
PRIVATE TAJIK RADIO STATION AGAINST “IDEOLOGICAL INFLUENCE” OF UZBEKISTAN

By Nargis Zakirova, journalist, Khudjand

In Khudjand, North of Tajikistan, Radio *Tiroz*, the first private station broadcasting in the country aims at “protecting the information space” of its region from “ideological influence” of Uzbekistan.

The founder of Radio *Tiroz* is an advertising/producing company *Khurshed Production* belonging to a businessman, Mr. Khurshed Ulmasov. How has the radio station obtained a broadcasting licence in Khudjand whilst, at the same time, no such licences have been issued in Dushanbe - the capital city? Mr. Khurshed Ulmasov sees the answer as: "the basic purpose of the new broadcasting station foundation is to protect the information space of Northern Tajikistan against the ideological influence of neighbouring countries." It is quite clear that the words "neighbouring countries" mean Uzbekistan. "The formula 'information space protection' is rather magic," said a representative of the regional administration, who wished to remain unknown. "It helped to have the radio station registered." The significance of the formula is strengthened by the fact that, during the course of a recent public-opinion poll, it turned out that the majority of Northern Tajikistan's inhabitants were sure they were living in Uzbekistan. Tajikistan journalists have no doubt that in the North of the country it is much easier to obtain a broadcasting licence than in the capital. Mrs. Galina Nazarova, an expert, said that "since the Soviet times, the North of the country always has had precedence over the South. The fact that the broadcasting station was registered in Khudjand is no surprise because the authorities in the capital are afraid of any competition with the governmental mass media. During the course of three years, the Dushanbe *Azia-Plus* agency could not have its broadcasting station registered although, according to the agency director, Umed Babakhanov, the authorities had no legal reasons to refuse a licence. However, there is one more detail. According to unverified information, one of the local administration high-rank employees patronizes the new broadcasting station. "Without his help, we would never have obtained the licence," said a *Tiroz* employee.

"INFORMATION SPACE PROTECTION"

Though the broadcasting station founder, Mr. Ulmasov, is sure that Radio *Tiroz* is successfully facing up to the problem of information space protection, the media professionals have some doubts about this. The first vice-president of the Union of Tajikistan Journalists, Mr. Bobodjon Ikromov, sees no real steps in that direction so far. "Despite the fact that the new radio has been functioning for six months," says Mr. Ikromov, "I, as a radio listener, still cannot understand its motives." Also, according to Mr. Ikromov, Radio *Tiroz* frequently gives one-sided information and almost never uses news published by independent mass media. Both the geographical and characteristic inputs are rather insularly-oriented. "All this implies a low professional level of the journalists," commented Ikromov. "Uzbek music is very popular in the North of Tajikistan," said Mrs. Galina Nazarova. "But, Radio *Tiroz* broadcasts only Tadjik melodies or Russian pop songs. Obviously, this is what is considered to be the means of information space protection." Really, there are few information broadcasts on the radio. They are

prepared by a team of creative young men who use information mainly taken from the Internet. Thirty-two persons working at the radio still consider themselves amateurs. According to Mr. Ulmasov, in Tajikistan there is no TV and radio school; therefore, the *Tiroz* workers have created a school themselves, taking the Russian TV and radio channels as examples. Mr. Ulmasov clearly sees the mistakes of his team, but hopes that very soon he will manage to sort matters out.

LISTENERS LIKE THIS

The Director of the information-analytical agency, *Varorud* - one of the best Tajik journalists - Mr. Ilkhom Djamolien, dislikes the fact that *Tiroz* practically does not spread information, but rather repeats news published in the governmental mass media or distributed via the Internet. "If Radio *Tiroz* continues to work like that, it cannot be considered as a truly independent mass media," said Djamolien. Despite the criticism on the part of professionals, *Tiroz* listeners seem to like the radio. On account of its musical and entertaining broadcasts, the station at once acquired many listeners, basically a young audience. Radio *Tiroz* is heard in many institutions, in public transport and in the street. Many say that the reason of its popularity is due to the novelty that *Tiroz* brought to its listeners. An unusual presentation of materials, and abundance of modern music, distinguish *Tiroz* from state radio broadcasting. Radio *Tiroz* broadcasts daily for 12 hours reaching up to 150 kilometres around the centre of Khudjand. A public-opinion poll completed by the *Tiroz* team has shown that the number of its listeners is approximately 1.5 million.