



Research project:

Political extremism, terrorism and media in Central Asia

REPORT

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1 Political and economic situation in the region

1.1 Kyrgyzstan: Brief overview

The Kyrgyz Republic, located in Central Asia with common borders with Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and China, gained independence in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Kyrgyzstan has a total area of 199 thousand km²; 90% of which is mountainous. The population of the country is slightly more than 5 million. Of the more than 90 different ethnic groups living in Kyrgyzstan¹; the Kyrgyz ethnic group at 65% is the largest; the Uzbeks minority is 14%; Russians 12.5%; the Ukrainians, Dungan and Uyghur each constitute 1%. 65% of the population live in rural communities. The literacy level is almost 99% and 10% of the population have a higher education².

1.2 Economic and political situation in Kyrgyzstan

There is no common interpretation of on 24 March 2007 events when the country's first president Askar Akaev absconded to Moscow resulting in an end to the old political system. Some believe that a people's revolution had occurred, others that a coup d'état had taken place. Whatever happened, it is difficult to underestimate the importance of this event for Kyrgyzstan. For the first time, civil activists began to believe that they had any power at all; that they could change the existing state of affairs if they wished. People were politically active as never before. There were protests and demonstrations on almost a daily basis.

Nevertheless, there were negative repercussions of the public's political activism. Protest actions became professional events and, for some groups, a way of earning for a living. Some politicians, pursuing their own selfish ends and angered at the ruling elites, used various kinds of protest actions as an instrument to harass and blackmail their opponents. Although people became accustomed to the demonstrations, these did cause some tension in the society, distracting people from their jobs - the main engine of the development.

In spite of these factors, there were positive aspects of the 24 March revolution. The main result was that people became more politically mature and more actively involved in the management of the country; exercising their rights as declared in the Constitution.

It is important to list the conditions that led to the overthrowing of ex-president Akaev before studying the developments since the March events as these conditions still significantly affect the country. Firstly, social-economic factors, especially in the agricultural sector, are most significant. Agriculture plays a dominant role in Kyrgyzstan's economy as the majority live in rural areas and 40% of GDP is produced by this sector. One of Akaev's first steps in his presidency was to transfer land ownership from the government to the farmers. All the "kolkhoz" (collective farms) were liquidated. The main idea basis for this shift was the idea that farmers only have an interest in increasing their agricultural productivity if there were private ownership of the land. However, as subsequent years have shown, because of a lack of strategic planning in the agricultural sector the reforms were made too

¹ General census of the population, 1999.

² People above the age of 15.

early. It was believed that the free market would itself provide solutions. The majority of rural people were accustomed to Soviet control and were not familiar with the market economy and could not take the necessary initiatives. Farmers could not manage the property they received. Also, the privatization of property by government was done without legal basis. As a result, there was mass unemployment in rural areas.

During the first years of the land reforms, agricultural growth was impressive and contributed to the largest portion of the GDP of the country. However, this upswing in production continued only until the farm equipment remaining from the former kolkhoz was still working and the soil was still fertile. Farmers soon realised that it was not possible to use industrial agricultural routines on small plots of land. They could not afford high-yield seeds and fertilizer when prices continued to increase. The arid soil became depleted of nutrients and the increasing prices for fuel, and natural disasters, worsened the situation. As noted in a Ministry for Economic Development and Trade meeting in 2007, land under cultivation was steadily decreasing; farmers were not growing wheat, beets, cotton and oil-yielding plants because of low profitability for these crops.

Rural unemployment increased. This critical situation was particularly evident in the south where half of the country's population lived. Very small plots of land that could not cover the cost of living were being allotted to each person in the region. Many rural people migrated to bigger cities such as Bishkek and Osh that could hardly manage this great influx of population. Large portions of the population migrated abroad in search of work as well. By rough estimates, there are three to five hundred thousand, or every tenth to fifteenth Kyrgyz citizen working in Russia and Kazakhstan. Unemployment and worsening living conditions increased dissatisfaction with the government's inactivity. It was not coincidental that almost all the mass protests, including the protest actions which overthrew Akaev, were centred in or originated in rural areas.

Step by step, farmers adopted the basics of market mechanism. Ironically, the country as a whole did not profit from this change. Farmers attempted to export significant part of their produce to Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkey and Uzbekistan, as the domestic profitability was small in comparison with neighbouring markets. For instance, according to official data from 2006, the average salary in Kazakhstan was 402 USD but only 105 USD in Kyrgyzstan³. In this context, prices for fruits, vegetables and other agricultural products in Kyrgyzstan are increasing each year and no decrease is expected. Inflation of prices for food staples such as bread affects the people most severely. In August 2007 alone, the price for bread rose by 40%⁴.

The industrial sector was in disarray well. By introducing the market economy, as recommended by international donors, a large-scale reform and privatisation of government enterprises was implemented. Today, the large majority of these companies are either no longer functioning at all or utilize only a fraction of their capacity. Valuable production specialists were left jobless; the majority forced to migrate to neighbouring countries. This dire situation was compounded by universal corruption that increased during Akaev's presidency. Most of the essential machine parks in the production plants, privatised through bribes via nepotism, had disappeared or sold abroad. The remaining factories, which showed some profitability, were privatised in the same way. In a 1995 government meeting, Akaev admitted that corruption had reached 'the seventh floor of the government house' (i.e. the highest levels of the government which occupies the seventh floor in the main government compound - editor's note).

3 "Social-economic development and trade relations of CIS member states in 2006", CIS Executive Committee, Moscow, 2007.

4 "Ata Meken party: the reaction of the government after sharp price increase was too late and not appropriate for the situation", AKIpress.

Due to corruption, Kyrgyzstan could not properly utilise its natural resources and hydroelectric energy sources. For example, the contract for mining of the gold fields, one of the ten largest deposits of gold in the world (700 tons), was signed with the Canadian company, Comeco. In the agreement with Comeco for setting up the "Kumtor Gold Company" in 1992, and in subsequent reforms of the project in 2003, only the government officials profited; not the national treasury. During the whole period of the company's existence, Kyrgyzstan only received 100 million USD in the form of taxes and social security payments - although according to the initial contract, state income should have been some 500 million USD. In last 2-3 years the production of gold has decreased. As Minister of Finance Akylbek Japarov said in a government meeting in November 2006, tax payments from the company decreased to same level as that of the mobile phone operator Bitel - possibly even less. This drop in state revenue occurred while world gold prices were on the rise. Obscure changes in ownership were happening in the smaller gold mine companies as well. On one day a mining company would have one main contractor; the next day ownership had changed hands and officially no gold produced. According to the Kyrgyz Altyn Joint Stock Company, the total deposits of gold in Kyrgyzstan are estimated at 1000-1500 tons.

The hydro-energy sector affects people directly. Among CIS countries, Kyrgyzstan has the third largest capacity for hydroelectric production, after Russia and Tajikistan. Today only 8% of this capacity are being utilised effectively. Kyrgyzstan's energy system was primarily based the Toktogul Hydropower Plant on the Naryn River with a total capacity of 1200 MW and a reservoir capacity of 15 billion m³ of water. The plant had seen any investments in improvements and maintenance. As a result, the energy loss rate in the system has increased. In addition, the plant had an increasing debt for electricity consumed by but not paid for by the population. This debt in turn caused an increase of tariffs. An attempt to reform the energy sector by dividing it into a few independent organizations and privatisation worsen the situation. According to experts, the current energy loss rate is almost 45% and the sector's debt to the state budget is close to 2 billion KGS. One of the main reasons for the failure of the reforms is said to again be corruption. In an article published by American research centre Jamestone Foundation, Central Asian analyst Erik Marat stated that "due to the developed pyramid systems benefiting only some people in the sector, Kyrgyzstan collects only 30% of the payments for electricity whereas, according to rough calculations, more than 40 million USD of the income is misappropriated annually".

During Akaev's presidency, Kyrgyzstan has dropped economically far behind its neighbours. In 1990, the year before independence, the GDP per capita was 600 USD. This was in second place in Central Asia after Kazakhstan with 1650 USD. In 2006, Kyrgyzstan is ahead of only Tajikistan with its 402 USD per capita. It needs to be noted that neighbouring Tajikistan is still recovering from a prolonged, destructive civil war. The economic lag is evident when comparing with the Kazakhstan 2006 GDP per capita of 5045 USD. In 15 years, Kyrgyz's GDP per capita has not returned to the 1990 levels while in Kazakhstan GDP has tripled.

By the end of Akaev's reign, Kyrgyzstan had a heavy debt burden. Debt to foreign investors amounted to about 2 billion USD while the annual state budget was 700 million USD. This was the consequence of the large-scale corruption and ineffective management created by a large black market economy. According to various estimates, from 40 to 60% of the Kyrgyz economy is still black market.

Positive GDP growth during the first quarter 2007 was 9, 2%. Some experts reasoned that this was because Kyrgyzstan was also affected by the rapid economic growth of its neighbours: Kazakhstan and China. Kyrgyzstan was forced to develop as part of this regional process. The Russian newspaper "Vedomosti" called this the "Kyrgyz miracle", explaining that it was caused by the Kazakhstan oil dollars invested in the Kyrgyz economy. Kazakhstan is the main foreign investor with 28 million USD in 2007. This figure is expected to increase significantly after the establishment of the Kazakh-Kyrgyz 120 million USD investment fund. In 2006 Kazakhstan was the second largest investor in Kyrgyzstan with accumulated investments of 300 million USD. The actual figures, however, may be much higher since investments are often done through Kyrgyz front companies.

Money coming from Kyrgyz Diasporas provides another influx of capital to the Kyrgyz economy. According to estimates, total of remittances from emigrated Krygyz is close to the whole state budget.

Another reason for this caused systematic collapse was an ineffective information policy implemented by the previous government. The government owned the media, including the only the television and radio channel that covered the whole country and the 70 newspapers and the national news agency.

The media did not provided people with objective information, did not report on the many negative consequences of economic reforms, and did not criticise the ruling elite. The impression that the government is lying made people angry. This war demonstrated by the government's information policy before and during the Aksy events of March 17, 2002 when five civilians were shot dead and the police injured tens during a peaceful protest action. The concealment of the negotiation process with China on delimitation of the Kyrgyz-Chinese border and the trickle of information about the process consequently increased opposition to the results of the negotiation to give part of Kyrgyzstan's territory (Uzongu-Kuush valley) to China. A majority of the population felt that the government was pursuing its own selfish ends and determining the country's future without consideration of the people's interests. A delayed explanation of the negotiation process and certain compromises made on border problem did not dissipate dissatisfaction. The public disappointment with the behaviour of the authorities in the Uzongu-Kuush valley negotiations eventually led to the Aksy protest and tragedy. The police opened fire on peaceful protestors from the Aksy region who were demanding the release of Azimbek Beknazarov, one of most outspoken critics of the compromises made with China. Government media covering these events repeated announced that nothing had happened in Aksy. The truths of the Aksy incident only became known to the public after a Radio Liberty correspondent visited Aksy and reported on the tragedy. The news shocked the country.

Another, no less important, reason for the March 24 events was the social and political situation in the country. President Akaev never made any statement to the domestic media about his delegation of authority in the autumn of 2005 as was required by the constitution. The opposition had no other way to change the government except via public protest. By then however, the situation in the country was already heated and public furore with Akaev was overwhelming and consequently the protests end up occupying the government house by.

Thus, economic reasons caused by massive corruption, particularly in the highest echelons of the government, combined with disinformation from the

government propaganda machine caused the overthrow of the government in 2005.

The new government that succeeded Akaev could not reform very much in the existing situation. Some problems were even made worse. The same people that had occupied high positions in Akaev's government are still in the highest echelons of the government today.

All those reforms promised by the new government to be carried out in economic and political fields in the country are implemented with delay and often only under the pressure from civil society and the political opposition. The reforms include: transforming the government television and radio channel into public television and radio; the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for Aksy tragedy; renegotiation of the agreement on the Kumtor gold field agreement; nationalisation of all illegally privatised enterprises; a halt to corruption; and reform of the constitution. None of the reforms promised have been so far been honoured by the government.

New opposition and civil society activists continuously demand from that the government act on its promises by various kinds of mass protest actions. The most significant action took place in November 2006 and April 2007. In some instances the public succeeds in getting significant compromises from the authorities, although these are often temporarily. The adoption of a new constitution in November 2006 that limits the president's authorities and hand these powers over to the Parliament and the Government is one good example of a short-term success at reform. On the pretext of adjusting some articles in accordance with each other of the raw constitution, pro-president forces later returned all of these powers back to the president after only one six weeks. The opposition again demanded reconsideration of the constitution. The authorities could not refuse to carry out the constitutional reform and new version of the country's main law was adopted.

It is worth mentioning that there was some lack of cohesion in the opposition block which eventually led to a split into two independent opposition blocks: the liberal "Movement for Reforms" and the more radical United Front "For Better Future of Kyrgyzstan". The first group was established by politicians who were well known as opposition activists during the Akaev period, specifically, parliament members Omurbek Tekebaev, Kubat Baybolov, Azimbek Beknazarov, Kabay Karabekov. There was no one prominent leader in this group. The second oppositional group was founded and led by ex-prime minister Feliks Kulov soon after leaving his post of prime minister.

Kulov political history is worth considering in depth. His political career began during Akaev's presidency when he was appointed vice-president. However, his relationship with Akaev deteriorated and he was imprisoned for misuse of his authority and other violations. He was only released from the prison in March 2005. He was from a small group of candidates for president who had any chance. Before the elections he unexpectedly made an alliance with Kurmanbek Bakiev and they participated in the election in a united front. Kulov explained that his decision to form this alliance was due to his unwillingness to cause a split in Kyrgyz society based on regional conflict that would have occurred if he would participate in the elections as a separate candidate. Bakiev was seen as a representative of the southern political elite; the elite in the north supported Kulov. After Bakiev was elected, Kulov was appointed prime minister. As events have later made evident, their political alliance was in many respects artificial and very unstable, although, both insisted at the time that their partnership was strong. The two leaders' actions were not coordinated and an underlying competition was observed.

Eventually, the unstable alliance culminated with the resignation of Kulov's government after November 2006 protest actions. The pretext for the resignation was that it would ease constitutional reform. Kulov expected Bakiev to honour their pre-elections agreement that he would again be appointed prime minister. But President Bakiev did actually offer him the post but the Parliament opposed his reinstatement. President Bakiev did not push the matter any further. Afterwards Kulov established the United Front "For a Better Future of Kyrgyzstan" party and became its leader. Only a few opposition representatives joined the Front. The April protests action in Bishkek was the first large demonstration lead by Kulov's party.

It needs to be mentioned that before the April actions Almazbek Atambaev, one of strongest opposition leaders, agreed to accept the post of prime minister. This created a division in the oppositional parties to the government.

The uncoordinated actions and disagreement between leaders of the opposition was the reason why the April 2007 opposition protest actions were significantly weaker compared to the previous November actions. In November, the opposition had not even been able to control the demonstration. Some of protestors had attempted to occupy the government house. The authorities began to legal actions against the leaders of the opposition. Conspiracy prosecutions, specifically against Kulov, were initiated based on a law article against "organizing mass disorder".

Unsuccessful attempt of the opposition to pressure the government was indeed a good lesson for the latter. The government actively began taking preventive measures by co-opting opposition members and destroying oppositional union. This tactic was also used in subsequent early parliamentary elections of December 2007.

After the April defeat, the opposition itself ought to have learned a lesson. However, both parties were not ready to find a middle ground. In the autumn of 2007, the uncompromising opposition was planning to initiate continuous demonstrations again.

There were concerns about the possibility of a social and political revolt. As a political researcher from Kyrgyz-Slavic University, Knyazev, notes "this, even if it happens, will happen not on the opposition's initiative alone. But if there is a public outcry as well, then the possible outcome is unpredictable." The reasons for these concerns were obvious. Food, housing, construction materials and fuel prices were increasing. The number of assassinations, including the assassination of parliament members, was increasing. Criminal forces were gaining power. One major criminal, Rysbek Akmatbaev, was almost elected to parliament. Unlawful acquisition of land became a common practice. The cases of harassment and physical attacks on journalists and, became more frequent. The first case of assassination of a journalist occurred in October in Kyrgyzstan's southern capital when Journalist Alisher Saipov, well known in Kyrgyzstan and abroad, was murdered.

Nevertheless, the government was able to move political development in a different, more secure direction through effective political manoeuvrings once it pulled ground from under opposition the opposition's feet. On September 19, the president announced a date for a referendum on the new constitution and on the elections code to be on October 21, 2007. He explained that his decision was based on a willingness to resolve the constitution issue, which had been one of the main reasons for the confrontation between the government and the opposition. The opposition wanted the parliament

and the government to be given more authority in the management of the country's affairs and thereby limit the power of the president's office. They demanded that the parliament be elected by party list and that this reform be stated in the constitution.

The opposition was taken unawares by the announcement of the referendum on the new constitution and the elections code. They were not able to keep abreast with the changing situation and they could not readjust their strategy for opposing the government. However, there were other reasons for the weakness of the opposition. Firstly, some prominent opposition activists left the protest movement. Their withdrawal was quite a shock. Parliament members Kabay Karabekov and Melis Eshimkanov, both considered to be outstanding oppositional leaders, initiated a lawsuit in the Kyrgyz Republic Constitutional Court about the unconstitutionality of the latest versions of the constitution, i.e. November and December 2006 versions. On September 14, the Constitutional Court decided that the latest versions of the constitution were unconstitutional. The decision of the court, according to Omurbek Tekebaev, one of opposition leaders, "created massive political and legal confusion"⁵. For one, it was no longer clear which constitution was legitimate once the other two versions are judged to be invalid. Parliament member Kubatbek Baybolov believed that Constitutional Court had not defined which Constitution should now be applied. "Now we could use the constitution of 1993 and even that of 1936", he said⁶.

Karabekov subsequently was seventh on the list of pro-president party "Akjol" and was later elected to the parliament. Eshimkanov was soon appointed to the post of acting president of government television and radio channel. It needs to be noted that five days since Constitutional Court's decision of September 19, 2007, the president announced a referendum on new version of constitution to be held in the parliament on October 21.

The opposition, which was planning to hold a mass protest in October, had to change its plan because the public and the opposition were preoccupied with the coming referendum. Former President Akaev had used before the trick of calling referendums on issues in which its results were known beforehand. In the October 21, 2007 referendum, the constitution, labelled by many experts as the "super president's constitution" was adopted. The president grabbed back the powers he lost because of reforms in the November constitution and the new constitution provided him with additional powers. He is now entitled to call in state martial law without parliamentary consent. As a compromise to the opposition, the new constitution requires that the parliamentary election process be done based on party lists. However, the real reason behind this supposed compromise became known later on. After the referendum, there was a new shock. The president dissolved the parliament on October 22. He had previously stated repeatedly that he did not intend to dissolve the parliament. The new early parliamentary elections started on December 16, 2007.

The opposition was not prepared for this new move. Unlike the government, which had prepared itself and the political scenario, the opposition always lagged behind due to a shortage of time to act, unite and mobilise its organisations. The government, of course, could use its administrative resources.

As a result, the pro-president party "Akjol" won the parliamentary elections and occupied 71 chairs (almost 47% of the parliament). The so-called "constructive opposition", Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan took 11 chairs (5, 05%), Communist Party – 8 chairs (5, 12%). The radical opposition

⁵ AKIpress, September 17, 2007, 11:51.

⁶ *Ibid*, September 18, 2007, 10:49.

gathered around the Timken party, received the second largest block of votes (8.3%) but could not be seated in the parliament because, according to the Central Elections Committee, it did not pass the 0.5% barrier in the city of Osh⁷.

The *Atatimken* party tried to dispute the election results in the courts. According to the party, the government blatantly used its administrative resources and falsified the voting results. However, the Bishkek Pervoe Maya District Court, and later the Supreme Court, did not turn down the appeal. Today the opposition does not have enough parliamentary seats influence political developments in the country. Some of opposition members declared that they are going to withdraw from politics all together.

Kyrgyzstan's contemporary political situation cannot be understood without comprehension of the role of the ethnicity. It is present main reason for clans' struggle for power and wealth. Ethnic relationships that played an important role throughout Kyrgyz's history and were essential to Kyrgyz survival in difficult times, today represent a serious threat to the stability and unity of the state instigating separatism and regionalism.

These relations, a source of social and economic cohesiveness, tested by thousand-year experience, well established in customs, traditions and ideology continue to influence politics and the economy in Kyrgyzstan. According to Melik Omarov, a candidate of historical science and vice director of Institute for Strategic Analysis and Forecasting, tribalism's influence on political events only became evident in recent years. "For decades northern clans dominated the political establishment in Kyrgyzstan. In March 2005, the events increased the southern clans' influence, and subsequent presidential elections showed how clearly country is divided into south and north. The problem of north-south confrontation worsened in November 2006 with the protest actions that were organized by the opposition and consisting mostly of people from the north. There were rumours circulating that the opposition was trying to take away the authority of the southern president. Eventually, many people from south came to Bishkek to support their leader. The ethnic divisions appeared again for a third time during the April 2007 protest actions organized by United Front "For a Better Kyrgyzstan Future".

As the last pre-term parliamentary elections demonstrated, there is a clear division between south and north. Both parties tried to use this divide in their elections campaigns: the opposition, represented mostly by the northern region, tried to impede the pro-president party Akjol from collecting the required 0.5 percentage level of votes in Talas while Akjol tried to impede Atameken from reaching the required level in southern regions.

It would also be wrong to say that all the political changes happened in Kyrgyzstan since March 2005 have been negative. For better or worse, all those reforms expected from the new government are being implemented. Attempts to improve the economy are being made. Government workers' salaries, teachers in particular, have been increased. But all these positive aspects cannot significantly change the existing political and economic situation in the country.

7 According to the new edition of Elections Code which was adopted on October 21 at the referendum, only the party that succeeds to collect at least 5% of votes in the country in general and 0,5% of votes in each election region and cities of Osh and Bishkek could enter the Parliament.

1.3 Geopolitics and Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan's geographic position in Central Asia is in fact a source of geopolitical interest. First of all, these interests are related to the proximity to Afghanistan, a centre of many years of instability. While geographically a secure distance from Kyrgyzstan, there is international friction do to

the American Ganci airbase at Manas airport. Since the Americans had to leave their airbase in Uzbekistan, losing this airbase would create a problem for American and alliance military forces in accomplishing their mission in Afghanistan. Ganci airbase is the only counterbalance to increasing Russian military and physical influence in Central Asian region. It must be noted that the Collective Security Treaty Organization force, which consisting mainly of the Russian air force, is located in Kant city, a few dozen kilometres from Ganci. This explains why the United States, although unwillingly, agreed to pay when Kyrgyz authorities raised the Manas airport rent price and why Kyrgyzstan is included on the list of aid recipient countries in Bush's Millennium Challenges programme.

Kyrgyzstan benefits from Russian presence as well. The CSTO Air forces in Kant created employment for many Kyrgyz nationals. The airbase purchases food and other locally produced products necessary for its functioning, renovates special training airbase that was used for training of pilots from socialist countries in Soviet period. Eventually Russian technical assistance made possible the creation of the Kyrgyz air forces. Today Russia is interested in increasing its presence in Kant. Earlier in 2007 the number of military personnel increased by 50%, to 1250 people. As *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* newspaper reported, "Experts believe that both initiatives (increase of personnel) of Russia's military and political administration demonstrate Russia's increasing interest in Central Asia".

These benefits from other countries' military presence raised serious discussions of whether to allocate territory for a Chinese military base.

Western and Russian interest in Kyrgyzstan is also due to the fact that one of the main drug traffic routes passes through Kyrgyzstan to Russia and further on to the West. NATO and American forces as well as Afghan government have not had much success in opposing growing opium in Afghanistan. Moreover, opium production increases year by year. The Fergana valley problem is closely related to this issue. Part of Kyrgyzstan's territory lies on this valley. Islamic radicals cherish their dream to create an Islamic caliphate in this region. Instability in the region would only help drug traffickers which would be neither good for Kyrgyzstan, or for its neighbours including Russia and the West. Instability in Fergana valley could negatively affect access to large resources of oil, gas and hydro power in Central Asia that attract major world players such as US, Russia and China.

Given that almost all of Central Asia's water resources are concentrated in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan; these countries have very large hydro power production potential. Clean water may become one of the most expensive export products in the future as well. The rapidly growing economies of China and Kazakhstan need large amounts of energy that could be produced by the Naryn River. This is why Kazakhstan is interested in two not yet completed hydro power plants Kambarata 1 and 2. Russian interest in this project is explained by its desire to increase its influence in Central Asia, since the one who controls the water, controls the whole region. The Kambarata power plant construction project cost an estimated two billion USD which is comparatively great deal of money for the country with a national budget of 700 million. Both Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan are interested in imports of electricity. In November 2006, American energy company AES was planning to participate in construction of transmission facilities for electricity transit from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Pakistan. The company was considering participating in construction of power plants and in the tender on power distribution companies". AES was ready to invest 1 billion USD in the project of electricity supplied from Central Asia to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Jane's

Information Group based in London reported that the US is in Central Asia due to energy issues and wants to increase its influence in the region which is becoming an arena of strategic competition through reducing influence of Russia, China and Iran because Washington observes its role in Central Asia decreasing because of its focus on Middle East.

Besides big neighbours such as Uzbekistan are also interested in Kyrgyzstan's energy capacity, although relations between the two countries are not always good. The water accumulated in the Toktogul power plant dam in winter is of vital importance for Uzbekistan's agriculture in summer. Kyrgyzstan has to release the water to satisfy its domestic electricity consumption which increases in winter. Agricultural regions of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan receive an excess of water in winter and experience shortage of water in summer. The power plants Kambarata One and Two would be able to better control the amount of water and solve this problem.

Kyrgyzstan is an important transport corridor between China and other parts of Eurasia. A few automobile roads are being renovated with financial support of international donors and the construction of railroad, the shortest way between Europe and China is being planned.

Kyrgyzstan's leaders while understanding that they cannot sustain development with own resources try to maintain good relations with all countries interested in development of relation with the country and ready to provide financial, technical and other types of assistance. Often these countries, mainly, the United States and Russia, competed for influence in the region such as. Therefore, Kyrgyzstan has to benefit from these countries' interests on particular issues. Such delicate issues include, for instance, prolongation of Ganci airbase in Kyrgyzstan. The country still manages to maintain its balance and neutrality without significant consequences. However, it is not clear how long it could go on. Kyrgyzstan often is an object of interest of various countries rather than object of relations.

In general, large political players and neighbours such as Russia and China are interested in Kyrgyzstan's stability. However, people of Kyrgyzstan are concerned about whether this stability is going to be maintained at the expense of their economic and political independence. This explains the long debates around Kambarata hydro power plants construction project. A number of parliament members and others are concerned that transfer of strategic objects into private firms' ownership could cause energy and water dependence on foreign countries.

1.4 Threats of terrorism and extremism in Kyrgyzstan

At the turn of the century countries of Central Asian region faced the problem of terrorism and extremism. After collapse of Soviet Union, religious movements advocated the idea of establishing an Islamic state governed by Sharia in Fergana valley. The party of Hizb-ut-Tahrir (the Islamic Liberation Party), banned in number of countries of the region, advocates this idea. The idea found support amongst people because of widespread poverty, everyday problems and inability of local authorities to solve these problems.

For long time, Kyrgyzstan's population was considered to be less Islamic than Uzbekistan or Tajikistan. However, after the collapse of the USSR and removal of restrictions on religious freedom, various religious movements took hold in Kyrgyzstan. The most popular was Islam. The number of mosques

in Kyrgyzstan increase to 2000 - more than the total number of schools in the country. Many young Kirghiz were education in religious centres of Islamic states although not everything labelled Islamic that was imported into Kyrgyzstan was harmless. The idea of building an Islamic state where fairness would reign and there would be no poverty, found more and more followers. This influence is in frequent news reports about the arrests of Hizb-ut-Tahrir followers and confiscation of propaganda materials. Besides the idea of fairness, ignorance of majority of the people on issues of Islam as well as Kyrgyz Islamic authorities' inability to oppose radical Islam advocates contributed to dissemination of the religious dogma. As Toygonbek Kalmatov, former director of Kyrgyzstan's State Agency on Religion Affairs, admitted, currently there are more than twelve thousand imams in the mosques⁸. "More than 70% of them are self-educated people who never received an education at specialized institutions. There are about fifty madras and none of these institutions are certified. It means that graduates of such Islamic schools are not recognized by government agencies".

The reason for the interest Kyrgyzstan among religious, extremist, terrorist or separatist organizations, according to experts, is explained by inefficient legislation that does not satisfy current requirements. "Kyrgyzstan's legislation is rather liberal in this regard and this advantage is used by destructive forces from neighbouring countries. This is particularly true with respect to Hizb-ut-Tahrir", says T. Kalmatov. According to him, the number of followers of this illegal party in Central Asia increased ten times in the last five years and currently total 10,000.

The first open confrontation with terrorists in Kyrgyzstan took place in 1999 when a group of militants from Uzbekistan Islamic Movement attempted to travel into Uzbekistan via Kyrgyzstan. The attempt was made again next year. However, with Russia, US and few other countries' assistance Kyrgyzstan could oppose militants.

In subsequent years few terrorist acts have taken place in Kyrgyzstan⁹:

- *December 2002.* A group of Uzbekistan Islamic Movement (UIM) militants carried out terrorist acts in Oberon market in Osh. The victims were all civilians. As the investigation revealed, the terrorists' target was the US embassy and the Ak-Keme hotel. Because of the difficult approaches and tight security, the attack was reverted to other, more accessible targets.
- *November 2004.* During inspection, police in Osh city stopped a car with four passengers. The police arrested the four men and, on the way to interior affairs department, they tried to escape. One blew himself up in the process. One policeman died. The investigation revealed that they were all Uzbekistan citizens and UIM militants wanted by the police for terrorist activities.
- *December 2005.* Osh Oblast: Unknown people blew up the Osh Oblast Administration meeting hall. There were no casualties. The police said that probably they were from an extremist organization operating in Kyrgyzstan and in the process of organizing a terrorist act.
- *March 2006.* Uzgen city. Kyrgyzstan's Ministry of Interior and National Security Service identified and stopped activities of an underground religious extremist group. 16 persons were arrested; large amounts of ammunition, firearms and cold arms as well as religious literature and audio with extremist content were confiscated. Members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir are among the detained. Another group escaped from the police.

⁸ Toygonbek Kalmatov, director of State Agency on Religion Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic: "Medrese (schools teaching Islam) in Kyrgyzstan should pass certification procedure", September 10, 2007, 24.kg.

⁹ Independent Research Centre "Peaceful Asia": "Uzgen - Kadamjai - Jalalabat: tendency or coincidence?", August 24, 2006.

- *May 2006.* An armed group of seven attacked the Tajikistan check point "Lyakkan". Two Tajik soldiers were killed, one wounded. Criminals took 19 Kalashnikov rifles, 1 light machine gun and a good supply of ammunition, and drove away in two cars, a Mercedes and an Opel.

One and half hours later, the group attacked the Ak-Turpak customs point. Special Forces of the Interior Ministry and National Security Agency cornered the armed group in a mountainous location close to the Kadamjai village. The possibility of involvement of the UIM in this event was confirmed after two members of the group, Nuralym Rakhmanov and Abdurakhman Khujaev, were captured. Rakhmanov was a Kyrgyz citizen from Osh; Khujaev, an Uzbekistan citizen, was since 2000 wanted by the police for terrorist activities. Both UIM militants had been hiding for a long time in the Sogdy Tajik and Batken oblast border regions of Kyrgyzstan.

- *June 2006.* In Jalalabat City a policeman was killed while attempting to stop a car with unknown people on June 9 at 19:30. On June 10th, an armed group of 10 unknown people were observed, however, the occupants escaped from the police in the direction of Uzbekistan border. A few policemen were wounded.

The police identified one of the criminals, Uzgen citizen, was the 27 years-old Jamaldin Abdrashitov. It is now clear that militants belonging to a religious extremist group were involved in this incident. The ammunition discovered included a RGD-5 bomb, a few hundred Kalashnikov cartridges, one sawed-off shotgun with cartridges, one air rifle, a book entitled "Voorujenie Pekhoty" (Soldiers Armaments) published in Minsk, 15 books and more than 30 brochures from the Hizb-ut-Tahrir movement was found in the house. Fourteen people were arrested including one woman who directly participated in the action.

- *05.* On July 14 in the city of Jalalabat, Interior Ministry and National Security Service special departments captured an armed group of five Uzbekistan Islamic Movement militants. The group put up vehement resistance using bombs, machine guns and grenade launcher. The tactics of the terrorists showed that they had a high level of military training. According to preliminary information, the militants were intending to carry out a series of terrorist acts in the southern oblasts to stir up conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbek ethnic groups.

In the pre-term parliamentary elections, possibly the first ever an open attempt of the surging religious party Hizb-ut-Tahrir to influence country's politics occurred. The Bishkek Department of Interior Ministry Press Service sent out a press release on December 14, 2007 informing of the arrest of people who had been distributing Hizb-ut-Tahrir leaflets designed to disrupt the parliamentary elections¹⁰. According to the Interior Ministry, on December 12, 2007 Interior Ministry's Lenin District Department patrol arrested 23 year-old Naryn citizen living in Ak-Bosogo district of Bishkek in Osh Bazaar neighbourhood. The man had 504 Hizb-ut-Tahrir leaflets "The Shariat Conditions for Participation in Parliamentary Election" and 21 CDs. The police also arrested a 35 year-old Sokuluk citizen. He had 14 copies of the same leaflets, 23 brochures and 42 CDs. On December 12, 2007 an envelope containing 1 Hizb-ut-Tahrir leaflet "Shariat Conditions for Participation in Parliamentary Election" and 1 CD was found at the office of the Association of Telecom Operators. The same leaflet was found in Bishkek Sverdlov District Administration. On December 11, a 28 year-old Jalalabat citizen carrying 173 copies of leaflets was arrested at the corner of Kuliev and Moskovskaya streets. 35 CDs were confiscated from his living quarters.

¹⁰ AKIpress, December 14, 2007, 15:00.

Also informed of such facts¹¹. According to the State Committee on National Security, the banned party Hizb-ut-Tahrir had switched to political methods to continue its struggle for the establishment of a caliphate. The State Committee Press Centre reported the arrest of three extremist activists from the organization in Naryn. 23 leaflets and the same quantity of CDs were confiscated. The CD's contained a message to not support the country's democratic institutions and to rather vote for real Muslim candidates who would help institute Islamic laws in the society. The special agency noted that an analysis of the leaflet and video content showed that they promotion a particular religious and political force. More than 100 copies and CDs were confiscated at the location.

All actions against terrorism are not effective as the sources of terrorism are not eliminated: the sources include poverty combined with increasing social differentiation, economic and energy crisis, inflation, increasing unemployment causing migration problem, psychological and professional deterioration and disorientation of a personality under market economy conditions, etc.

The high level of corruption in Kyrgyzstan also contributes to distribution of extremist ideas. The Russian experts A.G. Korchagin and A.M. Ivanov, believe that corruption is a driving force for organized crime, thus, it may affect distribution of terrorism. This effect can be direct (supporting terrorists directly), or indirect (supporting organized crime in drug business that eventually finances terrorists).

Although mass media more often uses notions of religious extremism and terrorism, it needs to be noted that its threat to the state unity of Kyrgyzstan is definitely lesser compared to political extremism. Religious extremism and terrorism is an imported phenomenon; the activities are financed from abroad. However, political extremism is local and has roots in the actual conditions in the country.

11 24.kg, December 14, 2007, 12:10.

2 Media industry in the region

2.1 History of Kyrgyz mass media development

Gaining independence in 1991 for Kyrgyzstan, as it was for all other former Soviet republics, was a beginning for the establishment of a qualitatively new media platform. However, it is worth mentioning that the first signs of the changes were observed much earlier. By late 1980s, the daily newspaper "Vecherniy Frunze" attempted to break free of its founder the Frunze City Committee of Communist Party. In early 1991, the newspaper "Komsomolec Kirgizii" broke from its founder the Central Committee of Lenin Communist Youth Union.

Since 1991, the republic's media landscape has significantly changed both in terms of the quality and quantity of media. At independence, there were only 50 newspapers being regularly published. The government television and radio channels were functioning throughout the country¹². All of government media remained under strict government and the communist party control. According to the Ministry of Justice, there were 939 newspapers and 266 magazines in the country by June 14, 2007¹³. The absolute majority of these media outlets are independent, although according to some estimates, only one fourth of all the registered media are actually operating. In any case, the number is significantly higher than in the first years after independence.

The success of media development in Kyrgyzstan is associated with a number of frequent shifts in government's attitude towards media. Ibraeva and Kulikova, authors of seminal work "The History of Development and Modern Media in Kyrgyzstan"¹⁴ divided the history of Kyrgyz media development before 2002 into 4 stages:

Stage 1: 1991-1992 - proclamation of press freedom;

Stage 2: 1993-1995 - the turning point in relations with the government, media's roles and functions;

Stage 3: 1996-1999 - the crisis in relations with the government;

Stage 4: 1999-2002 - the redistribution and concentration of media ownership through formation of media holdings;

Since this study was published in 2002, the fourth stage could be extended to 2005, when as a result of the revolution, the ruling government was overthrown. The same period could be associated with an escalation of the information war between the state and independent media.

The period from 2005 to the present could be classified as stage five - a period with redistribution and strengthened concentration of media ownership. It is important see this development in light of the history of Kyrgyz media development in different periods.

12 Azimjan Ibraimov: "Economic Independence. Real Problem of Journalists", "Kyrgyzstan's Mass Media in the Years of Independence", National Congress of Journalists, August 22-23, 2001 / Kyrgyzstan Journalist Union, Bishkek, 2001. p. 96.

13 MSN Newspaper, July 17, 2007.

14 Ibraeva & Kulikova: "The History of Development and Modern Media in Kyrgyzstan: Results of the Research", Bishkek, Salam Joint Stock Co, p. 304.

2.1.1 Beginning. The golden period in development of Kyrgyz journalism. 1991-1992.

By the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 90s, all Soviet and communist ideology had become discredited and a new political system, based on liberal democratic values, emerged and market mechanisms was introduced. The new journalism emerged in this context.

The media landscape that developed in this period played the main role in the process of formation of Kyrgyz journalism had following characteristics¹⁵:

1. Level of State Control over Mass Media

Before 1988, the government had full control over the mass media. During the Perestroika reform era some democratic reform in media and civil society took place. The emergence of independent journalism all over the former USSR was unprecedented.

2. Absence of Experience of Professional Freedom

There was a hierarchical network of printed media from large to small uniting soviet type journalists who were good in serving the party and not aware of the rationale for press freedom.

3. Communication Gap between Official and Unofficial Information Sources

The media had inherited behaviour patterns from the Soviet era, continuing to communicate with the audience in an authoritarian and undemocratic form. There was inevitably a gap between official and unofficial sources.

4. Absence of Perception of Journalism as an Economic Product

The commercial and economic value of media was not realized. Media were mostly seen as having an ideological role for political socialization and communication. The commercialization of journalism has just started.

5. Lack of Equipment

Both printed and other types of media outlet lacked modern equipment. Kyrgyzstan, the least favoured of the 15 Soviet republics, had been a peripheral country in economic terms. The country had not receive the safe level of investment from the Soviet Union as Uzbekistan, rich in cotton; or Kazakhstan rich in wheat. As noted by Ibraeva and Kulikova, being a low priority country was evident in all fields including and on the professional level with lacks of printing capacity and access to office equipment.

6. Absence of Analytical Systems in the Society and State

The absence of analytical systems led to higher expectations of people from liberalisation of relations between the state and media. It seemed to be enough to have highly professional and free journalism. Substantial democratic changes during first years of independence in Kyrgyzstan were preconditions for fulfilling these expectations. The government itself, however, had an illusion that rapid democratic development was possible.

Existing media in the country began covering public life from a democratic perspective. The first free of media such as the Kyrgyz language newspapers "Asaba", "Kyrgyz Rukhu" and the Russian language "Delo No", "Respublica", emerged. Then a new wave of private newspapers emerged: "Manas-Ata", "Ene-til", etc. However, a major segment of the media (national, oblast and regional newspapers, state television and radio) were still owned by the state.

15 G.Ibraeva, S.Kulikova: "The History of Development and Modern Media in Kyrgyzstan: Results of the Research", Bishkek, Salam Joint Stock Co, p. 304

Another reason for the emergence of independent was the many resources left from over from the Soviet period: such as printing houses owned by newspapers, plants, paper, etc. Newspapers had no difficulty finding new issues to write about either. All the concerns and interest that were forbidden to write about in the Soviet era could now be taken up in the press. The number of journalists increased. Many people with no journalism training, but who something to say, became active members of the journalism community. However, this change also had negative repercussions as well – the level of professionalism dropped. In the beginning, in the context of rapid media development and sudden room for freedom of expression with no taboos on particular subjects, low professionalism was not so evident, although eventually it became one of the main problems for Kyrgyz journalism.

The total politicization of the society determined the subject covered by the newspapers of that time. In most cases, newspapers were politicized, although, the number of tabloids also increased. The subjects covered by tabloids were about pornography and crime. This was a common tendency in all post-Soviet era media. The great demand for such this kind of tabloid press could be explained as being a reaction to the long period when these subjects were banned by the communists.

During the first years of independence, the first private TV and radio channels, such as "Piramida" in Bishkek, Osh-TV in city of Osh, and "Almaz" radio station in Bishkek emerged. The growth of non-print media was not as rapid. The main reasons for this trend was: the dearth of the major investment capital required, and the lack of experience of running small TV and radio stations, and the lack of qualified personnel. The state still had a monopoly in TV and radio broadcasting. Unlike the press, the first private television and radio stations were concerned primarily with generating profits. News and analytical programs were launched much later on. In this period, a large number of small TV cable studios had popped up in many cities. They transmitted mostly films, cartoons interspersed with advertisements. Some of these companies eventually founded private television companies and various kinds of content production studios.

In general, the period from 1991 till 1993 was a golden age for Kyrgyz journalism. As Ibraeva and Kulikova put it: "then started a short period of stars, revelations and good friendship of media with consumers"¹⁶. The relationship between the state and media were friendly and no media outlets were charge by the judiciary. It was because the attention of the whole society, including leaders, there focused on the euphoria around building a new democratic state. The government was not in the habit of harassing the media. But as noted by the well-known writer and journalist rights advocate, Mambetaliev in his article "Price of Freedom of Thought and Expression", "In the history of humanity there were no states where branches of power liked much those who were against what these branches wanted"¹⁷. Media in its essence always is on the side of opposition to the ruling powers. The first attempts to censor unwanted media took place in 1992.

16 G. Ibraeva, S. Kulikova: *"The History of Development and Modern Media in Kyrgyzstan: Results of the Research"*, Bishkek, Salam Joint Stock Co, p. 304.

17 K. Mambetaliev: *"Freedom from Fear"*, Collection of Articles, Bishkek, 2006, p. 143.

2.1.2 The turning point in relations between the media and the government. Beginning of information war between opposition and pro-government Media. 1993–1995.

Legislation in the 1990s provided improved conditions for media development: media organizations were exempt from paying the customary 20% value added tax and corporate income tax was 15%. The 1992 mass media law

was one of the most liberal of the post-soviet countries was also favourable. A lot of new media on various subjects were started including advertisement, criminal chronicles, erotica (newspapers as "Vse dlya vas", "Dlya vsekh I kaj-dogo", "Delo no", "Criminal chronicles", "Kattama"). In April 1995 122 newspapers, magazines and bulletins, nineteen non-print media were registered with Ministry of Justice¹⁸. However, only small part of these media actually operated.

The economic recession in Kyrgyzstan, the lack of development resources and low quality of life, significantly affected media development. Eric Johnson, Martha Olcott and Robert Horvitz in their analysis of media in Central Asia cited number of problems faced by Kyrgyz media¹⁹.

One of the main problems for print media was the shortage and price of newsprint. Due to the absence of any local paper production in Kyrgyzstan or in Central Asia as a whole, paper had to be imported from Russia. High prices of imported paper were made even higher due to Russian and Kazakhstan customs charges and transportation costs.

Print media experienced great difficulties in getting access to printing facilities. The state-owned printing houses were expensive. In the Soviet era, the printing houses were designed to produce large volumes of more than 50 thousand copies, which was quite a big number for emerging print media. Distribution of the news products was another big issue for independent media. The state owned the postal company "Kyrgyzpochtasy" had a monopoly in this field and charged high prices. The number of media willing to use this company's services as well as subscribers decreased. The state had also a monopoly in retail sales of printed products. Under these conditions, media started inventing new forms of distribution. "Aalam", one of the first Kyrgyz language independent newspapers, started using hand-to-hand sales through network of street sellers. The printed copies were sent to oblasts by express couriers. Aalam's distribution method was soon picked up by other newspapers including the quite successful newspaper "Vecherniy Bishkek".

Slow economy growth meant a low volume of advertisement revenue. Moreover, the market was unevenly distributed; it was mostly concentrated in the capital where people had more purchasing power compared to provinces. This small market was divided between a very limited number of media.

In 1994 only two newspapers were self-sufficient: Vecherniy Bishkek, because of large amount of advertisement, and Info-Piramida which published TV program of the only private and popular TV station Piramida. The disproportion of the advertisement was affected by the language used in the papers too. Kyrgyz language press had no chance to use ads since none of the advertisers were interested in only Kyrgyz press.

The uneven distribution of the advertisement market across the country and problems with the distribution channels caused uneven development and localization of media. Independent newspapers basically all started in large cities such as Bishkek and Osh (second biggest city in the country) and majority of these newspapers were still concentrated in the capital.

The new start-up newspapers were different in many aspects than those already in the market. In the south of the country, the local political micro climate, the sense of regionalism and the absence of developed printing activity affected the new players. "While in the north of Kyrgyzstan first private newspapers were politically oriented and consisted mostly of former employees of state media, in south the first private newspaper was initiated by a private computer trading firm Jeti Tus. In 1994, it started newspaper

18 G. Ibraeva, S. Kulikova: *"The History of Development and Modern Media in Kyrgyzstan: Results of the Research"*, Bishkek, Salam Joint Stock Co, p. 304.

19 Erick Johnson, Martha Olcott, Robert Horvitz: *"Mass Media in Countries of Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan"*, analysis conducted by Internews for USAID, April 1994.

Express-BAYAN. "It was a simple tabloid, but it created furore despite it was nothing more than a tabloid." – said media expert Almaz Ismanov²⁰. The high cost of distribution limits the reach of a newspaper. Newspapers become very local and regional. Basically, only the state media are available nationwide: Russian language newspapers Slovo Kyrgyzstana, Svobodnye Gory, Kyrgyz language Kyrgyz tuusu, Erkin Too and few independent newspapers as Aalam, Asaba, etc.

Another factor restricting capabilities of smaller newspapers and non-print media is the lack of professional journalists. "Even national papers cannot find professional journalists, local newspapers are in a much worse situation", as noted Eric Johnson, Martha Olcott and Robert Horvitz²¹. Working journalists are still imbued with the Soviet conception of the role of the press and of what people want from the media.

During the period between 1993 to 1995, the country gradually stepped back from its attempts to institute reform. This change of direction was evident when the democratic president and his followers tried to increase presidential authority by usurping some of the parliament's powers and transferring them to the presidency. The mass media could have either opposed this reactionary process or helped it along. "Yes, in the first years of independence the post-soviet governments did not have enough experience in harassing the media, or to be more precise, in keeping obstinate journalists who were reporting on the leaders' imperfections in their place. However, a remedy soon for this was found. Our government reformers creatively used the effective tactics developed in the Soviet era. The state newspapers and television directors appointed by the president started a war on non-governmental media", says Mambetaliev²².

The state effectively took advantage of the media's financial problems and its need for access to information with main source the government as information. Various methods were used to bring the media under the state's control. One of the most effective instruments was via distribution of subsidies. State subsidies took different forms: government media received direct financial support for operation or printing expenses, journalists' and other employees' salaries. The non-governmental but loyal media were granted significant subsidies on the occasions of anniversaries and other important dates. Media receiving "gifts" became loyal to the state²³. Additional incentives were used to keep media under control including government support for organizing distribution channels through subscriptions, and an inequality in providing access to government information as well as government printing services. For instance, at the beginning of 1994, the Uchkun printing house refused to print the new issue of Respublica that had sharply criticised the president's authority. The printing house explained that it has some technical production problems. Meanwhile, government owned papers had no difficulty obtaining access to printing facilities.

The state often used a "divide and conquer" tactic. In different periods the pro-presidential media outlets Asaba and Respublica, Kyrgyz Tuusu and Asaba, State TV and Radio Corporation under Amanbek Karypkulov's management and the late Asaba, became political opponents and attempted to ferment a split within journalist community itself. The lack of strong consensus among journalists themselves was another factor that helped fuel the conflict. The period of competition in emerging information market, struggle for resources such as printing facilities, information sources, as well as diverse stands of the media caused dissociation amongst journalists²⁴. Thus, this period could be considered as a start of information war between the state and opposition media.

20 Almaz Ismanov: "Problems and Perspectives of Mass Media in the South of Kyrgyzstan", report prepared for the conference Regional Journalism in Fergana Valley, Osh, April 28-29, 2003.

21 Erick Johnson, Martha Olcott, Robert Horvitz: "Mass Media in Countries of Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan", analysis conducted by Internews for USAID, April 1994.

22 Kuban Mambetaliev: article "Problems of Censorship" in the book "Valley of fear. Independent journalists from Central Asia", edited by Michael Anderson and Matthew McLachlan, Index on Censorship, spring-summer 2005.

23 Ibraeva & Kulikova: "The History of Development and Modern Media in Kyrgyzstan: results of the research", Bishkek, Salam Joint Stock Co, p. 304.

24 Ibid.

The state made undisguised attempts to control non-governmental press under (government media were already under control). The first such attempt was made in 1992. President Askar Akaev met with the newspapers editors and asked them to stop criticising his policies. Editors obviously rejected the appeals of the head of state. After this incident, Akaev changed his tactics to what would later become a more common method of dealing with the press. By the end of each year, the president would invite the editors to a meeting and because of discussions "effectively changed the course"²⁵. The heads of the two oppositional media Asaba and Respublica were not invited to these meetings in during the later years.

In 1993, the then Prime Minister Tursunbek Chyngyshbaev attempted to introduce state censorship with an official edict restricting freedom of the press. Journalists approached the head of state and were able to stop implementation of the edict. A further attempt to control the press was unsuccessful. "These methods of dealing with press were ineffective and outside the judicial system competency. Therefore, it was necessity for the government to use the courts and public prosecutors against journalists and politicians", says Mambetaliev in his article "Court and Press in Sovereign Kyrgyzstan"²⁶.

On July 15 1994, during the First Judges congress, President Akaev requested that the judiciary shut down the parliamentary paper Svobodnye Gori under editor Ludmila Jolmuhamedova as it had uncovered information illegal privatisation of state property, violations of foreign investment rules, specifically, the "gold case" (an investment contract with Comeco on Kumtor gold mines – in the list of top ten largest deposits). Judicial authorities initiate the process against Svobodnye Gori based on the general prosecutor's suit dated 28 July 1994. "The text of the claim is interesting in terms of its absence of legality" stated Mambetaliev²⁷. Specifically, the claim states that the newspaper published false information. The information considered to be false was written by journalist with regard to benefits of referendums on extending presidents' authorities. Journalist said that it is "a big and ambitious scandal". This expression was considered sedition. Articles written by five other journalists were judged to contain erroneous information. The suit caused to closure of the paper.

In the same year new, another paper Politika closed down. After few investigative articles about the government, the Ministry of Justice told the state printing company Uchkun, to stop printing the paper.

In 1995, president Akaev began a legal process, as an ordinary citizen, against Respublica accusing the paper of defamation. There was a note in the paper saying that Akaev had a villa in Swiss and a house in Turkey. The court returned a verdict of guilty. The editor of the paper, Zamira Sydykova and her assistant Tamara Slasheva were accused of 'defamation in printed form' were sentenced to one-and-half-years imprisonment -although execution of the sentence was delayed. They were not allowed to work as journalists for one year. This case was the first in Kyrgyz history where a journalist was prevented by law from practicing of his/her profession.

2.1.3 End of the free period for mass media. 1996–1999.

According to authors of 'The History of Development and Modern Media in Kyrgyzstan', the relatively healthy period for mass media ended in 1996. "It became clear that good news reports from third world countries was no longer of interesting to the wider world. The international community was not

25 Kuban Mambetaliev, Jyldyz Bugubaeva: "State power and non-governmental press in Kyrgyzstan".

26 Mambetaliev: "Court and press in sovereign Kyrgyzstan", Bishkek, 1998. p. 18.

27 Ditto.

prepared to support improvements in the relationship between media and the government in our country in the long term. The tolerance the authorities showed by agreeing to refrain from attacks on free media was connected to funds provided to improve the democratic image ran out", they say.

A surge in litigation and prosecutions against journalists and media started. The government began attacking media in an attempt to take it under control. In 1997, the number of legal cases involving the press reached a maximum²⁸. The Ministry of Justice sued the Kriminal newspaper for criticising Prime Minister Jumagulova and the court shut down the paper. Dastan Sarygulov, head of national gold company Kyrgyzaltyn, initiated a case against four Respublica journalists accusing them of defamation and slander. The journalists had referred to him as the Fuhrer or the corporal and introduced the term Sarygulofication to explain his use of the courts to harass the free press. Kriminal's chief editor, Zamira Sydykova, was imprisoned in a women's colony for eighteen months. The same punishment was handed down to Alyanchikov, the paper's columnist. Although the two journalists, Sivasheva and Shamshieva, spent only seventeen days in prison they were also barred from working as journalists for eighteen months. Widespread public protests forced the authorities to reconsider the judgement. International community pressure also significantly influenced the subsequent decision.

Angered at press for its investigative reporting, government officials and parliament members decided to institute tougher punishments by using article 128 of the Criminal Code covers defamation and slander in future prosecutions of the media. These statutes allow for harsher punishments with detentions of from three to six months or imprisonment to three years. The president, however, did not agree with the parliament's proposed amendment and issued instead his own version with fines of 1000 to 3000 times the minimum wage. The amount was equivalent to 6,000 to 16,000 USD: much too burdensome for any journalist. During the whole year of 1998, attempts were made by the government to enforce these amendments, although none of these attempts succeeded.

In 1998, the government made an attempt of increasing legal control of the media under. The Kyrgyz government established a Morals Commission within the Ministry of Justice. The commission immediately instituted legal proceedings against the newspapers Payshamba, Limon and Kaptama which were printing erotic material legally under present legislation. Journalists had able protections for the freedom of expression again.

During its struggles with the media, the government realized the potential of mass media for implementing political PR strategies and creating desired public opinion. Kyrgyz leaders were just learning the tactics from their older brothers from Russia and Kazakhstan. During the 1996-1997 presidential elections in Russia, huge resources were invested in media and large media holdings were established. During the same period, in Kazakhstan, President Nursultan Nazarbaev's family was expanding its media dominance through holding companies. Media bought up by the holding company came under political controlled.

Kyrgyz media can in fact be also profitable and explains interest in moves to consolidate the industry. For instance, as those watching media development noted in 1999, the Vecherniy Bishkek was both financially strong and had relative editorial independence²⁹. Vecherniy's advertisement agency, Rubikon, provided the necessary flow of advertising revenues. The agency was so lucrative that its payments of taxes to the state were even higher than that of the Kyrgyzaltyn national gold company.

28 Kuban Mambetaliev, Jyldyz Bugubaeva: "State power and non-governmental press in Kyrgyzstan".

29 G. Ibraeva, S. Kulikova: "The History of Development and Modern Media in Kyrgyzstan: results of the research", Bishkek, Salam Joint Stock Co, p. 304.

Although application of Russian and Kazakh strategies take over of media did not begin in Kyrgyzstan until 2000, in the mid-1990s some preparation was already being carried out. Since 1996, Kyrgyz media along with industrial enterprises must pay 20% value added tax, 30% in corporate income tax, and other direct and indirect taxes of 8%.

2.1.4 Redistribution of media ownership. Aggravation of information war. 1999-2005.

The parliamentary elections in 2000 became the polygon for wide use of media instrument in strategic PR campaigns. A propaganda strategy of creating heroes and anti-heroes was tested, although the results turned out to be the absolute opposite of those expected. The media campaigns were carried out by all television and radio stations and press loyal to the government. The state television and radio company – the only electronic media covering the whole country – and the three state newspapers, were used in attempts to discredit unwanted candidates, specifically, Feliks Kulov, but the strategy backfired. As a reaction the opposition members united around Kulov, the “disgraced general”.

In the presidential elections of the same year, the government had now learned from its previous mistakes. All effective methods of previous PR campaign were actively used. According to media coverage monitoring results conducted by Public Association Journalists, the incumbent president received a dominant 90% of the air time of independent stations and 100% on state channels during the campaign. However, this time around the tactics of discrediting opponents was not used.

Media coverage of the opponents was reduced but supplied more controversial facts about them. This strategic dosing out of negative information turned out to be quite effective. As noted by the authors of ‘The History of Development and modern media in Kyrgyzstan’, “The rising hero Kulov did not exist anymore, he was absorbed into a flow of routine media virtuality.”³⁰ This same model for sidelining opponents was repeated in 2005 parliamentary elections and the presidential elections.

A clear example of media conglomerates in forming desired public opinion in the beginning of 2000 and understanding of its high profitability, as mentioned earlier, pushed the government on creating its own media holding. Gradually, Akaev's family gained control over such large and leading media establishments as KOORT (Kyrgyz Public Educational Radio and TV), NBT (Independent Bishkek Television), Love Radio and Vecherniy Bishkek. In 2004, there was an attempt to take over the lucrative Piramira Television and Radio Company. Rachel Denber, acting director of Europe and Central Asia Division at Human Rights Watch, brought this take-over bid up in her open letter addressed to President Askar Akaev in February 2005³¹. The family's media holding was established with the help of tax inspectors' coercion, bribes and intimidation of media owners. Of course, the government was naturally backed up by state owned National TV and Radio Corporation and the more than fifty state-owned provincial papers. Owners of other non-governmental media, particularly independent electronic media, who were dependent on state authorities for broadcasting licences, realized that they risked the demise of their businesses and quickly shifted their political affiliations.

However, pressure on other independent media continued unabated. By 2003, the situation of media and freedom of expression in Kyrgyzstan was described by media experts as “independent media under the threat of extinction.”

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Bulletin “Monitoring of violation of journalists' and media rights in Kyrgyzstan”, February 2005.

³² Ulugbek Babakulov, Aseel Sagynbaeva: “Independent press threatened”, article written for IWPR, *Internews Kyrgyzstan Bulletin “Communication”*, special edition, July 2003.

Kuban Mambetaliev, head of the Public Association Journalists notes, "The government controls the courts, law enforcement and penal institutions. It will put pressure on anyone in its way, including parliament members, politicians and independent media". Authorities did not directly shut down independent media organizations; instead they force media organizations into bankruptcy by subjecting them to long drawn out litigation. By the beginning of 2000, there were only three independent media outlets, the Kyrgyz language Asaba and the two Russian language papers, Moya Stolitsa – Novosti and Delo No, which still openly express independent views. Combined, they had a large national circulation and therefore the ability to still seriously sway public opinion.

Asaba went bankrupt in 2000 as a result of multimillion lawsuits brought by various high ranking officials and it was subsequently appropriated by pro-president magnates. Within one-and-half-year period alone Moya Stolitsa – Novosti was sued 37 claims. In total, the paper received fines of 100,000 USD by the courts. Its journalists were personally fined 2,600 USD. Eventually, the paper was forced to close its doors. "We lost all the legal cases. We lost them under the conditions that still exist in Kyrgyzstan. We hope that in foreseeable future this prosecution will be seen in a different light. For the time being however, we are leaving", stated Moya's in its farewell press release. Delo No was the only one that survived - in spite of being involved in long judicial processes.

The then prime minister Nikolay Tanaev was the most successful plaintiff against the independent media. On April 29, 2003, he filed another claim against Moya Stolica. He stated that he considered the article by pensioner Mikhail Korsunskiy entitled "The Courts - Remedy for Stupor" had insulted his honour and sued Moya's owners for a quarter of a million dollars including 130,000 USD from editors, and 65,000 USD from the pension funds. The average amount of a pension in Kyrgyzstan was then about 12 USD per month. The district court decided for the plaintiff, the prime minister, and forced the paper to pay Tanaev almost 12,000 USD. Korsunskiy had to pay 150 USD. Litigation was aimed at government media as well, although as media analysts have noted, the fines were significantly lower, and most often the cases were closed before court sessions began.

Journalists criticising the government were also exposed to threats and violence. On January 17, 2003, Aleksandra Chernykh, a Moya Stolitsa Novosti correspondent, was severely beaten in her neighbourhood. Two unknown men attacked the young woman at half past six in the afternoon when she was returning home. Men hit her twice in the head with a rubber bludgeon (similar to those used by the police and military) and took her purse. The newspaper staff suspected that the attack was actually a warning to the victim's mother, Rina Prijivoit, a political editor and was well-known for her sharp criticism. In March 2003, a correspondent of one of capital's newspapers was beaten in Osh after a critical article about number of government officials was printed in the paper. Journalists from the independent newspaper Tribuna and Delo No were also beaten. None of these crimes were ever solved.

The offices of a few independent papers were robbed or attacked. In January 2001, unidentified people committed arson in Agym's office, a paper founded by former employees of Asaba after its appropriation by the government. In May 2002, office of Tribuna, well-known for its keen investigate articles unmasking corruption in government agencies, was robbed. All the computers were taken and no attempts were made to find the robbers.

The situation of independent media did not go unnoticed by international organizations. In June 2003, the World Association of Newspapers and the World Forum of Editors sent message to Kyrgyz president expressing "great concern at the facts about the intimidation of Moya Stolitsa – Novosti by the government". However, officials kept saying denying that there had been any incidence targeting the media. Abdil Segizbaev, the president's press secretary, in interview to IWPR, stated that no politically motivated prosecutions of independent media in Kyrgyzstan had ever happened.

The government used other instruments as well to cage the media. In April 2001, the Ministry of Justice on the pretext of "identifying and clarifying number of operating media organizations"³³ decided to re-register all Kyrgyz media. In June of that year, the ministry annulled the registration of 16 media including Moya Stolitsa – Novosti and Agym founded by Melis Eshimkanov after closure of his previous paper Asaba.

Print media were dependent on the decisions of director of the state printing house Uchkun with a monopoly of printing services³⁴. The head of Uchkun depends on the president's good will as he appoints candidates on this post. On May 23, 2003, the capital's Lenin District Court Executor Salamatov confiscated 15,000 copies of Moya Stolitsa from the printing house. This particular investigative report has collected information on the president's business activities and his attacks on freedom of expression. The situation changed dramatically after the establishment of the international printing house in the Bishkek Media Support Centre in November 2003. The centre receives financial support from the US government. Today this printing house prints 60% of the country's periodicals.

Electronic media were totally dependent on State Commission on Radio Frequency controlled by the Ministry of Defence. The commission had the authority to deprive any electronic media of its right to use radio frequencies from one minute to the next, to move a media outlets transmission from one frequency to another, to force transmission from VHF to the UHF transmission. The agency had the authority to at any moment force a to shut down television or radio transmissions because they are causing radio interference. This was example done in the frequency conflict with Osh-TV, a popular TV station in south.³⁵ In 2000, the TV Company ran into a conflict with the National Communication Agency and State Commission on Radio Frequency. These agencies decided to move the stations transmission from the VHF to the UHF range. The move was evidently was against the law. In 2000, Osh TV filed a claim against the two agencies at the arbitrage court. This lower court decided in favour of the government agencies. However, after Osh appealed the decision, the claim was granted. The government agencies would concede and set off new rounds of litigation and trials. The whole process continued until January 10, 2002 when the arbitrage court granted the Osh TVs previous appeal and agencies counter-claim was rejected.

Former journalist Kabay Karabekov who later became a member of the parliament in 2000 and led the parliament's Committee on Public Associations and Information Policy said that prosecution of independent media would create an information vacuum in the country. "What we have is that media do not cover the real picture of the situation in the country. Journalists are afraid to write about what is happening", he said. This was particularly the case with government media or those loyal to the government. An example was the events of March 17, 2002 when in the Aksy region when the police opened fire on peaceful protestors, five people were killed and many wounded. Government controlled media reported that the situation in the region was normal and under the control of the local authorities'. There were

33 *Internews Kyrgyzstan Bulletin "Communication"*, April 2001, issue no 74.

34 *Kuban Mambetaliev: "Kyrgyzstan's Mass Media in 21st Century"*, OCSE collection "Central Asia for protection of the future. Mass Media in multicultural and multilingual societies", Vienna, 2003.

35 *Kuban Mambetaliev: "Problems of and Development Trends in Kyrgyzstan's Print and Electronic Media"*, 2002.

no mentions of the victims and gunfire until the Radio Liberty correspondent reported the truth about the tragedy. The same method of concealing undesired facts and the slow dosing out of information through controlled media was used by the government before the March 2005 events when the president was forced to go into exile.

The independent press, mainly the Russian language MSN (a successor of Moya Stolitsa – Novosti), Delo No, Respublica, Tribuna, the Kyrgyz language Agym (the successor of Asaba) and Aalam, in spite of being harassed, continued confront the officials and with the government-controlled media, and reported the truth about events. Experts believe that independent press in fact played a major role in the March 2005 events.

2.1.5 Redistribution and concentration of media ownership since 2005

The year 2005 was a milestone in Kyrgyzstan's history a split between the past and the future.

To summarise media development before 2005 and analyse the established structure of media at that turning point:

In the beginning of 2006, 900 media organizations were registered³⁶, including:

- newspapers – 631;
- magazines – 191;
- radio stations – 35;
- television companies, studios and channels – 39;
- Television and radio companies – 25.

In fact, only a small group of these were actually in operation. The exact number of operating media would be difficult to estimate since some media were not regularly active. If the date from some media experts is correct³⁷, then, by 2003, 70 print media and 17 electronic media in total were operating in Kyrgyzstan. This number hardly changed by 2005, given that under conditions of high level market penetration, new media had difficulty surviving and the authorities used all possible means of impeding registration of new electronic media.

The press sector which was based on status (official/independent), language, target audience, significance and professionalism became even worse by 2005. Such division was being established since independence of the country and inception of the new Kyrgyz media landscape.

In 2005, the state owned fifty six newspapers (three of them were national papers, two in Kyrgyz and one in Russian). These were weekly papers with a circulation of 1000 copies in regions, 2000 in oblasts and 5000 in the capital. The papers never had and have a very large circulation or a large advertisement market. Without government subsidies, only a few would be able to survive. Journalist salaries are low; equipment is old. Significant parts of journalist in the provincial media still write on old manual typewriters left from Soviet era. The government owns the National TV and Radio Corporation (NTRC) with branches in the oblast centres. The government's authoritarian management style is a carry-over from the Soviet era. The chief editors of the national newspapers and the head of NTRC are appointed directly by the president. There is a state newspaper in each oblast, these chief editor are appointed by local governors. Each region also has an official paper whose

36 Asel Isaeva: "Development and activities of mass media in Kyrgyzstan", website of the news and analytics Centre on Research of Socio-Political Processes in Post-Soviet Space, (http://www.ia-centr.ru/public_details.php?id=64).

37 Mambetaliev: "Kyrgyzstan's Mass Media in 21st Century", OCSE collection "Central Asia for protection of the future. Mass Media in multicultural and multilingual societies", Vienna, 2003.

editor is appointed by region Akim (governor). There are official papers in the cities; the editors are appointed by the city mayors.

State media are financed by the state budget at regional, city, oblast and national levels. The managing editors cannot express any public dissent in the newspaper, television or radio media as they can lose their jobs. They have a clear incentive to take an implicit role in support of state policy and ruthlessly fight with independent media. As 'servants of the bureaucracy' they protect government from criticism for its shortfalls by protecting leaders' honour and dignity³⁸.

The non-governmental media are a small group, only about sixteen papers, the same number of television companies (fourteen broadcast on UHF frequencies) and ten are radio stations. The main newspapers are based in Bishkek printing on a weekly basis with large circulation, from ten to sixty thousand (which is ten times more than the state owned newspaper circulation).

Kyrgyz, Russian and Uzbek are the most widely used languages in multiethnic Kyrgyzstan. The largest portion of the news published in the three languages, although, not equally distributed in the country. The Uzbek language press is limited to Osh, to the Jalalabat and Batken oblasts. The Russian press is concentrated in the capital, in the Chui and Issyk-Kul oblasts; the Kyrgyz language press covers the whole country.

Traditionally, journalism in Kyrgyzstan, however, is in two languages: Kyrgyz and Russian. Russian dominated in the Soviet period, but after gaining independence, the Kyrgyz Language press developed rapidly. Media experts believe that media organizations in Kyrgyzstan are split along language lines. The researchers identified a difference in perception of the world reflected in multilingual journalism. For instance, Ibraeva says: "In the Kyrgyz language media Kyrgyzstan is at the centre of the world is; events taking place in the country are considered the reference point and represent a kind of measure of value for all world events. The centre of gravity for Russian language media shifts somewhat towards a Russian perspective; in the majority of the cases authors and characters assess events in Kyrgyzstan from Russian point of view".³⁹

During the years of independence, the regionalisation process gained strength. The most influential and significant media are based in Bishkek. Although, provincialism can be found around the world, in Kyrgyzstan it creates an information gap between northern and southern part of the country. This reflects geography of the country, divided by mountains, the north and south that have distinct historical and economic characters. These features, including strong ethnic traditions, as well as tendency of the Kyrgyz to form clans in managing the country, lead to divisions of the country into southerners and northerners. The existing information gap has aggravated this division.

Media workers' professionalism is another problem. In the Soviet period, there were entry requirements for working in this sector. Specifically, candidates needed to have higher education (preferably in journalism) and work experience as freelance correspondents. This system of requirements disappeared after the collapse of USSR. Today there are many non-professionals in the field. Authors of "The History of Development and Modern Media in Kyrgyzstan" say that "the lack of special journalist education and training for, in fact, ideological activity is caused by lack of ideas themselves and dominating role of journalism as a product".⁴⁰ Costs of such phenomenon are violation of legal and ethic norms, toneless and often grammatically poor texts. Many

38 *Ibid.*

39 Gulnara Ibraeva: "Journalism and languages: perception and functions of Russian and Kyrgyz language mass media in Kyrgyzstan", research materials, Bishkek, February 2002, CIMERA.

40 G. Ibraeva, S. Kulikova: "The History of Development and Modern Media in Kyrgyzstan: results of the research", Bishkek, Salam Joint Stock Co, p. 304.

genres are disappearing while reporting and informative genre becomes more and more dominating. Low level of professionalism is compensated by scathing and scandalous style of writing. "Scandal becomes the main measure of information, criteria of news quality", believes Isaeva.⁴¹

Although every higher education institution in the country offers journalism programme, this does not rectify the lack professionalism since the quality journalism training leaves much to be desired. The university lecturers had little knowledge of journalism. At best they are familiar with communication theory. Furthermore, young journalism graduates are reluctant to work in field. They are adverse to the profession which is losing its prestige because of risk associated with the work (trials, beating), as well as low level of earnings offered by majority of employers.

On positive point change in Kyrgyz journalism development by 2005 was the emergence of internet media. News agencies such as National Kabar, AKIpress, Kyrgyzinfo provide news online; many print media including Vecherniy Bishkek, Delo No, Respublica, etc launched online versions. Kyrgyz language papers including Zaman-Kyrgyzstan, Agym, Bishkek Times, Aalam and others are interested in opening their websites. Internet based media started influencing significantly the social and political life in the country thanks to nature of the World Wide Web. Internet is more difficult to control and influence for authorities compared to print media and it is an opportunity to promote freedom of expression. Another difficulty of controlling internet media is that according to existing law on media, internet content is not defined officially as media and therefore cannot be restricted as ordinary media.

Kyrgyzstan's mass media was at a similar stage in its early years. Looking back at freedom of expression in Kyrgyzstan since March 24, 2005 and its further development it is noticeable that that it exactly repeats the previous Askar Akaev model. The same golden period of freedom at the beginning and then gradual tightening screws on media, although, all stages were undergone in much shorter period. Previous administration's experience was sure taken in account and some innovative methods were used.

Number of trials against journalists did not decrease. The amounts charged did not decrease either. Government officials still remain to be the main plaintiffs as in Akaev's time. The claim of Usen Sydykov, head of president's administration, against Belyi Parakhod and Dlya Vas could be an example. The reason for the trial was Mayram Akaeva's open letter titled "I cannot keep silent!" published on Belyi Parakhod's website in December 2005 which was later published on print versions of Belyi Parakhod and Dlya Vas⁴². According to Usenov, Akaeva made public statement whereby damaged his dignity and honour by distributing false information defaming his reputation. He assessed moral damage in the amount of 1 million USD. Pervoe Maya District Court partially allowed the claim. The court decided to exact from Akaeva 50,000 Soms (1,250 USD) and 10,000 Soms (250 USD) from Belyi Parakhod. Moreover, Belyi Parakhod and Dlya Vas were to publish a refutation.

Cases of threatening and attacks on journalists are increasing. During the period from January to October 2007 the Public Association Journalists and Institute of Media Representative identified more than twenty such cases, in seven of journalists were severely beaten, in 1 case journalist was assassinated (on October 24, 2007 journalist and editor of Uzbek language paper Politika Alisher Saipov was assassinated in the southern capital of Kyrgyzstan). Profession of journalist in Kyrgyzstan is getting more and more dangerous. It needs to be noted, however, that majority of such cases do not become known to the public. Most journalists do not report such cases considering

41 Asel Isaeva: "Development and activities of mass media in Kyrgyzstan", website of the news and analytics Centre on Research of Socio-Political Processes in Post-Soviet Space, (http://www.ia-centr.ru/public_details.php?id=64)

42 For details refer to: http://www.parohod.kg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&Itemid=9999999&id=500&ccdate=3-2006;

this to be the cost of their professional activities and do not expect related measures to be taken and people responsible be punished by the government bodies. Journalists feel sceptic about it also because country's administration never made a statement with regard to many cases of attacks on journalists. Assassination of Alisher Saipov is a different issue given the case is quite exceptional for Kyrgyzstan. All these make people feel that journalists are not protected. As a result, in 2007 for the first time in Kyrgyzstan's history journalists had to seek political asylum abroad. In spring of this year Turatbek Bektenov, chief editor of Piramida TV channel, and in autumn Kayrat Birimkulov, National TV journalist, had to leave the country.

Various ways of putting pressure on opposition media are still being used. The analysis reports on cases of harassment. Law suits against journalists show that most of these cases involve opposition media. The same methods used in Askar Akaev's presidency are still used today: attempts to take control or close particular media through very costly legal suits, through the attacks on opposition media offices by unidentified assailants, desire to change information policy through transfer of ownership, confiscation of the hard copies of papers, etc. There are a number of related facts. In the night of February 11-12, 2007 Kyrgyz language paper Kyrgyz Rukhu computer centre with all archives burnt down. According to paper's editor Bolot Tashtanaliev, the fire was not accidental, and, probably, it is connected with recent criticism of head of president's administration Kurmanbek Temirbaev. In the morning on April 20, 2007, printed copies of Agym and Kyrgyz Rukhu were confiscated based on general prosecutor's sanction. On October 24, 2007 the work of Kyrgyz Rukhu was suspended as a result of legal suit. For the same reason the idea of creating public television is moving forward with lots of problems. This issue was raised in ex-president's time. The society needed media, which would provide objective and balanced information on events in the country.

Since March 24, 2005 it seemed that the idea of public television would finally be implemented. Current administration repeatedly said that it supports the idea. On June 21, 2005 then acting president K. Bakiev approved the plan of action on implementation of the strategy of combating corruption, where one of activities in the context of anti-corruption policy was about reorganizing NTRC into public television. However, only two years after expressing support of the idea, in March 2007, Bakiev signed the law on NTRC prepared by the parliament in cooperation with media organizations and adopted in June 8, 2006. It seemed that there were no other obstacles for creation of public channel. However, the process of establishing NTRC Supervisory Council (SC) lasted almost six months. Finally when the council was formed, on its second session eight of its fifteen members declared of their resignation on October 25, 2007. Members from the president and the parliament resigned at the same time⁴³. Establishment of new SC was only possible after election of new parliament. One time resignation of few members blocked the work of council right before parliamentary elections starting on December 16, 2007. Thus, throughout the election campaign NTRC was under full control of the government.

The electronic and internet sectors of the media market have shown the fastest development since 2005. As television and radio have the largest impact on peoples' opinions as well as their accessibility, the sector attracts more advertisement and more attention from those who see electronic media as another instrument that can be used to gain ideological influence and help them win political battles. Major financial investments have been made in a few television channels and new content production technologies are being implemented. During Akaev's presidency, an attempted was made to take over ownership of KOORT's Channel 1 by the president's family holding com-

⁴³ NTRC Supervisory Council is established from five representatives of Kyrgyz president, five from the parliament and five from civil society. The composition of the Supervisory Council is approved by the parliament;

pany. This channel had the best production equipment in the country and the staff members were paid highest salaries among other electronic media.

Since March 24, 2005 there has been a furious struggle for the right to take over this channel. No one knows for sure who officially owns it today. Such data is always top secret. According to non-official sources, however, the new owner is someone close to the current president. The channel has clear political leanings and always supports the president's initiatives while opposing those of the opposition. This could be considered as indirect evidence. In 2007, the channel was reborn; it changed its name to 5-Kanal and received large investments. The channel was launched as a Kyrgyz CNN with an accent on news and analytical programs with objective and balanced information, although, soon after serious political events occurred the channel had to change its stand.

NTS, another independent television channel with the largest technical and financial resources compared to other channels, started its activities in March 2005. It was created on the basis of the VOSST channel's infrastructure which was not as yet fully operational due to financial problems. It rebroadcast the Russian channel Pervyi Kanal. Vsemirnaya Set'. The businessman Omurbek Babanov owned 30% of shares of the channel; the rest belonged to stakeholders in Russia. Babanov was elected to the parliament in 2005. Soon NTS begin to run into problems because of Babanov's political allegiances - he had joined the new opposition. The pressure put on this channel was not of a political nature; rather financial instruments were used. On 1 May 2006, the station was blocked from broadcasting in provinces affecting its ability to generate advertising revenue and its agreement with its Russian partner. Soon after, Babanov sold his share hold in the company. The agreement between Russian channel and NTS was renegotiated; but the latter's right to broadcast its own content was highly restricted.

Piramida, another leading television channel in the capital, also went through a change of ownership, and therefore, the changed its political affiliation for an alignment with the opposition to one supporting the government. Programmes transmitted by the state television company also changed in quantity and quality. More advertisement and youth programmes as well as news and analytical programs are now produced. The channel, in partnership with Radio Liberty, launched the programmes Yngaysiz Suroolor (Inconvenient Questions) and Azattyk. However, in general, the quality of the state channel programmes still remains lower than programmes offered by the independent channels.

In this period, acute shortage of field professionals was felt. It could be seen that professionals went from one channel to another as their structure was changed. Partially the need for human resource was filled by more or less competent specialists from provinces, although, it was not enough.

Significant amounts were invested in development of channels mainly in the capital. Provinces in this sense were left behind. The exception is EITR channel. It was established in 2005 by using the infrastructure of Osh-3000 channel as an alternative to public television. The state invested in the renovation of equipment (double of what Osh-3000 had receive before) and assisted EITR in extending its coverage area. EITR was given the right to broadcasting on the frequency taken from NTS in May 2006. The channel produced new programmes and increased advertisement revenues, although, it cannot yet seriously compete with Bishkek or Uzbek channels.

The period after 2005 is associated with fast development of internet media and increase of its influence on social and political climate in the country. Number of news agencies was established, specifically, 24.kg which rapidly gained popularity and recognition in the country, Kyrgyznews, strana.kg, tazar.kg, and photo news agency Photo.kg, the first such resource in Central Asian internet space, local news agency AKIpress expanded to Central Asian market, launched first blog portal in Kyrgyz language, etc. Many of newspapers started paying more attention to electronic media. Significant progress was made in the field of Kyrgyz language media. In 2005 there were only 5-6 Kyrgyz language websites, while now Super-Info, De-facto, Kyrgyz Tuusu, Jany Ordo, Kyrgyz Rukhu, Maek, Alibi added to this list.

Internet development was triggered by social and political tension in the country since 2005. Events in Kyrgyzstan were in the focus of international community attention. Normal interest of Kyrgyz abroad in events taking place in their home has to be taken in account. According to various estimates, about half-million Kyrgyz are currently labour migrants abroad. Internet provides unique opportunity to get real-time news on what is happening in Kyrgyzstan. Internet unlike traditional media is also difficult to control and influence which gives opportunity to support freedom of expression in the country.

2.1.6 Conclusion

Kyrgyz journalism and mass media since independence made great progress: from communist party journalism to democratic journalism. Democratization process seems to be irreversible, although, Kyrgyz journalism is not yet completely democratic journalism. There are still government-owned media in the country and as long as they exist, the media will always be divided into two opposing groups. Journalists are still dependent on courts since the president personally appoints and dismisses judges. As far as the regulation of relations between electronic media and government regulation bodies in the context of constitutional norms is not clear, electronic media still remains dependent on the government. Such factors as weak national economy and resulting small advertisement market restrict media capabilities to develop, therefore, depend on their ambitious stakeholders (sponsors).

2.2 Mass media policy and legislation

Mass media in Kyrgyzstan is regulated by large number of laws relating to the following fields⁴⁴:

1. Constitutional law: right for freedom of speech as integral part of human and citizen rights; right for press freedom⁴⁵;
2. International law: Universal Declaration of Human Rights, right for freedom of speech as integral part of human and citizen rights;
3. Special legislation on mass media: regulation of issues relating to establishment and activities of media organizations;
4. Civil legislation: regulation of issues regarding publishing activities such as causing damage to honour and dignity, compensation for damage, etc;
5. Elections law: includes Elections Code⁴⁶ and other laws regulating access to mass media during election campaigns;
6. Criminal law: journalists enjoying full rights and having procedural rights and responsibilities;
7. Labour law: mass media as an organization uniting workers based on common interests, mass media professional unions and associations es-

44 G. Ibraeva, S. Kulikova: "The History of Development and Modern Media in Kyrgyzstan: results of the research", Bishkek, Salam Joint Stock Co, p. 304.

45 New version of the Constitution was adopted during referendum of October 21, 2007. Since the mentioned date, all references to the Constitution would mean the new Constitution.

46 Along with the new constitution, new Elections Code was adopted on October 21, 2007 during the referendum.

- established for protection of labour and social-economic rights and interests of their members;
8. Taxation law: media organization as taxable business entity;
 9. Customs law: media organization as an entity having right to conduct economic activities, specific obligations and bearing responsibility for customs rules associated with such activity;
 10. Financial law: financial regulation bodies' control over media organizations' income sources, quantities of incoming and outgoing funds;

Let us analyse some main laws regulating media organizations' activities in Kyrgyzstan.

2.2.1 The Kyrgyz constitution

Mass media organizations' activities in Kyrgyz Republic are regulated by article 14 of the constitution which reads: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, speech, and press as well as to freedom of expression of his ideas and opinions. " and "Everyone has the right to gather, store, use, and communicate information by word, in writing or otherwise." Thus, freedom of the press, communication and dissemination of information are provided for in the constitution. The constitution also proclaims that mass media is free just as the arts, literature and science . The new version of the constitution, as in the previous versions does not make a clear differentiation between related fields of human activity. Mass media is considered as an element of cultural field, not political or social-economic. However, the mere fact that the constitution guarantees press freedom is important. It is clear that the new version still contains the clause protecting freedom of speech in Kyrgyzstan: "No laws restricting freedom of speech and freedom of press may be adopted." (article 65, clause 6). Such clause is only in the Kyrgyzstan regions amongst post-soviet countries. The related amendment to the constitution of 1993 was made in 1998 to prevent various attempts at putting major restrictions on media activity. According to some media experts, this amendment was important for Kyrgyzstan as the first amendment was in the Constitution of the United States. In the US the amendment is recognized as one of the most significant achievements of democratic tradition of the country⁴⁸.

However, the new constitution, when compared to that from 1993 has some deviations with regard to protections of freedom of speech. As a result of the November-December 2006 constitution debates, the constitution as amended on November 9, 2006 and no longer included the clause prohibiting censorship that existed in the previous versions of the main law (article 16, clause 10). This clause was also excluded from the constitution of December 30, 2006. The absence of a constitutional norm directly prohibiting censorship despite the existence of a norm does not allow adoption of laws restricting freedom of speech and press might consequently lead to some forms of censorship.

According to Article 12, international agreements ratified by Kyrgyz Republic as well as other international laws are the main components of the Kyrgyzstan's legislation. Kyrgyzstan joined more than 20 international agreements on human rights in the framework of UN and its specialised agencies including:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1994;
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1994;
- Facultative Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1994;

47 article 36, clause 1;

48 G. Ibraeva, & S. Kulikova: "The History of Development and Modern Media in Kyrgyzstan: results of the research", Bishkek, Salam Joint Stock Co, p. 304.

Moreover, Kyrgyzstan is a member to agreements on human rights in the framework of Commonwealth of Independent States.

2.2.2 The Law on Mass Media

The most important law regulating relations in the field of mass media is the "law on means of mass information" adopted on July 2, 1992. This law defines the general legal, economic and social basis of communicating information through mass media. The law aims at maintaining free operation of media, regulates media's relations with government agencies, public associations, enterprises, organizations and citizens.

The law on mass media once was considered as the most progressive in post-soviet space. It prohibited censorship and direct government regulation of or interference in activities of media organizations. It also provided extensive rights for journalists. The positive aspect was that the law allowed media organizations to engage in commercial activities (article 3). This point created strong stimulus for development of media market and independent media. This law also contributed to media diversity since according to article five public associations, labour unions and citizens were given the right to institute media organizations in addition to government agencies.

One of the disadvantages of the law is obligatory registration of all media as legal entities with Ministry of Justice. This norm consequently was used by the authorities to restrict emergence of "unwanted" media. Second serious restriction is the long list of information (Article 23) was not allowed to be publicly disseminated, which is in fact deviation from principles of freedom of speech and press. The restrictions are as follows:

Article 23

List of Information which cannot be publicly disseminated

The following shall not be allowed in the mass media:

- a. divulgence of state and commercial secret;
- b. summoning to coercive overthrow or changing of the existing constitutional system of the state, violation of sovereignty and territorial inviolability of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, and any other state;
- c. propagation of war, violence and coercion, ethnic or religious chauvinism and intolerance towards other peoples and nations;
- d. insult of civil dignity of peoples¹
- e. insult of religious views of believers and ministers of religion;
- f. dissemination of pornography;
- g. use of expressions, regarded obscene;
- h. dissemination of materials, which break the norms of civil and national ethics, which insult attributes of state symbols (armour, flag, anthem);
- i. encroachment of honour and dignity of a person;
- j. Divulgence of intentionally false information.

Besides, as Ibraeva and Kulikova have noted, most of these points according to the established practice of democratic media are regarded either as mass media ethics or self-regulation issue⁴⁹. Another disadvantage of the law is unclear liquidation process for a media organization. Moreover, the law mainly regulates print media leaving electronic media without due attention. The latter, due to their nature, should be regulated by separate law. First attempt to develop such law was made in 2001, although, still not adopted⁵⁰.

49 G. Ibraeva & S. Kulikova: "The History of Development and Modern Media in Kyrgyzstan: results of the research", Bishkek, Salam Joint Stock Co, p. 304.

50 Radio and television companies being in unfavourable situation because of inexistence of law regulating television/radio broadcasting in the country made another attempt to create such law in 2007. Radio and Television Companies Association of Kyrgyzstan initiated related draft with support of Ministry of Culture and Information, the Parliament, National Communication Agency. Currently, the draft is prepared, however, due to dissolution of the Parliament, consideration and adoption is being delayed for unknown period.

In general the law is of a declarative nature, i.e. it does not specify many norms and mechanisms of implementation which are not provided by any other law. Moreover, some articles' texts are ambiguous and allow different interpretations to be made. General wording of the articles according to media experts bear additional risks: "... it gives opportunity to make by-laws which might be applied with regard to any specific case depending on what is preferred by authorities".⁵¹

2.2.3 Law on Protection of State Secrets and Law on Commercial Secret

These laws that affect mass media activity were the first adopted in 1994. Although restricting human rights, these laws had positive aspects for mass media. They provided definitions for "state secrets" and "non-state secrets". However, although the law on mass media placed responsibility for divulgence of state and commercial secrets, it did not provide explanation for what they are.

The law on commercial secret which is a supplement to the law on protection of state secrets was adopted on March 2, 1998.

2.2.4 The Law on Guarantee and Freedom of Access to Information, the Law on Protection of Professional Activities of Journalists, the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on Access to Information held by central and local government agencies

Under the initiation of ex-president Akaev, the parliament adopted two laws directly affecting mass media on November 11, 1997: the Law on Guarantee and Freedom of Access to Information and the Law on Protection of Professional Activities of Journalists. On the one hand, these amendments restated the constitutional rights of people to access information, freedom of speech and press. On the other hand, they define the procedure of accessing, production and dissemination of this information.

Article 13 of the law on guarantees and freedom of access to information states that "if an international agreement signed by Kyrgyz Republic specifies rules other than those specified in this law, and then international agreement shall be applicable." As Mambetaliev noted, "Theoretically it looks good, but in practice, however, it is unprecedented, i.e. there is no precedent when the courts' decisions were based on international treaties signed by president and ratified by parliament. These treaties are persistently referred to by attorneys while judges and prosecutors continue to ignore them."⁵²

There is also a built in contradiction in the law on protection of professional activities of journalists. According to Article 9 titled "Journalist Investigation", a journalist has the right to conduct journalist investigations, but Article 7 of the same law "obligations of journalist" says that "journalist cannot publish facts of an individual's private life and use audio/video recording device without the author's consent." This clause provides access to reliable and convincing proof and at the same time makes journalist investigation more difficult.

The law on access to information of central and local government agencies was adopted in 2006 which defines more clearly the procedure of gaining access to information held by government agencies. Many journalists, however, are not aware of the rules in the mentioned documents. This was clearly

51 G. Ibraeva & S. Kulikova: *"The History of Development and Modern Media in Kyrgyzstan: results of the research"*, Bishkek, Salam Joint Stock Co, p. 304.

52 Kuban Mambetaliev: report *"Mass Media of Kyrgyz Republic"*, 2003.

demonstrated at the end of 2007: of all the litigation that had taken place on the basis of the law on access to information, none of these were initiated by a major media outlet or a journalist.

Besides these laws there are number of other laws which to some extent affect mass media activity:

- The law on licensing, 1997;
- The law on electric and post communication, 1998;
- The law on advertisement, 1998;
- The law on copy and allied rights, 1998;
- The law on informatisation, 1999;
- The law on system of science and technology information, 1999;
- The law on National Television and Radio Corporation, 2007;
- The law on procedure of covering Kyrgyz Republic Jogorku Kenesh (the Parliament) activities by state mass media, 2007.

Rules pertaining to mass media activities are also addressed in the civil and criminal codes as well as related procedural legislation, tax code, various decrees of the president, etc.

Generally speaking, for mass media activity regulation in Kyrgyzstan, all of these regulations have one significant shortcoming: "they are not implemented in practice due to the absence of effective implementation mechanisms."⁵³ Media experts believe there is a need for single law covering all aspects of media activity which would simplify and integrate all existing laws⁵⁴.

Kyrgyz legislation on combating terrorism and extremism affecting media

The main law of the Kyrgyz Republic specifying actions for combating extremism and terrorism is the law on counteraction to extremist activity of August 17, 2005 and the law on counteraction to terrorism of November 8, 2006.

As far as the law on counteraction to extremist activity is concerned, then secretary of National Security Council Miroslav Niyazov in his comments to *Slovo Kyrgyzstana* says that the law is of a preventive nature⁵⁵. Before the adoption of this law, the main mechanism for combating extremism and terrorism was based on criminal code. This law aimed at harmonization Kyrgyz legislation with international legislation as well as number of agreements and contracts on international extremism and terrorism in the framework of Collective Security Treaty Organization, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Eurasian Economic Community, Central Asian Economic Union, etc (see annex 1).

The law has two articles directly related to mass media activities: Article 8 (warning of dissemination of extremist materials through and conducting extremist activity by mass media) and Article 11 (mass media responsibility for dissemination of extremist materials and doing extremist activity).

The articles stipulates that "In cases where extremist materials are disseminated by mass media or there is an evidence of any extremist activity, the founder and/or the editorial office (chief editor) of this particular mass medium should be notified in written by a competent state body which registered this organization, or agency on press, television and radio and means of mass communication, or Kyrgyz Republic Prosecutor General or other prosecutor warning of inadmissibility of such actions or activity with specification of reasons for the warning including violations taken place". The law includes a ten day warning period allowed to remedy the situation. In the event that during the specified period no measures on violations were taken or new facts of

53 G. Ibraeva & S. Kulikova: "The History of Development and Modern Media in Kyrgyzstan: results of the research", Bishkek, Salam Joint Stock Co, p. 304.

54 Y. Maksimov, Comments: "Mass Media: Legislation and Practice". *Bulletin of Kyrgyzstan Bureau on Human Rights and Rule of Law*, 1997, Issue No 8.

55 *Newspaper Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, No 85, August 2005;

extremist activity of the mass medium become known, activity of the related mass medium has to be stopped as specified by law.

Article 11 specifies following punishments for dissemination of extremist materials and conducting extremist activity by mass media:

- Activity of particular mass medium can be stopped as decided by court based on statement of authorised government body which registered this particular entity, or an executive body on press, television and radio and means of mass communication, or the Kyrgyz Republic prosecutor general or other subordinate prosecutor;
- The court can ban sales of related issue of a periodical or audio/video, television/radio programme;
- The court's decision becomes the basis for confiscation of the related issue of a mass medium containing extremism related materials in locations of storing, points of wholesale and retail.

On October 2006, the Ministry of Justice attempted to toughen the punishment for mass media and journalists for dissemination of extremist materials. Specifically, it was suggested to add article 18-1 to the law on mass media as follows: "Mass media cannot disseminate extremist materials and engage in extremist activity. Dissemination of extremist materials through mass media and extremist activities are prohibited." For violation of this article by journalists and media it was proposed to introduce punishment of 5-10 years of imprisonment.

This proposal met wide spread protest from the public. The Institute of Media Representative, an independent non-profit organization, charged with assisting development of mass media through providing legal education to media community members, believes that notion of "extremist materials", "extremist activity" are not clearly defined by the law, and being value-based norms they will serve for interested parties as real instrument of influencing unwanted journalists and mass media.⁵⁶ The organization also notes that the mentioned amendments roughly contradict clause 2 of Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which provides that freedom of speech in no case must be unreasonably restricted, as well as Clause 8 of Article 65 of Kyrgyz constitution⁵⁷ which prohibits adoption of laws restricting freedom of expression and press. The initiative of Ministry of Justice was not supported by the parliament.

The law on counteraction to terrorism of November 8, 2006, unlike the law on counteraction to extremist activity has more articles regulating mass media activity in the context of counteraction to terrorism.

The law places the responsibility on mass media institutions to assist in counteraction to terrorism (Part 2, Chapter 3, Article 12). It states that "Mass media employees while covering events related to terrorist acts and antiterrorist activity are responsible to take into account that right of people for life and security is primary compared to rights for free access to information and its dissemination". Mass media workers are responsible for immediately informing the relevant government agencies if they receive information regarding a terrorist act being organized; they also have to provide information or documents which can represent evidence in court with regard to cases of terrorist acts or that can be used to prevent terrorist act.

The law considers preventive measures that can be used by mass media. For instance, management of mass media is responsible to take measures to ensure that information materials disseminated by media do not justify ter-

56 Bulletin "Monitoring of violation of journalists' and media rights in Kyrgyzstan", October 2006.

57 See Kyrgyz Constitution then in force. Though, this norm appears in all versions of the Constitution adopted later.

rorist activity, call on or provoke such activity, and do not contain propaganda of interreligious, international, interethnic, and interracial animosity. Central and local government agencies are responsible for encouraging and stimulating participation of mass media in terrorist prevention activity as well as in increasing public antiterrorist awareness. The agencies combating terrorism are responsible for providing mass media with timely and objective information about any preparation, execution and prevention of terrorist acts in compliance with Article 2 of this law.

Mass media employees and managers who violated their obligations in assisting counteraction to terrorism based on the law must bear responsibility including criminal responsibility and discontinuation of mass medium activity (Part 2, Chapter 3, Article 14).

The law also specifies a number of restrictions on coverage of terrorism. According to Article 30 of Part 2, Chapter 3, the headquarter on antiterrorist operation can independently decide how and how much information on terrorist acts, results of antiterrorist operations, parties involved mass media will be provided to avoid publicity of details of antiterrorist operations tactics and methods. It also authorises mass media to access the zone of antiterrorist operations (Part 2, Chapter 3, Article 32, and Clause 6).

Existing criminal code of the country includes articles defining criminal responsibility for terrorist activities (pages 226-229, 232, 294, 296 and 376). However, there are no specific articles directly dealing with extremist activities in the criminal code. There is a draft law considering addendums of related articles. It was prepared in 2004 for ratification of the agreement with China on cooperation in the field of combating terrorism, separatism and extremism signed on December 11, 2002 in Beijing.

The Kyrgyz Republic Criminal Code, unlike criminal codes of other countries in the region, does not prohibit membership of banned organizations unless they openly propagated for changing the existing constitutional order. This law is widely used in Kyrgyzstan, specifically by members of religious party Hizb-ut-Tahrir⁵⁸.

Mass media coverage of extremism and terrorism is also restricted by other laws. First is the mentioned law on protection of state secrets. It was effectively used by the military authorities for why no information was provided on military events of 1999-2000 in the Batken oblast when militants of Uzbekistan Islamic Movement tried to enter Uzbekistan through Kyrgyz territory. In 1999 during the first Batken military operations, Uzbek military airplanes bombarded the Kyrgyz village Kara-Teyit. Three people died and seventeen were wounded. Bishkek and Tashkent authorities strictly dosed information about the events and did not allow journalists to enter the military zone; therefore the tragic incident was not covered widely by Kyrgyz media. As Kuban said Mambetaliev, the first journalist to cover this incident for the government paper Slovo Kyrgyzstana, the government took extensive measures to prevent media coverage of the bombardment. The government wanted to avoid starting a conflict with its Uzbek neighbour so close to the beginning of the heating season (Kyrgyzstan imports natural gas from Uzbekistan). In Tashkent, media were told that there were no victims and pilots mistakenly bombarded empty cowshed in the mountains. The scandal was concealed this way."⁵⁹

There was therefore quite a long list of the various types of secrets and possibility that merely any information could be qualified as official or military secret creates uncertainty for mass media in coverage of such delicate sub-

58 *Abdumomun Mambetaliyev: "Islamic group gradually gains support in Kyrgyzstan", IWPR, RCA No 516, November 16, 2007.*

59 *Kuban Mambetaliev: "Legal protection of journalists and mass media in Kyrgyzstan".*

ject as extremism and terrorism. It is thus possible to face problems with the law by ignorance or oversight.

As judicial practice in the country shows, mass media that addressed such delicate topics can be sued without considering divulgence of state secrets as official charge. An example could be the trial between the ombudsman Tursunbai Bakir Uлуу and Vecherniy Bishkek. Tursunbai Bakir uлуу approached the court to protect his honour, reputation and for compensation for moral damage. On December 13, 2002 Vecherniy Bishkek published an article titled "Al-Qaida in Kyrgyzstan" by Daniyar Karimov containing the following text: "Hizb-ut-Tahrir" according to some sources has headquarters in the south of Kyrgyzstan. Members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir probably have influential protectors including government officials. There is a version that connects Tursunbai Bakir uлуу with Hizb-ut-Tahrir and it puts the West in quite a difficult situation. Operations in Afghanistan were initiated to combat politicised Islam and now one of its representatives, our ombudsman, is going to receive grants from the West. The Islamic movement is gradually gaining support in Kyrgyzstan. Who is the West helping?" Tursunbai Bakir uлуу thought that the article by Vecherniy Bishkek damages his honour, dignity and reputation as a citizen and an ombudsman. Sverdlov District Court of the capital rejected to consider the claim of Tursunbai Bakir uлуу on June 22, 2004.⁶⁰ However, the claim itself is important. It is known how sensitive various religious organizations are with regard to criticism.

The mass media and journalists in Kyrgyzstan are not very aware of the legislation regarding extremism and terrorism. Large number of existing restrictions (specifically Article 23 of the law on mass media) and state secrets add more confusion to this issue. Criminal code creates risk for journalists and media covering the topic of religion to be sued for defamation and insult. All these factors cause journalists to be more reluctant to cover the subject or to cover it with far more caution.

Annex 1

List of International (Intergovernmental) agreements and contracts in the field of combating extremism and terrorism signed by Kyrgyzstan

1. Decision of November 24, 2006, regarding Activity Report prepared by Head of CIS Antiterrorist Centre;
2. Agreement dated June 7, 2002 between Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states on Regional Antiterrorist Structure;
3. Decision of Heads of SCO member states dated May 29, 2003 on regulations of SCO Regional Antiterrorist Structure Executive Committee;
4. Treaty of April 21, 2000 between Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Tajikistan, Republic of Uzbekistan on Concerted Action in Combating Terrorism, Political and Religious Extremism, Transnational Organized Crime and Other Threats to the Stability and Security of the Signatory Parties;
5. Shanghai Convention of June 15, 2001 on combating terrorism, separatism and extremism;
6. Agreement between Kyrgyz Republic and People's Republic of China on Cooperation on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism, December 11, 2002;
7. Joint Communiqué of Kyrgyz and Chinese Governments, September 21, 2004;
8. Tashkent Declaration of heads of SCO member states, June 17, 2004;
9. Protocol on Meeting Results of SCO Member States General Prosecutors, September 4, 2003;

⁶⁰ See "Practical application of Kyrgyz legislation on mass media", collection of court decisions on cases involving journalists and media in 2003-2006. Centre for Information Rights / Compilers: Abdykerimova N.A., Alisheva N.I., Bishkek, 2007. p. 784.

10. Agreement on SCO Regional Antiterrorist Structure Database, June 17, 2004;
11. Agreement on Procedure of Organizing and Conducting Joint Antiterrorist Actions in SCO Member States Territories;
12. Programme of Cooperation between Kyrgyz Republic and People's Republic of China for 2004-2014, September 21, 2004;
13. Tashkent Statement of Presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, December 28, 2001;
14. SCO Charter, June 7, 2002;
15. Statement of Foreign Ministers of SCO Member States, September 11, 2002;
16. Agreement between Kyrgyz Republic and Russian Federation on Security Cooperation, December 5, 2002;
17. Treaty on Protection of Common Borders of Eurasian Economic Community Member States;
18. Joint Declaration of Kyrgyz Republic and People's Republic of China, June 9, 2006;
19. Treaty on Alliance between Kyrgyz Republic and Republic of Kazakhstan;
20. Memorandum between Ministry of Interior Affairs of Kyrgyz Republic and Ministry of Interior Affairs of People's Republic of China on Conducting Joint Antiterrorist Operations Training, June 7, 2002;
21. Agreement between the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Kazakhstan on Cooperation in the field of Protection of State Borders, December 15, 2001;
22. Joint Communiqué on results of the meeting of Interior Ministers of Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, June 14, 2001;
23. Joint Communiqué on the results of the meeting of SCO Member States Prime Ministers, September 23, 2003;
24. Joint Statement on the results of official visit of President of Islamic Republic of Pakistan to Kyrgyz Republic on March 7-8, 2005, March 8, 2005;
25. SCO 5th Anniversary Declaration, June 15, 2006;
26. Joint Statement of Kyrgyz President K. Bakiev and Uzbek President Karimov (Slovo Kyrgyzstana, No 107, October 6, 2006);
27. Joint Statement of Kyrgyz President K. Bakiev and Uzbek President Karimov, October 3, 2006;
28. Protocol of approval of the Procedure of Organizing and Conducting Joint Antiterrorist Operations on the territory of CIS Members, October 7, 2002;
29. Decision on Implementation of the Plan of Action on Development of CIS until 2005, November 28, 2006;
30. Agreement between Kyrgyz Republic Prosecutor General and the Republic of Uzbekistan Prosecutor General on Legal Assistance and Cooperation, October 3, 2006;
31. Agreement between the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Cooperation in the field of Combating Organized Crime, July 9, 1999;
32. Agreement on Information Cooperation on Border Issues between Eurasian Economic Community Member States;
33. Articles of Association of Collective Security Treaty Organization, October 7, 2002;
34. Treaty on Good-neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation between Kyrgyz Republic and People's Republic of China, June 24, 2002;
35. Protocol on Relations between Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyz Republic and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, June 23, 2003;
36. Dushanbe Declaration of Presidents of Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan, July 4, 2000;
37. Joint Communiqué of Presidents of SCO Member States, June 14, 2001;

38. Protocol on Cooperation and Coordination of Activities between Ministries of Foreign Affairs of SCO Member States, June 17, 2004;
39. Agreement on Cooperation between Border Security Service of the Kyrgyzstan Republic and the Ministry of Public Security of the People's Republic of China, September 21, 2004;
40. Agreement between the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan on Kyrgyz-Tajik Border Check Points, May 26, 2004;
41. Agreement between the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and Antiterrorist Centre of CIS Member States on Conditions of Residence of Antiterrorist Centre Department on Central Asia in Kyrgyzstan's Territory;
42. Treaty between the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Tajikistan on Partner Good-Neighbourliness Relations, May 26, 2004;
43. Programme of Cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2006-2007, August 24, 2006;
44. Programme of Cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Korea, July 11, 2006;
45. Joint Declaration of Kyrgyz President Bakiev and President of Kazakhstan Nazarbaev on Deepening of Bilateral Relations Between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, July 11, 2006;
46. Protocol on Integration of Organization 'Central Asian Cooperation' in Eurasian Economic Community, June 23, 2006;
47. Joint Statement of Kyrgyz President K. Bakiev and Kazakh President Nazarbaev, April 26, 2007;
48. SCO Bishkek Declaration, August 16, 2007;

2.3 Economic situation of Kyrgyz mass media

Currently according to the information of the Ministry of Justice, there were 939 newspapers and 266 magazines registered on June 14, 2007.⁶¹ However, only a third of those registered are actually operating.

The following figures support this assumption. According to the Book Chamber of Kyrgyzstan in November 2006, 198 newspapers, 31 magazines and 27 bulletins were published. At the same time, according to the Ministry of Justice, in the beginning of March 2006 more than 900 media were registered including: 631 newspapers, 191 magazines. It means that only one third of the registered print media were actually issued.

Most of the media closed down or do not operate due to economic problems. This is demonstrated by the rapid growth of various print products during elections campaigns. During elections when large funds were spent for preparation and production of propaganda materials, the papers which did not operate due to financial problems were given another chance to be printed and probably earn some money.

However, each type of media including electronic, print and rapidly developing online media has its own distinctive characteristics. The economic situation of news mass media covering social and political environment of the country and therefore directly impact the society.

61 *Newspaper MSN, July 17, 2007.*

62 *NTRC has branches in each oblast.*

Television companies in Kyrgyzstan:

1 Public Television Channel: National Television and Radio Corporation (NTRC), the only electronic media in Kyrgyzstan that covers the whole country with its broadcasts⁶²;

1 State Channel: EITR, covers oblast centres of the republic;
 15 non-governmental channels:
 Chui Oblast: NBT, 5-Kanal, Piramida, NTS, MIR⁶³, Tatina.
 Osh Oblast: OshTV, Keremet, Mezon.
 Jalalabat Oblast: Sentyabr.
 Batken Oblast: Nayman
 Issyk-Kul Oblast: Antentv, EMTV
 Naryn Oblast: Shakai, Ayan.

The largest of all television companies in Kyrgyzstan in terms of equipment and number of employees is NTRC. NTRC has branches in each oblast. The number of employees is about 1500 thousand people, although only 200-300 people are directly engaged in the production of content. The rest are technical personnel. The total broadcasting time of NTRC is sixteen hours per day, however; only the half of the content is produced by NTRC itself.

NTRC and its branches are financed by the government. According to the statement of parliament member Dooronbek Sadyrbaev on February 13, 2007, "seven channels operate in seven oblasts which are financed from the state budget in the amount of one billion soms (27 million USD)". Besides state financing, NTRC can earn its own advertising revenue as it has exclusive rights for placement of ads on Russian channels ORT and RTR rebroadcasted in Kyrgyzstan.

The channels listed above are for the most popular in the country.⁶⁴ NTRC also sells air time for placement of programmes produced on the side. The channel received considerable financing from China's Xinjiang Uigur Autonomous Region for weekly broadcasts of the programme "Bugunku Kytai" (China Today).⁶⁵ Moreover, the state channel received the largest part of the spending for development of media in Kyrgyzstan.

In spite of this, NTRC and its branches suffer severe financial difficulties. According to Rysbai Jumabaev, head of Jalalabat Television and Radio Company (JTRC), one of NTRC branches, debt of the company to Kyrgyztelecom for the beginning of November 2007 reached 9,5 KGS (272 USD), only one phone line works, the rest are cut off because of non-payment. "Oblast administration promised us to help and provide 108 thousand KGS for purchasing video editing equipment but we did not yet receive this funding. This is how we survive." – says Jumabekov.⁶⁶

Other NTRC branches are in a similar situation. On January 23, 2007, the head of Talas Oblast Television and Radio Company Mashakbai Rakhmankulov expressed concern in interview to regional correspondent of www.monitoring.kg with regard to possibility that broadcasting may be stopped due to debts to the National Frame Relay Network of Television and Radio for broadcasting of the channel's programmes. The debt then reached 700,000 KGS (18,180 USD)⁶⁷. The debt of Naryn Oblast channel by February 2007 reached 325,000 KGS (8,442 USD)⁶⁸. "This debt is increasing everyday. Besides, we have to pay employees' salaries and travel expenses from internal resources." says Kalykov.

The level of salaries of provincial television company journalists is significantly lower than that offered by independent media. As chief editor of NTRC, on cooperation with regional channels and staff retraining Abdy Satarov, confessed in interview to KTR-OBO (see issue No. 13, 30.03.2007), the salary of a journalists is just 700-800 KGS (20 USD)." It is three times less than average salary in the country.

63 *MIR is the branch in Kyrgyzstan of international television channel established by CIS members.*

64 *www.pr.kg/n, January 22, 2007.*

65 *www.monitoring.kg, November 24, 2006.*

66 *Ibid, November 6, 2007.*

67 *Ibid, January 25, 2007.*

68 *Ibid, February 20, 2007.*

Although the situation in NTRC head office is much better than its branches in oblasts in terms of equipment, level of staff's professionalism, level of salaries, it is significantly worse compared to the situation of capital's independent television companies. Kyas Molokasymov ex-president of NTRC who managed the company till autumn of 2007 says that existing problems are mainly because of lack of financing. "It is impossible to attract strong journalists to NTRC because of lack of financing", he says.

Old equipment often can not be used for coverage of rapidly changing events and emergency situations in the country. The low level of professionalism of the staff adds to the problem. Not many are ready to work, as noted above, for such scanty earnings. Even if one agrees to work, it is because if he/she has another source of income. A conflict place between Sabyr Burkashev, a cameraman working for southern regional correspondent office of NTRC's Zamana studio, with the management of the company demonstrates this problem. On July 25, 2006 he was fired by Kyas Moldokasymov, general director of NTRC. He was fired because Zamana producer Bolokbai Sherimbekov reported that besides working for Zamana, Burkashev cooperates with other channels and hampers the work of Zamana. Burkashev in response says that he was forced to do it because of small salary which is 950 KGS. "I work for southern office of Zamana since 2001 and except my salary I have never received any help. I use my personal video camera and I buy video cassettes for my own money", says Burkashev.

The meagre level of salaries at NTRC also pushes journalists to use their professional authority for their selfish ends. It is not a secret that NTRC journalists charge money for showing or not showing particular materials. In such a situation, the quality and social significance of the information supplied not an issue.

Implementation of the law on NTRC which considers transformation of the channel in public television channel gives hopes for improvement.⁶⁹

The situation with EITR is not better than NTRC. Established by president's order by the end of 2005 on the basis of former Osh-3000, Osh oblast Television Company, as an alternative to the idea of public television, the channel improved its equipment and changed most of its programmes. These changes occurred because financing as almost doubled compared to previous years. However, these funds and other type of support from the government were not enough to make the channel competitive among Bishkek and Uzbek channels. Lack of financing, low levels of salaries and the small staff remain the biggest problems for EITR.

The capital's independent television companies have to be considered separately from the provincial ones since their level of development and development conditions are different. As mentioned in the section on news media in Kyrgyzstan, electronic media in the capital are in the process of rapid development. After the events of March 2005 large resources were invested in NTS (Novaya Televizionnaya Set) and 5-Kanal: new production technologies, so called "news factory", were implemented; new equipment purchased, and good conditions for journalists including pay raise created. NTS was on the peak of its development it was deprived of its licence to cover the provinces in May 2006 and later when its contract with Russian channel Pervyi Kanal was renegotiated in the beginning of 2007) increased to higher quality level and dictated high television standards in the country.

In 2007 KOORT Television Company took on a new life. After reforms the channel was renamed to 5-Kanal. Probably, this channel today is the leading

one in Kyrgyzstan in terms of equipment, level of professionalism and financial resources.

The process of modernisation of NTS and later 5-Kanal, as already mentioned, revealed the lack of professional television journalists. One group of professionals almost without any change in its composition changed their employers.

The rest of capital's television companies did not go through significant changes to improve quality of their content since March 2005 without considering dramatic change of Piramida's information policy.

However, that investments made in Bishkek television companies largely did not pursue the goal of making profits. The owners rather needed the television as instruments of achieving political goals and promoting their economic interests. According to some media experts, KOORT considered to be the leading Bishkek channel till 2005 was not profitable. Revenues from advertisement covered the half of the expenses at the best.

Piramida used to be considered as self-financing company which was not engaged in any particular political force and operated as business organization. However, the end of 2005, specifically the company's disputes with Invest-Media LLC, knew the facts, prove that Piramida possibly had significant financial problems.

By the end of 2005 Invest-Media claimed 50% of Piramida's shares. According to the claim, Invest-Media was legal successor of Areopag-Bishkek LLC which having paid 50% of Piramida's authorised capital equal to 149,219 KGS on April 29 2004 became one of the channel's stakeholders.

Eventually by decision of the Court on Economic Issues of October 5, 2006, Invest-Media as the Areopag-Bishkek's legal successor was given the right of ownership of Piramida's 50% share. Later Invest-Media bought additional 5.5% shares from Abdimukhtar Khaldarov, manager of Radio Technical Centre of Piramida and chairman of Kyrgyztelecom's board of directors and obtained the right to appoint head of the television company.⁷⁰

As media experts believe, today there is only one completely self-financing television company in Bishkek - NBT. The basis for this view is large volume of advertisement on the channel, significantly more than on others. According to survey done by M'ADgroup Bishkek in September 2007 NBT was the second most popular TV channel in Kyrgyzstan coming after Russian Pervyi Kanal.⁷¹

M'ADgroup's survey including such brands as ORT, NBT, Piramida, 39-Kanal, might be assuming responses people based on their evaluation of the channels being rebroadcasted by local television companies. Local companies largely rebroadcast foreign channels while smaller part of the air time is filled with self-produced content. NBT rebroadcasts Russian STS which is one of the most popular in Russia. Piramida rebroadcasts Russian channel REN-TV and 39-Kanal is Kazakhstan's channel.

The practice of rebroadcasting foreign channels is usual for Kyrgyz independent television stations with the exception of 5-Kanal which try to fill completely its air time with its own content and films. Kyrgyzstan's legislation allows rebroadcasts of only Russian channels ORT and RTR. However, as yet authorities tempt to take no notice of the practice of rebroadcasting other Russian channels by provincial stations.

⁷⁰ www.tazar.kg,
January 11, 2007.

⁷¹ 24.kg,
October 10, 2007.

Foreign channels rebroadcasts takes place because of lack of production capacity, technical, financial and human resources at local companies. The small size of advertisement market in Kyrgyzstan which is obviously not enough for all participants puts additional restrictions. Lack of resources affects the volume of production of the television content in state language. According to the law (article 20 of the law on state language as of April 2, 2004), more than half of the programmes of television and radio companies, regardless of their form of ownership, has to be in state language. However, no all companies have capabilities and resources to fulfil this requirement.

Television companies are also restricted in making coverage of events taking place in provinces of Kyrgyzstan including the ones related to extremism and terrorism. In recent time the cases of confiscating extremist literature and arresting its distributors in northern part of the country became more frequent. It means that radical Islamic ideas are being promoted in less Islamic north although the south is considered to be the source of the threat. Not all Bishkek companies can afford keeping correspondents in the south of the country or pay expenses of journalists for trips to the region. Therefore, in coverage of extremism and terrorism related issues most of the capital's media are forced to use other sources, specifically other media. The most popular source is internet based media because of its speed, easiness of access and low production costs. However, this circumstance makes television companies to provide fewer details and to be more news oriented while wide analysis of extremism and terrorism cases happens quite rarely. Limited resources mean that companies cannot afford to pay for a journalist who would have specialisation in the field and be more competent in his/her coverage and analysis.

There are not many specialists who can provide competent comments on all cases of extremism and terrorism taken place in the country.

Provincial electronic media unlike central ones are not attractive for investors due to local people's low purchasing power. They have to survive on their own account and thanks to various funds granted by international donors. To find place in current market conditions, provincial media use methods that cannot be used by companies from capital. For instance, Issyk-Kul channel EMTV covering city of Karakol created its subsidiary production studio in Bishkek. EMTV as all other provincial channels rebroadcasts one of Russian entertainment channels. It also tried once to rent a channel in AlaTV, cable television network in Bishkek, although did not succeed due to increased cost.

Television companies of Osh are in a more or less better situation than other provincial companies. Osh is the second most important city in economic and political terms and compared to people from other regions people living in Osh have slightly higher purchasing power. It is worth mentioning that the most popular channel in Osh is OshTV which was the first private TV studio in Central Asia. It was registered in March 1991 and is almost of the same age as sovereign Kyrgyzstan. The company was founded by telecommunications engineer Khalil Khudayberdiev.

Today it is one of few provincial stations focusing on daily news covering the life of the city and the country in general. "OshTV is the source of free information for people of southern part of the country, particularly for Uzbeks living in Kyrgyzstan. This channel can speak of things that other cannot." - said head of Public Association Journalists Kuban Mambetaliev in 2002.⁷² OshTV was the first to cover incident in 1999 when by mistake one of remote Kyrgyz villages was bombarded by Uzbekistani aircrafts.

72 Kuban Mambetaliev: *"Problems of and Development Trends in Kyrgyzstan's Print and Electronic Media"*, 2002.

The number of professional and creative personnel working for OshTV is the largest among all other private provincial stations of the country. Other television companies employ at most four to five professionals. This situation is explained by lack of financial resources. Private stations learned well that their success is directly related to their ability to attract money. Therefore, these companies are more creative than NTRC branches in oblasts where journalists receive, although small, but guaranteed salaries. Orientation on generating income determines the subject of the content of television companies which is mostly entertainment. Public importance of the information under this condition is the second priority.

Kyrgyzstan's radio stations in terms of the content are completely different from television channels. The entertainment content is prevalent possibly except first and second channels of the state radio, radio Almaz in Bishkek, Almaz-Naryn in the city of Naryn and international BBC and Liberty broadcasting in Kyrgyz language.

Most stations supply music. News programmes make up the smallest part of the air time whereas most of its content is taken from news agencies websites. Radio stations do not produce their own news programmes. Interviews genre and onsite reports are done only by state radio. The reason is the same: such stations as Ekho Mosksvy wouldn't be profitable in Kyrgyzstan. The main target group of the radio are youth who to listen to more music or talk shows rather than news. According to M'ADgroup's rating for September 2007 men of age 41-46 years in Kyrgyzstan prefer listening radio Shanson. Women of the same age also prefer this radio. Shanson comes second in the rating after Russkoe Radio. In general the radio Europa-Plus is at the first place, Hit-FM at the second, Russkoe Radio – third, Shanson – fourth, Love Radio – fifth.⁷³ All the stations mentioned are music radio stations.

These results are confirmed by the survey done by Expert Consulting Agency published in the beginning of 2007. According to Expert's survey, one third of respondents listen to radio everyday. More than 40% of the respondents reported that they do not listen to radio at all, 20% reported that they listen to radio rarely or sometimes. In general, respondents like listening to the music on radio. Less than half of the respondents listen to news programmes on radio.⁷⁴

Print media is easier to register and at the same time its liquidation wouldn't affect much the financial situation of its founders. Besides, operational costs of print media are lower. This explains why the number of print media exceeds electronic including both registered and non-operating media.

These characteristics affected also media's orientation. "Principles of freedom of speech are implemented first on papers. Papers are leading in this difficult process since first days of independence. Radio and television never played nor play a leading role so far." said Mambetaliev, head of Public Association Journalists in 2002.⁷⁵ Although five years past since this statement, general picture did not significantly change during this period. An indicative sign of it is the situation established by the end of 2007 when there was no independent channel which would position itself as oppositional and could criticise the ruling the government. Possibly, the only exception is Jalalabat television company Sentyabr owned by brother of well known opposition politician Omurbek Tekebaev. There is noticeably more diversity of opinions provided by the channel.

There are state and independent print media in Kyrgyzstan. Financial and economic situation of state print media is the same as in state electronic media.

73 24.kg, October 10, 2007.

74 www.pr.kg/n, January 22, 2007.

75 Kuban Mambetaliev: "Problems of and Development Trends in Kyrgyzstan's Print and Electronic Media", 2002.

These are the same problems with financing, lack of human and other resources (lack of journalists, low professionalism etc.). For instance, provincial papers experience problems because of irregular payments from the government. According to Otkurbek Jumaliev, chief editor of Demilge Jumgal region paper, until 2006 the annual budget provided by the state was 90 thousand KGS (2,400 USD). In 2007, however, only 79 thousand KGS (2100 USD) was in the regional budget. Furthermore, the office did not receive this amount by the end of 2007. By this time the newspaper had 60,000 KGS of debt to Social Fund, and receivables of 50,000-60,000 KGS from subscribers.⁷⁶

Using services of the state postal turned out to be a problem not only for state media of Naryn oblast. As Samidin Stambekov, chief editor of Jalalabat oblast paper Akyikat, reported that their newspaper cannot get back the 400,000 KGS (11,500 4sd) from Kyrgyzpochtasy collected from subscribers for long time. Chairman of Jalalabat oblast department of Kyrgyzstan Journalists Union Jalil Saparov says that in few years the main editors of oblast and other papers tired of asking management of Kyrgyzpochtasy branch in oblast and Oblast Administration to resolve this difficult situation of debts, but no results were achieved. However, the newspapers cannot refuse to use the services of Kyrgyzpochtasy since the main source of income is a paid subscription arranged with the help of local state authorities. A majority of these papers do not have a sales department.

Lately the issue of introducing double level budgets in Kyrgyzstan is being discussed which can become the reason for reforming oblasts. The process of abolishment of oblasts will possibly change the media subsidised by the government. Each oblast of the republic except regional and city print media has its own newspaper. It is not clear, however, what will happen to the state papers in case of abolishment of oblasts. Not long ago when given the choice to stay with oblast administrations or separate, many regional state print media elected government subsidies. The coming reform of oblasts will probably liquidate a few existing papers if not all state newspapers in the regions and cities in the regions.

The situation can negatively affect people's awareness in the regions. Batken oblast considered the least developed is an example. By the end of 2007 there were eight print media and all of them were state funded. The only sources of information in the region are state print media. Attempts to start non-governmental newspapers (such as Yiman avazy, Altyn Beshik, Kylym Plus) were unsuccessful due to lack of funds.⁷⁷ Except for the newspapers, there are 7 electronic media operating in the oblast.

Financial problems and resulting restrictedness in use of modern means of communication, lack of modern equipment, high personnel turnover, and small number of staff seriously affect state papers' ability to supply timely and sound information to people on events in the country and the region.

However, the main restraint for development of state papers is their dependence on state authorities. This dependence makes state newspapers more cautious and there are certain forbidden subjects that they cannot touch (e.g. criticise the governor, etc). Guaranteed financing from the state budget as well as support in sales would eliminate the necessity for state media to be more competitive, write interesting articles and satisfy consumers' needs.

Not all of the state media are in a worst situation. There are papers that feel confident and successfully compete with independent media as Chui oblast newspaper Chuyskiye Izvestiya. However, there are not many such papers.

76 www.monitoring.kg, June 26, 2007.

77 Besides newspapers, there are seven electronic media in the oblast including two state television channels, two radio and three private television channels; Radio stations operating on regular basis (everyday) have limited coverage and private television channels also cover the local area only with broadcasts once or twice a week.

In general state press is in more favourable situation than independent press. The state provides assistance to the media to sell subscriptions as well as real, although small, financial aid. According to survey of 2002⁷⁸ revenues from subscription and state subsidies make up 70 to 90 percent of oblast, region and city newspapers' income while 5-10% comes from other sales and 5-20% from advertisement. State papers also have better access to information held by government agencies (state agencies remain the main source of information in Kyrgyzstan). It is clear than why managers of state media are reluctant to privatise state media.

The idea of privatisation of state media on the grounds that that all media players of the country could compete on equal terms was raised long ago. The idea was given a chance to be implemented after March 2005. On December 8, 2005 the head of state, seeking to fulfil his promise, signed a decree to reforming particular mass media. However, as media experts from Institute of Media Representative and Internews-Kyrgyzstan say, this decree leaves no other legal and organizational forms that mass media organizations could choose except joint-stock company.⁷⁹

After the president's decree was signed in July 2006 the government created a working commission for incorporation of state papers Slovo Kyrgyzstana and Kyrgyz Tuusu. No other steps in this regard were taken to privatise the state media.

Problems of independent media are similar to problems of state media. However, the government does not support subscription sales and provide financial aid. The Advertisement market is distributed between a small number of papers and new entrant has a difficult time getting a piece of pie. To survive in such conditions independent media intentionally become political instrument of someone or serve someone's ambitions. Success of such newspapers depends on their sponsor's generosity (who are often the owners). As soon as financial support is runs out, these media lose their popularity and often are forced to close. An indicative example is the newspaper Alas. The paper started up in 2005 and was established by a well known group of journalists from another popular newspaper Agym. Alas as a political publication tried to compete with Agym. The paper was initially doing fine. It gained an audience and became well known. However, due to bad management the main sponsor stopped supporting it and after a year it had to close down. These cases demonstrate that Kyrgyzstan's political print media are not good business investments today. There are no many profitable papers (Vecherniy Bishkek, Delo No, Agym, Dlya Vas). These papers can afford network of correspondents across the country and correspondents specializing on particular subjects. Readers can get full and valid information on emergency situations in the country including extremism and terrorism from these papers.

As it was mentioned earlier, internet media which contributed to public awareness is developing fast in Kyrgyzstan. Before this segment was occupied by national news agency Kabar and independent AKIpress. Today there are 24.kg, Kyrgyznews, Strana.kg, video portal stan.kg, photo news photo.kg. Besides news, internet media started addressing online discussions and analysis of events in the country (tazar.kg, Bishkek Press Club, analitik.kg).

The blogosphere is growing. Internet media showed themselves to be more objective sources of information. This was demonstrated by the protests of November 2006 and April 2007. Unlike majority of electronic and print media, websites posted statements of all opposing parties and information about their activities. Internet based media provide fast coverage of political and emergency events. Extremism and terrorism issues are also covered by web-

78 Ibraeva & Kulikova: "The History of Development and Modern Media in Kyrgyzstan: results of the research", Bishkek, Salam Joint Stock Co, p. 304.

79 www.monitoring.kg, July 20, 2007.

sites more often than electronic or print media. However, such events are usually covered only in news form without analysis. In rare cases one could read analytical information regarding these topics. This is due to the common problem for all Kyrgyzstan's media – lack of field specialists. Internet based media, same as print media, use journalists for many purposes, e.g. a journalist has to be both news reporter and at the same time an expert on various issues.

Although internet media compared to electronic and print media are less costly, most of them are subsidised. According to some experts, only 24.kg news agency is self-financed. Lack of funds restricts internet media activities in providing coverage. Only few news agencies have correspondents in only big cities in oblasts. For this reason most of the information on websites is about Bishkek or Osh. Even most successful news agencies as Kabar, AKIpress and 24.kg employ at most five to seven correspondents in head offices.

In general, Kyrgyzstan's mass media as it is the case in all post-Soviet countries are not very business organizations as it perceived in the West. Aleksandr Iskandaryan, director of Caucasus Institute for Mass Media, with regard to the situation around Kyrgyz media in March 2007 said that the basic problem of media is not in censorship, but self-censorship. Iskandaryan believes that the situation with media in post-soviet countries is going to change as soon as economic and social situation improves and as a result press becomes a business. "When owner of media tends to improve quality for main sponsor – readers, we can discuss new level of development of media", said Skandaryan⁸⁰.

2.4 Foreign mass media and international donors

After independence, Russian mass media were the main source of information for the Kyrgyz nation. This situation was inherited from the Soviet era. Russian Pervyi Kanal along with Kyrgyz national channel covered the whole country, people subscribed to many Russian periodicals while Kyrgyz media's share was small. People often knew more about life in Russia rather than in Kyrgyzstan. With increasing number of Kyrgyz and Kyrgyz language independent press, economic problems resulting in drop in level of life, presence of Russian media in the country during subsequent years significantly decreased.

However, regarding the issue of decreasing Russian media presence in Kyrgyzstan, electronic and print media have to be considered separately since underlying conditions are different. Due to the difficulty of running a media business from a distance and consequent increased cost, Russian press incurred large losses in Kyrgyzstan. By mid 90s Russian quality press almost completely left the local market.⁸¹ This is particularly the case with respect to provinces. For instance, by the end of 90s in Kochkor region, seemingly not that remote place from the centre as some other regions, for the second half of 2000 there were ordered only 4 subscriptions for AiF and 18 subscriptions for Komsomolskaya Pravda. This is significantly less compared to local papers subscribed in this region. 2102 people subscribed for KTR-OBO, 695 for Kyrgyz-Karavan, 323 – Kyrgyz Tuusu, etc.⁸² People were able to subscribe for one or two papers at most since the cost of periodicals was considered high given low level of income (minimum wage of hundred soms (little more than two US dollars). The cost of one paper in 2000 was 3-4 Soms (0,7-09 USD).⁸³

However, as noted by media experts G.Ibraeva and S.Kulikova, not only purchasing strength was the case. "Russian mass media tend to leave informa-

80 www.monitoring.kg, March 5, 2007.

81 G. Ibraeva & S. Kulikova: "The History of Development and Modern Media in Kyrgyzstan: results of the research", Bishkek, Salam Joint Stock Co, p. 304.

82 *Ibid.*

83 M. Khamidov: "Print Media in Kyrgyzstan", Tashkent conference "Mass Media in Central Asia: today and tomorrow", Tashkent, 2000.

tion space of the region: there is almost no news coverage of Kyrgyzstan in leading Russian media", they say⁸⁴.

Russian language population leaving Kyrgyzstan contributed to the decreasing of the demand for Russian press. By 1989 according to the census there were 917 thousand Russian speaking people (21,5% of population) and ten years later there were 600 thousand (12,5%). In the following years and especially after events of March 2005, immigration of Russians dramatically increased. 25 thousand Russians left the country in 2005. Today Russian population hardly exceeds 10% of the population. In some oblasts, e.g. Naryn, there are no Russians at all.⁸⁵

Presently there are four Russian papers with some local content published in Kyrgyzstan: Komsomolskaya Pravda, AiF, Moskovskiy Komsomolets and Rossiyskaya Gazeta. The first three are non-governmental and are in Kyrgyzstan to make profits. Total circulation of these papers does not exceed 40 thousand copies. In comparison, a single issue of the daily Vecherniy Bishkek is about 30 thousand copies. It is interesting that local staff of the Russian papers have great degree of independence in determining local content information policy. As author of the article "US and Russia. Media War in Kyrgyzstan" says "Kyrgyz articles may not necessarily reflect the stand of Moscow office and sometimes are even anti-Russian (except Rossiyskaya Gazeta which is censored in Moscow)."⁸⁶

Unlike the Russian press, electronic media of this country never left Kyrgyzstan. To the contrary, their presence increased over time. Kyrgyz authorities were interested in Russian media presence. Since July 16, 2002 broadcasting of ORT and RTR in Osh, Jalalabat and Batken oblasts was resumed. The decision was made by the government. It is worth noting that the above mentioned Russian channels were given two of three metric frequencies (third belongs to the state television channel) to allow broadcasts across the country.

Besides this all the private channels in Kyrgyzstan except 5-Kanal rebroadcast other Russian channels. For instance, let us take television channels in the capital: NBT rebroadcasts Russian STS, Piramida – RenTV, NTS – ORT. This happens because programmes on the Russian channels are more interesting than those produced locally and due to low production capacity of local companies. TV companies do not have enough technical and creative capacity as well as financial resources to fill the air time with self-produced content.

The same situation prevails among local radio stations. Most popular radio are Russian stations: Europa+, Russkoe Radio, Avtoradio, Ekho Moskvyy, etc.⁸⁷.

Local news on television and radio mainly cover the country and its provinces. Kyrgyz learn foreign news from Russian channels, i.e. people look at events in the world from Moscow's perspective. Lately significant changes are happening in this field. Many provincial television channels show programmes of EuroNews, Discovery, etc. Radio stations rebroadcast programmes of non-Russian Deutsche Welle, Voice of America, Liberty and BBC.

Activities of Radio Liberty and BBC which supply programmes in Kyrgyz language are important to mention. Liberty's Kyrgyz department started working on March 18, 1953. First narrator and reporter was Kudaibergen Kojomberdiev under the pseudonym of Azamat Altay since 1960. In Soviet period, Liberty radio was the only alternative source of information about situation in the world and the country for Kyrgyzi expatriates. The station made great contribution to establishment and strengthening of democratic values in Kyrgyzstan. After gaining independence and the beginning of demo-

84 G. Ibraeva & S. Kulikova: "The History of Development and Modern Media in Kyrgyzstan: results of the research", Bishkek, Salam Joint Stock Co, p. 304.

85 www.asiainform.ru, "Question about Russian language: phobia are progressing", September 9, 2006.

86 Alisher Olim: "US and Russia. Media war in Kyrgyzstan", www.centrasia.ru, November 6, 2007.

87 24.kg, "Men of mature age in Kyrgyzstan prefer listening radio Shanson", October 10, 2007.

cratic state, Liberty opened an office in Kyrgyzstan. However, Liberty's relations with new the government were not always good. The station according to its principles continued informing people of the reality in the country. The government did not like it and took measures to make Liberty's work difficult. On February 24, 2005 National Frame Relay Television and Radio Network stopped broadcasting programmes of radio Liberty on medium and micro waves covering almost all the republic⁸⁸. Officials said that they are announcing a tender on radio transmitters of these radio frequencies. The tender for sale of the frequencies used by Liberty was planned for March 10, 2005 and before this date nobody had right to cut broadcasts of the radio. After Askar Akaev was overthrown, the station was given full access to its audience.

Today Liberty's programmes are available for two hours per day on 2nd state radio and one and half hours on Almaz radio (Bishkek and Naryn) and Salam radio (Batken). The radio station has website in internet which gives access to texts and audio of its radio programmes. Besides, Liberty in cooperation with the state radio runs television projects as Yngaysiz Suroo (Inconvenient Question) and Azattyk+. Liberty in Kyrgyzstan is the first in post soviet space in terms of the size of its audience.⁸⁹

Radio BBC started broadcasting in Kyrgyz language since June 3, 1996. Duration of broadcasts initially was only 5 minutes while today it is half hour per day.

Liberty and BBC programmes are considered as model of applying international standards of journalism in coverage of events in the country for Kyrgyz journalists.

Besides Russian, international and American media, broadcasts of Kazakh, Uzbek and Tajik channels reach Kyrgyzstan's border areas. In Chui oblast, in north of the country and Bishkek, Kazakh television channels as Elarna, Khabar and KTK are rebroadcasted. However, in this region there is significant number of Kyrgyz channels. In other regions, particularly south of the republic, the situation is more critical. People living in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan border areas, Leylek region of Batken oblast, prefer watching television of neighbouring Tajikistan and Uzbekistan rather than Kyrgyz television as reports correspondent of www.monitoring.kg.⁹⁰ Local people prefer foreign channels because they offer more options and diversity. These include Tajik channels such as Aziya, SM-1, Dushanbe, and Uzbek channels as Sport, Eshlar, etc.

There are regions in the south of the republic that are not covered by local television channels due to absence of transmitters while lots of neighbour countries' channels reach these regions. Consequently, Kyrgyz people living in these regions are more informed of life in other countries rather than Kyrgyzstan and receive news of their own country from Uzbek or Tajik channels.

Such situation prevails because of weakness of local electronic media. Low professionalism of Kyrgyz journalists also plays significant role in it. The state is not able to solve this problem on its own. Western organizations support to local media in the form of grants is significant given this critical situation. Large scale and effective support is provided by organizations as USAID, Internews Network, Soros Fund, IWPR, SDC, Freedom House, UNDP, OSCE, US Embassy Democratic Commission in Kyrgyzstan, Eurasia Fund and others.⁹¹

Soros Foundation Projects:

This organization operates in Kyrgyzstan since 1993. It provides financial support for media organizations through giving competition based financial grants. The organization also provides journalists with travel expenses abroad

88 *Bulletin "Monitoring of violation of journalists' and media rights in Kyrgyzstan", February 2005.*

89 *Newspaper Slovo Kyrgyzstana: "Liberty is expanding", May 29, 2007.*

90 *www.monitoring.kg, March 10, 2007.*

91 *Mambetaliev: "Western projects on mass media support in Kyrgyzstan", the report presented on round table "Freedom of speech in Central Asia", Amsterdam, December 12, 2003.*

for international conferences and training. Soros Foundation holds seminars for beginning employees of papers and TV companies. The Fund provides funds for large national conferences on mass media issues. The organization developed and implemented approaches and methods of supporting initiatives aimed at strengthening principles of freedom of speech and press. During the period from May 2002 to August 2003 Soros Fund financed the Project on Monitoring Conflicts and Violation of Journalists and Mass Media Rights in Kyrgyzstan. The project's goal was to do news coverage of all violation related facts on national level. Successful project was continued on larger scale in all countries of Central Asia and financed by USAID.

One of latest significant projects of Soros Foundation was the Congress of Kyrgyzstan's Journalists in December 2007, the first one in the last five years. During this congress journalists adopted an Ethic Code of Journalist and the mass media self-regulation body.

Institute for War and Peace Reporting Projects:

The institute has operated in Kyrgyzstan since 2000. It reports on the most acute problems of life in the country for foreign and local audience. The organization holds trainings, seminars and conferences on international journalism standards for journalists. These activities are done not in traditional way, but in more practical way aimed at maximal effect.

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

SDC started its activities in Kyrgyzstan in 1999, through the Swiss non-governmental organization SIMERA which has implemented mass media related projects in countries in transition since 2005. SIMERA conducted regional conferences such as Conference on Interethnic Relations in Fergana valley, Islam and Mass Media, Natural Resources of Central Asia. The subject of these conferences was chosen abstract and all-embracing while experts invited were not well aware of the region.

Practical seminars for journalists conducted by the agency where theoretical principles were practiced by producing education paper in professional format happened to be more successful. The projects for attraction of Russian journalists for working in local papers for long period were also successful. Publishing of the book "The History of Development and Modern Media in Kyrgyzstan" and another book titled "Journalism and Languages: Perception and Functions of Russian and Kyrgyz Language Mass Media in Kyrgyzstan" was significant media related event in the country. These books are valued high because it was the first experience of such social and analytical research on journalism.

Freedom House Projects:

Freedom House started operating in Kyrgyzstan in September 2002. The organization conducts trainings for journalists and lawyers on issues of legal responsibility for publications in press. One of the most significant projects of Freedom House is independent printing house opened in November 2003 in Bishkek for funds provided by US Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour. The Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Open Society Institute supported this project. Despite that the project was implemented in 18 months instead of the 8 months planned, and had problems in first days of operation, the new printing house broke the state monopoly on printing services and stimulate a decrease in the structural censorship imposed by authorities over independent media.

Eurasia Foundation Projects:

The fund started working in Kyrgyzstan in 1993. It provided financial support to provincial newspapers (including state papers), television and radio compa-

nies. There were no, however, socially significant media projects implemented by this fund. It is less popular than other funds. It attempts to work in Fergana valley by focusing on acute problems as labour migration; trans border trade, customs barriers and corruption.

US Embassy Democratic Commission Projects in Kyrgyzstan:

The Democratic Commission started implementing projects in 1995. During the period of the emergence of independent papers, the commission provided computer and office equipment. Conferences and seminars conducted by public journalist organizations were sponsored. During parliamentary and presidential election of 2000 and preterm parliamentary election of 2007, the Democratic Commission financed monitoring of electronic and print media. It also provided financial grants for development of new independent electronic media.

US National Democratic Institute Projects:

It started working in Kyrgyzstan in 1994 and in the field of mass media it provided assistance to independent television company from remote oblast in preparation of series of democracy related programmes. The most successful project was sponsorship for production of programmes as *Nashe Vremiya* (Our Time) and *Bez Retushi* (Without Retouch) on Piramida independent television channel.

USAID Projects:

USAID supports mass media since 1995. Few significant projects done mainly through Interview and Counterpart Consortium were implemented so far. Independent papers, television and radio, news agencies were provided with assistance though sponsoring trainings, conferences, seminars and round tables on mass media

From 2003 to 2007 the largest project was International Project on Protection of Democratic Principles of Freedom of Speech in Countries of Central Asia which conducted monitoring in the field of mass media in Kyrgyzstan.

UNDP Projects:

This organization sponsored government mass media initiatives. Specifically, UNDP financed conference held in September 2003 with participation of state media. In the conference the Media Council, its structure is defined by president's press service, was established.

Ebert and Adenauer Foundations:

The German Ebert Fund has worked in Kyrgyzstan since 1993. In this period two more or less popular media projects were implemented. In 1997 Gerhard Pflauber, an expert from Germany, provided consulting regarding two draft laws (guarantees of and free access to information / protection of journalist professional activities) which were initiated by the president and adopted by the parliament. In 2002 this foundation sponsored public awareness work aimed to explaining the Complex Development Principles to provincial journalists which was criticised. The foundation, in cooperation with the president's press service, organized round tables for journalists in the oblast centres. "Such initiatives going in unison with state press service activities are not much useful for development of democratic freedom of speech and press. These initiatives only repeat pro-government functions of UNDP oriented on supporting authorities in their mass media related activities", believes Mambetaliev.⁹²

Another German foundation, Adenauer Foundation, started its activities in Kyrgyzstan in 1996. This foundation does not conduct direct activities with mass media in our country because it works through Centre for Training Jour-

92 *Kuban Mambetaliev: "Western projects on mass media support in Kyrgyzstan", the report presented on round table "Freedom of speech in Central Asia", Amsterdam, December 12, 2003.*

nalists based in Tashkent. Journalists of Kyrgyzstan are invited to participate in trainings and seminars held by this Centre.

OSCE Projects:

OSCE works on mass media issues since 1999. It conducted the First International Conference on Mass Media of Central Asia in Bishkek. Later few other conferences including Present and Future of Journalism in the Region, Mass Media in the Period of Combating Terrorism, Mass Media and Corruption and Fifth Central Asian Mass Media Conference in 2003 were held with support of OSCE. According to K. Mambetaliev, all these events did not have expected result since no leading experts on issues considered as well as mass media leaders of the region participated. This decreases interest in these events.

Training project in the period 2004-2006 "Journalism and Democracy" was successful. More than 30 people from media of Central Asian Region passed training on standards of international journalism.

Besides, this organization is different from others in ability to react fast on emergency situations happening in the country. With regard to assassination of Saipov, the OSCE representative on freedom of mass media, Miklos Kharashti, made the following statement: "I'm shocked and saddened with cruel assassination of Alisher Saipov, one of the most prominent young journalists of Kyrgyzstan, well known in his own country and abroad. This loss overtook us when murder of Georgiy Gongadze, Elmar Guseynov, Anna Politkovskaya and Grant Dink are still fresh in our memory" said Kharashi. "We need to take drastic measures to provide secure working conditions for journalists in accordance with OSCE obligations".

HIVOS Projects:

This Dutch organization operates in Kyrgyzstan since 1994. It started with a large scale strategic programme focusing on four main sectors among which mass media were identified as the priority sector. However, for unknown reason this programme was amended so that mass media component was excluded while small business and human rights organizations were given priority. The HIVOS programme report of September 2003 by David Sog and Erick Johnson says that exclusion of mass media, as the fourth main sector was one of the most serious weaknesses.

Currently HIVOS is implementing two year project on monitoring of internet development in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Projects of International Federation of Journalists:

IFJ began working in Kyrgyzstan in April 2002. The representative of this organization started a pilot project on creation of independent journalists union in the country. The project was implemented in cooperation with local organization Public Association Journalists which became IFJ associated member in 1999. The result of such cooperation was the official start of the Kyrgyzstan Journalists Union in 2003, the first such establishment in Central Asia. Through the union's proposal, the IFJ conducted conference titled Regional Journalism in Fergana Valley in 2003 which was very important in terms of uniting and consolidation of efforts. The conference gathered leaders of mass media from three republics of Fergana valley (three oblasts of Kyrgyzstan, three oblasts of Uzbekistan and one oblast of Tajikistan). Woman journalist leaders of this region also participated in the conference. It was the first such content-rich event to be held in history of the country.

International Media Support Projects:

This European organization, based in Copenhagen, began its activities in Cen-

tral Asia in the autumn of 2002. IMS did preliminary research on situation of mass media in the region and in May 2003 held meeting of publishers and editors from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek. As a result, common strategy platform for assisting local media by European donors was developed.

In 2007 IMS started implementing a few short-term projects in Kyrgyzstan directly or through the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) such as creation of website of analytics and news edition Journalist News, Extremism and Terrorism and Mass Media in Central Asia, etc.

Such wide support of Kyrgyz media by western donors creates concern on the part of Russia. For instance, participants of the international conference "The Role of Russian Media in Central Asia in Forming Integrated Information Space" held in November 2007 in Bishkek raised the issue of why there is no interest in investing in local media and why there is no support of and trainings for local journalists working for Russian media on the part of Russia, as it is in the West, etc.⁹³

According to some analysts' explanation, such interest in Kyrgyzstan exists because the republic is perceived as a field that can be used for informational invasion to other countries of Central Asia by United States and the West as well as Russia⁹⁴.

2.5 Struggle for freedom of speech in the context of combating extremism and terrorism

Such factors as Kyrgyzstan's proximity to centres of instability in Central Asia as Afghanistan and Xinjiang Uigur Autonomous Region of China, propaganda being done by religious extremist organizations as Hizb-ut-Tahrir, Islamic Party of Turkistan, Akramiya, etc, forces the government to use media as effective instrument of ideological war with ideas of extremism, terrorism and separatism. However, there is no common approach as to how the state should cooperate with media on this issue. This was well demonstrated by first Bishkek media forum *The Role and Place of Mass Media in Opposing Challenges and Threats of XXI Century* held on May 21-24, 2007.

The event was held with support of the Kyrgyz president, the secretariat of Collective Security Treaty Organization and OSCE Centre in Bishkek. The forum raised issues such as how should media behave under conditions of increasing threats of extremism and terrorism, human trade, illegal trafficking of drug and weapons of mass destruction? Is it possible to unite efforts and oppose the threats to modern society?

In general, authorities blamed media and journalists in the forum. "Media objectively put themselves as allies of terrorism," believes vice president of Russian Federation Academy on Geopolitics and former military general L. Ivashov.⁹⁶ According to most speakers, media covering terrorist acts help terrorist organizations to pursue their goal which is to create fear in society.

However, no one had any specific suggestions how media should cover such delicate issues. As says the author of the article titled "What does our press have to say to Osama Bin Laden and his team?": "Unfortunately, participants spoke only general words and some facts about journalists' responsibility, moral and professional duty etc. There were no serious sociological surveys and methodological and professional analysis of media space to put as basis.

93 Larisa Li: "Press in Russian language is more popular in Kyrgyzstan", *Russiyaskaya Gazeta*, November 6, 2007;

94 Alisher Olim: "US and Russia. Media war in Kyrgyzstan", www.centrasia.ru, November 6, 2007;

95 Islamic Party of Turkistan, former Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, - international terrorist organization operating under the cover of radical Islamic slogans. In 1995-1998 the party was called "Uzbekistan Movement of Islamic Rebirth". The leaders of IPT carried out few large terrorist acts aimed at destabilising the situation in Fergana valley and Central Asian region in general (source: CIS Antiterrorist Centre).

96 Ibragim Rustanbek: "What does our press have to say to Osama Bin Laden and his team?", www.gazeta.kg, May 23, 2007;

Moreover, there is nothing about common mechanisms and ways of opposing modern threats and media tools (system)".⁹⁷

One of the results of media forum is the Resolution of 1st Bishkek media forum *The Role and Place of Mass Media in Opposing Challenges and Threats of XXI Century* (Bishkek, 21-24 May, 2007) (see Annex 2). Many documents cited in the resolution in fact were never used by Kyrgyz journalists.

As mentioned earlier, Kyrgyz law on mass media does not address issues of terrorism and there is no framework regulating press activities in crisis situations. The government attempts to create such framework usually means moving towards restricting freedom of expression and toughening of punishment. For instance, on October 16, 2006 the Minister of Justice Marat Kayipov in a parliament session presented a draft law expected to amend some legislative norms of Kyrgyzstan for the purpose of adjusting existing legislation in accordance with the law on combating extremist activity in force since August 17, 2005⁹⁸. The following addendum (Article 18-1) to Chapter 3 of the law on mass media was proposed: "Dissemination of extremist information through mass media and carrying out extremist activities by mass media is unallowable. It is prohibited to disseminate extremist materials through media as well as to engage in activities with sign of extremism". Draft law considers punishment from 5 to 10 years of imprisonment for violation of this article.

This initiative caused wide protests amongst media organizations. The Public Association Internews-Kyrgyzstan made open statement saying that this step by Ministry of Justice "is a real threat for our country's most important achievement – freedom of speech!"⁹⁹ Internews-Kyrgyzstan believes that this unjustified toughening of the legislation leads to increasing of mass media censorship in the country and is a threat for development of journalism", says the letter. According to Internews, "civil legislation has to be used for determining a violation of law by media while imprisonment of journalists is not admissible. Proposed amendments not just create big gap between Kyrgyz information related laws and internationally accepted standards on freedom of speech, but contradict existing constitution that proclaims freedom of speech and press in our country".

The Institute of Media representative also evaluated amendments to the some law proposed by Ministry of Justice as direct restriction of freedom of speech in Kyrgyzstan¹⁰⁰. The institute believes that notions *extremist materials* and extremist activities are not clearly defined by Kyrgyz legislation. These notions can become for interested people an instrument of pressuring unwanted journalists and media.

The human rights advocate organization Citizens Against Corruption expressed the same idea¹⁰¹. According to this organization, adoption of mentioned amendments and addenda would become "next step towards pursuing journalists in Kyrgyzstan and regulation of opposition forces' activities typical for authoritarian regimes."

Besides media and non-governmental organizations, the journalist community opposed the ministry's initiative. AKIpress on October 16, 2006 published an article on its website titled "Ministry of Justice proposes put journalists in prison for five to ten years for disseminating extremist materials" which raised violent reaction on the part of Ministry of Justice.

Despite assurances of minister of justice, Marat Kayipov, that amendments proposed do not restrict freedom and independence of media and help implementing the law on opposing extremist activities, parliament members

97 Ibid.

98 www.monitoring.kg, October 17, 2006.

99 www.monitoring.kg, October 17, 2006.

100 Ibid, October 17, 2006.

101 Ibid, October 19, 2006.

did not adopt the draft amendments to the law on mass media on October 19, 2006.

However, mass media being one of the most important mechanisms of influencing public opinion can help oppose terrorism, although it is impossible to force media to combat extremism and terrorism. As authors of the research titled "Terrorism and Mass Media" say that "eventually journalists come to conclusion that ethics of covering terrorist acts consequences is the matter of their professionalism."¹⁰²

In this context adoption of journalists' ethic code and creation of mass media self-regulation body during National Congress of Kyrgyzstan's Journalists held on December 8, 2007 appears significant. Many other attempts were made with regard to ethic code and establishment of self-regulation body in Kyrgyzstan before this event, although, none of them didn't work. As media representative Shamaryl Maychiev said, one of the main reasons of failures was that representatives of media expected to adopt the ethic code did not have enough authority to do so. On last congress of December 8, media representatives were given authority to adopt the code and participate in establishment of self-regulation body. About 70 delegates from media and 20 independent journalists took part in this congress.

Kyrgyzstan Journalists Ethic Code consists of 20 clauses. The basis of the code was the draft prepared by working group of well known journalists and media experts. Each clause of the code was thoroughly analysed and accepted after intense discussions, giving hope that the new ethic code corresponds to present day conditions and be more sustainable.

No less important is the adoption of the code in the same time with establishment of self-regulation body supposed to control implementation of the code.

Summarising this part we could say that Kyrgyz journalists are learning to cover the subject of extremism and terrorism. There are no clear methods of cooperation between media and the government in opposing these increasing threats.

Annex 2

Resolution of the First Bishkek Media Forum: *The Role and Place of Mass Media in Opposing Challenges and Threats of XXI Century*, Bishkek, May 21-24 2007

We, the participants of the First Bishkek Media Forum held under the aegis of the Kyrgyz Republic President, the Secretariat of Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and with support from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Centre in Bishkek, considered and discussed the most current issues and challenges to be overcome for secure development and the future of states.

Representatives from the CSTO member states, civil society and mass media believe it to be necessary to declare that the security of current transformations in Eurasia, stability in society, decent conditions of life for the population, and abiding freedom is only possible if there is a clear understanding of all the complexities and scale of work needed to be done today.

The new situation in the field of security of states and peoples shows that security issues in the present and future need to be solved via good-neighbourliness and cooperation. In this regard, Bishkek media forum calls

102 *Ibid*, July 2, 2004;

on journalists to consider present day political situation in their professional work, assist establishing peace and harmony in society, oppose modern challenges and threats as extremism, terrorism, drug trafficking and other problems.

Today it is important to realise that not just the degree of responsibility of politicians, journalists and other people with respect to the future, but our work's consequences, our place and role in common goal, degree of preparedness and ability to oppose violence.

The issue of creating sustainable system of international and collective security is also important and we, journalists, realise that such organizations as CSTO and OSCE, CIS Antiterrorist Centre and Regional Antiterrorist Structure of SCO are effective instruments of solving many problems and intend to provide information support to development of these organizations and help them solve current complex problems. In this case a good start may be opening of a joint information centre on development of common ideology of opposing terrorism and extremism.

Journalists cannot be sideline observers of real struggle of national and international organizations against terrorism, drugs and other challenges. We believe that there is a need for media strategy and systematic information activity which can become integral part of general international struggle for establishing public aversion to ideas of terrorism and extremism.

We believe that first steps of international antiterrorist media forum under the aegis of Collective Security Treaty Organization towards initiating international target programme of opposing modern threats and challenges to be sound.

On this stage of work, we think necessary to approach head of Kyrgyz Republic and other CSTO member states to ask for support of our efforts. We turn to our colleagues in other countries as well as public and international organizations with proposal to cooperate more closely and develop effective methods of propaganda against and opposing xenophobia, nationalism and other ideological and political routes of extremism and terrorism.

We propose hereby to interested governmental and inter-governmental organizations to hold Meeting of Heads of Information Bodies and Mass Media of CSTO member states for establishing coordination in the field of information policy.

International Antiterrorist Media Forum events will be based in future upon "Ethic Principles of Journalists' Professional Behaviour Covering Terrorist Acts and Antiterrorist Operations" adopted by journalist community, Antiterrorist Convention, Mass Media Ethic Rules in Cases of Terrorist Acts and Counter-Terrorism Operations, decisions of UNESCO International Conference titled "Terrorism and Mass Media (Manila, 2002), recommendations of Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly of 2005 on code of ethics for journalists, photographers and editors dealing with terrorist acts and threats as well as other international decisions and agreements.

3 Examples of mass media news coverage of extremism and terrorism in Kyrgyzstan

3.1 Foreword

The case happened on May 12, 2006 is taken as example for analysis. On mentioned date group of 6-10 armed people attacked border check point in Tajikistan and took 19 Kalashnikov machine guns, one heavy machine gun and 4 thousand cartridges. In the morning they attacked the Kyrgyz Ak-Turpak customs check point and entered Kyrgyz territory. As a result of military operations done by border protection forces, National Security Service and the Ministry of Internal Affairs until late night of the same day, four militants were killed, two were taken prisoners. Six Kyrgyz soldiers were killed and nine were wounded.

According to then minister of interior Murat Sutalinov, the militants were somehow involved with Islamic Party of Turkistan.¹⁰³ Extremist papers were found in the car left by militants. According to the military, this group intended to do series of terrorist acts in Kyrgyzstan since militants had explosives, specifically large amount of aluminium powder used for production of bombs.

The case was the first case of attempt of militants to enter Kyrgyz territory and armed conflict with military forces since Batken events of 1999-2000. News coverage of events in Batken on the May 12th by news agencies 24.kg, AKIpress, Kabar, the online news websites pr.kg and tazar.kg, the Russian language newspapers Belyi Parakhod, MSN, Slovo Kyrgyzstana and the Kyrgyz language newspapers Kyrgyz Tuusu, Erkin Too, Zaman Kyrgyzstan, Agym as well as electronic media including National Television and Radio Corporation (television and radio coverage), radio Liberty and BBC was analysed. From the mentioned media, Kabar is governmental news agency; Kyrgyz Tuusu and Erkin Too are governmental papers.

3.2 Analysis

For the majority of the population, the main sources of information on the 12 May 2006 events in Batken were the news agencies.

The first AKIpress news report, was transmitted at 9:28 a.m. and titled "As a result of armed conflict on Tajik-Kyrgyz border two Kyrgyz soldiers were killed". During the day, AKIpress ran 11 reports on the intrusion and on the counter-terrorism response. These reports from a total of 56 reports in all, constitute one fifth of all news reports on that the day. The www.24.kg news agency published 16 reports of a 67 total on May 12 2007). The Kabar national news agency lagged far behind with only three reports of the 29. Various sources and various news agencies could be the reason for this difference. In the Kabar case, the agency has to pay more attention to validity of reports and correspondence to official information. Therefore, Kabar provided reports based on only official information on May 12.

In the May 12 general news summary reports there were many inaccuracies about the number of militants that had entered Kyrgyz territory as well as number of victims. According to the news agencies, this inaccuracy was

¹⁰³ Islamic Party of Turkistan, former the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, - international terrorist organization operating under the cover of radical Islamic slogans. In 1995-1998 the party was called "Uzbekistan Movement of Islamic Rebirth". The leaders of IPT carried out few large terrorist acts aimed at destabilising the situation in Fergana valley and Central Asian region in general (source: CIS Antiterrorist Centre).

associated with the different sources disseminating conflicting information. Even the official reports provided by military units did not correspond to each other. Reports on the forum of www.pr.kg website providing news, or review of the news, coming from other media sources on operations in Batken are indicative.¹⁰⁴

Military equipment is being concentrated in the Region of Conflict

Date and Time: 12/05/06 - 18:02

Section: Kyrgyzstan | Attack on Check-Point

According to some reports, including those provided by the Tajikistan special service, there are currently about 10 militants in the mountains of Sary-Taala. National Security Service border patrols have already labelled this group as an "armed band". Military equipment including weapons as Kalashnikov machine guns and grenade launcher is being concentrated in the region, reports 24.kg.

www.pr.kg

Guest | 12/05/06 - 12:16 | ID: 1183

According to some reports, what does it mean? It may mean YES and NO.

Guest | 12/05/06 - 12:13 | ID: 1182

According to some reports, what does it mean?
The same lack of inaccuracy in reporting was observed the next day as well.

The same lack of inaccuracy in reporting was observed the next day as well.

Losses of National Security Service Border Protection:

Date and Time: 13/05/06 - 10:38

Section: Kyrgyzstan | Attack on a Check-Point

One soldier of Ministry of Interior Special Forces has been injured. Three border patrol soldiers from the Aydarken and Kadamjay military units have been injured. Captain Kurmanbek Ykyshev, commander of Aydarken unit died from his injuries. Five militants were killed. One, who was taken prisoner, is being interrogated in Kadamjay.

Major general Sadyrbek Dubanaev said that there was professional sniper among the group of militants. He was the last one killed.

The operation was put on hold when it became dark. Today, May 13 2006 special services and border patrol have collected the weapons taken by the militants at in skirmish area at the Tajik Lyakkan check-point. This was reported by Kyrgyz National Security Service Border Protection Forces, reports 24.kg.

According to AKIpress sources in the National Security Service, as a result of special operations of May 12 2006 in Batken oblast Sarytalaa area, four people from Kyrgyz security including two National Security Service agents, one border patrol soldier and one policeman died. One customs office worker was wounded.

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¹⁰⁴ In the examples cited, only the posts relating to accuracy of the news were given.

>

Four militants were killed; one was taken prisoner, the rest escaped. In total, according to sources, the number of militants was about 20 people.

The prisoner is currently being interrogated. There is an account that members of the group attacked Tajik check-point and Kyrgyz customs post on May 12 were drug traffickers.

Meanwhile, according to ITAR-TASS with reference to Tajikistan Ministry of Interior, the attack on the check points was done by terrorists.

www.pr.kg

Guest | 15/05/06 - 03:50 | ID: 1298

Esteemed PR! Write accurately about how many people died from our side. You refer to various sources and there are various results. It seems that more people were killed from our side than what is written. Maybe journalists cannot say exactly how many people died.

It is a catastrophe if we have equal losses with militants. If Kyrgyz military forces lose six people in gunfire with six bandits, then I'm disappointed. I'm sorry for all of us. With such alignment of forces we didn't have to be even wounded. I mean the skirmish. We should act more wisely.

We need to say that the next day various media gave various numbers with regard to number of militants dead and prisoners as well as deaths from Kyrgyz side.

Sometimes media created confusion. Pr.kg website put photo of militant allegedly killed on May 12 as illustration for the report titled "One of Militants Killed". Site visitors were in doubt whether this was the photo of the real militant. One of the guests says:

«Guest | 13/05/06 - 10:41 | ID: 1253 Guys, stop showing out of topic photos. This is a photo of killed Iraqi civilian. I've seen it recently on some website».

As mentioned earlier, on first day of intrusion of armed group to Kyrgyzstan and military operation on liquidation, news agencies provided only summary reports. The reports called people entered Kyrgyz territory "unknown men", "group of armed people", "band", "bandits", "criminals", "members of illegal armed band", "militants". None of the reports mentioned of these people's engagement in any terrorist group or extremist organization.

The first such assumption was made by the media next day, May 13 when 24.kg published a report titled "Group of militants entered the south of the country was possibly preparing a mass terrorist act" on its website at 13:18 o'clock. The article said following: "Militants as recognized by border protection were waiting for support. But it is not clear who exactly they were waiting for. The Border Patrol National Security Service refused to provide comments on newly raised version that the band was involved with well known Uzbekistan Islamic Movement which joined to so called Islamic Movement of Turkistan.¹⁰⁵ However, it is already known that at least one of the militants is connected with extremist organizations. With regard to other members of the liquidated band according to preliminary information there is no evidence of any involvement with extremist organizations.

¹⁰⁵ Border Protection Forces are the sub-structure of National Security Service.

Kabar news agency sent out two reports on the May 15 "The military forces of Kyrgyzstan supposed that the militant group that had been killed was planning to do series of terrorist acts" and "Group of militants that intruded from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan consisted of members of Uzbekistan Islamic Movement, said the Tajik border patrol service".

These estimations were mainly based on military conjectures, opinions of political researchers and other foreign media, but not on investigations made by local media. The first speculation on the events from Kyrgyz news agencies was done by the website 24.kg on May 15. The article, titled "The conflict in Sary-Talaa: many questions, not many answers" by Dmitriy Yarov, makes the following conclusion: "As far as the group members were from different countries (at least one of the militants has Kyrgyz citizenship and their leader has Tajik citizenship), Kyrgyzstan again faced threat of international terrorism. In Central Asia this term means few organizations including Islamic Movement of Turkmenistan and underground Hizb-ut-Tahrir".

Questions on identity of these armed people who entered Kyrgyzstan were resolved on May 16, 2007, i.e. 4 days after the events. Vecherniy Bishkek published an interview on this day with Interior Minister Shtalnov who said: "Bandits who entered Kyrgyz territory without any problems in Friday morning can be freely called international terrorist group". According to the minister, the militants were members of Islamic Party of Turkistan. The same interview with reference to the source of information was posted on website of Kabar. The same day 24.kg published interview with Alik Orozov, vice secretary of Security Council, under the title "Details of special operation on liquidation of militants in the south of Kyrgyzstan (exclusive interview)". Orozov, although refuses to answer clearly the question "What do you think, is there a still threat of another attack by militants in Kyrgyzstan?", he says the following: "There is a threat on the part of Hizb-ut-Tahrir as well as Uzbekistan Islamic Movement and other extremist organizations active in Fergana valley. It is also possible that Afghan and other international groups are active in this region." It is clearly said that the group was not just a group of armed people; it's were members of international extremist organizations.

Since many of Kyrgyzstan's print media are weeklies and the incident of intrusion by armed men in Batken happened on Friday May 12 2006 when almost all news publications had already been printed, these media had enough time to collect more information and provide more accurate details of what happened in their next issue. However, the articles published by print media had more questions than answers. It was not clear what extremist organization militants were from and why they entered Kyrgyzstan and moved through its territory in a random way, etc. In these days Kyrgyz media focused more on the issue of correctness of military forces' actions while liquidation of militants. The article titles speak for themselves: "Few NGOs believe that the military commanders must be punished for what happened in the south on May 12" (AKIpress, 17.05.06), "Ombudsman thinks that Border Protection Service, Ministry for Emergency Situations and Ministry of Defence must move to Osh" (AKIpress, 29.05.06), "National Security Service will find out the reason why militants entered Batken oblast" (Kabar, 18.05.06), "Bloody farce" (MSN, 16.05.06), "Kyrgyzstan lost six people in a moment" (Agym, 16.05.06), "Terrorist are killed, we also lost our soldiers" (Erkin-Too, 16.05.06), "Batken: Liquidation of the group of militants – should we celebrate victory or sound the alarm?" (Delo No, 17.05.06), "Why did militants come to our land? Nobody still answered this question" (Komsomolskaya Pravda Kyrgyzstan, 16.05.07), "Generals to be replaced by majors and captains" (Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 16.05.06), "Not every general is a good military leader" (Obshestvennyi Reiting, 18.05.06), "The route of death", "Generals are threatened to be fired" (Vecherniy Bishkek, 16.5.06), etc.

3.2.1 Electronic media coverage

3.2.1.1 Radio

Electronic media coverage of militants' intrusion to Batken oblast was not much different from internet media coverage. This is particularly true with respect to radio stations. News blocks of the most of local radio stations almost completely consisted of reports provided by news agency, although, among these stations, Kyrgyz state radio, Kyrgyz language departments of Liberty and BBC are different. The latter have correspondents in Batken oblast and therefore they could provide fast coverage of the military operation.

However, Kyrgyz radio being state media covered events in formal way based on official reports which were also discrepant as mentioned earlier. There were minimum of comments.

Unlike Kyrgyz state radio, Liberty and BBC had opportunity to cite other sources and speak of other versions different from official.

For instance, Liberty with regard to Batken events provided 5 text news reports on its website (14 reports in total that day), on May 13 – 3(13), May 14-15 – 2(10), May 16 – 2(12), May 17 – 2(12), May 18 – 2(12), May 19 – 2(11). Text reports were neutral and mainly in summary form. At the same time, Liberty with reference to head of security and defence department of Batken Administration reported about possible connection between members of armed group with Hizb-ut-Tahrir. After May 14, text news mostly were about public organizations and parliamentarians demands to conduct investigation on correctness of actions taken by national military forces while liquidation of militants.

Besides text summary reports there were voice reports and interviews. In the period May 12-22, 2006 following materials were broadcasted on radio:

- May 12, the heading *Politics*: "In incident on Kyrgyz-Tajik border 2 men died", detailed news report;
- May 12, the heading *Security and Defence*: General Sadyrbev Duvanaev: "Currently there is a gunfire going on in Batken", interview with vice head of Kyrgyz Republic Border Protection Service Sadyrbek Duvanaev on operation in Batken;
- May 12, under the heading *Security and Defence*: "Batken: operation on liquidation of armed group is started", detailed news report based on interview with vice head of Kyrgyz Republic Border Protection Service general Sadyrbek Duvanaev;
- May 12, the heading *Security and Defence*: "Batken: operation on liquidation of armed force is going on", report covers statements of head of department of security and defence of Batken oblast Administration Tashtemir Eshaliev, vice head of Border Protection Service general Sadyrbek Duvanaev, Kadamjay city mayor Kubanychbek Mashrapov, head of department on Andijan oblast of Erk, forbidden political party in Uzbekistan, Israil Khaldarov, secretary of Kyrgyzstan's Security Council Miroslav Niyazov; I.Khaldarov in the report made a conjecture that intrusion of militants to Kyrgyz territory was timed to anniversary of Andijan events and probably it was organized by Uzbekistan special service or Uzbekistan Islamic Movement;
- May 13, the heading *Security and Defence*: "Kadamjay: what happened to armed group?", the report with participation of the same people as in previous report including results of operation;
- May 13, the heading *Security and Defence*: "Operation against armed group in Kadamjay is finished", news report on results of the operation;

- May 13, the heading *Security and Defence*: "What did special operation in Batken show us?", political researcher Toktogul Kakchekeev says his opinion that intrusion of militants aimed at checking Kyrgyz state border;
- May 13, the heading *Society and Life*: "Soldiers died were given last honour in Kadamjay", news report;
- May 14, the heading *Security and Defence*: "Security Council Secretaries of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan met", news report;
- May 15, the heading *Politics*: "The Parliament to blame generals for death toll in Kadamjay", report about parliamentarians' reaction;
- May 22, the heading *Politics*: "Does the state help families of soldiers died in Batken".

It needs to be said that all news reports and interviews as per the authors' texts, militants are called "armed group", "bandits", while they are not associated with any extremist organizations.

BBC Radio worked the same way in these days.

3.2.1.2 Television

In first days of the intrusion by militants onto Kyrgyz territory, television coverage of events in Batken was similar to that found on web-based media. For example, in the morning news block on the state television channel, the news anchor read only a summary of reports on the militants' attack on the Ak-Turpak check-point and on the operation on liquidation based on military forces press releases. Subsequent news reporting included an interview with border guards' spokesman. By May 12 the evening the report shown was based on video from the site. NTRC, which has a regional television station in Batken oblast, showed the dead bodies of militants. The channel, however, parroted the version of the story provided by officials.

Besides NTRC, KOORT TV had a regional bureau in Osh that should be able to prepare its own video material. The rest of Bishkek television channels had request video footage from NTRC and KOORT.

Regional television companies of Kyrgyzstan had to rely on information from Batken events based on news from web-based media and from official press releases.

3.2.1.3 Conclusions

Analysis of local mass media reporting on the militants' intrusion onto Kyrgyz territory on May 12 2006 revealed the following problems for media coverage:

- Journalists know very little about extremism and terrorism; they focus more on gathering informing rather than providing analysis;
- There is no clear policy for mass media and government interaction in coverage and prevention of such phenomena as extremism and terrorism in Kyrgyzstan. This is the reason of discrepancies in the information provided by government officials and media. Media do not have the skills needed to verify official information.
- Economic weakness of television channels and other media. Media cannot afford to have journalists specializing in this topic and due to economic and financial problems they are restricted in obtaining information directly from the place of events and original sources.

Table 1 – News coverage of extremism and terrorism by Kyrgyzstan's mass media

(Quantity and volume/duration (in seconds) of all news content revealed by monitoring)

| No. | Name of Media | Positive (Volume & Duration) | Negative (Volume & Duration) | Neutral (Volume & Duration) | Total (Volume & Duration) |
|-----|--|---------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| 1 | National TV and Radio Corporation (NTRC) | 0 | 1 (600 sec) | 9 (6100 sec) | 10 (6700 sec) |
| 2 | NTRC, Kyrgyz Radio | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 3 | 5-Kanal | 0 | 0 | 10 (9540 sec.) | 10 (9540 sec) |
| 4 | Radio Liberty | 0 | 7 (1200 sec.) | 14 (780 sec.) | 21 (1980 sec) |
| 5 | 24.kg News Agency www.24.kg | 1 (770 words) | 1 (61 words) | 18 (1889 words) | 20 (2720 words) |
| 6 | AKIpress News Agency www.akipress.kg | | 3 (487 words) | 9 (1842 words) | 12 (2329 words) |
| 7 | Kabar News Agency www.kabar.kg | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 8 | Newspaper 'Obshestvennyi Rating' | | | 1 (53 words) | 1 (53 words) |
| 9 | Newspaper "MSN" | | 3 (2039 words) | | 3 (2039 words) |
| 10 | Newspaper "Belyi Parakhod" | | 1 (1038 words) | 1 (60 words) | 2 (1098 words) |
| 11 | Newspaper "Vzglyad" | | 1 (2000 words) | | 1 (2000 words) |
| 12 | Newspaper "Novyi Kyrgyzstan" | | | 1 (1000 words) | 1 (1000 words) |
| 13 | Newspaper "Agym" | | | 1 (1500 words) | 1 (1500 words) |
| 14 | Newspaper "Golos Svobody" | | | 1 (1000 words) | 1 (1000 words) |
| 15 | AKIpress Fergana News Agency http://fergana.akipress.org | 2 (333 words) | 0 | 4 (1260 words) | 6 (1593 words) |
| 16 | Radio "Almaz – Yug" | 2 (78 sec) | 5 (211 sec) | 39 (875 sec) | 46 (2034 sec) |
| 17 | Newspaper "Itogi Nedeli" | 0 | 4 (6000 words) | 5 (6206 words) | 9 (12206 words) |
| 18 | Newspaper "Ush Sadosi" | 0 | 0 | 3 (530 words) | 3 (530 words) |
| 19 | Television EITR | 3 (520 sec.) | 4 (413 sec) | 13 (2867 sec) | 20 (3800 sec) |
| 20 | Newspaper "Ekho Osha" | 0 | 0 | 2 (5000 words) | 2 (5000 words) |
| 21 | Television OshTV | 2 (283 sec) | 7 (445 sec) | 30 (2160 sec) | 39 (2888 sec) |
| 22 | Newspaper "Osh Janyrgy" | 0 | 1 (200 words) | 0 | 1 (200 words) |
| | Total | 10 (881 sec) (1103 words) | 38 (2869 sec) (11825 words) | 161 (23192 sec) (20340 words) | 209 (26942 sec) (33268 words) |

Table 2 - News messages by genre

| No. | Name of Media | News | Analysis | Articles | Eyewitness reports | Interviews | Total |
|-----|--|------------|----------|----------|--------------------|------------|------------|
| 1 | NTRC, TV channel | 7 | | | 3 | | 10 |
| 2 | NTRC, Kyrgyz Radio | | | | | | 0 |
| 3 | 5-Kanal | 5 | | | 5 | | 10 |
| 4 | Radio Liberty | 2 | | | 17 | 2 | 21 |
| 5 | 24.kg News Agency www.24.kg | 19 | 1 | | | | 20 |
| 6 | AKIpress News Agency www.akipress.kg | 11 | | 1 | | | 12 |
| 7 | Kabar News Agency www.kabar.kg | | | | | | 0 |
| 8 | Newspaper 'Obshestvennyi Rating' | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| 9 | Newspaper "MSN" | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | 3 |
| 10 | Newspaper "Belyi Parakhod" | 1 | | 1 | | | 2 |
| 11 | Newspaper "Vzglyad" | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| 12 | Newspaper "Novyi Kyrgyzstan" | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| 13 | Newspaper "Agym" | | | 1 | | | 1 |
| 14 | Newspaper "Golos Svobody" | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| 15 | AKI press Fergana News Agency http://fergana.akipress.org | 6 | | | | | 6 |
| 16 | Radio "Almaz - Yug" | 43 | | | | 3 | 46 |
| 17 | Newspaper "Itogi Nedeli" | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | | 9 |
| 18 | Newspaper "Ush Sadosi" | 3 | | | | | 3 |
| 19 | Television EITR | 17 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 20 |
| 20 | Newspaper "Ekho Osha" | | 1 | | | 1 | 2 |
| 21 | Television OshTV | 30 | | | 9 | | 39 |
| 22 | Newspaper "Osh Janyrygy" | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| | Total | 150 | 8 | 7 | 37 | 7 | 209 |

3.3 General report on monitoring of extremism and terrorism coverage by media in Kyrgyzstan

Monitoring of extremism and terrorism coverage by media in Kyrgyzstan was conducted in a two months from 1st October to 30th November 2007. Twenty two media outlets in the capital Bishkek and Osh in the south of country were selected for monitoring.

City of Bishkek:

1. National Television and Radio Corporation (TV);
2. National Television and Radio Corporation (Radio);
3. 5-Kanal (TV);
4. Radio Liberty;
5. 24.kg News Agency www.24.kg;
6. AKIpress News Agency www.akipress.kg;
7. Kabar News Agency www.kabar.kg;
8. Obshestvennyi Rating – Newspaper;
9. MSN – Newspaper;
10. Belyi Parakhod – Newspaper;
11. Vzglyad – Newspaper;
12. Novyi Kyrgyzstan – Newspaper;
13. Agym – Newspaper;

City of Osh:

14. Golos Svobody – newspaper;
15. AKIpress Fergana News Agency <http://fergana.akipress.org>;
16. Almaz – Yug – radio;
17. Itogi Nedeli – newspaper;
18. Ush Sadosi – newspaper;
19. EITR – television;
20. Ekho Osha – newspaper;
21. OshTV – television;
22. Osh Janyrygy – newspaper;

Of those media selected, seven are wave, four are web-based, and eleven are print media.

The main objective of the monitoring was to document reporting on extremism and terrorism. During the monitoring period, there were a total of 209 related reports made by all the mentioned media. Of these, Osh media and 83 made 129 reports by Bishkek outlets. (See Table 1).

| No | City | Number of Reports |
|----|--------------|-------------------|
| 1 | Bishkek | 83 |
| 2 | Osh | 126 |
| | Total | 209 |

Larger part of the reports was produced in Osh. According to Bakyt Ibraimov, monitor in Osh, the number of reports does not mean the subject of religious extremism and terrorism is more widely covered by local media. The largest number of reports on extremism and terrorism was produced by radio Almaz-Yug which majority of its airtime rebroadcasts Russian International Radio while OshTV rebroadcasts EuroNews and EITR rebroadcasts Voice of America. Thus, most of the reports were about situation abroad, specifically, in Pakistan, Turkey, Iraq and Afghanistan where terrorist acts, conflicts between militants and military forces, attempted murders had taken place. According to the monitoring methodology, the reports were divided into three categories based tone of the material: positive, neutral or negative.

| | Positive | Negative | Neutral | Total |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Reports on extremism and terrorism in Kyrgyzstan | 10 | 38 | 161 | 209 |

According to the table above, most of the reports were neutral in tone. The number of negative reports is four times less than neutral reports recorded by the monitoring. There were 11 reports in positive tone, i.e. three times less than negative reports. Positive reports were mainly about the party Hizb-ut-Tahrir. For instance, 24.kg in one of its news reports says about creation of newspaper by Hizb-ut-Tahrir. 9 positive reports were published in southern region media. According to statistics, the Hizb-ut-Tahrir movement is more popular in the south of the country. Besides, journalists do not have enough experience and knowledge for doing professional coverage of extremism and terrorism and thus give information in the way they see the phenomena without thinking of consequences.

Reports on extremism and terrorism were mainly of news type. Most of the reports were about cases of arresting distributors of Hizb-ut-Tahrir leaflets, confiscating leaflets and arresting members of this party. Analytical materials, articles, onsite reports directly related to extremism and terrorism are extremely rare. During the two-month monitoring covering 22 media, 8 analytical materials, 37 reportages, 7 interviews and 7 articles about religious extremism and terrorism were recorded. There were 150 news reports. (see table no 2).

| News reports | Analytical materials | Articles | Reportages | Interviews | Total |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| 150 | 8 | 7 | 37 | 7 | 209 |

The most outstanding report could be the reportage made by local television OshTV. The author of the report Guljan Ajimatova prepared news report about Kurman-Ait celebration on October 12, 2007 when members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir gathered not far from Uzbek Babur theatre were broken up. An interesting fact is that none of other media covered by the monitoring except OshTV made reports on this case, probably, because of the risk to be pursued by both officials and radical movements.

This report took two minutes fifteen seconds, although, part of the story was No Comments. Probably, the idea was to let viewers evaluate the situation themselves and make their own conclusions on the case. However, the audience consists of people who did not have enough knowledge about extremism in general and in how dangerous members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir actually are. The beginning of the report says about prohibition of celebration by local authorities. Some people's reaction might have been disappointment with prohibition of celebration while others' reaction might be inability of law enforcement agencies to take measures against religious extremists. The police officers called on crowd to break up but organizers of the celebration did not respond on warning. Woman protestors were crying and saying that they were prohibited to hold charity action which blackens the image of local authorities.

However, it needs to be taken into account that Osh city administration suggested for three years to hold this event in the park of Navoi, however, Islamic organizations representatives openly ignore local authorities' proposal thereby worsening social and political situation.

Recent years events show that religious festivals become an excuse for conflicts between radical Muslims and local authorities which looks like a growing tendency.

Most of Osh and Bishkek media reports also touched upon the issue of journalist Alisher Saipov assassination. Mass media representatives focused on possible involvement of Saipov with Hizb-ut-Tahrir and other radical movements including Uzbekistan Islamic Movement based on story given by law enforcement bodies. The reports mentioned the long term investigation of journalist assassination case and that law enforcement agencies are trying to put label of Hizb-ut-Tahrir follower on murdered journalist. It needs to be said that Alisher Saipov often wrote about religious extremist party Hizb-ut-Tahrir.

Rakhat Keneshova, electronic media monitor in Bishkek, writes in her note that in the reportage of November 12, 2007 Central Asian states governments plan to intensify actions against religious extremism. For increasing efficiency of combating terrorism and extremism, state needs to closely cooperate with influential religious leaders.

The reportage that could be marked out from all other reports covered by the monitoring is the Special Reportage about the measures taken against activities of religious extremist group Uzbekistan Islamic Movement in Jalalabat. As a result of special operation done by law enforcement bodies six extremists were killed. The report was shown at 20:33 on October 5, 2008. The duration of the report in Kyrgyz language by Bolotbek Tabaldiev is ten minutes. The report was evaluated by the monitor as negative since the author of the report made people know that this group is dangerous for the society.

Analysis of the listed reports show that Kyrgyzstan's media raise problems of religious extremism and terrorism only in cases when members of extremist groups are captured or operations against Hizb-ut-Tahrir is being carried out. The subject of extremism and terrorism is not considered apart from such cases. There are no special correspondents working in this specific field.

For a few reasons journalists do not try to prepare special reports and other news/analytics programmes on the matter concerned. Extremism and terrorism is a delicate subject and requires experience and good sources for providing balanced information.

Preparation of analytical reports requires not only lots of time but financial resources to pay for international phone calls, internet, transportation, travel expenses, etc. And the most important reason is the security of journalists. Nobody can guarantee that an article published in a paper or TV/radio programme on religious extremism and terrorism would not have negative consequences for a journalist.

The monitoring of media revealed the necessity of conducting trainings on extremism and terrorism for journalists. This topic also requires extensive knowledge in law, conflicts, journalist security, etc.

4 Recommendations and proposals

Recommendations:

A) To the Parliament and the government:

1. Amendments and addenda to the Kyrgyz Republic law on opposing extremist activities of August 17, 2005 and the law on opposing terrorism of November 8, 2006 to define extremism and terrorism in accordance with generally accepted international practice.

Reason: *Lack of clear and concise formulations of definitions of extremism and terrorism creates confusion as to whether a particular action is to be classified as an act of extremism or terrorism and how these acts corresponded to similar acts in other countries.*

2. Defining the concept of "political extremism and terrorism" in Kyrgyz legislation;

Reason: *These terms are not defined in Kyrgyz legislation. Political events in the country demonstrate that many activities taken by political groups can be classified as political extremism.*

3. Creation of integrated database on extremism and terrorism containing: all legislative acts of Kyrgyz Republic and international organizations in this field; comprehensive information on the world's extremist and terrorist organizations; information on organizations that are combating these phenomena; information on experts both local and foreign in this field, journalists specializing on terrorism and other information and news necessary for correct covering of this phenomenon. This database can be implemented on website. In this case, the government needs to provide financial and information support to ensure full functioning of this online resource.

Reason: *There is no integrated resource centre in Kyrgyzstan that can provide information on extremism and terrorism. All the information is distributed in various resources or does not exist at all. This creates difficulty in competent coverage of the topic. Parties interested in good coverage of this topic or acts of extremism and terrorism experience difficulty in finding journalists competent in the field whereas journalists cannot find field experts to ask for comments. The main player in opposing extremism and terrorism as well as the main source of information is the state. Therefore, it would be easier for the government to administer the work of this information resource and possesses enough financial resources to ensure its effective functioning.*

4. Improvement of cooperation with media, specifically on fast informing media about related events. Preferably, all the information on law enforcement bodies' operations against terrorist groups has to be provided by one source.

Reason: *As the experience of media coverage of terrorist and extremist acts or anti-extremist / terrorist operations demonstrates, different gov-*

ernment information sources supply conflicting information. Furthermore, information is not disseminated promptly - leaving people to make various conjectures.

5. Law enforcement bodies together with media have to hold trainings and seminars on extremism and terrorist, preferably, regular courses.

Reason: According to the results of the monitoring of media coverage of extremism and terrorism, media coverage often is limited to summary news coverage of extremist and terrorist acts while completely relying on government sources. Analysis of reasons and consequences of the acts is not provided. Only few media and journalists try to go beyond regular news.

Law enforcement bodies directly deal with extremism and terrorism, therefore, they are more competent in this field. Media organizations have large experience in organizing seminars and have better knowledge of journalist community. Trainings and seminars need to be on regular basis since. The more journalists pass such training sessions, the more competent media coverage of this topic will be. Journalists willing get specialized in this field can deepen their knowledge and improve their skills.

B) To journalists and other media workers and associations:

1. Journalists willing to cover extremism and terrorism or particular acts must pay themselves more attention to improving their understanding.

Reason: The subject of terrorism and extremism requires journalists to be competent in the field, it requires knowledge of difference between extremism and terrorism, types, characteristics and how these phenomena evolve, of organizations recognized to be extremist or terrorist, their goal and methods, etc. Weak coverage of the subject can create a misunderstanding in the public of the nature of extremism and terrorism in organizations involved. Moreover, such slipshod coverage can worsen the situation rather than solving it.

2. Media organizations need to organize trainings for journalists on extremism and terrorism in close cooperation with government bodies.

Reason: As noted above, media organizations have extensive experience in conducting trainings and seminars and are knowledgeable of journalist community.

C) To media owners:

1. More attention has to be paid to journalists' specialization on this issue; journalists need to be assisted to improve their knowledge in this field.

Reason: Coverage of extremism and terrorism requires journalists to be specialized in the field and to have particular knowledge which takes journalists' efforts and time. Considering increasing significance of these phenomena for people's life and resulting threats, journalist specialized in the field will contribute to competent coverage of extremism and terrorism as well better satisfaction of consumers needs.

D) External actors such as donor groups or international governmental and non-governmental organizations:

1. Donors and international organizations specializing in the field could assist in training journalists on how to do competent coverage of extremism and terrorism, how to increase their understanding of this issue, establishment expert networks dealing with knowledge of extremism and terrorism. This includes support of training and seminars (preferably regular courses), recruiting and then training of trainers (TOTs) from the journalist or the expert community, provide financing for publications and electronic media to producing particular materials and for journalists' travels to event sites.

Reason: *Extremism and terrorism are new phenomena in Kyrgyzstan and the country has little experience in opposing these threats than many other countries. Kyrgyzstan, due to its economic weakness, has fewer opportunities to allocate substantial resources to finance measures to oppose extremism and terrorism, specifically, more competent coverage of these phenomena by media and educating people through media about threats of these phenomena and their sources.*

All the recommendations pursue following goals:

1. Provide clear legal definitions for acts of extremist and terrorism, provide legal evaluation of these terms and increase public awareness through mass media in this field;
2. Identify sources of and method of distribution of this phenomenon, set specific objectives for the government to solve these problems;
3. Oppose popularization of extremist and terrorist organizations followers in wider society through effective and competent media coverage of these phenomena and their sources.

Annex 3

The assassination of Alisher Saipov

During October monitoring of electronic, print media and news agencies in Bishkek, the most striking material on extremism and terrorism was the news about assassination of prominent Kyrgyz journalist Alisher Saipov.

On September 4, 2007 Alisher Saipov celebrated his 26th birthday. He was murdered in southern capital Osh on October 24, 2007. Few months earlier he became a father. Saipov reported for the Fergana.ru online news agency. HE was a regional correspondent for the agency and for the Voice of America and Radio Liberty as well. Lately, he began publishing his own news letter, Siyasat (politics), with financing from the National Democratic Fund of the United States.

Alisher Saipov's assassination was covered by all the print and electronic media. On the day of the murder, leading news agencies of the country reported on Saipov's connection to representatives of the religious extremist party Hizb-ut-Tahrir.

On October 30 the AKIpress news agency disseminated an Interior Ministry statement putting Saipov in connection with the Uzbekistan Islamic Movement leader Tapir Yuldashev. The press release said Saipov met with Yulda-

shev in Iran in April-May, 2007 where, according to Ministry, the latter Yuldashev was hiding and allegedly was regularly providing Saipov with financing. Moreover, according to Ministry, the journalist also had close relations with Muhammed Solih, leader of Uzbek opposition party Erk. After the Andijan incidents, Saipov left for Turkey where he met with Solih and brought shipment of the book *Valfajur* (i.e. rise) to back to his Uzbekistan through his connections.

The press release also says that investigations revealed that murdered journalist had close connections with religious extremist movements of Uzbekistan. The police interrogated Hizb-ut-Tahrir leaders Dilerjani Jumabaev and Rashad Kamalov who is the son of Mahammad-kori. The older Kamalov was killed in Osh in 2006 along with other terrorists from Uzbekistan Islamic Movement who testified that they had close contact with A. Saipov who regularly took interview about activities of prohibited Hizb-ut-Tahrir in Kyrgyzstan. Investigation of A. Saipov's computer hard disk revealed 229 files and 7 folders about Hizb-ut-Tahrir. The files and folders contained all information known about Hizb-ut-Tahrir as leaflets, brochures. All these materials represent the main idea of Hizb-ut-Tahrir and call on for overthrowing existing government and building Caliphate.

According to an official Interior Ministry statement, Dilerjani Jumabaev and Rashad Kamalov were leaders of Hizb-ut-Tahrir. In Kyrgyzstan, the organisation Hizb-ut-Tahrir is prohibited while at the same time Kamalov was a member of one political party that participating in early parliamentary elections of 2007.

Many local media interpreted the Interior Ministry's statement as an attempt to smear the journalist's name. Media organizations asked for an impartial investigation of the Ministry's actions.

One of the website *Fergana.ru* news reports reads: "It is quite symptomatic that the journalist was murdered right before Uzbek President Karimov statement today to the Interior Ministry employees. President said was "the most important objective" as "opposing trans-border crimes". We could hardly doubt that one of such crimes according to Tashkent is distribution of papers with allegedly "extremist content" produced abroad, particularly right before presidential elections to be held in December." Based on analysis of these words, one could make conclusion that Uzbek authorities have completely different understanding of "extremism and terrorism", or intentionally want to create image of extremists and terrorists of those who dare to go against the government. It naturally affects media coverage of this issue.

Vitaliy Ponomarev in his article "Who is behind assassination of Alisher Saipov?" published on October 25, 2007 on website *www.agentura.ru* mentions last year special services' operation ended by murder of well known religious activist Muhammadrafika Kamalov. "Kyrgyz authorities ignore reports that "terrorists" being in the imam's car were dead long before official date of incident. According to witnesses, this fact was obvious based on mere visual inspection of the bodies in morgue. Imam's murder happened before media campaign about accusing him in "undermining activities" against Uzbekistan. Unfortunately, many international organizations preferred to leave Kamalov's assassination unnoticed and considered it as the "costs of opposing international terrorism". Kyrgyz authorities limited themselves to hypocritical condolences to family of the dead and made up a story about terrorists taken imam hostage".

According to RBC Daily based on report by Daniil Kislov *Fergana.ru* chief editor, Alisher Saipov was informed that some Osh criminal was paid 10 thousand

USD for his head few days before. "Who paid was not known, however, according to Kislov young journalist was the enemy number one for people around Uzbek president Islam Karimov. Saipov was also accused of contacts with Islamic radicals (specifically Hizb-ut-Tahrir), however, Daniil Kislov says that Alisher knew everyone in the region and could contact minister or leader of Islamists in the middle of night".

Ulugbek Babakulov author of the article "Freedom House condemns assassination of journalists in Kyrgyzstan" published by Golos Svobody on November 7, 2007 writes: "Saipov criticised the government of Uzbekistan in his works and felt sympathy for Islamic group of Hizb-ut-Tahrir".

Based on analysis of the materials on the assassination of Saipov, one could conclude unambiguously that society, the Kyrgyz law enforcement institutions and administration do not take extremism and terrorism serious. Arguments made by law enforcement bodies are mainly based on guesswork. The society has not yet understood how dangerous or not Hizb-ut-Tahrir may be nor whether this group actually has a connection to extremism and terrorism. Meanwhile, journalists do know have enough knowledge and experience of coverage of such complicated subject, although important for the people living in the country.



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