

MEDIA INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT IN KAZAKHSTAN

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So far, Kazakhstan has no conceptualized strategy for the promotion of the Kazakh language in the country. Kazakh-language mass media fail to use it effectively and thus find themselves outstripped by other local media in terms of material presentation, in funding and in the volume of their press runs.

It was after the former Soviet republics had secured their independence that they started to go through the process of national revival. The enactment by the newly-formed states of laws that established the status of national languages has given rise to the problem of how to proceed with implanting and ensuring wide use of national languages. Kazakhstan commands a unique geopolitical position of being partly a European and partly an Asian country. Also, it is home to more ethnic minorities than any other CIS country. However, while the Eurasian corridor enables Kazakhstan to enjoy quite tangible political and economic benefits, it is clearly thwarting the spread of the national language, which has actually been reduced to just a means of household communication.

THE USE OF KAZAHK

According to Narbin Kenjagulova, a Kazakh writer, the Kazakh language served as the region's lingua franca as early as the 12th-15th centuries - a fact cited in the Kazakh Soviet Encyclopedia, Volume 7. The Kypchak (or Kazakh) language provided a communication bridge for travellers, merchants, and researchers and also served as an instrument of communication be-

tween the Arab countries and China, Russia and other countries to the south. As regards the development of the Kazakh language, a completely different situation has taken shape in modern Kazakhstan. It is the Russian language that has come to function as the means of interethnic communication for non-Russians in Kazakhstan, thus reducing the Kazakh language to home and informal communication. In fact, the Kazakh language dominates the countryside, while Russian prevails in urban areas.

Kazakh language use in mass media strikes an issue worthy of special discussion. The share of the "Kazakh-language media totals a scanty 5%", says one expert. Most analysts and researchers point to two groups of factors contributing to the situation as we see it today. Firstly, external factors. According to Professor L. A. Baideldinov, here we deal with the "recognition of Russian culture as an all-important factor" and, hence, the Russification of both Kazakh intellectuals and ethnic groups of Kazakhstan. For a long time the number of Kazakhs did not exceed 50% of the total population - a circumstance that made people give preference to Russian-language mass media. Currently, the Turkic-language component of

the population of Kazakhstan is on a steady rise. The 1999 census indicates that Kazakhs made up 53.4% against 40.1% in 1989. This notwithstanding, the Kazakh language is not used as a language of interethnic communication on a mass scale, while the popularity of the Kazakh-language media is still low.

The second group includes internal factors - those characterizing Kazakh-language mass media themselves. Studies (carried out by the sociologist S. Ismailova in 2001) on the role of the Kazakh-language print media in the course of social reforms indicated that "Kazakh-language newspapers failed to occupy a worthy place in Kazakhstan's print media market." Yet, the recent sampling of expert opinion purposed to determine the most popular political newspapers has found out that the foremost position belonged to *Zhas Alash*, a Kazakh-language newspaper. The 2nd through the 8th positions were held by Russian-language newspapers, which included *Novoye Pokolenie*, *Express-K*, *Panorama*, etc. The 9th place and the other lower-ranking positions were occupied by Kazakh-language newspapers (*Egemen Kazakhstan*, *Altyn Orda*, *Jetisuu*, etc.). Commenting on the line-up just described, S. Ismailova pointed out that the leading position of *Zhas Alash* newspaper was an exception, rather than a rule, for the Kazakh-language print media.

While there may exist a whole array of impediments to the devel-

opment of Kazakh-language mass media, the issues of prime importance include: (a) inadequate financing (as Kazakh-language newspapers have the State as their only sponsor); (b) a lack of appeal for advertisers who normally prefer to turn to the services of Russian-language mass media commanding a wider audience; and (c) relatively small circulations (averaging 10,000-25,000 copies). Again, *Zhas Alash* newspaper with a circulation of 71,117 copies is an exception. Perhaps, Kazakh-language journalists should give special attention to ensuring the high quality of reporting. The same report by S. Ismailova says that both experts and readers agreed that “the style of Russian-language journalists is more accurate, concise and clear, and they choose more important topics while the Kazakh-language media is frequently second to its Russian peers when it comes to delivering a clearly formulated and concrete assessment of the matter in point.”

Another problem is that readers cannot always understand Kazakh-language publications. Moreover, the very style of a publication may fuel latent conflicts growing into open confrontations, say experts. Thus, while a phrase expressed in Russian may sound quite neutral leaving room for subsequent discussion, the same phrase put in the Kazakh language may exasperate a reader because it may acquire a more aggressive message.

DESERVING STATE HELP?

Some researchers conclude that Kazakh-language mass media alone will hardly cope with the situation, unless supported by the State. The more so as the progress of Kazakh-language mass media

is, in fact, very closely related to the need for preserving and promoting the Kazakh language. President Nursultan Nazarbaev is known as an ardent champion of the Kazakh language. Addressing the 1st Congress of Journalists, President Nazarbaev said that the Government should place state orders specially intended to produce Kazakh-language television programs. This would come as “an effective economic lever encouraging the development of Kazakhstani mass media”, said N. Nazarbaev. He also pointed out that no State-sponsored action would produce any tangible result unless there is dedication and competence on the part of the journalists themselves. “We cannot help but pay tribute to *Egemen Kazakhstan* newspaper which managed to increase its circulation by 27,000 copies over just a year. It is mass media of this sort that we should give our assistance to”, said President Nazarbaev.

According to reporter Janibek Suleev, after independence Kazakh-language mass media failed to win its traditional audience, much less to stir up interest in other ethnic groups. When considered from this angle, Kazakh-language mass media can be rightfully identified as a secondary element, which is merely an ethnic and cultural part of the everyday life of the Kazakh-language community. As for the Russian-language media, it remains lord and master in the media market of Kazakhstan.

MISUSE OF MEDIA LAWS

The amended version of the Law “On Mass Media in the Republic of Kazakhstan” has, in fact, assumed the character of a punitive instrument aimed to impose a wider application of the

Kazakh language in the national media industry. One of the amendments reads that “effective January 1, 2002, the air time appropriated for retransmission of foreign TV and radio broadcasts must not exceed 50% of the total air time. Starting January 1, 2003, this air time ration for the foreign mass media will make up 20% of the total TV and radio broadcasts duration” (Article 14, Clause 3-1).

The first series of editorial office inspections started on January 31, 2002 when Mr. A. Karagoyshin, Chief of the Information and Public Concord Department for Western Kazakhstan province (IPCDWKP) informed the administration of the *Talap* company that the *Talap* radio station was to be inspected for compliance with the Law “On the means of mass media in the Republic of Kazakhstan” and the Law “On languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan”. The inspection revealed that the *Talap* radio station had neither broadcast registration log nor records of the station’s productions supposed to be kept for a year. In addition, the auditors found out that the *Talap* radio station failed to observe the 50%-limit reserved for Kazakh-language programs by the Language Law.

Moreover, the inspecting commission was quick to estimate – without the log or broadcast records to build on – the weekly length of *Talap*-produced Kazakh-language programs at 27% of the station’s total air time. It remains unclear whence this figure was derived. Even the municipal court that was supposed to consider the audit’s findings gave no intelligible answer as to how the above figure had been arrived at. This notwithstanding, the judge brushed

off the statement that the radio station's editor-in-chief made to claim that the share of Kazakh-language broadcasts in the total air time of the *Talap* station was 40% and arbitrarily decided that this figure was just 27%. The court found the *Talap* station director guilty of the transgression and fined her 8,000 Kazakh tenge (an equivalent of around US \$52).

CHOOSING A LANGUAGE

The figure of 40% that was mentioned by *Talap's* editor-in-chief at the court hearing is also rather controversial though. The Kazakh legislation provides no clear clue as to which type of broadcasts should be considered as being Kazakh-language and which broadcasts are to stay beyond this category. This leads to disagreement between the parties involved as to which principle to apply in each particular case. Thus, the inspectors insist that a Kazakh-language song announced by a Kazakh-speaking DJ should be identified as a Kazakh-language

broadcast, while the same song announced by a Russian-speaking DJ should not.

There are numerous questions as to how television and radio stations are expected to apply the state language in their broadcasts. Besides, it is unclear what time of day (or night) must be apportioned for Kazakh-language broadcasts so that the controlling agencies are fully satisfied and we do not have to face recurrence of an odd situation where the judge of the Bostandyk Precinct Court (Almaty), while hearing a case against the *KTK* television channel (a case similar to *Talap's*), charged the administration of this TV channel that it would slot Kazakh-language programs into a "non-watchable time".

Although legal language does not contain such terms, you can never be sure that yet another electronic media outlet will never be prosecuted on similar charges. Any controller is free to come to any TV or radio station and ask "Why do your Kazakh-language

broadcasts go on the air in the daytime, instead of at night?" (or vice versa). The inspector's visit may well be followed by the editor-in-chief being served with a summons to appear before a court and the trouble is that the score of such occurrences starts to increase on the national scale.

According to L. A. Baideldinov, the language domain is akin to "social spontaneity that defies speedy and sweeping reformation through legal regulation". Considering the current situation in Kazakhstan, it is apparent that any attempt to apply the techniques of a shock-styled legal therapy to such a delicate sphere as the use and development of the Kazakh language is fraught with adverse effects. That is why experts increasingly highlight the need for a comprehensive and well-balanced national program that would serve the purpose of expanding and consolidating the functional areas of the Kazakh language, including in national mass media.