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# ELECTRONIC MEDIA LICENSING IN KYRGYZSTAN

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**The State Communication Agency (SCA) experts believe that Kyrgyzstan's telecommunication market has stabilized.**

The electronic media licensing with the National Communication Agency (NCA), beginning 1998, had played a significant role in that process. Recently, NCA was renamed State Communication Agency (SCA). As per the law, every citizen in Kyrgyzstan is entitled to have a radio or TV company registered by the Ministry of Justice. Upon submission of the appropriate documents to SCA, he will be issued with a broadcasting license and may begin to operate. However, the number of operating radio and TV companies is almost the same now as it was in 1998. At that time, there was talk in TV circles that Bishkek's advertisement market was insufficient and, as the citizens' living standards were very low, it could not provide for many stations. Nevertheless, there were many willing to invest in electronic media despite everyone's understanding that such an investment involved big money. So, what prevented the number of such stations from being increased? Indeed, it was on account of the economic crisis and the uncertain tomorrow. New people, whose only wish is to earn money, have begun to join the TV business, but this is impossible given the fully-destroyed economy and the low purchasing capacity of the people, and, therefore, almost a lack of advertisements.

## **THE USE OF NATIONAL LANGUAGE**

Also, different bureaucratic obstacles had been erected by the then National Communication Agency headed by Orozabek Kayikov. It is difficult to say now why NCA has undertaken other responsibilities. In signing a licensing agreement, it began demanding that 10 to 20 percent of the station's total broadcasting time be in the national language, i.e. Kyrgyz. How can this be done by a station engaged in retransmitting a Russian channel? It is clearly impossible but, nevertheless, station directors had to insert this point, as if voluntarily, into any agreement. The stations' interests are clear: to begin operating as soon as possible - but why did NCA need this? There are many answer versions to this question. One is that, in case a station began to broadcast something incorrect, this point could be used to disconnect it from the air.

## **MEANS OF PRESSURE**

At any time an inspector may visit a station and make technical measurements - but, he may not come! It has been observed that inspectors most often visit a station if it has aired sensitive comments in respect of a certain person. Kyrgyzstan's journalists still remember the last year scandal that emerged when the NCA's Osh office workers tried to stop *Osh TV* station broadcasting. The NCA workers were led by the fact that the company's license for broadcasting and using the meter broadcasting frequency had expired. According to the commentary by the local newspapers *Vecherny Bishkek* and *Delo No...* the NCA's aspiration to

close the company's transmitter is politically motivated and relates to the contents of *Osh TV* broadcasts and the fact of the Uzbek language being one of the broadcasting languages. The conflict has not ended so far.

## **NEW POLICY**

The SCA management changes had no impact on the license agreement contents. Andreï Titov, the manager of a private cellular communication company, has become the new director. About ten radio and TV stations have been licensed over this period. However none of them have complained of any obstacles to them put by the SCA. According to Andrey Titov the SCA specialists are only concerned with technical parameters. They are not concerned with the stations' broadcasting language and contents. The SCA has kept to this rule so far. Virtually none of the stations had any claims concerning the SCA operation during the last 12 months although these saw parliamentary and presidential elections. The above-mentioned company *Osh TV* was the only exclusion. There are no licensing-related issues now in Kyrgyzstan, believe managers of many Kyrgyz stations. Currently new bills On Television and Broadcasting are being drafted. One of the bills provides that a national commission on television and broadcasting should be established to define the republic's e-media development, including licensing. It depends on the bill drafters and the State's information security policy if the licensing function will be handed from the governmental body – the SCA – to a non-governmental organization.