

Salary of Uzbek Journalists: You Get What You Write

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Low purchasing power of population, unprofitable newspapers, state restrictions and censorship effect the salaries of journalists of Uzbekistan.

“Salary of journalists can be high only if newspapers have revenues, or even profit.

If the readers have no money to afford a minimal consumer basket, newspapers cannot have a demand” believes Bahodiy Musaef, expert of “Gorod Masterov Foundation” of Uzbekistan.

Indeed, an average monthly per capita income in Tashkent is 7,000 sums (approx. 8 USD). The retail price of “EKO” newspaper for one month is 400 sums (forty cents). It makes 6 % of the income, and according to the survey conducted by the public center “Ijtimoiy Fikr”, the majority of the population of Uzbekistan get information from the programs of the state (free) TV.

According to the experts, the main consumers of the print media are big cities such as Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, as well as cities with the Russian speaking majorities like Chirchik, Navoi, Bekabad, Almalyk. The rural population has an insignificant number of subscribers owing to the lower level of life and difficulties with distribution. This situation effects the salaries of both, nationwide and local publications.

Hence the first component effecting the salaries of journalists is the low purchasing power of population.

The high cost of production is another factor effecting the salaries of journalists. The majority of newspapers, especially the non-commercial publications, are unprofitable. They continue to exist owing to the existing reasoning - political gain justifies financial loses. Narodnoe Slovo/Halk Suzi and Pravda Vostoka are financed by the government; Tashkentskaya Pravda, Bukharskie Izvestia, Zarya Surkhana, Sirdariiskaya Pravda are financed by hokkimiyats (regional authorities); FIDO, Golos Uzbekistana/Uzbekiston Ovozi and Adolat are financed by political parties.

Only a few newspapers are profitable, such as EKO, Business Vestnik Vostoka (BVV), Nalogovie i Tamojennie Vesti” (Tax and Customs News), Darakchi and Zerkalo.

But even they cannot afford rising salaries, as according to their Chief Editors, the production costs grow too fast. Printing, paper, distribution, rents and taxes consume up to 90% of revenues. The remaining 10% is not even enough to upgrade equipment or raise salaries.

The normative and legal limits on the increase of salaries are the third hindering factor. In a market economy, it seems strange that even private firms get instructions on how much and when to pay their employees. Chief Editors cannot modify the remuneration fund approved by the tax, statistics and financial bodies of the government, which stipulates the size of the

salary for certain positions in accordance with the state register of salary tariffs. So even if the paper becomes a millionaire, the salaries of the staff won't change.

Salaries vary from paper to paper. The gross salary of a news reporter in Business Vestnik Vostoka is 11,000 sums (more than \$12), journalists writing articles get 16,000 (about \$18), the executive director gets 19,000 (\$21), and Chief Editor 24,000 (\$27).

The head of a department in Tashkentskaya Pravda gets 6,000 sums (\$6,6) and its Chief Editor 9,000 sums (\$10).

A reporter of another state media, the UzA information service gets 7,000 (\$8), a reporter in the press agency of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs "Jahon" receives up to 13,000 (\$14.4).

Publications in the remote regions have a circulation of up to 1.5 thousand, and local journalist are paid only up to 4,000 sums.

Not all newspapers pay honorariums to journalists. For example, Business Vestnik Vostoka pays high salaries but no honorariums. Some newspapers pay honorariums in transport or food coupons. TV correspondents get salaries and honorariums, which include a commercial coefficient (revenues from advertising) of 30,000 sums (\$33,3), but after tax profit is only \$16.6

All editors encourage journalist to "bring in" advertisers, and pay them a commission of 10 to 25% (papers Chastnaya Sobstvennost and Pravda Vostoka respectively).

Some companies express their gratitude to journalists, who write about them or their staff. Travel companies can award free trips, others invite to high-profile events or give expensive presents. Recently, one of the most profitable professions is that of a sports-correspondent. Sport federations present decent dollar awards to journalists who have actively and positively covered their activities, especially during international competitions.

Finally, the majority of the citizens of Uzbekistan prefers to buy Russian publications despite the fact, that they are more expensive. Russian newspapers and magazines, like Trud, AiF, Sovershenno Secretno, SPEED Info etc. present materials in a more readable and lively manner. The reason of this discrepancy is the censorship which checks out all the analytical materials. Hence, the censorship can be considered as a factor indirectly influencing the demand of a publication, and consequently the remuneration of journalists.