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## WOMAN'S VIEW ON WOMEN'S ISSUES

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*If they are numerous in the Kirgiz media, women do rarely have high position. This fact is particularly obvious outside the capital Bishkek, in the regional media.*

No one has ever counted how many Kyrgyzstani women are engaged in journalism. Probably such statistics have so far been of no interest. Yet, one can say that women journalists are rather numerous in the republic but also - from visual observations - that men are more numerous. This is especially obvious in the provincial media which are much fewer than those capital-based.

### WOMAN DO NOT SEEK EDITORSHIP...

Women journalists are mainly ordinary workers. Women who occupy 'in-chief' or 'deputy in-chief' positions are few and far between. It is men who command. Some of my feminine interlocutors believe this is how female discrimination manifests itself. However, I've never happened to meet women journalists strongly seeking to play the role of commander-in-chief. Yet, if any women are really willing to drudge in such a position, they can do so. Examples are Zamira Sydykova, editor-in-chief of *ResPublica*, and Svetlana Krasilnikova, *Delo No...* deputy editor-in-chief, who simultaneously generate ideas and turn them into relevant reality.

### ... IF MAN IS THE EDITOR

In the southern republic, for example in Osh, never has a woman directed any media, not counting small district papers. Neither were women even deputy editors in the provincial newspapers. *Ekho Osha*, a provincial newspaper in Russian, now has no women journalists. Vice versa, another provincial newspaper, *Osh Janyrygy*, published in Kyrgyz, has more women on its staff than men. They "solve all issues, work hard, find sponsors and make money". However, it has no women among its managers. "A new worker, a man, joined the staff and after a month the editor appointed him department chief", a lady journalist of the paper told me, requesting no mention of her name. "Isn't that discrimination? On the other hand, if a woman is appointed to direct, at least, a department, then intrigues and disputes begin immediately: why she, not me? Rumors start: she seems to be the editor's lover. That's why I think a man should direct the newspaper and its departments. Conflicts will be fewer. We women treat each other well when we're all equal. As soon as one of us is upgraded..."

### JOURNALISTS HAVE NO GENDER

Women working with different media do not focus on whether the work is going to be easier or more difficult for them or their men colleagues - they merely work. "I enjoy no privileges in being a woman", a newspaper lady with great experience told me. "I work on equal terms with the men and my salary is no less than theirs. A different matter is that I know I have a lot of things to do at home, all the things every woman is responsible for, and what we use as an argument in saying that a woman always has a harder time." Other feminine interlocutors said it was easier for a man to go on a business trip. However, it was

easier for a woman to get information: information is less seldom denied to her than to a man and, in general, she is better treated.

### **ISSUES CAN BE WOMEN'S AND...HUMAN**

In trying to find out the attitudes of my colleagues towards the so-called 'women's issues' in general and towards the way they are reflected in the media, I heard the most various, diverse and opposing viewpoints related to the topic. I spoke with the head of Bishkek's Press Club and the women journalists of newspapers *Asaba*, *Delo No...*, *Vecherni Bishkek*, *Prigovor*, *Oosh Sadosi*, *Vecherni Osh* and magazines *Continent* and *Osh*. First, they all tried to examine why women's issues are put into a separate category as though outside all human issues; we have no 'men's issues.' However, the deeper we went into our reflections, the less clear they became. Even phrases like these appeared: these are all trends from abroad; the so-called gender policy idea has been thrown to us and we've adopted it habitually without understanding it. Then an idea emerged from our disputes: women's issues are brought to the forefront because they are the most important and it is on account of them that the remaining issues can be solved. Also, the gender policy has always existed in our country, meaning the Soviet Union as well, although it used to be called in a different way: equal rights for men and women. How it was exercised is a different matter.

### **AN "OCCASIONAL" THEME FOR THE MEDIA?**

Now, the women theme is rather broadly covered in the media. However, few media are paying regular and special attention. "In our newspaper, this theme appears from time to time", said Cholpon Orozobekova of *Asaba*. "It seems to me that only those who write about women work for some women-related project, who work off the grant." The women theme is always present in the *Delo No...* newspaper. Most often, the readers see it as terrible, sad and unsightly. "Prostitution, selling their children, crimes - aren't these women's issues?", believes Nataliya Domogalskaya of this newspaper. "And violence against women? Not only physical. There is a theme that is never touched upon: violence among women, i.e. that of a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law." "I've had enough of the women theme", admits Salima Sharipova, *Osh* magazine editor-in-chief. "It has become speculative. It enjoyed peak interest in 1995-97 and now it is subsiding. I don't see any in-depth analytical materials and I've had enough of stories just about women."

### **WOMEN THEME AND THE AUTHORITIES**

Last year, almost every issue of *Vecherni Osh* newspaper contained a page entitled *Sovremennitsa* (contemporary women). Deputy editor, Mayram Chinalieva, was in charge of it. At the end of the year she was outstanding in the competition the Osh provincial administration holds annually for journalists. The former governor, who is now the republic's Finance Minister, had a kind feeling towards women's NGOs, women-directors and journalists. The new governor has not shown this 'weakness' thus far. So the southern newspapers have turned away from the women theme and refer back to it only from time to time.

### **READING ABOUT WOMEN ALONE IS DULL**

Do our women journalists love reading about women's issues? Yes, they enjoy leafing through fashion magazines, *Rabotnitsa*, *Krestyanka* and other 'purely women's magazines. However, they prefer reading the editions containing 'everything about everything', not just about women as "this is dull". Presumably,

that is why the *Sovremennitsa* magazine published by the well-known poetess, Svetlana Suslova, has not become popular among women. Also, the 'purely women's newspapers' published from time to time by women entrepreneurs have not achieved their hoped-for readerships.

### **WOMEN OF ALL THE MEDIA UNITE?**

WIMCA (Women in the Media of Central Asia) NGO exists in the republic since 1995. Judging by their reports, this organization associates "about 600 women journalists" of the Central Asian republics and its national coordinators "work with the local journalists, organize seminars, conferences, workshops and hold debating club meetings on different urgent themes". I've failed to communicate with women journalists in our republic who could tell me anything about WIMCA; many of them have never heard this name. The organization has its coordinator in Osh, but nobody knows who she coordinates and what she is doing. The northern and southern women journalists answered differently to the question of whether they would like to associate. "I don't mind if I associate if the association is headed by some honest and clever woman," said an Osh lady. "Why associate? Well I don't know. For moral support maybe..."

### **MEN'S AND WOMEN'S JOURNALISM**

"Usually associating women under one flag results in nothing productive", said a capital-based woman journalist. "I can judge by our women's political parties. First everything goes well, but soon after a hassle for leadership begins and everything goes to pieces. Generally speaking, I see no reason in dividing parties into men's and women's." Nevertheless, journalists do divide - however, not in terms of gender but in terms of professional level. As is known, there is good journalism and bad journalism. When here they begin dividing journalism into bad and good, women's journalism means bad journalism.