The examples of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan:

Political extremism, terrorism, and media in Central Asia

Contents

Preface

An important element in democratisation of any country is an active, engaged press that can uncover and analyse issues that have been sensitive or silenced.

Repressing information and silencing discussion on politically sensitive issues could have a diametric opposing effect and lead instead to growing misconceptions and illusions based on anecdotal rumours rather than on facts. This in turn may foster die-hard myths that take root in a community and even discolour political discourse.

For instance in Central Asia, the spread of extremism is one of a number of topics, subject to considerable attention and concern by the public. Regional media, having little access to hard facts on this issue, resorts to primarily building its coverage more on distortions, rumours and sketchy evidence.

The predominant public notion in Central Asia as well as globally is that extremism is widespread. This has prompted authorities to take precautionary measures such as banning groups assumed to be dangerous and preventing critical voices from airing their views publicly.

How do media behave in this atmosphere of global fear? How do media cover the issue of extremism and terror on a local, national as well as global scale?

Few studies have dealt with this important issue to date. This is why International Media Support has supported this study hoping to shed more light on the role of media in covering terrorism and extremism.

Based on research of media content in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, the report observes how media in Central Asia actually cover terror and extremism. The Central Asian findings have served as a basis for formulating recommendation to all parties involved in media policy and practice, both in the region and beyond.

IMS would like to express special thanks to Dušan Reljić for designing the study, piloting the research process and writing the final report. IMS would also like to thank all parties who were involved, both in contributing with their knowledge, and in the collection and collation of the data from media outlets in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

IMS is pleased to present this new research in the hope that the contents and analysis will spur a lively debate among media in Central Asia, as well as globally, and offer food for thought and reflection on the role of media in addressing extremism and terrorism.
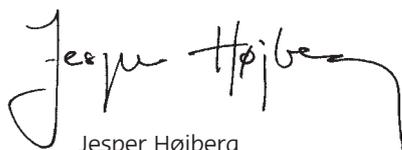
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Introduction

In February 2006, International Media Support (IMS) initiated a large-scale programme supporting media development in Central Asia.[1] The programme – funded by the Danish Ministry for Foreign Affairs – builds on previous activities undertaken since 2002. From 2002 to 2004 a series of workshops, launching of websites, research and dialogue with local partners were carried out. From May to August 2005 a pilot project took place involving radio stations from Ferghana Valley and focusing on co-production of radio documentaries.

In the summer 2007, IMS launched a research project to document and analyse the coverage of issues related to political extremism and terrorism in the news media of Central Asia. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were chosen as case-studies. The research took into account the political, legal and economic situation in the two countries.[2] It also analysed how journalism and the mass media have developed since the countries became independent. The full reports for the two countries in the Russian language were written in the winter of 2007/2008. This English summary, presenting the main findings, could not include the wealth of information contained in the original Russian language reports for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. They are available for download on www.freedolina.net, the IMS sponsored web-site in Central Asia. This web-site also contains a dedicated section containing news, background information and analytical texts on political extremism and terrorism in Central Asia and worldwide.

This study furnishes the media, the civil society organisations, the public authorities and international organisations in the region with a point of reference in context to the rising debate about extremism, especially Islamic fundamentalism, and terrorism. It provides insight into how the mass media cover these sensitive issues and how the public authorities react to it. These issues have had resonance on a wider scale within the last two years. The recurring, and often violent, reactions in some Muslim countries on the publication of a set of controversial cartoons in Danish newspapers depicting the Prophet Muhammad also suggest that there is a need to look more closely at the relationship between the media and political extremism. The Central Asia findings in the research served as the basis to formulate recommendations to all parties involved in media policy and practice, both in the region and externally. The expected impact is to strengthen democracy and political stability in Central Asia as one of the regions of outstanding importance for global peace.

The two principal partners of International Media Support in this project were in Kazakhstan *Adil Soz* (www.adilsoz.kz/), the International Foundation for the Protection of the Freedom of Speech (IFEX), and, in Kyrgyzstan, the independent association of media professionals *Public Association "Journalists"* (www.journalist.kg, www.monitoring.kg). The research methodology was designed so as to enable the partners in Almaty and Bishkek to carry out most of the exploration by themselves and to contribute decisively to the formulation of policy recommendations. Annex I provides a detailed explanation of the research methodology.

The research proceedings were continuously documented on the project website in order to increase the transparency of the aims, methods and outcomes of the project.

1 *International Media Support (IMS) www.i-m-s.dk is an international NGO, based in Copenhagen (Denmark) that promotes peace, stability, democracy, freedom of expression and media pluralism in areas threatened by conflict, crisis or severe human insecurity. IMS was established in 2001 and has since expanded its activities from a single focus on rapid assistance to media in conflict areas to also encompassing larger long-term media development programmes.*

2 *The research methodology is explained in Annex I*

Journalists, academics, civil society activists, public officials and all other interested parties in the region and from outside were invited to contribute to in the project proceedings. Around one hundred people participated in several public debates in connection to the research. Many more accessed the project website and a mass audience was informed about the project via IMS-sponsored radio programmes in the region.

IMS project manager Helene Bach was in charge of this project. The research was designed and the results analyzed and summarized by Dušan Reljić[2a], consultant to IMS,. Galiya Azhenova of *Adyl Soz* (Аділ Соз) and Marat Tokoev of *Public Association "Journalists"* (Журналисты) were the chief contributors and co-ordinators in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Ljudmila von Berg (Berlin), Meri Bekeshova (Byshkek), Artem Yermakov and Aibek Hamidov (Osh) provided input and assistance that significantly contributed to this report. The conclusions and recommendations are the product of joint deliberations of the research team.

August 2008

2a Dr Dušan Reljić is senior research associate at the German Institute for International Affairs and Security (SWP) in Berlin. Previously, he was head of the Media and Democracy Programme at the European Institute for the Media (EIM) in Dusseldorf.

Summary

In Central Asia, an uneven distribution of wealth, the absence of respect for the rule of law, bad governance, the suppression of secular opposition and other socio-economic and political flaws are widespread. Consequently the region is fertile ground for radicalisation that could manifest as political extremism, religious fundamentalism and terrorism. Such dangers are a recurring feature in political discourse both in Central Asia itself and in the international comments on the situation in this part of the world.

In every society disruptive trends and occurrences can increase if they find resonance in the public arena. Therefore, the relationship between extremism, terrorism and the mass media is of particular relevance. Although extremism and terrorism feature high on the agenda of the political debates about Central Asia, and the mass media in the region are also under much scrutiny, little empirical evidence exists that documents a factual link. Indeed, a number of analysts suggest that the governments in the region use the threat of Islamist fundamentalism and other forms of extremism as a rhetorical instrument to cement their position and, consequently, also to suppress freedom of speech and the press.

In theoretical writings there is widespread acceptance of the assumption that there is a potentially "dangerous liaison" between extremism, terrorism and the mass media. Indeed, many authors support the view that politically motivated violence is "made-for-TV" and that without publicity, political violence cannot achieve its goal to spread fear and thus force the authorities to change their policies. On the other hand, media are thought to be interested in garnering more income by extensively reporting on terrorist attacks because such events glue the audience to the media. However, such conclusions are usually drawn from observations in Western societies that sustain an autonomous and, with the exception of public service media, profit-oriented media sector. Little substantiation of the linkage between coverage of extremism with media outlet motivation for increasing audience and revenue exists in general for countries in transition and, more specifically, for the geographic area covered in this study.

In the investigations covered in this report, IMS and its project partners focused on how mass media in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan deal with the issue of political extremism and terrorism. In order to provide corroborative evidence via empirical research, the authors provided an in-depth look at the existing structures by describing the recent development of the media sector and the legal, political and economic framework. In the summer and autumn of 2007 they monitored a number of relevant media outlets in these two countries.

The quantitative monitoring showed that in most cases political extremism and terrorism are only covered when incidents occur. In an overwhelming number of cases, media editors chose to have the tone of the reports remain as neutral as possible in order to avoid possible criticism from the government. Usually, austere official statements provide the backbone of the reports in the mass media. Evidently, there is a lack of reliable and easily accessible information resources. Media owners, including the government, do not invest funds and energy in training journalists to take on complex reporting tasks. They also do not allocate funds for long-term, systematic investigations by media professionals on demanding issues such as extremism

and terrorism. Analytical texts not linked to specific incidents, which include in-depth reporting, are seldom.

After discussing the findings with journalists, civil society activists, academics and public officials, the research team formulated a set of recommendations for improving the method by which the mass media in the two countries cover extremism and terrorism and, in consequence, other contentious issues. The supposition is that improvement in the performance of the mass media in times of crises can contribute to the peaceful transformation of social conflicts.

The research team suggested that government authorities, in cooperation with professional media and civil society organisations, should launch a comparison of the present national media legislation and administrative rules. With the assistance of the OSCE and other international organisations, reformed legislative acts that correspond to the practice in consolidated democracies should be proposed to the parliaments. The research team also recommended that governments, media and civil society organisations cooperate on establishing accessible and reliable information and documentation resources about extremism and terrorism. They advised that parliaments, governments and other public authorities should improve their communication with the general public and the mass media, particularly when dealing with sensitive political issues such as extremism and terrorism.

The report further recommended that media and civil society organisations should upgrade the qualifications and the professional skills of their staff to inform the public in a timely and reliable manner on all contentious issues. They advocated fostering co-operation between mass media and national and international professional and civil society organisations, as well as co-operation with public authorities and international organisations. The report proposed that the media should co-operate with civil society organisations on long-term projects to monitor and evaluate the reporting of mass media outlets, including topics such as extremism and terrorism. The general public should be invited to comment on the work of mass media outlets through blogs, e-mails, and conferences with readers, listeners and viewers via other forms of interaction.

The first recommendation to media owners is to invest in professional training of journalists and other media workers in their companies because the reputation of media outlets can be made or broken on their performance when covering sensitive issues and in times of emergencies. The second recommendation is to resist the temptation to speculate for gains in circulation or audience shares by reporting in a sensational manner in times of crises. The potential for long-term damages in their reputations can outlive any short-time financial gains.

Finally, international media aid organisations are advised to continue focusing on training of journalists, public officials and participants in methods of political communication. They should attempt to twin local government authorities with media and civil society organisations in all assistance projects in the field of mass media. The recommendations refer to the need to include and foster policy-oriented research in future international media assistance.

1 Mass media, political extremism and terrorism

Extremism, in this research is a term used to describe:

– A political idea taken to its limits and with the intention not only to confront, but also to eliminate opposition;
– Intolerance towards all views other than one's own;
– Adoption of means to political ends which show disregard for the life, liberty, and human rights of others.[3]

Terrorism is understood in this study as a particular type of violence stemming from extremist thinking. Terrorist violence has specific characteristics:

– It is premeditated and designed to create a climate of extreme fear
– It involves attacks on random or symbolic targets, including civilians;
– It is meant to influence the political behaviour of governments and other political actors.[4]

A common view is that the perpetrators of terrorism are frequently religious fanatics targeting those with opposing beliefs. Indeed, there is some evidence suggesting than more than half of internationally operating terrorist groups use religion to justify their actions.[5] Theoretical explanations usually champion the concept that terrorism stems from a deep frustrations resulting from economic and social deprivation *combined* with a dissatisfaction with a lack of opportunity for political change. Also, it is usually presumed that there is fertile ground for extremist thinking and terrorist actions when the political system is undemocratic, prevents change, prohibits criticism in the mass media and violates basic human rights, such as the freedom of speech and assembly. In these circumstances, fundamentalist interpretations of religion can attract an increasing number of followers as they appear to be void of political interests and serve the whole community. Yet, it is evident that only tentative correlations can be identified in terms of social and political conditions of societies in which terrorist organisations have the best chances to develop. Nevertheless, broadly speaking, economic and political unresolved grievances and social conflicts remain the root cause.[6]

In is often proposed that only the abolishment of autocratic rule and the strengthening of economic prosperity, democratic governance, the freedom of speech and the autonomy of mass media will reduce the appeal that political violence exerts on frustrated and deprived individuals and groups.[7] The European Union, for instance, in its Counter-Terrorism Strategy, assumes that the promotion of good governance, human rights, democracy, as well as education and economic prosperity, are the best methods for countering radicalization in societies affected by the above described deficiencies.[8]

Another widespread view is that there is a "symbiotic relationship" between extremists, terrorists and the mass media. Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher gained negative publicity when she voiced the opinion that mass media were the "oxygen for terrorism". In 1988 she imposed limitations on Northern Irish radicals access the news media (the so-called broadcasting ban). British television and radio were allowed to report what representatives of Sinn Fein and other champions of the outlawed Irish Republican Army said, but broadcasting the actual interviews was not permitted. This restriction

3 cf. «What is political extremism", http://www.voluntaryist.com/articles/027a.php ;

4 For a broader conceptual discussion see Paul Wilkinson, The Media and Terrorism: A Reassessment. In: Terrorism and Political Violence, Vol.9, N0.2 (Summer 1997), pp.51-64, Frank Cass, London.

5 cf. Graham Bird, S. Brock Blumberg and Gregory D. Hess, International Terrorism: Causes, Consequences and Cures. The World Economy (2008), Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, p. 259 ff

6 For a discussion of underlying causes of terrorism see Edward Newman, Exploring the "Root Causes" of Terrorism. Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 29; 749-772, London 2006.

7 For a critical discussion of this assumption see Maurits S.Berger, Radicalisation in International Perspective: How Successful is Democratisation in Countering Radicalisation? In, Radicalisation in broader perspective. The National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (Nctb), The Hague (Netherlands), October 2007.

8 The European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy (Justice and Home Affairs Council), 1 December 2005, point 11.

was widely criticized as undemocratic and was counter productive to the undergoing efforts to reconcile the conflict in Northern Ireland.[9] Yet, the concept that terrorism and the mass media are engaged in a "diabolical and indissoluble partnership"[10] remains an entrenched opinion. This conviction is still used by government authorities, especially in non-democratic countries, to defend infringement of the freedom of speech and opinion in the name of what is usually termed as an element in their defence against the spread of terrorism. The assumption is that terrorist should be restricted from access to publicity for their acts so that they will become less motivated to continue using violence.

Indeed, it is beyond dispute that terrorist craft their actions with mass media in mind – at least when they operate in countries where media are free to report about such events.[11] Admittedly, governments find it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to hinder or stop the flow of information. The evolution of media technologies and the spread of the internet opened up for news from almost any point on the globe to be transmitted instantly world-wide. Undeniably, if the media can function without imposed or self-chosen censorship, they can expect, at least in the period after an attack, that reports of terror actions will increase their visibility on the market and subsequently their income due to a steep rise in newspaper sales and the number of television viewers which in turn can eventually attract more advertising revenue.

There is a hypothesis that assumes that the symbiosis between the mass media and the terrorists was strengthened after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001 – and was later further reinforced by the series of more recent terrorist attacks in Madrid, London, Moscow and some other Russian cities. All of these events received prominent coverage which seemed to prove that terrorists were planning their attacks with the aim of achieving maximum publicity and thereby also maximizing impact in terms of spreading fear and exerting pressure on governments. Research substantiates that intensive media coverage has caused many people to over-estimate the actual number and frequency of terrorist attacks in their region. Television broadcasts depicting political violence and national threat have the power to increase levels of anxiety among viewers.[12]

Nevertheless, the theory that there is a causal relationship between the mass media and terrorism based on the assumption the media have an interest in transmitting more news and reports about political extremism and terrorism in order to increase profits remains unsubstantiated. Moreover, the vast majority of research studies focus on this relationship in Western societies alone. Little mass media study on its relationship to extremism and terrorism in, for the most part, poor and non-democratic or post-authoritarian, developing countries has been done. In many parts of the developing world, the combined forces of economic deprivation and political oppression explain, to an extent, why terrorism is being "exported" from poor and undemocratic countries to rich democracies. In the eyes of the deprived and frustrated, the former colonial powers and the rich societies are often seen as the ultimate culprits responsible for the plight of the poor and disenfranchised. The asymmetrical relationship between the affluent West and the poor South has impact on how terrorists plan their actions:

> "The lower interest of Western media for terrorism in developing countries, rather than in North America and Western Europe, leads terrorist in developing countries to commit bloodier terror attacks. Increasing the number of fatalities and injuries is their only possibility of obtaining the desired media coverage".[13]

9   The New York Times wrote on 3 November 1988: "Britain's good name as mother of parliaments and seedbed of political freedom is an asset more precious than the crown jewels. How bizarre for it to be tarnished by a Conservative Government."

10   Patrick Brunot, Terrorism and the media: a diabolical relationship. Défense nationale et sécurité collective (Engl.), 64 (January 2008) 1, p. 59ff

11   cf. Simon Finch, Mixed messages of terror and the media. Financial Times, London, 8/9 December 2001;

12   Michelle Slone, Responses to Media Coverage of Terrorism. Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol. 44 No.44 August 2000, p.520.

13   Bruno S.Frey and Dominik Rohner, Blood and Ink! The Common-Interest-Game Between Terrorists and the Media. Institute for Empirical Research in Economics, University of Zurich, Working Paper No. 285, April 2006, p.20.

After the attacks in the US on 11 September 2001, the West has developed a new, intensive anxiety of terrorism, particularly the "Islamic brand". This has lead both to closer scrutiny of the possible threats to the security in West and also to increased attention in the South on issues related to political extremism, religious fundamentalism and terrorism. In this context, Central Asia has become a region of particular interest. To a varying degree, the countries of Central Asia, are all non-consolidated post-communist states where authoritarian rule is wide-spread and where large segments of the society suffer from economic deprivation and the lack of possibilities to effect their situation through a democratic political process. In most of these states, Islam has historical roots and has been on the rise since the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

In most of Central Asia, the mass media do not play a role were they can provide a platform for a broad and unhindered public debate about the roots of the dissatisfaction among large segments of the population and for fostering democratisation. This is amply documented in the IMS research reports from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.[14] Since the reports were finished, the Kazak state has continued to tighten its grip on media so that some observers assume that a kind of "de-privatization" was now under way with the state not only increasing its political control, but also through acquiring direct ownership of the majority of the assets in the media industry.[15] In Kyrgyzstan, a steady flow of reports is emerging about the strained relationship between government authorities and media professionals (www.monitoring.kg).

As postulated in theoretical writings on religious fundamentalism and terrorist activities, the conditions for the existence of political extremism, are in place in Central Asia. Early-warnings about this danger, and a debate how to overcome the perils, could come from the mass media of the countries in the region. Presuming, that is, that they had the freedom and the capabilities to report realistically about the developments concerning threats related to political extremism and terrorism. The monitoring of the coverage of political extremism and terrorism in a number of selected mass media carried out in this study (Chapter 4), provides insight into the realistic capabilities of mass media in the two countries. The work done by the researchers in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is of relevance not only to the region itself, but also to the region's external political and economic partners.

14 *cf. Chapters 2 (The political and economic situation) and Chapters 3 (The media industry) in the IMS study reports (www.freedolina.net)*

15 *Baymukhamedova Marin: Kazak state tightens grip on media. ISN/IWPR, 4 April 2008; www.isn.ethz.ch*

2 Political extremism, religious fundamentalism, terrorism and the media in Central Asia

Many authors in Central Asia as well as external analysts have focused their attention on the threat of radicalization in the states of the region.[16] They pay particular interest to the question of whether radicalisation is home-grown and if there are regional connections to extremist organisations that have gained ground in nearby Afghanistan and Pakistan. Among further topics of interest are these questions: Is there a wide-spread tendency of re-Islamization after the withdrawal of the Soviet Empire from the region? Have the five countries of this region become operating areas for terrorist organisations from outside? What is the regional influence of transnational organised crime specialising in drug trafficking from Afghanistan? Will a possible radicalisation in Central Asia eventually poise a security threat to the West? In the IMS study, a particular concern was if these issues have emerged in the mass media of the Central Asian countries and in public discourse in general.

A necessarily incomplete taxonomy of the main reasons for instability and potential for radicalisation in the region would include as a minimum the following elements:

– wide-spread poverty and uneven distribution of wealth;
– poor education, public health and other signs of non-performing state structures;
– power struggle between clans and groups;
– absence of respect for human rights, rule of law and other preconditions of democracy;
– continuing government attempts to control of the mass media and restrict the possibilities for the population to express dissatisfaction with the living conditions and the political leadership
– external political influences coming from mainly from Russia, the US and China;

A prevailing conclusion in a number of analytical studies is that although radical interpretations of the Islam teachings have spread among some segments of the population in Central Asia, there is little empirical evidence to support the assumption that the region is radicalising and becoming a hot-bed for extremists and terrorists.[17] Indeed, a common observation among analysts is that the risk of terrorism, especially from Islamic organisations, is often misused by governments, particularly in Uzbekistan, to justify the persecution of the opposition.[18] Regional analysts point out that the threat of Islamist extremism has become a "rhetorical instrument" used to "cement the positions" of the ruling elites in these countries. In official discourse, "Islamic extremism" is the "main ideological antipode of the regime".[19] In reality, according to the *Global Terrorism Database*, the frequency of terrorist attacks in Central Asia is lower than in most other parts of the world. Furthermore, there is little evidence that terrorism is being exported from the region. Yet, the alleged, or only, incremental presence of a local Islamist-Terrorist nexus is used by the governments, not only for domestic purposes, but also as an argument to strengthen intraregional security co-operation as well as to solidify security links to Russia, China, the EU and the US. As participants in the common struggle against terrorist threats, these Central Asian governments seek to increase both their domestic legitimacy and international acceptance.

16 cf. Abisheva Marian and Shaymergenov, Timur: Religious-Political Extremism in Central Asia: Why and how it is spreading; In: Cental Asia and the Caucasus, No.6 (42), 2006. p. 42-54 and Sidorov, Oleg: The Islamic Factor in Central Asian Countries' Domestic Stability. Central Asia and the Caucasus, No. 1 (43), 2007.

17 cf. Uwe Halbach: Zentralasien im Kampf gegen den militanten Islamismus /Central Asia struggling against militant Islamism/. German Institute for International Affairs and Security, Berlin, SWP-Aktuell 20, March 2008. www.swp-berlin.org

18 Emil Souleimanov/ Slavomír Horák: Islam, Islamism, and Terrorism in the Northern Caucasus and Central Asia: A Critical Assessment. Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (Ed.) OSCE Yearbook 2006. Yearbook on the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)), Nomos Verlag Baden-Baden.

19 Ibid, p. 285ff.

Some regional analysts are critical of Western perceptions of the situation. They argue that "Western experts, the mass media, and public opinion" are actually contributing to the increasing level of Islamophobia in the world by creating a geopolitical stereotype of political instability in Central Asia that is primarily a product of Islamist infiltration which will eventually lead to conflicts that include terrorist acts.[20] According to this group of analysts the true causes of the internal conflicts in the Central Asian countries, and in the region as a whole are two-fold. First, they are caused by pervasive internal socio-economic and political flaws. Second, they are linked to the geopolitical role Central Asian countries play in the global confrontations between the US, China and Russia, and increasingly the EU, over oil and gas resources, military security and, more generally, as part of these global power blocks' projection of external power and influence in the region.[21] Indeed, in a critical analysis of the reasons for "disillusionment" with democracy promotion in Central Asia, one leading Western observer of Central Asian notes that "supporting reform was neither a priority of the U.S. nor of EU", and that only after the attacks in the U.S. on 11 September 2001, did the US and Western engagement in the region increased as they now believed that it was necessary for their own security.[22]

Even so, there is obviously a potential for radicalisation in Central Asia primarily fuelled by human rights violations committed by the governments themselves under the guise of fighting extremism and terrorism *combined with* persistent socio-economic problems, suppression of secular opposition and an intensification of ethno-territorial disputes such as those simmering in the Ferghana Valley.[23] All of these conflicts are to a degree connected to the reluctance of the ruling elites to permit open political debate and to institute political reforms. An element of this inhibitive policy is seen in the suppression of press freedom and free public discourse that – if they were actually allowed – would include open debate on contentious issues. This characteristic of the political situation is clearly documented in the two case studies in this research project which report on how the space for independent media continues to shrink in the whole of Central Asia.[24]
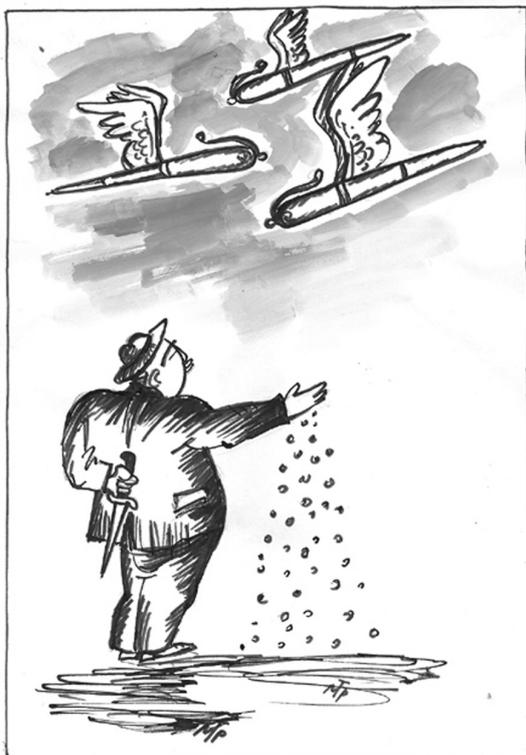
20 *Abisheva Marian and Shaymergenov, Timur, ibid, p.53.*

21 *Sidorov, ibid, p. 17.*

22 *Brill Olcott, Martha: Democracy Promotion in Central Asia: From High Expectations to Disillusionment. In: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Publications, 4 May 2007.*

23 *cf. Ramakant Dwiwedi: Religious Extremism in Ferghana Valley. Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, Strategic Analysis, Vol. 30, No. 2, Apr-Jun 2006, also Dr. Ehsan Ahrari, Countering the Ideological Support fo HT and the IMU: The Case of the Ferghana Valley, George C.Marshall Centre, Occasional Paper Series, No. 3, October 2006.*

24 *cf Olivia Allison: Selective enforcement and irresponsibility. Central Asia's shrinking space for independent media. Central Asian Survey (March – June 2006), 25 (1-2), p.93ff.*

3 Chief features of the media industry Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

The Soviet Union left behind a mixed legacy in the media industry in Central Asia and the other new independent states in its former territory. On the one hand, the mass media were part of the ideological "superstructure" of the societies. They were foremost an instrument of political command and control. On the other hand, Soviet support for media meant that newspapers, books and electronic media were cheap and widely available and contributed to the spread of literacy and education.

With the implosion of the Soviet Union and the coming of independent states, a kind of "golden", yet short interlude, started with an explosion in the number of independent mass media outlets in the post-Soviet era.[25] As long as the new post-communist authorities had not as yet consolidated their grip on power, their control of the mass media remained weak. At the same time, governments were hesitant to exert pressure on journalists because of the presence of Western democracy-building organisations that paid particular attention to press freedom. New entrepreneurs, including foreign investors began investing in Central Asia media production.

While Western external broadcasters continued transmitting programmes to most of the post-soviet countries, the changing Russian media achieved a high degree of professionalism and audience reach. In spite of the stronger control that the Kremlin now exerts over Russian mass media, these are nevertheless still much more informative and colourful than in the Soviet era. Russia remains the most important political and economic partner for the post-soviet countries as is reflected in the quantity and quality of mutual media coverage. Russian is still widely understood in most of the post-Soviet countries so media content from Russia, particularly when it comes to entertainment, is dominant in the region. Russia and its post-Soviet neighbours also share a common social and cultural heritage. Moreover, significant numbers of labourer have migrated from Central Asian to Russia where economic growth, combined with demographic decline, has opened up for jobs for foreigners. Thus, personal bonds between Russia and the post-soviet sphere remain strong, kindling obvious regional interest for media reports about Russia where so many migrant labourers from Central Asia now work.

Nonetheless, other forms of foreign media content are transmitted in Central Asia today, although they contain political content to a lesser extent. Ubiquitous and cheap products such as U.S. entertainment programmes, Latin American *telenovelas* and, increasingly, Turkish, Chinese and Korean television programmes have entered the media market, as well. Local media production is sparse and of lesser quality. "Kazakh productions suffer from lack of creativity and tend to be conventional", the Kazakh researcher reports.

A grievance often mentioned in the Kazakh and Kyrgyz research is that externally controlled mass media pay little or no attention to local developments and interests. Nonetheless, they attract a significant audience because they are of better quality, particularly in the field of entertainment, than those the domestic competitors can provide. "Segments of the population still see the world through the eyes of Moscow" the Kyrgyz report concludes. On the other hand, it notes that local journalists sometimes lack the professional

25 This section of the summary relies on information contained in the third chapters (on the media industry) of the research reports for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in Russian of this study.

skills and the necessary financial and technical resources to provide adequate news, current affairs reporting, cultural and entertainment programming.

Media ownership has accordingly diversified so that there are now various players on the market:

– state-owned outlets, including local and regional papers that depending on the financing from municipal and regional authorities (the Kyrgyz report labels these "servants" of the state);
– mass media owned by domestic profit-oriented entrepreneurs;
– mass media partly or fully owned by, for the most part Russian, foreigners;
– mass media owned by non-profit organisations that often dependant on external donors .

Media laws and regulations are in place in most of the Central Asia countries, but, as the Kyrgyz research editor notes, each revision of media legislation harks a potential new danger for the media freedom in each country. Since the initial liberal "golden" interlude for regional press freedom, a new "ice age" is approaching, or may have already ensued.

The authorities, which have become much more assertive than in the initial post-soviet phase, are steadily narrowing the playing field available for independent journalism. The purpose is to prevent opposition visibility and, in the broader sense, to counteract attempts to promote democracy and induce regime change. Until the very recent past, criticism from international organisations such as the Organisation for Co-operation and Security (OSCE) in Europe worried Central Asian governments. Their increasing consolidation of power has reduced their concern over foreign disparagement. When it comes to maintaining their hold on power, especially in pre-election periods, governments in the region are prone to intensify restrictive pressure on the media. The relevance of international norms and political interventions, particularly those established in the West, have recently decreased as the governments in Astana, Bishkek and the other capitals of Central Asia have consolidated their authority.

Private media entrepreneurs are usually cautious, avoiding friction with the authorities. They depend on funding from the advertising market and from sponsoring. Advertising revenue loss would be fatal for many private media. They are careful to avoid political conflicts that could affect their ability to attract market revenue. Therefore, news and current affairs reporting, especially about politically contentious issues (such as political extremism, religious fundamentalism and terrorism), are not a priority for most private media. Journalists depend on their employers that under state or private ownership so they too are overly sensitive to pressure. Political and economic pressures on journalists are sometimes accompanied by threats or even physical assaults. "Censorship by killing" (a phrase coined by the former OSCE Freedom of the Media Representative Freimut Duve) is still practised. Both the Kazakh and the Kyrgyz reports contain details about journalists who have disappeared (Oralgaysha Omarshanova in Almaty) or killed (Alisher Saipov in Osh).

The authors of the both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan research reports have expressed confidence that the increasing access to the internet is a "decisive moment" for freedom of expression in their countries and the region. While they acknowledge that it is still primarily only the wealthier and younger segments of the population that use internet for political communication, they nevertheless believe that there are now new possibilities to expand the realm of the free speech. In spite of the fact that the Kazakh government in particular has shut down some local websites, experience shows that authoritarian rulers find if difficult to prevent news and information transmitted via the internet from dissemination in their countries. China is usually quoted as an example of a state authority that was ultimately unable to block all internet sources containing uncensored information.

Some participants in the public debates about the initial research reports in Bishkek and Almaty pointed out that the internet is also conducive for the spread of radical ideology. Yet, along side high-tech information communicating tools (such as mobile telephony, the internet, trans-frontier television), radical activists also use traditional means to spread their visions of the world via leaflets, cheap publications, audio and video-cassettes, compact discs or even the spoken word at religious sermons. Such "low-tech", cheap instruments of public communication are even more difficult to block than the internet or the mass media.

4 Monitoring of selected media outlets in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

The partner organisations, "Adil Soz" in Almaty and Public Association "Journalists" in Bishkek, monitored a representative selection of the mass media in their respective countries. The monitoring in Kazakhstan covered 27 media outlets (18 newspapers, 5 TV stations, 3 radios and one news agency) from 1 July to 31 August 2007 (A82-126).[26] In Kyrgyzstan, 22 media outlets (11 dailies and weeklies, 7 radio and TV stations, 4 on-line news agencies) outlets were monitored from 1 October to 30 November 2007 (B86-88). The goal of the monitoring was to carry out a quantitative and qualitative analysis of how the media report on issues pertaining to political extremism and terrorism. The monitors were required to mark the reports they examined as "positive", "negative" or "neutral" in their bias and to provide information about the quantity of such reports. Also, they were encouraged to provide a qualitative description with succinct examples.

4.1 Kazakhstan

4.1.1 The main findings of the monitoring

In Kazakhstan, the monitors did not identify any report that was not neutral (A82-126). However, in Kyrgyzstan, the situation was slightly different, although the media here also show a high degree of care when tackling political extremism and terrorism and other sensitive topics. (B90). Furthermore, the Kazakh media monitoring disclosed that a negligible amount of articles or other publications consist of investigative reports or in-depth reports based on research and interviews with a variety of collocutors. There was no systematic coverage of political extremism and terrorism. Instead, reports seem to appear by chance unless spurned by a specific incident that was perceived to be an act of political extremism or terrorism. On such occasions, the media usually adopted a cautious approach and relied for the most part on official statements (A67).

It has to be taken into account that liberal and critical voices in the media in Kazakhstan still suffer from pressures from the government, some media owners and criminal elements as well. Understandably, journalists are by in large not ready to take professional risks. (A70). Media legislation contains highly restrictive clauses on media freedom that enable courts to close down media outlets for "violating Kazakhstan's integrity," condoning "extremism," and "undermining state security"(A46 ff). This echoes practices in many post-authoritarian states of the former Soviet Union where the authorities have used a plethora of restrictive methods to stifle critical voices. Tax inspectors attempt to check documents and seize computers in media outlets which have come under scrutiny; publishing houses pull out of agreements to print non-conformist newspapers. Repeatedly, governments confiscate print-runs of publications that express views which are not received favourably by the power-to-be (A70). State officials are often among the numerous plaintiffs who demand, as the monitors note, "gigantic" sums in courts from media outlets which allegedly have damaged their "reputation, honour and dignity" or harmed them in some other way (A67). Especially during election times, widespread disinformation campaigns against the opposition are staged (so-called "information wars" involving the usage of "compromising materials",

26 *In this section, we refer to the Kazakh report under the abbreviation „A" followed by the number of the page in the report where the topical information is to be found. The information was derived during the media monitoring as part of this research project. The Kyrgyz report is referred under the abbreviation "B" followed by the page number. The original Russian text of the full Kazakh and Kyrgyz reports are available for free download on www. freedolina.net*

kompromat), criminalization of independent and pro-opposition journalists and similar acts (A45). Journalists are at times exposed to extreme perils: for instance, journalist Oralgaysha Omarshanova *"Zakon I Pravosudie"(Law and Justice)* disappeared in Almaty on 30 March 2007. She had investigated cases of corruption and had received threatening phone calls (A116). The law enforcing authorities have not as yet resolved her disappearance yet.

Although the government also regularly closes down Kazakh news and information portals, there is evidence that the internet is being used as the main forum for political debate by an increasing number of people in Kazakhstan (A39) – mainly young Kazakhs who are more likely to sympathize with the opposition. Presently, less than a quarter of Kazakhstan's 15 million people, mainly in the commercial capital Almaty, regularly browse the internet. Given the rapid advance in telecommunications technology and rising standard of living in urban areas, internet-based resources enable those who seek information to breach any information blockade. This is especially vital during crises when official sources tend to implode – as was the case during the spring 2007 unrests in Malovodnoe.

4.1.2 Hooliganism or inter-ethnic conflicts: the incident in Malovodnoe

Authorities denied any ethnic motives in the unrests in the village of Malovodnoe, in the Enbekshikazak district of southern Kazakstan that took place on 18 March 2007 (A29-40). A huge crowd marched through the village, burning cars and setting buildings alight. At least three people (all brothers from the Mahmahanov clan) were killed in clashes between local Chechens and Kazakhs. Preceding this clash, there had been riots in the Almaty Region of Kazatkom involving members of the same ethnic communities. Occasionally reports had already surfaced about previous conflicts between the Kazakh population and members of other ethnic communities such Turks or Chinese who are employed on some of the big development projects in the country. According to some estimates in the international media, the conflict between Chechens and Kazakhs highlighted underlying tension among ethnic groups in the country – tensions the government was trying to ignore. However, security officials insisted that "hooliganism" was the cause incidents in Malovodnoe. A few opposition deputies in the parliament pointed to other causes such as the "utter poverty" of the peasants and other segments of the population, to corruption, and to crimes committed by members of the security services.

Apparently, debates and rumours did not subside in spite of the official denials. So on 7 April, the state prosecutor warned that "some mass media" had persisted in publishing "anti-constitutional statements touching upon the honour and dignity of citizens of different nationalities" (A41). The prosecutor issued a stern warning that he has ordered "checks" to be made. President Nursultan Nazarbaev told the electronic media on 11. April that there was "no interethnic conflict" and announced that he had ordered the state prosecutor to prosecute all mass media that had reported in a wrongful manner about the events (A43). Some media asked the Director of the Kazakhstan International Bureau for human rights and the observance of legality, Evgeni Zhovtis, whether he expected that there would be cases brought against journalists because of their reporting in the Malovodnoe case. According to his opinion, the constitution and the other legal acts do not provide a clear definition of what it is to incite national, ethnic and social discord. For his part, mentioning the ethnic belonging or participants in a conflict cannot be understood as inciting to conflict (A44).

4.2.2 Stiff sentences to "terrorists" or terrorists?

Trails against individuals or groups accused of political extremism and terrorism often take place without the presence of the public or the press. In such cases, the mass media of Kazakhstan publish only the official press releases or statements by representatives of the court or the state attorney. For instance, in August 2007 a court in the northern Karaganda area initiated proceedings against 30 people accused of being members of the forbidden Islamic group "Hizb Al-Tahrir" (A62). Similarly, most mass media rely almost exclusively on official statements when they report about the arrest of certain groups labelled by the authorities as "terrorist". A similar event occurred in August 2007 year, when the state prosecutor in Shymkent in southern Kazakhstan announced the reason for series of arrests. A month earlier, a court in Almaty sentenced several members of what the authorities had called "an international terrorist group" to long prison sentences. They were found guilty of murder and robbery. The leader of the group and his closest associate received respectively 25 and 22 years in prison (A45).

In general, the dealings of the government or the judiciary deliberations against people accused of political extremism and terrorism are not discussed in the country's mass media. Yet, as foreign media report, many people remain unconvinced that the people who were put on trial are indeed terrorists. Ninel Fokina, of the human rights group Almaty Helsinki Committee told an external broadcaster that she sometimes feels that an atmosphere of "hysteria about the so-called battle against extremism and terrorism" surrounds these cases. She remarks that there is little more behind the government restrictive behaviour than the "desire of the government to have another instrument to exert control".[27] Fokina repeated a frequently made charge that many security agencies in Central Asia are using the issue of terrorism to jail political opponents or are labelling simple criminals as terrorists to demonstrate to the world community that their countries are an active partner in the international struggle against extremism and terrorism.

4.2 Kyrgyzstan

4.2.1 The main findings of the monitoring

Kyrgyz media that were monitored behaved with caution when tackling issues of political extremism and terrorism. Although neutral attitudes were by far prevalent, in a small number of reports the monitors detected a positive bias towards organisations that are usually described by the government authorities as radical. Out of 209 examined published materials, 161 were neutral, 38 negative and ten positive towards such organisations (B 85).
For instance, some media outlets showed appreciation for the fact that the Islamic party Hizb Al-Tahriris was successful in spreading its presence in the country. Nine out of the ten positive mentions of this organisation occurred in the media outlets in the south of Kyrgyzstan, where this and other prescribed political groups have shown more presence than in the north of the country. The monitors judge that journalists covering these topics lack experience and have little knowledge of the facts and that journalists "reproduce the information in the format they receive it, without thinking of the repercussions".

The monitors in Kyrgyzstan considered that by far the most reports about political extremism and terrorism consisted of factual data. The majority of the reports detailed the number of publications run by Hizb Al-Tahrir and the

27 *Eurasia Insight:*
    Islamic Group Members
    On Trial For Terrorism,
    2 July 2007.

other groups or the number of their supporters that were arrested by the police. On extremely rare occasions analytical pieces, comments or features that touched upon topics of political extremism or terrorism are published. Out of the 209 published materials, only eight were analytical texts. There were also seven interviews, seven features, 37 longer reports and 150 news items (B 85).

The Kyrgyz monitors point to a feature on "OshTV" as a typical example of the prevailing manner in which such issues are covered. It shows how the police removed supporters of the Hizb Al-Tahrir from the area around the Uzbek Drama Theatre "Babura" in Osh where they tried to gather on the occasion of the Kurman-Ait holiday on 12 October 2007. Segments of the feature lasting 2 minutes and 15 seconds are without comment and included sequences where the police demanding that the crowd disperse. The camera sequence shows a close up of women crying because they were prohibited from carrying out an action that they considered to be of humanitarian character. The monitors question whether such reporting is justified because it does not touch upon the political background for this kind of manifestation. Some viewers may have been left with the impression that the security services were far too rough with the participants at the action. Others could be left with the impression that the police were too lenient with sympathisers of religious fanatics (B91).

On the other hand, an example of reporting with a clearly negative bias could be seen on national TV on 5 October 2007. Viewers could follow an almost ten-minute long report of a security services special operation targeting Usbek Islamic movement activists (IDU) in Zhalalabat that occurred in June 2006. According to the authorities, six members of the IDU were killed. The TV report repeated what the authorities had said about the terrorist plans of that group and qualified them as a danger to the whole of the society (B92).

The monitors in Kyrgyzstan concluded that reports on political extremism and terrorism in the mass media only surface if there is an incident or some other disruptive action. Otherwise, this topic is not on the media's agenda. If the public seeks comprehensive information on this topic, it must turn to Russian, British and US external broadcasters in the region, or search through the internet (B90). One reason for the absence of in-depth reporting on contentious issues, as understood by the monitors, is the lack of journalists who specialize in these issues. Also, covering this topic is not without difficulties and hazards for journalists as they need experience and the co-operation of authoritative sources in order to produce a balanced and truthful report.

Other factors also play a role: the cost of travel and communication that in-depth reporting incurs limited access to internet and a lack of understanding of how to access related information on the web. Finally, the job of reporting on political extremism and terrorism can imperil the security of the journalist. It is evident that journalists who cover such topics need additional training both in relation to acquiring new knowledge (information about the political context) and skills (how to work safely in crises situation) (B92).

4.2.2 Two examples

Furthermore, the monitors analysed two recent examples of how issues of political extremism and terrorism are covered by mass media in Kyrgyzstan

a) The intrusion of an armed group in the Batken region 12 May 2006

Early on the morning of 12 May an armed group of about 10 people attacked a Tajik border checkpoint in Isfara oblast. They seized weapons and killed three Tajik guards. A few hours later the group moved into Kyrgyzstan through Batken oblast and headed toward Osh city. The gunmen then clashed with Kyrgyz border guards. After the incident, the Kyrgyz Ministry of Interior said that the heavily armed group had ties with the Islamic movements in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan with the intention to commit terrorist attacks in Kyrgyzstan territory (B77).

Bishkek-based news agencies were the first to break the news of this on-going crisis on 12 May 2006. Yet, as the monitors noted, throughout that day an enormous amount of erroneous information filled the public space. There was speculation about the number of victims and the attackers, their origin, intentions and weaponry. Contradictory news was released by different sources. Apparently, there was little co-operation between the various branches of the government when it came to communicating the official version to the public (B78). Initially, almost all reporting in the mass media were based on official statements, interviews with local pundits or quotes from foreign mass media, but not on reports from the agencies' own local correspondents in Osh. Officials and journalists used vague terms such as "unknown people", "gunmen" or "armed gang" to describe the intruders. Four days went by before the Minister of Interior Marat Sutalinon stated that the "bandits...may be named as an international terrorist group" (B80).

During the incident, the printed media propagated more questions than answers so that readers could not grasp who the intruders were and their actual intentions. In other words, the authors of the articles failed to provide a comprehensible context explaining the events (B81). Most radio and TV stations followed the official line by simply reproducing government statements. Media outlets provide negligible analysis or commentaries (B82). Breaking news, although abet often incomplete and sometimes contradictory, was only available from internet-based information agencies whose blogs offer the opportunity for people to voice their opinions, ask otherwise suppressed questions or provide accounts of what they themselves have seen or heard.

According to the findings of the monitors, news coverage of the Batken incident exposed several flaws:

– journalists in Kyrgyzstan know little about political extremism and terrorism. In crises situations, they often lack skills to tackle such issues. Therefore they habitually reproduce official statements without looking for an opportunity to supplement these with their own investigations or third party analysis and comments.
– the government and the mass media have no elaborate routines for co-operation in crises situations. This leads to non-coordinated messages coming from government authorities that make it difficult for the media to verify the information and thereafter produce timely, consistent and accurate accounts of unfolding events.
– many mass media do not employ journalists who specialize on demanding topics due to financial limitations and their overall economic frailty. Moreover, for many media outlets, simply sending a special correspondent to cover an on-going event far away from the editorial office is not financially feasible (B84).

b) The murder of journalist Alisher Saipov

The murder of one Uzbek journalist working in the south of Kyrgyzstan provided tragic evidence about the risks involved with the journalistic profession in

Kyrgyzstan(B96) when reporting on political extremism and terrorism. It also shed light on the manner in which some of the mainstream media in this country deal with politically sensitive events that involve security issues.

On 24 October 2007, in Osh, unidentified killers fired three bullets at close range at the 26 year old Uzbek journalist Alisher Saipov. International human rights organisations and international media paid particular attention to the fact that Saipov often criticised Uzbek President Islam Karimov and that he regularly contacted Uzbek opposition abroad including fundamentalist groups. He also had contact with and worked for US and Russian mass media. Many of his colleagues hinted at the possibility that Uzbek authorities were behind the murder of Saipov. Yet, as monitored by the partner organisation of this project in Bishkek, a number of Kyrgyz media published only quotes from Interior Ministry press releases which pointed out to the slain journalist's ties to banned radical Islamist groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Hizb ut-Tahir. The official statements went into great details mentioning the number of files (229) and registers (7) that contained materials connected to Hizb ut-Tahir that were found in the journalist's computer.

Many Kyrgyz journalists thought that such statements to the press were aimed at denigrating Saipov. Some openly objected to the drawn-out investigation into the murder and also about the allusions from official sources that could be interpreted as attempts to portray him as a supporter of the extremist religious groups in the region (B91). Also, the authorities did not comment on a wide spread assumption that Saipov was the victim of a murder contracted by the secret services of neighbouring Uzbekistan – something that most local journalists and others considered most probable. According to his colleagues, Saipov was well-connected and spoke regularly to all political actors, including those officially proscribed as political extremists and living in exile. For them, it is evident that Uzbek authorities label anyone who dares to stand up against them as "extremists" and "terrorists". According to editor-in-chief Daniil Kislov of the internet-based news agency Fergana.ru, circles close to Uzbek ruler Karimov considered the young journalist Saipov to be "enemy number 1". In reality, according to Kislov, Saipov was just doing his job well and knew everyone in the region so that "he could call both the minister and the head of the Islamists at midnight" (B97).

5 Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

5.1.1 Many legal paragraphs, much ambiguity

Laws and administrative acts to suppress political extremism and terrorism are in place both in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Indeed, there is an abundance of legal stipulations that deal with the issue. Yet, both political extremism and terrorism are fluid political categories. In reality, the application of the legal statutes is often contingent on the attitude of the public authorities towards individuals and groups who are considered to be opponents or even enemies of the current government. The monitoring indicated that the authorities are prone to arbitrarily label any kind of political opponents as extremists and even terrorists. It is political practice and not just legal statutes that have a decisive influence on all forms of public communication in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in regard to political extremism and terrorism. However, journalists and their professional organisations, as well as human rights groups and other civil society initiatives, would still prefer to have a "clear" definition of what constitutes political extremism or indeed terrorism. They seek an unambiguous description clarified in short and self-explanatory legal stipulations. The assumption made by regional journalists is that, if the law would provide clear guidelines for what the state considers to be political extremism and terrorism in their countries, than they could avoid potential conflicts with the authorities and feel secure in their reporting.

The media's hesitant and cautious behaviour when reporting on political emergencies and crises is expressed in an adherence to official statements and qualifications served up by government representatives. The price for avoidance of potential confrontations with the government results in little authentic information being channelled to the public. The motivations and identity of groups targeted by the government remain largely obscure. This opens for a danger that segments of the population could interpret that these obscure extremist groups are the only genuine opposition to a government that they themselves considered to be the main culprit behind the injustice, deprivation, corruption and other flaws many countries in transition are suffering from. If the government reduces, or even eliminates, all authentic opposition from the parliament and the public sphere altogether, non-conformist groups operating outside the political system and ready to resort to violence might gain acceptance in the population. Their mouth-to-mouth propaganda and other subversive work cannot be countered if there is no free debate in the mass media and other public channels of communication.

5.1.2 Austere official statements

The absence of critical public debate both about the attitude of the governments and the motivations of the radical opposition is a strong indicator that freedom of expression in a particular country has not reached satisfactory levels. It is an established fact that if governments hide or delay information, they end up assisting extremists in their attempt to shock and confuse the public. As stated in the monitoring reports, these little known radical opponents of the governments could be perceived as "heroes" and

shining examples, especially among the less well-educated, poorer and socially marginalised segments of the population. When the media is not able to offer a reliable and encompassing picture about the political realities in the country, including factual information on extra-parliamentary and extremist opposition and terrorist groups, the credibility of the "official" arguments concerning such individuals and organisations diminishes. The lack of information in the mass media about officially anathematized individuals and groups raises the public interest in their ideology and their actions. Thus, by sticking to austere official statements, or remaining silent altogether, the mass media lose credibility and allow for rumours and forgeries to dominate public discourse. The situation aggravates if some mass media publish rumours or unchecked accounts of events, because they are not in the position to verify official statements or do not have the human and technical resources or professional capability to cover the actual causes of unexpected situations,. In such circumstances, political extremists and terrorists achieve maximum impact for their actions.

Ideally, mass media may contribute to the prevention of political extremism and terrorism by fostering an informed, open and balanced discussion of such phenomena. One way this can happen, is for the mass media to expose the flaws and perils of extremist ideologies. Speaking in normative terms, the contribution of the mass media to support a constructive transformation in society is to "function as a platform for dialogue, critical control and provider of information for citizens so that they are enabled to take actively part in democracy and development".

In real life, however, the mass media rarely achieve this ideal level of performance. In reality, the issue is further complicated by the fact that some Western media tend to become absorbed with political extremism and terrorism and report in an overblown and sensationalistic manner about these issues. This may lead to unfounded fears in the population which, in turn, may lead to the increased sympathies for populist and authoritarian politicians promising a quick fix to security risks.

In cases of lacking or unclear legal provisions or as a result of an arbitrary implementation of the legal stipulations, media may be constrained from providing accurate and timely reports about even the most sensitive political, security and other issues. Consequently, their potential contribution to a constructive transformation of a society is lost. Indeed, if the mass media and the public are silent about sensitive issues such as political extremism and terrorism, and only the official view is permitted, then the assumption that there is a lack of democracy and freedom of speech is justified.

5.1.3 Lack of reliable, easily accessible information resources

An informed public debate about all social issues, even the most contentious ones, such as political extremism, is a prerequisite for democracy in a society. Yet, even in situations when the public authorities do not impede open debates, other problems can occur. Often, there is a lack of information and documentation about certain topics. Dedicated internet portals, archives, platforms for exchanges among experts and similar resources cannot exist without regular funding. However, many developing countries have to cope with severe economic difficulties. Informational resources are frequently a scarce commodity in such regions. At the same time, developing countries are often non-consolidated democracies or still under authoritarian rule. Therefore, public or private investments in open and easily accessible

information resources are not a common occurrence. The result is that, not only the general public, but also journalists, academics and public officials are at a loss when they want to identify and use reliable and affordable sources of information and documentation. Thus, those whose duty it is to inform the general public about political extremism and terrorism often lack resources to do it.

Another important precondition for an informed public debate is the readiness and the capability of the public authorities to provide fast and reliable information through the mass media to the general public. In crises situations, representatives of the government and other public authorities are under strong pressure to react swiftly to the demand of the public for information. However, as the monitoring in this report indicated, over and over again, during crises situations, such as after actions by political extremists and terrorists, official representatives are late and selective with the information they communicate. Their statements tend to be incomplete, sometimes conflicting with releases from other official sources, and end up contributing to confusion and the spread of speculations. Thus ample space arises for perpetrators of such deeds to succeed in inducing fear and chaos, which is often the basic purpose of their action. Instead of controlled communication "from above" in crises situations, journalists, and the public in general, would prefer to have a coherent message delivered without delay from official sources and open to scrutiny from independent experts.

Paradoxically, those institutions of the state which are in the front-line against political extremism and terrorism, namely police, secret services, the army and other security sector organisations are as a rule, not only in Central Asia but worldwide, the slowest to modernise and to act as fast, reliable and profuse sources of information for the public. To a certain extent there is a tradition of the security sector, in countries of transition and in consolidated democracies, to operate far from the public eye. Nonetheless, the consolidation of democracy means that transparency and accountability have to apply to all sectors of the state, including those who traditionally like to avoid the limelight. Actually, the rule of law and the respect for democratic procedures are tested in emergency situations, and in particular in, the work of state institutions which are entrusted with the privilege to apply force, if necessary. Recurrently, the security sector prefers to remain opaque. This hampers the mass media when it attempts to inform swiftly and truthfully about disruptive events. The lack of comprehensive information and non-manipulative explanations in the mass media undermines the confidence of the public into public authorities in general. It also lowers the trust of the public in mass media – as incomplete and belated information can be perceived as an attempt to manipulate readers, listeners and viewers. Furthermore, if no debate takes place in the interaction between the public authorities, the mass media and the public in a particular country, fundamental of democracy are weakened.

5.1.4 Profits versus quality in the media industry

The performance of the mass media can fall below expectations during confrontations with political extremism, as well as in times of emergency when basic professional preconditions are not fulfilled, even if journalists have the best intentions. As indicated by the monitoring results in this research, the reason for this lapse is partly financial, partly related to a lack of training, and partly a failure to adhere to professional standards.

News and current affair reporting and other outputs of the mass media industry are commodities that have a price. The owner of a particular media outlet – whether it be a state- or publicly-owned company, or a private entrepreneur – is interested in lower the production costs. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (and other developing countries) this means that only few media owners invest in the specialisation of their journalists and other employees. Yet, reporting about sensitive and complicated issues such as political extremism and terrorism demands well-educated media workers. Often journalists have to invest much time and resources into producing an unbiased and truthful report. They have to be engaged in following the developments in their particular field of interest for months or even years. Only a firm grasp of facts and experience enables journalists to discern plausible information from attempts to manipulate, to gain access to credible sources and to build their reputation in the public as trustworthy authors. This is made difficult if the prime interest of the media owners is access to quick profit. On the contrary, a drive for income during emergency situations might tempt media owners and editors to lower professional standards and succumb to sensationalism. Terrorist attacks, acts of political extremists and other disruptive events rapidly engage public attention. If official sources are slow to inform the public, or are even unwilling to do so, and if there are no well-informed and well-connected journalists on hand, media owners and editors might decide to publish unchecked and even incorrect renditions of events just to attract the attention of the audience. Thus, standards of professional journalism are weakened. The monitoring showed that there are few instruments of self-regulation in the media sector, such as press councils, so there is little possibility in practice to intervene against such practices.

Sensationalistic, bias or manipulative reporting during emergency situations diminishes the standing of journalists in the public perception. By tendency, it is a threat to democracy, because it undermines the trustworthiness of political communication in general. Only a well-trained, educated and self-critical journalistic corps can protect and expand the trust attributed by the public to their profession. When confronting extremist ideologies and terrorist propaganda, democracies have to rely on their "messengers" – the mass media – enjoying the trust of the public, otherwise the message itself will also not be trusted.

5.1.5 Long-term joint projects with international partners

Problems in the triangle of interplay between public authorities, media owners and journalists that surface when dealing with political extremism, terrorism and other extra-ordinary developments are by no means specific to the Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan or indeed Central Asia. Much attention worldwide has been focused on the question of how the mass media can cope with political extremism and terrorism. This reflects the prominence of the debate about extremist thinking and actions as the new major threat to global security after the end of the bipolar confrontation that dominated the second half of the past century. Transition in countries that were previously under single-party rule has not always resulted in the consolidation of the new parliamentary systems, the rule of law and democracy. Therefore, support to independent media as a precondition for an informed and democratic public debate is still high on the agenda of organisations dedicated to democracy-building. Furthermore, as political extremism and terrorism are considered to be among the chief threats to the consolidation of democracies in countries of transition, a number of transnational organisations concentrate on research, debate and training connected to these issues. While professional

media and civil society organisations in Central Asian countries and in other regions appreciate the effort of their partners from the West, in future they would themselves like to be closely involved in the planning and execution of further activities. Also, they would like to see more long-term activities with a permanent network of partners to foster sustainability and quality of the projects.

The monitoring showed that professional media organisations and civil society groups in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan hold policy orientated research projects in high esteem. The fostering of media research based on scientific methods geared to the production of practical policy recommendations was strongly endorsed by projects partners in the two Central Asian countries. As a matter of fact, much of the "ownership" of this research was in the hands of the partners in Almaty and Bishek – their findings, conclusions and recommendations are for the most part only summarised in the English project report.

The partner organisations in Central Asia also pointed out the necessity of spreading the knowledge accumulated in the research, not only through the project's on-line database, but also through further direct interaction with journalists, academics and public officials, both from the region and further afield. They would like to see that the findings reach the representatives of the state, parliaments, entrepreneurs and international organisations involved in state-building, economic development and enhancing collective security in the region, such as the OSCE, SOC and UN. Both local partner organisations point out to the lack of compendium for journalists on how to report on specific issues and situations such as political extremism and terrorism. Western media organisations usually produce a "style book" for their staff determining language usage, procedures for verifying information before they are published and other internal "rules-of-engagement" in the daily journalistic routine. Such compendiums are not wide-spread in countries of transition.

The partner organisations in Central Asia would also like to use the knowledge generated throughout this project to influence the future national legislation on such issues. "Adil Soz" in Almaty and "Journalists" in Bishkek both expressed their intention to continue the research.

TALK IS CHEAP

On 3 May we celebrate the international day for freedom of speech

5.2 Recommendations

The final chapter of this research report is devoted to the policy recommendations that were formulated by the two partner organisations of IMS in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. They are a product of joint deliberations of the members of the project team and they chiefly based in the following components:

- monitoring of selected relevant media in this two countries that was carried out in the autumn of 2007;
- important examples of the media coverage of political extremism and terrorism in previous times;
- studies of the political and economic situations and the legal framework in the two countries, as well as their media sectors;
- debates with fellow-journalists, civil society activists, public officials and other interested parties.

5.2.1 Recommendations to the parliaments and governments

a) The governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan should launch a comparison of the national legislation and administrative rules dealing with extremism and terrorism with similar legal documents in consolidated democracies. This review should bring together public officials, professional and civil society organisations.

b) The findings of the comparative review should be presented to the parliaments and publics in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. If the comparison shows that legal reforms would be appropriate, the governments should propose to the parliaments such legislative acts that correspond with the established practice in consolidated democracies.

c) The governments should request the participation of some international organisations, in which the Central Asian countries are represented, in the review of the topical legal and administrative acts, including the Organisation for Co-operation and Security (OSCE), Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) and the United Nations (UN). These institutions, together with national and international professional media and civil society organisations, should be invited to provide expertise and assistance when drafting new legislative and administrative acts dealing with the suppression of political extremism and terrorism.

d) The governments should facilitate an environment in which professional media and civil society organisations can establish on-line databases and other resources dedicated to political extremism and terrorism. Relevant national and international legal and political acts, research and analysis and background documents should be presented together with topical news and reports on current affairs.

e) Mass media, journalists, public officials, experts and all those interested should have easy-to-access reliable information and documentation. Based on the exchanges and networks that would result from the work on the establishment and the running of such on-line resources, other topical projects could be launched such as joint workshops, training courses, research assignments and academic conferences.

f) Portals dealing with political extremism and terrorism could be launched as a joint regional project in Central Asia with the help of international organisations such as the EU, OSCE, SOC or UN, and national and international professional media and civil society groups.

g) Parliaments, governments and other public authorities in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan should improve their political communication with the general public and mass media, particularly when dealing with sensitive issues such as political extremism and terrorism.

h) Official spokespersons should be trained to reply swiftly to inquiries from the mass media in a professional manner. To be able to cope with emergencies, and avoid confusion and fear due to the reliability of information, public authorities should establish strategies and work out contingency plans that would provide for timely and substantial information to the public through the mass media.

i) The training for representatives of public authorities should include visits to mass media and civil society, as well as exchanges with journalists and, vice versa. In particular, the police, army and other segments of the security forces should interact cooperatively with the media, professional and civil society organisations. The purpose would be to increase the knowledge about each other, enhance mutual trust and thus the ability to work alongside one another in emergencies.

5.2.2 Recommendations to journalists, professional mass media and civil society organisations involved in the media sector

a) Professional organisations in the field of journalism and mass media should strive to improve the qualifications and capability of media workers to inform the public in a timely and reliable manner on sensitive issues such as political extremism and terrorism.

b) They should seek to establish co-operation with their colleagues in other mass media, national and international professional and civil society organisations, and the public authorities and international institutions.

c) Activities described in the recommendations in 6.2.1. offers a platform for co-operation with other national and international actors.

d) Media and civil society organisations should co-operate on long-term projects to monitor and self-evaluate the reporting of the mass media outlets, including issues such as political extremism and terrorism. Thus, the mass media, with input from civil society organisations and other interested parties, could establish an instrument of self-regulation.

e) The general public should be invited to comment on the work of mass media outlets through conferences with readers, listeners and viewers. Mass media should encourage their consumers to offer opinions and criticism on their reporting, for instance through direct replies via letters or e-mails to journalists or through web-based platforms fostering the debate between producers and consumers in the media industry.

f) Journalists and the professional organisations in the mass media sector should adopt a pro-active attitude towards their perspective partners for co-operation. In particular, they should propose projects to co-

operate with the public authorities in their countries and international institutions.

5.2.3 Recommendations to media owners

a) Media owners should invest in professional training of journalists and other media workers in their companies. The reputation of media outlets can be made or broken on the quality of their performance when covering sensitive issues and in times of emergencies and crises. Timely and reliable reporting on political extremism and terrorism is only possible if journalists and other media professionals are qualified. Therefore, investing in the education and training of journalists leads eventually to more revenue on the media market.

b) Media owners should resist the temptation to achieve gains in circulation or audience shares by reporting in a sensational manner about crises situations, for instance during emergencies provoked by political extremists or terrorists. Such increases are usually short-lived, but what remains is the public distrust if the reporting proves to be distorted or incorrect. This in turn diminishes the reputation and the market chances of these media outlets. Also, public authorities might decide to avoid dealing with certain mass media in the future, denying them access to reliable information and thus further reducing their capacity to provide accurate inform to their audience.

5.2.4 Recommendations to international actors

a) International media assistance in Central Asia should continue. The focus should be on support for the improvement of professional performance of media workers through education and international co-operation.

b) Reporting in crises situations demands additional skills by journalists so that specialized training workshops, on-line resources and other tools should be created and maintained through joint endeavours by local and international organisations.

c) International non-governmental groups should approach public authorities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and other countries in Central Asia with offers for joint projects for improving their political communication capacity to the general public and the mass media. This relates particularly to crises situations and when dealing with sensitive issues such as political extremism and terrorism. Platforms for such co-operation could be established together with international governmental organisations such as the OSCE, SCO and UN.

d) International media assistance should include and foster policy-oriented research. It should focus on issues that the public considers pertinent for the countries of the region. Such projects should bring together international academic and other interested institutions with their counterparts in Central Asia.

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Annex 1

The research methodology

Adyl Soz in Almaty and *Public Association "Journalists"* in Bishkek, the partner organisations, were asked to form research teams which included experts on the political, economic and media situation in their countries. After a preliminary discussion of a draft proposed by IMS, an outline of the research methodology was prepared. This document was discussed with journalists, scholars, human rights activities, public officials, members of international missions and other so-called stake-holders in Almaty on 19 June 2007 and in Bishkek on 21 June 2007. After absorbing the critical comments and other suggestions from these meetings into the draft, the IMS fixed a final methodology guideline for the contributors to the research.

Adyl Soz and *Public Association "Journalists"* undertook in the following months to provide detailed answers to the following methodological grid:

1.   The political and economic situation in the region

1.1. What are the main features of the *political and economic situation* of the countries of the region?

1.2. Which are *the most contentious issues* in each of the countries (such as ethnopolitical problems, the influence of external players such as Russia, the US, the EU and the Islamic countries)?

1.3. How are the issues of extremism and terrorism politically framed by *the public authorities* in each of the countries? What is the actual recent history of extremism and terrorism in each of the countries?

2. The media industry in the countries of the region

2.1. What is the *history* of the news media in the region? (Soviet background, 15 years of Western media assistance, suppression by the authoritarian post-Soviet rulers, new economic entrepreneurs...)

2.2. What are the main features of the *media law and policy* in the countries of the region, particularly in respect to the coverage of sensitive issues such as extremism & terrorism? The factual relevance of international norms promoted by the UN, OSCE and other actors?

2.3. What is the *economic situation* of the news media and how does it affect the coverage of sensitive issues such as extremism & terrorism?

2.4   What is the structure of the media industry: issues of ownership, the spread of the internet and other new platforms, the role of the state, who works in this sector, what are the labour relations, how is the audience structured?

2.5. Are there *external influences* such as transnational media (Russian and US media outlets, Islamic media), foreign media development donors, etc.

2.6. What have been the *main features* in the recent past in the context of the coverage of sensitive issues in each of the countries? What were the most prominent actions by the public authorities, how did the news media act?

2.7. How is the public discourse on political extremism and terrorism influenced by *other means of public communication* that are not mass media (for instance: leaflets, audio and videocassettes, pamphlets and other non-periodical publications, speeches to audiences in public spaces)?

In addition, the partner organisations undertook a monitoring of a number of mass media outlets in their countries in terms of the media's coverage of extremism and terrorism. The monitoring in Kazakhstan covered 27 media outlets (18 newspapers, 5 TV stations, 3 radios and one news agency) from 1 July to 31 August 2007. In Kyrgyzstan, 22 media outlets (11 dailies and weeklies, 7 radio and TV stations, 4 on-line news agencies) outlets were monitored from 1 October to 30 November 2007.

Quantitative monitoring was done by measuring the time (in TV and radio) and space (in newspapers) devoted to topics related to political extremism and terrorism in the set period of time, and in the case of internet, the number of topical items on selected websites in that moment.

The monitors evaluated qualitatively whether the news items dealt with issues of extremism in neutral, positive or negative terms. They marked with +, – or 0 each article to describe its orientation. Also, they identified and reproduced the content of several exceptionally telling news items.

After having gathered a set of empirical data through the monitoring, the partner organisations organised round tables with a selected group of journalists, scholars, human rights activities, public officials, members of international missions and other so-called stake-holders acting as a specific focus group. It was invited to comment on the preliminary findings of the research. Their comments were incorporated into the prefinal reports from Almaty and Bishkek.

The project consultant then checked the two reports for completeness and consistency and produced a draft summary which also included an analysis of the data provided as well as a set of conclusions and recommendations. The country reports for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, in Russian, were released on the dedicated web-site www.freedolina.net and on the web-sites of the partner organisations in late February.

The draft final report (in English), with special attention paid to the conclusions and recommendations, were discussed between IMS and *Adyl Soz* and *Public Association "Journalists"* in a workshop in late February 2008 after which the text of the final report was adopted. It is expected that the report, after translation into Russian, will be presented to journalists, scholars, public officials, international representatives and other "stake-holders" in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the summer of 2008.