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MEDIA BULLETIN

## EDITORIAL

BY VICKEN CHETERIAN

The presidential elections in Azerbaijan brought a ray of hope for journalist in that Caucasian country. President Heydar Aliev canceled censorship, and permitted the state dominated TV to reflect the opinion of those not in the government, including opposition candidates. In spite of irregularities, Mr. Aliev won the elections with a 76% of the votes, a huge progress compared with the previous presidential elections in Azerbaijan, where Mr. Aliev had won with a Soviet 98% of the votes.

Many hoped that these gains would be a first step towards more liberties in Azerbaijan. But post-elections period has frustrated such hope. As our news section on Azerbaijan shows, huge pressure has accumulated on media institutions affiliated with opposition forces, or independent ones.

Our project is following closely the media policy adopted in Baku, since for some time we are planning to organize a conference there. In direct contacts with the Minister of Information Syrus Tabrizi we were told to be patient until the outcome of the elections after which the Azerbaijani authorities would guarantee us the needed conditions to organize a regional conference in Azerbaijan.

On the other hand, our project has marked some success in bringing together Armenian and Azerbaijani journalists. After our Tzaghkatsor conference last year, where five

journalists from Baku visited Armenia for the first time since the Karabakh conflict, seven journalists from Azerbaijan arrived at Stepanakert, the capital of the self-declared Republic of Nagorno Karabakh. The event had immense significance in one of the more complicated conflicts in the war-torn Caucasus. Next to our internal discussions, our participants had the opportunity in meeting high level officials in both Stepanakert and Yerevan. We intend to continue our efforts to use media not to mobilize the public opinion for war and violence, but to use this tool to defuse tensions, by inviting journalists to visit and report the reality on the field, and start a dialogue among themselves, instead of confrontation and conflict.

But dialogue is difficult in case one misses the necessary tools. As our articles on the topic "Minorities and the Media" from our Tbilisi conference reveals, minorities and their position in media structures has been weakened in the last decade. State supported minority language publications are threatened to disappear, in an age where state capacities have shrunk to a minimum, and where the new centers of economic power have no interest in investing on "marginal" issues. Will the "international community" intervene and fill this lack? One should not forget: at the core of all the wars in the Caucasus one can find frustration of minorities. •

# FOREIGN LANGUAGE MEDIA IN SOVIET GEORGIA

BY ETERI KAKABADZE, KAVKAZPRESS INFORMATION AGENCY, TBILISI

The print media of Georgia during the years of Soviet rule were not really different in content despite their seemingly different affiliation with various political, public and governmental structures. This print media of that period can be classified as the following: organs of the Central Committee of the Communist party published in four languages (Georgian, Russian, Armenian and Azerbaijani), organs of the Central Committee of Komsomol (young communist union) published in Georgian and Russian, and a variety of papers of different state structures (of Trade Unions, agriculture, pedagogical, literary, for children etc.) This collection lacked originality and was essentially the same in the center and the provinces, with their circulation strictly regulated according to the "protocol of importance." Based on this principle none of the papers, even if it was very popular, could have a bigger circulation than that of the organs of the Central Committee of Communist party of Georgia.

These were the papers *Komunisti*, which had the biggest circulation, and *Zarya Vostoka* (the Sunrise of the Orient) in Russian, which had a slightly smaller circulation, and then the circulation was diminishing according to the "importance." None of these circulation reflected the demand and popularity of the paper among readers. The circulation was planned from above and an openly obligatory subscription was practised to meet that plan. The study of the readers' market did not exist for the simple reason that the Party knew better what the people needed and in what quantities.

Nevertheless, there was an unofficial rating of popularity of newspapers. Even visually it was obvious that the least popular papers in the kiosks were the Party papers flooded with

circulars and directives of the Central Committee of Communist Party and the Georgian Communist Party, reports from numerous summits and conferences, party activists gatherings and other official stuff. The less tense and less official papers were more popular e.g. sport, youth etc. which were more relaxed in the composition of their contents. The policy of any paper was defined by the Party and the press was obliged to unconditionally and blindly follow it. The Party directives were untouchable, out of reach of critics or re-thinking. The work of the journalistic corps was to secure a mass support of the policy of the Party by inventing feedback and positive comments of workers to it. Each and every article had only one aim-to reach the masses and disseminate the ideas of the Party, mobilize them for the implementation of a 5-year plan and stamp the superiority of the socialist over the capitalist way of life in their heads. For this reason, what we call mass media today, was then a certain category of mass propaganda and agitation.

The tight censorship which was imposed on any publication including the "harmless" ones covering sports, was actively helping the media to play its perceived role. The censorship was imposed in a multi-stage process.

First, by the editor himself, who, as a rule, was a member of the party nomenclature. Naturally, for reasons of job security, he was destroying from the creations of his employees everything which might have been against the general policy of the Party and might not have pleased the Party bosses.

Second, the article would pass through the filter of the professional censor, and finally there was also an open "telephone" censor-

ship. Each editor had a special telephone with the state symbol of the Soviet Union replacing the dial disc. One call to this telephone was enough to destroy all of the issue of the paper ready for publication.

Speaking about independence of journalists and freedom of press in such conditions would have been an utopia. Everything was based on the principle of "the one who pays can order the music." Even now "freedom of press" must be viewed as a relative notion, as any freedom is always limited by lots of other things including the law. Yes, the mass media has become independent especially in Georgia where this principle is integrated at its fullest compared to other Transcaucasian states. But becoming independent from an external dictate and the financial support of the state, none of the papers gained full internal freedom, as the policy of each paper is dictated and will be dictated by the founder and publisher. The journalist thus remains as dependent as during the reign of communists implementing the social order of his employer. The difference is only in the possibility of choice in the political variety.

In the past the reader was offered a careful selection of themes mainly based on obvious lies or half-truths which artificially covered up what was already not possible to hide. Articles about the activists of industry who were shown as ideals and role models without any negative sides, wearing themselves out at work thinking only about the 5-year plan, were examples of such practice. It was the peak of indecency to hint that a person works for one and the only thing-financial security. It was indecent to write about this as the Party was teaching that the Soviet man cannot fall as low as to the level of materialism and mercantilism, and must live a spiritual-pathetic life under the slogan "Happiness is not in money."

But in this "paradise" not everything was going quite as well and sometimes certain things

were surfacing to an extent that it was not possible to hide them. For example crime existed even if communists did not want it to, and they were forced to write about this, but in a special manner. It existed but the real scale of crime was unknown as statistics were classified and the only thing which was the same in publications on crime was the phrase " ..there is a tendency towards a decrease.." which was designed to quietly put the citizens to sleep. It was difficult to hide drug addiction but again, it was presented as separate cases among "the immature part of our youth."

Naturally there was no prostitution and sex, and hence the papers could not write about something which does not exist. There were other themes which were taboo (fortunately there are not any now): dedovschina (harsh treatment of new recruits) in the army, corruption in the higher echelons of power etc.

The warming up of the press started with the warming up in the politics with the beginning of Gorbachev's Perestroika and a gradual, very slow democratization or more precisely a visual democratization of the society. Under the pressure of the national-liberation struggle the party censorship was not able to rule as before. Starting at the end of the 80-s the press was actively engaged in the re-thinking of values. The first daring step in Georgia was made by the paper Molodej Gruzii (Youth of Georgia). First the paper offered its pages to the underground political forces which surfaced on the wave of democratization. This was a daredevil act unheard of in the past. Then, practically under martial law, it published the photos of Yuri Rost telling the truth about the events of April 9 in Tbilisi. Unfortunately the courageous Molodej Gruzii was the first to suffer from the national forces which replaced the communists. Immediately after becoming the president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia shut down the paper which did not want to wear new reins. But in any case it was too late to stop the process of obtaining real freedom by the press. •

# MINORITIES AND THEIR MEDIA IN SOVIET AZERBAIJAN

BY MEKHPARA SADIGOVA, 7GUN NEWSPAPER, BAKU

Azerbaijan of the Soviet period was a multiethnic republic. Baku was a unique city with a truly international spirit. There are no accurate figures on the number of Russians, Armenians and Jews living in Baku in the seventies, but an approximate estimate stands at the following: more than half a million Russians, more than 300,000 Armenians and about 100,000 Jews. Even these figures do not reveal the real picture of the time as there was a huge number of Russian speaking Azerbaijanis. This situation was fully defining the international image of the Soviet people. However, Baku was very different from other republics. There were several objective reasons for this but the main reason was the role of Baku (mainly in the oil production) in the economies of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. The whole story about Old Baku and its sunsets was perfectly reflected in the article of Elmar Huseynov in the Monitor magazine under the title "The City Which We Lost."

As a result of this kind of national policy, there could not be any hint of a free mass media of ethnic minorities in Soviet times. Nevertheless, in accordance with the directives of the time, the ethnic minorities had a podium for the propaganda of the ideals of communism, as the press and culture were "national in form and socialist in content." According to this directive, there were several mass media in the languages of the ethnic minorities in the glorious 70s of "zastoy" (standstill before "perestroika"): the Armenian language daily Kommunist with a circulation of 100,000

copies, daily Armenian Radio programs and a TV program;

local Georgian language papers in the Belokan and Zakatali regions (with a compact Georgian population); for obvious reasons there could have not been any mass media in Hebrew; there were local cultural and other programs in Talish and Lezgin languages.

Besides all these there were several newspapers, magazines, radio and TV programs in Russian, with the Bakinski Rabochi (The Worker of Baku), Vishka (The Oil Rig) and Molodej Azerbaijana (The Youth of Azerbaijan) having the biggest circulation.

The Perestroika and Glasnost of the end of the 80s touched upon the papers published in the ethnic languages. Thematic differences between the Azerbaijanian press and the Armenian paper Kommunist were emerging, especially in the covering of the Karabakh conflict. Of course with the evolving conflict the Armenian papers were shut down.

The mass media of less numerous ethnic groups were published as organs of their cultural societies. The majority of these groups were loyal to the central government, but the formation of the National Front and excessive nationalism of some of its leaders provoked separatist movements.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing the positive role of the Soviet system in preparing journalists, including those who were the representatives of national minorities. •

## STATE POLICY AND MINORITY MEDIA IN SOVIET ARMENIA

BY ARA TADEVOSYAN

NEWSPAPERS MOSKOVSKIE NOVOSTI AND ZINVOR, YEREVAN

It would have been a big exaggeration to state that national minorities in Armenia have a well developed mass media. As of today there are two papers which belong to ethnic communities and which come out more or less regularly-I would like to present them. Besides, I would like to touch upon the problems of Armenian Kurds, as today they are of special interest because of regional developments in which they are more or less involved.

The Kurdish newspaper Rya Taza (New Life) has been published in Armenia for already 68 years. According to its editor Amarike Sardar who is also the Chairman of the Union of Kurdish Intelligentsia, Rya Taza was the only paper in Kurdish published on the territory of the USSR. This is the only newspaper in the world which has come out regularly and has existed for such a long time. Now it comes out twice a month. Recently, Drujba, a new literary-historical and political magazine in Armenian and Kurdish started its publication three times a month financed by sponsors. Since 1954 Armenian Kurds have also had their radio station broadcasting daily for 45 minutes, but Amarike Sardar and other representatives of the Kurdish intelligentsia consider it quite desirable to have also access to television.

Last April The Ukrainian community of Armenia started the publication of its Dnipro newspaper. The editorial of the first issue was written by the Chairperson of the Ukrainian community Romania Yavir and

was describing the difficult financial situation of the community and thanking the Armenian and Ukrainian embassies and the Periodika publishing house for their support. As of today, already 20 issues of the paper have been published covering the life of Ukrainians in Armenia, the preservation of their language and the most important news from their historical motherland.

There is no state policy towards the mass media of minorities in Armenia. Their quantity, circulation and influence are too small and that is why, without any intention to offend my colleagues from these papers, I would like to note that their publications are very different from modern journalism. The absence of a state policy towards the media of national minorities is the result of the absence of a clear state policy towards that national minorities in general. There are several reasons explaining this.

First, Armenia has historically been a mono-ethnic state and the question of minorities was not a pressing one. Second, the economic possibilities of the state are quite limited. But there is hope that in the near future a clear policy towards the national minorities will be adopted and a respective coordinating body will be created. Immediately after his election, President of Armenia Robert Kocharian declared that he would do everything in his power to make Armenia a motherland for not only Armenians but all others living on its soil. Prime Minister Armen Darbinian in his turn pledged a creation of the post of an adviser on mi-

nority issues. The fact that immediately after being appointed adviser to the President, Vahan Hovhannisian had a meeting with the Chairman of the Union of Nationalities Mr. Chatoev, comes to prove the expected changes.

However, all said above does not mean that national minorities in Armenia live in an atmosphere of political pressure or intolerance. All of the leaders of the communities of the national minorities emphasize that emigration of their members from Armenia is the result of economic hardship which does not distinguish between ethnicities. They also emphasize the impossibility of assimilation in Armenia. The Chairman of the Assyrian community Pavel Tamrazov said: "There are 8 thousand Assyrians in Armenia today, 3 schools with the teaching in Assyrian. We registered our ATUR association in 1992 and started the Assyrian language courses in 1995. Unfortunately there are no other possibilities - we do not have rich Assyrians ready to support our initiatives. Owing to socio-economic conditions lots of Assyrians leave Armenia for Russia in search of jobs. But we are sure that sooner or later they all will come back to Armenia, as there is a big danger of assimilation in Russia. They can not leave in compact areas and thus, only returning to Armenia will save them from assimilation." The Chairperson of the Jewish Community of Armenia Rimma Varjapetian thinks that outside Armenia there is the belief that Armenians are intolerant of other nations. "The arguments against this notion which we present, come as a big surprise. But we do feel sort of forgotten as there is not a specialized state agency in charge of our problems" said Mrs. Varjapetian.

The editor of the Kurdish newspaper Rya Taza Amarike Sardar states that Armenia has the full right to be called a center of Kurdish culture, science and literature, as in the last 70 years there were more publications in Kurdish in Armenia than anywhere in the world. At the same time Kurds would have liked to have possibilities to play a more active role in the political life of the country. "One of the most important problems remains the question of the representation of the Kurds in the Armenian parliament. We always had Kurdish deputies in the Armenian parliament from 1918-1989 and hence would like to participate in the formation of legislative and executive branches of the government and include representatives of our intelligentsia" stated Mr. Sardar.

I would like to go into more details in my coverage of the Kurdish minority in Armenia most of all because this theme is often presented in the Western press in a wrong and pretentious manner. First, in Armenia there are problems among the Kurds themselves. The Kurdish population consists of Kurds and Yezidi-Kurds.

To understand the difference between them we consulted the prominent specialist on Kurds, the director of the Caucasian center of Iranistics and editor of London based AKTA KURDIKA magazine Dr. Garnik Asatryan, who explained that: "The majority of the Kurds are Suni Muslims, while Yezidis belong to an ancient syncretic religion. Yezidis speak in one of the dialects of Kurdish but there is an ancient and uncompromising hostility between them and the Kurds." I would not say that the Armenian Kurds and Yezidis are hostile to each other but there are certain tensions from time to time. In total there are about 60,000 representatives of these nationalities in Armenia,

all of whom the Yezidi community leaders consider as Yeszidis and the Kurdish community leaders as Kurds. Dr. Asatryan thinks that the question of belonging or not belonging to the Kurdish nation must be solved by the Yezidis themselves, as nobody has the right to interfere into confessional and ethnic questions of other peoples. "Armenia must not become a place of solution of these problems and I salute the Armenian authorities for having taken a neutral position of not interfering into Kurdish problems. I am sure that the Yezidi community of Armenia must not be dragged into the orbit of inter-Kurdish problems and Armenia must not become an arena of Kurdish political activism-Armenia is neither Sweden nor Germany" concluded Dr. Asatryan.

Political circles of Turkey and its mass media are periodically trying to "unveil" the secret cooperation of the Armenian authorities and PKK. There is even an established set of clichés in the Turkish press which are: the PKK bases in Armenia, Armenian assistance to Kurds driven out of Northern Irak. These reports are continuously denied by the official Yerevan. Couple of years ago the Turkish newspaper Zaman published a 'fantastic' report on PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan citing that he was going to transfer his headquarters to Armenia, on the shore of lake Sevan. The Armenian Foreign ministry called this absurd. Regretfully, the Turkish authorities have also directly ac-

cused Armenia. From May 1 to October 30, 1995, the Turkish government imposed a "security zone" in Kars aimed at the "prevention of penetration of PKK guerrillas to Turkey from Armenia." The same story was repeated after one year-in 1996 the Turkish government declared the Armenian-Turkish border near Kars a militarized zone for 6 months, again for barring Kurdish guerrillas from entering Turkey from Armenia.

Kurds themselves have tried couple of times to provoke the Armenian authorities. In 1995 several Armenian Kurds went on hunger strike to protest against the extradition of Kurds who illegally crossed to Armenia from Turkey. In the same year, the Chairman of the Kurdistan Committee of Armenia Charkyaze Rash declared, that the Armenian authorities aim at clearing Armenia from the Kurds who share ideas of the national-liberation struggle of the Kurdish people. We asked Dr. Asatryan to comment on this mood of some representatives of the Kurdish community and this is what he said:

"The desire of the Kurds to obtain freedom and independence is quite natural. As a civilized nation we cannot quietly watch the suppression of the Kurds. But considering the complicated nature of our historical relations and certain expansionist ideas of Kurdish political circles, we have all the grounds for a cautious approach to this movement" •

# POST-INDEPENDENCE MINORITY MEDIA IN AZERBAIJAN

BY ADELYA BABAKHANOVA, AYNA (ZERKALO), BAKU

Unlike the other states formed after the collapse of Soviet Union, the rights of national minorities in Azerbaijan are well protected. There are no legal limitations to the rights of indigenous and non-indigenous national minorities. On the contrary, there is a decree of the President on national minorities and there are representatives of Russian, Ukrainian, Lezgin, Avar and Talish minorities. Practically all the political parties have structures dealing with the problems of national minorities and cooperating with minority associations. None of the parties registered in Azerbaijan advocates the ideology of national superiority.

The best organized are the Russian and Jewish national minorities. International Jewish organizations are actively participating in the development of the Jewish community.

According to the deputy of the Azerbaijanian parliament and the chairman of the "Azerbaijan-Russia" association Mikhail Zabelin, there are 250,000 Russians in Azerbaijan today. In the Soviet period there were 400,000 Russians living in Azerbaijan but a lot of them left for Russia hoping for better living conditions. The Russian community is organized into a cultural organization called "The Russian Community of Azerbaijan" and the Azerbaijanian government jointly with the oil company Lukoil, has allocated 900 million manats for the opening of an information-cultural center for the Russian community. Three Russian TV stations broadcast to Azerbaijan, there are radio stations in Russian and a wide choice of Russian press.

The law allows the publishing of papers and magazines in any language. Besides this, there is a Center of Russian Culture, the Azerbaijan-Russia Union and a Russian Drama Theater. The Union prints the paper Vestnik with a circulation of 5,000 copies. It is interesting to note that the Russian papers in Azerbaijan are no less popular than the Azerbaijanian ones. The most popular weekly – Zerkalo-is published in two languages (circulation -25,000 copies), Panorama paper is also published in two languages and Gunay is published even in English. The

Yejednevnie Novosti (12,000 copies) and Alver (8,000 copies) are published only in Russian. There are official papers in Russian such as Bakinski Rabochi (6,000 copies) and Azerbaijan (13,000 copies). There are daily information programs in Russian on the state TV and the independent TV station ANS. One of the most popular cultural centers of Baku is the Russian Drama theater and in practically all the higher educational institutions, both, state and private, there is bilingual education.

The majority of national minorities in Azerbaijan have their cultural centers and periodicals. For example Azeri (the Tat cultural center), Alef (the Jewish cultural center), Vatan (the Meskhetian Turk center), Association of Cossacks of Azerbaijan, the Ukrainian cultural association, Talish and Udi cultural centers, the Lezgin cultural center Samur, the Kurdish cultural center Ronai. The following papers are published: Tolishi Sedo (1,5 thousand copies), Samur (a trilingual Lezgin paper-2 thousand copies), Dange Kurde (Kurdish paper – 1 thousand copies), AzIs (the Azerbaijani-Israelian association), Vestnik (the Russian community), Sodrujestvo, informing about national minorities in Azerbaijan. By the way, before the eruption of the conflict over Mountainous Karabakh, there was an Armenian language paper Komunist, a literary digest, TV and radio programs. The majority of these centers and publications are created and function with direct financial aid of the Azerbaijanian government.

Among the party organs the paper Istiglal of SDPA covers the topic most widely. Journalists covering national minority issues get more possibilities to place their articles on the pages of this paper. Despite the existing economic difficulties we can declare that the period of national estrangement typical for all of the post-Soviet republics during the emergence of the national consciousness and national-liberation struggle, is already a past. That is why without external stimulators from countries like Iran and Russia, the emergence of new hot spots of inter-ethnic conflicts in Azerbaijan is practically impossible. •

## ARMENIAN PAPERS IN GEORGIA

VAN BAYBURT, EDITOR OF VRASTAN ARMENIAN-LANGUAGE PAPER, TBILISI

The first Armenian paper which was published in Georgia was called Kovkas.

By 1918, the year of creation the Democratic Republic of Georgia, there were 30 Armenian newspapers and magazines in Georgia. Our newspaper was created in December 1920 as an organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Council of Ministers of Georgia. In 1991 it became the organ of the Supreme Council of Georgia and in January 1992, according to the decree of the Provisional Government, together with all other papers it was registered as an independent publication.

But it became obvious that lots of papers could not exist independently. Vrastan started to get financial aid from the Georgian Government, publishing the most important decrees of the President on legal, social and economic development but being free in its evaluation of these decrees. Vrastan continues to publish critical articles on the living conditions of its readers.

Besides its assistance to Vrastan, the Georgian Government finances about 200 Armenian schools, the Armenian Theater in Tbilisi, 12 folk ensembles, more than 250 libraries etc. In the regions with a compact Armenian population there are 4 regional papers in Armenian, and in Akhalkalaki and Tsalka regions the local papers have two pages in Armenian. Once in two months in Akhalkalaki, the unregistered organization Djavakhhk publishes its own paper.

Vrastan is considered a national (vs. regional) paper and has a circulation of 3,5 thousand copies. It is distributed not only in Georgia but also in Armenia. There is no censorship in Georgia and the press is free in its choice of theme. We consider informing the Armenian population of the new laws and socio-economic processes as our main task.

After the collapse of Soviet Union and up to 1992, the paper was coming out three times a week in four pages of A-2 format. Today it is published once a week on a A-4 format. This limits our possibility to cover the political and economic processes to its full extent and hence, in a way hinders the right of people to information. But even if there is a huge interest and demand in Vrastan, a part of the population is simply unable to buy or subscribe to it because of financial hardship. The price of one paper is 25 tetri (15 US cents). This is virtually the self-cost of the paper but we do it in sake of keeping the Armenian population informed about the life of the country.

This of course affects the salaries of the staff, who are not happy but sacrifice the personal for the common benefit. We hope that the economic conditions in Georgia will improve and there are all signs that it will. The buying power of the population will rise accordingly and the financial situation of our paper will improve. We look into the future with hope and optimism. •

# THE CURRENT STATE IN THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTHERN OSSETIA AND NATIONAL MINORITIES

**BATRADZ KHAREBOV,**  
**DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC INFORMATION CENTER OF TZKHINVALI**

There were two state papers in the South Ossetian Autonomous oblast of Georgia in Georgian and Ossetian. There was also an Ossetian language magazine.

The local radio was very popular with the local population and was broadcasting in two languages.

According to the last census (1989), the population of South Ossetia was around 100,000 people, with 67 % Ossetians, 26 % Georgians, 2.5 % Russians, 2 % Armenians and 1.5 % Jews. The rest was divided between different other nationalities. None of the national minorities had their own media except the Georgians.

In September 1990 South Ossetia declared itself a Republic, elected its parliament and adopted a constitution. The general chaos, disruption of old connections and a military confrontation led to the creation of new structures and new systems of interconnections. This was also true for the mass media. As a result of the war, a significant part of the Georgian population left South Ossetia and the Georgian language paper ceased to exist. The Georgian bureau of the local radio station also stopped broadcasting. The Ossetian language state newspaper was complemented with another one in Russian. Independent papers started to emerge, and among them Adamon

Nikhas, Ariag Mon, Vestnik Jujnoy Ossetii, ARD, Ekho, Dzerassa etc.

For the first time the Republic had its own TV. It was independent and financed by sponsors. With the absence of tax and other regulations and fees this financing was quite sufficient. The local TV was very popular and was often criticizing the local government. The broadcasting was done mainly in Ossetian and to a lesser extent in Russian.

In 1994 the Republic entered a stage of stabilization. By that time the military operations had been suspended and peacekeeping forces had been introduced. Life was gradually becoming peaceful and this had its impact on the media. The list of state papers today was complemented with another one - Molodej Gruzii (The Youth of Georgia). Almost all independent papers ceased publication. This was a direct result of less sponsor money because of a more regular tax system-the circulation of papers is minimal, the purchasing power of the population is low. There was also a decrease in interest in local papers with the new possibilities of subscription to Georgian and Russian print media.

There is a new tendency in the publishing of papers oriented towards the readers of both, South and North Ossetias. Their editorial bases are in Vladikavkaz (N. Ossetia-part of Russian Federation)

which has more powerful facilities. Examples of such "common" Ossetian papers are the organ of the All Ossetian Council Stir Nakhis, independent Ekho, Otechestvo, Zerkalo, IR, Khussar-Tzagat etc. These papers have a broad readers auditorium and sell well. South Ossetian journalists actively cooperate with them.

The independent TV had to close because of competition from the state TV broadcasting in the Ossetian language. The radio station functions as before but soon will be equipped with a medium-wave transmitter. The Georgian language service is about to resume its programs on the radio and later on television.

The recently created two information agencies are now in the stage of formation and are actively cooperating with the world mass media.

Also the recently created Tskhinvali Public Information Center is quite a new type of structure and not only for South Ossetia. It is a result of the Georgian-

Ossetian journalistic round tables. The Center was created to promote the resolution of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict by the means of mass media. Similar centers were created in Tbilisi and Gori and have agreements on cooperation and mutual assistance.

According to experts, 70,000 people were leaving in South Ossetia as of the beginning of 1998. The proportion of Georgians and Ossetians is much the same, the number of Armenians and Russians has gone down to 1000 people, and there are only 40 Jews. Only Russians and Ukrainians have their community organizations-Rossi, that of Russians and Vishnya of Ukrainians. They have no plans to start a newspaper.

The newspapers for the Georgian population are printed in Gori. They are published with different frequency, changing circulation, and do not have a clear system of delivery. •

## CHANCES OF MINORITY LANGUAGE MEDIA UNDER MARKET CONDITIONS IN AZERBAIJAN

BY SHIRIN MANAFOV, ISTIGLAL, BAKU

The mass media of national minorities in the market economy are struggling for mere survival. Papers and magazines oriented towards ethnic communities, diasporas and other movements are experiencing financial difficulties and do not sell well. Nationalism and free press are incompatible. The numerous movements, currents, associations etc. created to protect the interests of national minorities were unable to create constructive economic programs. Example: As early as in 1994, there was a proposal to create a public radio station which would broadcast in Russian, Avar, Tzakhurian, Talish, Lezgin, Georgian and Hebrew. Heads of communities agreed to participate in drafting the program. The key problem was financing. All the communities were very enthusiastic about the idea but refused to contribute a single manat (Azerbaijani currency unit) to the project, even though already at the initial stage, one of the humanitarian funds had pledged its support for the project. The reason for the failure of this project is the following: the political and financial elite of minorities was formed in an international environment and is not eager to differentiate itself on the national basis, as this would distance them from the capital in a period of active integration of Azerbaijan into international financial structures. On the contrary-the leaders of Talish, Avar, Lezgin and other movements are delegated to Baku to get involved in international projects and secure the participation of their communities in the economic programs of the coming century. There is a rise of positive changes, and the well forgotten idea of

the national radio channel has recently surfaced again in the proposals of the Minister in charge of National Minorities of Daghestan M. Gusaev. After a certain "cold" period, the Daghestanian authorities are now offering to simplify the border regime with Azerbaijan. According to a decision of the Russian government a joint project with Azerbaijan will launch a project of a free economic zone. It will include 5 southern regions of Daghestan and the Kuba-Kusar zone of Azerbaijan. Commenting on this project, Mr. Gusaev stated that there are external forces which try to play "the Daghestanian card", but there are no such forces in Daghestan itself. While waiting for the creation of the free economic zone, the two brotherly nations are demonstrating their free will to come closer to each other. Days of Azerbaijanian culture were organized in Derbent at the beginning of May. On May 19-th an honored prize named after Shamil was granted to Azerbaijanian writer Sadig Murtuzaev. Preparations are on the way for a joint conference on the border river Samur and two international national park-reserves are to be created under the auspices of UNESCO-one on the border between the Lagodekhski region of Georgia and Belokanski region of Azerbaijan, and the other between Azerbaijan and Daghestan. This will of course benefit the relations of two peoples in their complicated stage of development.

The aim of mass media is - not to supply illusions of national rebirth, but work towards the integration in economy and culture. •

## THE UNION OF NATIONALITIES IN ARMENIA

BY VLADIMIR CHATOEV, PRESIDENT OF UNA

As we are standing at the threshold of the new millennium we must remember that knowledge and understanding of others is our key to peace. The absence of this understanding is a reason for lots of conflicts and wars. To bear your neighbor because of respect for his rights is one thing, but to know and understand him is something else. It is not a secret that we know very little about each other.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was followed by an amazing awakening of national minorities. This was happening through an increased interest in their language, history, culture and religion. The Union of Nationalities of Armenia was created in December 1994 and did not join any party or movement. The members of the Union preserve their juridical independence. The members of UNA are the Assyrian, Greek, Georgian, Jewish, German and Polish communities, the Council of Kurdish Intelligentsia, the Kurdistan Committee, Russia and Oda associations, the International Center of Russian Culture Garmonia, the Fund for Support of Russians of Armenia, Ukraina Charity Fund. The Armenian people has survived a genocide and could have been full of hatred towards those who participated in it or did not do anything to stop and condemn it. But this did not happen- the Armenian people managed not only to survive and firmly stand on its feet, but also to take representatives of other nationalities into its family.

There are no monoethnic countries in the world and Armenia is not an exception even though some insist that representatives of other nationalities have been living on the Armenian soil for centuries without any discrimination. They found their second motherland here and serve it with honesty and dedication.

The Kurdish paper Rya Taza has been published in Armenia since 1930. Before the collapse of Soviet Union it was the only Kurdish paper on its territory. The paper was supported by the Armenian government. Today it has 700 subscribers. Despite the well known economic difficulties, the Armenian government supports the paper, which also serves as a didactic material for children studying Kurdish in the schools of Kurdish villages.

The Dnipro paper is published by the Ukraina Fund since 1997. It is published in Armenian and Ukrainian with occasional Russian language articles. The paper has a commercial supplement called Orient.

Russki Dom paper is published by the Rossia Society. The Jewish religious community publishes the paper Koelet. The Yezidi community also publishes a paper called Yezdineri Dzayn. The UNA is going to create a united publication-Alliance magazine. We hope to reach our goals through the united efforts of our members.

National minorities have no limitations on celebrations of their national holidays and are free to develop their traditions. 25 thousand events, programs, meetings with the political and religious leadership of Armenia, embassies and representatives of the EU have been organized since 1994.

We have applied for a grant to Eurasia Foundation to organize a round table of ethnic public organizations of Armenia and Georgia under the title "The Protection of National Minorities in National and International Legislations." This proposal is open also for you. We also propose that a joint publication of ethnic public organizations in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan be organized. •

## AZERBAIJANI PRESS IN GEORGIA

BY SULEYMAN SULEYMANOV,  
CHIEF EDITOR OF PAPER GYURDJUSTAN (GEORGIA), TBILISI

The history of the Azerbaijanian press in Georgia has deep roots. The first Azerbaijanian language paper was published in Tbilisi in 1832. At the end of the 19-th/ beginning of 20-th century, there were lots of papers and magazines published in Tbilisi, but the most enduring of them is the paper Gyurdjustan published since 1921 under different names. Before January 1992 Gyurdjustan was the organ of the Supreme Soviet of Georgia. According to the "Law on Press and Other Media", Gyurdjustan became a free paper with its staff as a founding body. Under the conditions of the free market and self-financing the restructuring of the paper's work is going on very slowly. One of the reasons is that our paper was an official organ of the Party and the Government, and our journalists were used to nothing but to create. They did not have the skills of combining creative work with the search of finances. Besides that, our base was created very slowly. It must become a base for the regional publications. But the most important of our problems is the impoverishment of the population. The circulation of our newspaper has dropped from 500 thousand to 45 thousand issues. We had to cut down on staff and the paper was at the edge of closing. The crisis went on for a long time. Later we signed a contract with the Government to publish official documents. For this the Government covered part of our expenses and we could take

some other orders. In 1996 we bought desktop publishing equipment through charity channels. But because of economic problems we could not make them work and use. Our paper is weekly and we do not get placements of advertisements. With the improvement of the financial situation of the population we are increasing the circulation even if the subscribers pay with delays.

Presently the circulation of our paper is 2000 copies and for already two months we have used our desktop publishing, which reduces the production costs.

We plan to publish 104 issues of the paper in 1999 with a combined circulation of 312 thousand copies. An estimate puts our earnings at 46,8 thousand Lari, and expenses at 105,93 thousand Lari. Consequently the balance will be negative with losses of 59,13 thousand Laris. We hope that this deficit will be covered by the Information-publishing corporation, which agreed to be considered as a founder. This is fixed in the new statutes of the paper.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the three new Azerbaijanian language papers in Georgia have organized their activities according to the rules of the market economy. I propose that the task of finance procurement be taken off the editor's shoulders. This should be the problem of publishers, leaving the staff to create. •

## RUSSIAN LANGUAGE AND MASS MEDIA IN AZERBAIJAN

BY **GENNADI TRETYAKOV**, GENERAL DIRECTOR OF AZERBAIJANIAN INFORMATION AGENCY **BILIK DUNYASI-INFORM (BDI)**

The collapse of the Soviet Union, global geopolitical changes, the independence of Azerbaijan, the transition to the new economic relations and the change of the political system of the Azerbaijan have influenced and continue to influence the mass media of Azerbaijan and their growing role in the life of modern Azerbaijan. The occurring socio-economic processes have not only changed the attitude of the population to mass media, but has completely changed the media themselves as a fourth pillar of power. It has also touched upon their financial situation. These processes most of all have influenced the Russian media, the situation of which is not satisfactory.

At present there are about 25 papers and magazines in Russian with their circulation varying from 2 to 25 thousand copies and frequency varying from 4 times a week to once in two months, depending on the financial situation. The state and independent TV and radio channels have daily broadcasts in Russian. The Russian language press of Azerbaijan can be grouped into 3 categories:

- 1) Official papers and magazines (papers Bakinski Rabochi, Azerbaijan)
- 2) The so called independent papers and magazines, which in fact are pro-governmental (Panorama, Vishka). The access of opposition politicians to these papers is very difficult.
- 3) Papers and magazines which are printed in Russian and Azerbaijanian and publish official information and materials of the opposition.

All the main publications of Russia are regularly received in Azerbaijan together with three TV and two radio channels. Nevertheless, there is a tendency towards the reduction of the Russian language mass media and their replacement with Turkish and English language mass media. The main reasons for this were the disruption of the unified information field of the former USSR and the policy of the political regime of the Peoples' Front of Azerbaijan which led to the emigration of the Russian population, the closing of faculties of journalism at the Universities, a lack of highly qualified Russian language journalists and the difficult financial situation of the Russian language mass media.

I have to emphasize that the Russian language information is consumed not only by the Russian population but also by other ethnic groups, and more importantly by the Azerbaijanian intelligentsia and urban population. But here also the situation is not very favorable-the recent case of confiscation of the issue of the popular Russian language magazine Monitor caused a wave of discontent among the circles close to the authorities. This proves not only that the state policy is excessively zealous, but also the existence and growth of aggression and nationalism, which are not typical of the Azerbaijanian mentality.

I think that we could inform each other about the problems of the Russian language media and exchange information on how to restore a unified and stable field of information and a constant connection based on the example of the countries of the European Union. •

# THE FUTURE OF THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE MEDIA IN ARMENIA

BY RITA KARAPETIAN, NOYAN TAPAN INFORMATION AGENCY, YEREVAN

Despite the struggle for the priority and purity of the national language, which in the early 90-s led to the closure of all the Russian schools, the Russian language press of Armenia operates according to the same rules as the rest of the media, and is not discriminated against. The Russian language press is a press of choice for not only the Russian population of 30 thousand, but also for the Armenian intelligentsia who traditionally prefers writing, speaking and reading in Russian.

The leading state and independent information agencies (Armenpress state agency and Noyan Tapan independent press agency) disseminate information in Armenia and abroad in Armenian and Russian. One of two official papers is in Russian.

The number of popular Russian language newspapers is not less than those in Armenian and their circulation fluctuates based on the financial situation and the political demand. The party press is an exception designed not only for the local population but also for the diaspora.

Respublika Armenia which was founded in 1992 as the organ of the National Assembly of Armenia, is financed from the state budget and receives 17 million Drams annually. This sum is not as big as it might seem, as according to the director of Tigran Metz printing house Vrej Markosyan, the cost of publication of one issue of a paper coming out with a frequency of 5 times a week and with a circulation of 5 thousand, is about

50 thousand drams. One paper sells for only 80 drams. The paper is read by those who need information on the new laws, appointments etc. but the paper also publishes less official information and even has nice cross-words.

Notorious for its free thinking, Golos Armenii daily also has a circulation of 5 thousand. According to the Chief Editor of the paper Flora Nakhshkaryan, there are no linguistic problems in the country. If a paper is interesting it is read - and this is proved by numerous calls and visits of readers who know Russian at a very low level. According to a poll conducted by the paper, 54 % of readers are representatives of the intelligentsia 31 % of whom read only in Russian. 30 % of readers are 25 to 40 years old and 42 % are 45-55 years old. 17 % of total number of readers are refugees from Azerbaijan. According to Flora Nakhshkaryan the future of the Russian language press and the press in general depends on the level of education in the republic, which today is not satisfactory.

Chief Editor of Novoe Vremya bi-weekly Ruben Satyan told us about his experience when his paper, founded in 1992 by the Fund of Technological and Intellectual Development, was left without any financial support after only 1.5 years. The financial grip is getting tighter but the staff does not want to give up and sell the paper to politicians, preferring instead to maintain the independent information policy of the paper. There are some Armenians from Moscow

who partially finance the paper and get some space for themselves. With the self cost of 180-220 Drams, the paper sells for 80 Drams. This gap is covered by grants which the paper got for its supplements called "The New Generation", "Ladies and Gentlemen" and others. Some expenses are covered by commercials which cost 100 Drams per square meter. The circulation is 2-5 thousand copies depending on the financial situation. The readers are stable and cover an age range of 30-60 years. Mr. Satyan thinks that the number of readers could triple if the price goes down and looks into the future with optimism, stating that with a more active economic life the circulation will go up and the number of Russian language papers will increase as there is a demand for them among the young generation.

"If there are advertisements there is a paper and there is no paper if there are not any advertisements" thinks Iosif Verdian, the Chief Editor of Urartu weekly. Mr. Verdian thinks that philanthropy is not only allowed but also needed, but only under the condition of absence of political pressure. Unlike others, Urartu has not got sponsors and does not count on grants from abroad. There are several firms which place advertisements. The most expensive paper in Armenia (200 Drams), Urartu, does not have its own computer base, reporters do not get salaries and honorariums are 1-2 dollars per page. Verdyan's salary is 10 times less than the salaries of other Chief Editors. The circulation of the paper was 14 thousand copies in 1992 and is only 5 thousand

now. Several times the paper was already about to cease to exist, but each time it managed to come out alive. Despite all these problems the paper has managed to preserve its "virginity" - independence. It is read only by the intelligentsia.

My journalistic investigation aimed at discovering specific problems of the Russian press ended in vain. The problems are the same everywhere. At the end of last year, almost all the papers, including the state, independent, party or non-partisan ones, declared a one day strike. The problems which united them were the monopoly and the "hold up" policy of Haymamul state distribution agency, the monopoly on the paper which drives the prices up to 1000 US Dollars for a tone, 20 % value added tax imposed on all the stages of production of a newspaper. Adding the rent of the office will make it clear to anyone that the Fourth Power cannot exist in such conditions-and all this despite the complete absence of censorship.

The situation with the radio and the TV is a little different. These are the most accessible and quite often the only two sources of information for the population which often cannot afford even the cheapest newspaper (10 cents). In this sphere of state monopoly the priority is given to the national language, which is reflected in the draft law on TV and radio broadcasting. But while the TV audience is deprived of the possibility to watch local programs in Russian, the radio audience can listen to a daily program Hayk. •

# THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE PRESS OF GEORGIA AND ITS FUTURE

BY GABRIEL NAMTALASHVILI, SVOBODNAYA GRUZIA PAPER, TBILISI

The Russian language press appeared in Georgia in the first half of the 19-th century occupying a vast sector of the information space owing to its rich financial and technical possibilities, professionalism of staff and an overall support of the authorities.

Without any doubt it played quite a positive role in the enlightenment and culture, but at the same time was an important tool for the Russification of the region.

During the communist rule the Russian language mass media had a purely ideological character. The "prohibited" themes were openly avoided.

Today the Russian language mass media in Georgia are presented by the papers Svobodnaya Gruzia (The Free Georgia) and Vecherni Tbilisi (The Evening Tbilisi). Most of their financing is done from the budget of the state and the city of Tbilisi. The circulation is low.

There are regular programs in Russian on TV and radio and a 24 hour Russian radio station Audientzia radio.

The Russian mass media is actively returning to the Georgian information market. The sale of Russian publications (about 60 titles) has reached 20 thousand copies. The Russian TV channels ORT and RTR are freely received in Georgia

and have a big audience. The Russian government finances the Rech (the Language) weekly from the special fund for the support of Russian populations abroad. It is distributed only by subscription. Several ethnic communities irregularly publish papers in Russian. The Union of Cossacks of Russia publishes The Cossack of Georgia paper, and the Greek community publishes The Diaspora paper in Russian and Greek.

The demand for a Russian press in the regional centers is not big. Even in industrial centers with, traditionally, a high percentage of Russian population like Kutaisi, Batumi and Rustavi, the Russian language press, with rare exceptions, has ceased to exist. In the Tsalka region the local government finances the Tsalkskie Vedomosti monthly, which publishes materials in Russian and Georgian.

Even if Georgia has oriented itself towards Europe, it gives a big importance to the inter-Caucasian dialogue and cooperation with former Soviet republics. Thus the Russian press could serve as an instrument for strengthening and developing political, economic and humanitarian ties.

It must be taken into consideration that Abkhazia and South Ossetia which today are not controlled by the official Tbilisi, are oriented towards Russia and their in-

formation needs are fulfilled by the Russian mass media.

It must also be taken into consideration that there are several regions with compact national minority populations. In Meskhet-Djavakheti, Kvemo-Kartli and Tsalka region there are compact populations of Armenians, Azerbaijanians, Russians, Greeks with a high demand for Russian language media. Because of disruption of the delivery system and the high transportation costs the delivery of Russian language press is practically impossible. There have been several attempts to form all kinds of unions of Russian language journalists. Two years ago such an attempt led to the creation of the Association of the Russian Language Press of Georgia with their headquarters in the offices of Zakavkazskie Voennie Vedomosti (Transcaucasus Mili-

tary News) - the organ of the Russian troops in the Transcaucasus. This association was trying to organize contests to define the best Russian language journalist of the year, but failed to reflect the real situation. Besides, this artificially created association could not reflect the whole spectrum of the Russian language journalism of Georgia and hence did not become a real factor for its development.

Meanwhile, the increasing competition on the information market of Georgia does not spare the Russian language press. There are no perspectives in orientation towards regular state donations. The Russian language information product will be demanded by the market if it can find its niche by offering themes which interest potential readers, viewers and businesses and encourage them to invest their money or place advertisements. •

## POLITICAL SITUATION IN AZERBAIJAN

BY SHAHIN RZAEV, THE CMSP COORDINATOR IN AZERBAIJAN

Couple of years ago there was a popular joke on the Armenian Radio: Georgians have a sea, Azerbaijanians have oil, and we have stability. Today Armenia has lost its monopoly on the stability sharing it with two other Caucasian republics. The credit for this goes to the leaders of Georgia and Azerbaijan, the experienced politicians Edward Shevardnadze and Heydar Aliiev. In sake of such a stability they rely on a firm, authoritarian regime. But history has shown that today's stability can become tomorrow's chaos. This is even more likely when there are objective pre-existing conditions. First of all the pace of the economic reform. Financial resources for the development of oil industry, together with credits for the implementation of economic reforms have already been invested in the economy of Azerbaijan. In the foreseeable future these credits and the interests in them have to be paid back. The pace of privatization, the development of the legal base of reforms and the corruption of authorities cast serious doubts on the possibility that future chaos and its destructive consequences can be avoided or minimized. While President Heydar Aliiev holds the power, he is a stabilizing factor, but his retirement can mean an end to the stability in the country.

I am not talking about the next coup attempt, but he is quite old (recently celebrated his 75-th anniversary) and sooner or later will have to take his much deserved retirement. Mainly owing to censorship in the press, it is very rare that someone dares to discuss the possibility of change of power. The Monitor magazine was an exception and published an article under the title "Who

Are You Mister the Next President ?" This article had a citation from "The Autumn of Patriarch" of Garcia Markes which read: "He was ruling over us as if he was immortal." In any case this question is not a pressing one right now. What is more interesting for the mass media, are the coming presidential elections in October. The elections were scheduled according to the Constitution - 5 years after the 1993 elections. But before that, some over-enthusiastic legislators were trying to change the Constitution and declare Aliiev President for life. As it always happens, the broad masses of people were "very supportive of this idea." But unlike his Central Asian colleagues, Aliiev appeared to be looking further and he drastically opposed these attempts. In fact he has a minimum of 5 more years of a guaranteed reign for now, (anybody thinking real has no doubts about that) and what will happen later-we will wait and see. Today the most interesting theme in connection with the elections is the adoption of the Law on Presidential Elections adopted by the Parliament. There were two drafts of the same law: one was presented by the presidential apparatus and the second by the block of opposition deputies.

Most of the debate was over the following provisions: the project presented by the presidential apparatus stipulated that for the registration as a candidate, a person must get at least 50 thousand votes in each electoral district (there are more than 70 of them) and in each of these districts the candidate must get not less that 0.8 % of the total 50 thousand votes. The opposition

project considered only 20 thousand votes received in 2/3 of the districts to be sufficient to qualify. The presidential draft demanded the electoral commissions to be fully formed from non-partisan members, half of whom would be appointed by the President and another half by the Parliament. The opposition insists that these so-called non-partisans be former Communist party activists totally obedient to the authorities and offers to include representatives of each candidate in the Central Electoral Commission. But these are not the most important disagreements. According to the presidential draft, if a voter has signed in the list under the name of a candidate during his campaign, he or she cannot sign under the name of another candidate, too. According to the opposition this is a serious breach of the principle of confidentiality of voting. If the Central Electoral Committee reads the lists it can find out who has signed only in the list of an "unwanted" candidate and pressurize the voter (now we know that this anti-democratic provision did not pass and any voter is free to sign for several candidates during the campaign). All these provisions already presume the outcome of the elections, as the "unwanted" candidates would not be able to register. The opposition's gloomy dilemma is to boycott the elections or strike a deal with the authorities. To create an illusion of an al-

ternative the authorities will have to let someone play the role of the rival, but there are serious grounds to think that this will be a phony candidate.

Unfortunately the government has mounted up the pressure on the press before the elections. The suspensions of the Monitor magazine in February and the medium-wave broadcasts of Radio Liberty in April are examples of this pressure. The reasoning behind the closures were different, for example the absence of a license. After the interference of the US State Department, the broadcasts were restored but two opposition journalists had to leave Radio Liberty, and even if the RL management denies any connection between the resumption of broadcasts and firing of journalists, I can not explain the sudden firing of two talented colleagues.

There is no progress in the resolution of the Karabagh conflict. After the change of power in Armenia, the first meeting took place between Presidents Kocharian and Aliiev. It is known that the new President of Armenia insists on a package solution of the problem which is opposed by the Azerbaijanian side.

It would be naive to expect a swift change in the positions of the parties. Perhaps after some time, may be after the presidential elections the parties will make a step towards each other. •

## POLITICAL SITUATION IN ARMENIA

BY HAKOB ASATRYAN, RADIO LIBERTY, AZG DAILY, YEREVAN

After the resignation of President Levon Ter-Petrossian the political situation in the Republic changed. But before we start analyzing the situation let us answer a question- 'Why did one of the leaders of the Karabagh movement, who had an image of a peaceful democrat, leave the political scene?' First, the resignation of Levon Ter-Petrossian was inevitable after the presidential elections of 1996. The scale of falsifications was so big that the international community and the people of Armenia lost their confidence in Ter-Petrossian. He realized that his resignation was sort of a social order. That is why, all his efforts to solve the internal political crisis through artificial reshuffling of posts failed. He had not been the leader of the nation already for a long time, and Armen Sarkissian and Robert Kocharian invited respectively from London and Mountainous Karabagh, realized that without serious support from all of the population, they cannot implement any of the government programs. Besides that, the political and economic doctrine of the country had to be changed. But serious disagreements appeared to be not only between the President and the Prime Minister, but also between the "power ministries" and the ruling Armenian Pan-National Movement. The power ministers together with the Prime minister managed to make the President step down. The second reason of resignation is the Karabagh question. Starting from summer 1997 there were serious disagreements between the Karabagh leadership and the Armenian authorities on the question of resolution of the conflict within the framework of the OSCE Minsk group. The negotiations in fact reached a dead end. After

the notorious press conference of Ter-Petrossian and his article "War and Peace," the relations between Yerevan and Stepanakert became almost hostile. Ter-Petrossian lost the support of the Karabaghis. As a result he resigned declaring that the party of peace in Armenia was temporarily defeated. But the reaction of the society to this and following the resignations was quite cool. There were no civil or other disturbances. It was the beginning of a new stage-the extraordinary presidential elections. During the forty days of the presidential campaign, Robert Kocharian managed to correct some of the mistakes of Ter-Petrossian. First of all the state level political repression of ARF-the Dashnaks was reversed and their leader Vahan Hovhannisyan freed from jail. Robert Kocharian agitated for the unity of the nation, a package solution of the Karabagh question and for free and fair elections. On March 16 Presidential elections were conducted with a runoff, with 12 candidates competing for the post. On March 30 Robert Kocharian and the former communist leader Karen Demirchyan ran in the second round and Kocharian became President.

I must note the particularities of these elections:

1. Despite some irregularities and sad incidents, the March 16 elections were on a higher level than those in 1996.
2. Some candidates were contesting the results of elections but there were not any mass manifestations or libel suits. We must

mention the political stability of Demirchyan who chose political struggle within the Constitutional framework over riots.

3. The Karen Demirchyan phenomenon - the former First Secretary of the Communist Party received 40 % of the votes and proved that the 10-years absence in big politics was not an obstacle for him. So even if people elected the new hero Kocharian, the old master Demirchyan was also not forgotten.

4. For the first time opposition candidates were on the side of the candidate of authorities: Paruyr Hayrikian (National Self Determination), Aram Sarkissian (Democratic party), Hrant Khachatryan (Constitutional Rights Union), Dashnaks and Socialists. Liberal Democrats and Yerkrpahs (the Protectors of the Country) were already supporting the candidate of the authorities for the second time.

5. The Pan Armenian National Movement did not take sides and remained a constructive opposition. Only Communists and the National Democratic Union stayed in opposition and took the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> places respectively in the first round. In the second round they were agitating their supporters to vote independently.

6. After the elections Kocharian named his 4 advisers - a Dashnak, a Ramkavar, a democrat and Hayrikian from the National Self Determination. Even a member of the National Democratic Union David Vardanyan got the position of the head of the Presidential Revision Commission, noting that this would not prevent them from criticizing authorities.

What is the situation after the elections? The new Government is formed, led by the 33-year old Prime Minister Armen Darbininian. The program of the Government was accepted by the National Assembly. After a 80-year break two Dashnak representatives re-appeared in the government. The Dashnak daily Yerkir is back to readers. After the elections the political life went back to the building of the National Assembly. Even the opposition deputies are actively involved into the law-making. Recently the theme of the dissolution of the Parliament and extraordinary Parliamentary elections are actively discussed. Many political parties consider the 1995 Parliamentary elections as the beginning of the political crisis in the country.

The present Parliament does not reflect the real picture of the society. Many deputies have started changing their memberships in different fractions and deputy groups. For example many members of the Armenian Pan-National Movement and so-called independent deputies became Protectors of the Country almost overnight. This Union was formed by the initiative of the Defense Minister Vazgen Sarkissian and supported Kocharian during the last elections. Another urgent issue is the adoption of a new election code and amendments in the current Constitution. Perhaps, only after the adoption of these documents will the President consider dissolving the Parliament, if before that the relations between the President and the Parliament do not become tense.

The problem of Mountainous Karabagh: Armenia is leading a clearer policy and advocates for a package solution and a direct dialog between Stepanakert and Baku. During the last few months President Kocharian has proved that he is in favor of a peaceful solution of the problem. •

## POLITICAL SITUATION IN GEORGIA

BY ZURAB CHIABERASHVILI, CHIEF EDITOR OF SAMOKALAKO SAZOGADOEBA (CIVIL SOCIETY) AND SAKARTVELO GAZETO, TBILISI.

The most sensational event of the last period was the terrorist act of February 9. It showed that occurring changes in Georgia are not irreversible, and that a single shot can question the very existence of the young independent state. That is why the word "stability" has become the magic word which appeals to the interests of the democratic West, transnational corporations, the progressive part of the Georgian political establishment and the majority of the population.

What threatens the stability of the country? The list of problems is not big but they are frightening in their scale:

- a) relations between the center and the regions. Problems in Abkhazia, Tskhinvali region and Adjara I consider in this context.
- b) the presence of the Russian military bases and protection of our borders.
- c) existence of political forces tied to Batumi and the Russian military bases constantly threatening the political scene of Georgia with an earthquake.
- d) because of not regulated relations of the center and the regions, a transfer to full self control in Georgia is delayed indefinitely.
- e) the last two problems define the fact that the borders between the rights and obligations of the citizen and the authorities are not clearly defined. Corruption is a vicious circle, and only the "heavenly forces" which saved the President on February 9, can help find the exit.

This list shows how the geopolitical, regional problems get transferred into the lives of common people. From September last year until February this year, experts of the International Business Inc. were working on a project of privatization of the port of Poti. The conclusion: the port will not be able to handle the weight of the Eurasian corridor and must be reconstructed. The Georgian government has not got finances for this and has to sell or to lease it long term. No one will invest money in this without a mini-

mum of 51 % of shares of the port. The Georgian government rejected the plan. Some politicians screamed about the "sale" of Georgian property for a penny.

I want to draw your attention to the new indicator of the Georgian political reality- private property. One of the main indicators of the political spring in Georgia is the privatization of land in the cities. The position of reformers, industrialists and Western experts is unanimous: the land must be given for free to speed up the formation of the market of land.

What is common between all these and the stability with which I started my article? Until the private sector is strong there will not be any interest groups in Georgia. Until there are interest groups and different political forces can be formed on their basis, there cannot be a full-blooded political life and stability. The balance of political forces today is artificial.

With the emergence of the private sector there was a problem with the independent judiciary. The tests for Georgian judges were printed in California and observers from the US and the EU controlled the exams.

If the West is interested only in the transit of oil, then why does it interfere into such internal Georgian matters as a judicial reform? I would like to answer this question by quoting the title of declaration of the EU Council in Luxembourg:

"The Importance of the Oil and Gas Resources of the Caspian Sea region for the EU."

I think that these resources are only a tool for creating a homogenous territory for the democratic West. Homogeneity provides protection of human rights, freedom of speech and religion, right to property, free market and competition, participation of citizens in the governing and decision making. I want to conclude with a phrase, which the Georgian democrats like to repeat: "Georgia should become a democratic state or it will not become a state at all." •

## ABOUT THE MASS MEDIA WHICH DID NOT EXIST

BY ARMAN JILAVYAN, SNARK PRESS AGENCY, YEREVAN

The state policy towards the mass media as an institution of realization of the right to freedom of speech and objective information, is a mirror reflection of the policy of a state (the leaders of the state) towards the society as a whole. This is why the attitude of the Soviet state towards the mass media of national minorities must be considered as a result of the "national" policy of that state as a whole.

The kind of attention towards national policy in Soviet times, more precisely the absence of any attention to it (the problem was there de-facto but de-jure it did not exist) proves the declarative nature of mass media of national minorities and rejects as a fiction the thesis that they played any role in Soviet society.

The very existence of this kind of press and TV - radio programs as the propagandistic-informative institutes of the Soviet regime, was dictated by a desire to prove the absence of any problems with the national minorities in the republics and implant a sense of internationalism and friendship among peoples. This, in its turn, was designed to serve as an efficient weapon in the "struggle with the nationalism, extremism, chauvinism and similar anti Soviet expressions."

Without any doubt the existence of mass media of national minorities in any society is quite a positive phenomenon. But the question is to what extent these media belonged to these very national minorities and served their interests. In reality the "national media" were absolutely ignorant of the existing discrimination of "natzmen" (abbreviation from the Russian *natzionalnoe menshinstvo* - national minority) based on ethnic origin and were used as a weapon of Soviet propaganda serving the interests of the Soviet leaders.

From a more global point of view the expression "Mass Media of national minorities in the USSR" is pointless. It would have been

more appropriate to call it the Mass Media in the languages of national minorities, as in reality the "natzmen media" were absolutely deprived of their national content. Let us consider two such papers as an example: the content of the Armenian language *Komunist* which was being published in Azerbaijan was identical to that of the Azerbaijanian regular papers. The same was true for the Azerbaijanian language *Sovet Ermenistan* which was being published in Armenia. *Komunist* was not allowed to write about Armenia and its problems, *Sovet Ermenistan* was not allowed to write about Azerbaijan. The only "national" hint was in the cultural columns of the papers where they were allowed to publish poems, but only those which eulogized the friendship between the two nations or the grandeur of the Union. As I already mentioned these publications were of declarative purpose only and hence could not even touch upon simple household issues. I won't even speak about the influence of such publications among the national minorities and the attitude of the dominant nationality population towards these media.

The mass media of national minorities were blind and deaf towards their audience and hence could not be heard by them. Even during the most tragic events in the life of minorities the mass media, including those of national minorities, were silent. They were silent when the raging hordes of bandits were raping, torturing and burning, when tanks were smashing hundreds of people whose only fault was to belong to a nation other than the dominant one. I conclude by stating that it is hardly worth talking about the existence or absence of mass media of national minorities in the former USSR, a state where one could only dream about a free and real press... •

## ABOUT CMSP SIXTH CONFERENCE, HELD IN STEPANAKERT

### AZERBAIJANI JOURNALISTS VISIT KARABAKH

*RFE/RL Armenia Report, 31 August, 1998*

A group of Azerbaijani journalists is currently visiting Nagorno-Karabakh in a first direct encounter with the region since it declared independence from Baku. The journalists, largely representing independent media, were received by Nagorno-Karabakh President Arkadi Ghukasian on Monday and Foreign Minister Naira Melkumian one day before. They also held meetings with local journalists and non-government organizations.

The trip is part of a Transcaucasus media seminar organized by Switzerland's Helsinki Assembly. The seminar brought together journalists from all over the region. •

### CONFERENCE OF JOURNALISTS HELD IN KARABAKH

*Stepanakert, September 1 (Noyan Tapan).*

The sixth regional conference of journalists attended by mass media representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh was held in Nagorno Karabakh on August 29-31 as part of the "In Support of Journalists from the Transcaucasus" Program. Journalists from Georgia refused to attend the conference for unknown reasons. The Azeri mass media were represented by the "Sharg" agency, ANS TV, "Zerkalo" ("Mirror") weekly as well as the press distributing agency and the office of "Argumenty i Fakty" ("Arguments & Facts") newspaper in Azerbaijan.

The conference considered the following subjects:

- Political situation in the countries of the region;

- Mass media and democracy;
- Caspian oil and its influence on the situation in the region;
- Common Caucasian House: stimuli and contradictions;

On August 29, participants in the conference met with Karabakh's Foreign Ministry Naira Melkumian. The sides discussed the issues of the internal and foreign political life of Nagorno Karabakh as well as current processes in the region.

Addressing prospects for the Karabakh settlement, the minister stressed that the problem is not in the recognition or non-recognition of Nagorno Karabakh, but in its regional character and influences the future of the entire Caucasus. In that connection Melkumian underlined that Nagorno Karabakh can become a kind of bridge between Armenia and Azerbaijan and it is what the efforts of the three countries' politicians should be aimed at. "Azerbaijan and we should seek the common interest, and I am sure we have it, for the sake of which we will achieve lasting and enduring peace," Melkumian said.

The minister reported that the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmen are expected to arrive in the region in the second half of September. According to the minister, they are actively seeking original variants of a comprehensive Karabakh settlement.

On August 29, the participants in the conference had an informal meeting with the speaker of the Karabakh Parliament, Oleg Yesayan. The following day they visited the town of Shushi, where they met with the head of the

Artsakh Diocese, Pargev Martirosian. They also visited the mosque and the Kazanchetsots church.

On the last day of their stay in Karabakh the journalists met with Karabakh's President Arkady Ghoukassian. The Karabakh chief hailed and appreciated the very fact of such a meeting, pointing out the significance of people's diplomacy and direct dialogue between Karabakh and Azerbaijan. Answering the journalists' numerous questions regarding different spheres of Karabakh's life, the president pointed out that despite the fact that Karabakh has not been recognized by the international community, it de facto exists and has all attributes of statehood. He stressed that Nagorno Karabakh is ready for contacts at any level — he strongly believes that all problems can be resolved by means of negotiations.

## BEAT JOURNALISTS!

Representatives of mass media and NGOs gathered yesterday in protest against the increased number of police crackdowns on journalists and rallies. In their statement, they demand the President and Parliament to evaluate the police actions and adopt a law on the freedom of information. Unless their demands are satisfied in two weeks, the protesters will resort to other protest actions and appeal to international organisations. Tiniko Izoria. • *«Droni» No. 146, December 24-26 (source: CIPDD)*

## AP: FEWER JOURNALISTS KILLED IN 1998, SAYS PRESS WATCHDOG

*December 31, 1998*

PARIS (AP) — Fewer journalists were killed in 1998 than in recent years but journalists investigating corruption were in danger in many countries, a French press watchdog reported Thursday.

In 1998, 19 journalists were killed worldwide, the report by Reporters Without Borders said. It said 487 others were arrested and 697 were physically abused or threatened.

Commenting on Vafa Guluzade's statement on granting autonomy to Karabakh, Ghoukassian said that negotiations make no sense if their outcome is predetermined.

The same day the participant in the conference visited the Gandzasar Cathedral in Mardakert from where they returned to Yerevan. The conference did not adopt any final document.

The "In Support of Journalists from the Transcaucasus" program is implemented with the assistance of the Helsinki Civil Assembly (Geneve), and the Foreign Ministry of Switzerland. The author of the program, a Swiss journalist of Armenian origin Vigen Chtrian, also attended the conference. He suggested holding the next forum of journalists from the Transcaucasus in Baku. •

The drop in the number of deaths was attributed in part to a drop in fatalities for reporters covering the former Yugoslavia, Chechnya and Algeria.

But the group said reporters investigating corruption by public officials had been killed in Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, the Philippines, Russia and Thailand.

Since 1994, 103 journalists - including 48 in Rwanda and 18 in Algeria - have been killed.

Some 93 journalists were currently in jail as a result of their work, compared to 90 last year, the report said, highlighting cases in Ethiopia, China, Syria and Burma. It also said torture was common in Turkish prisons.

Reporters Without Borders said the independent press was facing increasing difficulties in Pakistan and Congo. However, the report praised Indonesia, where it said no reporters had been jailed since the fall of President Suharto in May, and Nigeria, where the number of jailed reporters fell from 13 to two since the June death of dictator Gen. Sani Abacha.

## NEWS FROM ARMENIA

### **AZERI REPORTERS DISCUSS KARABAKH WITH EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

*YEREVAN (Yerevan News Agency)  
Asbarez-On-Line 4, September, 1998*  
Armenian Revolutionary Federation Executive Council members Armenia Rustamian, Eduard Ghazarian and Gegham Manoukian met with visiting Azeri reporters Thursday at the Executive Council offices.

The ARF leaders expressed hope that such meetings between the two sides would eventually lead to the establishment of peace in the region. ARF Executive Council representatives gave precise answers to numerous questions directed to them by the Azeri reporters.

It was stressed that the misleading characterization of the ARF stemmed from Soviet propaganda tactics, which was not only directed toward the ARF, but also the Musavat party and Georgian Mensheviks.

The representatives expressed that the ARF believed the existence of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic was an undeniable fact and that it should be officially recognized by Azerbaijan as an independent and self ruled government.

The ARF representatives asserted that the emerging concepts of inviolability of borders and territorial integrity have had contradictory interpretations in the realm of conflict resolution, within international circles. Furthermore, the ARF representatives stressed the need to find new methods through which the aforementioned concepts were interpreted, in order to facilitate the peaceful resolutions of such conflicts.

To avoid any future mistakes, the ARF representatives pointed to the need to stay away from stereotypes and to “learn to diffuse historic mines which still pose an explosive danger.” •

### **KOCHARIAN HAILS INVITATION OF AZERI JOURNALISTS TO ARMENIA**

*YEREVAN, August 27 (Noyan Tapan).*  
On August 26, President Robert Kocharian met with Azeri journalists and answered their questions, presidential advisor for information affairs Kasya Abgarian, told a briefing on Tuesday. According to her, Robert Kocharian hailed the fact of inviting seven Azeri journalists to Armenia to attend a regional seminar arranged by the Yerevan Press Club and pointed out that “this is another display of the open and peace-loving policy of Armenia which, undoubtedly, will strengthen the policy of the Republic of Armenia aimed at establishing stability in the region.” The president referred to the need for getting rid of the image of enemy by means of the press and personal contacts. •

### **CONFRONTATION BETWEEN PARLIAMENT AND TV, NEWSPAPER**

*ITAR-TASS news agency (World Service),  
Moscow, 16 Oct 98*  
Mutual criticism and insults, tough confrontation have driven a wedge between the Armenian parliament and national television at the end of this week.

The conflict started with criticism of Armenian MPs by Armenian national television. The lawmakers retaliated by issuing a resolu-

tion to establish a new television program “An hour in parliament” to be on the air every Sunday exactly at the same time when Director of the Armenian television Tigran Nagdalyan presents his own program.

The TV staff offended by the move fired back, showing in an evening news cast a deputy’s chair, a fig (a gesture of extending clenched fist with a thumb between index and middle fingers generally accompanying a refusal to comply with a request), and presumably using obscene language which could be easily guessed although the voice was silenced.

The Armenian parliament has been at loggerheads with its own newspaper. The parlia-

ment issued a resolution dismissing editor-in-chief of the “Aiastani Anpapatutyun” Wnewspaper, Liza Chagaryan, in connection with perpetual distortion and incorrect coverage of the activities of the parliament, lowering its prestige, creating a negative image of the National Assembly in the eyes of the public and running the newspaper proceeding from personal likes and dislikes.”

The editor-in-chief removed from her post barricaded herself in her office with a group of the newspaper staff loyal to her and declared that she was not going to give in. Meanwhile, the newspaper is issued by a new editor-in-chief with the rest of the staff. •

## NEWS FROM AZERBAIJAN

### A NATION'S DIGNITY

*By Arif Aliev, chairman of Yeni Nesil, the association of journalists of Azerbaijan.*

The Baku city court has been keeping close watch over the dignity of the citizens of Azerbaijan. After a bizarre trial that ended 7 July, Judge Zahid Agayev ruled that an article by journalist Elmar Husseynov had "insulted" the Azeri nation and ordered him to publish a refutation and pay a fine of 16,000,000 manat (about \$4,100) to a refugee fund. The prosecutor had only asked for half that sum.

The case began on 27 February, when policemen raided newsstands throughout the city and confiscated the issues remaining from the February press run (3,000 - 5,000 copies) of the independent magazine "Monitor". Funded by its staff and edited by Husseynov, the glossy, 72-page monthly runs political and economic analysis, usually critical of the authorities.

The action stunned local journalists, who scrambled to find a reason for such an extraordinary undertaking by the police (the last time a paper was confiscated was in 1993, when the anti-government newspaper Azadlig ran a cartoon that apparently offended President Heidar Aliev). What had made the authorities so angry this time! What particular article had pushed them into committing such an obviously illegal act! Some thought it might have been an article on Rasul Guliev, the former speaker of the Azerbaijani parliament, now in the camp of the radical opposition. Or it could have been several articles exploring the clannish character of the ruling elite and its monopoly on the sale of strategic raw materials. Or was it the expose on widespread torture in Azerbaijan's jails! Neither the presidential administration nor the Ministry of

Information and Press provided any hint, telling the press only that they were not familiar with the confiscation.

Several journalists' organizations and a number of independent publications then launched a joint protest action, which included appeals to the president and the general prosecutor. Their efforts eventually coaxed an explanation out of the Baku police, who claimed to have confiscated "Monitor" for rather noble aims: to protect the moral health of their fellow citizens and stop attempts to incite conflict among the country's various regions. The statement from the police chief of Baku also alleged that several articles had tended toward "misinformation and complicity in the enemy's propaganda."

The police failed to specify exactly which article or articles had been so threatening. Unexpectedly, Eldar Namazov, the head of the president's secretariat, provided an answer. In an article published by the daily newspaper Panorama, he wrote that the main danger to "the moral health and the unity of the nation" stemmed from a February piece by Husseynov, entitled "Azerbaijanis are the Nation of the 21st Century." Exploring questions of national identity, Husseynov had concluded that Azerbaijanis lacked any distinctive "high quality" or "clear-cut national idea." But, he wrote, this could be used to the country's advantage: "We represent a society that is quite amorphous and free of any national prejudices. We can make cosmopolitanism and supranational identity the trump card of the Azerbaijanis. ...We can combine the most valuable qualities that are of crucial importance for the future information era....We have all the necessary preconditions

to become a real nation. Not an industrial nation, but rather a nation of a new format.”

But Namazov claimed that Husseynov had insulted the nation and complained that the authors of such articles are punished in civilized countries, while in Azerbaijan people try to defend them. He then appealed to the country's leaders to defend the country's dignity.

The president's aide proved to be right in his Psychological calculations. He touched on the fragile national identities of those living in a fledgling country, and his call for support was soon accepted. The state media launched tales of alleged intrigue organized by “the agents of foreign states” and “the hostile forces to Azerbaijan” represented by Husseynov and his magazine. The culmination of the campaign was a lawsuit filed by three professors from Baku State University—Yagub Makhmudov, Seidaga Onunlakhi, and Gurban Mamedov—who accused Husseynov of libeling the nation and sought damages equal to “Monitor”'s yearly revenues. By even agreeing to hear the case, the Baku city court violated the country's

mass media law, which Stipulates that those who consider themselves insulted can sue only after the editorial staff of the offending publication has refused to publish a refutation or apology. “Monitor”'s editors say they never received any such request. It is also still unclear who authorized the three professors to represent the interests of the entire nation.

The trial itself resembled an academic dispute, with the plaintiff citing not facts but abstracts 60m Old manuscripts and academic literature.

“Monitor” cannot afford to pay such an enormous amount in damages—though other media have said they Would try to help out—and has appealed the decision. In addition, another libel lawsuit may be in the offing: the Ministry of the Interior has threatened to sue Husseynov over the prison torture article, which the editor insists was based on earlier reports by human rights organizations.

The case's final outcome is yet to come, but one thing is clear: everybody is talking about the court's verdict, and nobody remembers the illegal confiscation of “Monitor”. •

### THE GREAT GAME: AZERI CENSORS TOLD TO STOP; OH HURRAH!

*Carlotta Gall, The Moscow Times, August 7, 1998*

Congratulations. You've made the front page of Bakinsky Rabochy,” announced a girlfriend over the phone. “It means they approve of you.” She was laughing, but not wholly cynically. She was glad that in the climate of press censorship and near adulation of the president, a Baku paper was printing things from the Western press.

I stopped by a kiosk to pick up the dull, semi-official paper, once a pillar of communism and now faithful supporter of the present authorities. They had printed a translation of an interview I had done with

President Heidar Aliyev for The Financial Times. The translation by Itar-Tass in London was good, but the article itself had been censored and turned into an anodyne puff-piece.

The entire second part, which listed the extremely undemocratic facts of life in Azerbaijan, had been left out - details like the political prisoners who are still in prison, the police brutality that continues unchecked, and the existence of censors who still inspect every article before it goes to print and often slash them or ban them completely.

The government, and Aliyev himself, deny that censorship exists, saying there is only

military censorship, which is necessary since Azerbaijan remains technically at war with Armenia. But that is not quite true. Earlier this year when a big scandal broke around the president's son, Ilham Aliyev, and his huge gambling debts, every single article touching on the subject was banned. And then just last month the weekly newspaper Chag failed to appear on the newsstands after a whole article on Kurds in Azerbaijan was cut.

The editors did not have anything to put in its place so the whole paper was refused publication. The censors do not like newspapers appearing with white spaces that of course would tell their own tale. The editor of the Popular Front's newspaper, Azadlig, keeps a pile of cartoons especially to fill blanks at the last minute.

I called up the editor of Bakinsky Rabochy to see what had happened with my article. The editor, Vladimir Moroskov, sounded relaxed on the issue. "We shortened it a bit," he volunteered. "We left out the bits that everyone here already knows, like how Aliyev came to power. In England maybe you need to tell people that, but here everyone knows." That was not quite true either but I let it go. The important thing here was that the editor, not the censors, had done the censoring. It is important because this week two members of the presidential staff announced during a visit to the United States that within 10 days censorship would be abolished in Azerbaijan by official decree.

Azerbaijan is under pressure from abroad to improve its record on democracy in the run-up to presidential elections and, if the president's staff say it will be abolished, it probably will. So hurrah! But as one oppo-

sition paper points out, censors are not really needed any more as self-censorship is so deeply ingrained. There are no live interviews on radio or television, for instance, and editors go by the policy of "just in case." The government has many more subtle controls up its sleeve, such as licensing newspapers, the price and availability of newsprint, the courts, which recently closed and prosecuted a magazine for maligning the image of Azerbaijan, and straightforward intimidation of journalists.

Even without the censors, a free press will remain a far cry. •

### **AZERBAIJANIS COMMENT ON ABOLITION OF CENSORSHIP...**

Opposition party leaders and newspaper editors have greeted President Heidar Aliyev's 6 August decree abolishing political censorship, Turan reported. Musavat Party chairman Isa Gambar termed the move "the result of joint efforts by democratic forces," while Azerbaijan Popular Front Party chairman Abulfaz Elchibey says he believes it is irreversible. But Yashar Aliyev, assistant editor of "525 gazeti," wondered if the move is indeed permanent, and Democratic Party Secretary-General Sardar Djalaloglu expressed doubt that the abolition of censorship will resolve the problem of the lack of press freedom, given that "moral censorship still exists." •

RFE/RL, 10 August, 1998

### **...AS OPPOSITION PROTESTS RENEWED HARASSMENT.**

The Azerbaijan Popular Front Party issued a statement on 7 August reporting the arrest of four of its activists in three rural districts for their refusal to endorse Heidar

Aliyev's presidential candidacy, Turan reported. The party's Ordubad branch was prevented by Nakhichevan police from holding a planned meeting on 7 August, after the chairman of the Nakhichevan branch was interrogated and physically attacked by a local police official the previous day. Azerbaijan Popular Front Party chairman Elchibey told Turan in an interview that the necessary conditions for holding democratic elections still have not been created. Elchibey accused Aliyev of insincerity in calling for dialogue with the opposition while condoning the arrest of its local representatives. •

*RFE/RL, 10 August, 1998*

### **AZERI PARLIAMENT CALLS FOR TIGHTER MEDIA CONTROL**

*BAKU, Nov 10 (Reuters)*

Azerbaijan's parliament, the Milli Mejlis, on Tuesday called for tighter controls on the media only three months after the state eliminated censorship in response to international pressure.

The rubber-stamp body, overwhelmingly dominated by supporters of strongman President Haydar Aliyev, requested that the information ministry take "all legal measures" to block the publishing of "unconfirmed and provocative materials." It also called on state media to "take all legal measures to defend the honor and dignity of the president and guarantee political stability."

The order was part of a package of measures adopted after a weekend of rallies protesting Aliyev's rule.

Government ministers on Tuesday threatened top opposition figures with jail sentences for insulting the president during the rallies, a serious crime under Azeri law. Several criminal cases have been opened. Aliyev, 75, enjoys wide powers in the Caspian Sea oil state of eight million people. He served as its Communist-era chief when Azerbaijan was still part of the Soviet Union.

He is respected by many Azeris as a guarantor of stability, but has sometimes been accused abroad of human rights abuses.

Aliyev withdrew strict press censorship in August in response to international criticism in the run-up to the October 11 presidential election. He won 76.1 percent of the vote, but opposition parties claim the election was rigged. •

### **AZERI NEWSPAPERS EDITORS GO ON HUNGER STRIKE**

*BAKU, Nov 18 (Reuters)*

Editors from 19 independent Azeri newspapers went on a hunger strike on Wednesday to protest what they say is a campaign of repression against them by the government of President Haydar Aliyev. The editors say criminal cases which have been opened into the alleged defamation of Aliyev in the local press as well as recent calls for tighter media controls by parliament, the Milli Mejlis, are an effort at renewed harassment and censorship.

"We were forced to take this action and go on hunger strike because the authorities want to smother the independent press," said Rauf Arif, editor of the *Yeni Musavat*, organ of the opposition *Musavat* (Equal-

ity) party. "If we do not demonstrate solidarity and support each other, then they will destroy each one of us one by one," said Arif.

Aliyev bowed to international pressure and lifted official censorship only in August in advance of a presidential election.

The state prosecutor's office in recent months opened criminal cases under a statute prohibiting "defamation of the honor and dignity of the president."

It happened after Yeni Musavat and the daily Azadlyg ran allegations by opposition politicians that Aliyev helped found the leftist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the 1970s, when he was Azerbaijan's Soviet Communist leader.

The now defunct Soviet Union was a backer of the PKK against NATO-member Turkey. Nationalist politicians in Azerbaijan have sometimes alleged that Aliyev is an ethnic Kurd.

The editors are also protesting against what they say have been beatings of journalists by police during recent anti-Aliyev demonstrations. State Prosecutor Eldar Hasanov met the editors on Wednesday in an effort to convince them to call off the hunger strike.

He offered to drop the cases if the newspapers apologized for the articles and paid small fines, instead of the 400 million manat (\$100,000) fines that Aliyev's aides have insisted upon as compensation for moral damage. The editors rejected the offer.

## AZERBAIJANI PAPER FINED IN SECOND LIBEL SUIT

*RFE/RL, 20 November, 1998*

A Baku district court imposed a 20 million manat (\$5,000) fine on the independent newspaper "Yeni Musavat" on 19 November for having implicated a senior Azerbaijani Interior Ministry official in the February 1997 murder of Academician Zia Buniatov, Turan reported. Vidadi Mahmudov, defense lawyer for "Yeni Musavat," complained that the verdict was unfair as the newspaper had printed a statement by the official in question denying any part in the killing. Rauf Arifoglu, the editor of "Yeni Musavat," embarked on a hunger strike a week ago to protest an earlier fine for insulting a member of the presidential apparatus. A second independent newspaper, "Azadlyg," is facing a libel suit brought by President Heidar Aliyev's brother Djalal, whom it claimed has bought expensive property in Britain. Arifoglu and "Azadlyg" editor Gunduz Tairli met on 19 November with Western diplomats in Baku who expressed their regret at the court cases. •

## INDEPENDENT AZERBAIJANI NEWSPAPER FINED

*RFE/RL, 15 December, 1998*

A Baku city court handed down a \$125,000 fine to "Azadlyg" on 14 December for publishing reports that members of President Aliyev's family had purchased expensive real estate in the UK, AP reported. The newspaper was also ordered to print a front-page retraction of those allegations. Also on 14 December, editors of independent newspapers voted to postpone indefinitely a resumption of their suspended hunger strike after meeting with presidential administration member Ali Hasanov. Some 20 editors began a hunger strike in November to protest libel cases they believe are intended to bankrupt them. •

## NEWS FROM GEORGIA

### THE COURT TEMPORARILY TOOK THE MILITARY UNIFORM OFF A JOURNALIST

*"Resonance", 18 August 1998*

After publishing an anonymous interview with a soldier about homosexuality in an army unit, the independent newspaper "Orioni" (Samtskhe-Djavakheti region) became a target for pressure of the local administration and military command. Amiran Meskheli, the interviewer, was immediately called up for the military service in breach of law (without call-up papers and medical examination) and sent right to the unit described in the interview. His demand for alternative service was turned down (the respective law was put in force on January 1, 1998). He brought an action against the central enlistment commission, State Office (which failed to introduce the alternative service in the country) and the enlistment office. The respondents did not attend the August 17 hearing and the trial was postponed till September 3. •

### BE CAREFUL, COLLEAGUES...THIS IS DJAVAKHETI

*"Akhali 7 Dge" No. 31, August 28 - September 3*

The post-Communist press has contributed to the escalation of ethnic conflicts in Georgia, the newspaper argues. Personal conflicts or private opinions exaggerated by the press of both conflicting parties (quasi-intellectuals - writers, scientists, etc. - who come from Communist circles have plaid an especially negative role) have been transformed into political (politicians follow the public opinion) and further into armed conflicts. In the newspaper's opinion, the situation in Meskhet-Djavakheti is still at the first, per-

sonal squabble stage. Solutions to the problem must be found only in a dialogue through mass media. The future will show whether the Georgian mass media have learned anything from the bitter experience of the recent past. •

*Source: Georgian Press Digest, September 1, 1998, Compiled by the Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD)*

### HOW THE INDEPENDENT PRESS IS STIFLED IN GEORGIA

*"Droni" No. 106, 17-19 September, 1998*

Georgian journalists have held a solidarity meeting after Lasha Nadareishvili, the editor of the independent newspaper "Asaval-Dasavali" was severely beaten some days ago. Although the freedom of press was not openly violated in Georgia, the participants stressed, the authorities practiced financial backing of some newspapers and "economic stifling" of the others. It seems that the newspapers are divided into "welcome" and "not welcome" ones. •

*(source: CIPDD)*

### A REPORTER OF THE RESONANCE NEWSPAPER RECOGNISED AS A VICTIM

*"Resonance" No. 323, November 25, 1998*

The other day, the Mtatzminda district procurator's office of Tbilisi recognised Aleko Tskitishvili, a Georgian reporter who was beaten by Temur Mgebrishvili, the commander of the special police force, outside the Supreme Court on November 10, as a victim. Almost nobody believes, however, that Mgebrishvili will be prosecuted for having many times abused ordinary citizens. The procurator's office is supposed to hold confrontation between him and the reporter tomorrow.

*(source: CIPDD)*

## CIS NEWS

### JOURNALIST TRAINING IN MOSCOW

Three journalist from the South Caucasus had the opportunity through the Caucasus Media Support Project, to spend four weeks during September in Moscow in a training program at Nezavisimaya Gazeta. This was the first time the famous Moscovite daily offered training program for outside journalists. Both the CMSP and the newspaper editors express their conviction about the necessity and usefulness of such exchanges, and their readiness to further develop such projects. •

### COURT UPHOLDS DECISION AGAINST UZBEK JOURNALIST

*RFE/RL, 4 August, 1998*

An Uzbek appeals court on 3 August upheld a ruling against journalist Shodi Mardiev sentencing him to 11 years in jail, RFE/RL correspondents reported. Mardiev was found guilty of defamation for his satirical radio broadcast about the Samarkand deputy prosecutor-general in June 1997. He was arrested in November of that year and found guilty by a Syr-Darya regional court on 11 June. The Committee to Protect Journalists sent an appeal to Uzbek President Islam Karimov on 16 July asking for clemency for the 62-year-old Mardiev, who is said to be in poor health. •

### KYRGYZ NEWSPAPER EVICTED FROM BUILDING

*RFE/RL, 19 AUGUST, 1998*

The Kyrgyz weekly newspaper "Asaba" has been evicted from the building in which it was located for nearly 60 years, RFE/RL correspondents in Bishkek reported on 18 August. That building was transferred to the Interior Ministry in 1991. Former Prime Minister Apas Jumagulov allowed "Asaba," now an opposition newspaper, to continue using its offices in the building, but incumbent Premier Kubanychbek Jumaliev supported the ministry's call to evict the newspaper. A government decree was issued in late May ordering the newspaper to vacate the building by 15 August, on which day the newspaper organized a protest in Bishkek's central square. Some 500 people, including members of the parliament, took part in the rally. The Interior Ministry responded by sealing off the newspaper's offices and releasing a statement saying "Asaba" is under private ownership and can "provide itself with its own building." A member of the newspaper's editorial board said new office space has been found and this week's issue of the newspaper will appear on time on 21 August. •

### RUSSIAN MEDIA FEEL PINCH IN ECONOMIC CRISIS

**BY ANDREI KHALIP**

*MOSCOW, Sept 16 (Reuters)*

Russia's long powerful and lucrative media are feeling the squeeze in the country's economic crisis. Television channels and newspapers often reflect the views of their "oli-

garch” owners, such as magnate Boris Berezovsky, and have been hugely influential in Russian politics, most notably in helping to re-elect President Boris Yeltsin in 1996.

Now the media have seen a slump in advertising revenue that has forced them to cut costs and mull mergers, although it remains to be seen whether their influence is also waning.

“Last week they took away my cellular phone I used for work,” said a journalist with one of Moscow’s big newspapers. “They say it’s cost-cutting due to the crisis.”

For others, much more is at stake. The venerable newspaper *Izvestia* is considering a merger with the newcomer daily *Russky Telegraf*, officials said. Vadim Goryainov, head of the Profmedia company which owns more than 50 percent in each paper, told Reuters *Izvestia* shareholders would discuss several merger plans.

Many newspapers and television channels have already significantly cut staff salaries and warned of possible sacking if the decline in business continues, journalists say.

Russian media, state-run and virtually advert-free in Soviet times, lost most state support after 1991 as Russia set itself on a free market course. Since then, advertising has propelled many magazines, newspapers and particularly television channels to prosperity and influence.

Hundreds of advertising agencies, either making adverts or simply re-selling and placing them, also flourished.

Russia’s severe economic woes have now hit all businesses and people’s buying ability. As a result, crisis-stricken firms, both Russian and foreign, can no longer afford advertising, damaging broadcasters, printers and advertisement distributors.

“Many things will start from square one,” said Sergei Lisovsky, one of Russia’s most influential advertising tycoons, in an inter-

view with the *Kommersant Daily* business newspaper.

“Advertising budgets for the rest of this year have been lost. Those for the first half of 1999 have also been lost because they are being budgeted now,” said Lisovsky, who heads the Premier SV group.

Advertisers say order volumes have fallen by up to 80 percent. Major foreign players are in wait-and-see mode.

So far there have been few changes in media advertising, although commercial breaks during films have become slightly shorter and some newspapers have seemed somewhat slimmer.

“Broadcasters will be playing the same ads for some time even if they had not been paid. They consider it a face-saving solution, something that is supposed to convince people that everything is fine,” said one advertising manager.

“But things are not fine. Soon archives will come in handy — Soviet-era television dramas and cartoons. Cheap foreign productions will also flood the screens.” •

## TURKMEN TV CHIEF SACKED

*RFE/RL 21 October, 1998*

Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov on 20 October fired Klychmurad Kakabayev, head of Turkmen Television, after criticizing the standard of programming. “*Nezavisimaya gazeta*” reported on 21 October. Kakabayev was accused of serious financial violations and replaced by Annageldy Nurgeldyev. Niyazov also announced that the rebroadcasting of Russian Public Television programs will be cut to five hours daily. Niyazov said the move is necessary because of the cost of such broadcasts and because their contents often contradict the moral standards of Turkmen society. Niyazov called for Turkmen Televi-

sion and Radio to become advocates of patriotism and a high standard of morality.

## KYRGYZ JUSTICE MINISTRY CLOSES DOWN THREE NEWSPAPERS.

*RFE/RL, 22 October, 1998*

The Kyrgyz Justice Ministry has shut down three newspapers for "insulting the religious feelings of believers," ITAR-TASS reported on 22 October. The ministry claimed that "Limon," "Paishanba," and "Kattamadaidzhest" contained erotic material that could be considered offensive to some people. "Paishanba" is owned and published by the same group that put out the well-known weekly "Asaba," which this year has also run into difficulties with the authorities. The founder of both newspapers, Melis Eshimkanov, said "it's just the latest attempt by the authorities to strike out at undesirable opponents." Eshimkanov added that "erotic publications can be banned on religious grounds, but first there is a need to change the Kyrgyz Constitution, in which it is written that the country is secular state." •

## CAUCASUS RADIO IS ETHNIC BRIDGE

*Julia Solovyova, The Moscow Times, November 11, 1998*

Long divided by a bloody ethnic conflict, Armenians and Azeris in Moscow now have something they can share: a new radio station. The Krasny Most, or Red Bridge, radio station was founded three months ago to cater to hundreds of thousands of people from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia living in Moscow.

The station takes its name from the medieval Red Bridge over the Kura River where the three countries meet. "Even though there has been fighting going on ... we share

the same mentality," said Krasny Most founder Tigran Karapetyan, 29, sitting in his tiny office at the Ostankino television tower. The first day Krasny Most went on the air, the phones in the office were ringing off the hook. People called to say hello over the air to their friends and relatives, order their favorite songs and praise the timely idea of the new station.

"People long for communication," said Enver Mansurov, a native of Baku who DJs at Krasny Most. "News from the (Caucasus) republics is very poorly covered in the Russian media. It (the station) is the outlet for that and an escape for people." From 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily, Krasny Most plays Armenian, Azeri and Georgian tunes, including ethnic music, Soviet retro and modern pop. Music is interspersed with news from Yerevan, Baku and Tbilisi, as well as with poetry, recipes and jokes. The national holidays of the three former Soviet republics are strictly observed and famous people's birthdays celebrated. Stars such as Georgian singer Vakhtang Kikabidze do talk shows.

Living effectively in exile has brought the three peoples closer together, Karapetyan said. There have been no violent clashes between the Azeris and the Armenians in Moscow, he said, despite years of war between those nations.

All, however, are harassed by the police or by xenophobic Russians, and Krasny Most has a talk show dedicated to the problem. Called "Don't Worry, I'm With You" after a film by Yuly Gusman, a Russian director of Jewish origin from Baku, the show features lawyers, prosecutors and sociologists giving advice on how to behave when harassed, or how to get a Moscow registration permit. Karapetyan said Armenians from Baku are

the most fervent listeners of Krasny Most since it is especially difficult, if not impossible, for them to visit their hometown. Karapetyan came up with the idea for the station after putting together a collection of popular songs from the Caucasus for a karaoke project that then fell through. He spent \$ 1,200 to print 20,000 leaflets advertising the new station, which were handed out at city markets, where many sellers are from the Caucasus. For Karapetyan, the radio station is just the beginning. He is planning to create a Caucasian cultural center - complete with a children's playground, a stage where plays could be performed, exhibition space and a dance floor.

Baku, the Azeri capital, and Tbilisi, Georgia's capital, once were cosmopolitan cities with rich cultural lives. Enterprising and artistic Armenians often preferred them to their own capital, Yerevan, which is smaller and offers fewer opportunities, said Yerevan native Karapetyan - who added that he is so homesick he relishes anything made in Armenia, even moldy lavash bread and bad brandy. As the Soviet system began to collapse, fighting broke out in Nagorny Karabakh, an enclave within Azerbaijan populated largely by ethnic Armenians. Thousands of people fled the 1988-94 war and many came to Moscow.

"Some evil fate has separated us. In Armenia, they chase the Azeris. In Azerbaijan,

they chase the Armenians," Karapetyan said. "Here (in Moscow, however,) we don't have any mutual claims." •

### **TURKMEN PRESIDENT READY FOR 'OPEN DISCUSSION.'**

*RFE/RL, 23 November, 1998*

Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov will go on national television and radio on 20 December to answer questions put to him by Turkmen residents, ITAR-TASS reported on 20 November. Questions should be about the development of the country or society and must be sent to the president's press service or the national television and radio company before 20 December. •

### **KAZAKH PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE COMPLAINS ABOUT MEDIA ACCESS.**

*RFE/RL, 25 November, 1998*

Karishal Assanov, who has registered to run in the January presidential elections as an independent, said incumbent President Nursultan Nazarbayev has greater access to the media than his opponents, RFE/RL correspondents reported. Assanov made the comments at a press conference in Almaty on 24 November, adding that some candidates have been deprived of any access to the country's media. •