



THE REPRESENTATIVE ON FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA

**MEDIA FREEDOM  
IN TIMES OF  
ANTI-TERRORIST CONFLICT**

THIRD CENTRAL ASIAN MEDIA CONFERENCE  
ALMATY, 10-11 DECEMBER 2001

Vienna 2002

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The cover is a drawing by the German author and Nobel prize laureate (1999), Günter Grass, *Des Schreibers Hand (The Writer's Hand)*.

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The drawing was created in the context of his novel *Das Treffen in Telgte*, dealing with the literary authors of the time of the Thirty Years War.

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11 December 2001

THIRD CENTRAL ASIAN MEDIA CONFERENCE  
"MEDIA FREEDOM IN TIMES OF  
ANTI-TERRORIST CONFLICT"

On 10-11 December 2001, the Third Central Asian Media Conference was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The Conference was organized by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Freimut Duve and the OSCE Centre in Almaty in co-operation with the International Foundation for Protection of Freedom of Expression *Adil Soz* and the *Friedrich Ebert Foundation*. More than 80 journalists of all five Central Asia countries, government officials, members of parliament and NGOs took part.

Similar to the last two conferences (Bishkek in 1999 and Dushanbe in 2000) the lively debate was focused on the latest developments in the media field. Structural issues, such as legal media framework and media ownership, were also discussed. The crucial role of the media in the development of the civil society was particularly underlined. Special attention was paid to the opportunities for the next generation in journalism. The new challenges for the media in times of anti-terrorist conflict, especially in Central Asia that is affected by the conflict, became the main point of discussion. The participants noted that the problems highlighted in the Dushanbe Declaration adopted at the Conference last year still remain of great concern.

**Almaty Declaration on Freedom of the Media  
in Times of Anti-Terrorist Conflict**

The debates during the Conference in Almaty stressed these conclusions.

1. The governments of the Anti-Terror Alliance should not, in times of conflict, use national security arguments to limit human rights at home and reduce their support elsewhere.
2. In particular, the governments of the Central Asian States should not take the new conflict situation as a justification for repressive

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- steps against opposition media. On the contrary, they should use it as a catalyst for further steps towards creating a free media landscape in their societies.
3. The media should be free to exercise their corrective function towards economic, ecological and military decisions in their countries especially in times of conflict. The free public debate is imperative.
  4. The media should be free to play its fundamental role as society's watchdog against corruption, which is a serious obstacle for all countries on their way to democracy. Especially after 11 September the media should not be prevented to inform the public about existing financial links between terrorist group activities and corruption.
  5. Leading international media have to be, and must remain more actively engaged in the region, both as an important source of information and as example of professional journalism for their colleagues.
  6. Under the conditions of increased international tension and continued contradictions in Central Asia journalists should manifest more solidarity and support for each other.
  7. Journalists must undertake further efforts to report objectively and edit carefully their coverage of the conflict. Journalistic ethic is needed more than ever in times of conflict and the journalists have to be aware of their increased responsibility.
  8. The international community, governmental and non-governmental organizations must do more to safeguard journalists working in conflict zones. The leading media outlets could provide the needed training and insurance and can establish so-called security pools. Media foundations can be approached to financially support these pools. The creation of more efficient identification documents for professional journalists working in conflict zones should be promoted.

**THIRD REGIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON MASS MEDIA IN CENTRAL ASIA -  
“MASS MEDIA IN TIMES OF  
ANTI-TERRORIST CONFLICT”**

OPENING STATEMENT  
BY AMBASSADOR HEINRICH HAUPT  
HEAD OF THE OSCE CENTRE IN ALMATY

Almaty, 10 December 2001

**Ladies and Gentlemen:**

**I would like to welcome you to this Regional Conference on Mass Media organized by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the OSCE Centre in Almaty, in cooperation with the International Foundation for the Protection of Freedom of Expression Adil Soz and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Kazakhstan. We express our special gratitude for the generous financial support provided by the United Kingdom, Germany, Turkey, Portugal and the United States.**

We have gathered here today to follow up on the Regional Conferences on Mass Media in Central Asia held in Bishkek and Dushanbe, and to reflect on developments in media issues in the five Central Asian countries, also on the background of the crisis in neighbouring Afghanistan.

**Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right under international law.**

**Freedom of expression prominently figures in many OSCE documents.** At the Copenhagen Conference and at the Lisbon and Istanbul Summits, OSCE participating States have reaffirmed their obligation to ensure independent and pluralistic media in society. All OSCE participating States have committed themselves not only to tolerate media freedom, but to actively defend it.

**Free expression of facts and opinions is essential for any democratic process.** The free flow of information and ideas helps citizens to evaluate matters of public interest, and to foster public debate and participation of civil society in the democratic process.

**The level of freedom of expression existing in a given country is one of the prime indicators of democratic maturity in this country.**

**A country which unduly limits freedom of expression can not claim to be democratic.**

**Restrictions to the freedom of expression are admissible only under very strict conditions** as defined by competent international bodies.

**Politicians and public officials on all levels shall tolerate more criticism than ordinary citizens do.** This principle, which has been established by the European Court on Human Rights in the case *Lingens v. Austria* has been recognized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as reflecting international standards.

**Therefore, legal or administrative dispositions granting public officials of any level a higher degree of protection than ordinary citizens are contrary to international standards.**

As for fines or financial compensation: Courts should award a compensation only in case where a **refutation statement** is not sufficient to repair the harm caused to the victim.

In any case, **compensation must be proportional.** The European Court on Human Rights in the case *Tolstoy Miloslavsky v. UK* and then the UNHCHR have qualified as an unlawful restriction of freedom of expression the allocation of an excessive compensation.

**Ladies and Gentlemen:**

**many Central Asian media representatives affirm that their working conditions have been deteriorating in the last years.** Let me evoke some examples:

- **Concentration and monopolization of the media is continuing,**



primarily to the benefit of groups or individuals close to the political leadership.

- **Public officials, when criticized in the media, often turn to the courts demanding compensation for "libel", instead of entering into a public dialogue on the facts or opinions published.**
- **Ministries, (state security, police, fiscal) administrations or law courts, whose independence is not always guaranteed, often impose technical restrictions or excessive financial burdens on the media, thus seriously obstructing their work and inducing them to practice self-censorship. Cases of physical harassment have also been reported.**
- **Legal restrictions, like limitations on the retransmission of foreign electronic mass media or blocking the access to opposition internet web-sites are aimed to restrict the work of journalists, often under the pretext of safeguarding national security.**
- **Unspecified "dangers" allegedly emerging from the anti-terrorist campaign in Afghanistan have been used as a pretext to unduly limit the freedom of expression of mass media.**

**If the State has to respect and promote the freedom of speech, journalists, on their part, are bound to stick to the rules of professional ethics.**

**A suitable way to guarantee their professional integrity would be the adoption of a "Code of Conduct on Media Ethics" or a "Media Ethic Charter" for Central Asian media and journalists, following examples in many OSCE countries. Principles like "Seek Truth and Report It", "Minimize Harm" "Act Independently", and "Be Accountable" could reflect media representatives' ethic commitments to promote and reflect truth, objectivity, honesty, respect, tolerance, freedom and responsibility. Examples for such Codes or Charters on Media Ethic have been published by the **International Center for Journalists, Washington DC (<http://www.ijnet.org/>).****

**It is important to note that the implementation of such a Code of Conduct should be ensured not by the state administration but exclusively by an independent professional body under civil law,**

**whose membership will not be compulsory but who could guarantee its members' professionalism.**

**I would also like to stress that active networks of local NGOs monitoring and defending the freedom of expression can also contribute to safeguarding the freedom of media activities in this region.**

**To conclude, let me underline again that mass media are a fundamental element of democracy and an important platform for public debate in all OSCE participating states. Once again welcome to our conference, and I wish all of us some fruitful and enriching discussions.**

**FREIMUT DUVE**

OSCE REPRESENTATIVE ON FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA

OPENING STATEMENT AT THE  
THIRD CENTRAL ASIAN CONFERENCE  
IN ALMATY

10 December 2001

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends, Dear Journalists,

I would like to welcome all of you to the Third Central Asian Media Conference in Almaty, organised by my Office in conjunction with the OSCE Centre in Almaty. Two previous conferences, held in 1999 in Bishkek, and in 2000 in Dushanbe, showed the need for this regional dialogue, the need to discuss the numerous challenges to media freedom in Central Asia. When we met in Bishkek, we were in a much more optimistic mood regarding the future of media in the area. Our optimism slightly decreased in Dushanbe.

This conference is held at a time when there is a completely different situation in the world, when an anti-terror coalition is waging a military campaign to the south which will affect the countries of Central Asia. We are meeting at a time when several governments have stressed the priority of national security matters over human rights, an argument not only legitimately used at a time of war but also misused to stifle dissent and public debate.

Just three weeks ago I met in London with the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression and the OAS Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression. In our Joint Declaration we stressed that “guarantees for freedom of expression have developed over centuries but they can easily be rolled back; we are particularly concerned that recent moves by some governments to introduce legislation limiting freedom of expression set a bad precedent.”

We have monitored cases in Northern America and in Western Europe that, although in the single digits, provide an example that may be interpreted differently in the newly emerging democracies. The firing of an editor or the discontinued publication of a controversial comic strip in the United States, although still regrettable, will not seriously undermine the country's solid freedom of expression foundation: the First Amendment. The precedent it sets, however, may send chills through this region, where the process of democratisation is fragile to say the least.

When the *National Union of Journalists* in Great Britain warns that at a time of crisis the "BBC goes straight into "Ministry of Information" mode," this concerns all of us. However, the average British citizen will still have numerous sources to choose from for news. This is not the case in countries where the state broadcaster is the predominant one, as it is in Central Asia.

Even more worrying are the results of some public opinion polls. According to Gallup, for example, four out of five Americans are willing to sacrifice some freedoms for the sake of greater security.

Here I would like to stress that these issues were raised in the Bucharest Ministerial Declaration, adopted on 4 December, which underlined that the OSCE participating States were "determined to protect our citizens from new challenges to their security while safeguarding the rule of law, individual liberties, and the right to equal justice under law."

Another quote: "defence of national security is one of the more significant and often used reasons by governments to justify their interference into the work of the media." These words were said by one of the participants at the Second Media Conference in Dushanbe that took place more than a year ago. How true they sound today.

One of the issues we should discuss here deals with stability versus human rights. Can peace and prosperity be ensured when human rights, and especially freedom of expression, are violated on a regular basis? Some of your leaders may say "yes." How does the government and the civil journalistic community react to the establishment, for example, of

a radical Islamic newspaper or magazine, that shies away from “hate speech” but promotes ideas that, if implemented, would mean the end of any form of democracy? Does one allow such a media outlet to exist for the sake of the principle of freedom of expression, or does one support the government in closing it down? Can stability and human rights co-exist peacefully in all countries, or this rule applies only to certain states and excludes others? Isn’t “national security” often a code-word for attacks on any form of opposition media, especially those that try to investigate corruption? I hope we will be able to debate possible answers to these challenges.

My Office has taken an active interest in the work of the media in Central Asia. We have defended those who had been persecuted for their ideas and writings. We have even helped some writers move to Western European countries where there is a growing intellectual community from this region.

When the Editor of a Tajik opposition newspaper *Charogi ruz Dododjon Atovulloev* was detained at a Moscow airport in July at the request of the Tajik authorities, my Office was immediately involved in securing his release. Another case I am dealing with right now: the detention of Uzbek political leader, writer and editor Mohammed Solih in Prague at the request of the Uzbek authorities. In July, the Russian government helped Atovulloev safely leave the country. I expect no less from the Czech government.

On many occasions I have written to the authorities in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, demanding that they stop the harassment of independent media. Sometimes I was able to defend a newspaper, a journalist, more often: not. I looked into the structural issues of media freedom, or, more precisely, into “structural censorship” that often is as lethal as open censorship. Sending the tax collector to an independent newspaper twenty times a year can destroy a free voice. I am also concerned with the ownership question and how some of the new media owners, claiming to be independent, are closely connected to the power structures. One of the issues mentioned at the Bucharest Ministerial Council, specifically, by US Secretary of State Colin Powell,

was the connection between corruption and terrorism. Here, again, the media, have a fundamental role to play as society's watchdog. These are difficult problems, they will not be solved quickly. Nevertheless, I will continue fighting for press freedom in Central Asia, but we can only be successful if we work closely together.

You may have noticed that I do not mention Turkmenistan. There is a reason for that: it is the only country in the OSCE region where at present press freedom does not exist in any shape or form. It is a country more reminiscent of the former cold war times than of an emerging democracy that is a member of a family of declared democracies, the OSCE. Next year my Office plans to look more closely at Turkmenistan and I do not exclude that we will issue a special report on the media situation in this OSCE participating State.

I am also looking at publishing a book in the series *Defence of the Future*, a project of my Office for the past two years. Two books have already been printed: bringing together authors from south-east Europe and the Caucasus to discuss what can be done for the future generations in these regions. I now plan to publish a similar book on Central Asia, inviting writers and journalists to openly discuss issue of concern to your citizens: stability versus human rights, development of civil society, the future of free media, or whatever else they wish to discuss. Their thoughts will be bound in a book and distributed in all your countries and in Europe.

I initiated another project in Central Asia: as you know, in the aftermath of the 11 September attack hundreds of journalists from all over the world arrived in the Central Asian countries. In Tajikistan more than 1400 foreign journalists received accreditation in the first month after the attacks. To provide assistance to these journalists, my Office, together with the OSCE Mission in Tajikistan, decided to start an OSCE Information Hotline in Dushanbe, that is run by the OSCE Mission. It has been a major success story. I am looking at ways how international organisations can help train journalists in a more expeditious and professional manner. In this area a lot has been accomplished in Bosnia and Herzegovina and some of that experience could be relevant for Central

Asia, like, for example, the establishment of a *BBC* training course: a very successful endeavour in Sarajevo that can be repeated.

Here I would like also to mention the broadcasts of different international media into the region: often they are the only free voices heard in Central Asia. They should be supported and I hope that these broadcasts will continue.

There is a lot of work to be done in Central Asia. With the war against terror progressing, more international attention is directed at your region. More journalists visit it, more stories appear in the world press informing the public of the difficult issues you have to tackle in all spheres of life.

I would like to end my remarks with the words of the great Kazakh writer, poet and political leader Mukhtar Shakanov who wrote about the December 1986 student demonstrations in Almaty:

“For those bold youngsters, a lift,  
As they went out  
On the Square,  
In Alma-Ata, in the bare  
And frosty  
December days there,  
With firm demands, you see,  
For freedom, democracy...”

The struggle for freedom and democracy in Central Asia is still going on. Many of you sitting here are part of it. You have a tough time ahead. But remember: without free journalists there can be no true democracy.





**I.**

**LATEST DEVELOPMENTS FOR THE MEDIA  
IN CENTRAL ASIA**

**Sergei Yezhkov**

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MASS MEDIA  
IN UZBEKISTAN IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT EVENTS

**Tamara Kaleyeva**

FREEDOM OF SPEECH IN KAZAKHSTAN:  
LEGISLATION, PRACTICE AND OUTLOOK

**Kironshokh Sharifzoda**

MASS MEDIA AND FREEDOM OF THE PRESS  
IN TAJIKISTAN



**Sergei Yezhkov**

Department Head  
*Pravda Vostoka*  
Uzbekistan

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF MASS MEDIA IN UZBEKISTAN IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT EVENTS

It is very difficult to talk about the democratisation of the mass media in Uzbekistan, because in fact this process has yet to begin. Uzbek officials who have anything to do with the media like to quote the number of additional newspapers and magazines which have been set up in the Republic since independence. And this figure is used as the main – sometimes the only – proof that the media is becoming more democratic.

I am going to stick my neck out and say that this sort of approach to the mass media does not reflect the real state of affairs in journalism and, on the whole, does not correspond to the facts. For a start, newspapers, say, are still organized and published on the same principle as they were in the former Soviet Union. So if in the past *Pravda Vostoka* was the organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, now it is craftily named the newspaper of the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan. In Soviet times *Tashkentskaya Pravda* was the mouthpiece of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party; today it is the newspaper of the regional authority (*khokimiyat*). And so on down through the ranks.

What does this mean? First of all, that the executive continues to control the most popular and influential periodicals, and naturally uses them to put forward its own often incorrect version of events. Given these circumstances, the authorities can trumpet the facts they need on the front page and bury what they do not fully approve of near the back. Any facts which do not suit the authorities at all will never appear in newspapers, will never be heard on the radio or shown on television. So society will never find out what it has a legal right to know, what it must know.

Of course, Uzbekistan's constitution does not permit censorship of the mass media. The laws "On Mass Media" and "On the Protection of the Journalist's Professional Work" state: 'Nobody has the right to require preliminary approval of published information or materials, to change a text, or to withdraw it from publication (broadcasting)'.

In practice, censorship today is much more sophisticated, and I would go so far as to say that it defends clan, corporate and frequently private interests.

I can give an example from my own experience. There on the type page was an article in which I highlighted corruption at Goskomneftproduct, the organization in charge of supplying service stations with petrol. What does the censor do? There was no official reason for withdrawing the article from the page, but withdrawn it had to be. Erkin Kamilov, senior newspaper censor, called the directors of Goskomneftproduct on his government phone and warned them about the bomb which was about to go off in *Pravda Vostoka*. As they were not able to influence the editor directly, they started ringing around high-ranking government officials and influential people from the President's staff; and it was these people who demanded that the newspaper withdraw the article as "ill-timed". Thus, for example, the order to withdraw the article which raised doubts about Goskomneftproduct's innocence was given by Azamat Zieyev, then the President's press secretary, and Rustam Shagulyamov, Press Minister and Chief Censor of Uzbekistan – not just anyone.

The question is: what do these two bureaucrats have to do with petrol? Legally speaking, absolutely nothing, but I am firmly convinced that they were not acting out of pure altruism. Nowadays people like these two are not afraid of breaking the law: they feel they are beyond it. I have been told that when Rustam Shagulyamov was privately asked whether he was scared of shielding corrupt bigwigs by withdrawing articles from newspapers, he laughed at the man who asked the question, saying that "he had published so many of the President's books all over the world that he had long stopped being afraid of anything". Improbable as it may sound, I am told it was really so.

This naturally gives rise to the question why, despite all the legislation regulating their work, not one journalist has ever gone to court about illegal censorship. The answer is very simple: it is impossible to prove. No editor is going to pick a fight with the executive, and would never confirm that an article was withdrawn by the censor or on the insistence of an influential state or government official.

When the censor and Rustam Shagulyamov himself ordered the withdrawal of an article I had written about illegal actions taken by the National Bank for Foreign Economic Activity, I went to the BBC and they broadcast the essence of the conflict. The fuss *that* caused! A seriously worried Press Minister threatened the newspaper's editor-in-chief and made him phone the BBC and say that he, the editor, had withdrawn the article from the paper. This was obviously absurd, because it is the editor-in-chief who signs articles and puts them in the newspaper. That's why there are no journalists suing the censors. And how can you sue something that does not exist in law?

Incidentally, that's not the only reason there are no lawsuits. No editor wants to lose his job, which gives him social and financial privileges, admittance to prestigious medical institutions, trips abroad and so on. Even supposing I go mad, lose all sense of reality and sue Rustam Shagulyamov, nobody would support me – even my colleagues, painful though it is to admit it. Then the inevitable dismissal would follow, after which the traditional policeman's kit of two cartridges and four grams of marijuana wrapped in an anti-government leaflet would be found in my pocket or car, “quite by chance”.

To say that there are deviations from the principles of freedom of information in Uzbekistan is putting it mildly. There is censorship, an absolute state monopoly on the media and its funding, and interference by the state in media activity. It is vital that we move towards a new model of mass media which would reflect the diversity of opinion among all of Uzbekistan's citizens. Only then would there be some guarantees of decisions that would preclude the advent of terminal totalitarianism or religious extremism.

I don't like quotations, but here's one. When Madeleine Albright, then

US Secretary of State, visited Uzbekistan in 2000, she said in her speech to students and staff at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy: “I hope the governments of the region will soon cease playing the role which they could have in registering and therefore censoring the mass media. They must protect defenders of human rights from prosecution and the threat of physical violence. Every person in Central Asia must have the right to express their opinion freely and peacefully, including the mass media or groups of citizens, without asking for permission or fearing prosecution.”

I fully agree with the above, though I am less optimistic. My optimism did not increase after the well-known events of 11 September. On that ill-fated day I was on duty at the newspaper’s office, and in my office there was a TV set with an antenna tuned to Russian TV channels. Naturally, I learned what had happened in the US, and I wanted to know how Uzbek television had reacted to the tragedy. One channel showed the President making a speech in a major town, another covered the President of Uzbekistan’s Tennis Cup, and on the third there were songs praising the motherland and the President again. Not one channel mentioned the American tragedy. There were attempts to stop us informing our readers about it, and only the lateness of the hour and the chief censor’s absence enabled us to publish information on the terrorist attacks. Later the government bided its time, and still later, when civilized nations joined together into the anti-terrorist coalition, Uzbekistan also condemned the terrorists. But the comments on that event which were later published in our newspapers were the traditional Soviet type – initiated by the authorities, and often written in government organizations and then distributed to all the newspapers through government information agencies.

In the three months since then, there have been no radical or to any extent noticeable changes in Uzbekistan’s media, though various international envoys who have visited Uzbekistan have repeatedly raised the problem of press freedom. However, the traditional double standard is at work in our country, and I have observed that the Americans themselves are prepared to temporarily close their eyes to the absence of democracy

in Uzbekistan. In other words, the international community is acting in accordance with the old Leninist principle of “revolutionary expediency”. Today it is expedient not to raise the problem of how to make the press more democratic because the very mention of the problem jeopardizes Western countries’ military and political presence in Uzbekistan. To count on the authorities themselves to provide freedom to journalists is at best naïve and at worst unthinking.

There is another, no less important, aspect of the problem which I’d like to discuss separately. The fact is that the West’s active political and military presence in Uzbekistan is five to seven years late. Uzbekistan is now putting the finishing touches to its creation of a classic feudal society, and those who have power are unlikely to give up their positions of their own volition. There is no political opposition in Uzbekistan, and we can’t expect reforms from it. And this despite the fact that we have all the trappings of democracy. There are five different organizations dealing with human rights, but they have yet to protect anyone. These trappings, like theatre sets, are wheeled out for each performance – that is, the arrival of an influential politician from abroad. Then, quietly and without fanfare, they are rolled up to gather dust in the wings until the next high-ranking official visits.

At the same time I do not rule out the possibility that Western countries will put some pressure on Islam Karimov’s regime. Moreover, I admit that he will take a few risks in order to play at democracy. For example, he could have some second-rank policemen, lawyers, customs or tax officials prosecuted – tossing a bone to the West and to his own people. But it won’t be any more than PR for the authorities. And in Uzbekistan there will never be freedom in the true and traditional sense of the word. Dictatorship will remain the cornerstone of state and public organizations, and people will prefer silence to active protest, just as they do today.

Most journalists, too, are not ready to riot or oppose the existing regime. They depend too much on the authorities and often just want to be friendly with them for the meagre dividends this will bring them. In most cases they don’t need freedom either; they are quite satisfied with

serving the authorities in just the same way as they did 20 or 30, or even ten, years ago.

Vladimir Vysotsky sang a song which I'd like to quote from here. It is a song about a lunatic asylum and it goes: "There are very few fighters here, that's why there are no leaders."

There is a severe shortage of "fighters" in Uzbekistan. That's why our prospects don't look good.



## Tamara Kaleyeva

President of the *Adil Soz* Foundation  
for the Protection of Freedom of Speech

### FREEDOM OF SPEECH IN KAZAKHSTAN: LEGISLATION, PRACTICE AND OUTLOOK

In his own time, Mark Twain described a certain community like this: “We have freedom of speech. But we are prudent enough not to make use of it.” This is a perfect description of the current state of the mass media in Kazakhstan.

A year ago we met at this conference in Dushanbe and discussed the tendency towards restricting freedom of speech that had begun to manifest itself in Kazakhstan.

Today, one year later, it can be definitely stated that these restrictions are evolving into a complete suppression of freedom of speech. Raised up high on the Olympus of the Constitution, freedom of speech stands there gagged and bound from head to foot with new legislative restrictions, bureaucratic despotism, and the unreserved hostility of top state functionaries.

What is this conclusion based on? An analysis of:

- amendments to the legislation,
- law enforcement in practice, and
- the political environment in this country.

Our foundation monitors offences against freedom of speech in Kazakhstan. In 2000, we covered 612 different offences. Even now, we can project a much higher number in 2001.

**With regard to legislation**, the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Mass Media” and the new Administrative Offences Code were amended in 2001.

The amendments to the Mass Media Law make websites equivalent to mass media. This has already led to a number of opposition sites being

banned within the territory of Kazakhstan. This law also provides that mass media and journalists are liable for reprinting information from the Internet or other sources, and has introduced liability for quoting anyone except official statesmen. The amendments have quietly and gradually turned the regular registration of mass media into licensing, which expressly contravenes the Constitution.

Contrary to the international agreements signed by Kazakhstan, and to established world practice, these amendments have also imposed strict restraints on the re-broadcasting of foreign TV channels. According to the Law, re-broadcasts of foreign TV may not exceed 50 per cent of total broadcasting beginning from 1 January 2002 and 20 per cent as of 1 January 2003. In practice, this will lead to the mass closure of regional TV channels, which, due to the tax burden, cannot fund their activities without re-broadcasting. Consequently, it will cause a higher degree of media monopolization.

But the apotheosis in terms of restricting the freedom of speech of the media and journalists has turned out to be the Administrative Offences Code, enacted on 30 January 2001. The Code provides for about 40 types of administrative offences in the field of press and information. For the first time in the history of independent Kazakhstan, the Code empowers the Ministry of Culture, Information and Social Concord to draw up reports of administrative offences, thereby turning our favourite Ministry into an agent of surveillance and repression.

Moreover, the Administrative Offences Code grants the Ministry the right, albeit in exceptional cases, to suspend media activities for up to three days without going to court, allowing this period for filing the appropriate statement of claim.

These restraints are in addition to those adopted before. For example, under the criminal legislation of Kazakhstan, slandering and insulting ordinary citizens is a separate offence from attacking the honour and dignity of public officials. There are separate clauses dedicated to the honour and dignity of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, parliamentary deputies, and insulting public agents. These clauses were incorporated into the Criminal Code chapter entitled "Offences against

Administrative Procedure”. In practice, this often leads to a situation where, based on these clauses, criminal charges are brought for disseminating information related to officials’ personal non-property rights.

Yet even the imperfect legislation briefly discussed above is applied extremely arbitrarily in the practice of law enforcement.

Let us start with justice. In 2001, judicial practice has been characterized by stricter penalties imposed on the media and the institution of criminal as well as civil proceedings. For example, Ye. Bapi, editor of the newspaper *SolDat* (“Soldier”), was sentenced to one year’s imprisonment on the charge of insulting the President by reprinting information from the Eurasia website that was critical of the President. All in all, about ten criminal cases were initiated based on the charge of slander and insult.

Our Foundation has just completed a major project funded by a European Union grant. We have collected and published court judgments on cases involving mass media and journalists over the last five years, i.e. 1996 to 2000. The lion’s share of all the lawsuits was, and still is, filed by state officials. Major businessmen go hand-in-hand with them. A small example can be given here, just one of many similar cases: the members of the Valyut-Transit Financial and Industrial Association recently sued the editorial staff of *Vechernaya Gazeta* (The “Evening News”, Karaganda) and journalist Tatiana Voyevod. The journalist had written an article entitled “Valyut-Transit Brings Illegal Goods” based on a report prepared by the Karaganda Customs. The plaintiffs state that that the article is actually directed against all legal entities whose legal names include the words “Valyut-Transit” and are claiming 50 million tenge in compensation to remedy the moral damage!

The courts generally rule in favour of such major firms, to say nothing of important officials, and often penalize the media for publishing opinions, views and arguments.

Beginning from 1996, civil disputes related to the disparagement of honour and dignity have involved greater and greater penalties. For example, this year the newspaper *Vremya Po* has had to pay out three

million tenge (about US\$20,000) for publishing a number of articles about Rakhat Aliyev, Deputy Chairman of the National Security Committee (KNB) and the President's son-in-law; the newspaper *Ak Zhaiyk* has been fined two million tenge; and *Express K*, *Diapazon* and many other newspapers have been fined hundreds of thousands of tenge.

The following practice, which we know about only through hearsay, has long been established in advanced democratic countries: if there is not enough evidence in a critical article, but the journalist was not pursuing his own personal agenda and was acting in the interest of society, he received immunity. Kazakhstan's judicial system is such that an investigation of a journalist is effectively equivalent to a criminal investigation. But while the court usually remands a criminal case if there is insufficient evidence, a journalist or newspaper is so harshly punished that it is more like lynching, or in some cases a political order, rather than the justice which the court system is supposed to provide.

In 1998 *Dat*, the only opposition Kazakh-language newspaper, was reduced to ruin and closed as a result of the judgment in a case related to the protection of the honour and dignity of Mr Satybaldiyev, then the Director of GosTeleRadio. To remedy the moral damage, Sharip Kurakbayev was ordered to pay five million tenge, an astronomical sum which defies any reasonable explanation. No journalist who lives on their salary or fees is able to pay out such an amount of money. The judgment effectively "excommunicated" Kurakbayev from the profession, and also deprived him of any chance of working to his full potential and supporting his family and himself. The review appeal filed this year by our lawyers on behalf of Kurakbayev to the Supreme Court states that the judgment infringed Kurakbayev's constitutional rights. There is no statute of limitations on appeals for review involving an infringement of constitutional rights, yet the Supreme Court has ignored this provision and did not even take the trouble to consider the appeal, limiting itself to an answer written just for form. So the claim for five million tenge still hangs like the sword of Damocles over Kurakbayev.

An incident which demonstrates an utterly unprecedented level of cynicism happened last year to Nurbulat Massanov, Professor of Political

Science. And this year the case was closed with a similarly unprecedented court judgment. An unknown author fabricated a disgusting text that was offensive to Kazakhs and put it on an anonymous Internet site as if it was an interview with Massanov. Then this text was presented to the general public in the newspaper *Karavan*. First of all, an attempt was made to discredit a person in public opinion. Following this, unknown people distributed among the media an audiotape with an excerpt of a private conversation of Massanov's recorded on it. Thus, another offence was committed against the professor, as his privacy was violated. Who are these criminals who tapped and recorded the private conversation, made the forgery for the Internet and distributed the illegal recording? There was, and still is, no answer to this question. Now let us see what our independent court decides under such circumstances. The court takes no notice of the fact that the interview is a forgery, that the illegally obtained tape cannot serve as evidence and that Massanov did not cut and arrange the tape so that it looked like an interview, nor that Massanov was not involved in the dissemination of the forgery. The court passes a judgment according to which the aggrieved party, Massanov, is accused of disseminating false and defamatory information!

There are already several such precedents of extreme legal cynicism in Kazakhstani practice. You are sure to hear of them at this conference. But legal lynching is far from the only factor that unlawfully restricts freedom of speech in Kazakhstan.

A violent assault aimed at robbery was committed in March against the family of Gulzhan Yergalieva, a famous TV journalist. Her husband and son were brutally beaten.

Three assaults against journalists were reported in July. Early this year, B. Gabdullin, publisher of the newspaper *XXI Vek* ("21st Century"), had to emigrate to the USA due to the threat of criminal prosecution.

In November, Daniyar Ashimbayev, a journalist and the publisher of the *Who's Who Annual Directory*, was arrested, ostensibly for having drugs in his possession. Observers from a number of Russian and Kazakhstani mass media linked his detention to the Asiopa site, which

has become notorious for its articles compromising Kazakhstan's political elite. He was set free within ten days, but chose to avoid any contact with the press on the pretext that he was tired and wanted to take a rest.

This year, hundreds of incidents have been reported in which functionaries have discriminated against non-state mass media. For example, *Ak Zhaiyk*, the largest newspaper in the Atyrau region, has been systematically debarred from all official events arranged by regional leaders. Many government bodies invent internal department regulations that restrict access to information of social importance or arbitrarily classify it as a commercial secret.

Journalists are not infrequently expressly debarred from carrying out their professional duties. On 11 August 2001, for example, a group of soldiers headed by a lieutenant-colonel of the Ministry of Internal Affairs chased Yuri Siedin, who was filming the suppression of a prison riot by juvenile offenders, from the roof of a neighbouring building. Siedin would not have escaped violence had a prisoner's mother not protected him with her own body.

In June 2001, in the office of the deputy mayor of Atyrau, a certain D. Djarylgassov, an official, hit Timur Kaziev, a journalist with the newspaper *Prikaspiyskaya Kommuna*, in the face, allegedly for publishing something inaccurate. The functionary was immediately fired, but he was reinstated shortly after the incident because the witness, the deputy mayor, withdrew the evidence he had previously given. As a result, the newspapers that had reported the assault became the guilty ones, and were fined 50,000 tenge.

Everywhere there are instances of unlawful prosecutions of mass media and threats of closure from the prosecutor's office and bodies of the Ministry of Culture, Information and Social Concord. This primarily affects opposition periodicals, which are very few in number. For instance, the opposition newspaper *SolDat* did not come out for six months because the editorial staff could not find a printer that dared to print it. The newspaper recommenced publishing in October 2001, and no sooner had the second issue been printed than administrative pro-

ceedings were initiated based on an instruction issued by the regional division of the Ministry of Culture, Information and Social Concord, on the pretext that the printing press's address indicated on the printer's imprint, was wrong.

Although loyal enough, *Vremya Po* found it impossible to be printed in Almaty after it had published a number of articles criticising Rakhat Aliyev, Deputy Chairman of the National Security Committee, since both state-owned and private printing presses refused to print it. So the next issue was printed in Pavlodar. And it was only after Aliyev resigned that the printing press owners dared to circulate this edition.

What is the source of such unlawfulness? I would venture to say that in the authorities' attitude towards the independent mass media and freedom of speech, it is the President of this country who has called the tune. More than once Nursultan Nazarbayev has made it clear that the criticisms published by the private media spoil Kazakhstan's image abroad, contravene national interests and threaten the national security of the country. He is the author of the catch-phrase "The independent media is called independent because nothing depends on it."

Kasymzhomart Tokayev, Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, has repeatedly stated that he forbids ministers to publish their personal critical views in regard to this or that aspect of government activities and that who did not follow this instruction would be fired. He has arranged ministerial investigations to identify the sources of leaks when government documents of great social significance have fallen into the hands of the press.

Not long ago, in November, a court faction did shake the political idyll. This was also reflected in the media. The President warned major businessmen that if information that compromises certain persons or bodies and stirs up the general public keeps being published, then as head of state he will be forced to take "draconian measures" against private mass media through Parliament, "and will make it clear to the people why he is doing so". Moreover, the President gave us to understand that he is aware of the "draconian measures" taken by oligarchs toward the journalists employed by their publications.

I do not know whether it is flattering or insulting to our deputies that the President can be so sure they will legalize any “draconian measures” that he suggests. The point is that his assurance is not unfounded. This spring, when the journalists of the country united, perhaps for the first time, against the amendments to the Mass Media Law, nearly all the deputies, i.e. what is called a qualified majority, claimed that they would be voting against the amendments. Even the parliamentary faction of Otan, the pro-presidential party, made an official statement regarding the reactionary nature of the amendments and said they would be voting against them. But once the President announced in public that the amendments were good and should be adopted, all but three of the deputies voted for them.

As to the “draconian measures” applied by oligarchs to their publications, the President certainly knows what he is talking about. You can’t envy the journalists at *Karavan* or the TV channel *KTK*. They fell victims to the “November palace revolution” after the fall of General Aliyev, Deputy Chairman of the National Security Committee and omnipotent “curator” of these media. *KTK* suspended broadcasting and *Karavan* did not appear in print for the first time in the ten years of its existence. It was painful to see my fellow-journalists doing their best to hold their own and put a brave face on a sorry business by making one proud statement which turned into embarrassment, then a second and a third that contradicted themselves and said nothing, or were afraid to say anything but vague fine words.

But perhaps the President is unaware that the employees of state-owned TV and radio channels and newspapers are under the same pressure, and few of the functionaries belonging to the President’s well-staffed administration deny themselves the pleasure of dictating what should be written and broadcast and how.

This is where we approach the critical freedom of speech issue – the financial and political independence of the media. Though over 90 per cent of publications in Kazakhstan are officially called non-state, the overwhelming majority of them are actually owned or managed, either through men of straw or intermediary foundations, by financial and



political oligarchs. Until recently General Aliyev was the most powerful media magnate, as it was rumoured and then proved by the events in November. I do not think that Aliyev's media empire will remain "no man's land", i.e. independent, following his fall.

Of course, the point is not that publications have rich owners, which is natural in market economies. The problem is that the owners regard their property not as a business, but as an improvised means to their political and financial ends. Clearly, this is where society's right to unbiased information is violated. The clause prohibiting the monopolization of the mass media has disappeared from the 1999 Mass Media Law. Under such circumstances, none of the professional codes for journalists that the President has recently called on us to develop will have any positive effect. Nevertheless, deferential editors will of course write appropriate texts, conduct voting among their staff, and report in public that the instruction has been carried out. At best, this piece of paper will be forgotten. At worst, it will be used as another means for lynching disagreeable journalists.

It should be noted that the year 2001 was marked not only by increased repression of the media, but also the first attempts at organized and, which is particularly pleasant, civilized resistance to these tendencies. But these attempts are still too timid and cannot essentially influence the situation. The trend can only be stopped by an actual, not a declared, determination on the part of the authorities to strengthen freedom of speech and thought in the state. Otherwise, we are doomed to a long opposition or, even worse, to a meek, false, Soviet stagnation-time press.



**Kironshokh Sharifzoda**

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**MASS MEDIA AND FREEDOM OF THE PRESS  
IN TAJIKISTAN**

I have the honour of addressing you, the delegates at so respected a conference, on the subject of “Mass Media and Freedom of the Press in Tajikistan”, a topic so simple at first glance, but in reality extremely broad and complex. I will attempt to outline the general situation and trends within the media in Tajikistan, intertwined with numerous problems which I believe are also typical of the media in other countries in the region.

The Tajik press began with the first periodical in the Tajik language in Movarounnakh, entitled *Bukhoroi Sharif* (“Holy Bukhara”), which came out on 11 March 1912.

There is no need to describe the state and activities of the Tajik press as a component of the Soviet press during the years of the communist regime, as it was no different from the press in other republics of the former Soviet Union, achieving its principal aim of “being a collective agitator and propagandist” and remaining the faithful mouthpiece of the beloved Party for decades.

We have got into the habit of regarding the new history of the peoples which not long ago were Soviet as starting from the dates on which they declared independence from the former Soviet Union, and therefore these dates can be considered as the beginning of a new phase in the development of national media. Nevertheless, I believe that Tajikistan is an exception in this respect and that the Tajik press began to develop several years earlier, in the late 1980s, at the peak of Gorbachev’s *perestroika*. It was then that the Tajik media realised what it was for, liberated itself from narrow Party dogmas and started to follow the basic princi-

ples of journalism – to provide people with information and form public opinion. There were no independent mass media then, and all media entities were controlled by Party bodies, but there were other publications that supported the struggle for social justice and protection for the rights of ethnic Tajiks living in Samarkand and Bukhara [in Uzbekistan], initiated at the end of 1988 by the young people’s newspaper *Komsomoli Tojikiston*, and later, early in 1989, the struggle for Tajik to be recognized as the state language. Although the Party press – *Tojikistoni Soveti* (“Soviet Tajikistan”), *Kommunist Tajikistana* (“Communist of Tajikistan”), and a number of other Russian-language newspapers – firmly resisted this, the trend towards a freer press persisted. So it would be fair to regard those years as the starting point of the new phase in the history of the Tajik press.

So, here is a summary of the stages of development which the Tajik press has gone through:

**Phase 1** (1988-1990), the period of liberation of the Tajik press, during which it fearlessly began to transform society and people’s mentality within the scope of the democratic reforms initiated in the former Soviet Union.

**Phase 2** (1990-1992), the period during which a free press was formed. This period is characterized by a striving for freedom of speech and of the press on the part of the press itself and progressive Tajik intellectuals. During this period, the media began to play a greater role in the struggle for economic sovereignty, which brought about the first relatively democratic Law on the Press and Other Mass Media (14 December 1990), the declaration of the state sovereignty of Tajikistan (9 September 1991), the beginning of rapid political, social and economic change, the appearance of non-state periodicals, and an unprecedented boom in the development of a free press.

This period saw the appearance of a series of independent newspapers such as *Dunyo* (“Peace”, owned by Akhmadshokha Komila, a Tajik citizen), *Adolat* (“Justice”, owned by Imomnazara Kholnazara, a Tajik citizen) and *Charogi ruz* (“The Light of Day”, owned by *Dododjon Atovulloev*, a Tajik citizen). There were also new publications of politi-

cal parties, movements and social organizations: *Rastokhez* (“Renaissance”, owned by the Rastokhez People’s Movement), *Nyaftganl* (“Seven Treasures”, owned by the concern Khizmat), *Sukhan* (“Word” – the Journalists’ Union of Tajikistan), *Somon* (“Order” – the Tajik Language Foundation), *Tol’ikiston* (owned by the Consumers’ Rights Protection Society), and *Nalilot* (“Salvation”, owned by the Islamic Renaissance Party). These publications did much to promote the growth of national consciousness and political education for intellectuals and young people.

As further proof of how unique this period was, several organs of the Communist Party declared themselves independent from their former founders, although unsuccessfully: *Todjikistoni Shuravi* (“Soviet Tajikistan”), *Payomi Dushanbe* (“Dushanbe News”) and the young people’s newspaper *Komsomolets Tajikistana* (“Young Communist of Tajikistan”), while new publications which toed the Party line were created, such as *Nidoi ranjbar* (“The Worker’s Voice”), *Golos Tajikistana* (“The Voice of Tajikistan”) and *Todjikiston ovozi* (“The Voice of Tajikistan”).

**Phase 3** (1992-1995) was a regressive period in the recent history of Tajikistan’s mass media, a consequence of the civil war that caused economic meltdown, migration, and a multitude of human victims. This period is characterized by terror and violence against journalists, strict censorship, restricted access to information, the closure of a range of independent and private newspapers (*Adolat*, *Charogi ruz*), and the rise of a Tajik press phenomenon – the *Charogi ruz* newspaper in Russia, *Sadoi Mulyon’id* (“Voice of Modjakhed”) broadcasting station in Afghanistan – and the foundation of the first private magazine, *Mardumgiyon* (“Healer of Souls”), by Ravshan Rakhmoni, a citizen of Tajikistan.

**Phase 4** (1995-1997) saw contradictory processes in the development of Tajikistan’s mass media. On the one hand, continued covert repressive measures against freedom of speech and the intimidation of dissidents made the media docile and obedient, while on the other hand, journalists were encouraged by the inter-Tajik talks on a peaceful settlement of the

internal conflict. The first independent social and political newspapers began to appear: *Istikol* (“Independence”), founded by the Oli Somon Public Foundation and A. Vokhidov, a citizen of Tajikistan, *Biznes i politika* (“Business and Politics”), the private newspapers *Digest-press* and *Charkhi gardun*, founded by Akbarali Sattorov, the magazine *Guli murod*, founded by Paivand Gulmurodzoda, and *Daryo*, founded by Saodat Safarova, all Tajik citizens. These publications began to stir up public opinion, so to speak.

The Television and Broadcasting Law of 14 December 1996 contained numerous internal contradictions concerning freedom of speech and was no exception to the general background of this bleak period in the history of Tajikistan’s media.

**Phase 5** (1997 to the present) has been a period of peaceful coexistence in terms of media development due to the signing of the General Agreement on Peace and National Concord (27 June 1997) and its implementation in Tajikistan. This period is notable for the rebirth of banned publications, the foundation of many privately-run electronic media, the strengthening of private and state-owned publications alike, the formation of an information market, and the introduction of modern communication technologies for the media in Tajikistan.

Of course, the rapid development of the media in Tajikistan has not been painless, and every step forward in this direction comes with a certain risk and new problems which we must try to sort out, but the government’s strategy and the growing democratic mood in society provide optimism and hope for a better future.

Basic human rights and freedoms, and therefore the rights and freedoms of citizens with respect to media activity, are set forth by the Basic Law – the Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan. Article 30 of the Constitution states: “Everyone shall be guaranteed freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the right to use mass media. State censorship and prosecution for criticism shall be prohibited.”

The current legislation (“On the Press and Other Mass Media” of 14 December 1990, with many subsequent amendments; “On Television and Broadcasting” of 14 December 1996; and “On Copyright and Other

Related Rights” of 13 November 1998) provide the legal environment for the foundation and operation of the media.

274 mass publications and six news agencies were registered in Tajikistan as at 1 August 2001. If we compare the rate per capita with those of neighbouring Central Asian states, the average of one publication per 22,000 people is not so bad for Tajikistan with its population of 6 million.

And it is good that registering with the state and founding mass media, especially printed media, present no difficulties, since all you need to do to start operating is to observe your own charter, the current laws and other relevant documentation.

According to the Register kept by the Ministry of Culture of Tajikistan, the following periodicals have been registered as of today: 23 newspapers of political parties and movements; 67 specialist newspapers; 24 large-circulation newspapers; 23 private newspapers; 2 independent newspapers; 1 information and advertising newspaper; 4 government newspapers; and 66 regional and district newspapers and newspapers founded by the Ministry of Culture.

Magazines: 8 national magazines, 2 government bulletins, 43 specialist journals, and 5 private magazines.

The total number of periodicals is 210 newspapers and 58 magazines. National newspapers have a circulation of between 15,000 and 1,500 copies. For example, one issue of *Charkhi gardun*, the information and cultural weekly, will sell 15,000 copies and the Parliament’s newspaper *Sadoi mardum* (“Voice of the People”), 4,500 copies. The social and political weekly *Todjikiston* has a circulation of 3,100 copies, *Nadjot* 1,500 copies.

District and city newspapers (usually bimonthly) are printed in about 1,500-2,000 copies. There are no daily newspapers, and only 60% of periodicals are published on a regular basis.

The national press is published in Tajik, Russian, Uzbek and English; regional periodicals come out in Tajik, Uzbek and Russian; and district periodicals are available in Tajik, Uzbek, Russian and Kyrgyz. There are no publications directly funded by foreign capital in Tajikistan, but

grants from international organisations have helped to found several weeklies, such as *Asia Plus* and *Ozodi va inkishof* (“Freedom and Development”), and independent regional TV companies (*SM-1* in Khodzhent, *Regar TV* in Tursunzade, *Mavdji Ozod* (“Free Wave”) in the Vosei district, and *Kurgantyube* in the city of Kurgantyube in the Khatlon region).

Nor should we disregard the Tajik periodicals founded and functioning abroad as indicators of the post-conflict development of Tajikistan’s media. Today, two weekly newspapers and one magazine are published in the Russian Federation and Germany. And, while *Payom* (a weekly founded by Transdornauka Ltd.) and *Daryo* (a private magazine owned by Saodat Safarova, a Tajik citizen), which are printed in Moscow and distributed in Tajikistan, are loyal enough to the authorities, *Charogi ruz* (a newspaper in exile run by Dododjon Atovulloyev), which is published in Moscow and now in Germany, deserves attention as generally opposing the Dushanbe authorities. By the way, we often forget these “national-transnational” publications when talking about trends in the development of the national media, especially independent ones.

Official reports tend to subdivide Tajikistan’s mass media according to each periodical’s affiliation to a specific founder, which makes it more difficult to understand trends in their development. In my opinion, the media is best divided into two basic groups – state and non-state.

Although theoreticians and specialists have yet not worked out a uniform approach to this problem, I hold the opinion that sources of funding should be the basis for dividing mass media into the state and non-state categories, i.e. those that are funded by the state budget and those that are not.

More than half of the periodicals in Tajikistan are financed by direct budget allocations (four Government- and two Parliament-appropriated items), while 138 periodicals are funded by other state agencies. In principle, this approach to mass funding puts them in unequal positions from the very beginning. The lack of a level playing-field for state and non-state periodicals is not only evident in the principles of funding and allo-



cation of other resources; it can also be seen in the attitude of state agencies towards printing and postal services.

Despite their unequal position at the starting line, non-state periodicals try not to lag behind their privileged confrères, even outstripping them in many ways, and make a considerable contribution to the forming of public opinion both within and outside Tajikistan.

The state press that has preserved its structures and is funded from the state budget comprises about one half (144) of the periodicals in Tajikistan. These are government and parliamentary publications, specialist newspapers and journals attached to the Ministry of Culture, publications of regional and district local authorities, and also large-circulation newspapers. While *Djumkhuriyat*, the official organ of the President and Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, *Khalk ovozi* and *Narodnaya gazeta*, the government's Uzbek- and Russian-language newspapers, and *Sadoi mardum*, the Parliament's newspaper, are published regularly two or three times a week, and some specialist newspapers (*Omuzgor* of the Ministry of Education, *Adabiyot va san'at* of the Ministry of Culture and the Union of Writers) come out once a week, the other specialist and district newspapers are published only occasionally due to a lack of regular funding. The magazines are in an even worse state, as they are issued two or three times a year with a lower circulation, losing their focus and former prestige.

The state press, otherwise known as the "government press", full of official information and propaganda, providing arrogant coverage of events and no analysis or criticism, is turning into a dull press for which there is not much public demand.

The non-state press comprises 124 newspapers and magazines issued by private entities, political parties and movements, individuals and independent organisations.

The non-state press, though a relative newcomer appearing in the early '90s, has won popularity within the short period of its existence and continues to gain in authority. Nevertheless, it must be said that there are very few non-state newspapers and magazines with a social and political focus, let alone an opposition view. The majority are cultural

and educational periodicals and light reading. This is because of the reluctance of private publishers to “meddle with politics”, for one thing, and for another, the stance taken by political leaders on strict control and opposition to dissent.

Nevertheless, the formation of an information market is forcing publishers to review their positions and change their opinion of editorial policies and the subjects that ought to be covered in newspapers. Some private newspapers, such as Akbarali Sattorov’s *Vechernii Dushanbe* (“Evening Dushanbe”) and Sharif Khamdampur’s *Todjikiston* (they own six and four newspapers respectively and are considered media magnates), have changed their focus to cover more social and political issues, confirming the importance of competition for the customer. The process was given a new momentum when *Asia Plus* appeared on the market and quickly became a huge hit.

Another section of the non-state press – publications of political parties and movements – cannot work at its full potential for various reasons. Of the 23 registered party periodicals, only *Nadjot* (“Salvation”), a weekly owned by the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, is published on a regular basis, and *Minbari halk* (“The People’s Tribune”), the newspaper of the People’s Democratic Party of Tajikistan, comes out twice a month. But *Adolat* (the Democratic Party publication), *Nidoi randjbar* and *Golos Tajikistana* (the Communist Party) and *Ittikhod* (the Socialist Party) are not published regularly.

Yes, today we can speak of some changes for the better and some progress in the development of the information market in Tajikistan, bearing in mind the political and economic difficulties caused by the civil war. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that “in every society, freedom of the press plays a key role in ensuring transparency, the accountability of proper leadership and the supremacy of the law; and restricting the freedom of the press adversely affects the unity and stability of society. When this right is grossly infringed, for whatever reason, the likelihood of conflict arising increases many times.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from the Joint Declaration of the UN, UNESCO and the UN Commission on Human Rights on the occasion of the International Day of Freedom of the Press, 3 May 2000.

Now that Tajikistan is in the post-conflict period, the existence of a free and independent press facilitates, though it does not guarantee, the removal of distrust and fear. It assists in establishing an environment where free dialogue is possible, as people can express themselves without fear and support their opinions with facts.

From this generally accepted standpoint, the level of press freedom in Tajikistan remains relatively low. Let us take the early '90s for the purposes of comparison. By November 1992, there were 30 independent media entities operating in Tajikistan; today there are far fewer. In the late '80s and early '90s, in the context of the democratic reforms in the former Soviet Union, the Tajik press acted enthusiastically, without fear or backward glances, to transform society and souls. The media's influence in creating and reforming public opinion was so great that the authorities and social institutions took account of the opinion and arguments of the public as expressed via the media. In spite of some blunders and exaggerations in the activities of individual publications, in general Tajikistan's media genuinely began to aspire to the role of the fourth estate, having reconciled the "unbending will of bureaucracy" to the idea.

The present low level of media freedom in Tajikistan is caused by a range of interrelated political, socio-economic and ideological factors.

Although post-conflict Tajikistan is stabilizing politically and recovering socially and economically, there have been few changes in the general state of the mass media, and in the development of a free press in particular.

Tajikistan's media is going through a difficult period of transition from serving one ruling party (whether under the Soviet regime or during the recent civil war) to freedom of the press. Politically, the Constitution and the Law on the Press and Other Mass Media guarantee freedom of the press, but this freedom is not supported economically. The government finances all the leading newspapers (*Djumkhuriyat*, *Narodnaya gazeta*, *Khalk ovozi*, official publications of the President and Government, the Parliament's *Sadoi mardum*, *Djavononi Tojikiston* of the State Youth Committee) and state television and radio. That means

they are official organs, sort of “semi-free” publications. Journalists working at these newspapers are de facto limited in their activities and cannot reveal their creative potential and talents to the full. The press, television and radio are still supposed to fulfil the functions of agitation, propaganda and organisation.

Tajik journalists do not always succeed in obtaining, processing and disseminating information, which are the main tasks of a journalist and the main functions of the media.

Although Article 5 of the Law on the Press and Other Mass Media expressly obliges state, political and social organizations and movements, and also officials, to furnish information when required by the mass media, and furthermore Article 27 provides for prosecution for an unlawful refusal, in practice it is none too easy for journalists to get the information they need. In such cases officials usually say they cannot give out information because it is a state secret or other secret protected by the same Law that stipulated access to such information. This provision of the Law on the Press and another piece of legislation, the Law on State Secrets, which contains a long list of classified information, puts journalists off making the effort to obtain the information they want.

Let us imagine for a moment that Journalist A telephones Ministry Official B, wishing to clarify some information obtained through the bush telegraph (rumour). First, the official immediately says, “We don’t give out that sort of information over the phone”, and hangs up. At best, he would recommend making an official request to his bosses. Let us assume that Journalist A catches Official B at his office and repeats the request to clarify the information. Do you think the official would satisfy the journalist’s request? Do you think he would at least politely blame the alleged confidentiality of the information or the timing not being right? Of course not. The official would not fail to make some remark like “What do you need that for?” or “Who said that?”, not troubling to hide his annoyance at those tedious journalists.

Nasiba Yussupova, a newspaper correspondent, recently interviewed the Director of the Preventive Medicine Research Institute of Tajikistan

on a possible biological terrorist attack. The interview was published in *Vechernii Dushanbe*. Take a look at this:

Correspondent: *Can we say that if there is a longer ground war, American soldiers in Afghanistan will face dangerous enemies long defeated in the West, such as typhus, plague, malaria, smallpox and other deadly diseases?*

Director: *How should I know? Do we live in Afghanistan or what? These questions are not for us. Don't ask us questions about Afghanistan.*

And that was the answer given by a professor, a PhD, the head of a research institute which includes a laboratory of bacteriology where 17 bacteria preparations were created in Soviet times – and despite the fact that quite recently (right before the interview), WHO director Ms Brundtland had warned the governments of all WHO members (including Tajikistan) about possible terrorist attacks using chemical and biological weapons.

Moreover, the director finally warned the journalist: *Stay off this topic. Don't publish these groundless rumours. Or I might get even with you, both officially and unofficially.* (The journalist has kept a recording of the conversation.)

Is that not a threat? What does it mean, to get even with the journalist unofficially?

A finishing touch to the picture: if Journalist A represents a state publication, then the process will be more gentle, and the “undesirable consequences” may be limited to a phone call to the editor with a demand to “reset your correspondent’s brains”. And if Journalist A is a representative of a non-state or even an independent periodical, the process will be shorter and with more serious consequences should publication take place.

Of the many instances of undesirable consequences for Tajik journalists over the last few years, several can be recalled here. I myself, a representative of a parliamentary newspaper, got off lightly with a few remarks from the editor for creating a tense atmosphere at the Central Election Committee when the preliminary parliamentary election results were being verified. Fate was harder on Mukhiddin Idizoda, a corre-

spondent with *Nadjot*, and Sayof Mizrob from Ozodi Radio, who were roughed up by “unknown persons”; Mukhtar Bokizoda, the owner of *Nadjo*, was summoned to the prosecutor’s office to be carpeted; Abdufattokh Vokhidov and Saifiddin Dostiev, journalists at the weekly *Istikbol*, were under arbitrary arrest and prosecution for several days for “disobedience” and “insubordination”.

A reasonable question arises: why not use legal means to prosecute an unlawful refusal to disclose information? Article 27.4 of the Law on the Press and Other Mass Media states that “A refusal to provide requested information may be appealed by a representative of the mass media to a higher authority or official, and subsequently to the court in the procedure stipulated by the law for appealing against illegal actions by state administration bodies and officials which infringe citizens’ rights.”

Yes, in such cases Tajik journalists do not exercise their legal rights. This is probably because firstly, not everyone who works in the media is aware of the law and therefore is not armed with means of self-defence. Secondly, journalists themselves are reluctant to sue, influenced by the general attitude, “why go to court, it’s better to make peace”. And thirdly, the predominant theory that there is no justice to be had through courts which are effectively dependent on the executive authorities, does not exactly give them the confidence to plunge into court hearings.

In general, obtaining the latest information from primary sources, i.e. official structures, is even more difficult than publishing it in the press, even though all the ministries and agencies have set up press centres. So it looks as if these press centres were established not to disseminate news and significant information, but to stop “internal secrets” from getting out and dirty linen from being washed in public. Even if journalists do get hold of the latest information, it is not always printed or broadcast. Important information or topical material is always scrupulously checked and the responsible employees and editorial board smooth out any wrinkles, under the influence of both their self-censoring instinct and fear of the owner’s wrath.

The media’s economic dependence on the state is, in my opinion, the main obstacle to the development of a free press in Tajikistan. With the

state's monopoly on publishing and printing, none of the newspapers or magazines that claim to objectively reflect social and political processes, let alone those that support the opposition, can be printed easily. As far as the law is concerned, the situation seems to be quite normal: dozens of printing and publishing houses have been privatised and are known as "joint-stock companies", "publishing and printing complexes" and so on. Yet in reality they often refuse to print "undesirable" periodicals, blaming busy schedules or, at best, "disapproval by the authorities". In recent years *Djunbish*, *Istiklol*, *Nadjot*, *Mison* and other non-state newspapers have repeatedly faced this situation.

It is plain that free mass media are both the result of and a prerequisite for the establishment of a democratic society. From the very beginning, the OSCE Mission to Tajikistan has worked towards the emergence of free media.

The OSCE Mission to Tajikistan has supported many initiatives involving the establishment and rehabilitation of newspapers in the regions. Newspapers which have already been rehabilitated include *Navidi Dusti* in the Kumsangir district, *Khakikati Kolkhozobod* in the Kolkhozobod district, *Beshkent* in the Beshkent district, *Sadokat* in the Shaartuz district, *Subkhi Gozimalik* in the Gozimalik district, *Sharaf* in the Kubodiyon district and *Oinai Rasht* in the Rasht district. It should be noted that all these papers were established in the regions which suffered most from the civil war in Tajikistan. The OSCE Mission to Tajikistan is continuing its efforts in this direction with the rehabilitation of more local newspapers: *Darvoz*, *Paigomi Rushon*, *Shokhdara* and *Zindagi* in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region, and *Karotegin* in the Rasht Valley. According to Mark Gilbert, Head of the OSCE Mission to Tajikistan, "there were no cases of resistance on the part of the authorities during the implementation of the projects."<sup>2</sup>

The formation of an information market in Tajikistan is in progress. Unfortunately, the consumers' shopping basket is filled with gossip magazines, gutter press and criminal chronicles. Since more and more such

<sup>2</sup>The OSCE Mission to Tajikistan, Collected Materials of the Second Regional Conference "Mass Media in Central Asia: the Present and the Future". 14-15 November 2000, page 12.

market-oriented publications keep springing up and thriving, this trend has an unhealthy impact on the development of a free press. Saturated by these papers, the market will inevitably demand that the independent social and political newspapers, which are already so few and struggling to survive, change their focus.

Under the present conditions in Tajikistan, the independent media need a “second wind” and the free press requires further development, which again will depend on the state, i.e. financial support for the media by way of soft loans and a moderate taxation policy, even exempting non-state media from VAT for the duration of their rehabilitation.

The electronic media in Tajikistan are in much the same state as the printed media, and in some ways are even worse off. Most of the 20 registered electronic media belong to so-called “independent television organizations”. To be precise, however, independence is still just a dream for them. The fact is, they have not even started broadcasting yet as they are at the stage of state registration, which means that once they enter the licensing process, they will become dependent on the relevant executive authority. Article 12 of the Law on Television and Radio Broadcasting (14 December 1996) states, “the procedure of issuing a licence and the period of validity of such licence shall be determined by the TV and Radio Broadcasting Committee of the Republic of Tajikistan”. This legal approach to the problem has led to the “Provision on the Procedure for Licensing TV and Radio Broadcasting”, approved by the Government’s TV and Radio Broadcasting Committee. The Provision has further complicated the already difficult procedure for licensing independent TV channels, and has created many obstacles for the re-registration of existing independent TV channels.

The Provision is rather vague and can be interpreted any way you like, depending on the desire and mood of the official. As a result, some independent TV channels, such as *NIK* (Dushanbe) and *Asia-Plus* (Dushanbe), have not been able to obtain broadcasting licences for the last few years, and a number of independent TV channels (*Mavdji Ozod* in the Vosei district, Khatlon region, and *NT* in Pendjikent) cannot function uninterruptedly.



The issue of licensing is the sorest point for independent electronic media in Tajikistan today. Of course, this is not to diminish the problems of financing, ensuring freedom of speech and media freedom, and clearly separating executive and supervisory functions, but the solution to these problems will in many respects depend on the broadcasting licensing regulations.

The correct and democratic way of resolving the problems would be to establish national TV and Radio Broadcasting Councils to act as non-official supervisory bodies in this field, and to ensure that they can function. Such Councils could start to address the above problems both nationally and locally, and provide an effective media development policy.

The factors and causes I have described, which are slowing down the development of a free press in Tajikistan, make it urgently necessary to revise the legislation regulating media activities, and first of all, to draft and adopt a basic uniform Mass Media Law which suits the spirit of the age.



**II.**

**NEW CHALLENGES FOR THE MEDIA  
IN TIMES OF ANTI-TERRORIST CONFLICT**

**A. D. Sultanbayev**

THE ROLE OF JOURNALISTS IN COVERING CONFLICTS

**Yuri Chernogaev**

MASS MEDIA IN UZBEKISTAN:  
AN EVENTFUL AUTUMN/WINTER 2001

**Andrei Sviridov**

THE KAZAKHSTANI PRESS SINCE 11 SEPTEMBER

**Kironshokh Sharifzoda**

TAJIKISTAN'S MASS MEDIA AND THE WAR ON TERROR



**A. D. Sultanbayev**

Chairman  
of the *Union of Journalists of Kyrgyzstan*

## THE ROLE OF JOURNALISTS IN COVERING CONFLICTS

We have gathered together in Almaty, the hospitable southern capital of Kazakhstan, at the Central Asian Mass Media Conference. I am glad that this regional forum of journalists has become traditional, though infrequent. I hope that this tradition will continue and grow.

The theme of this conference reflects an urgent problem facing the international community today – how to combat terrorism.

Unfortunately, the first year of the 21st century has been marked by the horror of international terrorism. The tragic events in New York and Washington have shown the whole world that terrorism has gradually developed into an international phenomenon which acknowledges neither borders nor states. Obviously terrorist attacks did happen before the tragic events of 11 September, and measures were taken to combat terrorists, including military action. However, these measures were generally taken at local and national levels, and consequently the understanding of the threat of terrorism was on the same levels. In this sense I might mention the very serious ordeal that Kyrgyzstan has recently been through. Peace was disturbed by the bandit-style sallies of international terrorists in Batken in 1999-2000. At that time, journalists and mass media played a great stabilizing role by explaining the situation and supporting the patriotic spirit of the population and the soldiers who had come to the defence of their native land. The media's activities during that complex period in our history were truly valued by the people and leadership of our country. So the tragedy in the US, to which the whole world bore unwilling witness, could not but touch the people of Kyrgyzstan to their hearts.

The large-scale anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan has naturally attracted the attention of the entire world. The experience accumulated by the world's media in covering the anti-terrorist conflict has clearly identi-

fied the media's *three major objectives* in meeting the public's demand for objective and comprehensive information on the anti-terrorist operations and the situation surrounding them. *Firstly*, to obtain access to all sources of necessary information or to get hold of materials for further dissemination. *Secondly*, to ensure the objectivity and reliability of information and to present an accurate picture of events. And *thirdly*, to protect journalists and their rights in the areas of anti-terrorist operations.

Regarding the first objective, it should be borne in mind that a particular situation could require governments to restrict access to information and reduce the information to be distributed through the media. For instance, the US government suppressed information containing the opinions of Bin Laden and the Taliban because it might have contained coded instructions on carrying out terrorist attacks. We all understand that there can be no absolute freedom in human society. Freedom is confined by democratic laws protecting and ensuring human rights, primarily the rights to life and safety.

The second objective of journalists in providing unbiased coverage of the anti-terrorist conflict is associated with their responsibility for the information they disseminate. Clearly, any anti-terrorist conflict is an extraordinary event in itself and of increased interest to journalists. But it also places greater responsibility upon them, since different manifestations of terrorism might be unfairly connected with other deep social processes and phenomena, either deliberately or due to a lack of information.

For example, the terrorists who penetrated the territory of Kyrgyzstan pretended to be "true proponents" of Islam, although in fact their activities were directed against the peaceful life of many of their co-religionists who traditionally consider themselves Muslims. Now it is no secret that the reasons behind "Islamic" radicalism and extremism do not lie in Islam itself, but political and geopolitical goals reflecting the wishes of their inspirers and organizers. It is worth pointing out that inevitable conflict or opposition is not typical of the relationships between different states, ethnic groups and faiths in our region. The main and very real threat of destabilization in the region comes from outside, from international terrorism.

The third objective in ensuring freedom of speech during the war on ter-

ror is to protect journalists' lives and create safe conditions for their work in "hot spots" and anywhere else they may work. Unfortunately, our fellow-journalists still die at the hands of terrorists or as a result of a tragic combination of different circumstances in conflict areas. Obviously, journalists themselves must strictly observe the safety requirements in such areas.

In addition to its political and military aspects, the war on terror is one of information and ideology. The ideological aspect means, on the one hand, revealing the true nature and sources of terrorism, and, on the other, making people and society aware of the essence and meaning of the actions of terrorist organizations, and informing the public of any threat of terrorism.

Our Central Asian region has long served as a geographical and cultural bridge between East and West, and events that take place here inevitably have consequences beyond the region. Therefore, anyone with common sense clearly realizes that the stirring-up of international terrorism in our region threatens the entire Eurasian continent.

Freedom of speech here means the impartial dissemination of not only objective facts and events, but also the viewpoints of all parties concerned. It should not be reduced to an open propaganda war against terrorists. We believe that freedom of speech during the war on terror means exposing, throughout the media, the anti-social and anti-human nature of terrorism based on objective and efficient coverage of facts and events.

Journalism in Kyrgyzstan has been developing in an environment of independence and democracy for ten years now. During these years the Kyrgyz press has travelled a hard road, sharing the joys and sorrows of life with its people. It has made a significant contribution to the formation and development of statehood and the strengthening of democratic reforms in everyday life.

I believe that three main factors can be identified which could help us to achieve the objectives I have described.

**Firstly**, Kyrgyzstan has good legislation for the basis of a democratic press. This legislation succeeds as the legal foundation for citizens to exercise their right to freely express their opinion and obtain a wide variety of information.

**Secondly**, as is well known, Kyrgyzstan has no censor and no state agency regulating the mass media. Only information which is a state secret is protected by the law. The political independence of the press can be seen in the genuine pluralism of opinions and viewpoints. The media as a whole presents a rich tapestry of different points of view on socially significant issues, whether political, economic or cultural.

**Thirdly**, private mass media are playing an increasingly important role. This is a very important qualitative and quantitative indicator reflecting the level of freedom of speech and freedom of the press. The state has voluntarily given up its monopoly on information. This was a step forward, since without independent media there can be no question of freedom of the press, freedom of speech, or democracy in general.

All the measures taken to liberate the media have resulted in significant changes in the way the press works. The media has become more open and more substantial. Seeking out your own niche, voicing your own, individual opinions – these have become a normal phenomenon in our democratic and independent journalism.

Other important conditions for freedom of the press are the economic independence of the press and journalists' financial stability and social and legal protection. However, any improvement in the media's financial condition is directly linked to the improvement of the country's economy in general.

There are serious problems in guaranteeing and protecting journalists' employment rights and social rights. The most pressing issue is the legal regulation of professional relations between employed journalists and the management and owners of mass media.

The political and legal freedoms of speech and the press, combined with a media which does not have sufficient economic independence (to put it mildly), have had effects on our journalism. There is still room for one-sided and tendentious coverage of various problems in sovereign Kyrgyzstan. Our journalism is not well served by deliberate exaggeration, lack of critical analysis, unjustified harshness or downright rudeness about certain individuals. Breaches of journalistic ethics and general morals are the most frequent charges made against journalists.



**Yuri Chernogaev**

Uzbekistan

MASS MEDIA IN UZBEKISTAN:  
AN EVENTFUL AUTUMN/WINTER 2001

I would like to start my report by describing two incidents. Both occurred in Uzbekistan after the commencement of the international anti-terrorist operations and both involve international funds. In the first incident, the German Konrad Adenauer Fund sent its representative office in Tashkent a circular letter which reads as follows: "In view of the worsening situation in the region and the military operations in Afghanistan in which Uzbekistan is taking part, the Fund's representative may permit the evacuation of personnel at his discretion."

The second incident: a five-member delegation of the International Monetary Fund arrived in Tashkent headed by the IMF's representative in Uzbekistan, Leif Hansen. The delegation came one year after IMF representative Christoph Rosenberg had left Uzbekistan, having spent three "fruitless" years (as he put it) visiting and talking with high-ranking government officials, leaving behind only one member of the technical staff. Now the IMF mission had come to Uzbekistan to conduct new loan talks and meant to stay for two weeks in order to attain positive results by whatever means. One member of the delegation said, "The money for Uzbekistan is in our pocket. All we need to do is to find a diplomatic way of handing it over."

These two incidents are indicative of an opinion currently circulating in the West: that Uzbekistan has joined the international anti-terrorist coalition, jeopardizing its external security and internal order, and for that reason should be rewarded.

Never before had Uzbekistan received so much favourable attention from the West as in October, November and December 2001. Tommy Franks of the US Central Command visited twice. Senators Carl Levine and John Warner visited the country to meet American soldiers deployed

at the Hanabad air base. With the active phase of the anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan already over, American planes are bringing senators rather than bombs to the region. Last winter, nearly one third of Salay Madaminov's opposition leaders made an appearance in Tashkent. US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld feels very much at home in Uzbekistan – he even has personal friends here. US Secretary of State Colin Powell recently paid a visit to Uzbekistan. There is also traffic in the opposite direction: on 16 November in Washington, Powell and Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov discussed the “new situation in Central Asia in general and Uzbekistan in particular”. At the same time Powell said that the US is “preparing a considerably larger aid package”, including the social sphere and security. From 26-30 November an Uzbek delegation headed by Deputy Prime Minister Rustam Azimov held “extensive and intensive negotiations” (as the Americans put it) in the US. The negotiations largely focused on financial and economic matters, and the US “undertook to extend its cooperation”. According to the media, this extended cooperation means guaranteed American investments of US\$8 billion, which is comparable with the entire country's budget and exceeds the national debt by US\$2 billion. At the end of last winter, Congress approved US\$161.8 million worth of assistance to Uzbekistan, which is three times as much as in the financial year 2001. The US has also agreed to take Uzbekistan's interests into account at international organizations.

So Rustam Azimov was still unpacking his bags when the IMF delegation arrived with their suitcases full of loans. “We are prepared for top-level talks. We aren't leaving until the money has been handed over”, said one member of the delegation.

Finance is not the only area in which Uzbekistan now enjoys most-favoured-nation treatment. For two years the Uzbek security services had been asking their foreign counterparts (specifically Interpol) for help in arresting Salay Madaminov, one of the most prominent leaders of the armed opposition. He lived abroad quite openly, lecturing and taking advantage of his image as a political exile; no one in the West lifted a finger to arrest him. Yet one week ago, upon arriving in Prague, Madaminov was arrested by the Czech police on an international warrant issued by

the Uzbek Prosecutor's Office. As I write, they are deciding whether to extradite him to Uzbekistan, although Madaminov's lawyers hope he will be released. In any case, an arrest like this would simply not have been possible before 11 September.

Uzbekistan has been actively taking advantage of its new role internationally, as an active ally of Western democracy. In this respect, Uzbekistan is free to act, as it is not bound by the CIS Collective Security Treaty and is not a member of the Eurasian Union or other associations. Its geographical location in Central Asia is very convenient: Uzbekistan borders all the countries in the region, but does not have common borders with such great powers as Russia, China and India, which are located in close proximity. In other words, Uzbekistan is free to cooperate with all of them without being dependent on them.

Uzbekistan can choose its own priorities. But since these priorities must be clearly demonstrated to its allies, old and new, it is time to say a few words about the Uzbek press. Whatever problem the politicians discuss at their meetings, journalists have more to say about it in their newspapers. This has always been true. Diplomats posted to Tashkent and members of western missions look through numerous Uzbek newspapers trying to find a continuation or extension of the issues they are discussing with the Government. Using 11 September as an example, let's see how fruitful such attempts are.

Uzbekistan boasts about 500 newspapers and nearly 200 magazines. No matter how much the authorities deny the existence of censorship, it is there, although a censor may be disguised under a different name such as "officer of the Newspaper Department of the State Committee for the Press". Since no newspaper can be published unless this officer has stamped it, he has enormous power, which is not advisory but decisive. I am with *Tashkentskaya Pravda*, and can assure you that our newspaper sticks to the government's point of view 100 per cent in every respect, as it was founded by the local administration. Nevertheless, not an issue comes out without the officers of the Newspaper Department of the State Committee for the Press removing an article or photograph or amending a headline.

Supervision is strict and continuous, everywhere and at all times. The situation at the other 500 newspapers is the same. With electronic media, the practice is to approve the scripts, and only reliable and thoroughly-checked-out anchors and moderators are permitted to appear live.

For this reason, you are unlikely to find an opinion which differs from the Government's in the Uzbek media. And that is how this viewpoint is formulated for the media, and, accordingly, for both Uzbek readers (or viewers) and foreign analysts.

The attack on the World Trade Center on 11 September opened up a new era. But on 12 September, Uzbek newspapers were still living in the past. Only one newspaper, *Narodnoye slovo* ("The People's Word"), published a 20-line note briefly describing the event. On the following morning the editor was reprimanded by a high-ranking official for this unnecessary initiative, because the official line on the event had not yet been formulated. The reprimand was given in the morning, and the official was unaware that the official line was in the process of being formulated. He did it out of habit, just in case, so that he would be able to report that "action had been taken".

As a matter of fact, on the evening of 11 September, TV managers were instructed to link up directly to CNN, and for three hours non-stop, viewers were able to watch the New York tragedy unfolding on government TV. However, I repeat, the decision was taken at the very top: the TV managers were not acting independently. Newspaper bosses, unaware of this, had already begun laying into their over-hasty employees.

Having shown viewers the tragedy, however, it had to be evaluated and personal positions had to be worked out.

Working out your personal position is not that easy. Consider how Bin Laden's image has been transformed by the media. When he fought against the Soviet invaders in Afghanistan he was regarded as a freedom fighter. When he lifted his hand against the USA, the entire world united in its determination to punish him as an international terrorist. Yet Bin Laden has not changed. Moreover, both Bin Laden and President Bush appeal to God using the same words. Who will God listen to? Who and

what will the citizens of Uzbekistan listen to, and whose point of view will they hear?

And so the Uzbek press came to a standstill for a couple of days. It confined itself to giving sketchy information from America without any comment.

The President of Uzbekistan made his view clear following Donald Rumsfeld's visit to Uzbekistan a week after the tragic event in New York. Then it became clear that our No. 1 ally was the United States of America. We also learned that the US would be given an air base (the name Hanabad was not mentioned in the Uzbek press for a whole month, "pending specific instructions"). However, it was no big deal for journalists to figure out the name and location of the air base soon after the Americans had requested one. I even managed to visit it. Despite this, the name of the air base was kept secret – a good example of the unnecessary censorship that makes Western journalists smile sceptically. Then it became clear how we were supposed to write about the situation.

Nevertheless, although the official line had already been formulated and the political priorities clearly identified, the inertia of censorship still lingered. At a meeting in early October, Prime Minister Utkir Sultanov expressed his astonishment that Uzbek newspapers covering the anti-terrorist operations were limiting themselves to reprinting the brief comments provided by the Uzbek Information Agency (UzIA). Newspaper editors took this as an instruction, and *Tashkentskaya Pravda* prepared a comprehensive account written by yours truly. Given the strict supervision by the "officers of the Newspaper Department of the State Committee for the Press", I naturally tried to focus on the facts since, being a staff writer at the newspaper *Kommersant*, I have a well-developed network of sources.

So, just the facts. But even a selection of facts assembled by a journalist rather than the UzIA put the Newspaper Department on the alert, and the article was withdrawn from the paper. "And what about the instruction given by the Prime Minister?" you may ask. Well, all I can say is that it wasn't the first time the press has been given conflicting instructions, and it won't be the last.

As events in Afghanistan unfolded, this sort of thing started to happen more often. It is no secret that the US was none too keen on the Northern Alliance because it was supported by the CIS, i.e. Russia. As the military and political balance in Central Asia has shifted in favour of the US, the Northern Alliance is written and talked about less. Newspapers – or rather, the official information published in newspapers – are now putting the emphasis on Zahir Shah. Nobody seems to be interested in how journalists view the situation in Afghanistan.

Of course nobody would claim that events in Afghanistan are developing in the wrong direction. We are all sure that the Taliban's medieval regime must be eliminated and Bin Laden captured and punished. It is surprising, however, that different versions of this scenario are simply not up for discussion, that every newspaper has to reprint the wording drafted by the UzIA down to the last comma. This is disappointing. Some journalists working in the Uzbek media have many sources in every country in the region and could write very interesting exclusives for Uzbek newspapers. More than once, Uzbek newspapers, *Tashkentskaya Pravda* in particular, could have been the first to report certain events in and around Afghanistan. The newspaper would have been quoted and referred to, and this would have enhanced the image of the Uzbek press in the world. But this is beyond the limits established for Uzbek journalists. There is no need.

One of the American diplomats who have been visiting Tashkent so frequently of late told me that “the US has attained its objectives in Uzbekistan”. Remember that one of the objectives was freedom of the press. Yet as David Lewis, Central Asia Project Director from International Crisis Group, said at a recent international conference in Tashkent, the US has cut funding for the democratic reform project in Central Asia by 30 per cent. Instead, the focus will be on security issues.

So let me conclude my report with a question. Eventually we will capture Bin Laden. But what about freedom of speech?

**Andrei Sviridov**

*Freelance journalist, observer and researcher*  
Kazakhstan

## THE KAZAKHSTANI PRESS SINCE 11 SEPTEMBER

Although very little time has passed since 11 September, the topic has already acquired, in a way, its own history. I have written on it no fewer than five times myself in my column, “Press-Attaché”, in the Kazakhstani weekly *Respublika-2000 v XXI veke* (“Republic-2000 in the 21st century”) – the first time in the 13 September issue, two days after the tragedy in New York and Washington. I will venture to quote from the first of my articles, written overnight on 11-12 September, because the quotation expresses my personal credo on the issue, which underlies all of my subsequent articles on the subject and forms the basis for my presentation at this conference.

Here it is: “Now that the suicide assassins, whatever their politics, ethnic group or faith (since in any case it is clear that they were consumed with hatred of America), have killed at a stroke several thousand innocent people in the two capitals of the country they so hated, it would be utterly disgraceful to manifest any anti-Americanism, whether internally nurtured or imposed by fashion or propaganda. This would be equivalent to taking the side of those who, on the morning of 11 September, hijacked passenger Boeings and rammed them into the twin towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and, more importantly, those who sent the assassins to do the job, having turned them into ideological and moral zombies, if this word can be applicable here.” (*Respublika*, 13 September 2001).

Later on, when I analysed the judgments and comments on the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington that had been published in the Kazakhstani press by the end of September, which to a certain extent reflected the opinions prevailing in the press and society, I observed (and can now restate these observations as typical for October and November

as well) that our press "...is full of speculation that World War III began on 11 September 2001, although now that three weeks have passed (and all the more so after three months – A.S.), it is obvious that it has not yet started and, God willing, never will. It is often said that the Third Millennium, or the 21st century (which is the same thing), has only just begun... And many times it has been repeated that since 11 September our world and we ourselves have changed for ever." (*Respublika-2000*, 11 October 2001).

However, in the "new world and the new millennium" proclaimed by the press in both Russia and Kazakhstan, it was the press itself that "covered the Manhattan fire in the light of the flames, yet itself failed to change fundamentally from what it was prior to 11 September. Instead, some features typical of our press – alas, not the best ones – were much in evidence on the numerous pages of American news coverage in Kazakhstani newspapers and magazines" (*ibid.*). One of the worst of such features is the anti-Americanism cultivated by a large part, if not most, of the media in Kazakhstan. It is interesting to note here that the further this part of press moves away from direct information and analysis towards political commentary (which is the most interesting genre), the more it fosters anti-Americanism.

A certain regularity can be observed here: where and when our media merely covered the course of events in the early days, minute by minute, hour by hour, and ultimately week by week, I had no complaints about my fellow-journalists. Quite the reverse: as a professional I admired the way our TV channels were able to rearrange their broadcasting schedules at a moment's notice on the evening of 11 September, especially as 8.15 a.m. New York time is 8.15 p.m. in Almaty, i.e. prime time. Almost all of Almaty's TV channels immediately switched over to re-broadcast CNN or BBC live, and also the reporting and/or commentaries on the Moscow channels TV-6, NTV, RTV and ORT. From 12 September onwards, the newspapers in the first few days after the tragedy were full of chronologically arranged news, reports and initial reactions from America, Europe and Moscow, mostly sourced from the Internet. That was of prime importance for their Kazakhstani readership, for whom



access to the world's media, while not forbidden, is still difficult for many reasons.

So much for the reporting in our media. As far as analysis and comment are concerned, we have to admit that "...where Kazakhstan's media did not merely cover but also commented on developments, the predominant tone was gloating delight and scoffing at the victims of the unprecedented terrorist attacks and their country. With respect to the mass killers, on the other hand, there was vulgar demagoguery and even direct apologetics for these modern-day cannibals and enemies of the civilized world, as if a large section of Kazakhstan's media were part of the military propaganda division of bin Laden, Mullah Omar or Saddam Hussein." (*Respublika-2000* of 11 October 2001).

In principle, anti-American and anti-Western rhetoric was not the exclusive preserve of the Kazakhstani press. But while the Moscow press contained opposing opinions, cases of merited criticism in the Kazakhstani press (such as the argument about the rich North and the poor South, which we are fed up to the back teeth with hearing about) can be counted on the fingers of two hands.

I see no need to analyse the content of all the anti-American and anti-Western invective that flooded the Kazakhstani press after 11 September in detail here, let alone refute it item by item (which I did partly in my press reviews published in my Press-Attaché column). I will just permit myself to reproduce one argument, which is not perhaps the main one. In one of my reviews, I asked the advocates of the "Rich North guilt about Poor South" theory a rhetorical question: "What would you say if some people, groups or countries in the South you so ardently defend directed their envious and aggressive eyes, or, even worse, practical plans, not towards America and Europe, but to the CIS, including Kazakhstan? Would you be still harping on about 'not those who kill being to blame, but those who deprived them of a future'?"

"And, by the way", as I continued then and will continue now, "we still have to work out who deprived whom, and of what: the US, which spends vast sums of money supporting democracy throughout the world, or the dictatorships and traditionalist ruling cliques who go all out to pre-

vent the dissemination of so-called Western (in fact, common human) values in their countries because they are totally incompatible with terrorism, both state and anti-state.” (*Respublika*, 11 October 2001). It should be added that here in Central Asia, and Kazakhstan in particular, state terrorism is much more of a threat and in the long run could give rise to anti-state terrorism, as has presumably happened in neighbouring Uzbekistan.

But the dreadful month of September 2001 has already passed, and the initial shock of the international terrorist attack on the US has more or less subsided. And in the beginning of October, the International Anti-terrorist Coalition headed by America began its military campaign in Afghanistan. Nothing has changed in the Kazakhstani press: objective, professional coverage of daily events in and around Afghanistan, through re-broadcasts and digests of the international and Russian media, has been accompanied by the same biased, anti-American reactions and comments of our own analysts and, in particular, commentators. There have been new developments, though – our commentators’ scandalous lack of professionalism has become more obvious, being particularly noticeable in late November and early December 2001 when the early successes of the anti-Taliban military campaign became evident.

This is what it looks like (I will quote again from one of my press reviews, the latest one, in which I analysed mainly November articles from the Kazakhstani media on the new war): “Kabul and Kunduz were seized literally in front of our eyes, and Kandahar will be next. Mullah Omar has escaped no one knows where; Juma Namangani has been killed; the elusive bin Laden has dissociated himself from the Taliban, as they are losers now; the Taliban regime has effectively ceased to exist as a unified political force; a sane coalition government for Afghanistan has been formed at the inter-Afghan conference in Bonn. And yet with all these known events and indisputable facts in place, the inveterate anti-Americans from our press keep harping on the same old themes, such as alleged American failures in Afghanistan. In popular language this sort of rhetorical device is known as a barefaced lie.” (*Respublika-2000*, 6 December 2001).

In principle, everything in this life can be looked at from at least two points of view. And that is the case here: while the rhetoric produced by our local anti-Americans, defending terrorists and attacking America and the West in general, was dreadful enough, their comments on the hostilities in Afghanistan as described above are so obviously contrary to the facts as to be plainly ridiculous. It would be ridiculous if the writers were genuinely mistaken – supposing they do not watch CNN, or TV-6, or NTV, or watch them but don't believe what they see – well, that would be their own business. But if they do watch these channels and know what the truth is, but still deliberately lie to their readers? If this is done consciously, it is neither ridiculous nor threatening, but disgraceful.

The writers may well be aware of this themselves, since from September through to November they have kept using their old post-September materials on the terrorist strikes, regardless of the course of hostilities in Afghanistan. As before, these are so-called “world outlook”-type articles, in which the writers comment not so much on the ins and outs of the military campaign in Afghanistan as on the original terrorist strikes in America and their causes and effects. Sometimes these topics overlap, but the former more often serves as a source of comparisons and/or arguments concerning the latter.

However, a new trend has emerged in this field which may give cause for some hope. During the first month after 11 September (i.e. before the military campaign in Afghanistan), the few outstanding articles you could find in the Kazakhstani press rebutting the trend I described above had been reprinted from the Moscow press or the Internet; but October and November were marked by a number of articles by Kazakhstani writers in defence of America and against anti-Americanism. Among the most noteworthy I would like to single out the articles written by the political scientists Sergei Duvanov in *Respublika-2000* and Bulat Sultanov in the Kazakhstani supplement to *Argumenty i Fakty*, and an article by journalist Yuri Kirinitsyanov in the same paper. Kirinitsyanov gave his article a nifty polemical title: “IN DEFENCE OF THE WORLD'S POLICEMAN”, while Duvanov posed a kind of classical question – “WHY DO WE NOT LIKE AMERICANS?” – and analysed

the main factors at work in anti-Americanism in Kazakhstan today. In Duvanov's opinion, it is primarily motivated by envy and an inferiority complex.

In the final part of my presentation, I would like to touch on a question I have not had time to cover so far (due to my detailed analysis of specific quotations from the newspaper articles I reviewed, while this topic deserves to be discussed in a separate article). The question is: why are aggressive anti-Americanism and a pro-terrorist ideology so openly cultivated in the Kazakhstani press, which is generally more than loyal to President Nursultan Nazarbayev's regime of personal power?

There seems to be an insoluble contradiction here. The President of Kazakhstan promptly and clearly declared the terrorist attacks of 11 September to be just that – terrorism (his style was not as striking, graphic and unusually humane as that of his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, but it was still disapproval). The President just as unequivocally supported the military action by the US and the anti-Taliban coalition, at one time even talking about providing Americans with military bases in Kazakhstani territory and so on. And yet political commentators in the Kazakhstani media apparently run counter to the President's position? Is this a demonstration of freedom of speech and independent judgement? Theoretically it could be. But no one who knows anything about the relationship between the press and the authorities in Kazakhstan could seriously say that.

In principle, that could be said about, say, Gulzhan Yergalieva's talk show "Public Agreement" that was broadcast on Channel 31 right after 11 September, in which three of the four guests found a variety of arguments to justify the terrorists. It could also be said about anti-American articles in minor newspapers such as *Nachnyom s ponedel'nika* ("Let's start from Monday"), and, finally, to some of the articles in my beloved *Respublika-2000* (yes, this is the newspaper where I have my "Press-Attaché" column, in which I do my best to combat anti-American and anti-Western trends; but a number of other writers in the same paper hold exactly the opposite opinion – pluralism within the paper, as it were, and

I do not know whether this is good or bad). Such pluralism can be said to reflect the broad range of opinions existing in society, that is, newspapers reflecting what is in people's minds, not written to order for political reasons.

But it would be ridiculous to apply the criterion of "independence" to major weeklies which are actually under the patronage of the authorities, such as *Megapolis* and, in particular, *Novoye pokolenie* ("New Generation"). These newspapers regularly predict (in fact, hope) that the unfortunate US will suffer the same fate as the late lamented USSR, if not in 2001 (rhymes well with 1991), then next year. It is common knowledge that *Novoye pokolenie* is controlled by the President's elder son-in-law and *Megapolis* belongs to either his younger son-in-law or his nephew – this is where the experts disagree.

I will take the risk of offering the following explanation, although not as an indisputable assumption. We have to proceed from the fact that fundamentally our President, like Putin, to say nothing of Islam Karimov, is *not a democrat*, and their regimes are not democratic ones. But by virtue of fate, geopolitics and simple geography, they are forced to back America to survive themselves. Thus the typical post-Soviet Central Asian President says what he has to, while the courtier press says what he really thinks. And that's what makes this section of the press so interesting.



## Kironshokh Sharifzoda

Political observer  
*Sadoi Mardum* newspaper  
 Tajikistan

### TAJIKISTAN'S MASS MEDIA AND THE WAR ON TERROR

Before we start discussing how the war on terror is covered by the media in Tajikistan, I think it is worth considering what the word “terrorism” really means.

According to Vladimir Dal's *Thesaurus* (second edition, Moscow, 1882): Terrorism (Lat.): *Causing fear by way of death penalties, murders and all the horrors of rage.*

According to S. Ozhegov's Dictionary of the Russian Language (edition 20, stereotype, published in Moscow by Russkii yazyk, 1988, page 649): Terror: physical violence, up to and including physical annihilation, with respect to political opponents. Fascist ~, Individual ~ (individual acts of political assassination).

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon in the interaction of opposing political forces: it appeared many centuries ago with the emergence of state administration. History has witnessed dozens of acts of terrorism towards rulers, shahs, emirs and so on.

According to Hans-Peter Gasser, a well-known specialist in the field of international humanitarian rights, in everyday life the word *terrorism* is understood as follows:

- Terrorism is the application or threat of application of violence, threatening, as a rule, human lives;
- Terrorism is a means of achieving political goals which, according to those who resort to terrorism, cannot be achieved by conventional (legal) means;
- Terrorism is a strategy usually applied by organized groups for a certain period of time in accordance with an adopted programme;

- Terrorism is used to keep people in terror, which in itself helps in achieving the appointed goal.<sup>1</sup>

The history of humankind, including recent history, has shown that terrorism can be committed against specific individuals, groups, non-governmental organizations and entire states.

Terrorist groups usually spring up in the fertile soil of nationalism, separatism, or religious and social intolerance, and carry on their activities under the slogans of democracy, national liberation and religious and social equality. Such latent forms of struggle initially give terrorists privileges: their deeds are encouraged by sympathizers, and even by democratic forces and individual states, as was the case in the early '90s with Chechen separatists in Russia, and in the '80s with the Taliban movement in Afghanistan.

The phenomenon of terrorism is familiar to us from our own experience: starting from 1992 in Tajikistan we have all witnessed dozens of acts of terrorism – assassinations, kidnappings, explosions, etc.; and over the last ten years the wave of such acts of terrorism has not abated in our region. Also, for eight years our neighbour Russia has been struggling against terrorism using various means. Terrorists have been trained under various slogans for the last 20 years in our neighbourhood, in spite of the anxiety, petitions and warnings which the affected countries, particularly Russia and Tajikistan, have communicated to the international community about the need to adopt effective measures in the struggle against international terrorism. Despite all this, the civilized world did not bestir itself until 11 September 2001. The tragic events, which took place in the United States on that day, forced the international community to take a closer look at the problem of terrorism from a different angle, to understand the designs of international terrorists in a new way, i.e. as a threat not only to an individual country, but the entire civilized world. United fronts of struggle against international terrorism are being created, measures are being developed and agreed on to control the symptoms of terrorism and to prevent terrorism, and centres are being set up to coordinate the joint anti-terrorism actions of countries and blocs.

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<sup>1</sup> Journalists against Terrorism and Violence. Materials of International Conference. Yerevan, 25-26 October 2000, page 130.



Terrorism has been the top story in the papers and on TV and radio for four months now. In the context of 11 September, the coverage of terrorism by Tajikistan's mass media was no exception. The fact that the battleground is just a stone's throw away, in Afghanistan, makes the subject even more topical in the press and on TV and radio in Tajikistan.

As has been noted, terrorism is not a new subject for the Tajik media. Tajik journalists have long known how to cover acts of terrorism in this country, ever since May 1992, when Murodullo Sheralizoda, a journalist, editor-in-chief of the parliamentary newspaper *Sadoi mardum*, and people's deputy, became the first victim of terror. Later a group of Parliamentary deputies and a group from the President's staff were taken hostage, and numerous acts of terror were committed against civilians in the Vakhsh Valley, state officials, cultural figures, political leaders and journalists. Over half of the 75 Tajik journalists who died during the years of instability in Tajikistan were murdered by terrorists.

Nevertheless, information on acts of terrorism and media coverage of events connected with terror in Tajikistan, however alarming, were treated as just another fact of internal disturbance, sometimes as a manifestation of the tough policy of "enemies of the Tajik people" or "forces destabilizing the situation and the process of peaceful settlement of inter-Tajik conflicts". The most cynical act of terrorism was committed on 1 October 2000, in the building of a Korean Christian mission in which more than 200 parishioners were present at the time. As a result, five people died at the scene, three later died in hospital, and about 50 were wounded or burned to various degrees. The incident was covered by all the central newspapers, TV and radio. *Vechernii Dushanbe* covered the tragedy in detail, and the principal idea put forward by S. Siddikov, the author of the articles, was that we should not look for any religious, still less ethnic, element in this act of terrorism, since terrorists have no affiliation to any faith or ethnic group. And this is very true. Indeed, it is not the main thing people should be thinking about. The main issue here is to know where the threat of terrorism comes from and what terrorism is in general.

We can trace two approaches to the coverage of terrorism in Tajikistan's media since 11 September:

1. News distributed by Khovar, the official news agency, obtained from other sources (ITAR-TASS, Interfax, RIA-Novosti, Reuters, IRNA, Oriyono-Press).
2. Information reprinted from Russian media and the Internet.

By the way, when more than 4,000 foreign journalists arrived in Dushanbe to cover the anti-terrorist operations in Afghanistan and over half of them went on to the war zone in Afghanistan, to our utter shame representatives of just four Tajik publications joined them as journalists.

The publications that take the two approaches described above can be notionally divided into two categories:

1. State mass media: *Djumkhuriyat*, the official newspaper of the President and the Government, *Sadoi mardum*, the Parliament's publication, specialist newspapers, official regional and district newspapers, and State Television and Radio, which restrict themselves to publishing the official point of view. It is fair to say that the correspondents of *Sadoi mardum*, in spite of the established "tradition", do make efforts to cover issues themselves. A series of articles in this paper by the observer, Fariduni Oriyoni, entitled "Comments on Events" and "Political Comments" attracted wide interest, not only among the general readership, but also political scientists and experts at international organizations. Nurali Davlatov, a correspondent with the young people's newspaper *Djavononi Tajikistan*, took the risk of visiting Afghanistan and published some analytical materials and interviews with members of the anti-Taliban front in Afghanistan.
2. The second approach to covering terrorism issues is mainly found in independent private newspapers. Although their hands are not tied and they have modern equipment, this category of the media is reluctant to use the means available to provide its own broad coverage of topical problems of terrorism. Sometimes entire columns in weeklies such as *Asia Plus*, *Kur'er Tajikistana* ("The Tajikistan Courier") and *Vechernii Dushanbe* are indistinguishable from those in Russian newspapers. At the same time, the commentaries on political events written by staff journalists with *Asia Plus* and

*Vechernii Dushanbe* make you exclaim “Bravo, colleague!” Such articles include “Tajikistan without ORT...” by Marat Mamadshoyev (*Asia Plus*, 18 October 2001), “The Monopolar World has Become a Reality” by R. Gani (*Asia Plus*, 18 October 2001), “Putin’s Night Visit” by Umed Babakhonov (*Asia Plus*, 25 October 2001), “Afghanistan after the Taliban: New Wine in an Old Wineskin?” by Viktor Dubovitsky (*Asia Plus*, 22-28 November 2001), “A Germ of War” by P. Gairat, G. Amirshoyeva and others (*Vechernii Dushanbe*, 16 November 2001), “Rishtaronyi chodarsuzi dar Afghoniston” by Maznyabshonyi Makhabbashokh (*Tajikistan*, 15 November 2001), reports from Afghanistan “Piruzinyoi Lyabnyai muttanyid; sabab va nayomadnyo” by Sultoni Nyamad (*Tajikistan*, 15 November 2001), and others.

The editorial boards have talented correspondents and observers and can invite political scientists and specialists in international relations to write alongside them, yet they resort to reprinting materials, reliable though they may be, from foreign media. This approach is used by these newspapers to kill two birds with one stone, i.e. the readers get breaking news, and the editorial staff get an insurance policy in the event of any angry phone calls from the top – since it is just a quotation from other media.

Terrorism has been judged and rejected from the very beginning. Even if the perpetrators of terrorism wish to justify their acts, their philosophy contradicts the very logic of simple truths of humankind – “thou shalt not kill”. The civilized world has declared war on terrorism. What should the press do? Describe the terrorist’s “selfless” deeds with details of his demands, ultimatums and proclaimed aims? Briefly inform readers of the event? Or just keep silent?

Terrorists understand that the mass media are in a sense their servants. The media can be forced to work for them, even against the will of the correspondents themselves, for when bombs go off, people die from a terrorist’s bullet, or monuments of civilization are destroyed, the journalist, like any civilized person, cannot be silent. On the other hand, it is a journalist’s duty to think over events. A journalist’s approach to an

event, or to a piece of information, consists of trying to understand why this happens and why people get killed. And society itself has the right to turn to journalists for an explanation for such acts of violence.

There are no foolproof recipes for the coverage of terrorism in the media, nor am I in a position to offer a definitive procedure. Nevertheless, before summing up, I would like to recall several approaches or positions formulated by our colleagues from Northern Ireland, Georgia and Armenia during last year's conference in Yerevan, entitled "Journalists against Terror and Violence".

According to Malachi O'Doherty, a freelance journalist from Northern Ireland, "the media is a very effective platform for terrorists. And this is normal."

And here is what Margarita Akhvelidiani from Georgia thinks: "For journalists, the reporting of an act of terrorism or kidnapping is initially just a sensation, or information, which does not evoke sympathy, or anger, or other similar feelings. First of all you have to get material – any kind of material, the more the better. And it is only afterwards that the writer and editor move to the next stage: they decide which information will go to press or go out on air."

Tagik Arutunian, Doctor of Law and Chairman of the Constitutional Court of Armenia, who drew attention to the press's role in preventing violence and its manifestations, believed that "the press only begins to play a substantial role in the prevention of manifestations of violence when it reflects reality and evaluates phenomena according to real values, investing them with significance and making them comprehensible and accessible to people."

Without refuting these opinions and positions, and hoping to hear your suggestions and judgments on this problem, I would like to sum up my presentation as follows.

When covering terrorism issues, especially international terrorism, the media will only be plausible to readers, listeners and viewers when it provides a fair and unobtrusive account of what is happening, regardless of the authority or rank of the victim or the attacker, since its mission is to help people understand what is going on.

**III.**  
**OPPORTUNITIES**  
**FOR THE NEXT GENERATION IN THE MEDIA**

**Gulmira Kozhokeyeva**

CHALLENGES FOR JOURNALISTS IN KYRGYZSTAN

**Iskandar Firuz**

THE INDEPENDENT MEDIA IN TAJIKISTAN NEED SUPPORT

**Alexander Khamagaev**

THE MAIN CHALLENGE  
FACING THE YOUNG GENERATION OF JOURNALISTS

**Sergei Duvanov**

A NEW WAVE IN KAZAKHSTANI JOURNALISM



## **Gulmira Kozhokeyeva**

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*Vash Eksklyuziv* newspaper  
 Kyrgyzstan

### CHALLENGES FOR JOURNALISTS IN KYRGYZSTAN

During the years of democratic reform in Kyrgyzstan, the media has gone through a difficult process of formation and development in the conditions of national independence. Free and independent mass media, able to cover the life of the nation objectively and without bias, have become vital in the present political and economic environment. The 1992 Law “On Mass Media” provides the regulatory basis for freedom of speech and the freedom of the press, and enshrines the right to establish mass media entities on a par with establishing state agencies, public and commercial organizations and private entities. However, the concepts of freedom of speech and freedom of the press are still only relative.

In spite of the enormous number of new newspapers, TV channels and radio stations with various owners and editorial policies, the Kyrgyz media does not fully achieve its main objective – to provide objective information to society – due to the continuing pressure it is under from the authorities which seek to control it. Although the government has recently allowed the occasional criticism, just for show, they are trying to use the terrorist attacks to their advantage to justify continued repression of the opposition media in Kyrgyzstan.

The regulatory framework fulfils the provisions of the Constitution on freedom of speech and freedom of the press. However, theory is very different from practice, where the powers-that-be declare lofty principles and then ignore them in real life, infringing the rights of journalists and the media every day in order to gain control over economic, environmental and military decision-making, particularly during the war on terror.

The current regulatory framework requires further review and improvement as the most pressing problems are dealt with. This process must take account of the vulnerability of the independent media in the face of state agencies and its total dependence on the state's monopoly on printing and publishing. At the same time, in what is a highly competitive market, the state provides various kinds of support to pro-government mass media.

Though the Law "On Guarantees and Freedom of Access to Information" was adopted in 1997, there are often obstacles to obtaining information, particularly when it concerns political intrigues or economic offences. For example, an article entitled "A Joker in the Budget" (*Vash eksklyuziv* ["Your Exclusive"], No. 18) discussed a budget overrun of several billion som that had been misdirected for various purposes by the Government, the Zhogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic, ministries and departments. It took a lot of resources and effort on the part of the editorial staff to obtain the necessary materials, due to some corrupt individuals working for the authorities. And there are no perceptible changes for the better, despite the fact that even the President has openly stated that corruption has reached the White House (the government building), saying that he will not put up with it.

To illustrate these problems more clearly, I will give an example from the experience of *Vash eksklyuziv*, a newspaper covering social and legal issues, which was founded in November 2000 with technical assistance from the OSCE. Subsequently, the newspaper has been financed by its founders. Over the period of its activities, according to its stated objectives, the newspaper has provided effective help in solving problems raised by Kyrgyz citizens who write to the paper. In regular features entitled "Legal Advice" and "You Ask – We Answer", the newspaper answers questions asked by readers. In spite of the harsh conditions, the newspaper keeps to its motto "The truth and nothing but the truth". From its inception, *Vash eksklyuziv* has encountered many difficulties, such as:

- high prices for printing services (Uchkun Printing House charges US\$350-400 for 3,000 copies of 16 monochromatic type pages, and the quality leaves much to be desired);



- difficulties in selling newspapers (the Potchtasy Department [Post Office] is in charge of this in Kyrgyzstan and enters into contracts with publications at its sole discretion. To penalise late payment for newspapers by some regions, the department just blocks them, creating an artificial information shortage).

In the capital, newspapers are retailed by Basmasoz (formerly SoyuzPechat), which, despite having agreed on a particular retail price in the contract, sells the papers at a higher price for unknown reasons. According to the contract with *Vash eksklyuziv*, for example, the retail price was set at 3.20 som, but, as a raid by the editors revealed, the newspaper cost 6.0 som or more at all the newsstands in the city. This reduces demand to zero. Despite repeated formal requests from the editors, the situation will not improve – and the newspaper is not even laid out on the counter. It seems the newspaper is being sabotaged.

The situation in the Osh and Jalal-Abad Regions is even more deplorable. There, *Vash eksklyuziv* is sold under the counter as if it were a prohibited product. At this rate and with this attitude to sales, the newspaper has no future. This example is a good illustration of the problems faced by all the media in selling their products.

- There is no access to information. For instance, despite repeated requests, the Ministry of Culture and Education has refused to provide us with data on the budgets of universities and other educational establishments, let alone more important information. In response to our request for information about minelaying by the Uzbeks on land in the Batken region, near the border, the agencies concerned evaded the question, trying to persuade us that there was no cause for concern, despite evidence of continued explosions provided by locals and eye-witnesses. The fact that there have been several accidents at Barskaun was classified as so top-secret that none of the mass media has ever covered these events, except for *Vash eksklyuziv*, which reported them several months afterwards.

It is understandable that the authorities will do their best to keep their activities, particularly political activities, out of the newspa-

pers, radio and TV, especially as these activities are sometimes criminal. The impossibility of obtaining objective and reliable information leads to distortions and wild guesses, which aggravates the already complicated relationship between the authorities and the people.

- And finally, there is no solidarity or mutual support whatsoever among journalists. From time to time, a newspaper finds itself embroiled in various court cases, accompanied by baiting from the authorities, and some journalists, disgracefully, join in these campaigns. Not every newspaper, TV channel or radio station has the courage to cover the conflict objectively and make a stand for the accused editor or journalist. In view of the tense international situation and internal contradictions among Central Asian countries, it would seem that journalists should have displayed greater solidarity and mutual support in providing unbiased reporting on such conflicts. The conclusion drawn from the example of the young newspaper *Vash eksklyuziv*, which did not receive even moral support while it was being set up, suggests that the concepts of mutual support and help, let alone basic ethics, do not exist in the world of journalism.

A Public Foundation for the Protection of Glasnost has been established, but it does not always fulfil its duties. Thus, I believe it is now necessary to set up another foundation to support and fund young independent media. This foundation should be established by bringing independent media together within an International Association of Central Asian Journalists, so that journalists' problems in this region can be solved together. This would broaden the scope of cooperation between journalists in the region and would undoubtedly improve the situation in terms of resolving international and interethnic conflicts.

There can be no freedom of speech or freedom of the press unless all the problems I have described are sorted out.

**Iskandar Firuz**

*Varorud* news agency

Tajikistan

THE INDEPENDENT MEDIA IN TAJIKISTAN NEED SUPPORT

From the information and materials concerning the state of the media in Central Asian countries it can be concluded that, in many aspects of their development, the media in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are ahead of other countries in the region. At the same time, the development of independent media in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan has features and processes in common with Tajikistan. And if we look at the current realities in our country and the conditions in which independent media in Tajikistan operate, they are not very different from those in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Of course, our country does have opposition parties, representatives of which fought against the current official authorities during the civil war in Tajikistan with weapons in their hands. However, once they obtained quotas for participation in the administration of the state, as a result of the peace settlement, they ceased to be the opposition. As a result, today most of the opposition unconditionally supports all decisions made by Tajikistan's leadership.

It is commonly assumed that the democratic changes in the Republic of Tajikistan were, above all, manifested in the intensive development of the mass media. Without doubt, in the late '80s and early '90s the Tajik media far outstripped its neighbours in Central Asia with respect to development of freedom of speech. However, when the civil war in Tajikistan broke out, the process subsided. In later years, many observers analysing the causes of the internal conflict in Tajik society pointed to the media's contribution in escalating the war. Of course, this point of view can be contested, but after military clashes between the opposition and advocates of the current government began in 1992, the authorities became less loyal to the existing and new independent media. Most of the opposition publications which had been popular before the civil war were closed down; some, such

as the newspaper *Charogi ruz*, are published outside Tajikistan. Talking of *Charogi ruz* and its editor-in-chief Dododjon Atovulloyev, it is worth noting that most independent journalists believe that if Atovulloyev had been extradited to the Tajik authorities after his arrest at Moscow airport, independent journalists could have been subjected to mass repression.

When the current leadership of Tajikistan came to power, a certain number of Tajik journalists emigrated and most of the rest stopped working as journalists. A younger generation of journalists replaced them and the new independent media of independent Tajikistan slowly began to appear. Recently, observers have noted that the independent media are gradually losing sight of their direct mission and most refrain from covering what is actually happening in the country. Their principle now is “Just work, and don’t get involved!”

Under Article 8 of the Constitution, public life in Tajikistan is based on political and ideological pluralism. Also, it is assumed that a self-governed society should, by definition, take its own independent decisions. It cannot do this in the absence of reliable and verified information, supported by an open exchange of opinions and views. I fully agree with the well-known formula “Let people know the facts and the whole country will be secure”. In any country the freedom and independence of the media depend on legislation and guidelines, professional managers, the skills needed to survive and develop in market conditions, the level of professionalism, and a framework of internal control and ethics in conditions of freedom.

What is the current situation in and around the media in Tajikistan? Today the powers, means, interests and influence of state and non-state media are diametrically opposed. The term “diametric” refers to the superior opportunities, influence and impact of the state media as one of the drivers of state administration. That is, the state media are engaged in promoting and propagating state policy, while the non-state media are exclusively concerned with generating income and achieving stability and viability. Thus, public interest and opinion, social problems and issues relating to the formation of a civil society remain outside the focus of any type of media.

Representing the media in the Sogdian region, in the north of Tajikistan, I would like to give examples of the activities of the independent media of this region. The Sogdian region, with a population of almost two million, is the most economically developed part of Tajikistan. The growth of non-state media in the mid-1990s resulted primarily from the development of independent electronic media in the form of private TV channels. Of course, they cannot be compared in scope and range to similar TV channels in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, but nine of the 14 non-state TV channels in Tajikistan are in the Sogdian region. The only private radio station in the country is also located in the north of Tajikistan. This is all the more surprising given that the authorities interfere with the establishment of private radio broadcasting companies throughout the country, for reasons as yet unclear. One instance: the radio stations Asia Plus and Nik in Dushanbe have been unable to obtain broadcasting licences for over three years; no explanation has been given. Much has already been said on this subject, but I would like to note that the right to issue and revoke licences for television and radio broadcasting is vested in the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting. Most journalists believe that this non-democratic mechanism of regulating relationships between non-state electronic media and the authorities is evidence of the difficulties faced by independent media in Tajikistan. According to its founders, Tiroz, the only private radio station in the Sogdian region, only obtained its licence because it managed to convince the authorities that northern Tajikistan could be flooded with ideological information by neighbouring countries.

Over the past year in Khujand, the only private newspaper, *Sugd*, and the Varorud Information and Analysis Agency were established with financial support from the OSCE, and very quickly enjoyed success due to the daring articles they published. This incurred the displeasure of the local authorities, and they were soon refused any access to government sources of information.

The problem of access to information throughout Tajikistan, and in the Sogdian region in particular, is the most painful one for independent journalists. When a round table was held to discuss this issue with the

assistance of international organizations, representatives of the authorities preferred to stay away, although they had been sent invitations two weeks previously and had confirmed they would be attending. The law in Tajikistan requires all state agencies to provide the required information to employees of any type of media as stipulated by law. In practice, however, no official is authorized to give out any information without his superior's approval.

Once, having received an official refusal to confirm information, I told the official that I would be compelled to write that he had refused to provide information. To which he delightedly replied, "Please do, then my boss will know that I followed his instructions." In this connection it is worth mentioning that, during the last five years in Tajikistan, not a single court case has been initiated by a journalist. From my experience, I know that many independent media and journalists are ready to bring a lawsuit against state agencies, but they are unlikely to win in a country where there is no independent judiciary. In private talks they openly admit that they do not wish to aggravate their relationships with the local authorities.

As is well known, the acquisition of independence is a long and difficult process in the development of mass media. This process involves addressing such urgent issues as the existence of latent state and internal censorship, lack of professionalism of media workers, insufficient logistical support, poor level of legal education, and so on.

Here I would like to note to what extent the non-state media in the Sogdian region are independent. Based on the experience of the non-state electronic media in the Sogdian region, it would be stretching it to use the word "independent" in relation to them. Practically all the TV channels are directly dependent on the local authorities, and any disobedience could have adverse consequences, including the revocation of their broadcasting licences. Here it is probably worth mentioning that the employees of TV channels often give in to the local authorities. For example, Tajik law prohibits any interference by the authorities in the media's creative activities. However, in order to please the authorities, independent TV channels interrupt the broadcasting of their programmes

while official speeches by the regional administration are shown on regional state television. Then they actually rebroadcast these programmes, although they are able and entitled not to. Sometimes even the regional representatives wonder why they stopped broadcasting. The principle is "to be on the safe side".

The professional skills of employees of both electronic and printed media are in the process of formation. The establishment of independent media in the region is a new venture being carried out by amateurs, in a way. The absence of a school of journalism in its classical sense is an old problem for the Sogdian region. If you bear in mind that five people from the Sogdian region have graduated from the Journalism Department of the Tajik State National University (TGNU) since 1992, the reason for journalists' low level of professionalism in the Sogdian region becomes clear. The establishment of a Journalism Department at Khujan State University will not solve the problem due to the lack of qualified staff and logistical support. Most of the international organizations working in this area, such as Internews, Counterpart Consortium and the Soros Foundation, and national organizations, are located in the capital, Dushanbe, and in most cases their activities extend to the central and southern regions; journalists from the Sogdian region are not regularly invited to take part in programmes. Also, urgent access to information or other consulting support is restricted or unavailable in cases where a journalist or other media employee from remote parts of the district needs this sort of help.

Setting up non-state media is expensive, and in the Sogdian region the independent TV channels are sponsored by large businesses or industrial enterprises. The independent publishers, namely the newspaper *Sugd* and the Varorud Information and Analysis Agency, were established with the financial support of the OSCE.

The formation and development of independent media in the Sogdian region has also generated show business and advertising, and certain achievements can be attributed to the independent media.

Representatives of the authorities often claim that we have more freedom of speech than in Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan. Quite frankly, I don't

see any difference. However, journalists hope that, if the new democracies intend to preserve and develop these newly acquired freedoms, institutions that embody and support freedom of information will be established in the public and private sectors. Without the active involvement of such institutions, independent media are unlikely to develop in Tajikistan. Again taking the Sogdian region as an example, over 90 per cent of journalists in the region have no computer skills, let alone know how to use other means of communication. Obtaining alternative and reliable information is a big problem for journalists and other people in the region, especially since the average journalist in Tajikistan earns US\$8-10 a month.

During the civil war and its aftermath, Tajik journalism missed out on developments in international journalism, and the current professional level of most Tajik journalists does not differ significantly from that of Soviet journalism of the 1970s and '80s.

This situation can only be improved by encouraging international organizations that support the development of independent media and the creation of a partner media network, comprising local media-related organizations and media from neighbouring countries. In the case of the Sogdian region, this could be done with the countries that constitute the Fergana valley. For this purpose, a media training and information resource centre has been set up in the Sogdian region with the financial support of the OSCE. This project will address the media's priority problems using cost-effective and effective measures. We intend to facilitate the creation of an environment for the continuous professional and legal development of media employees in the region and the exchange of information between them. To achieve these goals, we are arranging logistical support and personnel for the centre. With this support, the centre will serve most of the journalists and media in the Sogdian region, including electronic media. All these services will be provided to journalists free of charge, which is very important given the economic situation in Tajikistan. Again, it should be noted that without such assistance, the formation and development of independent media, both in the Sogdian region and throughout Tajikistan, might be at risk.



**Alexander Khamagaev**

*Media Insight Central Asia*

Uzbekistan

## THE MAIN CHALLENGE FACING THE YOUNG GENERATION OF JOURNALISTS

The main problems and challenges faced by the young generation of journalists in Uzbekistan are generated by the current media environment in the country. Two opinions on the role of the media in society coexist in Uzbekistan's journalist community, which could notionally be described as "passive" and "active".

Adherents of the "passive" approach work on the principle of the authorities' infallibility. In this school of journalism, values such as balance, completeness, topicality, accessibility and openness are frequently sacrificed to pseudo-loyalty to the authorities. Today this approach prevails almost in all the mass media in Uzbekistan, whether state-owned or private. Any information passes not only through the filter of the censor, illegal though this is, but also an inspection by the editor-in-chief, who considers any material primarily from the point of view of how the official authorities might react.

The result of this situation is that the mass media in Uzbekistan are unable to meet society's need for information or to facilitate the establishment of horizontal links within society. Moreover, it eats away at journalists' consciences and has a dangerous effect on the younger generation working in the print and electronic media.

There is a solution – taking the "active" approach to the role of journalists in the life of society. Unfortunately, however, this approach is currently advocated by only a few and exists in theory rather than in practice. It is talked about by progressive lecturers at the journalism faculties of the country's universities, and is discussed at workshops organised by foreign foundations and organisations for the journalists of Uzbekistan.

So, what is it all about? Above all, the active approach is a clear understanding of journalism as social leadership. The media must not only identify, formulate and inform society about the most important problems, but propose possible solutions. Journalists should aim to cover events in such a way as to inspire debate in society. A journalist who holds this “active” view takes a critical stance on the authorities and analyses the government’s activity, letting the authorities know that anything they do could become the subject of discussion in the press, on radio or on television.

My discussions with journalism students and those who have just started working in the media in Uzbekistan demonstrated that although the young generation of journalists completely agree with the “active” approach, they have no illusions about putting it into practice: “Yes, we know a lot about the main principles of journalism in a Western democracy”, says one student at the Journalism Faculty of the State University of World Languages. “But I also understand that if I want to work in the local press, I’ll have to write the way the censor dictates.”

In my view, to write what the censor wants, making a deal with your own conscience, is one of the main challenges facing the young generation of journalists. It engenders self-censorship in the journalist’s maturing personality, resulting in the erosion of his or her conscience and creating a sense of helplessness and dependence on circumstances.

However, I believe that the main challenge the young generation of journalists faces today is the old chestnut that Western, primarily American, media represent the pattern of freedom of speech and pluralism that must be followed.

Over the last ten years, despite its objectively scanty influence in Central Asia, the United States has acted as a key advocate of human rights and freedom of speech in the region, including Uzbekistan. Russia, which undoubtedly enjoys greater influence on the policies of the Central Asian ruling elite, has preferred not to touch that sensitive issue, thus strengthening the values of American democracy in the consciousness of the masses. And gradually the peoples of Central Asia began to regard these values as a panacea for persuading the

regional regimes to respect the human rights and freedoms they had proclaimed.

The young generation of journalists in Uzbekistan, proponents of the “active” view on the role of the media in society, hoped that the authorities would nevertheless give the media the opportunity to take responsibility for highlighting the most important issues, including aspects of interstate relations between the countries of the region, the utilization of water and natural resources, borders and security. After all, the concealment or distortion of reality has a pernicious effect on the development of society. However, an informed public debate on these issues could help bring about an effective solution, ensuring long-term stability in Central Asia. This approach, according to a number of experts, corresponds with US interests in the region. David Lewis, Central Asia Project Director from International Crisis Group, believes that in order to achieve long-term stability, the masses must be involved in managing potentially conflict-ridden issues, and the economy must be opened up with the aim of improving the population’s standard of living. “The issue of breaches of human rights must be resolved, since it gives additional fuel to radical religious groups” (from David Lewis’s presentation, “US Policy in Central Asia”, at the Conference on “The Countries of Central Asia after September 11th”, Tashkent, 21-22 November 2001).

It is obvious that these objectives can only be achieved if the media’s status as a social leader is secured. This is exactly what adherents of the “active” approach to journalism in Uzbekistan are advocating.

Meanwhile, the events of 11 September in New York and Washington have postponed this goal indefinitely. Having declared war on international terrorism, the United States challenged all the countries of the world: you are either for us or against us. The overwhelming wave of emotional patriotism that swept the country was comprehensively reflected in the US media.

André Lersh, who works for the Swiss organization CIMERA, investigated the sentiments prevailing in the US media after the terrorist attack on 11 September and observed “strictly limited, not to say suppressed, pluralism of opinions in the US media during the weeks follow-



ing the attacks” (Media Insight Central Asia, No. 20, October 2001, page 36). Moreover, his analysis showed that the American media almost with one voice called for immediate military reprisals without any discussion on the need for, let alone the legality of, military action in response. “Those who live in Damascus, Baghdad and Tehran had better start digging their burrows right now”, said the *New York Post* (Media Insight Central Asia, No. 20, p. 43). And this is just one example demonstrating that when it is US interests that are touched on the raw, the universal rules of democracy – pluralism of opinions, balance, debate and an unbiased approach – cease to apply. We do not know how long this state of “American interests being stung” will last. We do not know how long cooperation with Uzbekistan will be the focus of the US’s regional policy in Central Asia. In this regard David Lewis points out that with the current composition of forces, the US “will inevitably compromise with states where universal standards of human rights and democratic procedures are not upheld”.

All the above leads to the conclusion that for the duration of the worldwide war on terror, the young generation of journalists in Uzbekistan will have to put up with the fact that the geopolitical pragmatism of American diplomacy will prevail over democratic idealism. Accordingly, young people’s hopes that journalism will provide social leadership and play an increased role in resolving socially important issues through public debate, are being postponed indefinitely.

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A NEW WAVE IN KAZAKHSTANI JOURNALISM

The developments taking place in journalism are in many respects determined by the social and political processes at work in Kazakhstan. Let us recall the heady days of freedom of speech during perestroika, when journalists muzzled by Soviet censorship first savoured the taste of freedom, independence and risk.

Later came a period of struggling for your niche among readers and viewers. At that time there were no oligarchs ready to support the mass media, so you had to earn your living as best you could. Professionalism, balanced coverage and analytical ability gave way to sensationalism, shock tactics and the pursuit of cheap populism.

As the authorities and oligarchs became more and more interested in the media, other sources of financing began to appear. The media began to pass into the hands of the powerful of this world, and the concept of articles written to order appeared at the same time. Journalism became more analytical, but at the same time more tied. Later on, having forced the small fry out of big business, the financial and clan groupings started fighting amongst themselves and establishing media holdings which were supposed to provide propaganda for their masters. Strictly speaking, this process is still going on.

But this is not the subject of the present discussion. It is just an objective aspect of the process I would like to talk about. The matter to be discussed is how all the social and political collisions have affected us as journalists.

What was typical of the old Soviet school of writing on current affairs? Total loyalty and even respect towards the authorities, and the ability to say the maximum possible within an extremely restricted political framework.

What was characteristic of the journalists who passed through the school of post-perestroika liberalism in 1990-97? A critical attitude towards the authorities. Many of the journalists of that time worked under conditions in which the state and society were in permanent opposition. It might even be said that protecting society from the state had been internalised. Shining examples of such journalism include Katsyeva, Verk, Britanova, Tunik, Tarakanova, Benditsky, Klimov, Ustyugov, Mekebaev, Batsyev, and others.

What is typical of journalists in this age of media holdings? Leaving aside the issue of professional skills, the main characteristic is that journalists are servants of their masters. Within most of today's media, a system has been established which renders the creative process totally dependent on the employer's instructions. It is understandable that, if mass media are used by their owners as a tool in an economic or political struggle, then journalists are naturally regarded as disciplined soldiers who are called upon to implement certain policies and carry out individual orders. This principle now governs state as well as private media. In general, the work of today's journalist does not differ much from that of any worker placed at a machine tool and forced to produce something strictly according to the drawings. He is not supposed to care what kind of product he produces or whether it gives him personal satisfaction. A journalist's opinion, civil position or moral values are of no interest to anybody. He or she is paid to work in strict accordance with the employer's requirements. This is the principle, and if you don't like it, goodbye.

As a result, some mass media have turned into watchdogs not of democracy, but of their masters. Today, the job of tearing apart a politician, businessman or just someone disagreeable is the pinnacle of bravery for those journalists who are fed by the media holdings. Clearly, political commentary cannot be kind and nice; it can and should express normal civil anger. But anger and spite are quite different things. And if we add slander, lies, twisting the facts, vile conjecture and outright insult, it's information genocide we have here.

Let us recall how Kazhegeldin was hounded, Kuttykadam was spied on, Kossanov was discredited and Massanov was persecuted. Let us

recall how the Kazakhstani opposition was scoffed at and its leaders were persecuted. And there are the latest facts involving Zhakiyanov, and then the other leaders of Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan. All this has been done by legal media which can be sued. They can be, but there is no point, because it is utterly useless to go to our courts.

There are also anonymous Internet sites that give a free hand to unpunished slander. The Asiopa site has undoubtedly become the summit of the achievements of the “new wave” in Kazakhstani journalism. Even if everything published on the site were true, it would still be disgusting. It is disgusting to write about people, even if they are not the best, while skulking in the shadows... The truth from undercover is a dirty truth. But if it’s lies, then it is just plain vile. Even if it sometimes criticizes the corrupt, Asiopa is an example of yellow journalism.

It is interesting to note that very few of the perestroika-age journalists have joined the “new wave”. Whether because of their moral values or other personal principles, the fact remains that few of them have dirtied their hands in the mud-slinging. Of course, like many others, they have to work for the media, so they take part in these wars one way or another, but most of them avoid crossing the moral line, plunging into bare-faced lies and slavishly obeying their masters’ orders.

Journalists who are ready to write anything for money have always existed, but they were not so widespread before. People like the Shukhov brothers could be found under both communism and perestroika. Nevertheless, their principle of “the end justifying the means, if it is well paid for” was not much in demand then. Their time came towards the end of the ‘90s. Demand generated supply, produced new names and caused not-so-new ones to reappear. They have not yet proved their worth as professionals, but they have shown another thing – the bravery of young wolves scenting the big money paid for the skill of heaping dirt on those who are disagreeable to the authorities and their masters. Dorenko and Leontiev are the most typical examples of the “new wave” in Russia. In this country, Nurshin and Platonov can be named as representatives of this wave. Unfortunately, this is also journalism, or, to be more precise, “cloak-and-dagger” journalism. I regard it as a sort of “information terrorism.”



Representatives of the “new wave” have invented a convenient formula to justify their dirty work. They claim, “Our job is to say what we are paid to say. So don’t take it personally. Today we are on opposite sides of the barricades, but maybe tomorrow we’ll be working for the same master.”

A very convenient position: we are not for any idea, we just make money. This is our business.

Undoubtedly, a journalist’s existence depends on his or her work and creativity. And, indeed, for many journalists specializing in political commentary, this is business in a sense. But not for everybody. There are also those who write, not to carry out an order or to follow the spirit of the times, but to express what they think: Nurbulat Massanov, Yevgeny Zhovtis, Andrey Sviridov, Petr Svoik, Seidakhmet Kuttykadam, Bakhytzhmal Bekturganova, Tatyana Deltsova, Janibek Suleyev, Aldan Aimbetov and several other famous commentators. They all have their own positions, which they defend not because they are paid to do so. On the contrary, many of them have no money just because of their principles.

Some tend to think that democracy is to blame for this, as if journalists have unleashed themselves, say what they want and insult whoever they want. As we all know, the President recently hinted to the media barons that if they do not chain up their Cerebruses, he will muzzle them himself. Now the discussion has moved on to a code of ethics which journalists will supposedly have to observe. It is not clear, however, why journalists and not their masters must observe this code.

It is stupid to talk about a code of ethics for journalists in a non-rule-of-law state. How can a journalist observe this code when he is entirely dependent on his or her employer, unprotected in the face of the law-enforcement bodies, and unable to defend himself in court? This is nonsense. The problem of protecting society from journalists is an invented one. This problem does not exist; the problem is that journalists are discriminated against by, and dependent on, their employers. Consequently, society does have a serious problem, resulting from monopolization – the concentration of the mass media in a few hands.



Unless this problem is solved, binding journalists to a code of ethics would be just another tool to limit freedom of speech.

Unfortunately, our journalism does not represent an independent force in social life. We cannot yet say that our journalism is sharp-toothed and ready to attack. We cannot boast of strong traditions of independent coverage. Can we name many journalists who are able to express their opinions on what is happening in this country? Alas, the need for a code of ethics will only arise when journalism is able to afford the luxury of limiting itself by certain ethical rules. But today it is too early to speak of it in Kazakhstan.

On the contrary, we should do our best to make journalism more emancipated, bold and independent in its opinions. That's why the task of establishing legal guarantees for journalists' professional activities is ever more urgent today. A journalist must have opportunities to exercise his or her constitutional right to freedom of speech within the framework of his or her professional activity.

Today the majority of journalists are deprived of this opportunity. They either have to produce articles to order, or carry out editorial directives, or write within the clearly fixed framework of their masters' ideology. In this sense, it would be stupid to talk about a code of ethics for journalists.

I find it strange that there is talk of a code of ethics for journalists in a country where there are no such codes for judges, the police, or officials of various ranks. It would be more logical to start with those who are bogged down in corruption, who ignore human rights and break the law, not those who write about it. This suggests that the real aim here is to hinder the press from covering any negative aspects of the sovereignty created by Nazarbayev.

And what can journalists do in a situation when what appears in newspapers and on television screens mostly does not depend on them? We should be talking about a code of ethics for the media barons, who wholly determine the face of the media and the tone of the articles published.

The efforts being made to force a code of ethics on journalists reflect at best a desire to imitate and follow the practice of democratic countries,

and at worst an attempt to put more pressure on journalists. To coin a phrase, someone is eager to hang another whip on the wall to terrorize Kazakhstani journalists, who are already terrorized enough.

**IV.**  
**PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS  
IN CONFLICT ZONES**

**Alexander Gabchenko**

THE ORGANIZATION OF JOURNALISTS' ACTIVITIES  
IN CONFLICT ZONES

**Turko Dikaev**

THE MASS MEDIA IN TAJIKISTAN:  
YOU CAN'T GO FORWARD IF YOU KEEP LOOKING BACK

**Marfua Tokhtakhodjaeva**

JOURNALISTS IN WARTIME

IV



**Alexander Gabchenko***Novosti Nedeli*

Kazakhstan

THE ORGANIZATION OF JOURNALISTS' ACTIVITIES  
IN CONFLICT ZONES

For any human being, a military conflict is a tragedy; for us, as a rule, it is just an event, something that has to be communicated, that the public should know about. To put it simply, it is your job and mine. To do the job well and survive ourselves is perhaps our main objective. Whether you can become a professional in this field and get used to the constant danger and chaos inherent in military conflict zones is a question I cannot answer. Maybe my Tajikistani colleagues can, I don't know. I had hoped to hear from them before I had to speak myself, but unfortunately I haven't had that opportunity.

Undoubtedly, a journalist's skill primarily depends on his or her basic training: elementary writing skills, the ability to distinguish between events and their causes and effects. But this is all theory. In practice, it always turns out differently. A military conflict causes the betrayal syndrome: everyone who distributes information not provided by the people controlling the territory in question becomes, in their eyes, a traitor of the "common cause". Consequently, anyone who publishes information which differs from the official line is suspected of working for the "other side". This attitude to the reporter makes his work more difficult and, moreover, puts his life in danger.

It is also tough on the journalist psychologically; he or she makes more mistakes or, on the contrary, turns on his or her internal censorship to try to avoid conflict. And this calls into question the need for correspondents in hot spots. Only personal experience can help a reporter avoid such extremes and find the "golden mean", as there are no training centres or proper equipment in Central Asia yet. Of course, Mr. Duve may contradict me: "We have the OSCE Berlin Declaration [of the

Representative on Freedom of the Media] and previous documents on journalists' security. Journalists are trained, insured and equipped with personal protection means." Perhaps. But if the audience will forgive my rustic ignorance: "I dunno anything about that."

I'd rather list, if I may, what Kazakhstani journalists do not have.

First: In Kazakhstan there are no documents regulating relations between the army and the media in either wartime or peacetime. It has not even been discussed. Neither reporters nor the military understand that some day we will be in desperate need of such a document. A couple of weeks ago we were talking about a code of professional ethics. But in my opinion, all these discussions are initiated from the top, towards other ends than the development of Kazakhstani journalism.

Second: No proper training for journalists. Speaking objectively, universities in Kazakhstan do not provide enough knowledge on how to behave in extreme situations where there are no traditional mechanisms regulating society. While the "iron" discipline inherent in every army does constitute an effort to cope with the chaos that reigns in a military action zone, it is unrealistic and useless to demand such discipline from a journalist. We are always restricted by entirely different limits: the time of going on air, filing deadlines and so on, and these considerations always prevail over military ones.

Third: Insurance! Or rather the lack of it. I know three Kazakhstani reporters who visited the southern provinces of Kyrgyzstan in 2000, and none of them had any insurance policies or guarantees.

There is a person in Kazakhstan (I'm not going to give his name as I am telling this story without his consent) who works for the largest and, we can certainly say, the richest TV channel in this country. Some years ago he lost his leg on the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border. He was sitting on an armoured car when it suddenly rolled over. When the border guards took the reporter to hospital, it was too late. The surgeons amputated his leg above the knee. And the only thing the biggest TV channel in the country did to help him was to refrain from firing him and pay him disability benefit according to his sick-leave certificate. His colleagues, of course, collected money and bought him medicines, but that was their

own initiative. The prosthesis that helped him get back to a normal life, and incidentally to work at the same TV station, was secured for him only with the help of a person who was very loosely connected to television; not a relative or a friend.

This autumn my colleagues from TAN TV and the newspaper *Vremya* (“Time”) went to Afghanistan without insurance or any guarantees whatsoever. They did not even inform the Ministry of Internal Affairs that they were going. Fortunately they didn’t have enough money to charter a helicopter and so didn’t even get as far as Hodjabahuddin. Again, this happened because they just did not think about the details of the forthcoming trip. They had to buy knapsacks, sleeping-bags, Afghan visas etc. in Dushanbe at twice the price it would have cost in Almaty.

Insurance for journalists in Kazakhstan is unheard of. It is a rare editor who would think of it when sending a journalist on an assignment. However, for many publications it’s a question of finances, because many of them just can’t afford it.

Fourth: Means of individual protection, including special warning stripes, are incomprehensible words for Kazakhstani journalists. Only once have I come across such a set in my entire career as a journalist – in 1997, if I am not mistaken. At that time, KTK TV did not belong to the authorities and was renowned for its production. The idea was for a film crew to travel along the whole perimeter of the Kazakhstani border in a UAZ jeep. We were escorted all the way along by a guard armed with a weapons licence and an immense rifle.

All our other assignments were at our own risk.

That’s it, in a nutshell. Kazakhstani reporters organise their own trips. Whether this bears good fruit or not you can judge for yourselves from the above. Of course, it’s not always like that, but these are typical examples.





**Turko Dikaev***Asia-Plus* news agency

Tajikistan

THE MASS MEDIA IN TAJIKISTAN:  
YOU CAN'T GO FORWARD IF YOU KEEP LOOKING BACK

Tajikistan urgently needs a new Law on the Press and Other Mass Media, otherwise the great potential of Tajik journalists could turn into professional impotence.

The world has split into two periods of time: before 11 September 2001 and after. People mostly try not to remember what was before, and everything that has happened since has become a milestone for people, countries and states. Even the main “post-11 September” slogan has become unequivocal: “Anyone who is not with us is for the terrorists”. Nevertheless, not everything is so straightforward. To confirm this, I will quote three political scientists from Central Asian countries. I will start with Shukhrat Norgitov, an Uzbek political scientist, who believes that it was only after the sad events of 11 September in the United States that the international community came to realize that it was necessary to reconsider the old stereotypes, where the attention paid to a particular region was determined by its geography and whose sphere of influence it was under, rather than the strategic considerations required to ensure regional and international security. Mr Norgitov agrees with the American view of Afghanistan as one of the main sources of transnational threats, above all international terrorism, hiding behind Islamic slogans and financed by the drugs business.

Konstantin Syroyezhkin, a Kazakhstani political scientist, is more categorical and original. He has thrown light on the issue through the prism of Anglo-American methods used in similar situations based on the principle “Who gains?” And he came to the conclusion that it was no accident that Afghanistan was chosen as the first target for the application of force. Firstly, in the eyes of the international community, the country did

indeed look like a “breeding-ground for international terrorism” and a base for drug trafficking. Therefore, any violation of international law could not cause a serious adverse reaction. Secondly, it would be possible to achieve an equally important strategic objective on the quiet – to establish a pro-American government in the country and entrench themselves in the region of Central Asia. This could guarantee alternative routes for the transportation of Caspian oil without going through Russia. And finally, this would prevent or minimize the possibility of a coalition of countries being established that might dare to challenge US influence in the region. In short, 11 September, sacrilegious as it may sound, came in handy to an America that was literally trumped by domestic and foreign problems. It is now far from clear what the post-war structure of the world in general and Afghanistan in particular will be. What is certain, however, is that the main geopolitical players in Central Asia, Russia and China are understandably unhappy about the US’s military presence in the region, the lingering war against terrorists in Afghanistan and the establishment of a Pushtun puppet government there, let alone the expansion of the conflict to Central Asia. And they will do their best to prevent this. Therefore, any illusions about the change in the strategic partnership could have very dangerous consequences.

Both these statements, to my mind, represent an effort to comprehend the essence of the conflict through the parties’ geopolitical interests, without addressing whether the event in general was justified. That is why I personally tend to share the opinion of Rashid Abdullo, a Tajik political scientist widely known outside Tajikistan: “If we are looking at a country that has been torn apart by continuous war for a quarter of a century, it is worth defining the stages of that war clearly, since each one is different. If we are talking about the present war, then we have to define, at least approximately, what kind of war this really is. It is often thought that the turnaround in the Afghan war became possible due to the massive international military, political, financial and ideological intervention in Afghanistan’s internal affairs led by the United States of America, but in reality it was merely an act of retribution. Still less can it be regarded as a war on international terrorism.”

Mr Abdullo is right – logically, an act of retribution for the terrorist attack of 11 September should have been directed against, firstly, the perpetrators of the attack, secondly, those who planned and financed it, and thirdly, those who ordered the attack and in whose interests it was carried out. And now they are trying to solve the problem using bombs and missiles. It is not quite clear who the world has taken up arms against – terrorism or terrorists. If it's terrorism, a phenomenon involving radical forms of protest by socially oppressed classes or groups of people, then bombs won't solve anything. Other, socially-oriented measures are needed here. If it's terrorists, then what does it have to do with the millions of Afghan citizens who perhaps up to now were not even aware of the 11 September attacks? What surprises me about this complex situation is the fact that, all of a sudden, almost all of the world's journalist community has lost its memory. It is as if amnesia has erased from journalists' memories the main principle that generally enables them to correctly and objectively serve the community, which is in constant need of up-to-date, accurate information on events. And that principle is: "If you want to get to the truth, question everything."

Prior to 11 September, the overwhelming majority of my colleagues followed this principle strictly. But on 12 September, everything was suddenly forgotten, and it was probably the first time that journalists in most of the planet blindly accepted the view of one person and one country. Fearing changes in the situation, literally several hours after the terrorist attacks, they loudly declaimed the menacing word "War", naming the exact targets of missile strikes. And they kept on shouting until the world agreed, until it was shaken by the roar of bombers and Tomahawks. And all this took place for the simple reason that the honour of the USA, leader of the world hegemony, had been defiled, although citizens of 82 countries, not just America, had been killed in the terrorist attack. But the leader of the hegemony must be obeyed; everyone must promptly line up so as not to be late. These sharp words are not directed against the American people, just as the US President declared that the bombs and missiles were not directed against the Afghan people. That is not the point. When the international community takes different

approaches to the same problem, political scientists call it a double standard.

For the last three years at the General Assembly of the United Nations, Emomali Rakhmonov, the President of Tajikistan, has tried in vain to draw the international community's attention to the problem and the threat of international terrorism generated by the situation in Tajikistan itself and Afghanistan in particular. He has reasoned that Tajikistan cannot cope alone with the constant threats of terrorism and the drugs trade from its neighbour, that the world would inevitably have to face them in the long run, and that it was better to nip the problem in the bud. Neither his voice nor those of other Asian leaders were heard. And there was no clap of thunder until the USA was insulted. Then even those born deaf began to hear.

It is indisputable that, with the rise of globalisation and modern technology, security must be based above all on people's drive for solidarity. And one of the main conditions for maintaining security is public awareness. People need to have a proper idea of the danger in order to be able to react accordingly. Therefore, a journalist's primary responsibility is to do his best to write about, show and describe events. Tajik journalists agree with this and are trying to do something. Nevertheless, this very topical objective cannot always be achieved, and it's not always Tajikistan's media that's to blame.

I'd like to give you just a general idea of journalism in Tajikistan today, the conditions in which those in the media do their jobs. There are a number of aspects which cannot be ignored. These are: the collapse of the country's entire media system in the early 1990s and the attempts made over the last two or three years to reach at least former levels. When the Soviet Union was in its death-throes, the Tajik press was the most professional and the freest in Central Asia. Today it is just taking its first steps towards a revival of its former glory. It is trying to learn lessons from its experience that could be useful for the press in both Tajikistan and other countries. I am sure that the wealth of experience of Tajik journalists will be much in demand. My certainty is based on the fact that, when speaking of journalists' activities in areas of conflict and

tension, we first recall wars, whether local or large-scale military oppositions, try to define the status of the journalist in that situation, and try to arrange protective measures so that a media representative can do his or her job as effectively as possible and stay alive under any circumstances, because even the best journalist will not write a line if he is dead. In the twentieth century, full of wars and military uprisings, bloody conflicts and numerous areas of tension, many attempts were made to define the role, place and status of the journalist in these exceptional conditions. Until 1977, journalists had the status of prisoners of war. If they were captured, they had no hope of proving they were journalists without an editorial card. Therefore, in accordance with International Humanitarian Law, over the last 24 years conflicting parties have been obliged to regard journalists as civilians and treat them accordingly. In practice, however, the last thing opposing sides in a conflict are likely to think about is International Humanitarian Law, the journalist's status or other niceties of war, so it is better not to get caught. This is proved by the sad experience of both the past century and the new one just beginning, in which journalism has already suffered losses in Afghanistan.

Tajikistan's journalists do not have to travel anywhere to gain experience of working in areas of conflict and tension. They have been living and working in a zone of total conflict and tension for the last twelve years. In order to learn how to survive in such an extreme situation, they have paid with the lives of 78 of their fellow-writers and broadcasters. And there is no guarantee that at the very moment we are discussing these problems here, another Tajik journalist who dared to write the truth has not been killed. Aside from the bitterness of loss, we are proud of the journalists who died: they told or tried to tell the Truth out loud! Even if the truth cost them their lives, they showed the way and the ideal to those who come after them.

It all started long ago in 1989, when the foundation of the Soviet Union still seemed unshakable. The Tajik conflict or Tajik instability, as our political scientist and conflict expert Parviz Mullojjanov defined it, was a direct consequence of the internal policy pursued by the Soviet authorities for decades – above all their human resources policy. During

the Soviet period, local elites took shape in each Republic. Many of these enjoyed limited support within their republics and regions, and for many years it was only with the support of the centre that they retained their power and influence. The foundation they stood on only had to shake a little for another correlation of forces to form between the old nomenclature and new groups aspiring to power. And so a fierce political struggle blazed up.

In Tajikistan, the Leninabad nomenclature, which had ruled since 1947, did not enjoy support or popularity in the south, where two-thirds of the total population lived. The ruling clan was already unable to control the country independently. A redistribution of power was inevitable. Whether it could have been peaceful in conditions of independence is another question. In an effort to hang on to as much power as possible, the Leninabad clan allied with the Kulyabians, southerners who at that moment seemed to be the weakest contenders for power.

Had the opposition been let into this alliance in 1991, the civil war could have been avoided and the conflict would have flowed easily, though not without some friction, into the political sphere. Instead, two political alliances were formed in the country: Garm-Badakhshan and Leninabad-Kulyab. The fact that the newly established Islamic Renaissance Party joined one of the alliances only added fuel to the flames. The conflict naturally led to the civil war, a bloodbath which according to the most conservative estimates claimed more than 60,000 lives. The defeat of the opposition and its exile to Afghanistan did not and could not bring peace to Tajikistan. It was only when the General Agreement on National Reconciliation and Concord was concluded in 1997 with the help of, it would not be an exaggeration to say, the whole world, that the foundation was established for the gradual restoration of stability in the country. For the first time in many years the regional power elites met each other halfway, having let the opposition into power and shared power with the opposition.

So it is natural to ask, what about the journalists who worked during that period? How did they cover the opposition and the political conflict between the local elites? Unfortunately, journalists turned out not to be

immune from the general psychosis and they divided into two irreconcilable camps. Today, rereading the press of those days, you get a strong impression that had the elites not unleashed the war, the journalists would have done it for them. Everything was black and white: we saw no shades between them. If anyone didn't match one of the two colours, then down with him! I will briefly give two examples of such intolerance. At that time I worked for *Kulyabskaya Pravda* in the south of the country, where later the People's Front was formed which defended and saved the "constitutional order", as they say. When the opposition was just beginning to manifest itself, through stormy debates in the squares of Dushanbe, I was determined to dig out the truth. I attended noisy demonstrations arranged by both sides. I was rumbled by both of them within three or four days. Both parties made it clear that the truth was to be looked for in another place and at another time, because then and there no one needed it. I had to go back to Kulyab empty-handed. But my trip to Dushanbe was not in vain, since I had realised that people would soon be reaching for weapons. And as they are brothers, people of one blood, they would sooner or later have to make peace and get together. I decided to put out all the propaganda in my newspaper under a new slogan, "For Civil Unity and Concord", replacing the old slogan "Workers of the World, Unite!", which had been on the pages of the newspaper for over 50 years. After the first issue came out, I had to spend several hours against the barrel of a loaded automatic rifle. But I stood my ground, and the newspaper is published under this slogan to this day.

Four and a half years ago the armed opposition came to an end. Now the country, put back several decades, is painfully trying to get to its feet and stand steadily.

Naturally, life is hard for people; many live below the poverty line and are literally destitute. Many of them have been forced to leave their families and wander about the world to earn a living. But changes are in progress and it is impossible not to see them. Only journalists still remain in the same zone of conflict and tension. The ban on every kind of preliminary censorship can be considered a major victory in

Tajikistan. But artificial obstacles like an awareness of one's role and place in the civil war, the cultivated slogan "Do not endanger the tenuous peace with an imprudent word!" and the daily threat of physical violence for any article – all this inevitably causes journalists to be cautious and censor themselves. According to monitoring experts from the Russian Centre for Journalism in Extreme Situations, all the conflicts in Tajikistan in which journalists and the media took part involved violence. However, self-censorship, which rules in the journalist community, flourishes not so much due to pressure from the state as from anxiety for one's own life and the lives and health of one's loved ones. Journalists expect no protection from law-enforcement bodies, as representatives of these are often themselves persecutors of journalists.

All media activities in Tajikistan are regulated by two basic laws: the Law on the Press and Other Mass Media and the Law on Television and Radio Broadcasting. These do not discriminate against the media, but since they were adopted at different times, they often contradict each other. Electronic media suffer particularly from the whims of officials.

Journalists' professional activities are obstructed by a range of insurmountable barriers, which is a direct contravention of the above laws. Let us concentrate on the basics. Article 27 of the Law on the Press and Other Mass Media unequivocally proclaims the right to obtain information from state agencies, public associations and officials. Moreover, Article 30 of the Constitution expressly guarantees everyone the freedom of speech, freedom of the press and the right to use mass media. Furthermore, a new Article 162 has been introduced in the Criminal Code which stipulates: "Any form of hindrance to the lawful professional activity of a journalist shall be punished by a fine in the amount of 500 to 800 times the minimum wage or up to two years' correctional labour." And it is noteworthy that in the three years of its existence, the article has never been applied. There are no legal precedents in this area. Not one clause defines the correct mechanism for obtaining information, as if the authors intentionally left a loophole for state officials, for whom leaks are not always beneficial. The definition of "lawfully obtained information", however, was not forgotten. This means that within the existing



system, any piece of information obtained by a journalist was obtained unlawfully, so journalists constantly have to work on (or beyond) the verge of committing an offence. The law entitles the journalist to prosecute an official for refusing to give out information only after the second written refusal. This would take so much time that the information would be useless to the media.

Orifdjon Azimov, a lawyer, has made an interesting study of the legal aspect of some articles of the laws regulating the media. In his opinion, terms in the laws like “provocative information” and “lawfully obtained” make it possible, if need be, to classify any information containing criticism or a negative evaluation of the authorities’ activities as “unlawful” or “provocative”. All these acts may form the *corpus delicti* provided for by Article 135 (Slander), Article 136 (Insult), Article 137 (Public Insult or Slander of the President), Article 330 (Insulting a Representative of the Authorities), Article 189 (Fomenting of National, Racial, Local or Religious Hatred), Article 241 (Illegal Production and Distribution of Pornographic Materials and Items), Article 311 (Divulgence of State Secrets), Articles 145, 278, 173 (Divulgence of Medical and Banking Secrets and the Secret of Adoption), and so on, and so forth.

According to Article 5 of the Law on State Secrets, information on natural disasters, catastrophes, the environment, public health and living standards, the state of law and order, the education and culture of the population, and illegal actions by state agencies and officials cannot be state secrets. But you just try to obtain the information “lawfully”: go to the official, show your card and get the necessary information! At best, you will be directed to a press centre where information is interpreted in such a way that even the least exigent reader will not trust it. Journalists are not invited or admitted to scenes of conflicts, catastrophes, natural disasters or even court hearings. The law-enforcement agencies contact them only when the President excoriates their activities and they have to pretend they are immensely busy. But the President only does this once or twice a year, then everything goes back to normal.

Now that the international anti-terrorist coalition is carrying on the action of retribution in neighbouring Afghanistan, officials are being

particularly uncooperative towards journalists. Some of Tajikistan's air bases, including Kulyab airport, will probably be used by the international coalition's forces to deliver humanitarian and other cargo. This was declared for all to hear by the President and Minister for Foreign Affairs, specifying each airport. But the officials and special forces will not allow any journalist to approach these airports within firing range. Journalists have to use roundabout, "unlawful" ways to obtain the information they need. I know this from my own experience, when I had to beat about the bush for hours and was rebuffed every time.

Another question is, can Tajik journalists be blamed for sourcing their material on the war in Afghanistan from the Internet without leaving their offices? Firstly, due to financial difficulties no publication can afford to send its correspondents to the battlefields. Secondly, as Vladimir Vorobyov, editor-in-chief of the government's *Narodnaya gazeta* ("People's Newspaper"), put it, no Tajik journalist in his right mind would go to cover the hostilities in Afghanistan risking his life for the princely sum of US\$1.50. Tajikistan's journalists have no social security from the state, and the Law on the Press and Other Mass Media does not provide for guarantees to protect journalists' health. There is no medical or life insurance for journalists in areas of military action, and in the event of the death of the breadwinner, the family receives benefits of 2 somoni (80 US cents).

There is one more problem which I think should not be omitted. For reasons of tradition and its vision of the country's national and geopolitical interests, and also to please Moscow, Dushanbe supports only the Northern Alliance in the internal conflict in Afghanistan, and always has done. Journalists writing on Afghanistan and the region have to remember this well, lest they be accused of inciting anti-Russian sentiment in Tajikistan. The material would not be published anyway. However, the situation is not so simple. All the evil that most of the population in the border areas have suffered from next-door Afghanistan was brought about by field commanders controlled by the Northern Alliance. Constantly taking hostages, driving people's cattle beyond the river, bringing huge drug and arms transits across the border, continually

harassing the population on the border, not allowing them to pasture their cattle, gather wild plants, etc. Yet all this is overlooked for fear of potential misunderstanding. It is merely hushed up or put down to Afghan smugglers, which makes it impossible for the ordinary reader to make out what is going on. For all that, the goal is achieved – the culprits were not named, but enmity towards the Taliban is worked up. It is clear that there are no reprimands or complaints about the state policy, since politics is politics. It follows its own rules and its own laws. But one-sided brainwashing of public opinion by journalists cannot fail to have sad consequences. First of all, it hardens the hearts of Tajikistanis with regard to the problems of ordinary Afghans by portraying everyone in Afghanistan as criminal Taliban, which the media is compelled to do. It causes a categorical aversion to Afghan refugees within Tajikistan and indifference to the fact that every day hundreds of innocent people in the neighbouring country are killed under the merciless bombs of the coalition.

Tajik journalists could also contribute to the eradication of “internal terrorism” within the country, which is still going on. In recent years hundreds of people have been killed – academics, politicians and public figures, from the General Prosecutor to the Minister of Information. Journalists are not admitted to investigations, if any take place at all. At best, the authorities fob journalists off with press centre information that nobody in Tajikistan trusts. By the way, of all the cases of journalists’ deaths, only the case of Otakhon Latifi was investigated. The killer was found and sentenced. In that case the figure of Latifi himself was too outstanding to be ignored, since at the time of his murder he was a prominent member of the Commission for National Reconciliation... Although a fairly good Law on Terrorism exists, many issues in it have not been properly thought through, including the media’s participation and place in this struggle against terrorism.

In short, the result is that Tajik journalists, who have enormous experience of living and working in the context of permanent conflict and civil war, have no opportunities to apply this experience in practice. Contributing to this are financial difficulties and the still existing dis-

trust between the parties to the process, i.e. officials and journalists, and also readers and journalists. Clearly both parties are doing something, but experts agree that the regulatory framework for the media in Tajikistan badly needs improvement. In their opinion, the basic reason why journalists' access to information sources are restricted and officials are reluctant to contact journalists is the lack of any control over law enforcement and the activities of people's representatives in power – deputies, government officials and directors of enterprises, i.e. everyone who is a little king in his domain and rules it accordingly.

I repeat, Tajikistan's journalists are not sitting with their arms folded blaming objective difficulties, nor are they waiting for better times in which to work. Everyone who was familiar with the state of affairs in Tajik journalism two or three years ago notices the quantitative and qualitative changes that have taken place since then. Many people, including in the Government and other high offices, are beginning to realize that the route Tajikistan is currently following – dealing with all media issues by force – contravenes national and international laws, and as such has no prospects. Today nobody accepts the politicians' constant excuses – the transition period and the temporary nature of the measures being taken. And those who order murders and beatings and put psychological pressure on daring journalists are also beginning to understand that Tajik journalists' search for the truth cannot be stopped by murders, beatings or persecution.

So one way or another, the issue of establishing a regulatory framework comes to the fore. In this respect, much is being done by the National Association of Independent Mass Media of Tajikistan. The Association arranges training courses, seminars and studies and publishes a special bulletin, *Mass Media and the Law*. The Foundation for the Protection of Journalists' Rights is becoming more active. Other journalists' associations and press clubs are appearing. It gives me particular pleasure to tell you that a new Law on the Press and Mass Media is being drafted, the OSCE being the main initiator and sponsor. And in general, it should be noted that warm relations have been established between the OSCE and Tajikistani journalists: the OSCE Mission to Tajikistan either

initiates or sponsors practically every seminar, training course and conference for Tajikistan's journalists, and furthermore it tries to cover the whole country. My only wish is that the OSCE Mission will move further inland, especially to the south of the country, where journalists in ten districts and the city of Kulyab (the former Kulyab region) are impatiently waiting for help, and if much more time passes, the local media will soon be dead and buried.

Over the last year or two, the Government has more frequently taken it upon itself to remedy problems that have been highlighted in criticism published by individual newspapers. And criticism is appearing more and more often. Take, for example, *Asia Plus*: every single issue, every week, contains criticism, and nearly all of it causes Vice Premier Nigina Sharopova to give appropriate instructions to the ministries and agencies concerned. That is why the newspaper is growing in popularity throughout the country, though it cannot be accused of love for the Government. Other newspapers, which, by the way, are published in four languages (Tajik, Russian, Uzbek and English), are growing bolder as well.

In conclusion, I would like to say that, despite the 12-year conflict (or maybe thanks to those conditions, which strengthen the spirit and will) still present in the relationship between the authorities and the media, Tajikistan is gradually coming round to the right idea: that the press and the government are natural rivals with different functions, and each of them should respect its opponent's opinion. Only a weak government cannot afford criticism in the sort of democratic society we are now engaged in building. And the Government of Tajikistan is becoming stronger and stronger every year, and that means that criticism of its activity must increase apace!



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Uzbekistan

## JOURNALISTS IN WARTIME

Uzbekistan has been in a state of war on terrorism since 1998, when a series of explosions took place in Tashkent. Kyrgyzstan engaged in a just war against terrorism in 1999 in Batken. It went on in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. The Central Asian governments were aware of the threat of terrorism originating from neighbouring Afghanistan, stuck in its long war. However, local journalists found themselves unprepared for reporting on terrorism as a serious common threat to the existence of the very statehood of the Central Asian countries. Hence, both local journalists and foreign agencies have accused some states and leaders of improper domestic and foreign policies.

It was not until later that the threat of international terrorism was unanimously acknowledged, at first after the events described above, and once and for all after 11 September. Yet even then the appraisal of the political decisions made by the states which joined the anti-terrorist coalition was influenced by the prejudice, rivalry, momentary interests and objectives of one state or another. The stereotypes and images of the previous period have still not been eliminated. Preparations had been made for war, then war broke out, but journalists kept on operating with the obsolete concepts and tactics of a disunited world. The reason for this was the contradictory nature of the official information, measured out and censored, and the shortage of independent sources, which were supplemented with conjecture and guesswork that filled the newspapers, radio, TV and the Internet.

The war began with an information war. The Internet was full of inconsistent and frightening information; the world was expecting something to happen, it was alarmed; the lack of information excited journalists, and some of them were eagerly fulfilling the orders of the special services. All the journalists I interviewed mentioned this.

A wave of correspondents poured into Central Asia and other neighbouring states of Afghanistan. They knew the region well enough, but did not have a clue about the geography, politics, culture or lifestyle in either Afghanistan or its neighbours, especially the Central Asian countries. They tended to either overestimate or underestimate the danger in hot spots.

At the beginning of November, over 500 journalists from foreign agencies, newspapers, radio and television channels were accredited in Uzbekistan, and by the end of the month there were around 1,000. They included representatives of major American periodicals, European and Asian media, and freelance journalists. Some of them, working in Moscow, got their information about events in Central Asia from the Russian media, while others, working in Asia, pictured the Central Asian states as similar to Afghanistan. A Mexican journalist was surprised to find that Termez, a town on the border, is a comfortable place with wide streets, since he had imagined it to be an Asian settlement with low buildings surrounded by sand dunes and with shoot-outs at night. In reports published in the American newspapers, photographs taken in Turkmenistan were captioned as Uzbekistan. Even today, many such extraordinary things occur.

There are currently<sup>1</sup> about 200 accredited journalists in Termez. The regional authority's press service arranges for them to see local customs and ceremonies and organises meetings in tea-houses just to keep them busy. The crossing of humanitarian aid to Northern Afghanistan was witnessed by 131 reporters. Journalists in search of information tried to visit the Hanabad air base in the Kashka-Darya region, but saw nothing but the fence and gates. A reporter from the *Washington Post* attempted to take a look at the Tuzel military air base in the Tashkent region, hoping to see a military plane arriving as broadcast by Russian television, but he could not get further than the gate. According to the experts, Russian television had shown library material filmed two years previously during the Partnership for Peace manoeuvres.

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<sup>1</sup> Presentation date 10-11 December 2001 (note from the editor).



General information on the progress of the anti-terrorist operation was presented twice during press conferences given by General Tommy Franks, Commander-in-Chief of the US Air Force. Other questions on political subjects were not answered. The press conferences of US Defence Minister Donald Rumsfeld, the Northern Alliance's Dr Abdullah Abdullah and President Bush's special representative were very brief. According to the journalist Sirozhiddin Tolipov of the BBC, it is especially difficult to report on political issues involving cooperation between members of the anti-terrorist coalition and the interaction of internal Afghan forces, since the official information is scanty and it is hard to make any predictions. Journalists can only make very cautious predictions based on independent sources of information. He also believes that the official sources provide very little information which cannot always be trusted, being either too general or already out of date. Information on cooperation between Uzbekistan and the US is limited not only due to the caution of the Uzbek authorities, but also at the request of the Americans.

As well as covering the anti-terrorist operations, journalists have been monitoring developments in other countries, focussing on such issues as the changes in drug-trafficking routes. According to a journalist at the Uzbek Radio Service Ozodlik in Tashkent, the drug-trafficking route out of Tajikistan has moved further north to avoid the zone of military action. It now goes from Khujand in Tajikistan via Bekabad in Uzbekistan. The drug barons are taking advantage of people's economic difficulties and recruiting drug couriers, taking members of their families hostage. They intimidate journalists into not covering the issue of drug trafficking.

The journalists I interviewed pointed out that in wartime they could be given misinformation as well as information, and so it is very important to work with tried-and-tested sources in order to stop misinformers hiding behind well-known agencies for their own purposes. Even official information has to be double-checked. In particular, the local and foreign journalists I interviewed keep a critical eye on the information given out by Russia's TV-6 and NTV, since they believe that these channels are

sources of misinformation discrediting Uzbekistan's cooperation with the US. And it must be said that this misinformation has achieved its aim. According to a survey carried out by the Uzbek Radio Service Ozodlik, more than 70 per cent of those questioned were against Uzbekistan's cooperation with the US in the war on terror; some of them responded that Uzbekistan should not support the West's action against their co-religionists; others believed that the threat from the Taliban would be greater after the military operations. People were especially concerned by Russian sites on the Internet devoted to a "jihad against Uzbekistan and the military power of the Taliban". During meetings in Termez, Russian journalists from TV-6 were forced to justify themselves, saying that the information had been received from foreign sources. However, these sources were not identified.

There are now scores of representatives of well-known world agencies working in hot spots worldwide. For instance, there have been 170 representatives of the BBC in Afghanistan over the last two months, and similar numbers of journalists representing CNN, Reuters and others. Along with the journalists accredited with the United Front, the Northern Alliance and other headquarters of the anti-Taliban coalition, dozens of freelance reporters are working in hot spots.

Here is how Sirozhiddin Talipov, a correspondent with the BBC's Uzbek Service, describes his work. Accredited journalists are provided with armed guards, military consultants (retired special forces officers), interpreters and drivers, who are responsible for their security. They recommend places to visit and people who might provide information. Together they work out the routes. BBC journalists work in groups in order to double-check and back up each other. They are given flak-jackets and helmets, but these do not protect against direct hits by shells and bombs. So the sense of fear is always there.

In the hot spots your life is always in danger, because war is war, and journalists are in the same danger as soldiers. But in addition they run the risk of being robbed or taken hostage and losing their papers, money or equipment during sudden attacks and bombardments. In war-torn countries there are a lot of marauders and bandits who represent another

threat to journalists. Sirozhiddin Talipov said he knows of no internationally recognized symbol that journalists could wear during wars; he himself wore none and thinks it wouldn't help much. In any case, very few people have heard of the Berlin Declaration of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Representatives of the German TV channel ARD and Reuters encountered danger directly while in Kalai Janghi during the Taliban mutiny and had to jump from a great height, risking their lives in the shelling. During an attack by General Dustum's troops they had to hide, fearing they would be mistaken for mercenaries. The sudden shelling and consequent need to leave immediately resulted in the loss of documents and footage. Money and equipment were stolen from some of the correspondents, for example a digital camera was stolen from a reporter from the newspaper *Mayiti-Sumbun*. Work in hot spots is accompanied by intense psychological stress. Uzbek journalists from UzTeleRadio who had been in Afghanistan confirmed this, although their meeting with General Dustum took place in liberated Mazar-i-Sharif.

According to unproven information, the Taliban have offered a big cash reward for the head of a foreign journalist.

Freelance reporters, who do not always get accreditation, are in special danger. They run the risk of being cheated by their interpreters, drivers and guides, who can dictate their terms. They charge a fortune for transport and translation services. According to the French journalist Irene Bronero, there are a lot of things freelancers have to do at their own risk. They usually make contact with humanitarian organizations and stick with them while moving around the country or when wounded. It was only because of this that her husband Mark Bronero was evacuated from Afghanistan in 1999 when he was seriously wounded. Mark Bronero visited Afghanistan several times over the last decade. During his last visit he was wounded by a grenade splinter. Although he was operated on in the military hospital of the 201st division in Tajikistan, he later died of that wound.

In the beginning of the anti-terrorist operation, four journalists died. Today the list of dead journalists contains eight names, and the whereabouts of one correspondent taken hostage is unknown.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise that journalists working in hot spots should obtain comprehensive information on the potential dangers before they arrive, undergo psychological training, and know about protective equipment and safety measures. Humanitarian organizations could lead such training and provide support to journalists who are taken hostage, wounded, etc.

This article has been prepared on the basis of interviews with representatives of the Uzbek Radio Service Ozodlik and the BBC and freelance journalist Irene Bronero (recording available). The questions asked in the interviews are given below.

### **Questionnaire: Journalists in Wartime**

1. How and where do you obtain up-to-date information? Official sources, unofficial sources, individuals or casual sources?
2. How many journalists from your agency are working in hot spots? On their own initiative or assigned; where accredited?
3. Information and misinformation. To what extent can you trust sources, particularly official ones?
4. How would you evaluate the coverage of the anti-terrorist operation in the media in Uzbekistan?
5. What is the most sensitive topic to cover: the interaction of members of the anti-terrorist coalition, progress of the operations, interrelations of internal Afghan forces, or something else?
6. What dangers do journalists face in hot spots and outside them?
7. To what extent do you think local and foreign journalists are prepared for reporting on events in Afghanistan and Central Asia?