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## CONCEPT PAPER

### MEDIA SUPPORT PROGRAMME



#### SITUATION ANALYSIS

Globally, freedom of information is increasingly being included specifically in recently developed or modified constitutions. According to the general provisions of the constitution, media are free and must function in compliance with the laws. Media are also responsible for the accuracy of the information and censorship is prohibited. In the meantime, most of the constitutions also recognize some rights of access to government-held information. Thus, Article 16(6) of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic allows citizens the right to be “acquainted with personal information” held by governmental bodies. However, these rights of access are immediately followed by general authorizations on protection on state and other secrets, which in practice give great protections than the right to know.

Assessing the present situation with the freedom of speech and activities of independent mass media in Kyrgyzstan, it could be noticed that on one hand, there are no direct threats and pressure on independent mass media on the part of state bodies, however, the government uses other tactics bringing suits and making use of the weakness and dependence of the judicial system (suits against the newspapers “Moya Stolitsa”, “Tribuna”, “Kyrgyz-Ordo”, etc.), as well as by attempting to initiate a number of amendments and addenda to effective legislation. The year 2003 was a very intricate for the Kyrgyz Mass Media market. A series of political developments, such as Aksy events, adoption of amendments to the Constitution and Election Code have raised discussion in the press, which led to clashes between independent press and authorities. Political and economic motives disunite the Kyrgyz media outlets. In particular, there was an attempt to introduce amendments to the Law “On Mass Media”, according to which the responsibility for dissemination of information would be also placed on the mass media founder, as well as an issue of compulsory registration of electronic mass media was raised, and the information disseminated through a computer network should be considered equal to the information published in printed and audio-and-visual mass media. As of July 19, 2002 the Administration of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic approved “the Regulation on the Tendering Procedure to Allocate Frequencies for UHF Television Broadcasting and VHF FM (RM) of Radio Broadcasting”, which, in particular, obliges stations to operate in difficult

to access and remote areas of Kyrgyzstan, which, taking into account the modern development and economic situation of a majority of stations, is infeasible and creates preconditions for closing mass media. Criminal legislation of Kyrgyzstan still envisages the responsibility for slander and indignity, and civil legislation does not stipulate a fair state fee when bringing lawsuits against mass media. The lower house of the Kyrgyz parliament on 9 December adopted amendments to the Election Code that prohibit the publication of campaign materials supporting candidates or parties in foreign media available in Kyrgyzstan. This clause was the cause of considerable dispute as some parliamentarians argued that this would infringe on the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech.

The Kyrgyz state authorities have made several attempts to improve the situation with the freedom of media and access to information through launching several initiatives, also in cooperation with international agencies:

***Establishment of the Media Council*** This decision was taken during the conference "Mutual activity of mass media and civil society in the 2200th year of Kyrgyz statehood", which was held on 12-13 September 2003. This institution was created to protect the interest of journalists and to regulate conflicts and information disputes between journalists, mass media and state bodies. The Council consists of nine people and among them are media workers as well as government officials.

***Opening of Independent Printing House*** Freedom of expression in Kyrgyzstan has taken a small step forward with the Opening of the country's first independently owned printing press. Operated by the Media Support Center Foundation, a local non-profit organization, the new printing press debuted on 14 November 2003 in the capital, Bishkek. Financial support was provided by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Open Society Institute.

The situation with media development in regions of Kyrgyzstan remains to be complicated as well. As independent mass media are mainly located in the capital, the information published by them is mostly related to the capital's problems and the information on regions' problems is published rarely. Inhabitants from remote areas have to obtain information from state mass media, which often provide one-sided materials. Journalists from province to a less extent are ensured with legal and social protection. They also have fewer opportunities to participate in workshops and upgrade their professional skills. Regional mass media do not have sufficient technical and financial possibilities to produce high-quality materials; they often do not have access to information contained in Internet and in foreign publications. The above-mentioned reasons do not allow regional mass media to provide local population with objective and complete information. And without having such information it is difficult to say anything about a possibility of stable and positive changes in the society.

The media are not the sole source of information, but in a world dominated by mass communications it is increasingly the media that determine the political agenda. In this regard, the CiB views the development of the information space satisfying the requirements for implementing the rights to the freedom of speech, expression and access to information as a necessary condition for building a democratic and open society in Kyrgyzstan.

## **INTERVENTION BY KEY ACTORS**

Media development activities have been undertaken by numerous other actors, including international organizations and NGOs. These players and programmes needed to be

considered by the OSCE Centre when planning its own interventions in media related projects. Among the major players implementing media support programmes in Kyrgyzstan are:

***CIMERA- Kyrgyzstan*** currently works on media development and language politics. Within the framework of its Central Asian Media Support Project, Cimera offers professional training for journalists and organizes regional conferences on current regional concerns. CIMERA conducts and supervises research on the situation of the media in the region.

***INTERNEWS –Kyrgyzstan-*** is a non-profit organization that uses global communications to enhance tolerance and understanding. The NGO supports independent media, produces and distributes innovative television programming, and uses the media as a tool to mediate conflict within and between countries. Internews projects are based on the conviction that vigorous and diverse mass media form an essential cornerstone of an open society.

***SOROS FOUNDATION-*** is implementing Mass Media Support programme as one of the major components of the Foundation's activities in Kyrgyzstan. The programme objectives include the following elements: contributing to establishment of an effective self-developing system of Mass Media, Promoting development of independent and free mass media; Ensuring free access and information dissemination, Upgrading professional skills of journalists, Increasing the role of regional mass media in the information space of Kyrgyzstan.

***FREEDOM HOUSE-*** Kyrgyzstan is carrying out a number of projects related to freedom of information and overall media support in Kyrgyzstan. The projects are mainly implemented in cooperation with the National Democratic Institution (NDI) with the objective to strengthen the work of human rights defenders in protecting and promoting human rights and to increase the reporting of human rights issues by journalists. To achieve this Freedom House coordinates the development of reading rooms and discussion groups designed to support civil society development.

***UNDP -*** in the Kyrgyz republic plays a major role in strengthening democratic reforms on the national and local levels through implementation of number of projects including media component in such areas as: elections, anti-corruption, education and border management.

***Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media*** –supports project on media legislation and access to information in Central Asian countries

## **PREVIOUS MEDIA-RELATED ACTIVITIES OF THE CiB**

The Centre hasn't had any media-development programme till 2004. In 2003, it participated in two media-related events: preparation of the 5<sup>th</sup> Central Asian Media Conference in Bishkek organized jointly with the Representative of the Freedom of the Media; and a preparation of a roundtable on access to information, with the participation of representatives from the governmental structures, law enforcement bodies, NGOs and journalists from Osh, Batken and Jalalabat (event was sponsored by ODIHR). In 2004, the Media Unit of the Centre included two major programmes:

***Media Legislation and Media and Information Accessibility and Civic Education in Rural Areas.*** The programmes are aimed at improving the democratic role and legal situation of media in election cycle, as well as focusing on the accessibility of information in rural areas. Under the above mentioned programmes, the Centre has carried out a number of projects, such as:

- Training for journalists and judges on development of judiciary practice related to mass media, particularly with respect to access to information;
- Support of the workshop on development of communication frameworks for access to information between the regional and central press services and media;
- Organization of roundtable discussions between Parliament and Media on objective coverage and improving the mechanisms of monitoring and analyses;
- Participation of the Kyrgyz journalists and Media Commissioner in the 6<sup>th</sup> Central Asian Media Conference in Dushanbe;
- Training and technical support in setting up the regional radio stations in the south;
- Providing technical support for the independent TV station in Osh;

## **OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE CiB MEDIA STRATEGY FOR 2004-05**

The current phase of the Media Support Programme is continuation of our engagement in media development activities in Kyrgyzstan. It is based on both national and regional approach to a broader involvement of civil society, enhancing transparency, anti-corruption and better governance in media. It also takes due account of promoting information accessibility, fostering media potential in conflict prevention activities and development of media legislation, as well as media monitoring in elections that combines the mutually reinforcing activities of professional ethics development and monitoring of the media. Thus, the CiB's systematic approach in support to media development is based on the following programme objectives:

### ***Objective 1: Ensuring free access and information dissemination***

The work of the media in Kyrgyzstan is hindered by the lack of free access to information by governmental and other public bodies. Even though guaranteed by the legislation of Kyrgyzstan, the access to information still suffers from an absence of recognition by the official structures and clear implementation procedures. However, the free access to this information by the media is essential step towards free and democratic media that will in turn contribute to good governance. In this regard, it would be useful the CiB should undertake the following steps to achieve the objective:

### ***Proposed activities:***

- To initiate a dialogue with the representatives of various public bodies with an aim to encourage adoption of a clear and comprehensive system of access to information for journalists by means of regular workshops for media and state press services; (possible partners: Press Service Of President's Administration, CIMERA, Friedrich Ebert Foundation);
- To provide technical and educational support to the regional media (radio, TV stations, media centre), in order to increase the role of regional mass media in the information space of Kyrgyzstan (in collaboration with: BOMCA, Tashkumyr Radio and Osh TV).
- To support measures on media in anti-corruption fight with respect to access to information to the state bodies within the comprehensive anti-corruption programme of the Kyrgyz Republic;
- To follow up the recommendations of the Central Asian Media conferences aimed at ensuring access to information in CA countries and decriminalization of libel laws.

## ***Objective 2: Enhancing the democratic role and legal situation of media in election cycle***

The year of 2005 should become an important milestone in democratic development of Kyrgyzstan due to both parliamentary and presidential elections. The Media, as a monitor of the electoral process, can incorporate integrity into its coverage and reporting of news events, the campaign and the candidates. The voters rely on the media for the transmission of information and on the media's analysis of that information. The role of media in elections is governed by a growing body of law, both at the national and international level.

### ***Proposed activities:***

- To develop Media Election monitoring project, in order to ensure transparent and overall coverage and monitoring of parliamentary and presidential elections (in cooperation with INTERNEWS and CIMERA);
- To work out Memorandum/Code of Ethics for Mass Media in elections (in partnership with Central Election Commission and media representatives) on fair and objective coverage during elections;
- To provide trainings for journalists at central and local level on coverage of elections and news regulations in Election Code;
- To support activities on creation of radio and TV public service announcements on elections, particularly for the rural areas. (In collaboration with "Radio Almaz", Radio "Silk Road", Studio "Beshkempir" and CIMERA)

## ***Objective 3: Fostering media potential in conflict prevention capabilities***

It is important to place emphasis on promoting role of media in conflict prevention, particularly on such topics as ethnic minorities and youth, border management and environmental issues. It is important to direct media interventions to where they are most needed and can be beneficial in combating the use of media in promoting conflict.

### ***Proposed activities:***

- To assist young local journalists in upgrading their professional skills and overall knowledge on democratic processes, which are undergoing in the country through participation in the journalism trainings and OSCE events;
- To support initiatives aimed at fostering interaction between the state bodies, civil society and media outlets in resolving conflicts;
- To have regular discussions on most urgent issues related to prevention of conflicts and role of media in such activities with the most active and key partners.

## **Media related projects of the CiB 2004-2005:**

*Total 2004 budget for the Freedom of the Media Programme: 70,000EURO*

1. *Series of training-seminars "Information accessibility and cooperation between regional and central governmental press bodies and media outlets" (4,567 EURO). The project aimed at development of communication frameworks for access to information between government press bodies and central and rural media outlets. It is meant to provide conditions guaranteeing implementation of constitutional rights to objective and truthful information required for*

strengthening democratic society. Partners: UNDP, the Kyrgyz President's Administration, Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES).

2. *Training and technical support in setting up a new radio station in Tash-Kumyr(south of Kyrgyzstan), (10,000EURO)*. The purpose of establishing the community youth radio is to promote broad-based dialogue between government authorities and local citizens to provide the recipients of the radio station with increased access to ongoing administrative, political social and other issues through various informational and educational programmes both in Russian and Kyrgyz languages. The radio helps to overcome communication obstacles inherent with mountainous terrains and sparse availability of newspapers and generate regional identity by overcoming identities along ethnic lines. Partners: ACDI/VOCA CAIP, Osh Resource Media Centre, Internews, Radio Almaz.
3. *“Promoting democracy and good electoral practices in the run-up to elections in Kyrgyzstan through radio storytellings and TV public service announcements in a contemporary context” (34,000EURO)*. The purpose of the project is to encourage active public participation in the coming elections in the country. A series of PSAs and radio storytellings are being done from a people's perspective: reservations, misgivings and skepticism, which are addressed in a positive fashion, thus encouraging an atmosphere of honest debate, which is the heart of true democracy. Partners: Silk Road Radio, CIMERA.
4. *Media Ethics in Elections - Monitoring (extra budgetary)- 89,000EURO* The project is aimed to conduct monitoring in the run up and during the upcoming local, parliamentary and presidential elections in order to enable impartial and professional monitoring of a balanced selection of central and regional media and provide regular detailed and user-friendly results through publication and distribution of weekly media monitoring reports in printed and electronic form. The reports will be based on the results of both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Seeking to build on the lessons learnt in previous elections, this project would combine mutually reinforcing activities of monitoring of the media coverage during election campaigns and encouraging media to consider development of professional ethics and conduct. Partners: Internews, CIMERA, CEC
5. *Number of project on technical support for the TV station, assistance for journalists participation in the OSCE Central Asian Media Conference, assistance for organization of the trainings for journalists and judges on media ethics, rule of law, OSCE principles, freedom of information, election procedures, etc. Total: 15,000 EURO*. Partners: Internews, CIMERA, FoM,Vienna, Osh TV, NDI.

The schemed of the Media Support Programme is given below:

