

### **Monopolization of Media in Tajikistan**

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Attempts of the Tajik lawmakers making their first steps towards the rule of law, sometimes remind the efforts of Sisyphus. Huge material and intellectual resources are spent to bring local laws in conformity with the international norms, only to watch how these laws are not enacted as a result of the of active resistance of the bureaucratic machine.

Among others, this concerns the legislation covering the creation of independent radio and TV stations.

In theory, the Tajik law on “TV and Radio Broadcasts” allows the creation of independent electronic media. The enactment of the law has led to the creation of Gulibodom, ACIS, SM-1, Ustrushana and other independent TV companies.

But there is not a single radio station functioning in the country despite the proven efficiency and profitability of such a venture. The law discriminates against private TV and Radio companies granting “a priority to the state-owned broadcasting companies to access the state owned TV and Radio networks.” Two years ago two alternative Radio stations, NIC and Asia-Plus, requested a permission to broadcast in Dushanbe and its surroundings.

The Dushanbe office of UNESCO issued a grant to develop these two radio stations at the end of 1998, and already in mid 1999 it was technically possible to start the broadcasting. But two things were missing - license from the State TV and Radio Committee and a technical permission of the Communications Ministry. And here the enthusiasts were met by bureaucratic bottlenecks.

Does it make a sense for a bureaucrat to issue a license to his potential competitor? Of course not! The reasons cited for refusals are artificial: the absence of a respective legal base, or presidential or parliamentary elections etc. In their efforts to delay giving away licenses, the bureaucrats from the State TV and Radio Committee resort to an absurd. When they refused a license to Asia-Plus the first time, they insisted that it was because Asia-Plus was a foreign company. Even if the respective commission of the Tajik Parliament ( Mdjlisi Oli) voided the decision of the State TV and Radio committee in spring 1999, today, after two years, nothing has changed.

Unfortunately, the law does not contain any penalties or responsibility for such monopolists. Other private broadcasting companies such as Asia from Khodjent, Regar TV from Tursunzade and NTV from Kurgan Tube envy the Broadcasting center of the Russian Military Division # 201, which rebroadcast signals of 2 Russian radio companies, TV-6 and Radio Nostalgie. According to the survey conducted by the Zerkalo Center of Sociological Studies, 38 % of the audience in Dushanbe prefers Radio Nostalgie, 29 % listens to the local state-owned channel “Sadoi Dushanbe” and only 12 % of the respondents prefer the National Radio. The

low popularity rating of the National Radio is a vivid example of the reluctance of the monopoly to give away even this small audience.

The parliamentary and presidential elections in Tajkistan are a history, the peace process has reached its logical end. It is interesting to know how the Committee will explain its refusal to issue licenses this time?