

## Editorial

# NO PROSPECTS TODAY FOR E-MEDIA IN CENTRAL ASIA

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**Journalists and media directors believe e-media development is mainly impeded by the authorities' policy of denying access by any rivals to the state-run broadcasters and the silent but actual media censorship and self-censorship.**

Some private radio and television stations in Tajikistan have to wait several years until they receive their broadcast license. In Uzbekistan, licensing tariffs have increased almost tenfold since late last year, and a private television company in Tajikistan wants to become a state-run one. The events over last several months exemplify an alarming trend: the electronic media crisis in Central Asia is growing. The most accessible form of media for Central Asia's broad audience, the electronic media now encounter serious issues related to professional skill development and technology, as well as interference from the authorities and founders in editorial policy and barriers to obtaining permission from the authorities. The state uses a legal means to administer control over the private media: in some cases these actions are explained by the inappropriateness of the laws regulating the media, but in some other cases both silent and constitutionally banned censorship, as well as media self-censorship, take place.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

One private broadcaster in Kulyab, southern Tajikistan, has experienced the predicament of being forced to become a division of the State Broadcasting Company. This is a vivid example

of the situation faced by the country's electronic media. The station directors believe "there has been no other way out" (see Turko Dikayev's article in this issue). Meanwhile there is no concern expressed about content improvement. 'Physical survival' is referred to as the settlement of financial and technical issues alone.

### **"PHYSICAL SURVIVAL"**

Uzbek e-media are facing the same problem of 'physical survival' as a result of the recently adopted governmental decision on "sufficient increases in licensing tariffs" (see Charos Abdullayeva's article). Some private media directors believe that the government is using these "new methods" to impede private e-media development; meanwhile it acts within the legal framework. "No human rights activists could now pounce upon anything in the Cabinet decision." (in the same article). The media have to choose between two exits: either raise their advertising prices almost tenfold or close. Given the low capacity of the advertiser market and the existing financial and equipment problems faced by the private media even before the government decision was issued, one can easily guess their choice. Some of them will probably decide to replicate the choice made by their Tajikistan

neighbors, i.e. to become a state agency, thus reducing the number of private broadcasters and an alternative news source. As for Tajikistan itself, private broadcasters there are licensed by the State Broadcasting Committee, which is an e-media company itself. This paradox lets the State Committee to refuse to issue any licenses to private e-media companies for many years in order not to create rivals (see article by Rufiya Abduvahidova).

Late last year, some financial reasons made the Tajikistan authorities seize the ORT broadcasting company and sufficiently reduce that of the RTR (both Russia-based companies) in Tajikistan (see Nargis Zakirova's article in this issue), even though local experts say 77% of the capital's residents used to obtain their news from these channels. The authorities explained their actions exclusively in terms of finances: the All-Russia State Broadcasting Company owes the Tajikistan Communication Ministry about 5.5 million roubles (around US \$180,000). However, local analysts have treated the Tajik authorities' actions as political, in the context of aggravated situation caused by the events in Afghan; "Tajik officials could try to restrict the influence of the uncontrolled media by using this modest method."

The authorities' silent censorship and journalists' own

self-censorship affects the content and quality of private stations' programs in Uzbekistan. Numerous musical, entertainment and educative programs discord with the lack of analytical programs about the country's political, economic and social issues. News blocs are irregular, but the editors 'when in doubt' have to phone the presidential office's press service, and those of the ministries and departments so that "corrections could be made on what is good to air and what it is better to abandon" (see Rustam Sadykov's article in

this issue). Yet station workers admit that there is no need for these 'political corrections' as people already have the censor in mind.

#### **SELF-CENSORSHIP**

Kyrgyz e-media analytical broadcasts are of low quality due to the lack that professional analysts and the private television stations fear their broadcasts may hurt "actors on the political stage" (see article by Igor Grebenshchikov). "Even if there are professional analysts qualified as political and social scientists in television they

will not be allowed to make an analytical program where one can call a spade a spade," believes Kyrgyz journalist Marina Sivasheva (in the same article). This is also the case of self-censorship, where "e-media owners, driven by self-preservation, prefer no-comment news blocs to competent analytical material." The fact that this deprives audiences of a broad range of opinions and discussion concerning important social processes and events remains out of the view of the private e-media.