

TAJIK GOVERNMENT WANTS TO SHARE THE BENEFIT OF PRIVATE TV AND RADIO

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Because of its monopoly media position, the Television and Radio Broadcasting Committee, which operates under the Tajik government, does not always respect the licensing of non-governmental television and radio companies.

The “Licensing in the field of television and radio broadcasting” regulation that was registered with the Justice Ministry on July 12, 2001, gives the right to issue television and radio broadcasting licenses to the Licensing Commission. The Commission consists of representatives from the Television and Radio Broadcasting Committee, the Communications Ministry and a few other organizations. As a rule, the Commission is headed by one of the Television and Radio Broadcasting Committee Vice Presidents.

According to a member of the Licensing Commission and the head of the Television and Radio Broadcasting Committee’s Information Department, Mekhri Umarova, only five non-governmental television and radio broadcasting companies have been licensed in the last nine months. She believes that the companies’ founders are to blame for any problems experienced with license issuing: “many founders present incorrect information, for example, or have failed to re-register with the Justice Ministry.”

FEAR FROM COMPETITION

According to the Media-Centre in Dushanbe, there are 12 out of a total of 14 non-governmental television companies and only one ra-

dio company operating in the Sogdi “oblast” (region) in north Tajikistan, whereas in the republic’s capital not a single non-governmental radio station operates. The question of the licensing of the two metropolitan radio stations, *Asia-Plus* and *Radio NIC* has been going on for the last three years. According to the *Asia-Plus* agency’s Director, Umed Babakhanov, the appropriate radio licensing application was filed as long ago as 1998. Since then the Television and Radio Broadcasting Committee management has refused to issue the license, using a variety of excuses, such as the country’s unstable socio-political situation and the presidential elections.

Now the Television and Radio Broadcasting Committee is simply ignoring all appeals, including the public ones. According to Daler Nurkhanov, *Asia-Plus*’s manager, they have still not received an answer to the last open letter published by the radio station as long ago as December 7, 2000. One of the Licensing Commission’s members, who wished to remain anonymous, explained the reasons for the Committee’s attitude to the metropolitan radio companies. According to this source, there is no political background to the refusal to issue a license. The reason is that the government-controlled ra-

dio station simply does not want to create any competition that would, furthermore, receive grants from international organizations. “Who needs more competition?” said the source.

ONE LICENSE NOT ENOUGH

In addition to a broadcasting license, the founders of television and radio companies also need technical permission to broadcast from the State Communication Inspectorate (SCI), which operates under the Communications Ministry. According to the head of the SCI, Makhmadkul Azizov, technical permission to broadcast is only issued if the list of required documents, including the broadcasting license issued by the State Television and Radio Broadcasting Committee, is presented. “Only then are frequencies allocated to non-governmental television and radio stations without delay,” Azizov confirmed. This function falls within the SCI’s competency.

The Inspectorate immediately informs the communication minister or his first deputy. What is more, Azizov claims that “we are in favor of granting channels to non-governmental television and radio companies, because living in market conditions means we are interested in profiting from the channels allotted to radio stations.” Television and radio companies have to pay both for the allocation and the operation of their frequencies. The current frequency charges for governmental and non-governmental television and radio com-

panies differ by 140 to 350 somoni (by 60 to 145 US dollars) a month, and it is obvious that the charges for government companies are much lower. However, according to Azizov a new price-list which is in development will contain no discriminating rates.

NEW LAW WILL HELP

Journalists believe that a new me-

dia law is urgently needed to both improve the current situation as well as regulate print and electronic media. The Dushanbe Internews office and employees of the OSCE Mission in Tajikistan are currently in the process of drafting a new law. According to Bakhodur Kasyimov, executive director of *Tajikistan Internews*, the law will cover the issue of non-government tele-

vision and radio broadcast licensing among other things. It is not known, however, how long the law will take to develop, when the Tajik parliament will discuss it, or when it will come in force. Meanwhile life goes on and the governmental Television and Radio Broadcasting Committee is still busy issuing licenses to non-government state television and radio companies.