



THE REPRESENTATIVE ON FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA

**FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA
AND CORRUPTION**

FOURTH CENTRAL ASIAN MEDIA CONFERENCE
TASHKENT, 26-27 SEPTEMBER 2002

Vienna 2003

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27 September 2002

FOURTH CENTRAL ASIAN MEDIA CONFERENCE

“Freedom of the Media and Corruption”

The annual Central Asian Media Conference was held on 26-27 September 2002 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. The Conference was organized by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Freimut Duve, and the OSCE Centre in Tashkent in co-operation with the Open Society Institute.

For the fourth time more than 100 journalists from all five Central Asian States came together to discuss the latest developments in the media field. The vivid discussions showed again the need for this regional dialogue, especially in light of the tragic events of 11 September 2001. Many journalists affirmed that their working conditions had been deteriorating in the last year. The tendency towards repression was clear, and many cases of media harassment was reported. The critical importance of freedom of the media and the need of public debate was emphasized – especially in times of anti-terrorist conflict.

The main theme of the Conference was corruption as a challenge for freedom of the media. Furthermore the relationship between religious freedom and freedom of expression was discussed.

The deliberations over the two days showed that many of the problems debated in this forum in the last years remain unresolved and therefore the concerns from the Dushanbe and Almaty Declarations were reiterated.

Tashkent Declaration on Freedom of the Media and Corruption

1. The media should be free to play its fundamental role as society's watchdog against corruption, which is a serious obstacle for all countries both East and West.
2. The media should be free to exercise their corrective function towards economic, ecological and military decisions in their coun-

-
- tries especially with regard to investigating the growing danger of corruption.
3. Journalists from all five Central Asian States should continue the practice, started in the framework of this Conference, to exchange views and cooperate, in order to better defend their interests. Solidarity among the journalistic community is imperative.
 4. The international community should continue to observe closely the situation in the field of freedom of the media and support the journalists in their work.
 5. Journalists should be protected while fulfilling their professional tasks, especially when covering controversial topics such as corruption in society.
 6. Members of Parliament must assist in the necessary public debate on corruption.
 7. Functioning independent courts should ensure that laws related to journalists are being fully and fairly implemented.

FREIMUT DUVE

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Representative on Freedom of the Media

26 September 2002

STATEMENT AT THE FOURTH CENTRAL
ASIAN MEDIA CONFERENCE

FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA AND CORRUPTION

TASHKENT

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

We are meeting for the fourth time: this ongoing project that my Office has initiated in 1999 in Bishkek, continued in 2000 in Dushanbe, and in 2001 in Almaty. Now we meet in Tashkent just over a year since the tragic events of 11 September brought in a new political era that mixed together a vigilant approach to fighting terrorism with an apparent inclination by some governments to use that pretext to roll back certain human rights. This includes freedom of expression.

In the Central Asian countries, all of them being participating States of a community, the OSCE, that describes itself as a family of democracies, the tendency towards oppression is very clear. My Office has dealt with many cases of media harassment in the region and I do not expect the situation to change dramatically for the better in the nearest future.

However, to be on the objective side, there is one country where there are at least some positive tendencies, albeit minor ones, that may develop into something worthwhile later on. I am talking about Tajikistan, where the current approach to media freedom is much more *laisser-faire* than it has ever been since the end of the internal military conflict in

1997. In this context, my Office helped set up a drafting committee that is working on a new media law for the country. We will also review all existing media legislation in Tajikistan.

These developments, though, do not overshadow the general deterioration of media freedom in the other four countries, including the former “poster boy” for freedom of expression in the region, Kyrgyzstan. “Structural censorship,” a phenomenon that I have been dealing with for several years, is growing stronger and stronger, used by authorities to repress opposition media and breed self-censorship forcing journalists to ignore stories that might be considered offensive by officials. Either in the capital or, what is more prolific, in one of the provinces.

This is especially true concerning media coverage of corruption, that often has a crippling effect on the newly emerging democracies and on their economies. I still remember President Akaev’s comments to me in one of our earlier meetings when he stressed that for him the role of the media was particularly important as that of a public watchdog on issues like corruption. I myself refer to this role of the media as its “corrective function.”

We have many questions to discuss in the next two days: issues stemming from our previous conference in Almaty where we focused more on how the war against terror had influenced media developments, to such controversial issues as religious freedom and freedom of expression, media and covering corruption, criminal libel and insult laws, another issue that I am very much concerned about. Here the Central Asian countries hold the dubious record for sentencing more journalists to prison terms for insulting politicians than any other OSCE region.

Once again I would like to reiterate my position: no journalist, be it in Germany or in Uzbekistan, should go to prison or even be sentenced to a suspended term for performing his or her professional duties. Period, no exceptions, especially for “insulting” politicians whose level of toler-

ance has to be much higher than that of a private individual who does not go into public service. Just to make a point: serving the public is exactly that and not a financial enrichment option with undue protection against libel thrown in as a fringe benefit.

Today, I also introduce our newest publication: five reports on the media situation in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. They provide a general overview of the current state of media affairs in the country concerned, focus on media legislation and cases of harassment of journalists and provide country-specific recommendations to the governments on what can be done to improve the situation. Our Office and the OSCE field presences in the region stand ready to assist in implementing these recommendations.

As with our previous reports, in this endeavour we have been assisted by outside experts who live in these countries and who have focused on media freedom issues for years. Some of them we name, some, for security reasons, we don't.

But until then, we have a lot of work to do and only two days to discuss all the numerous problems that you as media professionals face today.

Thank you.

I.

**LATEST DEVELOPMENTS FOR THE MEDIA
IN CENTRAL ASIA – ONE YEAR AFTER
11 SEPTEMBER 2001**

Nadezhda Alisheva

LEGAL ASPECTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE KYRGYZ
MEDIA OVER THE LAST YEAR

Tamara Kaleeva

FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM AND THE FREEDOM
OF EXPRESSION CRISIS IN KAZAKHSTAN

Alexander Khamagaev

THE UZBEK MEDIA AFTER ABOLITION
OF CENSORSHIP: DID WE GET MORE FREEDOM

Aysulu Kurbanova

MASS MEDIA DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA –
ONE YEAR AFTER 11 SEPTEMBER 2001

Khurshed Niyozov

THE TAJIK MEDIA ON THE 11 SEPTEMBER
TERRORIST ACTS IN THE USA AND ON OTHER
MANIFESTATIONS OF TERRORISM

Toshpulat Rakhmatullaev

DEVELOPMENT OF CENTRAL ASIAN MEDIA

Inera Safargalieva

LACK OF CONSOLIDATION IN THE JOURNALIST
ASSOCIATION OF UZBEKISTAN

Sergey Vlasenko

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE MEDIA AND
THE STATE AUTHORITIES

Nadezhda Alisheva

LEGAL ASPECTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE KYRGYZ MEDIA OVER THE LAST YEAR

Background Information

Freedom of the press in Kyrgyzstan was proclaimed as early as the beginning of the 1990s, when the Republic gained independence following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The first independent media were registered at that time. For 5 million people, there are now over 800 officially registered media, of which 689 are print media and 129 are electronic. Several dozens of newspapers, TV channels and radio stations currently function on a regular basis.

The law in force allows both legal and physical subjects to institute media, irrespective of the form of property they have. That's why we have both state-owned media and independent private companies. As for their form and content, the media are divided into two categories – governmental and non-governmental.

The State Television and Radio Corporation, which is based in Bishkek, has branches in every region of the country. It broadcasts to the greatest part of the country, but recently its broadcast reception area has diminished, threatening information hunger in more remote regions.

The State Television and Radio Corporation is funded mainly by the state budget, and is currently undergoing reforms. Six months ago, a special commission (the Public Advisory Committee) was established by presidential decree with the aim of working out a new concept for governmental television and radio over a three-month period. The Council consists mainly of governmental employees and parliamentarians and – to a lesser extent – of media representatives. The impetus for establishing the Council was provided by a final report of the State Commission, which investigated the shooting of a peaceful rally in the Aksy Region. The report strongly criticised journalists of the governmental media as “having lost an information war to their colleagues from

the independent press”, meaning by this an insufficient or untimely coverage of major political events in the country. The authorities acknowledged that the only governmental channel broadcasting to the entire country was experiencing a deep crisis and that its operations were to be urgently improved.

To rectify the situation, the government passed the “Resolution on Radical Measures for Developing and Modernizing the TV and Radio Broadcasting Network”. It entrusted the Ministry of Finance to introduce changes and to make amendments to the State Budget Law of the Kyrgyz Republic within one month and to provide Soum 40.882.6000 of additional funding for the State Television and Radio Corporation so that it could pay for the communication service it received.

In addition, the Ministry of Finance together with the Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunications were to find funds and to extend either a grant or an interest-free loan for the rehabilitation of non-operational equipment, for the installation of new automatic television retranslating equipment, and for the improvement of the quality of its broadcasts in the south of the country by 1 September.

Deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh passed the Law “On Procedures of Coverage of Activities of the State Authorities by the Governmental Media”. It seems that the parliamentarians were thus trying to “discipline” the State Television and Radio Corporation and make it an obedient tool in their hands. The Law established priorities – the president, Jogorku Kenesh, chambers, government, local authorities and courts. The governmental media are obliged to ensure the full coverage of all major events in the country. Moreover, the television and radio broadcasts are to be issued not later than 24 hours after an event takes place. The Law focuses almost completely on the coverage of Jogorku Kenesh’s debates.

However, despite the fact that the Public Advisory Council has been in operation for five months, “the correspondents of the State Television and Radio Corporation continue to work in the same spirit as before, distorting facts, attaching labels and providing stupid comments”, summarises one of the Council’s media members.

In July 2002, meeting with a new government, President Askar Akayev said that one of the main causes of the Aksu events was a hunger for information. According to the president, the people listen mainly to “one-sided broadcasts” and also read “harmful” opposition newspapers that portray governmental authorities in a negative light. “All this causes a protest of the local people.” No doubt he meant the independent media and blamed the “Almaz” radio station.

Currently more than ten private television stations provide alternative broadcasting in Bishkek. Every region has at least one television station, including seven districts of the Bishkek Region. The radio stations are also available in all regional centres. In total, there are twenty of them. They are mostly based in Bishkek, but some, for example, “Almaz” and “Evropa”, are based in other regions.

Unlike print media, electronic media are not involved in politics. One of the reasons is their dependence on the authorities, i.e., on the State Commission for Frequencies and on the Kyrgyz Republic State Communication Agency that issues licences and broadcasting permits. The approved “Regulations on Tender for Allocation of Television and Radio Frequencies” have caused some apprehension about the development of electronic media in the future.

Although the country’s print media are not subject to licensing, they depend strongly on publishing houses. The “Uchkun” Stock Company, which is owned by the government (controlling stock), sometimes introduces “preventive measures” in order to put pressure on the independent print media. Meanwhile, most print media are forced to use its services since no other publishing house has the required machinery for printing large circulation newspapers. Thus, the print media depend fully on the will of the head of this concern, which is a monopoly in the field of newspaper printing.

Due to the efforts of international agencies, including the OSCE, the Republic has embarked on a project to establish an independent publishing house – the International Publishing House. Not happy with the monopolist “Uchkun” State Publishing House, the Kyrgyz media have pointed out over and over again the need to have an independent publishing company.

The less wealthy private newspapers and the small circulation newspapers believe that the new publishing house will charge relatively low prices. Printing services and paper in the CIS countries are more expensive than in the rest of the world. In their opinion: “If new machines and paper are imported from non-CIS countries, the quality of printing will be excellent and prices acceptable.” The independent press, which is pursued on political grounds, links its hopes for survival with this publishing house.

“Even if prices are not lower, the international agencies for the protection of democratic rights and freedoms represented in the management of the publishing house will safeguard from the repressions of local leaders,” say journalists. The new publishing house will also bring them protection from unemployment, ensuring the existence of their newspaper and along with it their jobs.

The two largest newspapers in Kyrgyzstan (“Slovo Kyrgyzstana” and “Kyrgyz Tuusu”) belong to the government. Their circulation is 5,000-6,000. The support provided by the state to the governmental media is much less now than it was during the Soviet period, so such media also have to get involved in commercial activities. In this respect, some of them can be considered relatively free.

Over 70 print media publish their newspapers in the Russian and Kyrgyz languages, except in the southern regions of the country where people speak Uzbek. Circulation of such regional newspapers can be as high as 4,000.

The most independent and well-known newspapers are “Moya Stolitsa – Novosti” issued five days a week (daily circulation is 5,100 and on Fridays 12,000), “Delo No” (40,000 copies), “Agim” (12,000-17,000 copies) and “ResPublika” (5,000 copies).

“Delo No” and “ResPublika” have been published since the beginning of the 1990s. During the same period, the popular Kyrgyz-language newspaper “Asaba” was founded too, though later lawsuits by governmental officers saw to its bankruptcy. People now pursuing pro-governmental newspaper policies bought it out. Actions against editorial houses and journalists end with huge fines that ruin the independent print media or make them bankrupt.

One such case was in 2000. A parliamentarian, T. Usubaliev, brought an action against the “Asaba” newspaper in order to protect his honour and dignity and requested US\$ 1 million of compensation. The court found against the newspaper and in March 2001 the newspaper had to close down. Melis Ashimkanov, a former editor, founded a new newspaper, which is known now as “Agim”.

The authorities take planned unlawful actions against the media with the aim of a total suppression of the freedom of expression in Kyrgyzstan. Any media outlet that tries to tell the truth to the people is immediately branded as an opposition one. As one newspaper wrote: “The existing situation is truly a paradoxical one: the free press in the democratic society has to fight with the democratic government so that the Constitution would not be violated, the democratic laws would function, the principles of the freedom of expression, press, transfer and dissemination of information would be efficient, and the human rights would be observed.”

The governmental authorities use different methods to put pressure on the Kyrgyz media – criminal punishment for libel, court precedents, an imposition of taxes, penalties, etc.

The media people want their media to be economically stable, which is one of the most acute problems. Most of them believe that financial independence would immediately lead to independent broadcasting.

The government has signed several resolutions and initiated a series of draft laws that contradict the Constitution and the legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic.

January was specially devoted to the “freedom of the press”. The Deputy Prime Minister, N. Tanaev, signed a governmental resolution that effected the Provisional Regulations “On Procedures of Editorial Activities”. This paper authorised the Ministry of Justice to exercise supervisory powers, issue licences and suspend publishing activities, though only the courts are supposed to have the authority to do this. The Resolution gave the right to print newspapers only to those companies in which the state has a share. This deprives the people of Kyrgyzstan of the

right to be involved in every possible kind of economic activity and will lead to the direct censorship of independent newspapers.

The governmental officers explain that the passing of this document arose from the need to counteract the publication of leaflets or other printed material by religious extremist centres. However, the main editors of seven independent newspapers (“Agim”, “Advokat”, “Delo No”, “Litsa”, “Moya Stolitsa – Novosti”, “ResPublika”, and “Tribuna”) have issued a statement of protest. They share the opinion that the actual aim of this Resolution was to prevent the establishment of the International Publishing House in Bishkek. They think that it contradicts the Constitution and the country’s laws. It contradicts not only the laws on the freedom of the press but also the law on anti-monopoly policies and the principle of equal protection of all forms of property.

Activists of 15 nongovernmental public organisations also expressed their protest against the Resolution. “In compliance with our by-laws, we issue different information bulletins”, add the leaders of 15 local NGOs in their letter of protest 6 February 2002 to the Head of State. “However, the new resolution of the government would make us refuse to issue them. We consider the governmental resolution to be in a complete violation of the human right for the freedom of expression and for the freedom of religion.”

In order to protect the freedom of expression and to inform the people about the danger of that document, NGOs and international organisations began to arrange roundtable discussions all over the country. Thanks to the efforts of the public, the regulations have been abolished by a governmental resolution. The same officer (N. Tanaev) signed a new resolution, this time in his capacity as elected Prime Minister.

Actions Against the Media and Journalists

A huge increase in the number of lawsuits against the media and journalists make this year different from previous ones.

Seemingly, the increased number of actions for the protection of honour and dignity is an indication of an enhanced value of honour, dignity and good name. On the one hand, it is good that the self-esteem of the people is growing so rapidly.

Still, the social status of the parties of conflicts does not leave ground for special optimism. It is not the rank and file citizens who protect their honour and dignity but mostly the people burdened with power and influence.

Numerous actions are indications of the desire of those in power to punish the “disobedient”, to teach them a lesson for others to see. A plaintiff may (he can fully use this right) make the most bizarre claims and require any amount of compensation for a moral injury caused to him, because the state duty for filing such lawsuits is only Soum 10, or less than 25 cents. The claim for Soum 1 million made by T. Usabaliev, an MP, has been mentioned before.

In our country, the inability and the unwillingness of many people to have freedom of ideas, expression and mass information still prevail. Numerous attempts by bosses at various levels to protect their dignity with court help provide increasing evidence of their intolerance to criticism.

Compared to the court hearings of the last year, when multi-million lawsuits were filed against the media and one newspaper went bankrupt, the arrest and trial of Samangan Orozaliev, a journalist charged with extortion, did not get a big public response. This case is interesting in respect that no Kyrgyz journalist has ever been charged before with extortion (US\$ 1,200). All discussions, hints and fantasies about “mercenary journalists” have remained rumours. Society finally got a precedent when the court found the journalist guilty of blackmail and obtaining bribes from a relative of one of his “heroes”. The sentence exceeded all expectations. Orozaliev was sentenced to nine years, with confiscation of his property. The court passed the highest possible sentence, in compliance with the criminal law (the lowest sentence could be a conditional one).

Although, in the opinion of lawyers, the court passed a very tough sentence – 9-year imprisonment – this case did not worry the journalists.

Conclusion

As regards the global prospects, nobody now will succeed in erasing the centres of freethinking from our country. New newspapers will come

to replace closed popular newspapers and they will work in the same spirit. The democratic process is irreversible, but a constant battle with the media consumes lots of force and resources, thereby hampering the ongoing reforms of the state.

The country's poor economic situation and the financial instability of the media have led to media corruption and to writing articles by order, thereby causing distrust among the people of the media in general. Long-term projects for media support will encourage media stability and will provide support.

Among the weakest points are associations of the republican media. Journalists unite just for the sake of uniting and stop lobbying once they have attained their first objective. The journalistic unions need to have long-term plans of their work. One of the latest attempts in this direction is being undertaken by "Journalists", a public association, which is trying to establish a trade union of journalists.

To conclude, let me give a citation from a popular newspaper. "Speaking about actual achievements of democracy in our country, they usually point to two miracles – free press and independent justice, but we have neither of them." Some people, however, would not agree.

Tamara Kaleeva

FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM AND
THE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION CRISIS IN KAZAKHSTAN

Let me begin with an anecdote. Once, before the Second World War, a collective farmer, having seen a Soviet film “Kuban Cossacks”, asked her neighbour: “What country do they show in the film?” Reading or hearing the statements of Kazakh high-ranking officers on the freedom of expression similarly makes me want to ask: “What country are they speaking about?”

According to the Ministry of Culture, Information and Public Consent (as expressed in an official press release): “The state pursues consecutive policies aimed at the development of the media”, “the democratic processes are developing dynamically in the domestic media”, “over the last two years circulation and broadcasting of the media have tended towards stable growth”, not to mention claims that the media is growing rapidly.

According to the observations not just of our Foundation but also of others, the state of freedom of expression in Kazakhstan is deteriorating year in, year out, and during the last year it has deteriorated so badly that it can now only be described as critical. Judicial persecutions of the media occur on a massive scale. Cases of criminal persecutions against journalists have become more frequent. Our country has become notoriously famous for the criminal persecution of its journalists.

For eight months, from January to September, the monitoring of our Foundation has recorded:

- 23 attacks on journalists and offices of the media;
- 13 cases of threats and calls for violent action against journalists;
- 126 initiated civil and administrative cases;
- 23 criminal charges, of which five are charges of humiliating the honour and dignity of the Kazakh president.

This year the numbers are much higher than last year. In order to clarify what stands behind them, I will list just several headings on our Internet site.

May:

- Activities of the “Irbis” TV Station (Pavlodar) were suspended for 2 months.
- In Aktirau, a printing house of the newspaper “Ak Jayik” was set on fire.
- A “Tana” cable was damaged again (in March the cable was damaged by unknown hooligans who had shot at it with a sniper rifle).
- Journalists of the opposition newspaper “SolDat” were beaten up.
- Office of the newspaper “Delovoye Obozreniye Respubliki” was set on fire.

June:

- The sale of the independent newspaper “Novoye Vremya” (Pavlodar) was prohibited.
- In Pavlodar, the newspapers “ResPublika”, “SolDat” and “Nachnem s ponedelnika” were confiscated.
- Batirkhan Darimbet, a correspondent of the radio “Azattik-Svoboda”, was detained.
- A newspaper was confiscated again in Astana.
- A human skull was planted in the “Ak Jayik” office.
- The TV channels “Irbis” and “6x6” were closed down.
- The first independent radio station “Rifma” was closed down.
- A journalist from Atirau was detained in Pavlodar on charges of humiliating the honour of the Kazakh president.
- Irina Petrusheva, the editor in chief of “Delovoye Obozreniye Respubliki”, was convicted by a criminal court of the Republic of Kazakhstan.
- Sergey Duvanov was interrogated on criminal charges of humiliating the honour of the Kazakh president.

August:

- Artur Platonov, a secretary of the “Solidarnost” Independent Union and the host of the “KTK” channel, was beaten up.
- Sergey Duvanov was beaten up mercilessly in Almaty.
- In Semipalatinsk, editorial boards of opposition newspapers were thrown out onto the street.

September:

- The Kokshetau Prosecutor’s Office confiscated the newspaper “Economy. Finance. Markets”.
- A press secretary in the administration of the Karaganda Province felt offended on behalf of Nursultan Nazarbayev.
- The Western Kazakhstan Prosecutor’s Office tried to find materials that could be considered to be humiliating to the honour of the President of Kazakhstan.
- A bomb search in a printing house, all issues of “SolDat” disappeared.

The situation on the whole can be best described by the words of the head of the OSCE Office in Almaty, Heinrich Haupt, who said in the summer of this year, before leaving Kazakhstan: “Over the last few months in Kazakhstan, almost all critically minded media have disappeared. Some of them have been subjected to administrative sanctions, others have fallen victim to the criminal world, and some have suffered from both of these. Those several of them that have managed to survive are subjected to threats and have to suffer because their future is vague. The mistrust in them held by the authorities can not be justified at all – neither by considerations of security, nor by a global struggle against terrorism, nor by a so-called lack of democratic experience by the young republic.”

At approximately the same time, in the beginning of July, the head of state Nursultan Nazarbayev also gave a very different opinion on the state of the media. From his point of view, everything is well as regards the freedom of expression in the country: “Ninety percent of our media are independent, no censorship exists in Kazakhstan”, although “in

localities, some violations of the laws on the media and on the actions of civil society members can take place”. He responded to such single and infrequent occasions completely in the style of the former party secretaries of the Soviet period: “I can see it and we will introduce some appropriate measures so that the Kazakh laws on the media and on the political parties are strictly adhered to.”

It wasn't until August, when the domestic and foreign human rights organizations reacted strongly to the beating-up of Sergey Duvanov, that the parallel worlds of power and of society came somewhat closer to each other. Following denunciations by the OSCE, the Helsinki Committee, the US State Department, the Committee for Journalists Protection and so on, the Kazakh President also condemned the attack; he demanded that the criminals be found and admitted that a new law on the media was needed. Coming from the top, this completely shattered the all-round defence of the functionaries, who, for almost two years since the last amendments to the media law, had been retorting any criticism by affirming simply that the Kazakh law completely ensured the freedom of expression.

For a long time we have been trying to prove that the Kazakh media law complies poorly with international democratic standards and that the changes to it over the last few years have only weakened the freedom of expression. By the way, the last innovation of this kind was a governmental resolution (in June) about the rules of recording the foreign media. From then on, the foreign media or their dealers were to be recorded by the Ministry of Culture, Information and Public Consent, and they were to obtain an appropriate certificate, being essentially a permission to disseminate information that was valid for one year.

This year, at the initiative of the OSCE Center in Almaty, the International Center of Fighting Against Censorship “Article 19” has conducted an analysis of the Kazakh law and formulated its remarks and recommendations. All deputies, the Ministry of Culture, Information and Public Consent, and the President's administration have received a copy of this memorandum. It has also been published and sent to many media editorial boards. Seemingly the “desired hour has come” – a high-

level approval has been given and serious recommendations are available.

However, the developments in September have given us serious grounds to doubt that the power actually wants to have a democratic law. First, Nursultan Nazarbayev, giving permission to start a new legislative “race”, proposed a very peculiar route. As it is custom to say here, he expressed a wish that the new law should protect journalists from their bosses as well as protect the honour and dignity of the citizens from unjust attacks by journalists. There were no other suggestions.

The actions of our head ministry, the Ministry of Information, call for even less optimism. From so-called confidential sources, we came to know that a working group on drafting a new media law had been set up. We began to negotiate and to correspond with a vice minister. The last outcome of those negotiations was a letter that we received on 24 September, before going to Tashkent. Here are just two citations from it:

“We greet the strivings of the Foundation to assist in drafting a new law...” Then followed a series of polite phrases, the core of which was: “Still it is not possible to include the candidate nominated in your letter into the working group, which is subject to approval by the Prime Minister of the Republic. The said group consists of representatives of ministries and departments at vice-minister level as well as of a number of top managers of public organizations... Despite this, the Ministry of Information expresses its readiness to work together with all concerned organizations on the preparation of the afore-said draft law.”

That is it. Until now we would consider a working group to be an association of specialists gathered to achieve a particular task. It has turned out that our government has a different idea and that being a working group member is a new and honourable title for senior managers. It is not known who, under the disguise of this parade group, will in fact be developing this law. It will in all likelihood be a group of anonymous specialists from the Ministry of Information, Ministry of Justice, Prosecutor’s Office, Committee of National Security, and so on and so forth. The promise that proposals put forward by the public will be taken into account and broadly discussed cannot deceive anyone – we have had

too many campaigns of this kind in our country, when many proposals were collected, but then sorted and taken into account only by functionaries. As a result, the laws that were being passed became more and more reactionary.

Unfortunately, I do not have time to give more details about this and other extremely topical subjects. Concluding my statement, I still do not want to describe freedom of expression in Kazakhstan as a hopeless cause. We and other non-governmental organizations in the country will try to do all we can. However, without the support of international organizations, all our efforts will be almost surely wasted or will have a miserable effect. The role of the OSCE in Central Asia should be growing, not diminishing. In particular, we rely very much on the help of the OSCE Centre in Almaty and on the mission of Mr. Duve, on its adherence to principles and its consistency in the democratic reform of the law on the media. In general, we need to have new, serious and long-term programmes and not just talk about extreme situations.

Alexander Khamagayev

THE UZBEK MEDIA AFTER ABOLITION OF CENSORSHIP:
DID WE GET MORE FREEDOM?

May 2001 was marked by a significant event – the abolition of the inspection for the protection of state secrets in the press; the journalists called the staff very simply “censors”. Months have passed since then, but occasionally our journalists will say: “It would not be bad to have censorship back!” How can this paradox be explained?

Journalists and human rights activists put a lot of effort into trying to abolish censorship. Each and everyone believed that its abolition would bring new life and that the freedom of expression would make it possible for the media to speak about the painful truths. In reality, there has been no drastic turnaround. I remember several shrewd journalists warning when censorship still existed that it would not simply pass away and that it would be replaced by chief editors or other media officials, which would be even worse than any censorship. It looks like this prophecy has come true.

Most of the newspapers have the same format that they used to have. Nobody is in a hurry to expose economic, political or social vice. As for the general public, they get accustomed to being satisfied with what is given to them. For instance, just have a look at what people read in the subway or in other public places. It is easy reading, mainly, the “Darakchi”, the “Tasvir” or the “Prestige”, to find what is sold and at what price, to read gossip about the “stars”, to solve a crossword or to read a horoscope, nothing more. What hurts the most is that the young people are acquiring the same habits too. The readers are forced to read about trivial things and develop a narrow-minded outlook. One should not forget mentioning that the political life of our country is generally non-eventful. Most of the time events comprise the actions and statements of governmental officers, the functioning of the parliament whose members can discuss over 20 laws in two days. How do the existing

parties or public movements function, where and how do they maintain the interests of the people, how do their leaders act? Most people know nothing about this and have no particular interest in it. This situation is real, such public mentality the direct effect of many years of censorship. Is it not the task of the media to wake up the human consciousness?

I want to say that the periodicals, for which the abolition of censorship has opened up the opportunity to fully perform their duty to the public, felt immediate support from their readers. They have realised that they can do much for the people should they guard their interests and overcome an old fear of those in power. Such periodicals have succeeded in making a breakthrough, thereby demonstrating that the struggle for the abolition of censorship has not been futile.

Among such periodicals is “Vremya i Mi”, issued by the non-governmental information agency “Turkeston Press”. It very quickly published several articles that caught the public’s interest. One of them was the article “Import Confusion” of 26 July 2002. For the first time ever in the history of the print media of Uzbekistan, a shade of doubt was cast simultaneously on three governmental resolutions that had affected a “shuttle” traders’ business. The author of the article tried to be impartial in evaluating the situation that had emerged after these resolutions as well as to calculate their possible negative effects. It was extremely important that the article presented the viewpoint of those who were not happy with the resolutions.

Another article published in the same newspaper on 5 July, “Autumn was in the air”, raised the problem of relations between Uzbekistan and the International Monetary Fund. The article concerned a possible scenario of the country’s economic development if reforms continued at the current slow pace. It also made a forecast of the country’s external debt.

All this was an obvious contrast to the existing practices of highlighting economic matters in the major media, which either speak positively about reforms or say nothing at all; critical articles remain within the framework of republican leadership statements.

Despite all bold articles and broadcasts that have appeared after the abolition of censorship, there has been no change in the quality of media

work. Many journalists say that chief editors and their deputies, being afraid of government officers, have themselves taken on the role of censors. It is custom here to care not about a public response, but about what some functionary will say. The outcome of such an approach is sad – people fail to perceive the local media as an impartial, balanced source free from political interference. The experience of the last five months has shown that the abolition of censorship by itself will not mean anything for the social climate. It is necessary for the founders of governmental and non-governmental media as well as for government officers to ensure the independence of editors. Criteria for the selection of materials for a publication should be public significance and a weighted approach, not the opinion of the government functionaries.

Freedom of expression will not be ensured until steps have been undertaken to exclude the involvement of officers and politicians in all aspects of media work. Only then it would become possible for the public to trust the media.

Aysulu Kurbanova**MEDIA DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA – ONE YEAR
AFTER 11 SEPTEMBER 2001**

The 11 September events have turned upside down the lives of thousands of Americans, left a terrible wound in the history of the USA, changed the consciousness of people throughout the world and made us all more intolerant to any manifestations of terrorism or extremism. We share the pain and suffering of all those who survived this tragedy and grieve together with the relatives and friends of those who perished.

I happened to celebrate the start of the third millennium in New York, on Time Square, close to the Twin Towers. Those grandiose celebrations of thousands of people who got together under an open sky will stay in my memory for the rest of my life. I remember my initial fear when a crystal ball burst into pieces above the crowd, and the people went quiet in awe. It was the culmination of the holiday. I can not begin to imagine the feelings of the witnesses of those tragic events that took place a year later.

Our newspaper was the first in the country to respond to the tragedy, providing its commentaries on the front page. Twice the censorship office refused to give the go-ahead to this issue, but stubbornness and a firm confidence among journalists that they were right broke through the censorship barrier and rejected the committee on the protection of state secrets. When it is said that there is not even a semblance of freedom of expression and freedom of the press in Uzbekistan, this is not exactly true. Often many journalists excel in using the Aesopian language in order to say what they need. In other words, media bosses are careful that not even one little word can be seen as offensive to high-ranking officers.

After all, this year can be noted for abolishing the institution of censorship. In fact, it is the first time that I have said the word “censorship” in public, because up until now it has been prohibited to use it. The trick was very intricate – a censor was called a guard of secrets, and as there

was no relevant word, censorship did not officially exist. This did not change anything and the situation deteriorated so badly that – no matter how paradoxical it may sound – the truth was then more frightening than it had been under the Soviet Union.

For over three months all the media in the country functioned under Glavlit, a pillar of the society for 11 years. Do you think that the media ran wild, publishing as many extraordinary articles as they possibly could? This was by no means the case. Initially, they still could not believe that it would be possible to publish something liberal and without a censor's stamp. Then the editors of state media and the founders of independent media discreetly took on the role of the censors themselves.

The abolition of a seemingly indispensable and often simply stupid censor, whose square stamp “for publication” had to approve all materials, has nevertheless become an important step towards the freedom of expression. I consider it to be the greatest democratic achievement, for which closer political interests between Uzbekistan and the USA were of no little significance. We have learned and adapted much from the Americans.

With my harsh words, I have no doubt upset the media bosses, whose personal well-being still directly depends on their loyalty to those in power. However, this will pass. When the media achieves economic independence, young and energetic managers will replace the self-complacent bosses of the media and television.

Such people have already begun to appear; many of them study in America and in Europe. These new people will come and no one can stop them or the change that they will bring with them.

Khurshed Niyozov

THE TAJIK MEDIA ON THE 11 SEPTEMBER TERRORIST ACTS IN THE USA AND ON OTHER MANIFESTATIONS OF TERRORISM

Introduction

The term “terrorism” has been familiar to the Tajik media and to the Tajik people for a long time. First, the republic has gone through the civil war, and second, it borders with Afghanistan, the source of international terrorism. That’s why much has been and is being said in the country about terrorism, and before 11 September the Tajik people knew much more than other people about the situation in Afghanistan. It is worth mentioning that Tajik President Rakhmonov is the only head of state to have visited Afghanistan twice, in 1993 and 1996. In 1998, speaking from a UN rostrum, President Rakhmonov proposed establishing a ring of security around the Islamic State of Afghanistan. However, the leadership of other states did not respond to this appeal. A former president of Afghanistan, B. Rabboni, gave the following assessment to this initiative of President Rakhmonov: “We, President Rakhmonov in Tajikistan and myself in Afghanistan, have many times warned the international community about a danger of proliferation of terrorism, [but] still our apprehensions have not been taken into consideration” (“Tochikiston” Newspaper No 23, 11 October 2001).

The Tajik media have experienced the effects of terrorism. During and after the civil war, 78 Tajik journalists perished at the hands of terrorists; none was killed in warfare, all of them were ruthlessly murdered by unknown groups. That’s probably why the Tajik people did not find anything new about the 11 September events in the USA.

Visiting Dushanbe in the summer of 2001, the leader of the Northern Alliance, A. Masud, spoke about the danger of proliferation of terrorism: “If the USA and other countries do not fight against terrorism, in the end they may suffer from the terrorist attacks themselves.”

11 September 2001:

That day the Tajik people were occupied with their own problems. The terrorist acts of September in Tajikistan began somewhat earlier, on 8 September 2001. That day the Minister of Culture, A. Rakhimov, was killed in the doorway of his house. As usual, the identity of the murderer was not established.

On 9 September, at 8.05 pm, an explosion sounded near the Frunze stadium. This terrorist act was executed by a soldier named Abdugaffor Gafurov, nicknamed “Khamsa”. Fortunately, nobody was injured at the entrance to the stadium, where celebrations of a ten-year anniversary of independence of the Republic of Tajikistan had been planned. On 9 September 2001, terrorists in Afghanistan killed the leader of the Northern Alliance, A. Masud, who was highly respected in Tajikistan.

That’s why after the three terrorist acts, the 11 September tragedy in the USA was perceived by the Tajik people not as something new but as a regular act of international terrorism.

The “Tochikiston” social and political newspaper, issued in the Tajik language, called the murder of A. Masud and the 11 September tragedy to be “the links of one chain” (“Tochikiston”, No 19, 14 September 2001). The newspaper managed to provide coverage of military actions against the Taliban regime from Afghanistan. Though the newspaper had not sent its special correspondents to Afghanistan, two journalists who were cooperating with foreign journalists as interpreters, Akhmadi Nushin and Sultoni Khamad, did not miss their chance. In issue No 22 of 4 October 2001, Akhmadi Nushin wrote from the area of warfare: “Two days before the attack on the USA, A. Masud was murdered. Did anyone think that the murder of A. Masud would be the beginning of the world war against the Taliban?”

The US strikes against the Taliban became a kind of response to the three terrorist acts and brought hope of a peaceful life to the Tajik people.

Did Osama bin Laden Commit It All?

“The 11 September tragedy is no doubt a manifestation of terrorism.” No Tajik media would deny it. However, opinions differ regarding whether it had been committed by Osama or not. President Rakhmonov made the following statement at a meeting with national law-enforcement units: “Tajikistan condemns the acts of terrorism in the USA and those who committed them. Since the early days we support the anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan because the 11 September events were directed not only against the USA but also against the entire international community.”

In another statement, the president said: “Many politicians from different countries connect terrorism and extremism with Islam. In some countries the concepts of terrorism and Islam have even become synonyms. It is equally true that some hostile forces use the Islamic slogans as a cover and commit different criminal actions, defiling thus the Islamic religion. However, it would be the worst mistake to blame Islam for all misfortune caused by terrorists.”

It is necessary to point out that opinions differ on whether Osama bin Laden was the initiator of the tragedy in the USA, and that the answer is negative in most cases. A major-general, S. Kasimov, commander of a rapid response team of the Interior Ministry of Tajikistan, believes that “some other forces stand behind Osama; he is nothing more than a puppet. They say that he has lots of money. Suppose that several modern tanks can be bought for US\$ 100 million. Does he have enough money to buy as many tanks as the Taliban have? Therefore detaining and killing Osama will not put an end to it and terrorism will not be eradicated” (“Tochikiston”, No 23, 11 October 2001).

A journalist, Sulton Hamadov, proposed several statements of the Russian media to the Tajik readers. “The American special services use Osama bin Laden as a horrible puppet to terrify their own people in order to distract attention of the public from those forces that committed this crime” (“Tochikiston”, No 22, 4 October 2001).

The journalist wrote in another article: “Using only force, army and weapons, it will not be possible to solve the No. 1 problem of the world today” (“Tochikiston”, No 18, 2 May 2002).

The newspaper “Asia Plus” No 37 as of 12 September 2002, wrote: “The official version of the terrorist acts in the USA was provided by all the media of the world when the World Trade Center was still in smoke. An exemplary terrorist, Osama bin Laden was chosen to play the role of a scapegoat and the target of retaliation, Afghanistan, as his last shelter. Still now, when the Talibani movement has been defeated, the USA does not stop on the achieved, but identifies new targets – Iraq, Iran and other countries. More and more people begin to think – who actually needs this?”

Mokhbegim Hasankhonova, in an open letter to US President G.W. Bush, wrote: “Mr. Bush, you began your barbaric attack but you know perfectly well that it was not the Afghani people who destroyed the World Trade Center in New York or the Pentagon” (“Tochikiston”, No 24, 18 October 2001).

The Tajik people are not inclined to think that Osama bin Laden was the main organizer of the 11 September events in the USA, maybe because of weak efforts by the pro-American media. Being familiar with the political activities of A. Masud in Tajikistan, most of them share the opinion that the terrorist who could not break down Masud’s resistance for so many years could hardly organize and conduct this global tragedy in the most powerful state of the world.

America in Central Asia

The Tajik media share common views on this subject: “It’s the political interests that brought America to Central Asia and not the fight against terrorism.” The commander of the President’s Guards of the Republic of Tajikistan, Lieutenant General G. Mirzoev, said to a correspondent of the “Tochikiston” newspaper (No 23, 11 October 2001): “If pursuing its political aims linked with the use of the natural resources of Central Asia, the USA ignores the Northern Alliance, it will make a political mistake. The war in Afghanistan will enter a new stage.”

Mazkhabsho Mukhabbatshoev wrote: “The purpose of the military presence of the USA in the region is to enhance a political blockade of the Islamic Republic of Iran, to estrange Russia from a gas- and oil-bearing and cotton-growing region, which is rich in water sources” (“Tochikiston”, 17 January 2002).

Another journalist, Bobochon Kodirov, said: “The purpose of US military bases in the region is to get a lever of influence on China” (“Tochikiston”, No 4, 24 January 2002).

A politologist, I. Sokhibnazar, wrote: “After the 11 September events, the world will be captured by a new crisis. It will affect three components of statehood – political, economic and cultural independence. The great powers are trying to address global problems; however, their efforts are in violation of the rules of international law” (“Tochikiston”, No 23, 15 August 2002).

Another politologist, Latif Yazdonfar, (“Tochikiston”, No 30, 25 July 2002) indicated: “Current developments have shown that under the pretext of finding Osama bin Laden and other terrorists, the USA has come to Central Asia and is settling down there.”

The Tajik media do not believe that the purpose of the US presence in the region is the fight against terrorism, and this is because of poor propaganda by the pro-American media.

The newspaper “Asia Plus” wrote (No 8, January 21st 2002): “The Pentagon is devising programmes of misinforming the media abroad on a number of social and political issues. The headquarters established soon after 11 September have quickly become a kind of specific response of the American administration to the loss of public support, mainly in the Islamic countries.”

Though positive views regarding the American presence in Central Asia exist too, they are not numerous. Gani Abdullo wrote in the “Tochikiston” newspaper: “Some state figures believe that a decree on an amnesty of a journalist Dododzhon Atovulloev, permission for broadcasting by private radio stations, and the repeated investigations into the murder of journalists and politicians to be a negative influence of the West in the country and in the region.”

New Taliban for Tajikistan

As is known, due to the sad state of the country's economy, the majority of males in the country go to work in Russia. According to official data, the number is up to 500,000 but unofficially it has reached 1 million. No entry visas are required for travelling to Russia, which enables our citizens to go to work in Russia without any impediments.

However, the Tajiks are the most deprived resettlers in Russia. It is because they came to the Russian market later than people of other ethnic origins. According to official Russian statistics, the temporary resettlers are the citizens of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Afghanistan, Ukraine and Tajikistan. Tajikistan was gripped by civil war later than the other listed countries. By the time Tajik citizens began to leave for Russia, citizens of other countries had already familiarized themselves with the written and unwritten laws of Russia and had already accumulated an initial capital.

The Tajiks there have no rights, they are persecuted and murdered by the Russian skinheads who are supported to some extent by the Russian law-enforcement bodies. All this causes bad feeling in the Republic.

Speaking at the tenth world forum of the Tajik people, President Rakhmonov condemned such actions. Somewhat earlier (June 2002), at a meeting with the republican law-enforcement bodies, the Tajik president said: "Over the last ten years, terrorism has acquired many different guises in the territory of the former USSR. Different groups and neo-fascist forces have become more active, their attempts to prove that one race is superior over another one add to terrorism and extremism."

I should point out that the stand of the Russian authorities today, and especially of Moscow, with regard to refugees from Tajikistan, is alarming. Such a stand may seem strange because Tajikistan is the main stronghold of Russia in the region and hosts the Russian division 201 that has been turned into a military base. All this makes one think that the Russians are allowed everything! Let me give an example to reinforce my opinion. Law-enforcement bodies in Moscow detained a sixteen-year-old boy, Dgamshed Safolov, and charged him with theft.

The court acquitted the young boy of the crime. However, his birth certificate had been destroyed and so the young boy was kept in the Butirskaya prison for three years. Only after a journalist from NTV spoke in his support and the Tajik embassy intervened was the young boy released. For three years Dgamshed had been beaten. He had attempted to commit suicide three times, and had been on hunger strike twice. The tragedy ended with a complete mental disorder of the young boy. In Tajikistan, Dgamshed was placed in a mental hospital. A journalist from “Djavononi Tođjikiston” met with the patient and was horrified: “Under what law could a sixteen-year-old boy be beaten into such a state? Under what law could an innocent boy be placed in one cell together with murderers and marauders? Under what law was it possible to keep an innocent man in prison for three whole years?” The answer was only one: they can act like this only in the “most democratic” country in the entire post-Soviet world, in the Russian Federation.

The “Djavononi Tođjikiston” newspaper (No 37, 13 September 2002) wrote: “A number of political parties in Moscow have an openly pro-fascist orientation and are supporters of Hitler. I met with a Russian fascist and asked him: ‘Don’t you realise that fascists annihilated 20 million people, many of whom were Russians?’ The skinhead replied: ‘Those who were killed had been guilty themselves. Hitler was promising to bring freedom to Russia. But those people together with you, you black, resisted.’ Isn’t it a strange conclusion? The murderers who wiped out millions of people are friends today, while the black people who rose for the freedom of the Russian land are enemies?”

It’s a wonder why the Moscow police have not detained any of these neo-fascists. The rumours that they act under a patronage of some political forces in power have been confirmed.

As proof of this, the “Asia Plus” Newspaper (25 April 2002), referring to the statements of the “Moskovsky Komsomolets”, wrote: “The Moscow skinheads are trained in a seven-storey building of the Special Police Unit. In the lobby, on a board for advertisements, there are some clips from the “I am Russian” Newspaper. The training instructors are the policemen from the Special Police Unit. The heads of sections kind-

ly welcome skinheads and say to people from outside: ‘Our little children train here’ ”

The same issue of “Asia Plus” provided further information: “A native of Tajikistan was ruthlessly murdered in Surgut. The man was beaten to death by a group of young people. His companion miraculously managed to run away. The violence was being recorded by video. Those young people belong to a skinhead grouping.”

One of the founders of the private press of Tajikistan, Sharif Hamdamov, responded to the words of Mr. Kotenkov, representative of the Russian President in the State Duma, who said: “Moscow is full of beggars and Tajiks.” Mr. Hamdamov remarked: “There should be a difference between the statements of officials and street hooligans. Unfortunately, there is no distance between them when it concerns Tajiks. The ideas of Mr. Kotenkov are similar to the statements of Russian fascists and a link between them can not be excluded.”

Two days after Mr. Kotenkov made a statement, a 30-year-old Tajik, Boyali Radjabov, was ruthlessly killed by neo-fascists in a Moscow subway. No one can suggest how this political game will end. Our refugees who go to Russia in order to earn money for a living have become an important source of additional income for the police, citizen registration departments, pensioners and employers” (“Tochikiston”, No 10, 6 February 2002).

Later on, though with a delay, Mr. Kotenkov officially apologised to the Tajik people. As they say in Tajikistan, an apology of this kind is worse than an acknowledgement of guilt.

Conclusion

Completely new types of terrorism have appeared in the world. Terrorism is terrible in any shape and it cannot be accepted in principle. It should not be approached according to the principle “ours” or “alien”, it should not be identified as “Islamic”, “Christian”, social or political terrorism or terrorism of children or adults, etc.

On the contrary, it is necessary to fight against all manifestations of terrorism, using different methods, but equally ruthlessly. After three

so-called blacks – an Armenian, an Indian and a Tajik – had been murdered in Moscow, the head of the State Interior Department of Moscow did not accuse those who were guilty. He said about the skinheads: “But they are young.”

When Moscow television broadcasts on the subject of terrorism or religious extremism, they will always show some bearded people or 5-6-year-old Muslim children, who first pray and then play with Kalashnikovs. As the head of the State Interior Department would say: “But they are just children.”

Terrorism in any manifestation is an enemy of all mankind. It knows no religion, no ethnic origin, and no colour of the skin. That’s why it should be discussed and condemned by the media, but impartially, fairly and correctly, from many aspects and not just one, so that people and religion would not be brought into confrontation, but on the contrary be united in their fight against a common evil – that of terrorism.

Often I am asked: why do the international human rights organizations, including the OSCE, keep silent about the brutalities of the skinheads in Russia?

Toshpulat Rakhmatullaev

DEVELOPMENT OF CENTRAL ASIAN MEDIA

In 2002, the media of Uzbekistan underwent some changes. These changes can be viewed as positive, even though they were not noticeable in the press, radio or television. In any case, some of the obstacles have been eliminated. On the one hand, changes in the freedom of expression were due to an “internal” factor, or the democratic development of Uzbekistan, and on the other hand they may be attributable to an “external” factor, or the enhanced presence of the West in this region.

Let's focus on these two factors.

The laws and resolutions passed during the last few months may be regarded as a logical continuation of the efforts for the laying down of the legal foundations for the media that began five or six years ago. The “external” factor helped to accelerate their adoption. It was especially relevant in respect of the abolition of censorship in May of this year.

Amendments to the Law “On the Mass Media” were important steps for the journalists of Uzbekistan. Now the work of the media may be suspended only by a court decision, while previously this authority belonged to the body responsible for the registration of the media.

The changes touched on a super powerful department that would control the entire information space of Uzbekistan. This department, the State Committee for Publishing, has lost most of its controlling functions and is known now under its new name of the Information and Publishing Agency.

However, the major and most crucial question is how all these innovations have affected the Uzbek media and whether the media have changed for the better. It is still premature to give an affirmative answer to this question. It would not be realistic to expect positive changes to have taken place overnight. On the other hand, the need for this important decision had been discussed for many years and it is already four

months since the decision on abolition was made. Over this period, several newspapers have published articles on such subjects that previously under censorship would never have been allowed. They covered the environment, unemployment, social issues and other such subjects. In this respect, especially worth mentioning are publications of the newspapers “Mokhiyat” and “Vremya i mi” (both are circulated by the non-governmental information agency “Turkiston-Press”) and of the independent newspaper “Khurriyat”. The “Mokhiyat” newspaper published articles that had earlier been rejected by censorship.

Many experts, both in this country and abroad, and even ordinary readers (as well as TV viewers and radio listeners) still wonder why the situation did not change drastically right after the abolition of censorship? The following considerations should be taken into account:

Experience shows that some factors existing in the developed countries ensure the freedom of expression. Such factors promote the development of media. Among the most important are:

the supremacy of the law in society, an independent judicial power, a division of three branches of power, private ownership of the media, and the existence of forces interested in the freedom of expression, such as the political parties, non-government organizations, and the like. Which of these already exist in our country and to what extent? How do they influence the development of the media?

A significant problem faced by our journalists is the issue of training. Because of a shortage of journalists trained according to modern standards, the workshops and conferences arranged on different levels are especially valuable. In this respect, it is necessary to highlight the big and invaluable contribution made by international organizations and foundations for the development of journalism in Uzbekistan.

Inera Safargalieva

LACK OF CONSOLIDATION IN THE JOURNALIST
ASSOCIATION OF UZBEKISTAN

In my presentation, I want to try to clarify why the community of Uzbek journalists has not yet been consolidated and to propose some possible solutions to this problem. It is not a revelation to anyone if I say that the journalistic community of Uzbekistan is not consolidated because of pressure by the authorities over many years in the shape of both censorship and economic, taxation and regulatory mechanisms. An example is the former State Publishing Committee, which is now an agency, or the Inter-Ministerial Coordination Commission (ICC), responsible for the licensing of all media. I am deeply convinced that another reason for this lack of consolidation of journalists in Uzbekistan is the political and legal illiteracy of most Uzbek journalists who work for the local media. On the whole, this corresponds with the political illiteracy of the bulk of the population in our country. The local Russian-language press is not seeking solidarity because it is estranged from political processes in the country. It is mainly due to the loss of the Russian language's former status and prestige and also to a continuing migration of Russian people. The opposition press, represented mainly by the journalists that work for foreign media, have more opportunities to survive and to remain untouched in the case of conflicts with the authorities, because they are somehow protected by their agencies. It still looks as if they do not need a solidarity of journalists in the country; their personal interests are often closer to them than the interests of the public. The economic situation of such journalists, which is much better than that of local media journalists who earn low salaries and royalties, is also quite important here. A man with a full belly thinks no one is hungry. This is also not conducive to a joint coordination of tasks and interests among Uzbek journalists.

You certainly remember that the Union of Independent Journalists was established in 2001 in Uzbekistan and that its president, Ruslan Sharipov, became a young journalist. Consolidation of the journalists was one of the Union's objectives. However, the Union has not achieved this. In my view, the main reason was the sharply negative response of the Uzbek authorities and the fact that the Union had no professional journalists on its management for whom journalism is a lifestyle, who know about the problems of the Uzbek press not just from hearsay and who actually want to improve the situation with the freedom of expression in Uzbekistan. It became clear to everyone that the Union of Independent Journalists of Uzbekistan was not meant to be. The first step is always the hardest. Still there was a need for an organization that would efficiently help the journalists in fighting for the freedom of expression, and defending their rights for obtaining and disseminating information. I say all this as a journalist, who lives and works in Uzbekistan and who knows all about the hardships and difficulties of a journalist as well as the need for journalistic solidarity. I am not going to promote any populist ideas or slogans, but being at this rostrum I want to state that we, a group of several journalists, declare the establishment of the Uzbek Committee for the Freedom of Expression that will be part of the Central Asian and South Caucasian networks of the freedom of expression. The initiator of this network is the Trade Unions of Journalists of Azerbaijan. It is presumed that international journalistic organizations will become its associate members. The Uzbek Committee for the Freedom of Expression is open for cooperation with all those who wish to work together with us. The major objective is to overcome the separateness of journalists of Uzbekistan, to promote full independence of the Uzbek media, and to develop a dialogue between the authorities, the public and the media, as well as to assist our colleagues in establishing contacts with the international journalist organizations, also with the aim of exchanging working visits. In particular, it has been planned to arrange an exchange of visits by journalists from the Caucasian and Central Asian regions in the near future. This is necessary to give Uzbek journalists an understanding of what the freedom of expression really

means for the media, for instance, in Azerbaijan, where the media are totally independent from the state. Such experience will help our journalists to be more active and to fight with more confidence to gain a true freedom in our country. To conclude my brief presentation, I would like to raise, before the OSCE and other international organizations, the issue of establishing a republican resource centre for free journalists in Tashkent with branches in all our country's provinces. Such a centre could operate under our Committee. Due to economic reasons, most journalists here have no dictaphones, no computers, no access to the Internet, and no access to local, Russian or foreign periodicals on a daily basis. A resource centre of this kind would significantly mobilise our country's journalists.

Sergey Vlasenko

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE MEDIA
AND THE STATE AUTHORITIES

The Constitution is sufficiently precise in its regard for both the state authorities and the media. According to Article 18, section 3, of the Kazakhstan Constitution: “The state authorities, the public associations, the officials and the media should provide every citizen with an opportunity to familiarise themselves with documents, decisions and information sources that touch on their rights and interests.”

As we can see, the duty to inform the public is entrusted equally to both the state authorities and the media. To perform these functions, almost every state authority has established its own press service. These services were established in order to inform the public about the activities of a state body, not just to remind about its existence but to create a positive public opinion about its stable and efficient functioning. For a more benevolent treatment of a state body by the general public, a press service should demonstrate that its activities are aimed at eliminating the social and economic problems that concern society. As has been mentioned, the Constitution states that the media, alongside the state authorities, should equally provide citizens with information that affects their rights. However, it is difficult for the media to compete with the state authorities. The state authorities often create artificial barriers that prevent journalists from obtaining information, despite the fact that the Constitution specifies that “each is entitled to freely get information and disseminate it by every method not prohibited by law”. Establishing such obstacles and posing such limitations on the journalists is not just a violation of the rights of journalists, it is also a violation of the constitutional rights of the Kazakh citizens to obtain information that concerns them.

Journalists of the same kind work in the press services as in the media, but it looks like they stand on different sides of a barricade. They are not

concerned about providing more information on their state body to the public. On the contrary, they try to keep as quiet as possible.

The press services try to keep information to themselves and not to disseminate it. Frequently, they forget what their main purpose really is, or maybe they have the wrong idea about it. It seems that many press services are quite content with the role of an outside observer of communication between the public officers and the media. Not everyone has the skills to communicate with the media or to speak in front of a television camera. But they should develop much quicker if the press service people are involved in the process. The press service should analyse public opinion on the activities of a state body, including tracing information about it in the media. Such monitoring should not, however, end with making a “this-journalist-should-never-step-in-here” decision. On the contrary, if the public has a negative perception of certain government activities, then even more journalists should be invited to cover the measures undertaken in order to boost public opinion.

Quite often, the negative perception of a government body can be the result of shortcomings based on hearsay. The task is not to find the source spreading such hearsay, but to fill in the information gap. Arranging press conferences and inviting more journalists to take part in the body’s events can rectify this. If it turns out that there have in fact been shortcomings, no more lies should be told as it is better to acknowledge them and to mention their causes.

It seems that the fear of speaking openly about the problems of a government body leaves an imprint on activities of the press services. An unwillingness to discuss problems openly will cause the spreading of different rumours in society. Moreover, if the rumours are supported by actual facts that testify against a government body, or if information has not been obtained from the media, then it is not the media that should be blamed. Sooner or later, objective information will reach the public, but it can be surrounded by such details that will agitate the whole of society. This can be avoided if the government body and its press service were more open and more easily accessible from the start.

There is one more interesting point concerning the activities of the press services. On the one hand, it looks like they provide information, but, on the other hand, they do not want to be responsible for it. Here I refer in particular to press releases. If we ask whether a journalist can use a press release obtained from a government body without being afraid of the consequences, most often the answer will be negative, because the journalist simply picked up a press release at some institution. Press releases are not signed by a press service, which means that if the information is not true, the journalist and not the press service will be responsible. Officially the press service should be responsible, because pursuant to Article 26 of the Law “On the Media”, a chief editor and a journalist shall be not responsible for disseminating such information in the media that is not true, should such information have been obtained from a press service of a government body. Sometimes it is easier for a journalist to approach a head of a government body and to get information from him directly.

Having considered some of the main issues in the press services’ role of informing the public about government body activities, let us move on to the second part of this issue, namely to the problem of covering activities of the government bodies in the media. The Constitutional norms that govern the media have been mentioned before. They are contained in the Law “On the Media”.

Article 2, Freedom of expression, freedom to get and disseminate information:

1. The freedom of word, creation, expression of one’s own views and convictions in a printed or other form, to obtain and disseminate information by any means not prohibited by law is ensured by the Constitution of the Republic.

Censorship is prohibited.

2. Government bodies, public associations, government officials and the media should ensure for every citizen the opportunity to familiarise oneself with documents, decisions and information sources that concern one’s rights and interests.

3. It is forbidden to use the media for propaganda or agitation, to change the constitutional system by force, to undermine the state security, for propaganda of war, social, racial, ethnic, religious, social or clan superiority, cult of cruelty or violence, pornography or exposure of information that constitutes the state secrets of the Republic of Kazakhstan or other secrets guarded by law.

Article 18. Official Statements:

1. Official statements by government bodies shall be placed in the media pursuant to the legal enactments of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

2. Government bodies should provide information on an equal basis, if a representative of the media requested it, irrespective of who owns the latter, excluding such information that constitutes the state secrets of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

2.1. The requested information should be provided by the state bodies or other agencies not later than three days after a request, or an answer should indicate the time when such information will be provided, or the reasons for refusal should be given.

An answer to a request for information that requires additional investigation or checking should be provided not later than one month after the request has been made.

In cases where a request is made by the media to the state and other state bodies, or to other agencies that are not competent to address the issues raised, the request should be sent to the relevant bodies and the media notified within five days.

3. In case of refusal to provide the requested information, the media can appeal to a higher body or official and then to the courts, according to the procedure specified by law for appealing against illegal actions of state administrative bodies and officials that violate citizens' rights.

Article 20. Rights of a Journalist:

A journalist is entitled to:

Search, request, obtain and disseminate information.

Visit government bodies, private and public organisations and be

received by their officials when performing his or her professional duties, be present at all events of a body that has accredited it, except when a decision has been made to arrange a private event.

Make records, including with the use of audio and video equipment, make films and pictures, except in cases prohibited by the legislative enactment of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Article 22. Accreditation of Journalists:

1. The media, on approval of the government bodies, public associations and organizations, may accredit their journalists.

2. The government bodies, public associations and organizations to which a journalist is accredited should notify journalists well in advance about their meetings, conferences or other events and provide a shorthand report, minutes or other documents.

3. An accredited journalist shall be entitled to be present at meetings, conferences or other events arranged by the government bodies, public associations or organizations which have accredited him or her, except when a decision has been made to hold a private event.

4. Accreditation may be withdrawn from a journalist if he or she has violated accreditation rules or disseminates information which is not true to reality, damages the honour and dignity of the government bodies, public associations or organizations that have accredited him or her.

5. The rules of accreditation of journalists shall be approved by an authorised body and according to an established procedure.

The most topical issue for the media, which is the accreditation of a journalist, should be considered first.

In practice, accreditation rules are stumbling blocks for journalists who want to obtain information from a government body.

Either incidentally or not, journalists have been divided into two categories accredited and not accredited, which makes it almost impossible for a not accredited journalist to get access to a government body. How can the equal right of all journalists to look for, to obtain and to disseminate information be enforced? In such cases, a press service will refer to Article 22 of the Law “On the Media”: “Only an accredited jour-

nalist has a right to be present at events of the body that has accredited him.” Actually, a journalist will have no objections. But what will an un-accredited journalist have to do in such cases? He or she will have to look for other sources of information. And it cannot be excluded that a journalist will give his or her readers negative information about the activities of the body that has refused to grant accreditation. It is interesting that Article 22 of the Law “On the Media” does not specify accreditation refusal guidelines. These appeared in the Rules of Journalist Accreditation. The only positive aspect is that there are only three possible reasons for refusal: (i) a request for accreditation does not comply with the rules; (ii) a journalist has already been issued with an accreditation certificate and it has not expired; and (iii) a journalist has been previously deprived of accreditation. One more point: refusal to provide accreditation can apply not to a journalist but to an organ of mass media, because according to the same article of the aforementioned law, it’s not the journalists that get accreditation by themselves, but the media that accredit their journalists.

The accredited journalists can also have problems because they can be given different categories. The following mechanism is used for this purpose. According to the Rules (the same norm is available in the Law “On the Media”), the government bodies should notify accredited journalists in advance about meetings, conferences or other events, and provide them with a hand-written record, minutes or other documents. So they will call some journalists and forget about the others. It happens because in the opinion of press services of some government bodies, some journalists were too frivolous in giving an objective assessment of the government body’s activities, and an adequate response by the government body immediately followed.

So the norms specified by the law create problems where there shouldn’t be any how to implement the norms laid down by the Constitution and by the Law “On the Media”. According to them, irrespective of accreditation, all journalists have an equal right to be present at the events arranged by a government body. The situation is different when it concerns providing a journalist with referential or other materi-

al, or whether he or she will have a permanent place of work, etc. in other words, whether more comfortable conditions for work will be created in a body that has accredited him or her. However, both accredited and not accredited journalists have the same access to information sources.

In general, the purpose of accreditation is to quickly be able to provide the public with plenty of information on the activities of executive or representative bodies and administration, as well as on the activities of other agencies of the Republic of Kazakhstan. That's why "The Rules of Accreditation of Journalists of the Media and of Information Agencies with Government Bodies or Other Organizations" seems to be strange. These rules determine the rights and obligations of journalists but leave unattended the rights and obligations of accrediting bodies and organizations, including the press services, namely how they should go about creating favourable working conditions in a government body.

This omission stands out because another norm of the Law "On the Media" stipulates strict requirements for an accredited journalist. Accreditation may be withdrawn from an accredited journalist if he or she has violated accreditation rules or if he or she has been disseminating untrue information about a government body that has provided accreditation. A relevant body will decide, although dissemination of such information should be made either by the media body or through a court decision.

The problem of establishing a most favoured regime for the work of journalists has still to be resolved by many government bodies.

Attention should be also given to the fact that relations between a journalist and a government body are built on oral instructions by the press services and not on normative documents. Much depends on whether a press service has good relations with the media, or frequently on personal relations with journalists. But just try to find the provisions that would rule the relations between a government body and the media; except on rare occasions, they are not available. Journalists have to be content with the oral instructions of the press services, and such instructions can change every day and it is difficult to dispute them. Even if a journalist has good relations with a press service today, who can guaran-

tee what will happen tomorrow? Practically all regulations say that the meetings of governmental bodies are open, but it is still possible to have private sittings. And it is rather difficult for a journalist to be present at an open meeting because no regulations describe how a journalist can get there.

What does it mean arbitrariness of bureaucrats, demonstration of force that many press services of government bodies are not prepared to deal with the media or are intolerant of different evaluations, opinions or views?

Such treatment leads to the introduction of restricting measures.

Namely

- limited access to government bodies, though it would be sufficient to have one person on duty at an entrance to a building. Moreover, a journalistic certificate does not authorise a journalist to enter, even though a journalist goes there not for his or her own personal entertainment but for performing his or her duties;
- invitations to press conferences sent to only some journalists, which distorts even the idea of press conferences. It is always possible to find suitable explanations, for instance, a shortage of seats. In this case a press conference should not even be announced. If they still decide to go ahead, the premises should have enough seats. Journalists have to get information in rather difficult conditions, but the most important thing for a journalist is to have access to information. A hidden division of the media into “desirable” and “not desirable” would cast a shade of doubt on the information about a government body;
- ungrounded refusal to provide the requested information is an indication that a government body is not transparent;
- intervention in the professional activities of journalists, such as instructions about what is allowed and what is not.

Objective information by a journalist on government activities will have more effect than keeping silent about it. It would also not be nec-

essary to put pressure on the media or to struggle with them. In any case, the last word will belong to the journalists, and when their patience is over they will write exactly what they think about the activities of a government body.

Unfortunately, most violations regarding journalist access to information remain unpunished. Journalists and the media are not willing to waste their time on those who are liable, thereby promoting the lawlessness of some of the government bodies. All this takes place, despite the Law “On the Media”, which specifies that officials of the government bodies or of other organizations are to be held responsible for violations of the law on the media.

The Administrative Offence Code states:

Article 84. Reasons for Refusing to Provide Information to a Citizen

An illegal refusal to provide the documents or materials that have been collected according to an established procedure and that concern the rights and liberties of a citizen, or the provision of incomplete or intentionally false information to a citizen, or the illegal referral of information of common access to information of a restricted access shall involve a fine on an official in the amount of five to ten calculated monthly indicators.

Article 352. Making Obstacles for Legal Activities of a Journalist

Creating conditions that would prevent a journalist from performing his or her duties and obligations as specified by law, or that would completely deprive him or her of such an opportunity shall entail a fine in the amount of up to 50 calculated monthly indicators.

The Criminal Code states:

Article 154. Reasons for Refusing to Provide Information to a Citizen

An illegal refusal of an official to provide the documents or materials

that have been collected according to an established procedure and that concern the rights and liberties of a citizen, or the provision of incomplete or intentionally false information to a citizen, if such actions have damaged a citizen's rights and legal interests, shall be subject to a fine in the amount of 200 to 500 calculated monthly indicators or in the amount of a salary, or of with withdrawing the right to occupy some positions or to be engaged in some activities for two to five years.

Article 155. Preventing Legal Professional Activities of a Journalist:

1. Preventing legal professional activities of a journalist by forcing him or her to disseminate information or refusing to disseminate information, shall be subject to a fine in the amount of 50 to 100 calculated monthly indicators, or in the amount of income for the period of up to one month, or to community service for up to 180 hours, or to corrective work for up to one year.

2. The same actions committed by a person who has been abusing his or her position or using or threatening to use force shall be punished by corrective work for up to two years, or deprived of freedom for up to three years, with or without a deprivation of the right to be involved in some activities for up to three years.”

To get a more complete picture of the activities of press services of government bodies, it is necessary to mention the framework of their activities.

A press service is a government unit and as such it is guided primarily by the Law “On Government Service” and then by the norms of the Law “On the Media”. It therefore follows that any information provided by a government body will have to have been approved by several instances, which will take a long time. As a result, the media get “yesterday's news”.

Some press services have their own specific features due to the kind of activities performed by their government body the Ministry of Defence, the National Security Committee, etc.

The press services at headquarters level are not linked to press services in the regions. Still the claims are addressed mainly to the regional units of a government body.

The norms that regulate the activities of press services should be represented in the Law “On the Media” and in the Law “On Government Service”.

These issues should be addressed by making amendments to these and other regulatory enactments.

To conclude, every organization cherishes its reputation, and this is especially true for government bodies. Should problems of this kind arise, the media should not be the first to be blamed; it is necessary to begin with oneself. To foster better relations between government bodies and the media, the government bodies should be first to want to foster better relations between themselves and the media.



II.
**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA AND RELIGION**

Sulton Khamadov

RELIGION AND FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE
IN THE MEDIA OF TAJIKISTAN:
BEFORE AND AFTER INDEPENDENCE

Oleg Panfilov

ISLAM AND THE MEDIA:
OBJECTIVITY AND PROPAGANDA

Ludmila Stepenko

PROBLEMS OF COVERAGE OF RELIGIOUS
EXTREMISM IN THE MEDIA

Yusur Loma

THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN KYRGYZSTAN
AND ITS COVERAGE IN THE MEDIA

Sulton Khamadov

THE ROLE OF JOURNALISTS IN COVERING CONFLICTS

In the 1920s, after a communist regime was established in place of the former Bukhara Emirate (now Central Asia), the “builders of a new society”, in reference to the works of theoreticians of the communist ideology, declared the Islamic religion to be “an opium for people”. Fighting against Islam and religious leaders began on a broad scale. Millions of Muslims and believers of other confessions were persecuted. The communist ideology, of which the atheistic upbringing of people was an inherent part, was proclaimed to be an official ideology of the state. The atheistic upbringing of children was made mandatory in all public schools. The destruction and abolition of religious institutions, churches, mosques, synagogues, Buddhist temples, etc. began on an unprecedented scale. Not only were religious leaders pursued and subjected to reprisals, so were ordinary believers who were not willing to give up their religious outlook and beliefs.

During the first years of the Soviet regime, the annihilation and persecution of clergymen was done mainly under the slogans of “fighting against enemies of the revolution”, “fighting against enemies of the collective farm system”, “fighting against basmatchi”, etc. Millions of ordinary and innocent people were killed just for their religious convictions, without any preliminary checking, trial or investigation.

In the mid-1930s and in the beginning of the 1940s, this fighting in the Soviet Union was called the “fighting against people’s enemies”. During that time, millions of religious leaders, theologians, and ordinary believers of different confessions were killed, sent to exile in Siberia or imprisoned for many years.

During and after the Second World War, the scale of persecutions and reprisals against believers became somewhat narrower. However, the atheistic content of communism as the only ideology of the state remained unchanged till the beginning of the 1990s.

Let's look together at the Constitution (Main Law) of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), with modifications and amendments introduced into the legislation of the Tajik SSR as of 19 November 1988, 22 July 1989, 23 September 1989 and 14 November 1989, or two years before gaining independence.

The sixth article of the Constitution says: "A leading and guiding force of the Soviet society and the core of its political system, governmental and public organizations is the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The CPSU exists for the people and serves the people.

Armed with Marxist and Leninist teachings, the Communist Party determines general prospects of social development and the guidelines of domestic and external policies of the USSR, it leads the great and creative activities of the Soviet people, and brings its fighting for victory onto a planned and scientifically grounded basis."

How did the CPSU treat believers and their religious feelings, and what plans did it have for religion? Answers to these questions were provided in a major Party document the CPSU Programme. The Programme, passed by the 22nd Party Congress, said: "It is essential to conduct on a regular basis wide scientific and religious propaganda, to explain patiently the groundlessness of religious beliefs that emerged in the past because people were afraid of wild natural forces and were socially oppressed, because they had no knowledge of actual causes of natural or social phenomena. In so doing, it is necessary to proceed from the achievements of science today, which is providing an increasingly comprehensive picture of the world, enhancing powers of the individual over nature and leaving no place for religious fantasies about supernatural forces."

When such "a leading and guiding force" "determines general prospects of social development and the guidelines of the domestic and external policies of the USSR", then how one can speak about the freedom of conscience or the freedom of expression in a country? With a multi-million population, not everyone supported the communist ideology or was a Communist Party member. Some people were outspoken, expressing their discontent with the Communist Party and govern-

ment policies in the area of religion and freedom of conscience. Still, they had no opportunity of expressing their ideas about such policies in the media, because the latter obeyed only the CPSU and the country leaders. The country leaders, in turn, were the same communists subordinate to the CPSU Central Committee. That's why under the Soviet system, in all republics of the former USSR, including Tajikistan, the newspapers and magazines, radio and television belonged to the state, of which all the functionaries at the top were CPSU members and reported to it on a regular basis. The CPSU Programme said openly: "The Party is using the means of ideological influence to bring up people in the spirit of scientific and materialistic outlook and to overcome religious prejudices." It would be absurd to speak about the freedom of conscience or belief under such conditions. Although Article 50 of the Tajik SSR Constitution formally secured the freedom of conscience to its citizens, "the Tajik SSR citizens are guaranteed to have the freedom of conscience, or the right to profess every religion or not to profess any, to perform cults or to conduct an atheistic propaganda. Instigation of enmity and hatred on religious grounds is prohibited. The church was separated from the state in the Tajik SSR.

According to this Article, people could formally profess a religion of any kind or no religion at all, perform religious cults and conduct atheistic propaganda. How did this work in reality? Every citizen was allowed to conduct atheistic propaganda because it was not against the requirements of the Programme or of the "CPSU Charter". However, if a public officer, especially one from a law-enforcement body, a ministry, a local authority, or the educational or medicinal professions performed religious rituals, they would be severely punished and even sacked. Usually such people were criticised in the press, because instead of fighting against religious prejudices, they were participating in religious ceremonies. If such an article were prepared by the Tajik Telegraph Agency, it had to be reprinted by all the republican, regional or district newspapers. Let me cite an example. At the end of the 1960s, an influential Muslim clergyman Makhsumi Sangi Kulula, (Parkhar District, Kulyab Province), died. Several thousand people from the nearby

villages came to his funerals. Many public and law-enforcement officers, teachers, doctors, etc., attended. Later, as assigned by the Tajikistan Communist Party Central Committee, this case was studied carefully to find out which public officers had taken part. Many of them were identified and punished. The punishment was a severe one, namely dismissal.

Prior to the beginning of the 1990s, there were 17 official Friday mosques in Tajikistan, mainly in the capital and in regional centres. This was not sufficient for meeting the religious needs of all Muslim believers in the country. The country's population at that time totalled 5 million, 90% of whom were Muslims.

Naturally, Muslims tried to perform their rituals outside officially registered mosques. They began to build prayer houses or rooms in almost every village. Many people went there during the month-long fast of Ramadan, and many performed the so-called "Tarobekh" prayer. Praying in illegal praying places was exercised with some caution because the local authorities had begun to crack down on many people praying in unregistered mosques. They established so-called commissions for compliance with religious rituals under the village and district councils of people's deputies. During the month-long fast of Ramadan, these commissions sent missions to detect and prevent Tarobekh collective prayers. Newspapers, radio and television covered the findings of such missions. Believers were criticised for praying collectively in unregistered mosques. If officers of public institutions, law-enforcement bodies, education, etc., were found among those who took part in the Tarobekh collective prayers, their names would be made public and their destinies ruined. Almost all of them were removed from their duties.

Back then, no newspaper in Tajikistan would protect the rights of believers. The media was owned by the state, which expressed the interests of the only political force in the country, the CPSU. All the newspapers and magazines, radio and television channels provided one-sided coverage of the country's religious affairs. All religious leaders, reputable clergymen, mullahs, ashans, and especially the clergymen that were not affiliated with officialdom, were the subject of criticism in the media. The official clergymen were mentioned only in order to respond

to the criticism that sounded abroad regarding an absence of the freedom of consciousness in Tajikistan. The media would point out that the clergy was free to perform its religious duties and that nobody would prevent it from performing its rituals. Prior to the beginning of the 1990s, there had been no official religious periodicals. Radio and television avoided the subject of religious teachings; the press did not touch on it either. Such subjects were taboo.

However, with the coming to power of Gorbachev and his policies of openness and democratisation, some positive developments began to take shape. Thus in the mid-1980s, the first issue of an illegal religious newspaper “Hakikati Islom” (“Islamic Truth”) was secretly circulated in the City of Dushanbe (Tajikistan). The articles focused on religious subjects, on the power of religion to bring up people. Later on it became known that “Hakikati Islom” had been the first illegal newspaper not only in Tajikistan, but also in all of Central Asia. Not only the Tajik authorities, but also the central authorities in Moscow, began to get concerned: at approximately the same time Tajik security became aware of the existence of a political organization of a religious nature. In 1986, under the leadership of the USSR Committee for State Security, the security bodies of the Tajik SSR undertook jointly with other country’s power units a number of operative and investigation actions with the aim of exposing members of this possibly extensive organization and charging them with criminal activity. As a result, about 40 clergymen, a so-called “reactionary part of the Muslim clergy”, were detained and charged. Despite the ongoing changes, the Communist Party still remained a significant political force in control of the whole country. Therefore, the country’s media were naturally on the side of the authorities whose interests they protected. The newspapers and magazines, radio and television systematically and purposefully criticised the Muslim clergymen. However, during that period the media abroad, especially the “Freedom” Radio Station and the BBC, began to speak frequently about the deplorable treatment of the Muslim believers in Tajikistan who had been pursued for their convictions. At a plenary session (April, 1987), the first secretary of the Central Committee of

Tajikistan even complained to Mr. Yakovlev, the CPSU Central Committee secretary, that the “Freedom” Radio Station was broadcasting in seven languages and that mullah Abdullo Saidov was being presented as a martyr of conscience in Tajikistan.

After the republic gained independence in 1991, the Tajik media began to approach “the freedom of conscience” in an essentially different, or to be more exact, radically different way. Tajikistan, like all other republics of the former Soviet Union, abolished Article 6 of its Constitution on a leading role of the CPSU in society. A system where more than one party exists became legal. Political parties of a different kind were established, including of a religious nature, e.g., the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan. In addition to the state media, privately owned periodicals that considered themselves to be independent began to function and even started to publish articles on the persecutions and reprisals that had been arranged by the government against famous theologians and ordinary believers in the early days of the Soviet power and in the 1930s-1950s.

Many articles on this subject appeared in privately owned periodicals, such as the “Charogi ruz” (“Lampion of the Day”), “Adolat” (“Fairness”), “Sukhan” (“Word”), “Haft Ganch” (“Seven Treasures”), etc. These publications caught the interest of many readers. The printing of religious newspapers began for the first time in the history of the republic. On 10 January 1992, the Theological Department of the Tajik Muslims published the first issue of the “Minbari Islom” (“Islamic Rostrum”) newspaper, the aim of which was the upbringing of people in the spirit of Islam, the teaching of Islamic ethics and informing about events in the religious life of Tajikistan. In total, eight issues of this newspaper were published, but due to economic difficulties, the last one was printed on 29 May 1992. Its chief editor was Said Abdullo Nuri, a prominent religious leader in Central Asia.

During that period, besides the “Minbari Islom”, two other religious newspapers were published: the “Paemi Hak” (“Message of God”), sponsored by the PIVT Deputy Chairman Davlat Usmon, and the “Nachot” (“Salvation”), a chief editor of which was Aimiddin Sattorov.

The “Paemi Hak” and the “Nachot” were the first newspapers to talk about the protection of rights of ordinary Muslims. They began to print unmasking articles about the reprisals in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Such publications influenced the style and content of other newspapers, including the government ones. Then the newspapers began to write about religion as a positive factor for bringing up people. Many newspapers wrote regularly about Islam, the sacred Koran and statements of prophet Muhammad. Heated discussions and debates about religion and the treatment of religion and Muslim clergy by the Communist Party filled newspapers of both the clergy and of the government.

Unfortunately, sometimes they called for extreme action. For instance, the communists demanded the prohibition of other parties, including PIVT, to exile their members to Siberia or to send them to prison. Extremist-minded PIVT wanted all communists to be referred to as “kafirs” (unfaithful), and to prohibit the Communist Party of Tajikistan and the praying for deceased communists. There is no doubt that such a violent confrontation of these two oppositional ideologies had a negative effect on the political and social situation in the country. Unleashing a civil war in Tajikistan, hostile external forces took all of this into account and used it to deepen the conflict and possibly extend the war.

During the civil war, the Tajik press, like the country’s public, split into two parts – the press of the armed opposition and the press that considered itself to be official and protecting the “constitutional system” of the republic. The leadership of the armed opposition comprised mainly Islamic people who were leading the war under the slogans of “Jihad”, protection of Islam and of the interests of the country’s Muslims. They used both electronic and printed media for consolidation of all forces. As far back as 1993, the Radio Station “Free Tajikistan” began to broadcast from Afghanistan, the seat of the opposition’s headquarters. It paid special attention to supporting the jihad ideologically. Underground, it published newspapers, such as “Surush” (“Voice”) and “Sadoi Muchohid” (“Voice of Mojahed”). Abroad it published “Nachot” (“Salvation”), “Chaihun” (“Amu-Darya”) and “Paiki Piruzi” (“Herald of Victory”); the latter was the first newspaper in colour to be published in

the Tajik language. Electronic media of foreign countries were also used extensively by the opposition, in particular, the Tajik and Russian branches of Radio “Freedom”, the “BBC” in Persian, the “Huroson Voice” (Islamic Republic of Iran), etc.

In this way the opposition leaders informed the world community that they were conducting their armed struggle in order to return to the home country with dignity and to restore the rights that had been lost – freedom of conscience, freedom of expression and freedom to get involved in political activities. All these points were taken into account in the General Agreement on National Reconciliation in Tajikistan, which came into force following several legal enactments. Pursuant to them, the activities of religious parties, including of the Islamic party, are allowed in Tajikistan. Free press is permitted too. Religious propaganda is not prohibited in Tajikistan; moreover, all newspapers use it for a spiritual upbringing of the people. All newspapers have devoted special headings for this purpose, for instance, “Religion as Upbringing”, “Koran in Our Life”, “Sayings of the Prophet”, etc. The “Nachot” is the only newspaper in Central Asia that belongs to the Islamic Party and opposes the existing system in Tajikistan. The “Nachot” highlights not only the country’s political life, but also attends to the protection of Muslim interests. It is the only newspaper in the Republic now that criticises boldly both the external and domestic policies of the government. Life has shown that the free media of independent Tajikistan have played an important role in the democratisation process.

Oleg Panfilov

ISLAM AND THE MEDIA:
OBJECTIVITY AND PROPAGANDA

My statement is not aimed at examining the subject of “The Media and Religion” or making recommendations in this respect. It will rather be an attempt at asking the journalists once again to be prudent, objective, reserved and tolerant.

“The Media and Religion” is such a multi-faceted subject and at the same time so trivial that examples can be found in many publications and TV broadcasts in European countries that are experienced in such interaction. This subject seems to have lost its topicality in the European countries a long time ago, meaning by this the confrontation between the media and religion of the kind that exists today in the Central Asian countries.

Maybe the following example is not quite appropriate. I recall being in Tashkent as I conducted my first student research almost 30 years ago. I was studying archives of the “Turkestarskiye Vedomosti” newspaper (“Turkestan Gazette”) that had been circulated in Tashkent from 1870 to 1917. It was a newspaper of the colonial tsarist administration. However, its major difference from the press of the Soviet era and from the Central Asian newspapers of recently lies in the fact that during its 47 years of circulation, it published not one article that would humiliate the dignity of the Muslim people. On the contrary, it published many articles by well-known scholars, telling about specific features of Islam and about Muslim traditions.

I reiterate that maybe my example is not quite appropriate, but it makes me ask myself: What is happening almost one century later? Why is the press of today an arena of confrontation between objectivity and propaganda? How can the media and the journalists allow themselves to interpret the role of religion so arbitrarily?

Many answers can be given. Some people will say that time has changed and that the interaction between the state and the religious communities has acquired a different nature. Other people will recall the socialist past of the Central Asian countries, when a tough totalitarianism governed relations between the communist regime and those people seeking to preserve a traditional Islamic culture. Finally, last year, after 11 September 2001, these relations gained another aspect, often a menacing one.

In different periods, the press has taken and is taking an active part in all these relations. But how? By using the methods of Soviet propaganda and agitation and by praising atheism.

What is happening now? I am not going to give examples. However, I should point out some tendencies. And to put it mildly, they prove that the Central Asian states are grasping the control of religion and frequently tend to forget what is laid down in the Constitution about the separation of religion from the state.

Another problem is that of religious extremism. It exists in Northern Ireland and in India. It proves to be in Central Asia too. But who can tell what the actual scale of it is in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan or in the south of Kyrgyzstan? Society does not know. Society consumes information that is retranslated by the press and comes from special and ideological state departments. Society is in a cold war with all those whom the state press blames to be the culprits of all misfortunes. All this greatly reminds of the Soviet propaganda methods: "We know nothing about the activities of the American government, but we condemn them."

Thus, modern propaganda splits society, dividing people even by their appearance – the length of a beard or a veil worn by women. Recently, an Uzbek diplomat told me a secret, that a true Muslim is not the one who goes to a mosque or performs a "namaz" prayer five times a day. That diplomat, who holds a position in the government, identified the rules of behaviour acceptable for the state. And these rules of the state are forced on the journalists too.

I say again that my statement is not aimed at working out recommendations. The Central Asian press is characterised by being not free and

by the pressure of the government on it. I want to call on the journalists to approach this subject for Central Asia with objectivity, tolerance and respect.

We have come across the concept that the ideology of the post-Soviet states needs to have the image of an enemy. Should the journalists be involved in it? What will it lead them to?

Ludmila Stepenko

PROBLEMS OF COVERAGE OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN THE MEDIA

I. ISLAM IN KAZAKHSTAN

Before speaking about the coverage of religious extremism in the press, it would be logical, I believe, to raise the question as to whether extremism as such exists in Kazakhstan?

The problem of religious extremism in Kazakhstan is not as acute as in the neighbouring countries of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhstan is a secular and multi-ethnic state and as a result is also a multi-religious one. Neither Islam, nor Christianity, nor any other religion can claim to play the role of a state religion.

After the American tragedy of September 11th, journalists and political analysts (anyone reflecting on this subject) tend to link religious extremism with Islam. To all appearances, this is not without grounds. What is the situation in our country?

Kazakhstan does not practice the Muslim law and has no developed facilities for Muslim education. Although not long ago the Islamic University was established, there has been no sign of broad advertising or aggressive propaganda aimed at young people (as is the case with the secular universities). If this had been the case, the public would have known about it and, consequently, the press too.

As we recall, in Tajikistan, in the 1990s, Islam began the process of revival and politicisation. The local elite banked on reputable clergy. A number of Tajik leaders succeeded in transforming Islam into a solid political force in the country that only yesterday had been a Soviet republic. Kazakhstan did not have such leaders during the first years after the disintegration of the USSR, nor does it have them now.

It therefore follows that in our country Islam does not have the “strong” stand that it has in our neighbouring countries. As such, it currently does not have the foundations on which to build extremism.

However, as we have written many times in “AiF Kazakhstan”, the danger of radicalisation or politicisation of Islam does exist in our country. It is a danger caused by radical ideas exported from Islamic countries – Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iran. The second danger, according to analyst Eduard Poletaev, is linked with religious extremist ideas penetrating together “with a flow of illegal immigrants and refugees from the countries of Central Asia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, with the university students and missionaries from the Islamic countries. The problem in the south of Kazakhstan is due to the fact that Islam is rather strong there. It is active due to poverty and a low educational level in the region. In this respect, the problem in small towns is very acute: difficult social and economic situations and a poor control by the local authorities over the religious sphere are fraught with the danger of radicalisation of Islam.”

II. READERS OF “AIF KAZAKHSTAN”

“AiF Kazakhstan” has conducted many sociological studies. We were interested to know who is reading our newspaper (a so-called “sociological cut”) and what subjects our readers prefer. It is clear that we use these figures in working out the subjects to be covered. A sociological survey was conducted by experts, and the following findings were obtained.

The average age of our readers is 39 years, 65% of our readers have had a higher education, 21% have a secondary and incomplete higher education. A Russian-language edition of “AiF” has approximately the same numbers.

The subjects preferred by our readers include political digest, politics, culture, criminal cases, women’s themes, economics and sports. Practically no reader would like to read about religion.

This is why our newspaper does not regularly publish articles about religion, and it will not so long as such articles are not in demand in Kazakhstan. (Let’s not overlook the fact that religious fanatics prefer literature of a completely different kind.) We can make such a judgement, because our periodical is one of the most popular and most widely circulated in both Kazakhstan and the CIS.

A quick look at other Kazakh newspapers will reveal the same picture.

III. INFORMATION CHANNELS OBTAINING INFORMATION

Another point needs highlighting. On the one hand, religious subjects are not popular with readers. On the other hand, it is not the best option to totally ignore religious issues. In my opinion, it would be proper to indicate how we, the journalists, obtain information.

One information channel is letters from our readers. For instance, we published letters from students who had left to study in Turkey. “AiF Kazakhstan” No 29 (2002) wrote a story about a Kazakh guy who had promised to tell us everything if we changed his name. The editorial board agreed to do it, despite being in violation of its own rules – anonymity is not welcomed by other media either. A story of this kind would have a high social resonance, so we decided to publish his confessions. To summarise, the young boy went to study at a secular university, but ended up in a madrassah where they took his passport away from him. All the students there (three Kazakh students had fallen into the trap) were kept under a prison regime – no contacts with the Turkish people; the curriculum consisted of just one subject – the study of the Koran. The boy managed to escape from the madrassah-prison and then from the country.

Of course, this is a very efficient method of presenting information to the readers. Having read these confessions, many parents will probably consider whether they should send their children to study there because of the risk of being converted into religious fanatics. Still the problem is that having had to face religious extremism, people are not willing to speak about it openly. They agree to tell their stories only if anonymity is preserved. Of course, anonymity makes the material less hard-hitting and loses a certain amount of trust. The same refers to a series of materials from Afghanistan. Our correspondent managed to visit several Afghan prisons and to meet with people who had suffered under the Taliban. The principle of “everyone for oneself” worked again. Afraid of revenge, people stop speaking in front of a microphone. Certainly, it creates many difficulties for the journalists. For the same reasons many Afghan refugees that have flooded the south of Kazakhstan do not want to be open, even though their home country will not see or hear them.

The response of official representatives to the confessions was quite peculiar. After the student's story had been published, nobody from the Ministry of Education called and the Theological Department of Kazakh Muslims also preferred to keep silent. Unofficially it is the Theological Department of the Kazakh Muslims (previously known as khadja Derbisali) that sends Kazakhs to study at such madrassahs, without providing the full picture first.

Logically, the religious leaders should be the first to help the press in covering the subject of religious extremism. However, it is not possible to establish contact with the Theological Department because of their way of working. The Theological Department asks for a list of questions from the editorial board. It then decides which questions may be asked and which ones should be rejected. Preliminary questionnaires are typically used to work with secular agencies, but they are used to help an official in procuring the documents required for an interview. For the spiritual leaders, a strictly polished questionnaire is a tool for providing only that information to the press that they are willing to provide.

The spiritual leaders say that they don't want to wash their dirty linen in public; they know as well as the journalists that a semi-literate or false mullah can perform a religious service in a mosque. Imams of some mosques are the young people who have studied at the Islamic universities of Central Asia. The editorial board has obtained materials of a regional conference "Islam and the Society in the Central Asian Countries". One of the examples there concerned the most visited mosque – Tasktak (Almaty) where a young imam had been calling to combat any manifestations of paganism in the life of Muslims – wearing a so-called 'turmans', celebrating the first anniversary of the death of a person, etc. Naturally, the editorial board asked the Theological Department to provide its comments on the subject of "The Level of Training of Clergy". An assistant of the High Mufti rudely refused to provide any comments and did not even bother to introduce himself.

After Absattar khadji Derbisali was appointed the High Mufti of Kazakhstan, they began to select clergy staff more carefully. By all appearances, their intention is to ensure complete loyalty to government

policies, as well as non-intervention in policymaking as such, namely, that religion and politics should be independent “because policy can change not only over years but also in months, while religion will always have just one road to follow”. It is clear that in the near future the Kazakh people will have to choose: to be free to worship the Almighty with the state preventing every possibility of disseminating dangerous ideas or to opt for a true freedom of belief, thereby enhancing the risk of threats from radicals. Isn't this a subject for discussion? The press is alone in trying to tackle such issues. Our Muslim clergy is not willing to give an answer to such vital questions; essentially it creates obstacles to our professional activities.

Quite different is the position of “collaborators” of the League of the Islamic World. They have clearly identified for themselves that “the state and religion are inseparable” and consistently pursue their policy by sending their materials to editorial boards and using all possible communication channels – phones, fax machines and e-mail. For instance, at the beginning of September, the editorial board of “AiF Kazakhstan” received material entitled “By Separating Religion from the State We Are Splitting Society”. I guess that the content of this article is clear to everyone. To give just one citation: “The Great Prophet said that the belief sent by the Almighty is comprehensive. One should not separate the state from the spiritual life. In real life, everything is closely interwoven. A Muslim should be actively involved in all aspects of life. To separate religion from the state is like separating one part of the body from another.” The same material was sent to other editorial boards too. As far as I know, not one newspaper wanted to publish this material, although the reasons for wanting to hide the problem instead of discussing it on the newspaper pages together with readers, political analysts, theologians, etc., are not clear. Our editorial board decided to publish it in abridged form. The Theological Department categorically refused to comment. After some consideration, the Institute of Oriental Studies also refused. However, the League of the Islamic World was rather aggressive, insisting that their comments be published as soon as possible, preferably before 11 September. For obvious reasons, the

editorial board could not agree to do it. So there are two methods of dealing with the press – on the one hand, to refuse to provide information and, on the other hand, to put pressure on the press. I would call it methodological extremism.

Here is another example. After the beginning of the second war in Chechnya, we were approached by employees of the public Chechen organization “Vaynakh”. Unfortunately I cannot recall the name of one of its leaders (the organization had split into “right Vaynakh” and “not right Vaynakh”). The editorial board proposed an interview on the hardships of the Chechen people caused by the war. The material was ready for publication, but it was never published. The leader of “Vaynakh” began to threaten us and said that no Chechen would agree to sign such material: “You should cover the war in Chechnya from a position that I myself will determine.”

IV. CONCLUSION

In my opinion, the problems of coverage of religious extremism exist because the clergy and other public figures either prevent us from obtaining information or aggressively force it on us.

Nevertheless, the press should not try to escape from the subject of “Religious Extremism and Society”. We should work to prevent the spreading of radical Islam in the CIS and Central Asian countries.

Yusur LomaTHE RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN KYRGYZSTAN
AND ITS COVERAGE IN THE MEDIA

Disintegration of the USSR and the resulting formation of sovereign states entailed significant changes in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the entire Central Asian region. The common spiritual, cultural and material values, a single informative space, a relative interethnic accord and peace, and an inter-confessional tolerance that had been created for many years have to a significant extent been lost and in some cases even destroyed.

In the years of disjunction, a different situation emerged. A different way of thinking and different approaches to ongoing processes were developed, especially as regards religion, which is now experiencing a period of “Renaissance”.

Kyrgyzstan is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. Its accession to the “European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Basic Freedoms” has ensured the conditions for laying down the foundations of human rights and of the freedom of conscience, thereby facilitating the promotion of religion. Evidence of this can be found in the arrival of many new religious streams and cults, including the most radical ones, such as the Bakhai community, Buddhist communities, the Krishna Conscience Society, a religious extremist party “Hisb ut-Tahrir al-Islami”, and others. Promoted by vigorous missionary activities, they are not typical of our region, but they exist side by side with traditional religions.

At the beginning of 1991, the Kyrgyz Republic had three or four mainly traditional, religious streams; now there are over 23 of them, including Kharismats (“Iyis Church” Kyrgyz group), Presbyterianism, Protestantism, Proselytism, Jewish religious community, United Church (also known as “Saint Spirit Association for United World Christianity”), and the Unification Church. Some Christian organisations are not

affiliated with any official church, i.e. “Biblical Society of Kazakhstan in Kyrgyzstan”.

Prior to 1991, there were only 39 mosques and 25 Russian Orthodox churches and parishes; today there are over 1,338 (registered) mosques, more than 40 Russian Orthodox churches and parishes, 200 Christian praying houses and one nunnery.

It should also be mentioned that before 1991, the Republic did not have one single institution of religious education. Now there are 40 of them, of which 27 are madrassahs, five are Islamic institutes, seven are Christian educational institutions, and one is a Jewish school. Their number is increasing every year.

Previously, just a handful of people could perform the Haj and even then with great difficulty. Today all financially capable people find no obstacles to making a pilgrimage to holy places (Mecca).

Statistically it is possible to speak of a rapidly growing number of religious organisations, of their diversity, of a powerful construction and strong financial support, and of the involvement of new believers.

Although the number of fixed memberships cannot be collected by statistics, the breakdown of people of different ethnic origin by faith can be traced indirectly. A comparative analysis has shown that over 80% of people traditionally adhere to Islam, of which 60% are Kyrgyzs, 15% are Uzbeks, 5% are Uygurs, Dungans, Kazakhs, Tatars, Tajiks, Bashkirs, Turks, Chechens, Dargin and others. Some 17% of people, mainly Russians, Ukrainians and Belarussians, belong to the Russian Orthodox Church.

With the appearance of Kyrgyzstan in the international arena, people got an opportunity to study at Islamic universities abroad. According to the State Commission for Religious Matters under the Kyrgyz government, 284 Kyrgyz nationals study in religious centres abroad, of which 155 study at the World University “Al-Azhar” (Cairo), 84 in Turkey, 22 in Pakistan, and the rest by private invitation in Syria, Kuwait and Jordan. According to some sources, as many as 300 people who go abroad as tourists or who are invited privately enroll in institutions of religious education, in violation of the existing rules. It cannot be ruled

out that these young people study at educational institutions of an extremist kind.

Gaining independence and the transition to new social and political relations have been accompanied by an aggravation of old problems and an emergence of new ones.

A recent concern is the so-called phenomenon of proselyte (trying to convert to a different religion), which is becoming large-scale and could threaten stability. The events in Ak-Tyuz (Chu Province) and in Bishkek have demonstrated that missionaries are very active, and by providing humanitarian and free financial assistance and by sending people to study abroad and utilizing some other methods, they are succeeding in attracting young people, mainly of Kyrgyz ethnic origin. Having no regard for local conditions, customs or traditions, however, they face resistance from the local people, which can spill over into violent clashes. On the whole, though, the resistance is not an obstacle to converting people to their faiths.

Under such conditions, traditional Islam or Christianity are not able to counteract the proliferation of extremist ideas or a targeted missionary work, which is gaining in scale. In the last three or four years, over 885 foreign nationals came to Kyrgyzstan to conduct their religious activities. Of them over 600 were Christian and 200 Islamic missionaries, and 70 missionaries belonged to other religions. Many Islamic missionaries come from Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, India, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Missionaries of Christian and non-traditional religions come mainly from the USA, South Korea, India and Kazakhstan. This requires pursuing a weighted government policy that would promote consolidation of the Kyrgyz people and not their disjunction on religious, ethnic or cultural grounds.

An examination of this situation has shown that, by profiteering on social and economic hardships and skillfully exploiting the vacuum of information, religious ideologists propagate a politicised Islam (Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami) and get more and more people involved, especially the young. The lack of coordination and the absence of a clear-cut programme make it possible for the activists of some religious streams

and cults and for the missionaries to act, avoiding registration, without any regard for local mentality and conditions. Sometimes this causes clashes between different ethnic groups or faiths. The government, for objective reasons (shortage of funds and experts, no objective analysis of the religious situation), has not been able to introduce preventive measures. The law enables religious organizations, including those with extremist and radical views, to penetrate into the country and to legally set up there.

At the basis of government policy lie tolerant approaches to different ethnic cultures and religions, avoidance of inter-faith conflicts, non-proliferation of religious extremism, and an attainment of tolerance between religions and ethnic cultures. Religious policy is gaining a strategic and ideological orientation and the role of religion in social and political life is growing. Thus a national renaissance of sovereign Kyrgyzstan has been accompanied by a religious renaissance.

The Muslim religion was adopted by the Kyrgyz people later than by the settled people of Central Asia. Due to historical differences, the piety of the Kyrgyz people in the north and in the south is not the same. In the north, the Muslim religion has absorbed many pagan pre-Muslim beliefs and took from Islam only its external appearance, namely its customs, traditions and holidays.

The south of Kyrgyzstan has its own characteristics, which are due to its historic development and to the place of Islam in the life of ethnic groups in the Fergana Valley. The ethnic structure of people in the valley used to be a very diverse one – more than ten Turk and Iranian groups inhabited it. Before the formation of the modern states, all ethnic groups in this region, both nomadic and settled ones, perceived themselves to be a part of one territory, Fergana, and called themselves “Muslims”, using this word as an alternative to the ethnic origin.

The geographic location, the historical and cultural past helped the Kyrgyz people in the north to be more inclined to adapt the European culture and in the south the Oriental culture and the Arabic one. The activity of Islamic radicals and the attraction of some people to them have their own social and cultural roots, which are supplemented by

regional characteristics of Islam and stipulated by the social and cultural development, ethnic and cultural origin of people, and modern political clashes.

It is therefore possible to speak about the existence of “spiritual borders” in Islam. They can be either relatively easily surpassed by some of the Islamic streams or can remain “locked” for those of them that are alien to an ethnic group.

It is known that “since long ago the theological system of Islam is seeking to destroy... the ethnic and national boundaries in the conscience of Muslims by announcing them to be a part of Umma”. But the emergence of sovereign states led to the emergence of borders between the national religious institutions, accentuated differences between the national forms of Islam and strengthened disjunction between different ideological and theological interpretations, separating countries, regions and ethnic group.

In this respect, I would like to tell about the Dungans. Paradoxically an ethnic conflict also has religious grounds. Here is a brief historical background.

Forced to leave their home country more than a century ago, the Dungans settled in the Russian empire. According to scholars, they have a very complex ethnic and genetic origin. Different peoples took part in the formation of the Dungans as an ethnic group, the presence of Arabic, Persian and Turkish components being undeniable. The origin of the Dungans, not even to mention the name of these people (Dungans, Huazu, Jun-Yab, Huaymin, Lohuayhuay, Turgan, etc.), have not been yet completely researched by historiography. The ordinary people connect their origin with the resettlement of Arabic warriors to China and their marriage to the Chinese women. This would explain both their Muslim beliefs and their language that belongs to the Chino-Tibet group and culture.

The Dungans found a new motherland, bringing with them their own specific material and spiritual culture. Born farmers experienced in land cultivation, in those days they were a huge influence on agriculture in Djetisu. In Kyrgyzstan, they live mainly in the Chu Valley and engage in

cultivation, though life has brought in its own corrections. By the latest statistics, the number of Dungans is approximately 53,000. For various reasons, the Dungans have scattered in the Central Asian states and for over a hundred years now they live in peace and accord with all the people there. Today's situation is far from being beneficial for the Dungans. They have become an indigenous people, but the social and economic hardships, political instability, and dim prospects instil a sense of uncertainty in them and compel many of them to leave their familiar places in search of a better lot. It is typical of all people in the post-Soviet world; however, for the Dungans it is destructive. Having no statehood or territory, having recently lost their language, culture, traditions and customs (young people not only barely know their mother tongue, they don't know even their historical roots), which is resulting in a gradual wiping out of their ethnic characteristics: they merge with the natives of those title nations in which they live. This happened, for instance, to the people of a former collective farm named after H. Tashoriv, twice awarded the order of Hero of the Soviet Union (Osh Region, Kyrgyzstan), where the Dungans, having lost their language and their roots, have practically become Uzbeks.

Apart from this, they are being split by inter-ethnic contradictions. Two groups of Dungans have been fighting for over a century. The roots of their debates are difficult to explain. Without going into details or sources, which lie somewhere in a remote past, the core of contradictions concerns purely external aspects of rituals. Some Dungans will make "pata" twice (passing two hands over one's own face), others just once. Some Dungans will slaughter cattle and arrange a funeral repast, others won't. Canonic texts can be interpreted differently. It may be explained by differences in dialects and by other things. Right after their resettlement, the Dungans split into so-called Yakshy and Yaman. They would live in peace, only this year the relations between them have deteriorated because of a mosque that has been built by one group of Dungans and was appropriated by another. This is the core of the problem, which is no longer a local one. "Funchin", together with the OSCE office in Bishkek, have tried to help resolve the dispute, but have not succeeded. A solution

is still being sought. These people are not numerous, but they have many problems. Here we have briefly outlined just one inter-ethnic problem.

Just recently this problem has been surprisingly resolved successfully after the membership of Muftiyat has changed.

All the people living in the post-Soviet world have their own problems that have been accumulating for years. Today's reality has exposed not only these but also religious problems.

It follows that despite the historical clashes, the destinies of all people centred around the common tendencies of survival and development. The search for common spiritual and moral orientations, where people would have common roots, could become a connecting link in an inter-faith and interethnic dialogue.

As regards the religious situation in Kyrgyzstan today, it must be noted that the country's media only very rarely cover it. Following an international conference on religion conducted in Djalalabad City under the OSCE patronage in February, many other international organizations, foundations, missions, etc., quickly began to arrange roundtable discussions and workshops on religious themes.

The Friedrich Ebert Foundation, UNFPA, NOS Association and NKO discussed jointly with the "Funchin" Public Foundation the problems of the development of Islam in Kyrgyzstan under the current sovereignty.

The Republic has three Islamic periodicals: the "Islam Madaniyati" newspaper of the Spiritual Board of Muslims, the "Musulmane" (Djalal-Abad Province), and the "Islam Avasi" (Batken Province).

The Christian Church publishes the newspapers "O Tserkvi Bojiei" and "Tvoi Put". A religious centre of Jehovah's Witnesses brings to the country the magazines "Watch Tower", "On Guard" and "Wake-Up", both in Russian and in Kyrgyz. Practically all religious organizations bring and disseminate literature.

Islamic periodicals have no significant influence yet, having still to find a dedicated readership. For this they should improve the content, the quickness of response, and the objectivity of information, and they should highlight more diverse subjects. A bold professional staff is required, of specialists of theology, and most importantly, like all

periodicals, they need to be issued on a regular basis. At the same time, missionaries of all faiths disseminate literature and leaflets, including of the most extremist and radical kind, that in many cases can be delivered to the home and are free. The TV viewers of Kyrgyzstan can watch programmes on Christian themes, even from the USA. A weekly half-hour TV programme “Juma Hutbasi” broadcast by a state-owned channel is not even worth criticising. The existing commercial and private TV channels do not show any interest in religious matters; it is only rarely that they will touch on the subject.

In such conditions, it is necessary to cover a religious situation on a systemic and regular basis, to provide in-depth and more objective analytical materials, to inform the public regularly, and to arrange workshops for the journalists.

The government should provide attention and support, because the situation can become uncontrollable at any moment. The events happening in the south of the republic should remind us of this.

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III.
**CORRUPTION AS A CHALLENGE
FOR FREE MEDIA**

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III

Looking through our periodicals for the last month (and not only for that period), you will not find one publication that paints a true picture of the social and political life of Uzbekistan. Our newspapers have neither analytical articles that would present different viewpoints nor opinions of reputable experts about the draft laws of economic development of Uzbekistan. Certainly you will not read about any debates and arguments of our politicians, deputies or high-ranking officers (who are still poorly known to most people in the country), concerning the issues of key importance for our future. Meanwhile, their decisions touch on the vital interests of all of us.

Moreover, you will not find exposures of abuse by authorities or bribe-taking (for example, that the daily “income” of a traffic police officer on duty is not less than Sum 30,000, while average wages in the country are Sum 20,000-25,000 a month) or violations of legislative norms or human rights. The latest economic developments in the country, in which the Uzbek government has begun to destroy small trading businesses, are a vivid example. The Resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 154 and No. 259 have broken down the destinies of dozens of thousands of people and destroyed a whole sector of the economy. Moreover, they facilitate the development of a shadow economy and as a result all governmental officers are becoming even more corrupt.

Passivity among journalists is conducive for bringing such unpopular laws into life. Furthermore, it gives shape to the concept of all-permissiveness, when the interests of some influential persons are superior to the interests of the state and of its citizens.

The official authorities, in contrast, are very skilful in manipulating the media for imposing their opinion, and not only on the Uzbek citizens.

Usually, the majority of journalists try to avoid confrontation. This proves once again that freedom of expression and an independent press in our country are mere words and not realities of our days. To be truthful to the end, it is necessary to discuss the objective reasons that silence many journalists. This problem has been formulated very precisely by Andre Loersch, an expert of an international organisation that supports the development of civil media: “In your country, where journalists have no rights and can barely make ends meet, to push them to write about corruption is to push them to commit suicide.”

To fight against corruption, objective prerequisites should exist in a society, so that the governmental authorities and the units capable of initiating such a struggle would exist in reality. The journalist would then have no ethical right to stand aside. For this to happen, a major objective of the Uzbek journalists now is to aim at improving the self-consciousness of the country’s nationals and at informing public opinion on the key issues of the country’s political and economic life, which will finally lead to democratic processes in Uzbekistan.” It is hard not to agree with Mr. Loersch.

Each of us can give plenty of examples of when the society itself facilitates corruption in all spheres of our life. Against a background of political infantilism and a legal illiteracy of most of the country’s people, bribe-giving and -taking is considered the norm.

This constitutes the greatest priority of our work. We should provide our citizens with full and reliable information and provide them with the opportunity to learn the various (including opposition) viewpoints on different issues of public life. The journalists should give more attention to the draft laws passed by Oliy Majlis (Parliament) or by the government, and not simply say “we approve” but carry out an analysis and calculation of the prospects for the future.

Of course, we must not forget the abuse by customs officers (a rare small-time trader has not been robbed at a customs post). Or the price that a person has to pay in order to get a position with the tax or customs bodies. Or the price for a student to enrol at a prestigious university. Or the family clans working in governmental units. Or whether the striv-

ing of authorities to build a law-abiding state always accords with their actions in reality.

I admit that it's not a simple task. As long as the state or some other powerful units subsidise all social and political newspapers, the latter will support an official viewpoint. Of course, it would be fraught with consequences for them to sound a different opinion. Just one example: an Interior Ministry officer made a phone call and prohibited the "Echo of Valley" radio station to broadcast a report about how powers had been exceeded by one of the officers from that department.

Uzbek journalists should display more solidarity and support for each other. It's high time for us to unite and to address together the problems that still exist.

I would like us, the journalists, to keep in mind that the media are a strong power that can bring changes to this world.

Eltay Dovlenov

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM IN CASES OF CORRUPTION
AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES FOR THE MEDIA

Investigative journalism and especially investigations of corruption are probably the least developed but the most promising trend of journalism in our country. To take a quote from a remarkable book: “Fighting against corruption is similar to searching for a snowman.”

I liked an explanation of the concept of “investigative journalism” given by the “News Day” editor, as “the material obtained by using one’s own efforts and initiative for investigating an important subject, which some people or agencies would like to keep secret”. There are many topics of this kind and many people would like to keep them secret. Unfortunately, the regional media (Aktyubinsk Province) hardly conduct any investigative journalism. Those few of them that begin to “shovel away mud” do so in the darkness, having no firm legal backup. They are rather lonely, crazy people.

Our young periodical (I represent the “Diapazon” newspaper, Aktobe City, Western Kazakhstan) has experience of such investigations. Let me tell you what one such investigation meant for our newspaper and its staff. Was it a sad experience or a useful one? Equally, both can be true.

Our newspaper reported on the first deputy prosecutor of the Aktyubinsk Region, Parasat Kuthujin, who was using his powers to protect the interests of a local businessman. As it is accustomed to say now, he was providing a “roof”.

It was an economic dispute between two companies fighting for the right to own real estate. Our journalists found out that the high-ranking officer had a direct interest in the outcome of the dispute.

Our editorial board, its head and journalists were persecuted by the law-enforcement bodies. The best forces of our law-enforcement system were thrown against “Diapazon”. Very soon criminal proceedings on charges of libel were instituted against our periodical, and the courts

began to consider several civil suits against us. The shadowing of our editor was unprecedented – a dozen strong policemen with a video camera following a slim woman at close distance. Their intentions are not clear to us even now. After some time our editor was questioned by an investigator right in her office. The persecution culminated in a search of our editorial house. The police seized a list of newspaper staff, accountancy data on salaries, and a newspaper file, probably as souvenirs.

In parallel to the investigation by the law-enforcement bodies, “Diapazon” was conducting its own investigation. New details about the life of the prosecutor came to light. For instance, he played billiards in the confiscated premises and bought an apartment from his department at an intentionally low price and later resold it in Atirau (where he also had a high position in a prosecutor’s office).

The result of our investigation was the quiet transfer of Parasat Kuthujin to the Kizilorda Province. The procurator’s office presented this “appointment” as a staff shuffle. Meanwhile, Mr. Kuthujin managed to claim Tenge 700 million from the editorial board for his loss of honour and dignity (more than US\$ 4,000).

All of a sudden, as if with the help of a magic wand, the criminal proceedings against “Diapazon” were dropped. Actions for libel and the dissemination of untrue information began to fail. It makes us ask whether it was worth wasting time and the taxpayers’ money to support the police, the procurator’s office and the court in order to establish that our newspaper was right and to remove an officer from his position?

“Diapazon” journalists have had many collisions with that officer on many different occasions. Three years ago, the activities of our newspaper were suspended on the pretext of humiliation of honour and dignity of another officer. An expertise was conducted by individuals who did not have the proper qualifications. Another examination made in the City of Almaty, at the heart of legal expertise, rejected all charges against us. I recall these three-year-old events because the same Parasat Kuthujin concealed one of the expert opinions. Who knows whether “Diapazon” would have been closed down or not in 1999 had that officer performed his duty and took into account that experts opinion.

Let me give another example that can be called unique for our country. All cities and towns of Kazakhstan receive the popular TV channels KTK and NTK that have business partners to help them with news reporting. Everywhere cooperation of this kind is viewed as legal. Since 1998, an Aktyubinsk Partnership “Rifma” (the founder of my newspaper) has been preparing news reporting for KTK and NTK. Only a week ago, the Aktyubinsk court recognised such activity to be illegal. Following the logic of the court, a licence for TV frequencies is required for preparing TV broadcasts. It is a complete absurdity. “Thanks” to that decision, our company may be ruined. It seems that we have been involved in an illegal entrepreneurship for several years. I have given this example only because the same prosecutor Mr. Kuthujin had a hand in this too.

To close my statement, I would like to thank you for your attention and to express my only wish to the law-enforcement bodies of Kazakhstan. Both you and we, the journalists, should make one and the same big thing. Therefore, I wish the following – let’s show each other some respect. Believe me, we are all worthy of it.

Sergey Duvanov

CORRUPTION AGAINST THE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

I would like to begin my statement by quoting a good friend and a well-known Kazakh politologist Nurbulat Masanov, who finds that corruption in Kazakhstan is “the foundation of the state and political system”. In his opinion: “With the exception of the three Baltic states, following the disintegration of the USSR, a new type of state based on total corruption has been created in the post-Soviet world. Its political form is a presidential republic.”

It should be admitted that corruption has become overwhelming; it has trampled down and absorbed the entire political system, adapted the entire state machinery for its own purposes, and created new “rules of the game” for the people of Kazakhstan.

If in the early days of independence, the usurpation of power by President Nazarbayev and the elimination of true democratic mechanisms laid down the foundations for corruption in Kazakhstan, by now that corruption has become a feeding ground for Nazarbayev’s authoritarianism as well as a major force counteracting the democratic processes.

A democratic political system and freedom of expression are the only real mechanisms to fight corruption efficiently and effectively. Therefore, the only way a corrupt system can survive and exist is to eliminate the democratic principles of a state. It is because of this, as Mr. Masanov said, that “the corruption has taken the entire state and political system under its direct control”.

It is clear that, when referring to corruption, we mean the relations between the people in the state power system. The bearers of the ideology of corruption are the bureaucrats of government authorities. They have their own interests, which are quite material. In principle, nothing can function in Kazakhstan at present without the involvement of the personal interests of public officers; corruption has become the driving force of the entire state machinery.

Kazakhstan represents the most typical authoritarian and corrupt political system. It has its own ideology and its own social basis epitomised by a well-developed stratum of public officers.

For instance, most courts are supposed to resolve disputes between separate subjects of “corruptedness”. But being only a part of this system, the court will usually adjudicate according to unspoken rules and norms of “corruptedness”. The core of such rules is that the decisions made by the public officers may be bought.

To put it plainly, corruption as a state principle means that any service in the system of state relations should be paid for. Formally, the Constitution, laws, norms and the rules specified in relevant regulatory acts do exist. But all of this is nothing more than a sham. It is very easy to get round every law, having paid money to the people responsible for a functioning of some mechanism of the state machinery.

A bribe has turned into a necessary attribute of social relations. By recognising a bribe to be the basis of such relations, especially when dealing with the state, you become an inherent part of the country’s way of life. Should you begin to “revolt” against such relations, you will face an unenviable destiny – to go from one bureaucratic office to another till the end of your life or to be subjected to administrative pressure.

The law-enforcement bodies whose task it is to combat such activities are in fact vigilant guards of the corrupt system. Both the court and the police usually support those who act according to the “principles” of corruption and instead punish those who seek to live in compliance with the law in force.

The role of lawyers in legal proceedings in Kazakhstan has been reduced more and more to mediation. The most valued are the lawyer-mediators who know how to “divorce” and how much money is involved and whom to give it to.

A special role is given to the media. Realising that the media are essential for ensuring an ideological basis for the functioning of the system, the ruling elite in the form of President Nazarbayev and his family has “cleansed” the country’s informative space of disloyal media. As a result, the family now controls Kazakhstan’s most important media.

Most manipulated periodicals merely appear to fight corruption. Moreover, such press provides informative support: All of its critical analysis as well as its praise of governmental efforts in the fight against corruption create an illusion that the authorities themselves are not involved, that the corruption exists by itself, and that governmental authorities even help in the fight against corruption.

Within this pattern, criticising the authorities for not enough attention to corruption, for inadequate efforts in fighting against it and even for showing indulgence towards corrupt people is not precluded. The most important thing still remains behind the scene – the state power already means corruption; fighting against corruption is fighting against the existing system of state power. Obviously, corruption does not exist outside the state power and, furthermore, no state power exists outside corruption.

It should be acknowledged that the controlled press copes for the time being with the task of making fools of people. Some of the media still believe that the state power, if it wants, can easily defeat corruption and that the president is trying to fight against it, his noble fight hampered only by his slow-witted associates.

Referring to numerous exposures and penalising corrupt people cannot be evidence of an anti-corruption fight in Kazakhstan. Analysed impartially, most such “exposures” disguise either a struggle between competitors or a confrontation of different clans.

On the other hand, few opposition newspapers are subject to continuous attacks by the authorities. Typically, the authorities are seemingly not involved. The opposition newspaper “DAT” was ordered to be closed down by the courts. The shooting of a leader of the challenging “TAN” TV station was simply an act of hooliganism. The newspapers “ResPublika 2000” and “Vremya Po” were closed down because a printing house had refused to print them. Editorial boards of the newspapers “XXI Century” and “ResPublika” were set on fire; hooligans attacked the editorial board of “SolDAT”. Periodic threats and attacks on opposition journalists have become a norm of life.

As a result, no media disloyal enough to inform the public about the cases of corruption of the Kazakh authorities is left in the country. The remaining dissent is rooted out using all possible means.

Such realities are a logical result of the corrupt system established by President Nazarbayev. In this way the corrupt circles of Kazakhstan get rid of dangerous witnesses of their crimes. It is in the deep interest of a whole army of bureaucrats of all ranks to abolish an independent and uncontrolled media and to apply all efforts to suppressing any remaining criticism and dissent in the country.

The ruling clan merely imitates fighting against corruption. In reality it supports corruption by passing relevant laws and regulations, and by cultivating patron and client relations and contempt for human rights and freedoms. Moreover, the ruling clan itself has begun to depend on the corruption that it had borne and an inherent part of which it has become. Now, within the system of mutual responsibility, authoritarianism and corruption rely on the existence and propensity of each other. The vicious circle has been established.

Several conclusions can be made here.

1. Fighting against corruption, as declared by Nazarbayev's regime, is nothing more than an imitation of the process. Actually, it resembles a puppet fight. The slogan of corruption fighting often masks the pursuit of opposition leaders who are said to be corrupt and subjected to legal proceedings. Examples include proceedings against Kazhegeldin, Zhakiyanov, and Ablyazov.
2. The persecution of opposition journalists and the pressure on independent media will continue – “corruptedness” will not permit the existence of a press that publicises their criminal actions and criticises the political system that ensures their safety.
3. The abundance of natural resources will continue to attract foreign investors to Kazakhstan and these investors will continue to offer financial support and to lobby Mr. Nazarbayev's political regime. Oil companies in the USA are an example of this lobbying activity.

4. The system of “corruptedness” will continue to improve itself by adjusting itself to the requirements of the international community. Regimes will mimic and find more elaborate methods of suppressing dissent and freedom of expression. The Kazakh authorities have already gained some experience in this. They pass laws that formally proclaim democratic principles but which in reality limit them. Such is a new law on political parties that deprives opposition parties from an opportunity to fight for power on legitimate grounds. The authorities are quick to establish their own human rights organizations and various public councils. Examples include a human rights organization founded under the patronage of a president’s daughter or the scheduled establishment of the Public Council on the Media under the president.
5. All attempts at fighting corruption in the existing political system are doomed to fail. The political system established by Mr. Nazarbayev has no place for independent courts, separation of powers, or freedom of the press, so in principle it cannot avoid generating corruption. In this regard, all attempts by the OSCE, the European Union and the US State Department to push Mr. Nazarbayev towards democratisation of the political system are in vain. For Mr. Nazarbayev and his team, the movement towards democracy is the movement towards an indictment. He will hardly volunteer to go that way. More probably he will act contrarily. All ten years of his rule testify to this: the situation on human rights and freedom of the media in Kazakhstan is worsening every year, despite all efforts by the international community.

Lastly, it is not a conclusion. It is not an advice. It is not even a proposal. Rather these are my own thoughts aloud. I believe that it is time for the international organizations that set the democratic development of Central Asia as their aim to seriously ponder over their tactics and strategy. Unfortunately, the means and methods of today have a low efficiency and sometimes bring results contrary to those intended, as can be witnessed in Kazakhstan.

Sergei Ejkov

CORRUPTION AS A CHALLENGE FOR FREE MEDIA

To understand the factors conducive to corruption in Uzbekistan, one should refer to the book “From the Strong State to the Strong Society” by President Islam Karimov. Just think it over – first comes the state and then the society, the individual and the citizen. This principle is not a subject for discussion in official circles. Moreover, it is not disputed by the press. However, the sources of corruption should be sought from this angle, namely of a quickly growing influence of governmental units and naturally of their employees. To put it simply, such a stand by the head of state is a legal and ideological foundation for corruption in Uzbekistan.

Why do people from European countries want to work for their government? In many ways such jobs are secure. Governmental employees are not safe from financial disaster, bankruptcy or other similar misfortunes of the market economy. By strictly observing the law and meticulously performing duties, a governmental employee will probably not get rich, but will be comfortably well-off for all of his or her life. Such an employee is guaranteed to have a decent pension and earns a certain amount of social respect.

Why do the people of Uzbekistan want to be governmental employees? To gain power over the people, a power to allow or to prohibit, to punish or to pardon. Such functions go hand in hand with extortion, blackmail or other not very nice but very promising things.

Considering the growing corruption among governmental employees and the role of the media in informing the public about corruption cases, our conclusion will be far from a comforting one.

Unlike their colleagues in neighbouring countries or in the rest of the world, Uzbek journalists practically do not touch on the problem of corruption in their country, almost as if it does not exist at all. Extremely occasionally, the word “corruption” can be found in the Uzbek

newspapers; it is usually substituted by the word “bribery”, which has less scope.

However, in my opinion the situation is not simply troublesome, it is almost catastrophic. All Uzbeks present here are well aware of the fact that one can hardly take a step in Uzbekistan without having to pay someone for something, ranging from a trivial certificate or contacts with a traffic police officer through to the signing of large commercial contracts on terms extremely beneficial to the Uzbek economy.

Speaking at a recent session in Oliy Majlis (Parliament), the president drew attention to the corruption, regionalism and clan relations that are typical of Uzbekistan and are essentially a major national characteristic. The president sounded an idea of fighting against such negative phenomena, and presumably some people sincerely believed in this declaration of intentions. Right after Islam Karimov’s statement, I received a call from London (BBC) asking for my opinion on it. I cautioned openly that not everything pronounced from a high rostrum should be taken at face value. The aim of some statements is merely to produce an external effect or an external response. In this very case, the topic of fighting against corruption was raised in order to please both the International Monetary Fund, which is going to provide a substantial financial injection into the fading Uzbek economy, and potential investors, who are poorly informed about the realities of Uzbekistan. It became necessary to calm concerns, since corruption is becoming a serious concern among international experts and foreigners who risked money some time ago. By the way, we have been here once before. Several years ago, Islam Karimov, speaking in Samarkand and Navoi, removed hokims of provinces from their positions. His speech was bright and devoted mainly to the corruption and clan relations that had impregnated not only hokimiyats but also law-enforcement bodies. In a fit of rage, the president exclaimed: “Who will the people go to if even those who should enforce the law are criminals!”

Everyone was waiting for the fight against corruption to begin in earnest. Prosecutors and police stopped driving luxury Mercedes and BMW cars and began to use locally produced “Tico” or old Russian

“Zhiguli” cars. Apprehensions lasted for about two months, after which those who were afraid of the crackdown on corruption realised that nothing would happen. The president’s speech was intended for “plebeian” people and no actions would follow. In other words, one “big boss” just pretends to be angry and “small bosses” pretend to be afraid. Still, everyone plays according to the rules and knows that even the opposing party will not break them.

Uzbekistan has no intention of fighting against corruption, as the dynamics of the country show: an enhanced role of the state and of the control functions of governmental units. In one of his statements, the president mentioned that more than 20 different agencies perform economic control functions. He expressed his indignation, complaining that such a situation should not be permitted, but he did not change anything afterwards. On the contrary, presidential decrees and resolutions by the Cabinet of Ministers (the head of which is Islam Karimov himself) continued to develop fiscal and other policies that suffocated the economy and any sign of entrepreneurship.

A recent example is a resolution by the Cabinet of Ministers making it possible to conduct unscheduled inspections of economic units and companies. This resolution was lobbied by the Taxation Committee and by the Unit for Fighting Against Tax Crime, which was recently established under the Uzbek Prosecutor’s Office.

Previously, inspections could be conducted only when absolutely necessary, thereby stemming the flow of bribes to tax officers and other governmental employees. Now the opportunities are unlimited and the chances of being caught red-handed are extremely slim.

Not so long ago I wrote how employees of the Shayhantaur Prosecutor’s Office (Tashkent) were extorting money from Mr. Dostmukhamedov, an entrepreneur (Urta-Chirchik District, Tashkent Province). The Prosecutor’s Office was clearly acting in violation of the law, as was the Tax Crime Department in the country’s capital. After my material had been published, we received a letter from Mr. Ruziev, the Department chief, stating that extortion had not been proven and that everything had been done legitimately. He had not even taken the

trouble to open the Criminal and Procedural Code, where it is clearly stated that a crime related to tax avoidance is the responsibility of the territorial investigation units. Moreover, he informed the editorial board that the entrepreneur was being sought as a suspect. However, according to his domicile registration that man continued to live at home.

What was it all for? In the first place, to punish the businessman who had dared to bring his case onto the pages of the republican newspaper. In this way other people would be discouraged from getting help from the press or from exposing cases of corruption by law-enforcement bodies.

It would not be proper for me to cite myself. However, it is more honest than to cite hypocritically a high-ranking officer whose words, thoughts and actions do not concur.

Having analysed the reasons behind hastily made arrests and holding many people under investigation in custody, I wrote in June 2002 that corrupt law-enforcement officers “are accustomed to putting on the pressure, taking no trouble to stay within the framework of the law. They realise that freedom opens a broad field for protection, while the absence of freedom narrows it down.”

It is my aim to alert the people here of the corruption in the units that should in fact be guarding the interests of the individual and of the state. Instead, it is here that extortion, blackmail and intimidation have become the rules of conduct and formed a foundation for corruption. Corruption has not passed by one of the more cleaner agencies, the Council for the National Security of Uzbekistan (CNS). Even today this agency can abuse its influence and employ extortion. In my article “A Person Behind Bars. Who Profits From it?”, I wrote about some high-ranking officers of the CNS (Surkhandarya Province) who had been trying to gain control of Denau Oil Factory. Having had no success, they used a fictitious pretext to arrest a factory manager and to institute criminal proceedings against him. Their demands for a bribe delayed the case being taken to court. Initially they requested US\$ 75,000, which was later dropped to US\$ 40,000, and was finally reduced to US\$ 25,000. It was only after the

accused's family refused to hand over the money that the case went to court and where the judges were forced to indict him.

Assuming that the media of Uzbekistan will not keep silent forever, corrupt law-enforcement officers have ensured a legal security for themselves and have made it practically impossible for journalists to get information about their not always "clean" affairs. The Law "On the Media" prohibits comments about an investigation or descriptions of any actions before a court decision is made or a sentence comes into force. In this way, corrupt employees can resort to extremely undemocratic methods and shelter themselves from the natural anger of the public.

Courts have also secured themselves and today they can make decisions with practically no regard of the law. The term judicial independence in fact frequently means independence from the law.

Here is a simple example. A new Criminal Code specifies a wide range of penalties for one particular crime, ranging from a fine to imprisonment for several years. I remember a Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Court, who, during a statement at a workshop arranged by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, tried very hard to convince us that this was a sign of democracy. In fact, it is a sign of corruption. Any judge earning a beggar's salary with the power to pass such vastly different sentences will obviously decide in favour of that sentence that allows him to pocket the most money.

In my opinion, no judge can allow himself to be independent. Why? Because the whole judicial system is corrupt.

Once a young judge who had not had enough time to acquire all the vices of his trade exposed to me the mechanism of corruption in the judicial sphere. He said that to acquit a person he had to be paid, even if an accused was clearly innocent. I was naïve and naturally wondered what would prevent him from being objective?

With a sad smile the young man remarked that those at the "top" would not believe him. They would decide that he had taken a bribe from relatives of the accused but had not given them a share of money. The existing system would not forbid it and any judge not playing by the rules of the game would be quickly removed under a legal pretext, without any guarantee of later returning to his profession.

Corruption in the courts makes them an obedient tool in the hands of police and the Prosecutor's Office entrusted with investigation powers. Because you can't keep a lot of information secret and judges end up investing bribe money in property, every judge is at the beck and call of the Prosecutor's Office. And if so, the judges will continue to carbon copy indictments in their sentences, sometimes even with the same grammatical mistakes.

The judicial procedure in our country is sometimes a farce, a mockery of justice or an inquisition, if will you excuse me for having such a sharp tongue.

The Uzbek customs authority is a gold mine, and it is very difficult to get a job there. Using traditional methods (enhancing the role of the state), the government has decided to moderate the appetites of custom officers and has introduced new import rules. Actually yesterday, I met with a businessman who told me about a so-called "customs clearing". He managed to pay only US\$ 500 for the goods, for which he had been supposed to pay US\$ 5,000. He gave US\$ 1,000 to the customs officers and was thankful to them because they had valued the goods at a lower price. It seems that every time the authorities attempt to increase state control, they count on obtaining additional funds for the budget. But this does not happen. The additional money lines the bottomless pockets of corrupt governmental employees. You may then well ask if it is in fact the corrupt employees who are drafting such documents?

But let's return to the subject of corruption in general. Corrupt employees, whose job it is to guard state interests, lobbied against recent actions by the government to eliminate imports to the republic. Once private trade on imported goods had been almost completely wiped out, the traders began to work "underground". By paying bribes to inspectors, they naturally raise the prices of their goods. But it's the Uzbek people who suffer. The only commercial newspaper that had attempted to report on the situation was immediately punished. One of its journalists happened to be on the verge of dismissal and, as far as I know, its founder was sent on holiday to Antalya in Turkey.

What can we do and how can we live in an openly corrupt society? How can we, the journalists, fight against the arbitrariness of the power that is encouraging corruption? It can only be possible through the existence in Uzbekistan of truly independent and free media, something that is not anticipated for a while yet. Meanwhile, one of my colleagues who publishes a newspaper in Tashkent says that his newspaper is the only independent one. Maybe this really is the case. But then why does he direct those people who have suffered under the authorities and from corruption to me, instead of publishing their stories himself in his own newspaper?

In my opinion, it is a rhetorical question.

Another question arises. Are the authorities interested in the creation of an independent press? In my opinion, no. As I said once in Almaty: “Uzbekistan is now about to finish the construction of a classical feudalistic state with all the required democratic decorations.” I am not going to withdraw my words. Instead, I would reiterate that the situation is still not changing for the better.

The “Pravda Vostoka” newspaper, for which I have the honour to work, is at least trying to warn of the danger and the destruction to the country’s economy that corruption is bringing about. Our newspaper, or more precisely your obedient servant, told readers that Uzbekistan buys seed potatoes from Holland at a twice the actual price. We have reported on how we buy planes from Western companies, and how money is extorted from ordinary people who sometimes are as poor as a church mouse. Please excuse me for being frank, but we don’t see articles on these subjects in other periodicals. At best, after every article of this kind, they wonder why I am not behind bars or in fact if I am still alive. Their imaginations run wild, but not one of them has ever tried to undertake, if not the same, then at least something similar in essence or spirit. I think they tend to forget about a famous expression, which is still topical today: “A person who refrains from freedom in order to have a piece of bread will finally remain without both bread and freedom.”

The only thing that can be stated is that we now have several dilettante journalists who are discussing demagogically the need to free the media.

They engage only in discussion and go from one international “get-together” or workshop to another. Not once have they tried to tell the people the truth, although they refer to themselves as having suffered under the authorities. (For me, personally, it is difficult to understand the pathetic rhetoric of a former Ideology Secretary of the Tashkent Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan who never tires of saying how much he has suffered at the hands of the authorities because of his fight for democracy. I still remember his statements about a leadership role in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and about how it was preparing a bright future for us.)

Without getting personal, let me remark that as far as democratisation of the media is concerned, Uzbekistan is already 15 years behind Russia and ten years behind Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. It is sad, but true.

Second, the authorities that initially resolved to play a part in democracy and that proclaimed an orientation toward free thinking and a polarity of views in the media quickly realised that it was too much. Yet they still continue to give instructions on how, on what subject or in which spirit to write, and they do not allow any criticism of themselves.

Third, Uzbekistan today has no active public opinion that could counteract the dictatorship of governmental employees. There are almost no editors willing to risk their positions for the victory of justice or in order to tell the truth or at least part of the truth to the people. There are almost no journalists who would dare to throw publicly a shade of doubt on the actions of the governmental authorities. I don't take into account those who, for their own purposes, use mainly international agencies and foundations. In my view, the current situation suits them well because they can gain essential financial advantages when the media are not free. Should freedom come tomorrow, they will have to prove their professional competence. And it would be quite problematic for many of them.

Fourth, as before, the Uzbek authorities mentally referring to journalists as “supporters of the party” are not clever enough to play democratic games. However, they are also not stupid enough to put open pressure

on opposition journalists, in disregard of a possible response by the international community. Though the last statement is rather disputable, it can still be accepted with significant reservations; it is not an absolute truth, but the situation itself is reassuring.

And finally, the increasing awareness among the community of democratic states of Uzbekistan and its ongoing changes can have a significant impact on the policies of the ruling elite. But on one basic condition: an elimination or minimization of the double standards of the West in respect of Uzbekistan. I think that one should not close one's eyes to blank out the systematic violations of human rights or the totalitarian control over the media that are taking place in my country.

Even for the sake of current geographical needs or for a so-called political expedience, one's eyes should be open. By raising the issue in such a manner, I am confident that democratisation of Uzbekistan and specifically of its media will finally come into sight.

Rustam Koshmuratov

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM AND CORRUPTION

My presentation is devoted to corruption and to investigative journalism on the subject. I'd like to begin by citing the words of the Kyrgyz president, Askar Akayev, who once said: "... corruption has reached the 7th floor of the White House". For your information, our White House, the seat of the President's administration and of the Republican government, has just seven floors.

One of the most significant events in the beginning of investigative journalism was a series of articles published in the "Svobodniye Gori", a parliamentary newspaper, in 1994. The materials concerned a so-called "golden case", an agreement between the Kyrgyz government and the Canadian Corporation "Siabeco" for the development of the Kumtor gold mine (Issik-Kul Province).

The "Svobodniye Gori" wrote that none of the deputies had ever had a chance to read that agreement carefully and demanded that it be publicised. Another article informed about a US\$ 13.8 million loan that had been obtained by the government but the fate of which was not known. Such openness constituted a major threat for the leaders of the sovereign state who had announced to the world that they were going to build a second Switzerland. They began to build it with the help of a notorious Swiss citizen Boris Birshtein. This caused a protest among non-government newspapers, which had to be suppressed.

Thus, in July 1994, the Procurator General's office filed a suit against the newspaper. The court ruled that the newspaper should be closed down. That same day the printing presses stopped.

That same year the Procurator General's office initiated criminal proceedings against I. Stepkichova, a journalist who in the newspaper "Yujniy Kurier" (13 August 1994) had written that the privatisation of an entity was legal, and had reported on claims of a company that was challenging that decision. The correspondent highlighted the doubtful

approach of A. Sharshenaliev, the Republican Prosecutor General, to this issue. The author was charged with slander and was brought to court. However, the case backfired and the defendant was acquitted as the suit had no grounds.

The Procurator's Office appealed. The High Court repealed the decision of the regional court and ordered a new judicial review. This red tape lasted for two years in different instances. Finally, the journalist lodged a complaint with the Constitutional Court, which on 15 May 1996 made a ruling depriving the Procurator General's Office of the right to appeal against court decisions. The journalist was left in peace, but the law-enforcement bodies made an attempt to arrest her thirteen-year old daughter and kept her in custody for some time. The former Prosecutor General still continues to file lawsuits against the journalist and he does not come to attend the hearings.

In January 1999, a Kyrgyz parliamentarian, Tursunbai Bakir uulu, filed a suit against 12 journalists simultaneously, accusing them of humiliating his personal dignity. He requested US\$ 400,000 of compensation for the moral injury that he had suffered. A journalistic NGO sent an official letter to the municipal prosecutors, documenting the right of the press to expose information about the deeds of this law-maker, who was known to have conducted rather strange negotiations with the leaders of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and to report that his brother had been sentenced for a drug-related crime. The absurd suit against the journalists was rejected by a prosecutor as having no grounds.

In 2000, the first issue of a new newspaper "Tribuna" (Bishkek City) created problems for its editor, I. Omurzakov. Following a damning article, a policeman of a correctional institution began to terrorise the editor and the author. A journalistic NGO talked to the policeman and thus helped the editor. The policeman excused himself and the newspaper continued to publish unmasking materials.

In summer 2000, M. Ibragimov, a journalist from a rural newspaper, published a critical article in a government newspaper (Jalalabad Province), in which he accused a local judge of bribe-taking. The latter

filed a suit to the local court. The author was sentenced to two years of imprisonment and a fine of US\$ 2,000. He was immediately sent to jail. Such a cruel punishment raised a wave of indignation among the public. A journalistic NGO found a well-known lawyer to help the journalist. As a result of an appeal, the sentence of deprivation of liberty was repelled and the fine was reduced ten times, to just US\$ 200.

In autumn 2000, much public attention was drawn to a case against the most popular Kyrgyz newspaper “Asaba”. The oldest parliamentarian, T. Usubaliev, who had been a leader of the republican Communist Party for 25 years, filed a lawsuit. He demanded compensation for a moral injury in the amount of US\$ 1 million. In his opinion, the newspaper was guilty of humiliating him over a period of eight years. After a long litigation, based on the Criminal Code articles on slander and humiliation of dignity, a judge made the decision to impose a US\$ 100,000 fine on the newspaper. As a result of this and other proceedings, the newspaper went bankrupt and was transferred into the ownership of a group of businessmen. It retained its title but lost its format. Its former editor, M. Eshimkanov, and his creative team established a new newspaper, the “Agim”, which quickly became popular.

In December 2002, the newspaper “Delo No” printed an article “Copper Items of Boris Trofimovich” about an illegal sale of non-ferrous metals by the Deputy Defence Minister of Kyrgyzstan. After this the latter filed a lawsuit in which he demanded that the author of the article be charged with liability for slander pursuant to Article 127, part 3 of the Criminal Code and to impose a US\$ 2,000 fine for moral injury. After long judicial battles, the court acquitted the journalist on the grounds of non-availability of *corpus delicti*.

A Russian-language newspaper “Moya Stolitsa” was founded in 2001. Its editor became A. Kim who had been removed from office at the daily newspaper “Vecherniy Bishkek” following some intricate actions of a group of businessmen who later managed to become newspaper owners. For six months, under different pretexts, the Ministry of Justice refused to register the newspaper. Nevertheless, the newspaper went ahead and its first issue was circulated on 6 November 2001. In a short time, the

newspaper became extremely popular and gained a broad audience. It was ruthless in exposing the shadow economy. When a son-in-law of the Kyrgyz president got in its line of fire, the patience of the authorities was exhausted.

In January 2002, the State Publishing Concern stopped the printing of the newspaper, claiming that the newspaper management had not signed a contract with it. Such argumentation was absurd because, according to the law in force, a publishing concern is not entitled to undertake such discriminatory actions. The editorial board filed a suit against the Publishing Concern and the court ruled that the refusal to print the newspaper was illegal and issued an order to resume printing. However, the Concern manager did not obey the order and requested a reversal of the ruling. The judge reconsidered her decision and repelled the previous verdict. The editorial board appealed to higher judicial instances, but the case got stuck there because of intentional dragging. The “Moya Stolitsa” had to publish its materials in the Kyrgyz newspaper “Agim” (though its articles were in Russian). Following statements by the Kyrgyz and international community (OSCE, US State Department, etc.) printing resumed. The newspaper has not been put off by its experiences and continues to publish materials about corruption in the upper echelons of power.

I have drawn your attention to only some of the investigative journalism in our republic; of course I could not cover every aspect of the Kyrgyz journalist’s daily work. As you can see, the way of those who conduct investigative journalism into corruption is not strewn with roses. Courts, police, national security, taxation bodies, etc., are all in the hands of those in power. Talking privately, journalists admit that their telephones are tapped, that they are shadowed, that provocations can be arranged against their relatives. Despite this, the fourth power continues to circulate information about corruption and the shadow economy and to expose a social vice. Let us hope that they stay on their chosen road, for the sake of a better life and a brighter future for our children.

Marat Mamadshoev

TAJKISTAN: CORRUPTION DOES EXIST
BUT INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM DOES NOT

III

The Tajik authorities recognised long ago that corruption is a serious problem in the country. President Amomali Rakhmonov has spoken about it publicly. At least in words, the authorities call upon the media to help them fight against this evil. Nevertheless, investigative journalism of corruption cases are not published very often in the Tajik media.

To begin, let me make a couple of remarks on this type of reporting. Many definitions of investigative journalism have been developed. In general, it means a comprehensive and detailed investigation of some poorly studied, closed or carefully guarded subject, during which one has to overcome the resistance of some bodies that are not willing to provide information of interest. In Russia and in the post-Soviet states, this concept is much narrower, implying an exposure of abuse of power. Investigative journalism is one of the most favoured story types of the reader. Publication of such materials facilitates a sharp growth of popularity of a periodical and enhances the role of the press in society.

Unfortunately, such materials are almost not available in the Tajik press. Even critical materials about the country's life are relatively rare, although significantly more such materials have been published over the last few years. Articles about corruption in the CIS and in the rest of the world are reprinted very often. The main reason of having no "teeth" is a fear among journalists for their safety. Let's recall that over the last few years, more than 70 journalists have been murdered in Tajikistan. There are grounds to believe that most of them were murdered because of their professional activities. But there is also another reason – the unavailability of real incentives to write such kinds of articles. Tajik journalists do not earn high royalties. The editors who should be the initiators of such investigations are often against them, and no powerful financial or other group that could order such articles exist in Tajikistan. For

instance, journalists in the West can be awarded a grant from a foundation in order to conduct an investigation. Having means for existence, a person can work for a sufficiently long period without having to worry about the daily bread. In Tajikistan, as well as preparing a serious and comprehensive investigation, a journalist should also be “producing lines” to make just enough money to live on.

Among the periodicals that more or less regularly publish critical materials are the governmental newspapers “Sadoi Mardum”, “Djumkhuriyat” and “Narodnaya Gazetta”, the newspaper “Nadjot” of the Party of Islamic Revival of Tajikistan, and the independent newspapers “Tajikistan”, “Vecherniy Dushanbe” and “Asia Plus”. The favourite subjects to come under fire in the Tajik media are the bad condition of Tajik trains, abuse by customs, extortion by the state traffic inspection officers, etc. Naturally, nobody is going to conduct investigations about corruption in the upper echelons of power, even though President Rakhmonov has himself acknowledged at a governmental meeting that a problem does exist.

Still, there are not many critical materials even of this kind. Essentially, it cannot be called fully fledged investigative journalism because most of it does not meet the common criteria of reliability, clarity of narration and – most importantly – of comprehensive coverage of the problem.

The shortcomings can be attributed, on the one hand, to the low professional level of the journalists, their inability to clearly write down their ideas on paper. The meaning of their content can get confused or even distorted. In general, much depends on the professionalism of the journalists.

On the other hand, another serious drawback is insignificant content, superficial conclusions or no conclusions at all. A low professional level of authors may explain it too. Another major reason can be a fear among the journalists to speak the entire truth, to make comparisons or to draw conclusions.

Very often, the opinion of an accused party is not presented in the Tajik press. The most difficult part of investigative journalism is obtain-

ing the comments of an “anti-hero”. In Tajikistan, an accused party often refuses to have any contacts, relying on the fact that an article will not be published without his comments. By the way, this is not so naïve. I have witnessed myself that despite having enough evidence, an editorial board would refuse to publish a sharp article because no comments of an opponent were available. Quite often, an author does not make enough efforts to meet with an accused party. As a result, the subject under investigation is not covered objectively. This enables an accused party to counter-attack and to demand a rebuttal and its publication, it could be argued, undermines the trust the public has in a media outlet. Should the opponent present convincing evidence, however, it should be published.

Several publications in the newspaper “Asia Plus” where I work can be taken as an example. For instance, about a year ago, our newspaper published an article about policemen extorting money from people, near the monument to the founder of the Tajik state, Ismail Somoni. The “guards of order” demanded money from our correspondent for permission to take a picture of the monument. When they realised that he was a journalist, they allowed him to go ahead. The policemen categorically refused to provide any comments and advised him to refer to higher-level bodies. In his comments, Said Djuraev, the head of the Interior Department of the district where the monument is located, admitted that such events could have taken place. High staff rotation due to low salaries was his explanation. However, the newspaper did not draw its own conclusions on whether such extortion was typical of the law-enforcement bodies or about its causes. Therefore, in my opinion, this article, which was not bad on the whole, could have been more far-reaching.

Let’s take another example. Our newspaper published an article about improper relations in the Artists’ Union of the Republic of Tajikistan. A famous Tajik artist, Farrukh Negmat-zade, accused the Union chairman Sukhrob Kurbanov of financial abuse. While Mr. Kurbanov was away, the editorial board asked his deputy Vafo Nazarov to provide comments. Mr. Nazarov refused, saying that an investigation by a special commission had not found anything criminal. He refused to provide any

records of the investigation and said that the relevant bodies had the records. Still the newspaper decided that those words of Mr. Nazarov were sufficient and published an article. Mr. Kurbanov came back to Tajikistan and demanded that a refutation be published. He presented records of the audit of financial activities of the Artists' Union. After several issues, the newspaper was actually forced to publish the refutation.

Quite recently, in July, "Asia Plus" published an article "Typhoid in Dushanbe: Rumours or Lies". At that time Dushanbe was filled with rumours of a quickly spreading typhoid epidemic. Our journalists tried to find out what the real situation was. The Health Ministry of Tajikistan refused categorically to provide any information. Our newspaper then tried to conduct its own additional investigation to prove that the Health Ministry was actually hiding the beginning of a typhoid epidemic in Dushanbe from the people.

Our journalists only partially succeeded. For instance, they could not get into the hospitals guarded by the police. Still the newspaper obtained such data that testified indirectly to a sharply increased number of cases of typhoid. In particular, they were told by drugstores that the sales of anti-typhoid drugs had increased sharply. The public response following the article's publication was not bad. The Health Ministry, known to be inaccessible to the press, even arranged a press conference on the subject of typhoid in Dushanbe.

Several more articles have attempted to conduct similar investigations. For instance, in the article "It Smells of Kerosene", our newspaper told about the danger of many cisterns of kerosene accumulated at a Dushanbe railway station, close to residential quarters. The article "What's the Price of Electricity for People?" told about attempts by the Tajik Power Company "Barki Tochik" to raise the price of connecting to the electricity network. Our newspaper cited Djamshed Zabirov, head of the Electricity Division of the executive staff of the Tajik President, who had said that such steps should not be allowed. An official from the Antimonopoly Policy Agency had also commented on this situation. In both cases, the accused parties – the Tajik railway and "Barki Tochik" –

preferred to keep silent, though the newspaper had approached them several times. Still the newspaper decided not to criticise the management of these organizations. Thus in the article about kerosene, “Asia Plus” reported that the time wasn’t right to be searching for the guilty ones; it was more urgent to eliminate the threat. The second article did not provide any comments at all.

I believe that the examples I have given are enough to show that investigative journalism is only just taking off in Tajikistan. Still the results are already available. The readers have a better opinion of the periodicals that are trying to undertake such investigations. A growing trust among readers also instils hope that the Tajik media will not stop at what they have achieved but will continue to advance.

Alisher Toksanov

POWER, CORRUPTION AND THE PRESS

Corruption is a social phenomenon that has been haunting mankind since the emergence of material civilisation, with its wealth, private property, and state and social inequality. Thousands of years passed, cities and states came and went, but corruption stayed. It has acquired new characteristics and has adapted to new technological innovations: it has become more difficult to identify. Modern civilisation has brought with it new methods of appropriating national resources and using them for profiteering that had been unthinkable before. This century is distinguished by a corruption that has reached epidemic proportions and surpassed the boundaries of one continent. Still, I want to emphasise that this sickness has not been brought in from outside. Corruption cannot be imported or exported; it develops only thanks to a country's internal factors, be they historic or economic.

Mankind has acquired a certain amount of immunity from corruption, though it has not recovered completely (it will probably need more than a century to do so). If we take the European countries, which have essentially built civil societies, support and protect human rights, have transparent economies, and where the governments are under the control of all branches of power, we can see that the chances of corruption there are slim. One does not have to go far – Denmark, Norway, Sweden... Moreover, the international community refers to corruption as a socially dangerous phenomenon. Let me cite the words of the US Minister of Trade, William Daily, who said on 22 February 1999 in Washington at a conference arranged by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development: “If a contract is awarded for a bribe and not as a result of honest competition, the people will not get quality products or service. Even more important is that such practices deprive them of an opportunity to have a government that will guard the interests of the society.” According to Mr. Daily: “If there are any positive aspects in corruption,

they have no material value. They have been paid for at a political price: the people involved in corruption have had to resign.”

In the developing countries, including the post-Soviet states, corruption has crawled out of the Soviet bureaucratic woodwork, has criminalized and has reached overwhelming proportions. It has been estimated that the shadow economy in the countries of the former Soviet Union comprises 40-60% of gross domestic product; a share of such proportions can only exist because of corruption. There is no doubt that corruption embraces all branches of power, penetrates all social strata, creates double standards of morals and social life – as some say: “If it is not allowed, but you want it very much, it means that you can.” A wild primary accumulation of capital signified the beginning of the market economy. Organized crime started to get into the economic and political arena, trying and succeeding in collaborating with the bodies of power. This was much facilitated by the Soviet outlook, according to which the state, and not the individual, is responsible for everything. Such an approach fits completely within the framework of a so-called eastern despotism and an Asiatic way of production, in which society is ruled by the state machinery and not by the citizens.

Central Asia is a traditional society where authorities enjoy respect and honour and the opinion of the government is not disputable and is beyond any criticism. It has strong political leaders and reputable parliaments (admittedly not everywhere), but the economies are weak (everyone there can feel it), the courts are shapeless and the press is not recognised to be a fourth power. The real power belongs to corruption. All of you know that sometimes everything is decided not by using economic methods or laws, but by administrative methods that are not open and not formally agreed. The power of the telephone is higher than the power of a written law. Sometimes a by-law has a higher status than the Constitution. It therefore turns out that what is declared differs from what really exists. And such a situation quite suits a corrupt power.

Let me give a citation from the book “Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the 21st century. Threat to Security, Conditions and Guarantees of the Progress” by Uzbek President Islam Karimov (1997): “The existence of

a criminal ‘shadow economy’ in society gives birth to organized crime and the governmental officers of different ranks and levels get caught in its demoralising web. The emerging corruption primarily takes advantage of a governmental service in order to assist or directly help organized criminal groups. And then it becomes a direct threat to the security and stability of society, because of the negative consequences that crime and corruption have on society.” This was the opinion of the Uzbek head of state.

Corruption is latent, it is afraid of acting openly, without a shield. The victims of its blows are all of us who want to live honestly. Corruption is afraid of an open fight, especially with the press, which always acts publicly and on a large scale. For eleven years, corruption has not been afraid of anyone, because it knew that the press was under the pressure of the government, or watched by it, and that no criticism or analysis of a real situation in the economy and politics would be allowed for. Can you recall a newspaper or a television programme raising the question of why there are so many beggars in the country? Why the workers or employees do not get their salaries for months? Where the money comes from for building palaces for the administration? Why people from the countryside abandon places they are accustomed to and go to live in the capital? What are the police doing – extorting money or fighting crime?

They have been telling us over and over again that censorship was necessary so as not to destabilise the social and political situation in the country, referring to Tajikistan as if the press had activated the civil war. This fairy-tale is repeated in many authoritarian countries as justification for the authorities’ anti-constitutional actions. The road to hell is paved with good intentions... Being a journalist, I saw how newspaper articles were banned for publication by censorship – information about corruption, poverty, the shadow economy, crime, ruthless officials, arbitrariness in localities... All of this was considered to be a state secret and “UzLit” strictly guarded it.

Hidden games with staff, machinations with government resources, persecutions of a liberal and constructive opposition, the lack of an independent judicial system as well as totalitarian censorship were also some

of the effects of corruption. Will you recall the amazement of the Uzbek President that corruption had become dangerous and the shadow economy had become so large, when in the autumn of 1999 he made changes to the staffing of the Samarkand and Navoi Provinces. He angrily questioned where the press had been? Had it not seen anything? Couldn't it have signalled to society that something wrong had been taking place?

Naturally, the press was able to see everything, and it was able to hear and know everything, but it followed the principle of the three eastern monkeys – see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil. Moreover, its mouth was sealed by censorship. How could it be possible to write about misappropriation, abuse, persecutions and suppression by the authorities, when in just a moment one could find oneself squashed by the state machinery? One television journalist from Khoresm was forced to leave the country and seek political asylum in Europe for having done so. Therefore, it is quite objective that an independent press could not exist here, while a corrupt machinery undertakes all the measures for its own security and self-preservation. That's why we consume from the print media and TV such information that has been painfully familiar to us since the olden Soviet times, namely, reports about glorious victories on economic battlefields, the social protection of the people, the revival of medieval traditions and outlooks, diplomatic success, an enhancing role of Uzbekistan in the world, the national ideology as the most acceptable and proper one. No mention of the real problems. We did not know what we were because we could not see our image in a real mirror, or we were looking at our reflection through a distorted looking glass.

Abroad they knew us very well and very rarely had a favourable opinion of us. For instance, according to the International Advisory Group "Control Risks Group", the most developed shadow economies and levels of corruption are in such states as Indonesia, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Iran and Yugoslavia. Its experts pointed to the fact that two out of three foreign projects do not materialise there because Western companies refuse to give bribes. "The organized crime and corruption of officials are serious and growing problems in the Central Asian republics – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan,

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan,” stated Rob Bun, a US State Department representative in the Bureau for the International Struggle against Drugs and Crime, speaking in the Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe. In his view, the principle behind criminal groups in the region is typically belonging to some clan and competing on the illegal market – starting with drugs and stolen cars and ending with commercial machinations. He added that in these countries “corruption on the high level stimulates organized crime”, while the strength of criminal groups in terms of their number, resources and political support has suppressed most of the law-enforcement bodies, which are underfunded, badly equipped and have a small incentive to work efficiently.

They say in the East: “Tradition is stronger than the law!” It suits corruption. All problems can be explained by traditions and the lifestyle of the people, as if from the earliest times bribe-giving is viewed as a symbol of respect to the power and bribe-taking is an indication of attention to the needs of the people. But corrupt officials would always be afraid of exposure and the anger of a ruler. Rulers would realise that corruption could shake to pieces the entire state and would pass tough laws, counteracting bribe-takers and criminals. I want to cite the words of the Russian tsar Nicholas the Second who sadly said to his son: “In this country it’s only you and me who do not steal!”

Corruption is a “natural” institution of an anti-democratic and totalitarian society. People believe that under Stalin no shadow economy or corruption existed, that the dictator was watching each and everyone and that it was impossible to steal, to conduct an illegal deal or to give a bribe. This is by no means the case, as corruption was flourishing that time too. Reprisals and censorship of the media promoted ugly thinking and a deformed outlook. Violations of human rights were ordinary things that were explained by a revolutionary necessity. An individual was simply at the mercy of corruption.

Now, when we refer to authoritarian tendencies in Uzbekistan, we are trying to suggest that we will survive an ordeal and that corruption will no longer threaten us once we have our own and specific way. Meanwhile, the international organisation “Transparency International” gave

us an “honourable” fifth place in corruption rankings for 98 countries of the world. Only Cameroon, Nigeria, Azerbaijan and Yugoslavia came before us. Maybe we should not repeat the experience of those countries that have passed this slippery way, but rather immune ourselves against the corruption virus? It’s not only in the interests of Uzbekistan but also in the interests of all those who want to cooperate with us. Finally, we are not alone on the planet, even though the globe of Uzbekistan that is installed on the Mustakillik Square symbolises just this.

As I have said, weak representative, executive and judicial powers suit corruption. It also wants to rule the fourth power, the media, with an iron rod. On 13 May 2002, censorship – that government institution for the control of public conscience and for fighting against dissidents – ceased to exist. Let’s not dispute the main reason behind this – a natural historical development, pressure by the West or finally recognition by the state of the real threat to society that corruption poses. Let’s seek an answer to the question: does it suit corruption? Of course not. Because an independent and untamed press will unmask all shadow transactions of corrupt officials and all machinations of those in power, and will provide a true picture of the country’s economic life. To become a real fourth power, the media should have the power to influence by providing independent and alternative information to the people on all aspects of government actions. No one opinion can be the only right one; other opinions should be available too. Pluralism and opposition are natural phenomena of the civil society and we are heading in that direction, but it’s a pity that this movement is too slow. Still, better late than never, because extremism and fanaticism are due to the mistrust of people in real power. Events of February and the summer of 1999 are further proof of this.

Thanks be to God that censorship as an institution no longer exists in Uzbekistan. But there is self-censorship, which is essentially worse than censorship in that it kills the will for freedom in people. Maybe we have spent too much time in a cage and when “all of a sudden” we are let free we do not want to abandon this “warm and well adjusted” little world? We have been tamed, we are scared of losing the attention of those who are higher up, and it’s difficult for us to become independent. There is no

doubt that such slave's thinking should be squeezed out, drop by drop, because it's free people thinking freely who build democracy. A herd of slaves does not represent a civil society. While the process of "squeezing out" is going on, corruption can be calm and continue to perform its deeds. But there will be an end to it.

I am confident that, with time, corruption will find how to proceed. I can imagine three possible actions against the media.

First, it is possible to continue to put pressure on the media. For this it is enough to intimidate the journalists, to withdraw a licence from an editorial board, or to establish technological censorship. Printing houses will start to boycott newspapers and power stations will cut off the electricity supplied to broadcasting stations. There are other methods too, crude but quite efficient, such as planting drugs or cartridges on journalists, constantly accusing them of violating the so-called 'passport regime,' threatening them on the phone, spilling dirt on them over the Internet, or sacking them under different pretexts. We have seen all of this and we are "bored". Moreover, since 11 September 2001, when Central Asia began to draw the attention of an entire international community, such an approach would discredit the state itself, as they already have an unfavourable opinion of us as a country that doesn't observe human rights. That's why this first scenario is possible, but not probable.

Second, it is possible to bribe the media. The journalists of Uzbekistan are far from rich and any amount of money that can be given for not publishing information sometimes is almost the only way of survival. On the other hand, it is also a method to make the press work for itself. Corruption will simply gain one more "supporter" in the person of the esteemed fourth power. The possibility of such a scenario has been proven by the realities in many CIS countries.

Third, it is possible to play off one newspaper against another, and while they fight, to profitably manage one's own affairs. Thus corruption will discredit the press in the eyes of the public and the people will treat journalists as they treat corrupt officials. In this case, mistrust can lead to the search for another source of information, which religious fanatics frequently exploit.

It is not excluded that the press may itself become corrupt. To counteract this, the country should have a system of balances of mutual control: parliament, government, courts, press, opposition, of which every element should perform its own function. I don't think that having gained freedom, the press will start throwing accusations around – for this there exists a counterbalance, or the system of judicial control. The government will also stop playing cat and mouse with the press, when it realises just how much millions of citizens who read the newspapers and watch the television are looking into how it functions.

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Part I: Latest Developments for the Media in Central Asia – one year after 11 September 2001

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