

Uzbek Broadcasters Set To Self-Destruct

The headline says it all.

Uzbekistan's cabinet of ministers met on April 14 and sent out the word -- all the country's television and radio stations have to rig their facilities to be blown up.

Not the whole complex, however.

According to RFE/RL's Uzbek Service, Ozodlik, broadcast media has until May 14 to place "self-destructing devices" on transmitter apparatus so that, in the event of the station falling into hostile hands, all broadcasting can be cut immediately.

The Uzbek ministers know about the recent captures of broadcasting stations in eastern Ukraine by pro-Russian forces and this is perhaps the ministers' way of pre-empting similar events in Uzbekistan.

Only a small group of people would have access to the detonation device for an individual station, hopefully no one who easily gets disgusted with the quality of television or radio programming.

The National Security Service (SNB) is tasked with overseeing every step of this last resort in censorship.

As of when this article went to print, the SNB is also checking ventilation ducts in broadcast buildings and I think everyone sees where this is going...

Indeed, ventilation chutes, ducts and shafts leading toward studios are not permitted to be big enough for anyone to crawl through. Studios cannot be connected to other rooms either, such as a bathroom.

So it seems no studios can be seized in Uzbekistan.

No more live programming either, even news programs.

At least two policemen from the Interior Ministry must be part of every station's security force.

And before we wrap this up, other recent rules require journalists to submit all questions they intend to ask at a press conference, in advance for approval.

Also, no travel abroad without prior approval and in this, journalists join a growing number of professionals who are essentially trapped in Uzbekistan (Qishloq Ovozi will look at that list soon).

Additionally, Ozodlik colleagues said it has been standard practice for years now that everyone entering a broadcast station is checked, their documents checked, sometimes more than once.

There is a also list of topics and people, some of them historical, that are not to be mentioned and guests on programs are reminded of this list of taboo subjects continually from the time they enter the station grounds until the program they are on starts.

So, Central Asia's "Ukraine Fall Out" scorecard now includes; Uzbekistan putting explosives on station transmission equipment, Kazakhstan's new regulation on media during a state of emergency that essentially delays dissemination of news by up to 24 hours; and authorities in the Tajik capital Dushanbe ordering all old and spare tires taken to a dump 40 kilometers outside the city.

It will be interesting to see what's next.

-- Bruce Pannier with contributions from Shukrat Babajanov, Farruh Yusufiy, and Oktambek Karimov of RFE/RL's Uzbek Service

<http://www.rferl.org/content/qishloq-ovozi-uzbekistan-broadcasters-self-destruct/25361053.html>