

# **CENTRAL ASIA MEDIA OWNERSHIP MAPPING (CAMOM)**

Final Report on Completion of Task 3 – D3 – Version 2.0

August 2024

*NOTE: The following report is produced by an external contractor and is not an official position of the EEAS. The report is produced based on the evaluation of over 200 media outlets, combined with research interviews with over 30 journalists, editors, and media experts. EEAS does not carry responsibility for the conclusions or possible inaccuracies in the analysis.*

## **Executive Summary**

The Central Asian media landscape is undergoing significant transformations, driven by rising smartphone penetration, increased use of social media, and the emergence of new media publishers and broadcasters. The European External Action Service's East Stratcom Task Force (ESTF) initiated the Central Asia Media Ownership and Mapping (CAMOM) project to improve its understanding of media ownership and production in the region. This report provides a comprehensive overview of media outlets in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, known collectively as the Central Asian Republics. This report aims to inform European policymakers and communicators, particularly those at ESTF, helping them to navigate the information environment in Central Asia, to devise strategies to counter foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), and to support media projects and programs to enhance media quality and independence.

This review of media outlets in the Central Asian Republics indicated limited cases of FIMI. An evaluation of over 200 media outlets, combined with research interviews with over 30 journalists, editors, and media experts confirmed that a few media outlets directly amplified Russian narratives. These were predominantly Russian-owned or funded. Overall, penetration of Russian state media in the region is limited by linguistic, technological, and commercial factors. Individuals in Central Asia are increasingly consuming news in local languages, are increasingly accessing news through digital publishers and social media, and are increasingly drawn to new, privately-owned media platforms launched from the region. Importantly, among these Central Asian platforms, few either openly supported Ukraine or opposed Russia's war of aggression—most maintained a neutral stance, mirroring their governments' positions and the coverage from Central Asian state-owned media. However, while FIMI did not emerge as a major threat to the information domain, this mapping exercised identified significant challenges that limit media freedom and the quality of journalism across the Central Asian Republics.

To strengthen the quality and sustainability of Central Asian media, and to reduce vulnerability to FIMI, this report makes several policy recommendations. There is an extensive need to support Central Asian journalists through programs aimed at improving their skills and leveraging new technologies. Additionally, there should be greater support for media outlets that demonstrate significant independence and editorial integrity. Policymakers are advised to draw on successful initiatives from other regions to foster a robust media ecosystem and reduce the impact of FIMI. Such measures are essential to enhance media quality, independence, and transparency in Central Asia.

## **1. Introduction**

The media landscape in Central Asia is undergoing significant transformations driven by several trends. Central Asia has a relatively young population, with around half of the proportion under the age of 30, reflecting high birth rates in recent decades. The median age

in the region ranges from a low of 23 in Tajikistan to a high of 32 in Kazakhstan.<sup>1</sup> Central Asia is linguistically diverse, with each country having its own official language, such as Kazakh in Kazakhstan, Uzbek in Uzbekistan, Turkmen in Turkmenistan, Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan, and Tajik in Tajikistan. Russian remains an official language across the region—a legacy of the Soviet Union—and it remains widely spoken and understood, especially among older generations and in urban areas. However, the use of Russian is gradually declining as younger generations increasingly favor their national languages and, significantly, English.<sup>2</sup> The rising importance of English is driven by globalization, economic opportunities, and educational reforms that emphasize English proficiency. This shift is evident in the growing number of English language schools, the inclusion of English in national curricula, and the increasing use of English in business and international communication.

Among this young and linguistically diverse population, rising smartphone penetration and increased use of social media have created new channels for disseminating and sharing news. The average level of smartphone adoption across the Central Asian Republics is expected to exceed 90% by the end of the decade.<sup>3</sup> In urban centers, the smartphone has become the dominant source of current affairs information. Increased smartphone use has allowed rural communities to tap into the online information ecosystem even before the expansion of broadband internet. The use of smartphones has also led to the rise of new media formats, such as digital video and podcasts. As online media displaces newspapers and television broadcasting as the primary news source, Central Asian communities are consuming news from a wider range of media organizations, including foreign media. Video reportage distributed through Telegram, Instagram, and YouTube has begun to challenge TV broadcasters. Additionally, the number of bloggers focused on political and social issues, commanding large audiences, has increased. Savvy media consumers in the region are increasingly turning to foreign media outlets as part of their media consumption, chiefly activist or state-funded media based in Western countries, such as the American government-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Consequently, the media ecosystem in Central Asia has expanded, encompassing both state and private media outlets working across a wider range of media formats. With the adoption of new technologies and the expansion of media outlets in the Central Asian Republics, new political pressures are influencing the media ecosystem. Central Asian authorities no longer exercise total control over their countries' media ecosystems, although repression of media continues as authorities seek to curtail media independence and coverage of sensitive topics such as corruption and human rights. At the same time, foreign governments have sought to influence media narratives in Central Asia. The manipulation of media narratives remains a significant issue across the region, and members of the public may struggle to identify accurate information. These issues have been examined by leading human rights organizations as part of global or regional research reports. For example, Freedom House publishes a flagship annual “Freedom in the World” report, which includes assessments of the protection of political

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<sup>1</sup> “Median Age,” CIA World Factbook. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/median-age/>

<sup>2</sup> Haidar, Aliya. “With the Russian Language Waning in Central Asia, Will Other Languages Replace It?” *The Times of Central Asia*, August 21, 2023. <https://timesca.com/with-the-russian-language-waning-in-central-asia-will-other-languages-replace-it/>.

<sup>3</sup> GSMA. *Closing the Digital Divide in Central Asia & the South Caucasus: Mobile Economy 2023*. GSMA, May 2023. <https://www.gsma.com/solutions-and-impact/connectivity-for-good/mobile-economy/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Closing-the-digital-divide-in-Central-Asia-the-South-Caucasus-2023.pdf>.

rights and civil liberties in Central Asia.<sup>4</sup> As part of these assessments, Freedom House experts evaluate whether countries possess “free and independent media.” Each country is given a score between zero and four, with four indicating a fully free and independent media landscape. The Central Asian Republics score poorly on this assessment as indicated in the table below.

*Table 1: Freedom House Assessments of Media Freedom in Central Asia*

	<b>Kazakhstan</b>	<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	<b>Uzbekistan</b>	<b>Tajikistan</b>	<b>Turkmenistan</b>
<b>2024</b>	0	2	1	0	0
<b>2023</b>	0	2	1	0	0
<b>2022</b>	0	2	1	0	0
<b>2021</b>	0	2	1	0	0
<b>2020</b>	0	2	0	0	0
<b>2019</b>	0	2	0	0	0
<b>2018</b>	0	2	0	0	0
<b>2017</b>	0	2	0	0	0
<b>2016</b>	0	2	0	1	0
<b>2015</b>	0	2	0	1	0
<b>2014</b>	0	2	0	1	0
<b>2013</b>	0	2	0	1	0

*Note: Scores given on a scale of 0-4, corresponds to subcategory D1.*

Other organizations, including Reporters without Borders and Human Rights Watch also conduct assessments of media freedom in the region. But like the analysis provided by Freedom House, these assessments tend to be high-level, lacking detail about the types of media outlets operating in each country. Consequently, there remain significant gaps in the research on the Central Asian media landscape. Earlier efforts to “map” the media landscape in Central Asia were limited in scope and are now dated. For example, the Open Society Foundations included Kazakhstan in its 2014 “Mapping Digital Media” report, which sought to examine how the expansion of digital media was impacting journalism and news distribution in 60 countries around the world.<sup>5</sup> Overall, the lack of comprehensive and comparative studies has made it difficult to understand the potential political and social ramifications of the new trends in media production and consumption as well as the salience of those trends for policymakers.

To address these gaps, the European External Action Service’s East Stratcom Task Force (ESTF) initiated the Central Asia Media Ownership and Mapping (CAMOM) project. This report is the final output of the project and presents a comprehensive overview of media ownership in the Central Asian Republics. The report has been prepared to inform the work of the European Union’s policymakers and communicators. Central Asia is a region of

<sup>4</sup> Freedom House. *Freedom in the World 2024: A Year of Pushback*. 2024. [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/FIW\\_2024\\_DigitalBooklet.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/FIW_2024_DigitalBooklet.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Open Society Foundations. *Mapping Digital Media: Global Findings*. New York: Open Society Foundations, 2014. <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/mapping-digital-media-global-findings>.

interest to ESTF as it works on societal awareness raising, capacity building on recognizing disinformation and tackling foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) more broadly. The findings of this report will help policymakers and communicators to better navigate the information environment, assisting ESTF in devising strategies to counteract FIMI and support media projects and programs to enhance the media ecosystem in Central Asia. Mapping the media outlets and collecting data on the Central Asian Republics' media landscape is essential for future work in the region, potential partnerships, and guiding efforts to tackle FIMI and disinformation while enhancing media quality and resilience.

By mapping media ownership in the Central Asian Republics and identifying tendencies of certain media outlets to amplify disinformation narratives or be involved in information manipulation, the project team can provide recommendations for efforts to counteract FIMI. These efforts might include programs to support journalists in improving their skills or learning how to leverage new technologies. Alternatively, efforts could involve greater support for media outlets identified as providers of factual and quality content. These recommendations will consider initiatives that have proven successful in fostering a more robust media ecosystem and reducing FIMI in other regions around the world. This comprehensive report examines the factors influencing media environments across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, drawing on a wide range of sources, including official registries, academic research, journalistic reports, and consultations with local media representatives.

The CAMOM project was conducted by a research team with extensive experience in social sciences research in Central Asia, a deep understanding of the media landscape, and the requisite language skills. The project encompassed three tasks, which were completed between September 2023 and August 2024:

- Task 1: Identification of media outlets in each CAR and preparation of a data matrix
- Task 2: Completion of research interviews and preparation of the final report
- Task 3: Preparation of visualization to present the matrix data

Overall, the CAMOM project included a review of 203 media outlets. For the purposes of this research project, a media outlet was defined as any blog website, digital publisher, print newspaper, Telegram channel, television broadcaster, radio station, Instagram account, or YouTube channel that represents a discrete, identifiable platform publishing news or information that can shape public opinion. The report does not constitute an exhaustive review of all media outlets in the Central Asian Republic. However, the detailed review of over 200 media outlets provides an accurate picture of the types of media platforms, typical ownership structures, and the nature and quality of the news reporting in the region.

The initial review of the media outlets captured in the matrix indicated a limited degree of foreign influence in the media environments of the Central Asian Republics. These findings were confirmed through research interviews conducted with over 30 journalists, editors, and media experts based in Central Asia or with direct professional experience in Central Asia. Notably, only a handful of media outlets amplified Russian narratives, and most of these were Russian-owned or funded. On the other hand, few media outlets openly supported Ukraine or opposed Russia's war of aggression. Most outlets in the region maintain a neutral stance on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which reflects the neutral stance of their governments—a stance also reflected in the coverage from state-owned media. Among those media outlets


with a neutral stance, the invasion of Ukraine and related Russian policies were the subject of limited coverage.

However, while FIMI did not emerge as a major threat in Central Asia’s media domain, structural issues persist that limit media freedom and contribute to a limited information environment and an underlying vulnerability to domestic or foreign manipulation. Throughout the Central Asian Republics, issues of opaque media ownership, self-censorship, low-quality reporting, and challenges in assessing media reach underscore the persistent struggles faced by journalists and editors seeking to inform. This report provides a comprehensive understanding of the media landscapes in Central Asia, highlighting both progress and ongoing challenges in fostering independent journalism, transparency, and freedom of expression. It also presents policy recommendations to improve the media landscape to reduce long-term vulnerabilities related to FIMI.

## 2. Project Methodology

The CAMOM researchers used a mixed methodology to collect quantitative and qualitative information about the media landscape in Central Asia. Task 1 of the project involved collecting key information about media outlets in the Central Asian Republics in a matrix. Media outlets were defined as publications, broadcasters, or social media channels that publish news or opinion content. The aim was to populate the matrix with all influential media outlets, meaning those outlets that have a large audience, or those outlets that have notable influence over a small but politically or economically significant group. A total of 203 media outlets were included in the matrix. The breakdown by country can be seen in the below table.

*Table 2: Number of Media Outlets Identified in the Matrix*

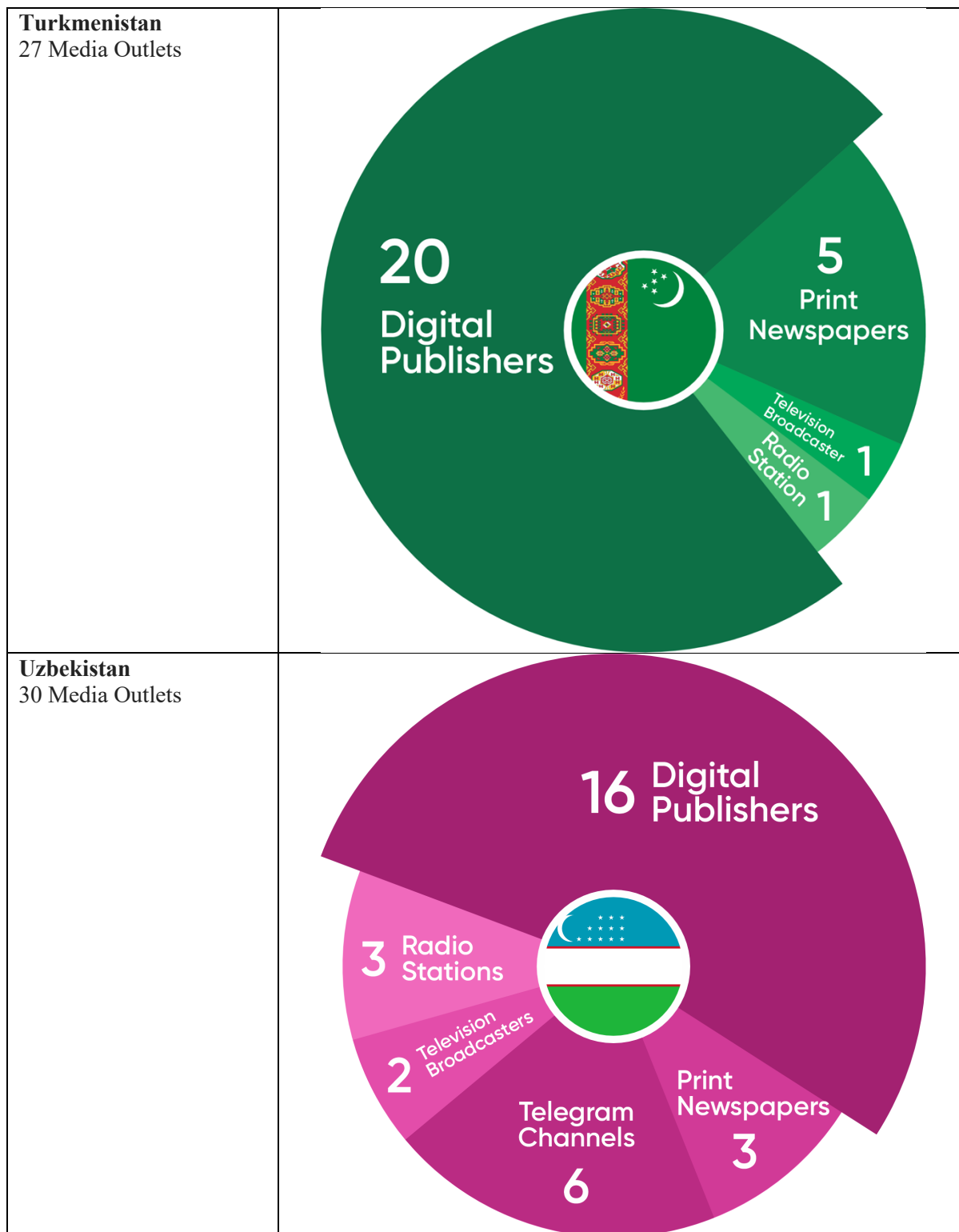
Country	Map														
<b>Kazakhstan</b> 62 Media Outlets	 <table border="1"> <caption>Breakdown of Media Outlets in Kazakhstan</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Digital Publishers</td> <td>30</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Print Newspapers</td> <td>12</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Television Broadcasters</td> <td>9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Instagram Accounts</td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>YouTube Channels</td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Telegram Channels</td> <td>3</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Count	Digital Publishers	30	Print Newspapers	12	Television Broadcasters	9	Instagram Accounts	4	YouTube Channels	4	Telegram Channels	3
Category	Count														
Digital Publishers	30														
Print Newspapers	12														
Television Broadcasters	9														
Instagram Accounts	4														
YouTube Channels	4														
Telegram Channels	3														

**Kyrgyzstan**  
50 Media Outlets



**Tajikistan**  
34 Media Outlets





### 3. Populating the Matrix

Populating the matrix successfully required accounting for significant variation in the media environments of each of the Central Asian Republics, while still maintain a consistent methodology. Consistency was established by following the standardized categories described above. However, each of the countries posed their own challenges, including difficulties in identifying revenue models, lack of transparency in ownership registries, and

challenges in assessing media reach. In addition, low-quality reporting, government influence, and restrictive media environments persist across the region. In Task 2 of the project, information collected in the matrix was augmented with qualitative information gathered during research interviews with journalists, editors, and media experts who are based in the region or who have worked in the region. These interviews were tailored to draw out country-specific insights and to help fill in missing parts of the matrix where possible. In total, over 30 individuals were interviewed, with at least five interview subjects for each of the Central Asian Republics. To protect the interview subjects, their names are not included in this report. However, insights from the interviews are indicated by footnotes describing the profile of the interviewed individual. Specific considerations for each country are listed in the table below, including a general description of the media environment and the difficulties encountered in relying on publicly available resources to populate the matrix.

*Table 4: Country Specific Considerations for the Research Interviews*

<b>Kazakhstan</b>
<p>For Kazakhstan, the matrix was populated by consulting official registries of print and broadcast media, tracking news media consumption on popular social media platforms as well as reviewing recent publications on the state of journalism and media by local and international experts. In Kazakhstan, the media environment is predominantly characterized by state control, with most broadcast and print media under government ownership. The intricate web of media ownership, self-censorship practices, and the thriving but challenged realm of independent online journalism collectively shape a nuanced environment, marked by government efforts to stigmatize, and potentially restrict media freedom. Considerations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Media Ownership and Control:</i> Most broadcast and print media in Kazakhstan is owned and controlled by the state, with privately-owned outlets often linked to individuals connected to current or former government officials. The relationships between private investors and political figures remain opaque and challenging to discern. Due to their reliance on direct or indirect financial support from the state, traditional news media outlets engage in extensive self-censorship practices.</li> <li>● <i>Content and Reporting Practices:</i> State and private media outlets in Kazakhstan predominantly function as news agencies, producing brief news items without engaging in original reporting, analysis, or investigative journalism. While regional newspapers and news websites, also reliant on government support, occasionally report on local corruption, they tend to avoid direct criticism of the national government.</li> <li>● <i>Independent Journalism:</i> A thriving ecosystem of independent and critical journalism has emerged in the form of online publications, YouTube channels, Instagram pages, and Telegram channels. These outlets cater to a younger, urban online audience and sustain themselves through crowdfunding, ad revenue, and international grants.</li> <li>● <i>Media Registration:</i> All news media outlets are mandated to register with the Ministry of Culture and Information. However, the registry is not publicly accessible, and the up-to-date media registration numbers are frequently absent from their respective websites. Notably, news outlets and bloggers exclusively using social media channels are not obligated to register.</li> <li>● <i>Verification of Ownership:</i> The Bureau of National Statistics in Kazakhstan provides a free database of registered companies, facilitating the verification of media ownership. However, this database only discloses information about the managing director and lacks details on shareholders or actual ownership structures.</li> <li>● <i>Shifts in Ownership:</i> Several major news publications are reportedly undergoing ownership changes, possibly transitioning to entities with ties to the current government. Unfortunately, the lack of public information makes tracking these shifts in ownership challenging.</li> <li>● <i>Online Media Environment:</i> A significant shift is observed among younger Kazakhs who increasingly rely on social media for unfiltered news, political analysis, and sharp criticism</li> </ul>

of the government. Government efforts to stigmatize independent online media as influenced by foreign actors are notable. Some private media companies have created seemingly anonymous Telegram channels and Instagram accounts, incorporating them into their expanding media portfolio.

- *Government Actions and Legislation:* The Kazakh government published a list of entities receiving foreign financial support, aiming to stigmatize independent media. Since early 2023, efforts have been underway to pass new legislation regulating media outlets, particularly online and on social media. Experts view this legislation as a potential tool for restricting media freedom.

### **Kyrgyzstan**

For Kyrgyzstan, the matrix was populated by drawing on the research team’s professional knowledge of the local media environment, consultations with prominent local media representatives, and review of recent literature on media consumption and development in the country. Kyrgyzstan is perceived arguably as having the most diverse media environment in Central Asia, featuring many privately-owned outlets. However, the sector grapples with challenges, ranging from a dominant state-owned TV presence to the emergence of dynamic digital media. Considerations include:

- *Television Dominance:* State-owned public broadcasting holds a near-monopoly on Kyrgyz-language news, leaving TV viewers reliant on Russian channels. Television channels avoid disclosing viewership figures, and print media often lacks updated circulation data.
- *Digital Media Dynamics:* Privately-owned digital media websites serve as popular news sources for those with internet access. These platforms include established 24-hour news websites and independent outlets conducting investigative reporting. Many rely on grant funding from Western donors due to limited state support and ad revenue.
- *Challenges in Media Registration and Ownership:* The Kyrgyz Ministry of Justice offers a database of registered companies, yet its limitations, including sparse information on managing directors and no shareholder details, pose challenges. Frequent changes in ownership often go untracked. Media outlets are often registered under figureheads, obscuring true ownership connections.
- *High Turnover and Influence Dynamics:* Kyrgyz media outlets experience high turnover among editors and managing directors. Outdated or non-existent staff information is frequently listed. While state-owned media has a relatively small market share, influential elite groups often control or influence outlets.
- *Self-Censorship and Legal Challenges:* Media outlets in Kyrgyzstan engage in self-censorship to avoid lawsuits from elites seeking to prevent media scrutiny, a growing concern with high legal costs. Authorities have blocked independent news sites and threatened closure. Legislation targeting foreign-funded media raises concerns about stifling critical voices.
- *Emerging Trends:* New outlets accessible via social media platforms like Telegram, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have surfaced. These outlets cater to a younger audience, addressing controversial social and political topics and critiquing abuses of power. A new law on foreign representatives, modeled after existing Russian legislation, passed in Kyrgyzstan after over a year of discussion and pressure from civil society, international donors for the law to be retracted. Signed into law in April 2024, the new law has already come into force this summer. According to the new law, NGOs and local media organizations that receive any kind of funding from abroad will now be required to register as foreign representatives and provide onerous reports to the authorities on their activities. This will allow authorities to potentially shut down these foreign representatives under the pretext of reporting failures or infractions.

### **Tajikistan**

For Tajikistan, the matrix was populated by drawing on existing research on the media environment, an informal survey of media consumption among the research team’s contacts, and on international academic, policy, and journalistic reports about Tajikistan. In Tajikistan, the media

environment is characterized by overwhelming government control and low-quality reporting with challenges in identifying media owners and assessing media reach. Considerations include:

- *Government Control:* The government has consolidated its control over the media, eradicating independently owned outlets while degrading the working capacity of the remaining few and forcing them into self-censorship. The stifling of criticism involves vague laws against extremism and dissemination of false information, physical and digital attacks on journalists, bureaucratic obstacles and lack of information transparency from government agencies.
- *Media Consumption:* Television is the primary medium dominated by government-owned channels. Print media follows, also under government influence, and radio has a smaller share. Digital media lags due to the slow and expensive internet, with notable bloggers generally adopting apolitical stances.
- *Ownership and Transparency:* Independent media owners are not required to declare their ownership stakes publicly. Registration of media outlets is fragmented - foreign-funded media must be cleared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, print media must register with the Ministry of Culture, and television, radio, and digital media must get a license from the State Committee on Television and Radio. The government does not make any registries of these licensed media outlets publicly available. Many of the print and digital media register under names different from how they are known publicly and do not make the names of their management, stakeholders, or editors publicly available. The few outlets that receive grants from international donors might use third parties (either individuals or companies) to obscure their funding and protect themselves from government pressure.
- *Challenges in Assessing Media Reach:* Difficulties in verifying television and radio consumption figures. Print media lacks publicly shared circulation data. Digital media sees overlapping subscribers across social media platforms and potential bot usage, distorting reach metrics. Distrust in media, a culture of paranoia, and low media literacy further complicate reach assessment.
- *Low-Quality Journalism:* Due to eroded working capacity and self-censorship, media lack the ability to conduct independent accurate reporting and often rely on government press releases and cross-publishing from other media platforms, leading to inaccuracies, editorial lapses, and ethical oversights, notably observed during the September 2022 border conflict with Kyrgyzstan.

### **Turkmenistan**

For Turkmenistan, the matrix was populated by referring to research on Turkmenistan's media environment and on international academic, policy, and journalistic reports about the country. The domestic media environment in Turkmenistan is characterized by total government control and low-quality reporting with challenges in identifying media owners and assessing media reach. All independent media are forced to operate in exile; severe restrictions on the Internet and the overall information space allow no press freedom. Considerations include:

- *Government Control:* The government has full control over the domestic media which are used primarily to endorse government viewpoints or promote the personality cult of the ruling family. The few remaining independent media are forced to work in exile and around severe restrictions on Internet use in Turkmenistan. Press freedom is severely limited by vague laws, physical and digital attacks on journalists, bureaucratic obstacles and a lack of information transparency from government agencies.
- *Media Consumption:* Television is the primary medium dominated by government-owned channels. Print media follows, also under government influence, and radio has a smaller share. Digital media lags due to the slow and expensive Internet and severe restrictions on its use.
- *Ownership and Transparency:* The government does not make any registries of the licensed media outlets publicly available. Most media are either government-owned or belong to people connected to the ruling regime. A few outlets are affiliated with Russia-based media and clearly promote Russian economic interests in Turkmenistan.
- *Challenges in Assessing Media Reach:* Difficulties in verifying television and radio consumption figures. Print media lacks publicly shared circulation data. Digital media face

restrictions on Internet use in the country. Due to severe restrictions on the use of social media in Turkmenistan, very few media outlets are represented on those platforms. Distrust in media, a culture of paranoia, and low media literacy further complicate reach assessment.

- *Low-Quality Reporting:* Domestic media serve as the government mouthpiece, with most daily reporting limited to fawning coverage of the government's activities. Independent media operating in exile are limited by their struggle to safely maintain reliable information sources in the country.

#### **Uzbekistan**

For Uzbekistan, the matrix was populated by referencing widely cited media outlets in Western academic and journalistic reports, while capturing local media consumption habits through national language searches. The research team also utilized a web tool to access information on the top Telegram channels in the country to capture the significance of social media, particularly among urban youth in Uzbekistan. This tool provided insights not only into accredited news outlets but also popular amateur bloggers. The media environment in Uzbekistan has historically been marked by state-controlled outlets, heavily influenced by government interests. However, recent reforms, under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, have brought about a shift towards greater media independence. Considerations include:

- *Government Control:* Traditional state-controlled media coexist with emerging digital platforms, allowing for a broader range of perspectives, but despite these positive changes, government influence, even over independent media, remains significant, leading to self-censorship to avoid crossing perceived boundaries.
- *Ownership and Transparency:* Data transparency in Uzbekistan has improved, but discovering ownership details of independent companies is difficult due to the use of shell companies in tax filings.
- *Lack of High-Quality Journalism:* Many media outlets in Uzbekistan heavily rely on official government press releases for their news stories, often replicating the language used in these releases. This practice is increasingly recognized by the younger generation, leading them to seek information from non-traditional sources such as Telegram and Instagram bloggers.
- *Other Challenges:* Acquiring contact information for individuals, including editorial personnel, is nearly impossible. Identification of tax identification numbers (Tax IDs) for private individuals, especially bloggers, is intricate due to privacy laws. In addition, follower counts in the data may not accurately represent genuine local dynamics, as some followers may not be within Uzbekistan or may be non-authentic (e.g., bots).

## **4. Main Findings**

The report's main findings highlight distinct media landscapes across the Central Asian Republics. In Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan social media surpasses the national TV channels as the top source of news, while in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan national TV channels are substantially more popular than social media. This corresponds with the data on use of the Internet for obtaining news, according to which respondents from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are less reliant on the Internet than their counterparts from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. YouTube is the most popular social network in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, while Instagram is a top choice in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Politics is the most popular topic of news in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, while people in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are less politicized and are more interested in sports news. However, in Kazakhstan younger people are less interested in regular news consumption, unlike the older generation. The opposite trend can be observed in Tajikistan, where young people aged 18-25 are more inclined to obtain news via the Internet every day than other age groups.

With press freedom restrictions and government repressions hollowing out the traditional media's capacity and reach across Central Asia and with the Internet growing more available, social media is increasingly competing with television as a major source of news and information in the region. This is part of a global trend. However, low media literacy, low trust in institutions and media, and low levels of education coupled with social media's lax content moderation policies and absence of content moderation in Central Asian languages result in Central Asians' vulnerability to disinformation perpetrated by external and internal state and private actors on social media. Additionally, most high-quality knowledge and content in Central Asia are still produced in Russian while the use of Russian has been declining among the local populations, creating a gap between quality information and information consumers that is ripe for manipulation. On the one hand, social media, messengers, and bloggers act as alternatives to the state-directed political narratives and propaganda. On the other hand, social media pages and bloggers are not subject to any editorial standards the way traditional media are and can be more evasive of any institutional and democratic control, making it easier for them to spread disinformation. Different categories of population appear to be easy victims of disinformation. Older generations may have difficulties with cross-checking pieces of information due to the lack of relevant technical skills. In turn, younger people are generally apolitical and rarely care to double-check what they consume online.

Despite these risks, the research conducted in Task 1 and Task 2 revealed the limited degree of FIMI in the Central Asian media landscape. This can be attributed to several factors. First, the region's governments maintain stringent control over media outlets, ensuring that most broadcast and print media remain under state ownership or influence. This control is particularly pronounced in countries like Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, where the government tightly regulates information dissemination and suppresses media freedom and independent journalism. Additionally, the prevalence of self-censorship among journalists, driven by the fear of government reprisal, further curtails the presence of foreign narratives. While there are some media outlets in the region that receive funding from foreign sources or amplify foreign narratives, these platforms tend to have small audiences. Furthermore, linguistic barriers can limit the penetration of foreign media, as local populations predominantly consume content in their native languages. The combination of government control, self-censorship, and limited accessibility creates a media environment that is relatively insulated from substantial foreign influence. However, the Central Asian Republics remain vulnerable to FIMI due to lack of independence and transparency among media outlets. Additionally, large Central Asian migrant populations living in Russia have different media consumption patterns and may share biased information disseminated by Russian media outlets with family members in their home countries through informal channels. Understanding these vulnerabilities is critical if policymakers intend to enhance the media landscape and reduce the risk of FIMI. A detailed assessment of the vulnerabilities for each country, drawing on the information presented in the matrix and gathered during the research interviews, is presented in the sections below.

## **A. Kazakhstan**

For Kazakhstan, the matrix was populated by consulting official registries of print and broadcast media, tracking news media consumption on popular social media platforms, as well as reviewing recent publications on the state of journalism and media by local and international experts. Kazakhstan's media landscape reflects a nuanced interplay of state control, private ownership, and the emergence of digital platforms. Across broadcast, print,

and online media, the state exerts significant influence, with most outlets owned and directed by governmental entities. Moreover, privately-owned media often maintain ties to individuals affiliated with current or former government officials. This dominance extends to online platforms, where government funding shapes content and editorial decisions. Despite nominal private ownership, many media entities operate under substantial government influence, resulting in self-censorship and a limited diversity of perspectives in news reporting. The main findings about the Kazakh media landscape are as follows:

- *Media Ownership and Control:* Most broadcast and print media in Kazakhstan is owned and controlled by the state, with privately-owned outlets often linked to individuals connected to current or former government officials. The relationships between private investors and political figures remain opaque and challenging to discern. Due to their reliance on direct or indirect financial support from the state, traditional news media outlets engage in extensive self-censorship practices. Reliance on government funding, particularly through government orders (*goszakaz*), as a mechanism for control even extends to the network of online media outlets.<sup>6</sup> Despite nominal private ownership, these outlets often operate under significant government influence, impacting their editorial independence. The concentration of media ownership in Kazakhstan raises concerns about transparency and pluralism. While formal ownership information is available online, the true extent of government influence may not be fully reflected in these disclosures.
- *Content and Reporting Practices:* State and private media outlets in Kazakhstan predominantly function as news agencies, producing brief news items without engaging in original reporting, analysis, or investigative journalism. While regional newspapers and news websites, also reliant on government support, occasionally report on local corruption, they tend to avoid direct criticism of the national government. Recent trends indicate a shift towards shorter, video-based content.<sup>7</sup> This transition away from in-depth written content towards bite-size video content, including explainers and long interviews, reflects changing consumer preferences and consumption habits. However, concerns persist regarding the quality of reporting and the prevalence of propaganda, particularly in state-funded media outlets. Despite efforts to produce more engaging and accessible content, there remains a lack of diversity in reporting practices. Independent journalism outlets, such as Vlast.kz and Azattyk, strive to maintain high editorial standards amidst pressures from the government. However, the dominance of state-funded media outlets limits the availability of unbiased news reporting, contributing to public skepticism and cynicism towards media content.
- *Independent Journalism:* A thriving ecosystem of independent and critical journalism has emerged in the form of online publications, YouTube channels, Instagram pages, and Telegram channels. These outlets cater to a younger, urban online audience. However, independent journalism is characterized by challenges stemming from government control and financial constraints. Most major outlets rely on government funding for survival.<sup>8</sup> Maintaining independence remains a constant struggle and most of these online outlets sustain themselves through crowdfunding, ad revenue, and international grants, highlighting the precarious financial situation faced by many.<sup>9</sup> Despite these challenges, independent journalists persevere in their pursuit of truth

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<sup>6</sup> According to a local professor and local journalist

<sup>7</sup> According to a former local journalist

<sup>8</sup> According to a local professor

<sup>9</sup> According to a local, independent journalist

and accountability, providing essential perspectives amidst a landscape dominated by state-controlled media.

- *Media Registration:* All news media outlets are mandated to register with the Ministry of Culture and Information. However, the registry is not publicly accessible, and the up-to-date media registration numbers are frequently absent from their respective websites. Notably, news outlets and bloggers who exclusively use social media channels are not obligated to register. Recently, the Kazakh government published a list of entities receiving foreign financial support, aiming to mark out independent media. Since early 2023, efforts have been underway to pass new legislation regulating media outlets, particularly online and on social media. Experts view this legislation as a potential tool for restricting media freedom. Proposed legislative changes pose significant challenges to journalistic practices, particularly for journalists working for foreign media outlets. The introduction of rules on accreditation and press cards may restrict journalist access and impede their ability to report independently. An independent journalist expressed concerns about the potential misuse of accreditation as a tool to control media narratives and limit critical reporting.<sup>10</sup>
- *Verification of Ownership:* The Bureau of National Statistics in Kazakhstan provides a free database of registered companies, facilitating the verification of media ownership. However, this database only discloses information about the managing director and lacks details on shareholders or actual ownership structures. While formal ownership information may be publicly available, the true extent of government influence over media outlets may not be fully disclosed. The prevalence of government funding and indirect control mechanisms further complicates efforts to assess the independence and impartiality of media outlets.
- *Shifts in Ownership:* Several major news publications are reportedly undergoing ownership changes, possibly transitioning to entities with ties to the new, current government, taking power away from the former ruling family. Unfortunately, the lack of public information makes tracking these shifts in ownership challenging. Recent shifts in media ownership patterns reflect broader trends towards consolidation and centralized control, with observations of the presidential administration exerting more direct control over media outlets.<sup>11</sup> The transition away from diverse ownership structures towards greater government influence has implications for media pluralism and editorial independence. As government-aligned media outlets continue to dominate the media landscape, independent voices face increasing challenges in maintaining editorial autonomy and integrity.
- *Online Media Environment:* The rise of digital media platforms has transformed the media landscape, offering new opportunities for news consumption and dissemination. However, concerns persist about the quality of reporting and the prevalence of propaganda on digital platforms. A significant shift is observed among younger Kazakhs who increasingly rely on social media for unfiltered news, political analysis, and sharp criticism of the government. Government efforts to mark out independent online media as influenced by foreign actors are notable. Some private media companies have created seemingly anonymous Telegram channels and Instagram accounts, incorporating them into their expanding media portfolio. However, there are risks associated with anonymous Telegram channels and there is the potential for further government manipulation of digital media platforms.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> According to a local, independent journalist

<sup>11</sup> According to a local professor

<sup>12</sup> According to a former local journalist

## B. Kyrgyzstan

For Kyrgyzstan, the matrix was populated by drawing on the research team's professional knowledge of the local media environment, consultations with prominent local media representatives, and a review of recent literature on media consumption and development in the country. Kyrgyzstan is perceived as having the most diverse media environment in Central Asia, featuring many privately-owned outlets. However, the sector faces numerous challenges. The media landscape is undergoing significant shifts influenced by government control, changing consumption patterns, registration and ownership challenges, and pervasive self-censorship. These factors create a complex media environment in the country, reflecting both long-standing issues and emerging trends. Against the backdrop of a government increasingly asserting its influence over the media sphere, Kyrgyzstan's journalists and media outlets grapple with navigating regulatory frameworks, adapting to evolving consumer preferences, and contending with the ever-present specter of self-censorship. The main findings about the Kyrgyz media landscape are as follows:

- *Government Control:* Government control over the media in Kyrgyzstan is multifaceted, involving both formal regulatory measures and informal tactics aimed at suppressing dissent and controlling the flow of information. According to a local journalist, there has been increasing pressure from authorities since 2021, leading to a climate of fear and self-censorship among journalists.<sup>13</sup> This sentiment is echoed by other local journalists, who indicated that the government attempts to muzzle the media through restrictive legislation and intimidation tactics.<sup>14</sup> State-owned public broadcasting holds a near-monopoly on Kyrgyz-language news, and for the older generations, they tend to gravitate to Russian channels for news and entertainment because of higher production value. Despite efforts to reform the state broadcasting company, the lack of true independence has perpetuated a landscape dominated by state-controlled narratives. Additionally, print media often lacks updated circulation data, further obscuring the reach and impact of traditional news outlets.
- *Media Consumption:* The media landscape in the country is undergoing a significant transformation, with traditional channels such as television and radio losing relevance, particularly among younger demographics. Social media platforms have emerged as primary sources of news and information, especially in rural areas where chat groups on platforms like Telegram and WhatsApp serve as vital conduits for local news. For example, farmers may be members of a chat group to share information about changes in government regulations, prices for key inputs, or advice on growing techniques.<sup>15</sup> Overall, the rise of digital media platforms has introduced new dynamics to Kyrgyzstan's media landscape, offering both opportunities and challenges for journalists and content creators. New outlets accessible via social media platforms like Telegram, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have surfaced. These outlets cater to a younger audience, addressing controversial social and political topics and critiquing abuses of power. Proposed laws mandating registration for social media users with over 1,000 followers are seen as potential tools to suppress dissent. A threat inherent to the rise of online media has been the proliferation of online trolls and the increasing sophistication of disinformation campaigns, which pose significant threats to media

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<sup>13</sup> According to a prominent local journalist

<sup>14</sup> According to several local journalists

<sup>15</sup> According to a senior official at an international think tank operating in Kyrgyzstan

credibility and public discourse.<sup>16</sup> Conversely, digital media has the possibility to democratize access to information, enabling independent voices to reach wider audiences and fostering civic engagement. However, trust in media institutions is eroding, as social media content depoliticizes the population, leading to a decline in news consumption overall.<sup>17</sup>

- *Challenges in Media Registration and Ownership:* Navigating the regulatory framework for media registration and ownership presents significant challenges for journalists and media organizations. The Kyrgyz Ministry of Justice offers a database of registered companies, yet its limitations, including sparse information on managing directors and no shareholder details, pose challenges. Media ownership is opaque, with frequent changes in ownership and political affiliations complicating efforts to ensure transparency and accountability. While state-owned media has a relatively small market share, influential elite groups often control or influence outlets. In addition, several independent news outlets have transferred to government-affiliated owners over the last several years. Media outlets are often registered under figureheads, obscuring true ownership connections. Outdated or non-existent staff information is frequently listed. Additionally, high turnover and influence dynamics within the media industry further exacerbate concerns about editorial independence and media integrity.
- *Self-Censorship and Legal Challenges:* Media outlets grapple with self-censorship amid legal challenges, restricting their ability to report freely. Journalists often withhold critical content to evade lawsuits and reprisals from elites, fearing high legal costs. Authorities compound the issue by blocking independent news sites and threatening closure. Newly passed laws targeting foreign-funded media heighten concerns about stifling dissent. The absence of legal safeguards exposes journalists to harassment and intimidation, forcing them to navigate a precarious balance between professional integrity and personal safety.

### C. Tajikistan

For Tajikistan, the matrix was populated by drawing on existing research on the media environment, an informal survey of media consumption among the research team's on-the-ground contacts, and on international academic, policy, and journalistic reports about Tajikistan. The government of Tajikistan has wielded its influence to consolidate control over the nation's media landscape, conducting a systematic campaign to suppress independently owned media outlets and to impose stringent limits on the few remaining entities. This orchestrated suppression takes various forms, including legal ambiguity and bureaucratic entanglements, physical and digital assaults on journalists, and a conspicuous lack of transparency from governmental bodies. As a result, journalists find themselves navigating an environment fraught with self-censorship and intimidation, evident in the wave of arrests following the May 2022 spike in violence in the Badakhshan Mountainous Autonomous Region. Moreover, there is a discernible erosion of trust in media institutions among the populace, attributed in part to the media's limited working capacity resulting from self-censorship and government pressure. The media environment in Tajikistan is characterized by overwhelming government control and low-quality reporting, with challenges in identifying media owners and assessing media reach. The lack of reliable data and the pervasive government censorship create an environment where independent journalism

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<sup>16</sup> According to a local journalist

<sup>17</sup> According to a local journalist

struggles to thrive, and critical reporting encounters substantial barriers. Despite these challenges, there is a growing recognition of the need for comprehensive coverage and transparency in media operations, underscoring the importance of addressing these systemic issues to foster a more open and accountable media landscape in Tajikistan. The main findings about the Tajik media landscape are as follows:

- *Government Control:* The government has consolidated control over Tajikistan's media landscape and has led a systematic campaign to eradicate independently owned media outlets, imposing stringent limits on the few remaining entities. This orchestrated suppression manifests in many forms, including legal ambiguity and bureaucratic entanglements, physical and digital attacks on journalists, and a conspicuous lack of transparency from governmental bodies. The government's consolidation of power over media outlets has left journalists struggling to navigate an environment fraught with self-censorship and intimidation.<sup>18</sup> Instances of government interference and intimidation tactics, such as arrests following the May 2022 spike in violence in GBAO, further underscore the pervasive climate of fear and suppression within the media landscape. Moreover, there is a discernible erosion of trust in media institutions among the populace, attributed in part to the media's limited working capacity resulting from self-censorship and government pressure.<sup>19</sup> Notably, outlets like Asia Plus face public scrutiny for their perceived reluctance to cover sensitive topics, indicative of the broader climate of apprehension and censorship.
- *Media Consumption:* Television remains the preeminent medium for information dissemination in Tajikistan, holding sway over both urban and rural populations, and largely controlled by government-owned channels.<sup>20</sup> This dominance is mirrored in print media, where government influence extends its reach, with radio occupying a comparatively smaller share of the media landscape. The younger generation based in large urban centers is increasingly reliant on social media and digital outlets for news consumption. However, the growth of digital media in Tajikistan has been hampered by the nation's sluggish and expensive internet infrastructure, deterring widespread adoption among the populace.<sup>21</sup> Notable bloggers, cognizant of the restrictive environment, often adopt apolitical stances to navigate censorship and to maintain their online presence. State-sponsored media outlets, exemplified by entities like Khovar, wield significant influence over public opinion, particularly on matters pertaining to government affairs.<sup>22</sup> Acting as the primary source of information on governmental affairs, these outlets shape public discourse and set the narrative, with other media entities often following suit in their coverage. Despite the emergence of digital media platforms, traditional media channels maintain their dominance, reflecting the enduring influence of government-controlled narratives and the limitations imposed by infrastructure challenges on digital media growth. Another challenge is the dominance of Russian-language content in the media landscape, despite a decline in the use of Russian across the country in recent years. This linguistic disparity creates a disconnect between knowledge production and consumption, as quality media content is primarily produced in Russian, potentially

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<sup>18</sup> According to the CEO of a prominent independent media outlet based in Tajikistan and a leading international Central Asia expert

<sup>19</sup> According to the CEO of a prominent independent media outlet based in Tajikistan

<sup>20</sup> According to the CEO and a journalist from prominent independent media outlets based in Tajikistan

<sup>21</sup> According to a local journalist

<sup>22</sup> According to a local journalist

alienating segments of the population.<sup>23</sup> This linguistic divide underscores broader challenges in media accessibility and inclusivity, highlighting the need for strategies to bridge linguistic barriers and ensure equitable access to information across diverse linguistic demographics.

- *Ownership and transparency:* The landscape of media ownership is opaque, exacerbated by disjointed registration procedures that foster anonymity among independent proprietors. This lack of transparency extends to licensing procedures, where government agencies such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Committee on Television and Radio wield significant influence without disclosing registered media outlets publicly. While legal requirements ostensibly mandate ownership disclosure, the public often relies on hearsay to decipher the ownership and ideological leanings of media outlets, further exacerbating the prevailing lack of trust in media.<sup>24</sup> The convoluted registration framework necessitates clearance from various governmental bodies, including the Ministry of Culture for print media and the State Committee on Television and Radio for television, radio, and digital media. Moreover, the use of third parties to obscure funding sources adds another layer of complexity to transparency efforts, particularly for outlets receiving grants from international donors. Many media entities register under different names from their public identities and refrain from disclosing information about their management, stakeholders, or editors, further obscuring the ownership landscape. This lack of transparency not only undermines accountability but also perpetuates a climate of uncertainty and suspicion.
- *Challenges in Assessing Media Reach:* Verifying the reach of media outlets presents formidable obstacles, echoing concerns voiced by interviewees.<sup>25</sup> These challenges encompass the lack of verifiable television and radio consumption figures, the absence of publicly shared print media circulation data, and the distortion of digital media reach metrics due to overlapping subscribers and potential bot usage. Moreover, the prevailing atmosphere of distrust in media, coupled with a pervasive culture of paranoia and low levels of media literacy among the populace, further complicates the assessment of media reach. Despite these formidable hurdles, there is a discernible demand for more information and coverage on highly sensitive topics.<sup>26</sup> This demand is evidenced by increased feedback on social media platforms, indicating a desire for comprehensive coverage amidst the challenging media landscape in the country.
- *Low-Quality Journalism:* The observable decline in journalism quality reflects a multifaceted crisis marked by diminished working capacity and widespread self-censorship. Media outlets, grappling with government pressure and resource constraints, frequently resort to uncritical reporting practices, leaning heavily on government press releases and cross-publishing from alternative sources, as seen in the reporting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine.<sup>27</sup> This trend has engendered notable inaccuracies, editorial lapses, and ethical oversights, with glaring instances underscored during the September 2022 border conflict with Kyrgyzstan. The inability of media organizations to conduct independent and accurate reporting perpetuates a cycle of compromised journalistic standards and undermines public trust

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<sup>23</sup> According to a former local reporter

<sup>24</sup> According to a former local reporter

<sup>25</sup> According to two former local reporters

<sup>26</sup> According to the CEO of a prominent independent media outlet based in Tajikistan

<sup>27</sup> According to a former local reporter and a leading international Central Asia expert

in media institutions.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, the scarcity of professional development and training opportunities exacerbates the deterioration in journalism quality, hampering avenues for skill enhancement and career progression. The reluctance of young people to pursue journalism as a viable career path stems from the associated risks and meager financial rewards, further exacerbating the generational gap in media professionalism and expertise.<sup>29</sup> Addressing these systemic challenges requires concerted efforts to bolster media independence, enhance professional standards, and cultivate a supportive environment for aspiring journalists to thrive and contribute meaningfully to the public discourse.

#### **D. Turkmenistan**

For Turkmenistan, the matrix was populated by referring to research on Turkmenistan's media environment and on international academic, policy, and journalistic reports about the country. In Turkmenistan, the government's control over the media landscape is absolute, leaving no space for independent voices to thrive. All domestic outlets are tightly regulated, with stringent censorship and severe repercussions for journalists who deviate from official narratives. This control extends to all aspects of media consumption, from television to the internet, where government restrictions impede the free flow of information. With opaque media ownership and limited transparency, foreign influence further shapes the media landscape, often promoting state interests. As a result, Turkmenistan's media environment is characterized by a lack of diversity, low-quality reporting, and a culture of fear and self-censorship among journalists.

- *Government Control:* The government dominance over the media landscape throughout the country is absolute, with all domestic outlets subject to state influence and control. Independent media have been effectively silenced, with no independent outlets left in the country, and all independent Turkmen media forced into exile to evade censorship and persecution.<sup>30</sup> The government's tight grip on media extends to stringent regulations and censorship, with journalists facing severe repercussions for deviating from prescribed narratives. Foreign journalists are not allowed in the country, and all domestic journalists are scrutinized and punished for not following the official government line. Any criticism of the country and its government is punished.<sup>31</sup> Government control over media is effectively used to promote the personality cult of the ruling family. In addition, all citizens, including the media, are forced to navigate severe restrictions on Internet use. Overall, press freedom is severely limited by vague laws, physical and digital attacks on journalists, bureaucratic obstacles, and a lack of information transparency from government agencies.
- *Media Consumption:* Television serves as the primary medium for news consumption in Turkmenistan, predominantly featuring government-owned channels disseminating state-endorsed propaganda. Print media, while existing, is largely perceived as government propaganda, contributing minimally to the dissemination of independent information.<sup>32</sup> The Internet is a crucial but restricted, expensive, and slow avenue for accessing alternative perspectives, particularly among the youth and middle class.

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<sup>28</sup> According to two former local reporters

<sup>29</sup> According to a former local reporter

<sup>30</sup> According to a leading international Central Asia expert

<sup>31</sup> According to a Turkmen journalist in exile

<sup>32</sup> According to a senior Turkmen journalist in exile

However, government censorship impedes the free flow of information online, limiting the reach of exiled or international media outlets striving to provide independent coverage.

- *Ownership and Transparency:* The government does not make any registries of the licensed media outlets publicly available. Ownership of media outlets remains opaque, with affiliations predominantly tied to government ministries or individuals connected to the ruling family.<sup>33</sup> Foreign influence also permeates the media landscape, with some outlets affiliated with Russia-based media, promoting Russian economic interests in Turkmenistan.
- *Challenges in Assessing Media Reach:* Verifying media reach presents significant challenges due to limited transparency and government restrictions. Television and radio consumption figures are difficult to verify, while print media lacks publicly shared circulation data. Digital media face obstacles due to internet censorship, hampering accurate assessments of audience engagement. Due to these severe restrictions, very few media outlets are represented on social media platforms. Distrust in media, a culture of paranoia, and low media literacy further complicate reach assessment.
- *Low-Quality Reporting:* Domestic media predominantly serve as government mouthpieces, perpetuating state-endorsed narratives while stifling dissenting voices. Any sensitive issues, like Russia's invasion of Ukraine, are not discussed in the media.<sup>34</sup> Independent media operating in exile face obstacles in maintaining reliable sources and disseminating information within the country.

## E. Uzbekistan

For Uzbekistan, the matrix was populated by referencing widely cited media outlets in Western academic and journalistic reports, while capturing local media consumption habits through national language searches. The research team also utilized a web tool to access information on the top Telegram channels in the country to capture the significance of social media, particularly among urban youth in Uzbekistan. This tool provided insights not only into accredited news outlets but also popular amateur bloggers. The media environment in Uzbekistan has historically been marked by state-controlled outlets. However, recent reforms, under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, have brought about a shift towards greater media independence, but many problems persist. The media landscape in Uzbekistan is characterized by a complex interplay of traditional and digital media outlets, with significant influence exerted by state-funded media. While traditional television remains a primary source of news for many, there has been a notable shift towards digital platforms, particularly Telegram channels and social media, driven by the accessibility and perceived independence of these channels. However, concerns regarding media ownership, regulatory frameworks, editorial independence, and self-censorship persist, limiting the diversity of perspectives and the quality of journalism in the country. The government maintains a significant presence in the media sector, with state-funded outlets dominating the broadcast sphere and exerting control over digital media through various means. Despite challenges, there are emerging trends indicating a growing appetite for diverse and critical reporting, especially among younger audiences, facilitated by advancements in digital technology.

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<sup>33</sup> According to a senior Turkmen journalist in exile

<sup>34</sup> According to a senior Turkmen journalist in exile

- *Government Control:* Traditional state-controlled media coexist with emerging digital platforms, allowing for a broader range of perspectives, but despite these positive changes, government influence, even over independent media, remains significant, leading to self-censorship to avoid crossing perceived boundaries. Government control has led to regulatory frameworks in Uzbekistan that place significant constraints on journalistic practices, often leading to self-censorship and limited freedom of expression. Certain topics, such as government criticism, human rights abuses, and religious or ethnic tensions, are considered off-limits, with potential consequences including legal repercussions, harassment, or closure of media outlets.<sup>35</sup> The regulatory framework governing media organizations in Uzbekistan is restrictive. Stringent registration requirements and licensing procedures place significant bureaucratic hurdles on media outlets, potentially deterring new entrants and limiting the diversity of voices in the media landscape. Non-compliance with regulatory requirements can result in severe repercussions, including fines, suspension, or even closure of media outlets, further stifling freedom of expression and independent journalism.<sup>36</sup> Despite efforts to provide diverse perspectives, state-controlled outlets dominate the narrative, resulting in limited representation of dissenting views.
- *Ownership and Transparency:* Data transparency in Uzbekistan has improved in recent years, but significant challenges remain, particularly regarding the transparency of ownership structures. While private ownership exists, there are concerns about transparency and indirect influence, with some outlets suspected of being controlled by politically connected individuals or oligarchs.<sup>37</sup> Efforts have been made to enhance disclosure requirements but discovering ownership details of independent media companies can still be difficult due to the prevalent use of shell companies in tax filings. This opacity hampers efforts to assess the true extent of media ownership and potential conflicts of interest. The lack of transparency surrounding ownership structures contributes to these suspicions, as it becomes challenging to discern the true motivations and agendas behind media content. Media concentration is another significant concern in Uzbekistan's media landscape, although it may not be widely acknowledged due to cultural factors.<sup>38</sup> A handful of major media conglomerates or influential individuals often dominate the market, limiting diversity of perspectives and potentially stifling competition. This concentration of media ownership can have profound implications for media pluralism and the democratic functioning of society.
- *Lack of quality journalism:* Many media outlets in Uzbekistan heavily rely on official government press releases for their news stories, often replicating the language used in these releases. This practice is increasingly recognized by the younger generation, leading them to seek information from non-traditional sources such as Telegram and Instagram bloggers. The rise of digital media and social platforms has challenged traditional journalism in Uzbekistan, with independent bloggers gaining traction and sometimes outpacing traditional media in terms of reach and engagement.<sup>39</sup> There is a greater level of trust between the public and certain non-traditional media outlets, like Telegram blogs, because there is a perception that on social media there is less bias and censorship.<sup>40</sup> According to interlocutors, there is a need for comprehensive initiatives to promote critical thinking skills among the population in an effort to

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<sup>35</sup> According to multiple local private journalists, including one who is close to the presidential administration

<sup>36</sup> According to multiple local private journalists

<sup>37</sup> According to a local private journalist and owner of a private blog

<sup>38</sup> According to a local journalist who is close to the presidential administration

<sup>39</sup> According to two local, independent bloggers

<sup>40</sup> According to local bloggers and Uzbek bloggers in America

increase media literacy.<sup>41</sup> As legal, financial, and political constraints pose significant challenges to media outlets, many journalists are trying to pivot to non-traditional means, but even in this sphere, their ability to operate independently and pursue Western-style investigative journalism is limited. To improve the quality of journalism, greater press freedom, transparency in media ownership, and investment in professional training are needed.<sup>42</sup>

- *Other Challenges:* Acquiring contact information for individuals, including editorial personnel, is nearly impossible. Identification of tax identification numbers (Tax IDs) for private individuals, especially bloggers, is intricate due to privacy laws. In addition, follower counts in the data may not accurately represent genuine local dynamics, as some followers may not be within Uzbekistan or may be non-authentic (e.g., bots). Additionally, resource constraints and infrastructure limitations pose significant barriers to media development and sustainability. Limited access to funding and technological resources restricts innovation and content quality, while inadequate infrastructure, especially in rural areas, hampers information dissemination.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, a lack of media literacy and civic engagement among the population exacerbates challenges, fostering the spread of misinformation and impeding efforts to hold media and government accountable.<sup>44</sup> Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires comprehensive strategies aimed at promoting transparency, improving resource allocation, and enhancing media literacy and civic participation.

## 5. Declining Penetration of Russian Television

The most significant threat of FIMI in the Central Asian Republics arises from broadcasts of Russian state television. However, the penetration of Russian television in the region is declining due to linguistic, technological, and commercial factors. Individuals in Central Asia are increasingly consuming news in local languages, accessing news through digital publishers and social media, and are drawn to new, privately-owned media platforms. In some cases, media regulators in Central Asia have even blocked broadcasts from Russian networks, owing to concerns over foreign influence and propaganda.

A recent USAID-funded report on media consumption in Kyrgyzstan, published by research firm Mvector in 2023 and based on a representative survey conducted every six years, highlights several key trends.<sup>45</sup> TV penetration nationally has dropped from 88% to 65%. Although 89% of respondents had a television set at home, more people are using them for streaming services and watching TV channels on smart TVs through dedicated apps rather than via antenna or cable reception. Language preferences for television viewing are split, with 49% of respondents preferring to watch television in Kyrgyz and 44% in Russian. There has been a significant drop in television viewing across the country, particularly during the day. Peak prime-time viewership in 2017 was at 35% nationally, but this dropped to 15.7% in 2023. Russian TV channels, such as Rossiya RTR and Perviy Kanal, now rank 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> in terms of viewership popularity nationally.

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<sup>41</sup> According to multiple local journalists who have received training by Western governments

<sup>42</sup> As requested by local journalists

<sup>43</sup> According to Uzbek students studying abroad

<sup>44</sup> According to local bloggers and Uzbek bloggers in America

<sup>45</sup> “Исследование медиапотребления в Кыргызстане,” MVector, (2023).

<https://mediasabak.org/media/library/2024/01/27/c339b41bf384412e85995410242a5675.pdf>.

Similarly, a 2022 poll conducted by Tajik polling companies Mashvarati Rasonai and Zerkalo indicate that long-popular Russian television channels have seen a decline in their viewership in recent years.<sup>46</sup> Four Russian state-owned media outlets have a physical presence in Tajikistan, including physical office space or local bureaus and broadcasting infrastructure. Russian news channels continue to shape public opinion in many Tajik households. But the overall fall in viewership can be attributed to the decline in the use of the Russian language, the growing popularity of social media among the younger generation, and the increasing diversity of Iranian, Turkish, and Uzbek television channels available in the country.

In January 2024, Kazakh state television operator TVCOM blocked the broadcast of several stations belonging to Russia’s Channel One, a state broadcaster, citing a desire to reduce the presence of foreign news channels in the local television market. In August 2023, TVCOM had blocked the Russian network “Tsargrad” owing to “signs of extremism” in the broadcaster’s programming. Lawmakers in Uzbekistan have similarly highlighted the need to curtail Russian broadcasts in the country, although no formal step has been taken to do so. Declining viewership of television and diminished preferences for Russian-language programming appear to be significant factors contributing to a reduction in the risk of FIMI in the Central Asian Republics.

## 6. Recommendations

For international organizations and governments, supporting the advancement of media freedom and independent journalism in Central Asia necessitates targeted strategies and sustained engagement. Capacity-building initiatives aimed at strengthening the skills, resources, and resilience of local journalists and media outlets to withstand pressure and censorship should be a priority. This includes providing training on digital security, fundamentals of journalism, investigative reporting, legal protections, audience engagement, financial sustainability, and ethical journalism standards. Five recommendations for actions are presented in the table below.

*Table 5: Policy Recommendations for Policymakers*

<b>1. Enhance Transparency of Media Ownership</b>
<p><i>Supporting the implementation of robust regulatory frameworks to ensure the holistic approach to transparency in media ownership across Central Asia.</i> Currently, Central Asian governments are selectively addressing the lack of transparency through the creation of “foreign agent laws,” which punitively target those media platforms that receive foreign funding. European Union regulations may provide an inspiration for a more holistic model, as in the example of Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)1 of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers to member states on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership. This recommendation proposes a regulatory framework that can allow for the “essential for the regulation of media ownership transparency, so that the disclosed data can be made useful for the purposes of safeguarding media and information pluralism.”<sup>47</sup> Establishing independent media regulatory bodies to oversee compliance will further reinforce such initiatives. International organizations can assist by providing technical support and frameworks for transparency, fostering a more accountable and independent</p>

<sup>46</sup> “Tajiks Watching Less Russian TV, But Its News Still Shapes Public Opinion,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (June 2022). <https://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-russian-television-news-public-opinion/31887824.html>

<sup>47</sup> “Transparency of Media Ownership,” European Audiovisual Observatory (2021). <https://rm.coe.int/iris-special-2021-02en-transparency-of-media-ownership/1680a57bf0>

media environment. This action is important to mitigate the risk of manipulation and ensure that media entities operate with integrity and accountability.

## **2. Strengthen Journalistic Integrity and Media Literacy**

*Investing in comprehensive training programs for media owners, editors, and journalists to improve reporting quality and ethical standards.*

Encouraging investigative journalism by providing trainings, grants and resources to independent media outlets is essential. Additionally, implementing media literacy programs dedicated to the general population will help citizens critically assess information sources, reducing susceptibility to disinformation and foreign information manipulation. Cooperation with NGOs and international bodies can amplify these efforts, ensuring widespread reach and impact. This initiative will enhance the overall quality of journalism and equip the public with the tools to discern credible information, thereby fortifying the information environment against FIMI.

## **3. Promote Digital Media Security and Pluralism**

*Assisting in developing policies that protect digital media from censorship and cyber-attacks, ensuring a safe environment for independent online journalism.*

Supporting the creation of diverse digital media platforms, particularly in countries with stringent media controls like Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, is critical. Establishing partnerships with global tech firms to enhance cybersecurity measures and safeguard digital platforms from manipulation is also necessary. Additionally, encouraging local content creation and distribution to reflect diverse perspectives will bolster media pluralism and resilience against disinformation campaigns. These measures will help maintain a vibrant and secure digital media landscape, essential for independent journalism and informed public discourse.

## **4. Support Development of Sustainable Media Business Models**

*Focusing on strengthening journalism in Central Asia by supporting the development of sustainable media business models.*

While training for journalists and improving the legal and regulatory environment is important, there is a need to address the financial viability of media outlets. Today, private-sector media outlets have emerged as a growing source of news and information for the publics across Central Asia. This positive development has contributed to a more open media environment in which journalists are providing transparency and accountability for increasingly engaged publics. However, privately-owned media outlets remain overwhelmingly dependent on advertisement and sponsored content to fund their operations. These revenue streams incentivise editors and journalists to publish news that generates a high volume of traffic. Additionally, the reliance on sponsored content disincentivises incisive journalism about businesses and their activities and forces businesses to pay to generate media coverage, even for news that is in the public interest. As made clear during the interviews conducted for this report, many media platforms operate at a loss and are supported by a single sponsor, usually a high-net worth individual. This can leave media outlets vulnerable to being co-opted for political aims, including FIMI. To support the further development of the media ecosystem in Central Asia, a new effort is needed to enable publishers, editors, journalists, and policymakers from across the region to learn how they can adopt more successful and sustainable business models that provide a basis for impactful journalism and editorial independence. The media landscape in Central Asia has advanced considerably in the subsequent years, with new economic realities, new social and political dynamics, and new technologies. Therefore, new initiatives are needed.

## **5. Support Regional Collaboration on Media Production**

*Facilitating greater collaboration among journalists and editors across Central Asia to address common challenges and reduce reliance on external narratives.*

Financial incentives, grants, and training programs for local media producers can help promote the production of high-quality local content. Encouraging collaborations between regional media outlets to share resources and best practices will foster a more interconnected and resilient media landscape. Establishing regional journalism networks can collectively address issues of mutual concern and build a vibrant local media ecosystem that is less vulnerable to foreign influence. This collaborative approach will enhance the quality of regional journalism and better serve the informational needs of Central Asian audiences.

## **7. Media-Focused Projects by Non-EU Stakeholders**

When looking to act on such recommendations, it is important to note that international stakeholders have been successfully implemented media-focused projects in Central Asia, working closely with local media organizations and non-governmental and governmental stakeholders. These projects can serve as a model for future initiatives. In Uzbekistan, UNESCO has recently launched an initiative in Uzbekistan seeking to improve “media legislation and access to information, media development, and media literacy to enhance government capacity and citizen engagement.”<sup>48</sup> Implemented in partnership with the Agency of Information and Mass Communications, a government body, the project promotes open dialogue among policymakers, media professionals, and citizens. It includes cooperation with judicial actors and law enforcement to strengthen the rule of law, develop guidelines for media-law enforcement relations, and ensure police transparency through effective communication. Additionally, the program supports a media and information literacy strategy to equip both government and citizens with skills to navigate and assess information sources. Research, workshops, training, and awareness campaigns will be conducted in collaboration with local organizations to ensure sustainability and inclusivity. In Kyrgyzstan, USAID has renewed a longstanding project called Media-K, which “works to increase the viability, professionalism, and vibrancy of independent Kyrgyz media.”<sup>49</sup> The program focuses on improving the financial sustainability of regional Kyrgyz-language media, funding high-quality local content, expanding the availability of quality journalism, and providing extensive training for journalists. It also supports annual forums, TV audience measurement, legal literacy, and resilience against disinformation. The five-year project launched in October 2022 and is implemented by Freedom House and Internews Kyrgyzstan. Media-K is part of a series of USAID funded programmes focused on strengthening journalism and improving media literacy in Central Asia.

## **8. Conclusion**

The transformation of the media landscape in Central Asia, driven by the rapid adoption of smartphones, increased use of social media, and the rise of new media formats, presents both opportunities and challenges for the region. The European External Action Service’s East

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<sup>48</sup> UNESCO. "Transforming the Media Landscape in Uzbekistan." UNESCO. Accessed June 14, 2024. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/transforming-media-landscape-uzbekistan>.

<sup>49</sup> USAID. "Media in the Kyrgyz Republic: Media-K Continued." U.S. Agency for International Development. Accessed June 14, 2024. <https://www.usaid.gov/kyrgyz-republic/fact-sheets/media-kyrgyzstan-media-k-continued>.

Stratcom Task Force (ESTF) commissioned the Central Asia Media Ownership and Mapping (CAMOM) project to fill the knowledge gaps regarding media ownership in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. This report aims to provide policymakers and communicators with the necessary insights to navigate the complex information environment and devise effective strategies to counter foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI). The Central Asian media landscape is varied. Kazakhstan's media is predominantly state controlled but sees emerging independent online journalism; Kyrgyzstan has a diverse media environment facing increasing government pressure; Tajikistan is marked by overwhelming government control and restricted independent reporting; Turkmenistan experiences absolute government control with stringent censorship; and Uzbekistan, while showing signs of reform, still struggles with significant state influence.

A review of over 200 media outlets revealed limited evidence of FIMI. Even so, concerning conditions persist. These include non-transparent media ownership, pervasive self-censorship, low-quality reporting, and challenges in assessing media reach. Such conditions not only undermine media freedom but also create an information environment susceptible to manipulation. Understanding these dynamics is crucial. The persistence of these issues highlights the importance of supporting initiatives that improve journalistic skills and leverage new technologies. Promoting media outlets that demonstrate editorial independence and integrity is essential. Drawing on successful global initiatives can help foster a robust media ecosystem resistant to FIMI. Ultimately, the recommendations in this report aim to enhance media quality, independence, and transparency across the Central Asian Republics, ensuring a more informed public and an improved outlook for political participation by ordinary citizens. Addressing these challenges can contribute to a more resilient information environment, reducing the long-term risks associated with foreign manipulation and fostering a more robust and independent media landscape in the region.

## 9. Annex: Matrix Summary Tables

### Kazakhstan

1	KZAST2010	The Astana Times
2	KZTEN2010	Tengri News
3	KZVLA2012	Vlast.kz
4	KZZAK1999	Zakon.kz
5	KZAIR2022	AIRAN MEDIA
6	KZQAZ1994	Qazaqstan TV
7	KZKHA2008	Khabar
8	KZKHA2012	Khabar24
9	KZPER1997	Perviy Kanal Evraziya
10	KZKTK1990	KTK
11	KZ31K1998	31 Kanal
12	KZNOV2004	Novoe televidenie
13	KZORD2020	Orda.kz
14	KZMAS2019	masa.media
15	KZELZ2012	El.kz
16	KZBAQ2010	Baq.kz
17	KZNUR2009	Nur.kz
18	KZCAR2006	Caravan

19	KZKAZ2010	Kazakhstan Today
20	KZINF2015	Informburo
21	KZKUR2002	Kursiv
22	KZFOR2011	Forbes Kazakhstan
23	KZVIL2017	The Village Kazakhstan
24	KZ3652014	365info.kz
25	KZAZA2013	Azattyq Ryhy
26	KZKAZ2013	Kazinform
27	KZBES2022	5 media
28	KZRAT2013	Ratel.kz
29	KZNEW2013	NewTimes.kz
30	KZKAZ1991	Kazakhstanskaya Pravda
31	KZEGE1991	Egemen Qazaqstan
32	KZULY2021	Ulys Media
33	KZGIP2019	Giperborey
34	KZJUR2015	Jurttyn Balasy
35	KZQUM2019	Qumash
36	KZINB2016	Inbusiness.kz
37	KZZAN2019	Za nami uzhe vyehali
38	KZFAC2017	Factcheck.kz
39	KZVRE1999	Vremya
40	KZKOM2002	Komsomolkaya Pravda Kazakhtan
41	KZAIF2006	AiF Kazakhstan
42	KZAST2004	Astana TV
43	KZZTB2019	ZTB News
44	KZKOZ2020	Kozachkov offside
45	KZNUR2019	Nursultanskiy solovey
46	KZZLO2020	Zlobnaya tateshka
47	KZZON2000	Zona.kz
48	KZDEL2006	Delovoy Kazakhstan
49	KZKAZ2008	KazTag
50	KZAST2016	Astanovka98
51	KZKAP2005	Kapital
52	KZSH2017	Shymkent Online
53	KZOTY1994	Otyrar.kz
54	KZVEC1968	Vecherniy Almaty
55	KZDIA1996	Diapazon
56	KZAKT2007	Aktobe Times
57	KZKAR2009	eKaraganda.kz
58	KZ5KA2012	5 Kanal
59	KZPAV2014	Pavon.kz
60	KZBIZ2022	Bizdin Oskemen
61	KZAKZ1991	Ak Zhayyk
62	KZRES2017	Respublika.kz.media

### Kyrgyzstan

1	KGKLO2007	Kloop.kg
2	KGKAK2017	Kaktus.media

3	KG24K2016	24.kg
4	KGECO2018	Economist.kg
5	KGVES2013	Vesti.kg
6	KGUTR1991	UTRK
7	KGALA2016	Ala-Too 24
8	KGKYR1999	Kyrgyzstan Obondoru
9	KGMAR2010	Maral FM
10	KGARC2021	Archa Media
11	KGNEW2015	News.kg
12	KGKNE2011	Knews
13	KGAKI2000	AKIpress
14	KGNTS2011	NTS
15	KGMED2020	Mediahub.kg
16	KGBAS2021	Bashta
17	KGBAS2020	Bashtan Bashta
18	KGTV12019	TV1.KG
19	KGELT2015	ELTR
20	KGBUL2018	Bulak.kg
21	KGAPR2018	Telekanal Aprel'
22	KGVEC1996	Vecherniy Bishkek
23	KGKAB2014	Kabarlar
24	KGKYR2016	kyrgyznews
25	KGSOK2019	SOKOL Media
26	KGSER2018	SuperTV
27	KGFAC2018	Factcheck.kg
28	KGPOL2016	Politklinika
29	KGAKC2013	Akchabar
30	KGTME2018	T-Media
31	KGGOV2017	Govori.tv
32	KGTEM2020	Temirov LIVE
33	KGAYT2021	Ayt Ayt Dese
34	KGBIS2021	Bishkek24
35	KGNOV2014	Novye Litsa
36	KGTAZ2008	Tazabek
37	KGTUR2018	Turmush
38	KGKAB2001	Kabar
39	KGKER2019	Kereez Media
40	KGNEW2014	NewTV
41	KGNAZ2019	NazarNews
42	KGKOM2004	Komsomolskaya Pravda KG
43	KGAIK2011	Argumenty i Fakty
44	KGMKA2011	MK-Aziya
45	KGAZI2009	Aziya News
46	KGDLY2001	Dlya Vas
47	KGKYR1991	Kyrgyz Tuusu
48	KGERK1997	Erkin-Too
49	KZSUP2002	Super-Info
50	KZSAL2002	Salam Media

**Tajikistan**

1	TJASI1995	Asia Plus
2	TJASI2002	Asia Plus Radio
3	TJVEC2011	Vecherka
4	TJYOU2019	Your.tj
5	TJSFA2005	TV Safina
6	TJBAH2006	TV Bahoriston
7	TJBON2010	Bonuvoni Tojikistan
8	TJTOJ1959	TV Tojikiston
9	TJSPU2014	Sputnik Tajikistan
10	TJFAR2012	Faraj
11	TJBOM2013	Bomdod
12	TJPAM2019	Pamir Inside
13	TJLOV2013	Love Radio
14	TJKHO1925	National Information Agency Khovar
15	TJVAT2003	Vatan Radio
16	TJJAH2008	TV Jahonnamo
17	TJTAN2012	TV Tanin
18	TJREG1993	TV Regar
19	TJSHA2017	TV Shahnavez
20	TJKUL1992	TV Kulob
21	TJSUG2008	TV Sugd
22	TJBAD2008	TV Badakhshon
23	TJKHA1993	TV Khatlon
24	TJDUS2017	TV Dushanbe
25	TJHAL2020	Halva
26	TJSAD1991	Sadoi Mardum
27	TJJUM1995	Jumhuriyat
28	TJAVE2004	Avesta
29	TJPRE1992	Pressa
30	TJOIL2009	Oila
31	TJOZO2011	Ozodagon
32	TJRAD1999	Radio Ozodi
33	TJSAD1999	Sadoi Dushanbe
34	TJFAC2018	Factcheck.tj

**Turkmenistan**

1	TMTUR2010	Turkmen.News
2	TMCHR2006	Chronicles of Turkmenistan
3	TMGUN2001	Gundogar
4	TMNEU1924	Neutral Turkmenistan
5	TMTUR1920	Turkmenistan
6	TMVAT	Watan

7	TMGAL	Galkynys
8	TMVAT	Watan
9	TMTUR2012	Turkmen Dovlet Habarlary
10	TMORI2017	Orient
12	TMTUR2011	Turkmen TV
13	TMTUR	Turkmenistan Live
14	TMARZ2012	Arzuw News
15	TMGUN2013	Gundogar News
16	TMJEY2019	Jeyhun News
19	TMTUR	Turkmen Habar
20	TMTUR	Turkmen Inform
21	TMTUR2000	Turkmenistan
22	TMTUR2017	Turkmenistan Altyn Asyr
23	TMTUR2005	Turkmenistan Info
24	TMTUR2011	Turkmen Portal
25	TMAZA1953	Azatlyk Radiosy
26	TMTUR2016	Turkmen Yurt
27	TMZEN1931	Zenan Kalby
28	TMINF2008	Infoabad
29	TMBUS2019	Business Turkmenistan
30	TMINA2019	InAshgabat

### Uzbekistan

1	UZKUN2012	Kun.uz
3	UZBAK2019	Bakiroo
4	UZQAL2018	Qalampir.uz
5	UZNAR1991	Narodnoye Slovo
6	UZZOR2017	Zo'r TV
7	UZEFF2019	Effekt Makarenko
8	UZUZR1999	UzReport
9	UZDAV2017	Davletovuz
10	UZAME1942	Amerika Ovozi
11	UZPRU2022	PR.uz
12	UZYOS2000	Yoshlar Ovozi Radio
13	UZORI2000	Oriat FM
14	UZDAR2015	Daryo.uz
15	UZSPO2017	Spot.uz
16	UZHUM2019	Human.uz
17	UZKHA1991	Khalq Sozi
18	UZTRO2016	Troll.uz
19	UZUZA1991	UZA
20	UZGAZ2009	Gazeta.uz
21	UZSAM1990	Samarkandnews.uz
22	UZARG1978	Argumenty i Fakty
23	UZVOD1998	Vodiy Sadosi
24	UZXAB1992	xabar.uz
25	UZFAY2017	Fayzbog'
26	UZRAS2019	Rasul Kusherbayev

27	UZRAD1953	Radio Ozodlik
28	UZOZB2017	O'zbekiston 24
29	UZNAM1995	Namanganliklar.Uz
30	UZNUZ2014	Nuz.uz
31	UZDUN1991	Dunyo

## 10. Annex: Elements of the CAMOM Matrix

<p><b>Section 1: Unique Identifier</b></p> <p>In this section, each media outlet is assigned an alphanumeric identifier. This allows for the precise identification of the media outlet, as some outlets have similar names. The identifier is comprised of the two-letter code (ISO Alpha-2) for the country in which the media outlet is registered, followed by the first three letters of the publication name and the year it was established.</p>
<p><b>Section 2: Type and Reach</b></p> <p>In this section, the type of media outlet is identified, and basic information is collected to provide an indication of the size of the media outlet’s audience. Key details include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Location:</i> Reflects the location in which the media outlet is primarily based. Some media outlets serving audiences in the Central Asian Republics are not based in the region.</li> <li>• <i>Type:</i> Includes blog website, digital publisher, print newspaper, Telegram channel, television broadcaster, radio station, Instagram account, and YouTube channel</li> <li>• <i>Circulation (if a print publication):</i> The approximate number of issues published each day/week/month.</li> <li>• <i>Television or Radio Audiences:</i> The estimated reach of TV and radio broadcasters, which can be inferred from surveys on media consumption.</li> <li>• <i>Language:</i> The languages in which the media outlet publishes news.</li> <li>• <i>Website:</i> The primary URL of the media outlet.</li> <li>• <i>Social Media Channels and Follower Count:</i> Links to all Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube and Telegram channels associated with the media outlet and their respective follower counts.</li> <li>• <i>Level of Activity:</i> An estimate of the frequency with which the media outlet publishes news.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Section 3: Revenue Model</b></p> <p>The revenue model of a given media outlet can have a bearing on the nature of the reporting it does. In this section, information is collected on how the media outlet appears to be funded. Types of revenue include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>State Funding:</i> Applies if the media outlet is funded by a government ministry or body.</li> <li>• <i>Private backer:</i> Applies when the media outlet is supported financially by a company or private individual.</li> <li>• <i>Grant Funding:</i> Applies if the media outlet receives grant funding from a government or non-government donor. Owing to the sensitive media environment in the region, most media outlets receiving grants would not disclose this fact, so information may need to be gathered from other sources.</li> <li>• <i>Advertisements:</i> Applies when the media outlet runs advertisements in print or online.</li> <li>• <i>Sponsored Content:</i> Applies if the media outlet produces articles or social media posts on a paid basis.</li> <li>• <i>Paid Events:</i> Applies if the media outlet appears to be running its own sponsored or ticketed events.</li> <li>• <i>Monetized YouTube:</i> Applies if the media outlet has monetized its YouTube channel meaning it draws revenue from YouTube ads that play during its video content.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Section 4: Contact Details</b></p> <p>The contact details provided on the media outlet’s website (email and phone number) are collected from the open sources and included. Where possible, the most senior editorial decision maker at the media outlet is identified by name. Central Asian media outlets rarely have defined “mastheads” in</p>

which editorial roles are defined and in many cases these outlets lack a clear management structure. In addition, these roles change rapidly, so the information collected requires regular updating to remain up to date.

#### **Section 5: Ownership and Control**

The matrix includes information on ownership, including the corporate entity to which the media outlet belongs (if formally incorporated). The name of the corporate entity may differ from the name of the media outlet. In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, ownership information includes the company registration number (tax ID) or the corporate entity and its registered address (which may differ from the address from which the media outlet is operated). In Tajikistan, this information does not appear to be available. In Turkmenistan, this information is not available at all. Where possible, ownership information includes the date of incorporation and the names of shareholders. The matrix only includes information on the current owner of the media outlet. The date of founding of the media outlet can differ from the date of establishment of the corporate entity. If the corporate entity is younger than the media outlet, this may indicate that there was a transfer of ownership in the past. In some cases, the Central Asian Republics require media outlets to be licensed. In this case, the “media registration number” associated with the corporate entity has also been included. The question of legal owner of the media outlet is distinct from the question of control. It is possible that the corporate entity is a subsidiary of a larger company or is indirectly controlled by another individual or entity through the inclusion of certain directors in that company.

#### **Section 6: Editorial Approach**

The matrix includes five basic questions designed to provide a qualitative assessment of the nature of the media outlet and its editorial approach. While the researchers completed this section of the matrix based on their own review as part of Task 1, their assessment was checked through the research interviews conducted in Task 2. These questions include:

- *What is the reputation of the media outlet among liberal, educated audiences?*
  - To characterise the reputation of media outlets, the researchers will assess how liberal, educated audiences, representing a stratum of sophisticated media consumers in Central Asia perceive the platform.
- *What is the general quality of reporting?*
  - While some media outlets engage in journalism and publish original reporting, many outlets function primarily as news wires, reprinting press releases and news items issued by government bodies or companies.
- *Evidence of domestic influence?*
  - The nature of the media outlet’s reporting may indicate the influence of a domestic organization or actor, such as the government or a politician.
- *Evidence of foreign influence?*
  - The nature of the media outlet’s reporting may indicate influence from a foreign organization or actor, such as the government or a politician.
- *Stance on Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine?*
  - The way the media outlet has reported on Russia’s war in Ukraine, or refrained from doing so, can be considered an indicator of the publication’s degree of independence and editorial approach.
- *Application of Russian narratives?*
  - Some media outlets reproduce or amplify Russian media narratives in ways that advance the influence of Russian propaganda in the Central Asian Republics.