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## INCREASING PRESSURE ON THE MEDIA IN SOUTHERN KIRGIZSTAN

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**In the course of a few months, the situation in which mass media found itself in the south of Kyrgyzstan, began to decline due to the difficult financial position and a number of trials.**

Today, one can hardly say that mass media in the south of Kyrgyzstan is able to maintain an independently-balanced position. The situation has developed because proceeds from advertising and circulation sales cannot cover even half of newspaper publication costs. Lack of money forced mass media to support those who wished to take advantage of the press to settle their own and, as a rule, political problems. However, it is not the lack of money only that interferes with the functioning of newspapers and TV broadcasting companies. Just in May and June of this year, there were four events related to mass media in the south of Kyrgyzstan. At the end of June, in Osh, security service agents effected a search in the newspaper *Djany Muun* editorial office. The reason of their visit was due to an article about corruption published in one of the newspaper's issues; they found a manuscript copy of the article and confiscated it. The newspaper's management affirmed that the search was conducted without any warrant. At the end of May, Mr. Samagan Orozaliev, a part-time *Zamana* correspondent, was arrested in Jalal-Abad. He was charged of racket. The journalist was preparing a broadcasting cycle entitled "Who are you, deputy?". Ergesh Torobaev, deputy of parliament and head of the regional electric systems enterprise, engineered an accusation of bribery. Soon after, the journalist was arrested. Four more persons applied to the law-enforcement bodies with complaints of racket on the part of Orozaliev. All of them were high rank officials. According to the Prosecutor's office employees, they refused to explain why they had not filed their own claims. The script of what happened very much resembled the circumstances of the case of the Uzbek journalist Madjid Abduraimov who is, at the moment, being tried in the Termez municipal court, in the south of Uzbekistan.

### FIGHTING AGAINST THE EVIDENCE

In June, a hearing of the case was held, based on the claim of the head of the journalism department of Jalal-Abad State University to the regional teachers' newspaper *Di*. The newspaper published an article regarding a teacher's harassment of a girl-student in one of the city cafes. The girl refused to have a drink with him, so the teacher splashed vodka on her. Her boy-friend took her side and, in a few minutes, a fight flared up. In the Court, the ill-starred scapegrace demanded an amount of 200'000 soms (about 4000 US) as compensation for the moral stigma caused by the newspaper and the girl-student. The Court dismissed the claim because too many witnesses confirmed the incorrectness of the teacher. Also in June, in Mailuu-Suu, the city TV broadcasting company KTM lost the possibility of broadcasting because it was deprived of the TV transmitter, and the bank blocked its account. The reason for such actions was "an initiative" of one of the local businessmen. He had proposed to the city management to organize the stable reception of TV signals of several Russian broadcasting companies, including KTR. As the city is situated in a canyon, this problem was rather urgent. However, he has done nothing, as he did not have any licenses in respect of activity in the field of TV broadcasting, nor had registered the mass media with the judicial authorities. All these cases, different in character, are

consolidated into one fact: there is a tendency of, so to say, "being not fearful" of mass media and journalists. Officials and law-enforcement employees came to an understanding that there were 'cracks' in the issue of freedom of speech protection. Asserting their private interests, they were ready to frame up a criminal case, even against a correspondent of the central press.

### **THE OBEDIENT PRINTING HOUSES**

To keep speaking about economic difficulties, then we should confirm that the position of newspapers is aggravated by a shortage of printing houses in the region. The printing house in Osh, a linotype, does not meet current technical requirements. Therefore, the majority of Osh newspapers are printed in a Jalal-Abad regional printing house that was privatized a year ago. In Jalal-Abad, the equipment is better. However, the cost of printing exceeds two-fold that of Bishkek, and the quality of printing leaves much to be desired. In addition, the Jalal-Abad printing house is the property of a republican-rank official. Soon after privatization, the printing house refused to print the report of the human rights organization "Right for all". So it is obvious that the existence of printed mass media depends on many factors. It is possible "to block oxygen" from them even without strong "militia" methods. It is enough to hint, or directly say, to printing house heads or owners not to print this or that newspaper; and if they refuse, then, under any excuse, can follow a discontinuation of delivery of paper. Finally, a printing house can be fined and closed for sanitary standards infringement. However, printing houses in the south are used to being quite obedient.

### **UNWRITTEN PROSCRIPTIONS vs. WRITTEN LAWS**

As to TV and Radio broadcasting in the region, the opening of new companies is rather questionable. In June, at a seminar in Jalal-Abad in the presence of local mass media representatives, a Deputy Editor of the republican governmental newspaper *Erkin-Too*, the Head of prime-minister press-service, and the Head of the morning KTR TV channel *Zamana* stated with one accord that, henceforth, nobody could receive the metric wave channel either for commercial or for private broadcasting. Also, no licenses would be given to private radio stations. Government officials have justified that for "security reasons". They gave only one reason for such a decision: "May be you are going to speak against the power?" The decimeter waves, however, still remain vacant, but for whom? Now in Jalal-Abad there is less than one percent of TV receivers who can receive signals in the decimeter range. If to speak about the laws and instructions, the officials will always find a way to drag out any business indefinitely. For example, the radio station *Kyrgyzstan obondoru* applied for the frequency for a one and a half-year period of time. Such an agonizing suspense and spending of money can only be afforded by very rich altruists. Of course there are laws, but there are also proscriptions, though not written, but, nevertheless, working well by a telephone-right principle.

### **PURPOSE: TO BRING UNDER CONTROL**

Thus, it is possible to speak about the gradual escalation of pressure, both on non-governmental and state mass media with the purpose of bringing them under total control of the existing powers, both in the center and in remote areas. Under pressure, there are state mass media as well. Journalist Orozaliev convicted of racket is an employee of the Kyrgyzstan State TV and Radio Company. At the end of the previous year, a trial against the regional state newspaper *Akyikat* was held initiated by the claim of one of the local judges. The newspaper was sentenced to a fine in the amount of 100 thousand soms (about 2000 US); as to the correspondent, he was imprisoned for two years. There is no reason to believe that all this occurs on account of orders from the upper crust. But, one can say for sure that all attacks on

mass media and journalists become possible as soon as local officials and oligarchs have understood that they may, with impunity, fight by all accessible methods. Journalists alone cannot withstand the pressure from the powers because of fear of losing a job is too deeply stuck in people. They frequently found themselves in captivity of patriarchal folk-laws: "How dare you write about a dear person from our clan in such a way?" There is no professional organization which would fight for their rights.