

Freedom of Speech in Tajikistan January 2010

This report is based upon messages from the Tajik media and the NANSMIT monitoring network.

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In January 2010 the NANSMIT Monitoring Service received 26 reports. Sixteen of them describe the factual situation in the media in the light of socio-legal and political environment; two reports describe direct violations of rights of media professionals; and eight reports describe conflicts and accusations against the media and journalists.

I. PECULIARITIES OF POLITICAL, SOCIAL, ADMINISTRATIVE AND LEGAL CLIMATE IN THE COUNTRY DEFINING THE FACTUAL SITUATION IN THE MEDIA

1. Public speeches and statements of superior officials defining the factual situation in the mass media

13 January
Lutfullo Davlatov, director of TV Safina, Dushanbe

“TV Safina is ready to cooperate with all political parties and provide them with broadcasting time for election debates”, - Lutfullo Davlatov, director of TV Safina told the media at a press conference in Dushanbe. - “There are no impediments for political parties on our TV channel, and we are ready to consider any proposals from politicians,” - he added.

18 January
G. Afzalov, chairman of Khatlon province

Chairman of Khatlon province G. Afzalov stated that every official must hold press conferences according to preliminary designed schedules, and irresponsible officials will be punished for violation of such schedules. He gave relevant errands to his subordinates urging them to improve the situation.

2. Factual status of the media and the freedom of speech

6 January
Varorud weekly, Khujand, Sughd province

According to the Asia Plus news agency, the public-political newspaper Varorud is launching its original enclosure – “Russloe Slovo” (Russian Word).

Atakhon Ganiv, project coordinator told Asia Plus that the new edition will be covering the issues of Tajik-Russian cooperation, labor migration and other topical themes. Special attention will be paid to Russian language and literature.

Expenditures will be partially covered by a grant provided by the Russian World Foundation.

11 January
Sogdiiskaya Pravda, Khakikati Sughd, Sughd Khakikati, Khujand, Sughd province

The three newspapers belonging to the Sughd province authorities – Sogdiiskaya Pravda (1,950 copies), Khakikati Sughd (4,750 copies) and Sughd Khakikati (2 thousand copies) have changed their printing house. From now on, they will be published in a private printing house “Matbuoti Uroteppa”, 80 kilometers from the city of Khujand, the administrative center of Sughd province. The decision was made jointly by the editors of these newspapers upon commercial feasibility.

15 January
Tajik State TV, Dushanbe

Abdurakhmon Abdumanonov, first deputy chairman of the Tajik State Broadcasting Committee told the media that the Tajik State television is switching to digital broadcasting. On the initial stage, this broadcasting will be covering the territory of Dushanbe.

The Tajik government has adopted a digital broadcasting concept covering the period until 2015. The strategy is discussed and agreed upon with the line ministries. The Broadcasting Committee is ready to invest its own funds for the beginning, but the complete implementation of the strategy would require additional 15,5 million Somoni.

Ambumanonov stressed that the new strategy requires not only essential financial allocations, but also the strengthening of both technical and human potentials.

21 January
Ministry of Culture, Dushanbe

According to Mirzobadal Badalov, head of the printing media unit under the Ministry of Culture, two new dailies will be launched in 2010. In accordance with the new Information Policy Concept, one of the papers must be a daily published in Tajik language, and another one – in one of foreign languages, possibly, in Russian, English, Arabic or Persian.

Since the early 1990-s, there have not been any daily newspapers in Tajikistan.

21 January
Mirzoshohruxh Asrori, Minister of Culture, Dushanbe

Minister of Culture Mirzoshohruxh Asrori told the media at a press conference that the absence of daily newspapers in the country is caused by the reluctance of editors to work rather than by the inability of readers to buy newspapers.

According to the Ministry, 201 newspapers, 98 magazines, 44 publishing firms, 148 printing houses and 7 news agencies are registered in Tajikistan.

21 January
Khatlon province media

According to the Khatlon province officials, since the beginning of 2009, the media have published 196 critical and analytical materials covering developments in Khatlon. Officials have publicly responded to 113 of them. The media have provided 124 feedbacks.

3. Journalists protecting their civil and professional rights

11 January
The Union of Independent Outlets, Dushanbe

Saimuddin Dustov, editor of the Nikoh newspaper is elected chairman of the newly established Union of Independent Outlets.

Speaking at a press conference in Dushanbe, Dustov told that three newspapers decided to join the Union – Farazh, SSSR and Nikokh, and signed a special agreement. The purpose of the Union is to strengthen solidarity among journalists.

14 January
The Tajik Media Council, Dushanbe

On 14 January 2010, the Ministry of Justice registered the Media Council of the Republic of Tajikistan.

Ibrohim Usmanov, chairman of the Media Council told NANSMIT that the purpose of the new public organization is support to the freedom of speech and strengthening of the international ethical media standards.

The Council was founded on 30 October 2009 at a foundation conference attended by journalists from all regions of Tajikistan.

28 January
All media, Dushanbe

On 29-30 January, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) held a training “Protection of human rights and legal education through the media in Central Asia” financed by the European Union.

29 January
All media, Dushanbe

On 28 January, on the eve of the parliamentary elections in Tajikistan, journalists from more than 20 newspapers, radio and TV companies took part in a seminar “The media and elections” held in Dushanbe.

The seminar was conducted by the International Foundation of Election Systems (IFES) under support of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Tajik Central Election Committee under the government.

According to Michael Ghetto, head of the IFES office in Dushanbe, the seminar is targeted to mobilization of the media for objective coverage of the election processes in the country.

II. VIOLATION OF RIGHTS IN THE MEDIA

1. Impediments to professional activities

20 January
Asia Plus, Dushanbe

On 18 January, correspondent of the Asia Plus weekly Bakhtior Valiev had a long telephone conversation with colonel Munira Nazarieva of the Tajik Emergency Committee.

The conversation was based on the article titled “Three days under the avalanche”. It contained critical remarks addressed to the Committee made by one of the victims of an avalanche on the road Dushanbe – Khujand, on 20 December 2009.

The correspondent was recommended to check information received from witnesses of accidents and to receive comments at the Emergency Committee for a more objective coverage of events.

6 January
Varorud newspaper, Khujand, Sughd province

Unknown individuals position themselves as correspondents of the Varorud weekly, showing fake identification cards. The impostors discredit the newspaper impeding the work of the real correspondents.

In order to resolve the problem, the Varorud management has given its correspondent new ID cards. Along with that, Varorud approached heads of organizations and enterprises with a request not to provide any information to its correspondents unless they present a real ID or an official letter-request from the editing board.

III. CONFLICTS. VIOLATIONS INCRIMINATED TO THE MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS

1. Accusation of libel

13 January
Ozodagon weekly, Dushanbe

Head of the Traffic Police under the Tajik Interior Ministry, colonel M. Saidov accused the author of an article published in Ozodagon weekly (#1, 13.01.2010) of libel.

Saidov indicates in his response (Ozodagon, #2, 13.01.2010) that the author is confusing the authorities describing non-existing relations between a commercial company and the Traffic Police.

2. Illegal broadcasting (violation of licensing procedures)

15 January
Dushanbe

First deputy chairman of the Tajik Broadcasting Committee Abdurakhmon Abdumanonov told the media on 15 January at a press conference in Dushanbe that the Russian ORT television is functioning illegally in Tajikistan.

Abdumanonov stressed that on the basis of the existing agreement on the status of the 201-st Russian Motorized Division, the latter is allowed to rebroadcast ORT only within its territory. "The broadcasting frequency belongs to the private SMT channel.

However, the official noted that this issue is beyond the competence of his agency; it rather refers to the Ministry of Transport and Communications. The latter has set up a commission to resolve the conflict.

3. Protection of honor, dignity and business reputation

7 January
Nigokh weekly, Dushanbe

Officials from the Khatlon province prosecutor's office requested the Nuri Zindagi newspaper to publish their response to the article titled "Papa, when will you become a prosecutor?" published in another newspaper - Nigokh (#36, 26.12.2009).

The officials complain that Nigokh refused to publish their feedback, and they turned to another periodical. Besides that, the officials say that the author of the article has a personal dislike to the prosecutor's office, and the article is written in an offensive manner.

7 January
Millat, Dushanbe

Deputy minister of the Tajik Agriculture Ministry Sh. Rakhimnazorov approached the editor of the Millat weekly with a request to provide them with the facts confirming corruption within his institution. In December 2009, Millat published an article titled "The Ministry of Agriculture is the most corrupt government agency".

Rakhimnazorov noted that on 7 December the Ministry held a press conference on the issues of cotton farming in the country. However, the newspaper published a material referring to a parliament session, where it was mentioned that the Ministry of Agriculture is rated the first in terms of corruption and misuse of the state budget funds.

The official reminded that according to the Constitution, only the judicial power has the right to pronounce a verdict to a government agency.

This report is based on compiled materials from the media and private information presented by correspondents of the NANSMIT Monitoring Network

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