

I. Summary

The weakness of the media in Tajikistan is due to many different reasons, at the same time structural and linked to the general political, social and economic circumstances in the country: consequences of the civil war, loss of competent journalists (killed or exiled), high costs of production (price of paper for newspaper amounting sometimes to 30% of the expenses, usual high costs of TV production), self-censorship, pressure exerted on journalists and editors by politicians not used to relatively free press, ruined economy. The fact that there is presently no daily newspaper in the country speaks for itself: for economic reasons it is not likely that a daily could start up soon and become sustainable in the long run. The general bad situation of the media and journalism is at the same time appalling and perfectly understandable: no-one would probably consider that any important institution in the country (the government, the state, the judicial system, civil society) is functioning in a comprehensive way. To function, the media requires relative understanding and acceptance of its role. Despite their contradictions and the need for a revision, the existing Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan, laws, and legal media regulations can provide a basis for the development of a reasonably pluralistic and free media system. But, the absence of the functioning of the judicial system makes it impossible at present to have a basis to understand and, in the absence of jurisprudence, what, for example, does "libel" mean in Tajikistan today. The same absence of clarity concerning the conditions to obtain a TV or radio license and the fear of editors to contest any refusal in Court also make it impossible to work out a basis for a coherent policy between state- and privately- owned electronic media (with the hope to turn the former into a public service).

Like the Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan and the democratic principles contained therein, the laws on the media in the country have no deep roots, neither among the majority of media actors and politicians, nor in the society. The state itself and its functioning are still marked by their very origin: a product of the cessation of hostilities, with a Peace Agreement signed in 1997 largely based on Western inspired political models, which cannot have been assimilated in such a short time by a society which only left the Soviet Union to enter into a brutal civil war in 1992. The general weakness of the Tajik media and the fear of the journalists can only be reinforced by the fact that the political leadership, which signed and committed itself to freedom of speech and freedom of the media, is the same leadership clearly accused to have been, just a few years ago, directly involved in numerous murders of journalists (see section on "Killing of journalists").

Bringing a significant change in the Tajik media field, at a large scale and in the short run, appears almost impossible. Time is needed, not only to bring legal or technical changes to the media structure, but to have the change of mentality necessary to favour a more general understanding of the role of the media. In that regard, a lot of useful initiatives can immediately be taken, giving opportunities to some journalists to experience in reality all fundamental elements of the usual functioning of the media in a reasonably open society. The normal way to answer the huge need for training of journalists mainly lies in organizing seminars, withdrawing participants from their redaction and everyday practice, and bringing them to training sessions, without guarantees that they will be in a position to change their practice once they are back at work. To take into more precise consideration the very concrete circumstances that the journalists work in, trainers should be brought into the redaction and work there on an everyday basis. Theory can only be useful when completed by practice. To possibly encourage or participate towards a change of perception by editors, journalists and politicians, all projects should integrate this dimension: not only to train journalists, but to encourage discussions on the media role among all interested people -media professionals, politicians, judges in particular- based on concrete examples and practice.