are interested in starting new papers in underserved regions, consultations to help draft business plans, and material/technical assistance to launch the papers – possibly including them in the “Plus TV” network of regional newspapers.
- *\*\*Media Law Drafting / Amendment Drafting / Advocacy:* BAJ is already active in this area, as illustrated by their critical commentary on proposed amendments by GOB in early 2002 to Belarus’ main media law. BAJ and other media sector associations could potentially engage still more actively in research and lobbying for improvements in the legislative-regulatory environment of the media and advertising sectors. For example, the Association recently co-hosted a seminar with the European Institute for Media on Public Broadcasting; but BAJ does not appear capable of following up in a systemic way. In this specific case, chances in the short-term for serious reform of state television into a public broadcasting system are admittedly dim. Nevertheless, it would be useful for shaping a long-term legislative vision among media industry associations if BAJ and other media associations were more involved in researching draft media laws and regulations which could enable progress toward a more independent media system. Work developing an agenda for future democratic media and media laws can help keep these important issues on the agenda, and also help focus the mission statements of media sector associations.
- *\*\*State Media Ownership/Subsidy Transparency Project:* The main barrier to the economic growth of the independent (non-state) media is the extraordinary range of direct and indirect subsidies and privileges that the GOB showers upon its preferred, mainly state-owned media outlets. BAJ, with a research think-tank and/or a consortium of CSOs could fully research and publicize these subsidies and state control systems, making transparent to Belarusian taxpayers the direct fiscal costs, as well as other lost opportunity costs, involved with these media subsidies (e.g., damage to genuine advertising market growth, losses to economic growth, lack of government accountability and resulting corruption/dysfunction). The independent media have long complained about unequal conditions, but they have never yet systematically gathered all the data under the rubric of a unified, seriously analytic report which documents all the inequalities across the board and the costs of these subsidies to the taxpayer, society and press freedoms. This information could be used to help lobby for more reasonable, market-oriented reforms and law in the media sector.

## 7. Regional Television

Background: About a dozen private regional television stations were successfully launched in the early 1990s and experienced promising starts during that period of economic liberalism. Although OSI provided some equipment in the mid 1990s, the regional non-state TV sector has generally received less international donor attention than newspapers and print media. Accordingly, given that local TV news enjoys considerable real (and still larger potential) audience interest, this sector demonstrates much room for further development.

USAID-supported activities in the regional TV sector began only in 1999. An unsuccessful marriage was attempted under IREX-Promedia between IREX and Internews. The reasons for the disputes between this ill-fated pair provide a complex history that remains beyond my capacity to fully explore (nor would the effort be worthwhile). However, two lessons for future contracting in the media assistance domain would appear to be: (1) always separate the two main organizations (IREX and Internews) by two separate grants or cooperative agreements so that the lines of responsibility for results are clear; and (2) sustain a long-term development commitment to each sector, both the independent print and TV sectors; and avoid damaging work stoppages or funding hesitations (if possible).

*Especially impressive is how much was accomplished in the regional TV sector since October, 1999 -- despite a very late start (ideally, sustained TA to regional TV stations should have started as early as 1992), modest funding, poor economic conditions, and the IREX-Internews problems noted above. The degree of regional TV development during the past two years has nevertheless proven significant, demonstrating a large potential for further development work with these stations.*

Provider Options: As of March, 2002, there seemed to be four contractual options: (a) continue TV sector assistance more or less unchanged with IREX; (b) split off the TV sector work completely from print sector work, making a new sole-source award to Internews; (c) hold an open competition for future TV sector work; or finally (d) pursue a division of labor in the TV sector between IREX and Internews, playing to the comparative strengths of each provider. Under the last option, the March version of this concept paper suggested that "Internews could potentially operate as a sub-grantee under Counterpart or the follow-on CSO support program after September, 2002." As of May, 2002, it appears that the past two months have moved the media assistance program in the direction of option (d). Assuming that this dual-provider pattern persists, I would recommend the following possible division of labor in the TV sector between IREX and Internews:

- IREX has strength in the area of media business development and should continue to conduct business, accounting and advertising training/consulting for regional television stations. IREX should also continue legal training and support to TV stations, preferably helping BAJ and ABPE to also develop this legal support capacity for both the print and broadcast sectors. Provision of TV studio equipment should remain primarily an IREX responsibility, insofar as IREX knows the legal regulations in detail.
- Internews is stronger on the TV production side, and is better positioned to: (a) continue *Rakurs* and other television news sharing projects; (b) conduct television

production training both in-country and out-of-country in the USA, Europe, and strong stations/training centers in Russia and Ukraine; (c) assist with association building of IABB; (d) provide support to the TV festival next September *if* relations between IREX and Internews staffs can be smoothed; and (e) facilitate computerization of TV newsrooms if extra funding can be found. Internews furthermore enjoys strong capacity in the area of assisting CSOs improve the quality of TV and media reporting about CSO activities. Evidently, Internews is already working with Counterpart on raising professionalism in the linkages between CSOs and media.

The scope of work for assisting the non-state TV sector might include the following:

**A) Production/Training:** With minimal resources (about \$5,000 monthly from OSI) Internews has maintained a threadbare presence in Belarus and continued production of its weekly regional news program, “Rakurs” or “Perspective”. The Rakurs TV news exchange performs a variety of concurrent functions: training, production of a popular weekly program that helps broaden local station audiences, horizontal (inter-regional) exchange of information to journalists as well as to mass audiences, embryonic network building and professional association building. A larger budget (more than \$5,000 monthly) is probably desirable to bolster the training aspects of this activity.

All 15 regional non-state television stations are participating in the production and airing of *Rakurs*, with a maximum potential audience (station signal zone) of 35% of the Belarusian population. Scientific survey research of the actual audience of *Rakurs* (and of the audiences of most stations) remains sketchy, but existing research suggests that *Rakurs* is watched by a substantial share of local populations. (The data shows, not surprisingly, that the most popular locally-produced programs are often local daily newscasts. Where data is available, *Rakurs* tends to enjoy weekly audiences of about 1/3 that of the daily news – not bad for a weekly program).

*Rakurs* broadcasts unusually frank reporting about local problems – providing pictures and coverage of factory strikes, demonstrations by local entrepreneurs, difficult social issues such as trafficking of women, problems with medical care, and breakdowns in social infrastructure (water supply, schools, etc). Each participating station submits its best weekly stories to Internews, which selects the best or most representative stories and edits them together into *Rakurs*. Internews also provides regular feedback to the stations regarding the professional strengths and weaknesses of the submitted materials. Moreover, journalists gain a sense of professional corporatism and feel professional peer pressure for the first time in their careers: the participating stations can see the best work (and also less effective reporting) by their colleagues in other cities on a weekly basis. The activity thus creates a dual training effect: professional comments from Internews, plus professional pride and peer pressure from the national airing of *Rakurs* on 15 regional TV station throughout Belarus.

Very importantly, small regional stations are exposed to each others’ work, removing them from their former isolation and, in many cases, making stations braver in their coverage of difficult local issues after they see the best reporting from their peers in other regions.

It should be noted that *Rakurs* sometimes has a “home movie” quality to it, reflecting the technical and professional levels of many of the participating stations’ news production capacities. The mix of observed professional progress combined with weaker reporting is a natural development phenomenon – showing room for further improvement and a need for more training and production assistance. Despite these weaknesses, *Rakurs* also shows a refreshing frankness and an evolution toward modern, people-oriented reporting that is largely lacking on the State channel.

*Other potential production/training activities by Internews:*

- *\*\*Revival of Internews television production training, in-country, Ukraine and/or Russia, Europe, and USA.* Also, *internships in advanced regional TV stations* in other NIS countries (e.g., Kiev, Channel 4 Ekaterinburg, TV-2 Tomsk) would likely prove very useful. Training is especially effective when tied to production activities such as *Rakurs* or *Internovosti* (see below) as well as periodic television festivals that feature training and professional newsmaking competitions.
- *\*\*Media Reporting about CSOs:* All too often in transitional societies, we observe a “disconnect” between CSOs and the media. And when donors give money to CSOs to “get their message out”, the results are often disappointing. In some cases, the result has been home-movie quality documentary films that no TV station would ever wish to air. CSOs need training in how to tailor their messages into suitable packages to attract media attention, and TV journalists also need training in how to cover civil-society-related stories most effectively. Accordingly, cross-sectoral CSO-media training and assistance activities which bring CSO activists together with TV journalists to develop heightened, yet balanced media attention to a specific issue area (eg, environment or medical care) represents an effective assistance strategy. One project that worked very well was an Internews/Russia media campaign against domestic violence, which trained CSO and TV station staffs together to effectively cover the work of women’s crises centers throughout the Russian Federation. Each TV news report or PSA, closed with credits that included contact information (address and phone) of the local women’s crisis centers. The results of this program included large increases for the women’s crises centers in volunteers, clients (women who needed help), and local government funding support – despite the fact that domestic violence was earlier a culturally sensitive issue. (*Note: Highly professional Russian-language PSA’s are available from this earlier Internews/Russia program.*)
- *\*Computerization of newsrooms (“News Factory” or Fabrika Novostei)* and internet exchange of news scenarios, updated daily (*Internovosti*). See Internews proposal. This program has worked very effectively in Russia and elsewhere in the NIS to improve newsroom operations and facilitate the daily exchange of news information among stations. In Belarus, *Fabrika Novosti* would be a clear advance for the production of *Rakurs*, and other news programs. I am roughly estimating that maybe half of the local stations in Belarus would be large and advanced enough to benefit from *Fabrika Novosti* at this time. Costs in Internews proposal for this computerization appear to be far too high – but may be partially justified, perhaps, by above average equipment and training needs in Belarus stations.

**B) TV Festival/Training/Association Building:** Internews in other NIS countries has demonstrated skill in building local broadcasting associations, and absolutely superb capacity in creating multi-purpose television festivals.

- *TV Training-Competition Event, or so-called “Festival”:* Internews/Russia has conducted about 20 regional television *News: Local Time* “festivals”, although it would be more accurate to label these events as training-competitions. For each of these three day events, Internews gathers 20-60 regional television stations (up to 100 regional TV professionals) as well as leading domestic and international TV professionals to serve on the jury and to conduct master classes. These events create a powerful training impact, while helping to build a sense of professional corporatism in an emerging post-Soviet non-state regional TV industry (in this case, Russian regional TV). Television industry associations and media legal defense groups also participate, which supports association building in the media sector. *For planned September 2002 festival, USAID/Minsk might need to carefully negotiate a joint IREX-Internews sponsored event, insofar as IREX planning for this event is already well underway. If some joint cooperation is possible, my impression is that Internews could handle the news programming competition - training components very well, while IREX handles documentary film-making, advertising, and other competition components.*
- *Association Building:* Internews also enjoys a good record of helping to build national broadcasting associations, including joint work with the US National Association of Broadcasters to create the National Association of Tele-Radio-Broadcasters in Russia (currently with about 300 member stations throughout the RF).

**C-E) Business Development/ Media Law and Legal Defense.** Initially or for the longer term, these activities can remain with IREX – given funding limitations and given that IREX is performing well in these areas.

Regional television stations will need all of the basic business development services already provided by IREX, including:

- Audience research;
- Advertising department development and training in marketing;
- Business management training; and
- Assistance drafting business plans.

In addition, the developing Independent Association of Broadcasters of Belarus (IABB) will need to develop a capacity lobby the public and legislative interests of the independent television sector.

Whatever is decided in terms of division of labor in TV sector, stronger program results will be achieved if USAID-supported TV production-training capacity is well coordinated between both providers. It should be noted that IREX (Kashker and Mindlin, formerly also with Internews) is also providing production assistance: sending consultants to stations, providing trainings in Minsk, and assisting with special reporting projects and small documentaries. Visited stations expressed appreciation for this work by IREX (earlier Internews). An interesting new proposal from IREX to European funders is to create a program called “Our European Home”, which would facilitate independent television reporting about the Baltics, Poland, Ukraine, Russia, and other nearby countries.

- IREX may be weaker overall in television training; but has a growing capacity in this sector and seems to have better professional connections with East-Central European media, which is a plus.

## 8) Radio:

FM radio represents a fast growing media sector that offers a potentially highly interesting area of assistance work – if additional resources became available.

The FM market in Minsk is hotly competitive, with rapidly growing private stations (*Alpha*, *BA*, *Roks*, *Russkaya Radio* and *Unistar*) capturing a 50-60% share of the audience, while the state-owned national and *Stolitsa* radio networks retain a 40-50% share. (*Dima*, *recheck numbers*) It is the sole media sector that is now dominated in terms of audience share by non-state outlets.

FM programming is dominated by music, but most stations air 3-6 minutes of news bulletins per hour. Both *Alpha Radio* (Sergei Kuzin) and *Roks-M / Russkaya Radio* (Tatiana Sedova) affirmed that the editorial policies of their news services called for balanced, objective, fact-based news. These stations had encountered serious threats to themselves on one occasion each: *Alpha* was raided by masked tax police on March 21, 2000, just two weeks after *Alpha* provided live coverage of a worker strike in Minsk. And *Roks* director Sedova endured a very uncomfortable period of phoned personal threats in 2000, but those threats ended when she authorized the police to monitor and trace all incoming calls. It is unclear what provoked the phone threats against *Roks*.

Although neither station has encountered direct censorship, self-censorship is surely a factor. Both *Alpha* and *Roks* are very careful to keep their reports balanced, objective, and not too critical of government authorities, particularly with regard to the “First Person”. The closure of FM 101 in 1996 remains a lesson for radio journalists.

The business approaches of *Alpha* and *Roks* proved to be diametric opposites: *Alpha* is highly oriented to advertising and has become sufficiently profitable to purchase its own building and equipment, and fully pay off the loan for its starting capital (within 2 years and 9 months!). By contrast, *Roks* never formally established an advertising department and simply takes in advertising orders when clients phone in. *Roks*, accordingly, has remained strictly a break-even business operation, and Sedova appears comfortable with that economic situation.

There are at least three regional non-state FM Stations, in Pinsk, Vitebsk and Mozyr. We visited the *Varyag* FM station in Pinsk, which was launched within the past year and is already well on its way to becoming profitable. The station manager, Mikhail Zhilyuk, appears to be a capable businessman who has created a small media group in Pinsk (TV, radio, advertising newspaper) with an effective advertising department. We listened to *Varyag* during our return trip to Minsk, and received the signal up to 80-90 km away (nearly to Baranovichy). The news reporting, similar to other FM stations, was about 3-4 minutes per hour, balanced, and included reporting from BelaPan and other sources.

**Possible Assistance in Radio Sector:** Little TA has been provided yet to the radio sector, although (I understand) IREX has a small training program proposal pending with the Thompson Foundation and is ready to start upon approval.

In terms of possible future work for the radio sector, a good start might be the establishment of an association of radio broadcasters, possibly combined with the emerging Independent Association of Broadcasters of Belarus (IABB). The association could engage in training activities, industry lobbying, and common industry support for individual stations when they get into trouble. *Alpha* director, Sergei Kuzin, in particular, supported the idea of a radio association, possibly combined with independent television broadcasters.