

Newspapers of Tajikistan Are Not Ready to Write the Modern History Yet

By Nargis Zakirova, Tajikistan

Despite the desire of many journalists to become a fourth power, the Tajik media is far from professionally reflecting the reality and presenting the life of the people. Events in both, the Russian and Tajik language media are covered superficially, without any hint of analysis. This approach rends the audience critical.

The introduction of the new national currency – Somoni – became the main event in the public life of Tajikistan. Upon the decree of the President of Tadjik Republic, the new currency entered the circulation on November 30, 2000.

The decree was signed on November 26, the day of publication of all the media in Tajikistan, which comes out only once a week. Because of this coincidence, papers did not have much information on the event. But they compensated this absence a week later, dedicating a whole page or two to the introduction of the national currency.

Most of the articles in the official media were simply praising this step of the government. The official Jumhuriyat allocated two pages to the event publishing the Decree of the President, Resolution of the Government and several articles under the titles: “The New Currency as a Reflection of the National Dream” by Shukhrat, and “Towards Enriching the National Budget” by Ziedullaev. None of them analyzed or explained how can the new currency enrich the budget when everyone knows, that the budget runs into a deficit. One page was filled with an official information on the social-economic situation of Tajikistan in the past nine months of the year 2000.

The organ of the parliament, Sadoi Mardum, also published the decree and the resolution, but presented neither comments nor analysis of these documents.

Saidkasim Kiyampur, a well known Tajik journalist and the head of the bureau of Radio Liberty in Tajikistan commented on this coverage: “Review of these two official publications shows that an important economic topic which is of vital concern for everyone, has not been properly studied. There should have been interviews with respective officials, like the Deputy Chairman of the National Bank Sharif Rahimov. It was necessary to determine what would interest the readers most: why the currency is introduced now and not a year ago, which would have been more logical given the fact, that back then Tajikistan was celebrating the 1100th anniversary of the Somonid State. There are no comments concerning the advantages or disadvantages of the new currency for the economy. No one tells how much it cost to print the bank notes. I think that these questions should have been discussed by the editors.”

The Russian language media approached the topic differently and did not limit itself to praising the authorities and wishing well to the currency itself.

In its November 3 issue, Vecherniy Dushanbe wrote: “ October 26, 2000 opened a new page in the modern history of the Tajik people.” Presenting the main articles of the Decree and the Resolution, the paper tries to address possible worries of population by informing, that the current currency-Tajik Ruble will be in circulation together with the new Somoni up

until the 1st of April, 2001. It also presents a table with the prices of the main products calculated in the old and new currencies. The same page carries a big headline - “The National Currency is a National Treasure, Heritage and Honor,” and features an article by A. Artemov under the title “How it Happened.” In the article, two participants of the creation of the national currency, Deputy Chairman of the National Bank Sharif Rahimov and Deputy Finance Minister Sharif Mulloev tell how, where, why and when the currency was created. Their story is not followed by any comments or analysis.

A week later, on November 10, Vecherniy Dushambe published an opinion poll on the new currency, conducted among the Dushanbe residents of different social layers. High ranking officials had welcomed the event. More vulnerable groups were disappointed. The unemployed Lidia Negmatova was quoted saying “...instead of rising prices and changing the currency they would better increase salaries. I won’t live better with the new currency! The prices on the market have gone up...”

“Topic # 1: New Currency-Somoni-is Introduced in the Country” wrote Asia Plus. The paper also conducted a survey among the high ranking officials and asked for the opinions of representatives of international financial institutions. In an article entitled “The Bad Grin of the Good Game” Zufar Abdullaev, the editor of Asia Plus wrote: “...At any case the government has undertaken a difficult task of balancing the national currency. But administrative measures or IMF infusions won’t and shouldn’t help. The economy must be reformed, the privatization finalized, the small and medium businesses supported in reality...and all these must be done in a very short time to avoid Somoni sharing the fate of the Ruble.”

The author further criticizes the Decree and asks why didn’t the government announce about the introduction of the currency 2-3 months earlier, like it was done in Russia? It is clear that Somoni were not printed in couple of nights, so the government could have avoided the urgent announcements, confusion among the people and speculation on the market, concludes the author.

The same paper published another article-“The Tajik Ruble is Dead, Long Live Somoni” written by Lidiya Isamova. A simple overview of articles in the Russian language media of Tajikistan shows, that they did their best to present a variety of opinions on the topic.

Sayefi Mizrob, a well-known journalist in Tajikistan, thinks that “...the coverage of the most important event of the country could have been more neutral and professional. Many materials published in local media in both, Tadjik and Russian languages, do not reflect any critical sides of the event and praise it instead. This approach does not meet the standards of the professional journalism.”