
THE MONTH IN REVIEW – APRIL 2001

KYRGYZSTAN

KYRGYZ PRESIDENT FOR ABOLISHING CRIMINAL PERSECUTION OF JOURNALISTS FOR LIBEL

Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev has developed and referred to Jogorku Kenesh (the republic's bicameral parliament) a bill to abolish criminal persecution of journalists for libel, the Head of the State's press secretary Ilyas Bekbolotov stated in Bishkek. According to him the presidential bill runs that such questions should be resolved "by administrative action." In addition Akayev has added a paragraph to the bill providing that plaintiffs suing the media are bound to pay pledge equal to 5% of the sum claimed as compensation. Previously everyone in Kyrgyzstan could sue a journalist or an edition and claim enormous sums to compensate for moral or material damage. Recently two journalists were convicted in Kyrgyzstan for libel. Bekbolotov said, the President takes these measures in order to defend freedom of speech in Kyrgyzstan and to go on with democratic transformations. //ITAR-TASS agency, April 30, 2001.

CONVICTED JOURNALIST APPROACHES SUPREME COURT

Akyikat newspaper in the Jalal-Abad Province and its correspondent Mamasali Ibraimov have applied to Supreme Court claiming to reverse a judgement against him, Bakyt Orunbekov, the newspaper editor-in-chief, told Radio Azattyk correspondent on May 7. Last year the district court sentenced Ibraimov to two-year conditional imprisonment and the newspaper to 107,000 soms (about 1,200 USD) fine. Ibraimov had written several articles on corruption among the local judges and this was qualified as insult of the judges. The Jalal-Abad provincial court affirmed these verdicts this March. According to Orunbekov judge Toktosun Kasymbekov who was the plaintiff in this case also recently wrote a letter to Supreme Court asking to pardon the journalist. RFE/RL, May 7, 2001

RESPUBLICA EMPLOYS ALL JOURNALISTS FROM ASABA

Editor-in chief of the opposition newspaper *ResPublica* Zamira Sydykova on April 5 employed all journalists from the banned opposition newspaper *Asaba*, Sydykova has told Radio Azattyk correspondent. She has appointed former the *Asaba* editor-in-chief Mamat Sabyrov secretary-in-charge of *ResPublica's* Kyrgyz version. They will not be *ResPublica's* guests forever but they are going to create a new newspaper soon, Sabyrov told *Radio Azattyk* the same day. Kyrgyzstan's Court of Arbitration on December 27, last year, decided that *Asaba* must pay more than 1 million (about 21,000 USD) fine as coverage for 200,000 soms loan the newspaper obtained from Kyrgyz-Canadian Kumtor Operating Company. *Asaba* did not have such money and thus the Bishkek district court suspended its publication since March. After that *ResPublica* has produced four issues containing the *Asaba* journalists' materials under the title «*Asaba* on a visit to *ResPublica*». Starting April the *Asaba* journalists' materials have been published in *ResPublica's* Kyrgyz edition which, prior to this, mainly was a duplication of the Russian version.//RFE/RL

RALLY TO SUPPORT FREEDOM OF SPEECH IN KYRGYZSTAN

Several political parties, NGOs and *Asaba* workers held public rally to support freedom of press in Bishkek on April 13. About 500 participants demanded that the authorities should stop persecution of free-lance journalists and release the imprisoned opposition leaders. City authorities did not give the permission to hold the rally but they neither banned it officially. *Asaba* owner Melis Eshimkanov told *Azattyk* radio correspondent, on April 18 department chief Sultanaliev of the Pervomaisky district police station invited Omurbek Tekebayev (Ata-Meken party chairman and parliamentary Vice Speaker), Melis Eshimkanov (People's Party chairman and *Asaba* owner) and Emil Aliyev (Ar-Namys party deputy chairman) to inform them that they were accused of organising and participating in a non-sanctioned rally. They were presented accusations under articles 371 and 392 of Administrative Code and their cases were referred to the district court the same day. The oppositionists could be sentenced to fine equal to 50 minimum salaries (about 6,000 soms or 120 USD) or imprisonment up to 15 days.

JUSTICE MINISTRY STARTS RE-REGISTRATION OF PARTIES AND MEDIA

All political parties and the media are bound to undergo re-registration in Kyrgyzstan's Ministry of Justice before July 1 this year, the Ministry announced on April 10. The Ministry believes, as many of the parties and media have been founded long time ago, now some of them only exist on paper. The new law on political parties was adopted by the Kyrgyz parliament in June 1999. As of today more than 30 political parties and more than 300 mass media are registered. Jypar Jeksheyev, Kyrgyzstan Democratic Movement party leader, said Radio *Azattyk* correspondent that the Ministry's new action is intended to create additional obstacles for opposition parties' and media. Viktor Zapolsky, *Delo No...* weekly editor-in-chief, believes this to be a continuation to the power's recent actions against free press and opposition. The pro-governmental journalists back this new step of the Ministry of Justice. Internews workers and Journalists NGO members have approached the Ministry with an address concerning this decision. The text asks for an «appropriate explanation on the Ministry of Justice college's decision that prescribes all the media and political parties to undergo re-registration before July 1, 2001». It also underlines that «the Kyrgyz Republic's current laws do not provide non-publication of the media "for a long time" to be a ground for re-registration. Also in accordance with the Kyrgyz Republic's Media Law the non-compliance of "some individual and corporate media founders" with its provisions does not constitute a foundation for re-registering mass media».

DELO No... EDITOR-IN-CHIEF LOST CASE

On April 24 Bishkek's Pervomaisky district court ended the four-month-long legal proceeding to defend honour and dignity of Misir Ashirkulov, former National Security Minister and now Kyrgyzstan's Security Council Secretary who considered himself insulted by *Delo No...* publications. Judge Davletbayeva has partially satisfied the civil claim of the high-ranking official who claimed 1 million soms (about 20,000 USD) as moral damage indemnity from *Delo No...* editor-in-chief Viktor Zapolsky. The judge has passed her sentence to recover 50,000 soms (about 1,000 USD) from Zapolsky in favour of Ashirkulov.

COMMITTEE TO SUPPORT PROVINCIAL TV STATION COLLECTS SIGNATURES

Committee to support *Osh TV* station has begun to collect signatures to defend the station. The state frequencies commission has claimed that the station should change its broadcasting channel; however this will cost about 42,000 USD, according to *Osh TV* managers' calculations. The station lodged a protest against the Frequencies Commission's decision but Bishkek city court of arbitration refused its appeal. The country's higher court of arbitration plans to consider the station's application on May 15.

NEW RADIO STATION PRESENTED IN BATKEN

On April 12, a presentation of the new radio station *Radio Salam* took place in Batken, Internews-Kyrgyzstan has reported. *Radio Salam* has been established through joint efforts from UNESCO together with Foundation for International Tolerance and Internews association. It began broadcasting on March 16 on the FM 105 MHz frequency and is presently the only radio in Batken's area. The everyday 18-hour broadcasting that mainly contains music is intended mainly for young audience. News are broadcast every hour. The station staff have undergone training courses in Internews.

CENTRAL ASIA JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION TO BE CREATED

A working group was established to prepare the creation of Central Asia Journalists Association during the conference on Central Asian mass media issues held in Bishkek on April 20. The group includes Chinara Jakypova of Kyrgyzstan, Tatyana Deltsova of Kazakhstan, Shukhrat Babajanov of Uzbekistan, Lidiya Ismailova of Tajikistan and Andrey Aranbayev of Turkmenistan. The conference on Central Asian Mass Media under Cross-fire was held by Great Britain's Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) Bishkek office headed by Chinara Jakypova. The conference discussed the region's freedom of press issues and possible implications of the information security doctrines adopted in Central Asian countries. // RFE/RL, 20-04-2001

TAJIKISTAN

TV ANIS IN BLACKOUT DUE TO DEBTS

Anis TV station in the town of Kanibadam (Sogdian Province in northern Tajikistan) has stopped broadcasting since April 1, 2001. According to *Anis'* director, Kadyr Makhmudov, the TV Station was disconnected from the air on April 1 due to its 1,400 somoni (about 600 USD) debt to the provincial broadcasting centre (PBC). Makhmudov understands that *Anis* cannot cover the debt due to its own debtors who owe the station 2,400 somoni (1,021 USD). However, PBC feels this is the station's own problem and demands that the debt be settled immediately. So far, the Kanibadam population only watches the broadcasts of another local station 'Guli Bodom'.

TAJIKISTAN'S RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE JOURNALISTS CLUB PRESENTATION

On April 12, a presentation of Tajikistan's Club of Russian-language Journalists took place in Dushanbe. The Club was established in March 2001 under the aegis of Tajikistan's Union of Journalists at the request of the International Association of Russian-language Journalists (Baku, Azerbaijan). According to Khayot Davlyatov, Chairman of Tajikistan's Union of Journalists, the Club's intent is to increase the role of Russian-language journalists in the country's social life. Nasiba Gulyamova, editor of News Programmes Directorate of the Tajik Television, was elected President of the Club. As of today, some 25 journalists of Tajikistan's Russian-language press are members of the Club. The new organization continues to admit new members. (Inter-press-service news agency)