

Salary of Tajik Journalists: Laughter Through Tears

By Nargis Zakirova, Tajikistan

Salaries of Tajik journalists are about USD 15 a month, the editorial offices have almost no computers. "Our income equals to only one third of the subsistence level per person, and of course it is impossible to survive on such a salary, so we are forced to seek additional income elsewhere", says Valentina Kasymbekova of the official "Narodnaya Gazeta" newspaper.

Journalists are forced to have three to four jobs in order to be able to feed themselves and their families. Journalists of the parliamentary newspaper "Sadoi Murdum" are in a similar situation with a salary of 30-35 Somonis a month. "All our staff, from journalists to the deputy Chief Editor, are in a never-ending search for other sources of income", says Safar Ayubzade, a journalist of the newspaper.

Journalists of the private press, "Asia Plus", "Vecherniy Dushanbe", "Charhy Gardun", "Oila" and others are better-off with, salaries of 50-100 Somoni, but nevertheless they too are forced to seek additional income elsewhere..

"...Even with our miserable salary, I believe we work and live honestly and with devotion. Of course we are offended knowing that in civilized countries, journalists who are paid less than 1000 dollars a month are considered as failures. Nevertheless we do not succumb to pessimism and firmly believe in a better future" says journalist Alexander Geivandov of "Vecherniy Dushanbe."

Besides low salary and uncertain future, Tajik journalists live in a constant fear for unpredictable consequences, which might follow if someone doesn't like their critical articles. At the second regional conference on "Mass Media of Central Asia, Today and Tomorrow" which took place on November 14-15, 2000, Rajabi Mirzo, one of the journalists of Charkhi Gardun, put it this way: "Why should our journalists risk their lives for a miserable salary they get? Who will take care of their families after their death? Let those, who get decent salaries take risks." Seventy journalists have been murdered in Tajikistan for the last years. Investigations of these murders did not yield any results.

Even more frustrating is the lack of elementary technical devices, like voice recorders. Having one personally is a luxury, using one belonging to the paper is a chance. In the neighboring countries journalists have started to use computers long time ago, while in Tajikistan they have no idea on how such equipment can be used. One-hour access to Internet costs about six dollars, half of the monthly salary of a journalist.

Journalists can neither afford buying newspapers of the neighboring countries, nor traveling there or to other regions of Tajikistan. They are completely isolated and often limit themselves to reprinting articles from the Russian press.

Galina Nazarova, the national coordinator of the Association of Women in the Central Asian Media thinks, that "...journalists' independence depends on their financial

independence. You can't blame them for looking for an additional income. Only economic stability can guarantee the development of the independent media, and the society as a whole. As of today, journalists in the capital earn twice or three times the salary of journalist in the regions. But even with this, journalists feel themselves abandoned not only financially but also morally. Everything depends on money and not on professionalism.”