

RUSSIA AND TAJIKISTAN: BUILDING MEDIA COOPERATION

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Last December Tajikistan and Russia agreed to interact in the media sector. Whereas Russia's goal is to maintain control over its media, it is a good opportunity for Tajikistan to improve its international image through the Russian media.

Both parties are interested in media cooperation, stated the Russian President's Aide on Information, Sergey Yastrzhembski, during his visit to Dushanbe. «Without doubt, the presence of Russia's channels in Tajikistan's media sphere meets the interests of both states, the Tajik people and those Russian citizens living in Tajikistan,» he emphasized. The RF presidential aide admitted that numerous problems exist in this area, such as the suspension of *ORT* broadcasting retransmissions and the reduction in *RTR*'s broadcasting time. He also reported that a deal had been made with Tajik President Rakhmonov to create a joint media team that would include representatives of both the Tajik and Russian presidential offices.

ACCURACY ABOVE ALL

Several days after the *Asia-Plus* weekly published a report entitled "Tajikistan's Image To Be Improved", about a group of Russian media experts arriving in Dushanbe. Tatyana Yershova, deputy chief of the RF President's Office media information department, headed the delegation. The trip followed the agreement between Russia and Tajikistan to create the media group. The Russian experts intended to assess the Tajik media coop-

eration capacity with the aim of improving Tajikistan's image in the international arena.

This event was followed by the Tajik delegation's reciprocal visit to Moscow. According to the Tajik team leader, Sukhrob Sharipov, the information and analysis director in the Tajik President's Office, the group included both presidential officers and delegates from of the Communication Ministry, the Foreign Ministry and the State Broadcasting Committee. According to Sharipov, contacts with Russian colleagues are progressing; but he has refused to go into details about the work done during the visit, saying the information he has is not for publication. However our source in the Presidential Office, who wishes to remain anonymous, has reported that this work involves private requests and agreements with Russian governmental media directors concerning correct coverage of the Tajikistan events. It should be noted that foreign, including Russian, journalists have contributed to Tajikistan's bad international image by disregarding positive news. According to Foreign Ministry department chief, Igor Sattarov, «working in this way with the Russian media has been the practice for several years already: we ask them to be more accurate in

their news stories about Tajikistan. Some Russian journalists have been invited to the republic to see with their own eyes that Tajikistan is not the source of evil their colleagues portray in their reports.» The Russia-based *Ogonyok* magazine that dedicated its two special issues to Tajikistan in 1996 and 2001 exemplifies the positive cooperation between the Tajikistan and Russian media. Yet some independent journalists in the republic refer to these issues as "sugary". A correspondent with the *Vecherny Dushanbe* newspaper, who wishes to remain anonymous, said: «If I myself were not a Tajikistan resident I would think what a happy people they are. They have everything; everything is marvelous for them! It seems to me that however willing we are to improve the image of our republic, we the journalist must never encroach upon the truth and never romanticize.»

BACK TO EARLIER LINKS

As far as the *ORT* and *RTR* broadcast retransmission is concerned, according to Sharipov, this issue is being settled at the governmental level; the different ways of repaying the Tajik transmitter debt owed by the Russians are being considered; for example, by hosting local advertisements, as is the practice in other CIS countries.

Different means of print media exchanges with Moscow are also being developed in Dushanbe. According to Odina Khamidov, dep-

uty chief of the Tajik Culture Ministry's department of publishing houses, the printing industry and book sales, «the republican government has asked to exchange periodicals with Russia. Subscriptions to Russian editions in Tajikistan and Tajik editions in Russia are being elaborated, including payment for subscriptions, delivery and the distribution of newspapers and magazines. The work is progressing, yet not as quickly as desired.» He also emphasized that book exchanges between Tajikistan's Firdousi National Library and both countries' ministries of culture had already reached Russia's Lenin Library. The Tajik Academy of Sciences' library regularly receives new scientific literature published in Russia. «Tajikistan is working towards

a cultural and information partnership, however the Russian side is very slow at getting moving on this,» Khamidov said. He believes this sort of relationship between CIS partners is due to the disruption of earlier links. «These agencies should be led by more determined people to establish new contacts on a qualitatively new level,» Khamidov said.

BILINGUAL PUBLICATION

While the media team of the Tajik and Russian presidential offices is elaborating cooperation mechanisms, newspapers in Dushanbe reported that the first issue of the *Charkhi Gardun* newspaper was released in Moscow on March 6. This is a new project of *Charkhi Gardun*'s owner, Akbarali Sattorov, and the first attempt by the

Tajik media to enter Russia's market. So far the newspaper print-run is 5,000. In the long term - depending on demand - the newspaper intends to increase its volume (it has 16 pages now) and print-run. According to Sattorov, two pages of the newspaper will report on life in Moscow for Tajiks; the rest will contain information sent from Dushanbe. The first issue is bilingual: Russian and Tajik. Sattorov believes that the new paper will help Russia's Tajik community obtain reliable information of what is happening in their native country. According to him, the Tajik Ambassador to Kazakhstan, Akbarsho Isqandarov, has expressed his readiness to assist in publishing this newspaper in Astana for the Tajik community in this country.