

WHO IS THE BEST TAJIK JOURNALIST? - AND THE WINNER IS...

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Public opinion polls on the best journalists were held in Tajikistan. The two polls conducted by different organizations have produced strikingly different results. This has led to an open debate on what makes one journalist better than the other.

On September 27 this year the socio-political newspaper Tajikistan #21 (196) published an opinion poll of Tajikistan's best journalists. The newspaper's journalists based their research on an opinion poll carried out by a Djumhuriyat journalist, Radjab Mirzo. The results showed that, with 72.32 per cent of total votes, Khurshed Atovullo of Tajikistan came first on the «glory scale». In second place was Saidaly Siddik of Vecherny Dushanbe, who received 47.46 per cent of votes. Third was Turko Dikaev of Asia-plus, who received 39.55 per cent of the votes.

The other top journalists voted for in the opinion poll were Saief Mirzob, an independent journalist (33.9 per cent); Mazkhabsho Mukhabbatsho of Tajikistan and Kironbek Sharifzoda of Sadoi Mardum (both with 31.64 per cent); Nuimon Nizomi of Charkhi gardun (28.25 per cent); Marat Mamadshoev of Asia-plus (27.12 per cent); Salimi Zarafshonfar of Djavononi Tojikiston (24.86 per cent); Nurali Davlatov, also of Djavononi Tojikiston, (25.99 per cent); and finally, Samariddin Asozoda of Djumhuriyat (22.6 per cent).

OPINIONS ON THE POLL

The opinion poll immediately led to many contradictory views and disputes. Many journalists

working for other newspapers considered the opinion poll dishonest and even bogus (incidentally, the poll only encompassed the area covered by Dushanbe newspapers and magazines). Among the most dissatisfied journalists was Barno Kodirduht of Charkhi gardun. Soon after its publication, she wrote an article in Djavononi Tojikiston about the survey, in which she expressed her disagreement with its results. Barno believes that Khurshed Atovullo, who received the greatest number of votes, should not «put himself» in first place in the very newspaper where he is editor-in-chief. Mukhamadato Sul-tonov, head of the «Madjlisi Oli» (Parliament) press service, is of almost the same opinion. He believes it is immodest, frivolous, and not entirely correct for journalists to rate themselves. Such a survey should, in his opinion, be conducted by an absolutely neutral body, like «Zerkalo» (The Mirror) Centre for Sociological Research.

DIFFICULT TO DEFINE

It is difficult to define by what criteria respondents rated the journalists. For example, Khayet Davlyatov, Chairman of the Tajikistan Union of Journalists, believes that those journalists rated the best are successful only because they write a lot. But much to his regret they

seldom reveal the painful aspects of socio-political life in our society. He would like to see more insight in their reporting, but he believes this only occurs in articles by the professional journalist, Mazshabsho Mukhabbatsho. Davlatov has also noticed that there are currently no Tajik journalists of the same standard as the now-dead Otakhon Latifi (during Soviet times he was the Pravda correspondent in Tajikistan). «Today journalists represent a sort of window-dressing: there is form, but there is no content,» says Davlatov.

WHO'S WHO?

In order to clarify the situation and objectively select the best journalists on the basis of an independent survey, the National Association of Independent Mass Media of Tajikistan (NAIMMT) conducted another opinion poll. 100 respondents were selected, representing different social classes ages and gender: servicemen, officials, creative people and celebrities, intellectuals, the unemployed, housewives, students, workers, retired and, naturally, journalists. Right at the start of polling it was evident in what ways many people respond to such things: unwillingly and, at times, even with fear. Close to the end of the survey it became obvious that there were as many opinions as there were respondents.

It was also clear that it would be very difficult to impartially as-

sess the poll, as many respondents could not distinguish between a journalist and an editor, a correspondent and a presenter, or a reviewer and a television announcer. Nevertheless, having collected all the questionnaires it became clear that Zie Abdullo and Nur Tabarov received the greatest recognition among respondents (7 votes each). At present these leading figures in Tajik journalism do not write much, but many intellectuals, creative people and celebrities consider them strong professionals. As far as Charkhi gardun's editor, Khabibullo Erov, believes, Nur Tabarov has contributed much to national publicism, but today he is not called for any more, and his place has been taken by young journalists. However, Erov cannot single out any strong professionals from amongst them.

Those philologists, officials, journalists, and civil servants interested in newspaper publications questioned rated Mazshabsho Mukhabbatsho as the best journalist (6 votes). Khurshed Atovullo received the same number of votes, but he was voted for by students at the journalism faculty where he is a lecturer. Umari Sherkhon, Deputy Director of the «Sharki Ozod» publishing house believes that Mazkhabsho Mukhabbatsho is the most experienced and professional journalist; a tutor to many strong Tajik journalists, who continues to work actively, despite his age. Davlat Nazriev, Deputy Head of the Information Department at the Tajik Ministry of Foreign Affairs, believes that Khurshed Atovullo has his own insight into events: «He writes a lot and, after he became editor of Tajikistan, his writing changed very much for the better.»

Both Pavel Geivandov, the Coryphaeus of Tajik newspapers

- who contributed to Vecherny Dushanbe for forty years - and the deceased Otakhon Latifi, received 6 votes each. «At times, when Vecherny Dushanbe was still a daily newspaper, Pavel Geivandov's interesting and urgent articles attracted readers,» believes Abdullo Khabibov, Deputy of the Tajik Parliament. He also thinks that today's young journalists cannot be considered strong, as they have no chance at good training or international experience: «There are certainly definite omissions on the part of the state, for example bad funding. Upon the adoption of the new media law we shall take all these issues into account.»

TV REPORTERS ON TOP

Also popular in the NAIMMT poll is Akbar Sattorov, the founder and chief editor of the Charkhi gardun media group, and Nasiba Gulyamova, the Tajik television reporter, both with 5 votes. Respondents from various social backgrounds know Akbar Sattorov as the owner of six popular newspapers in the republic. Nasiba Gulaymova, a Russian-language journalist working for Tajik television appears every week in her live investigative programme «Tajikistan».

It should be noted that the most popular journalists in the poll were television journalists. This is probably due to the fact that today television is under greater demand than print media and that people remember personalities they "know". Saidaly Siddik, Djuma Kuddus of Digest Press, and Alisher Khodjaev (ORT, Tajikistan) received 4 votes each. Here there were totally contradictory opinions. According to intellectuals and civil servants, Saidaly Siddik is a professional journalist. Sharif

Khamdampur, Chief Editor of Tajikistan, is of the same opinion: «I rate Saidaly Siddik as the best journalist and this assessment is confirmed by the contents of his popular newspaper Vecherny Dushanbe.»

Djuma Kudus received 4 votes because of his publications about women in Digest Press. This newspaper is popular among housewives, the unemployed and people with little education, which today constitutes the greater part of the Tajik population. Russians in the capital still remember Alisher Khodjaev, whom they consider an impartial journalist. However, after the assassination of Viktor Nikulin, he was forced to migrate to Russia and now contributes to ORT. According to many journalists after the numerous murders of Tajik journalists in the 90s, the majority of those working in the media have become more cautious about what they said. That is probably why 8 respondents, including intellectuals, creatives and celebrities, believed that there are no strong professionals at present in Tajikistan. «Even if they want to, journalists are not capable of achieving their potential because of the fear of being punished,» said the people's artist, Sabzali Sharipov. As for Gulshifat Shakhidi, who started her professional life as far back as the 70s for the Komsomolets Tajikistana, she believes that those strong journalists still living in the republic simply do not want to work, because nobody needs their professionalism, and that there are neither good readers, nor good newspapers.

The result is that the majority of respondents (12) stated that they do not know any journalists. They believe that the majority of the population does not read news-

papers: first, many of them do not have the money to buy a newspaper; and secondly, those who are interested in an article do not usually pay any attention to its author. In our opinion, this indicates that the Tajik press is just in a process of revival. The question of «Who is Tajikistan's best journalist?» should prompt Tajik journalists to compete for glory and their readers' recognition.