

National Endowment for Democracy expresses indignation regarding the murder of Kyrgyz journalist

National Endowment for Democracy expressed indignation regarding the murder of our close friend, Alisher Saipov, editor of the Uzbek-language newspaper Siyosat. The journalist was assassinated on 24 October, after a long discrediting campaign against him. This defamation is still continuing. We express our deepest condolences to Alisher's family and colleagues.

Alisher Saipov was one of the best journalists in Central Asia. Being the editor of newspaper Siyosat, which NED supported with pride, he always spoke freely appealing to the audience at large, to those who had no access to independent media. Alisher wrote about violations of human rights, revealing manipulations of the authorities during the presidential elections, and openly telling truly stories about the Uzbek special services clandestinely acting in Kyrgyzstan. Alisher's friends and colleagues felt anxious about his safety. This fear was caused by constant attacks against the journalist on Uzbek web sites. We also know that his office was under surveillance.

Shortly after the murder, on 30-th October, the Kyrgyz Interior Ministry issued a press release accusing Saipov of affiliation with Islamic extremist organizations and defaming his professional reputation. This is nothing but a clumsy attempt to take people's attention off the problems described by Alisher in his publications, including threats from those who disliked his articles. Alisher's professionalism was quite evident. He was a clever, smart and talented young man.

We can say the same about other journalists working for Siyosat. After the murder of Saipov, all the newspaper computers, documents and property had been arrested by the police. The law enforcement officers keep interrogating the newspaper staff.

Kyrgyzstan desires to become an island of liberty in Central Asia. If the government really wishes to create a positive image of the country, it should stop the defaming campaign against Saipov, and adequately protect all independent Kyrgyz journalists. The authorities should conduct an impartial investigation of the murder of Alisher Saipov.